EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE IN THE URBAN MARGINS: THE CASE OF OKMEYDANI

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ABSTRACT

Everyday Experiences of Violence at the Urban Margins:

The Case of Okmeydanı

This thesis examines the transformation of an Alevi working-class district in Istanbul, Okmeydanı, with a long history of left-wing politics since the 1960s, to depoliticization, with a specific focus on how women experienced this shift. The fieldwork that lasted on-and-off four years indicate that Okmeydanı's robust contentious politics from the past have significantly diminished since the 2000s, mainly because of increased state interference in daily life. The state interfered in everyday life through both repression and cooptation. While the increasing presence of police in everyday life increased, the state co-opted with social aids. Such state-led interventions have resulted in decreasing number of protests, narrowing of repertoire of actions, and the intertwining of municipalities and muhtars. The fieldwork revealed that the district's gendered nature and the gender-based impacts of urban violence are integral to analyzing the depoliticization process transformation. With their nuanced and sometimes ambiguous responses to these political changes, the women living in Okmeydanı offer more than a narrative of temporal transition. Their experiences underscore the complex dynamics at play as they move back and forth between the region's political past and present. The analysis of transformations in Okmeydanı aims to contribute to the depoliticization literature by examining it in an authoritarian context, exploring the effects of neoliberal state practices in urban margins, and assessing the gendered consequences of depoliticization.

ÖZET

Kent Marjinlerinde Gündelik Yaşamda Şiddet Deneyimleri: Okmeydanı Örneği

Bu tez, 1960'lardan bu yana sol bir mirasa sahip, İstanbul'daki Alevi işçi sınıfı mahallesi Okmeydanı'nın depolitize oluşu ve mahalleli kadınların bu dönüşümü nasıl deneyimlediklerini incelemektedir. 4 yıllık çok katmanlı politik etnografiye dayanan saha çalışması, Okmeydanı'nın geçmişten gelen güçlü sol muhalif siyasetinin 2000'li yıllardan bu yana, özellikle de devletin gündelik hayata artan müdahalesi nedeniyle önemli ölçüde azaldığını göstermektedir. Devlet pratikleri, gündelik hayata hem baskı hem de kooptasyon yoluyla müdahale etmektedir. Bir taraftan polisin gündelik hayattaki varlığı artarken, bir taraftan dasosyal yardımlar ve mülkiyet rejimi yoluyla işbirliğine gitmiştir. Devletin bu müdahaleleri, protestoların azalmasına, toplumsal hareket repertuarının daralmasına ve belediye bürokrasisi ve muhtarların artan rolüne neden olmuştur. Saha çalışması, ilçenin cinsiyetlendirilmiş doğasının ve kentsel şiddetin toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı etkilerinin, depolitizasyon süreci dönüşümünü analiz etmenin ayrılmaz bir parçası olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Okmeydanı'nda yaşayan kadınlar, bu siyasi değişimlere verdikleri incelikli ve muğlak tepkileriyle, zamansal bir geçişin anlatısından çok daha fazlasını sunuyor. Kadınların deneyimleri, bölgenin siyasi geçmişi ile bugünü arasında gidip gelirken yaşanan karmaşık dinamiklerin altını çiziyor. Okmeydanı'ndaki dönüşümlerin analizi, depolitizasyonu otoriter bir bağlamda, neoliberal devlet uygulamalarının kent çeperlerindeki etkilerini ve depolitizasyonun toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı sonuçlarını inceleyerek depolitizasyon, kent marjinlerde devlet pratikleri ve cinsiyete dayalı kentsel şiddet literatürüne katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

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ABBREVATIONS

AP	Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*)
AYTK	Anatolian Life Consumption Cooperative (*Anadolu'da Yaşam Tüketim Kooperatifi*)
CHP	Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*)
DISK	Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions in Türkiye (*Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfedarasyonu*)
DEP	Democracy Party (*Demokrasi Partisi*)
DPT	State Planing Organisation (*Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı)*
GBT	General Information Gathering (*Genel Bilgi Toplama)*
HDP	People's Democracy Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*)
HEP	People's Labor Party (*Halkın Emek Partisi)*
IHD	Human Rights Association (*İnsan Hakları Derneği*)
KADES	Women Emergency Assistance Notification System (*Kadın Acil Destek Hattı)*
OKDER	Okmeydanı Social Assistance and Solidarity Organization *(Okmeydanı Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği)*
SHP	Socialdemocrat People's Party (*Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti*)
THIV	Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye (*Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfi*)
TİP	Turkey Workers Party (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*)
TKDF	Turkey Women's Associations Federation (*Türkiye Kadın Dernekleri Federasyonu*)
TMK	Anti-Terror Law (*Terörle Mücadele Kanunu*)
TOKİ	Mass Housing Agency (*Toplu Konut İdaresi)*
TUIK	Türkiye's Statistic Institution (*Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu)*

TÜRK-İŞ Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (*Turkish Confederation of Labour Unions*)

TÜSTAV Türkiye Social History Research Foundation (*Türkiye Sosyal Tarih Araştırma Vakfı*)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Aslı, a 40-year-old resident of Okmeydanı working at a private firm, expressed her frustration about her colleagues' reluctance to have the workplace shuttle enter her neighborhood. The apprehension of her colleagues stems from a prevailing perception of the area being unsafe. Her colleagues insisted she get off the shuttle on the main street at the district's entrance. This led to almost daily disputes between Aslı and her workmates over whether the shuttle should venture into the district. Additionally, her friends were perpetually perplexed and concerned about her decision to raise her children in such an environment. This bias on behalf of Aslı's friends reflects a stigmatizing gaze that is neither surprising nor unusual to the district's inhabitants.

Okmeydanı, an Alevi working-class district, has been historically labeled a "no-go place" by mainstream media and the state, owing to its role as a site of contentious politics. This reputation has stigmatized Okmeydanı, branding it with a "distinctive set of rules" (Koonings & Krujit, 2007, p.12). Nevertheless, my extensive four-year ethnographic fieldwork suggests a paradigm shift in this "distinct set of rules" in Okmeydanı. The district's customary codes and unique political framework—established since its early days—are undergoing significant change. The change is mainly about the narrowing of contentious politics, the decreasing number of protests, decreasing number socio-cultural activities organized by leftist groups, the apathy of inhabitants toward the protests and atomization within the district, that I call as depoliticization of the district.

There is a consensus among various stakeholders, including inhabitants, headman (*muhtar*), and leftist groups, about the depoliticization. They all share a perspective recognizing the political transformation toward depoliticization in the district. Besides that, this transformation in the district is also reflected in mainstream and alternative media, with numerous articles and reports highlighting changes in the district's day-to-day dynamics.

The mainstream media, once describing Okmeydanı as volatile, now portrays it as "sanitized" and under the control of community police (Kalekollar Vatandaşa Güven Düşmana Korku Salıyor, 2018). Some locals view the current situation as peaceful, but others see it as a loss of the revolutionary politics they have long cherished. The time spent in the district, their income, education levels, and identities notwithstanding, the perspectives of women living in the district on this depoliticization are marked by ambiguity. Women in the district consistently offer an ambivalent and critical outlook when evaluating this transformation.

Based on both the consensus about the existence of depoliticization and the disagreements regarding the impact of depoliticization on everyday life in the district, the present study examines two main research questions: Although Okmeydanı has faced challenges such as waves of migration, poverty, property disputes, and police violence since its establishment, why has it experienced this trend of depoliticization only recently and not before? Secondly, what underlies the ambivalent experiences and perspectives among the district's female inhabitants concerning this change? While there is a consensus about the occurrence of this shift, do residents evaluate and judge the nature and implications of depoliticization for daily life differently?

The research reveals that the district, traditionally a contentious space, is undergoing depoliticization due to entrenching and shifting modalities of police repression, cooptation by welfare state tools, such as social assistance. Depoliticization has been revealed in diverse forms such as decreasing number of protests, decreasing participation of inhabitants into protest, decrease in the diversity of repertoire of action and issues, and apathy of inhabitants toward the protests and fragmentation among the inhabitants instead of solidarity.

While the police practices in the district were more intermittent and reactionary in the past, they are now more proactive and continuous. Upon hearing news of a protest or gathering, the police swiftly intervenes, creating a siege-like atmosphere in the district. However, on the other hand, the police engage in intense but selective repression regarding the increasing drug trade in the district. They selectively perform police work but do not contribute to community work and neglect the safety of the inhabitants.

The second argument suggests that it is not only through the increasing police repression the state power penetrate into everyday life, however, the state also coopt everyday life through social assistance and property issue. This two hand of the state is often overlooked when examining the political context in working-class Alevi neighborhoods in Istanbul. While poverty initially served as the foundation for solidarity and political mobilization in the district's formation in the 1960s, it is now becoming a cause of cooptation by welfare state tool in the district and as a result of it depoliticization. In Turkey, poverty is managed through social assistance, and the district ranks among the areas receiving the highest cash aid. The issue of social assistance has been on the agenda since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. There is a modality to these aids, with a constant rumor circulating in

the district regarding who receives aid and why some are excluded, and it is often discussed anxiously. It is believed that the aid is not provided because of political inclinations and is given to those supporting the AKP. Despite the state expanding its aid policies, it is used disparately and politically, creating ambiguity that hinders mobilization in the district where poverty is deepening. Rather than blaming the welfare state practices, there is a tendency to self-blame or blame the political environment of the district, leading to the formation of a neoliberal ethos. Even if a macro-level pattern argues that more aid goes to more contentious groups (Yörük, 2022), the micro-level impact differs, and individuals perceive it differently. The inhabitants see social aids not as something to gain by mobilizing but as something to lose. This perception contributes to a fragmented internal structure within the district, where residents blame each other.

One of the forms of depoliticization caused by the state's ambivalent presence is the replacement of all opposition movements with the issue of seeking rights solely through municipalities. In other words, rather than contentious politics against the uncertainty created, opposition and government municipal actors, including muhtars, became prominent actors of everyday life. Described as a post-political modality of depoliticization, this process is also fueled by opposition municipalities of the Republican People's Party (CHP). Overall, the residents have become depoliticized, and municipal actors have filled the void left by contentious actors.

The research revealed that all these practices of the state and the depoliticization in the district as a result of it have gendered consequences, and women experience it differently. Conducting an analysis and interviews with women revealed a clear emergence of both the state's repression and cooptation narratives. Experiences of various forms of gender-based violence, along with perceptions and

experiences in the process of applying for and receiving social assistance, are closely related to political transformations in the district. The atmosphere of violence in the streets limits their daily preferences to go out, the lack of socio-cultural gatherings affects their participation in public spaces, and their responsibilities for caregiving, exposure to male violence, and efforts to combat it are also influential. It not only reflects the experience of women but also provides unnoticed perspectives. Given that urban violence, as discussed in the literature, disproportionately affects different genders, the experiences of women in this context underscore the necessity of incorporating a gender analysis into the examination of political transformation in the district for a nuanced and critical understanding.

Based on these arguments, this research contributes to depoliticization literature through three analyses: Depoliticization under the authoritarian transformation, the impacts of authoritarian neoliberal state interventions at the urban margins on depoliticization, and the gendered analysis of depoliticization. Before explaining these contributions, it is also crucial to explain why I am talking to depoliticization literature. Depoliticization literature offers a comprehensive framework for understanding both structural changes and their impact on political practices, opposition politics, and protests. The focus extends beyond specific movements to a detailed examination of political participation within the neighborhood, enabling a nuanced exploration of the dynamics shaping the local political landscape.

The depoliticization literature is mainly dominated by the Western political theory taking a stable liberal democratic regime as the context (Hay, 2016; Wood, 2014). At this point, the question that needs to be asked is: In a country that is becoming authoritarian, can we apply this depoliticization discussion and concepts

used in the context of Western liberal democracy? Both Turkey's authoritarian regime and the political transformation in an urban margin require moving beyond the dominant perspective prevalent in Western literature on the concept of depoliticization and taking a broader perspective. Firstly, depoliticization in Okmeydanı is not just manifested as a mere technical treatment of politics. Depoliticization in Okmeydanı is also evident in the decrease of protests, narrowing of the diversity of repertoire of action, decreasing participation and interest of people in oppositional politics and protests, and division among people. However, under the authoritarian regime, politics no longer progresses solely based on technical matters. Thus, analyzing depoliticization in diverse political regimes goes beyond being merely a technical administrative issue.

The second contribution concerns that while police repression was reactive in Okmeydanı since its establishment, it has transitioned to a more pre-emptive and constant stance, akin to a 'siege.' It is becoming increasingly persistent and intensified in the district. Simultaneously, police exerts considerable pressure on contentious politics while seemingly overlooking prevalent drug traficking, indicating a 'selective' policing approach (Sobering & Auyero, 2019). The study emphasizes the multifaceted nature of state interventions through police repression in the district. The police practice in the urban margins specifically in the cases of Latin American favelas have been discussed through ambivalent and violence perpetrator roles of the police (Han, 2016; Pearce, 2010; Saborio, 2013; Sobering & Auyero, 2019). From the visible presence of units like armored vehicles on the streets to the invasive use of helicopters illuminating homes, from establishing checkpoints at district entrances to inconsistent enforcement of laws—like permitting drug trade

while suppressing protests—these police practices are not only becoming a permanent fixture but are also selective and contradictory.

Notwithstanding, the present study contends that police practices in the district cannot be understood as a singular or unvarying entity. The state's intervention in daily life and its influence on contentious politics persist not only through police pressure but also through cooptation via social assistance regime. Notably, uncertainties of social assistance and property regime play a role, directing inhabitants' attention primarily towards getting benefit through them. Most existing literature on Alevi working-class neighborhoods predominantly examines state (non)intervention through the singular perspective of police activities (Yonucu, 2022), often sidelining the significant influence of neoliberal welfare state strategies. Merely analyzing state relations with these contentious spaces in terms of police repression, ignoring the subtleties of cooptation, results in a limited comprehension of the authoritarian neoliberal state's complex power relations. In this study, Okmeydanı inhabitants navigate various manifestations of the neoliberal state daily, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of the state's diverse roles and interventions- these diverse practices of the state cause a ground for depoliticization.

Lastly, acknowledging neighborhoods as gendered spaces necessitates a gender-sensitive approach to understanding political transitions within them (Mills, 2007). The disproportionate impact of urban violence on women cannot be overstated. Their daily battles against such violence resonate with discussions around women's agency, encapsulated as efforts to lead an 'ordinary life' in a milieu rife with violence (Das, 2004; Datta, 2016; Hume & Wilding, 2020). This study emphasizes that moving from active political engagement to a state of depoliticization is a complex, non-linear journey, particularly when viewed through its gendered

dynamics. Women navigate the district's repression, cooptation, and political shifts with a palpable sense of ambivalence. Rather than perceiving this transformation as an unequivocal improvement or deterioration, they recognize the layered nuances that define their everyday realities.

Women consistently draw connections between shifts in political and urban spaces and the cyclical patterns of poverty and male-inflicted violence that touch every aspect of their lives – from domestic caregiving responsibilities to unstable work environments and dependence on social welfare. Women highlight the altered dynamics of their engagement with public spaces, emphasizing how they now navigate and inhabit the streets. A notable sentiment some express is a sense of loss: the district's depoliticization, the absence of its once-vibrant revolutionary youth, and the cessation of previously frequent social and cultural activities. They argue that this absence of revolutionary figures leaves them vulnerable in the district's streets and homes.

1.1 Macropolitical transformation in Türkiye since 2002

While Okmeydanı has a distinct socio-economic, cultural, and political structure that leads to its classification as an urban margin, it is also significantly influenced by macro-political transformations in Türkiye as an urban margin. The authoritarian transformation in the country resulted in more intense state oppression in the district. Additionally, in the context of nationwide impoverishment, the district, already inhabited by the city's most disadvantaged population, experiences this impoverishment more profoundly. Therefore, this urban margin serves as a microcosm, capturing and mirroring the nuances of the overarching changes in the country. In other words, on the one hand, with the intersections of its class, identity,

geographical and political structure, it contributes to the literature on how the state governs the most marginalized in Turkey and on the relationship between state practice and society in the urban margins, but on the other hand, it is not independent from the fundamental macro transformations in Turkey. In particular, the regime transformation towards authoritarianism, which I will elaborate on below, the AKP government's policy towards Alevis, and the authoritarian neolibreal transformation targeting women the most, can at times provide a microcosm of macro politics. Regarding the country's social, political, and economic changes in the last 20 years, in the Freedom House "Freedom in the World Report 2022", Türkiye is categorized under the countries "Not Free" within the Global Freedom Index. While Türkiye's freedom note was 61 in 2013 and categorized under the countries "partly free," the country's freedom note decreased to 32, Not Free, in 2022. The country gets 16 over 40 for political rights and 16 over 60 for civil liberties.

The authoritarian transformation of Türkiye has been examined and defined in academic literature through various dimensions. These concepts took the form of competitive authoritarianism (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016), neoliberal authoritarianism (Tansel, 2018; Borsuk et al., 2022), and authoritarian populism (Aslan-Akman 2012), hybrid regime (Öniş, 2016), delegative democracy (Özbudun, 2014), unconsolidated democracy (Müftüler-Baç & Keyman, 2015). Some scholars segment the AKP's two-decade reign, suggesting that while its initial approach leaned towards democratic values, in more recent times, the party's tactics have grown increasingly authoritarian. Esen and Gümüşçü (2016) propose a phased transition: Türkiye moved from tutelary democracy to a competitive authoritarian regime. Citing the 2015 election cycles, they point to unfair electoral practices and a systematic infringement on civil liberties. Coupled with neoliberal economic policies, this period saw the

concentration of wealth and assets among select elites, subjecting the masses to heightened insecurities and disparities in housing, employment, and healthcare. After the constitutional referendum at the end of 2010, which expanded executive control over the judiciary, and the general elections in early 2011, which the AKP won with nearly 50% of the popular vote, these intertwined trends of authoritarianism and flagrant sectarianism became more pronounced (Yılmaz, Shukri & Shakil, 2023).

While there is no consensus on the precise typology to explain the political regime transformation in Turkey, there is a growing agreement that the recent years of the AKP have been marked by a distinct authoritarian shift (Tansel, 2018). This era has been marked by deepening socio-economic inequalities, especially among the urban poor, further exacerbating everyday life challenges (Şentürk, 2016). Yılmaz (2021) analyzed the recent period as ”the judicialization of politics, the gradual institutionalization of the police emergency in the country, and the marginalization of citizenship”.

This study provides an opportunity to investigate the district's 20-year history through periodic division, taking into account issues such as poverty, displacement policies, and police violence in an Alevi working-class community. The necessity for a thorough understanding of this 20-year era is highlighted by the growing police engagement in daily life, the deepening of poverty, and the persistent property conflicts that result in displacement. Therefore, evaluations indicating the authoritarian tendencies of the AKP from the outset are more relevant to this study. Authoritarian neoliberalism will be further clarified by the Okmeydanı narrative.

Authoritarian neoliberalism aims to eliminate public participation and oversight mechanisms on the one hand while strengthening the circuits of capital accumulation (Tansel, 2017). Additionally, it is defined by a dual principle of

utilizing repressive state apparatuses to suppress societal opposition. The authoritarian turn in Turkey has been experienced both in the economic and political spheres. Moreover, the conceptualization of authoritarian neoliberalism criticizes analyzing by separating economic or political (Tansel, 2018). In their definition, Tansel (2018) says that authoritarian neoliberalism emphasizes how the practices and institutions introduced with the 1980 coup were adapted and utilized under civilian rule. This authoritarian transformation's significant intervention and impact was on social mobilization in the country. When addressing the bans on protests from 2007 to 2019, Arslanalp and Erkmen (2020) highlight that rights can be suspended in an emergency-like manner, even without the official declaration of a state of emergency. Their analysis terms this phase in Türkiye's political trajectory as the "mobile emergency rule," underscoring the country's shift towards authoritarianism.

1.1.1 Targeting Alevis and Alevi neighborhoods

The police oppression and state practices observed in the district mirror the discrimination experienced by Alevis nationwide, leaving a tangible imprint on the urban landscape. Furthermore, the escalating police violence and socioeconomic deterioration within the neighborhood can also be interpreted as manifestations of the AKP's Alevi policies over the past two decades, particularly in marginalized urban areas. In Turkey, the Alevis constitute the second-largest religious group after the Sunni population (Karakaya-Stumpt, 2018). Throughout the authoritarian transformation of the country, certain groups, including the Alevis, have been marginalized and excluded from the definition of acceptable citizens. The oppressive policies targeting the Alevi community persisted during the AKP's two decades in power.

Alevism has long been a taboo subject in Turkey, often misconstrued as a heretical cult despite its theological roots in Shia philosophy. The historical roots of the marginalization that the Alevis have experienced date back to the Ottoman era, much beyond the present day. In the past, the majority of Sunnis viewed Alevis as "suspicious" and unreliable (White, 2017). Though Alevi population totaled about 10% of the population,[1] Alevis were almost unknown during the earlier decades of Turkish history. Alevis continued to face discrimination and persecution even after supporting secular measures after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Republic of Turkey creation. Sunni Hanafi Islam continued to be the predominant religion in the country despite its official secular attitude, which led to Alevis regularly being excluded from powerful positions and facing persecution (Karakaya-Stumpt, 2018).

The Maraş Massacre, the Çorum Massacre, and the Sivas Massacre represent some of the darkest periods in Turkey's modern history. The Maraş Massacre occurred in 1978 in the southern city of Kahramanmaraş, targeting Alevi and leftist individuals. The Çorum Massacre took place in 1980 in the city of Çorum, where Alevi and leftist groups were attacked. The Sivas Massacre occurred in 1993 in the city of Sivas, resulting in the deaths of at least 33 people, mostly Alevi writers and intellectuals (Ertan, 2017; Massicard, 2007; Mutluer, 2016).

Yonucu (2023a) examines how Alevis are racialized, drawing on the state-sanctioned violence and discrimination against Alevis. She states that the Alevis case in Turkey serves as an example of the connection between the politics of mortality and the construction of race, as well as how sectarianism can function as a type of racism. Alevi people in Turkey have experienced discrimination as a form of

[1] Yonucu (2023a) states that the exact size of the Alevi population in Turkey is not known due to many Alevis feeling the need to conceal their identity because of the stigma attached to it. However, researchers have estimated that the Alevi population ranges between 10 and 30 percent of Turkey's population.

collective punishment. These range from everyday, affective forms of discipline to more overt acts of physical assault, such as pogroms, lynchings, massacres, and acts of genocidal violence (Yonucu, 2023a).

The AKP's treatment of the Alevis goes beyond just upholding and embracing historical injustices. The AKP's utilization of Islamist authoritarian populism during its second decade in power has exacerbated its tendency to marginalize political adversaries, non-Muslims, non-Sunnis, ethnic minorities, vulnerable populations, and anyone who opposes the AKP's ideologies and breaches of democratic principles (Yılmaz, Shukri & Shakil, 2023). Despite a brief period of discussion known as the 'Alevi opening' in 2007–2008, characterized by meetings between Alevi community representatives and the government, which yielded no tangible outcomes, the marginalization of Alevis has worsened significantly under the AKP government. This trend is attributed to the AKP's rapid top-down Islamization of Turkish society and the simultaneous increase in sectarian rhetoric. In addition, the community is portrayed as an unreliable group and a security risk to the nation during periods of civil unrest (Boyraz, 2019; Karakaya-Stump, 2018).

Though the AKP's sectarian discourse went much further in terms of its overtness, the disconcerting exploitation of religious sensibilities and sectarianism for political terminates was reminiscent of the right-wing parties' strategies in the 1960s and 1970s to create a link between "communism" and "heretical" Alevism in a bid to demonize their leftist rivals in the eyes of the Sunni majority (Karakaya-Stump, 2018). A number of the communities that these programs are aimed at are well-known for having a substantial Alevi Marxist population that actively participates in antigovernment demonstrations. All victims of police brutality during the riots were of Alevi descent (Karakaya-Stuımp, 2018).

The government's partisans and spokesmen found it expedient to portray Gezi as an Alevi rebellion. Undoubtedly, the disclosure of a police report claiming that 78% of the people arrested during the protests were Alevi was a part of the same calculated plan to condemn the demonstrations in the eyes of hardline Sunnis. (Karakaya-Stump, 2018). The Gezi protests in Istanbul are examples of the simultaneous beginning and continuation of the otherization process as a new approach to gain political traction (Yılmaz, Shukri & Sakil, 2019). It should come as no surprise that Alevis are heavily impacted by various AKP policies, as they are among those most negatively impacted. The selective nature of police violence based on the time, location, and identity of the target, as well as the fact that most of these fatal police-Gezi victim encounters happened in neighborhoods with a high concentration of Alevi residents, paint a different, more complex picture.

Even though the demonstrators at the Gezi demonstrations were a diverse group, the government and its leaders had already begun to brand them as Alevis by the time the Gezi events happened (Karakaya-Stump, 2014). As a result, in an effort to quell the protests, the government began to target Alevi communities, subjecting the neighborhood to state-sanctioned violence. "The publication of a police report, which claimed that 78 percent of those arrested during the protests were Alevi, was undoubtedly part of a deliberate strategy to discredit the protests in the eyes of conservative Sunnis," wrote Karakaya-Stump (2018, p.62) in describing the profiling of the community during the crackdown.

The neighborhoods with a stigmatized Alevi majority, which are usually easier for leftist parties to organize in, are also the ones where the AKP's gentrification schemes face the biggest societal resistance. Because of this, they have seen sporadic police operations under a variety of cover stories long before the Gezi

Park protests, which helps to explain why the security forces there tended to employ more ruthless force than they did elsewhere during the protests (Karakaya-Stump, 2018).

1.1.1. The patriarchal restoration of the country

The political transformation in the country toward authoritarianism affected women in the country more than men. One of the issues that the country has particularly targeted in recent years is the rights and freedoms of women. Arat (2022) posits that in the face of democratic backsliding, governments manipulated gender policies in distinct ways. First, they broadened liberal legislation regarding women's rights to validate their policies. Next, they infused these laws with conservative interpretations to legitimize their conservative ideologies. Lastly, they established new civil society organizations to consolidate support for their regime. Kandiyoti (2016) suggests that the AKP's ideology and actions are deeply rooted in upholding traditional gender roles and promoting conservative family values. This manifests in three primary areas: first, by utilizing gender as a distinguishing factor in their populist approach, creating a distinction between the authentic nationals and those deemed 'anti-national'; second, through an alliance between neo-liberal welfare and job policies with a (neo)-conservative focus on family values; and lastly, by incorporating violence as a standard aspect of daily politics and political behavior. Kandiyoti (2016) defines the debates, policies, and legal regulations emphasized by the AKP regarding women's rights and freedoms as the masculine restoration of the country.

A pivotal moment came with Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention on 1 July 2021, significantly impacting the country's women's

movement (Bayar, 2023).[2] The decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention[3] was highlighted as a significant event in Freedom House's 2021 report:

> "In March, President Erdoğan decided to withdraw Türkiye from the Istanbul Convention, an international accord designed to counter gender-based violence. This move was met with substantial backlash from advocacy groups both within Türkiye and internationally, as well as foreign governments. Most of Türkiye's opposition parties and citizens disagree with this decision. Moreover, civil society organizations have sought to challenge the withdrawal, labeling it unconstitutional."

To sum up, when looking at what the 20 years of the AKP have meant for the neoliberal authoritarian state intervention, depoliticization, and gender-based violence, the AKP era is essentially a period of neo-liberalization and a period in which working-class Alevi neighborhoods are marginalized. These neighborhoods have a class dimension in this period, deepening poverty and being the place of the lowest segments of society. Before examining the demographic, class, and property relations, distinct characteristics of the neighborhood will be analyzed.

1.2 Chapter summaries

Chapter 2 delves into a comprehensive literature review exploring depoliticization discussions. It bridges the depoliticization theories with discussions on the depoliticization under authoritarianism, authoritarian neoliberal state practices' impacts on depoliticization, and patriarchal dimensions of into depoliticization. This study interprets the process of depoliticization as a complex and nonlinear

[2] The Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe's treaty on countering and preventing violence against women and domestic abuse) categorizes violence against women into four main types: physical, sexual, psychological, and economicalhttps://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/forms-of-violence

[3] The Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe's treaty on countering and preventing violence against women and domestic abuse) categorizes violence against women into four main types: physical, sexual, psychological, and economical. It is argued this withdrawal stemmed from a broader shift from Europeanization to de-Europeanization and a transition from liberalism to conservatism (Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2022).

transformation; it meticulously examines the nuanced interaction between individual agencies and overarching structures during the depoliticization process.

Chapter 3 explained the ethnographic research methods I used during the four years of fieldwork and why I examined a working-class Alevi neighborhood in the context of Türkiye using a political ethnographic approach. In selecting this method, I elaborated on the district's class structure, its relationship with the state, and the approach of newspaper articles. Additionally, I discussed the advantages and disadvantages of conducting ethnographic research in the place where I was born and raised, referencing the literature on native ethnography.

Chapter 4 delves into the evolution of Okmeydanı, tracing its transformation from its inception to 2002. The chapter addresses a primary inquiry: how did Okmeydanı morph into a space of contention? It juxtaposes the district's development with other squatter settlements birthed during Istanbul's rapid urbanization in the 1960s. Two pivotal elements central to Okmeydanı's contentious identity - labor and housing struggles - are meticulously explored. This exploration is grounded in newspaper analyses, archival research, and semi-structured interviews. The analysis bifurcates the timeline into 1960-1980 and 1980-2002 for clarity and depth.

Chapter 5 examines the evolution of contentious politics in Okmeydanı over two decades, from 2002 to 2022. It analyses the frequency, form, and appearances of protests in the district as parts of depoliticization. Centering on the pivotal question—of how the frequency and nature of protests has shifted over this period—the chapter critically examines the current landscape of political dissent within the district. Drawing on narratives from inhabitants and activists and a comprehensive protest event analysis (which includes peaceful protests and socio-political

gatherings) as reported in newspapers, the chapter illuminates a substantial decrease in the number, scale, duration, and variety of actions orchestrated by left-wing factions over the years.

Chapter 6 explores the role of police repression in shaping the political landscape of Okmeydanı between 2002 and 2022. The central question explored is: To what extent and in what manner has the increased police presence contributed to the district's recent depoliticization? The chapter comprehensively reviews the evolving police practices and improvements, particularly the establishment of the 'Kalekol' outpost in 2017. Findings indicate that as police visibility and repression surged, residents increasingly felt pressured, leading to hesitance in participating in street activities and public gatherings. This intensified police presence effectively curbed social and political engagements, pushing Okmeydanı towards depoliticization.

Chapter 7 examines the cooptation of the state into the district through social assistance regime. The chapter highlights that with the increasing poverty, the state governs the everyday life through social assistance. The uncertainty of these asssitances make the district atomized. The dominance of social aid intensifies polarization, and exacerbates vulnerability. The state's cooptation of daily life through poverty, coupled with police repression, induces political apathy, prioritizing immediate survival needs over civic engagement.

Chapter 8 delves into the distinct ways women navigate the political evolution in Okmeydanı, seeking to uncover the underlying reasons behind their multifaceted experiences. The focus sharpens on the impact of the district's depoliticization on women's experiences with GBV, particularly during the shift from an era of politicization to one marked by depoliticization. Over two decades,

women have faced unique challenges amid the district's changing socio-political landscape. Tales of economic coercion and the struggles accompanying urban renewal emerge prominently. Concurrently, as the district drifts towards post-political modality of depoliticization, the traditionally gendered dimensions of contentious politics have gravitated towards municipal avenues and street-level bureaucracy. This transition signifies a stark contraction in public spaces available to women for resisting gender-based violence, with the battlefront largely being relegated to localized government initiatives and bureaucratic channels.

The conclusion chapter illuminates Okmeydanı's nuanced depoliticization amid Turkey's political changes since 2002, exploring authoritarianism, police practices, and neoliberal policies. It reveals that police violence and repression have diminished protests, replaced by municipal actors. The study challenges depoliticization as a standalone concept, emphasizing its complex and nonlinear nature. It calls for further research on depoliticization in authoritarian regimes and meaningful interventions in contemporary political landscapes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The study seeks to explain how politics in an ethnically segregated working-class district evolves and transforms into a realm of depoliticization and how women experience the political transformation in the district. Central to this exploration are two primary inquiries: How do diverse forms of state (non)intervention, repression and cooptation, influence the political evolution from politicization to depoliticization in the district, and how is this depoliticization process under repression and cooptation of the state into everyday life gendered?

2.2 Depoliticization

Discussions about depoliticization emerged after communism's collapse, often characterized as the 'end of politics'. Drawing from a range of studies (Burnham, 2001; Foster et al., 2014; Kunz, 2017; Lombardo & Meier, 2006; Mason, 2013; Muhhoadhyay, 2004; Verloo, 2001; Wood, 2016), one of the main definitions of depoliticization is that it encapsulates the transition of an issue from the realm of political to that of expertise, reframing it as a technical matter subject to expert assessment (Crouch, 2000). Flinder and Buller (2006) define depoliticization as the assortment of methods, systems, and establishments that politicians employ to establish an indirect mode of governance and/or convince the public that they cannot be reasonably held accountable for a specific issue, policy area, or decision (Flinder and Buller, 2006). Although the most referenced definition of depoliticization in the literature has been the transformation of politics into a technical matter, the factors

that have been discussed as contributing to depoliticization are apathy or disengagement in the society, state repression, consensus politics and structural factors (Brown, 2006; Flinders, 2006; Fraser, 1989; Hay, 2007; Mouffe, 2009).

As I employ it in my argument, the term "depoliticization" is broadly in line with definitions offered by other academics, especially those who examine how state actions affect political participation and contestation in particular contexts or societies. Although there isn't a single definition for depoliticization, a number of academics have studied related topics and ideas about the marginalization or repression of political action. Depoliticization has been examined in relation to state power, neoliberalism, and the exclusion of particular groups or concerns from the political arena (Brown, 2006; Rancière, 2001; Hay, 2007). I use the idea of depoliticization in my argument to explain how state policies in a working-class area stifle political protests, uphold police brutality, and encourage atomization and apathy among locals. This is consistent with more general talks about how government policies can restrict political engagement and participation in particular communities.

When Rancière (2001) defines depoliticization as the withdrawal of specific subjects or groups from the political sphere through systems of exclusion and inequality, he concentrates on the distribution of the sensible. Depoliticization, in his view, is the process of eliminating specific issues or groups from the political sphere, typically by the application of discriminatory and unfair techniques. Rancière would likely argue that state activities on the outskirts of cities, such as police brutality and the suppression of political demonstrations, depoliticize these communities by keeping them out of the political sphere. By using coercive tactics to maintain social order and suppress dissent, marginalized groups' voices are effectively silenced and

existing power structures are sustained. Considering the case of Okmeydanı according to Rancière's perspective, the outcomes of state actions at the urban margins might be interpreted as an indication of depoliticization, in which underprivileged populations are essentially excluded from taking part in the political process.

In her analysis of depoliticization, Chantal Mouffe (2009) places particular emphasis on the repression of conflict and the foreclosure of alternative political views within the framework of agonistic democracy. Wendy Brown (2006) links the concept of depoliticization to the logic of neoliberal rationality, which views the selling and privatization of political ideas and beliefs as a way to lessen political participation and agency on a collective level. She says:

> "Depoliticization involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its historical emergence and from a recognition of the powers that produce and contour it. No matter its particular form and mechanics, depoliticization always eschews power and history in the representation of its subject." (p.15)

Peter Mair (2013) demonstrates how apolitical decision-making and technocratic leadership both contribute to the marginalization of democratic politics, with a focus on depoliticization within the context of party politics and the dissolution of established political parties. Ulrich Beck (2005) looks at depoliticization in the context of globalization and the emergence of governance structures that are not based in nation-states, arguing that transnational forces and processes are weakening established political institutions. These differing perspectives help us understand depoliticization as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by a variety of social, political, and economic factors.

The depoliticization model, pioneered by Colin Hay, has profoundly shaped subsequent discourse. Hay (2007) delineates depoliticization as the displacement and

concealment of politics from public scrutiny, while Wood (2016) defines it as the rhetorical maneuvering by social actors to either politicize or depoliticize issues. Hay (2007) further characterizes depoliticization as the process of relegating political matters to administrative or technical domains, a phenomenon he contends occurs when once-politicized topics evade democratic scrutiny and are ceded to bureaucratic or technocratic authorities. He emphasizes how market-oriented reforms, driven by neoliberal principles, prioritize efficiency and economic interests over democratic deliberation, exacerbating the marginalization of diverse viewpoints in policymaking.

Marxist historian and political theorist Ellen Meiksins Wood (1981) offers an alternative perspective on depoliticization, primarily with regard to capitalist nations. Wood (1981) claims that as capitalism's social relations have grown, political issues have been subsumed under concerns about the economy and class power, which has depoliticized society. Wood argues that depoliticization is not merely a management phenomenon, but rather a structural feature of capitalism, wherein the capitalist mode of production shapes and restricts political speech and decision-making. By highlighting the ways in which capitalism conceals the underlying power structures and normalizes social interactions, Wood (1981) elevates some issues beyond the realm of political discourse. According to Wood, depoliticization is essential to comprehending how capitalist societies operate since it is closely linked to class conflict and the perpetuation of capitalist social relations. In conclusion, Wood (1981) views depoliticization within the larger framework of capitalist social relations and class control, whereas Hay (2007) concentrates on depoliticization as a management process under neoliberalism. Thus, the theoretical foundation, focus, and scope of their definitions vary.

Using Okmeydanı as an example, the notion of depoliticization is defined as removing a place and its people from political engagement by means of governmental apparatuses. Thus, it becomes crucial to consider whether depoliticization is best understood from a state or agency perspective. Here, depoliticization occurs not only from one side but also from the encounter between the two and the result of the interaction. Analysis of politics made only from the state perspective was criticized (Jenkin, 2011; Wood & Flinders, 2014). Qi Peng (2023) states that although depoliticization can take many different forms, most studies on the subject have concentrated on government measures (e.g., Burnham 2001, Flinders and Buller, 2006). Ylöstalo (2020) argues that depoliticization is a contentious concept, and it's more about the denial of the political rather than its removal. He criticizes those who define depoliticization as the absence of agencies, stating that if depoliticization is about one form of knowledge superseding another, it is inherently political.

Wood and Flinders (2014, p. 156) categorized the various forms of depoliticization into three groups – governmental, discursive, and societal. Hay's definition of governmental aspect of depoliticization primarily concern the relegation of issues within the state. However, the other two forms focuses on the societal actors in the depoliticization process. Discursive depoliticization is linked to the neoliberal discourse, which encompasses the ideas and language used to advance a topic or issue while disregarding the concept of politics (Wood & Flinders, 2014). Societal depoliticization involves the shift of concerns from the public arena to the private domain, emphasizing "engaged" and "active" citizenship, along with the factors contributing to political disengagement (Wood & Flinders, 2014, p. 159).

Based on these definitions of depoliticization, this study focuses not on state strategy but on how the practices of the state in the spaces of those living in an urban margin, their responses, reactions, participation desires and forms in decision-making mechanisms, and their ways of dissenting, change. In other words, it examines how depoliticization is experienced by individuals living in an urban margin. Therefore, it examines the depoliticization in the district beyond the reduction of politics to a technical issue solely handled by state actors.

A range of topics are examined, including delegating and democratic ideals, crises and uncertainty, extraordinary events and explanations, fate and fear, indifference and autonomy, control, and paradoxes. These topics provide new perspectives on the dynamics that are changing in relation to depoliticization, governance, and the state's function in the modern day (Rosanvallon, 2008).

2.2.1 Depoliticization under the context of authoritarianism

The theoretical discussion on depoliticization is mostly studied in the context of Western liberal democracies (Peng et al., 2023). Considering the relationship between depoliticization and the regime type, the literature on post-politics in Western liberal democracies explained depoliticization as consensus-based politics that sidelines the political debate and contestation (Mouffe, 2002; Ranciere, 1998; Zizek, 2000). However, this definition of depoliticization may not apply to authoritarian regimes. Although the literature on liberal democracies discusses depoliticization as the technocratization of contentious politics, depoliticization in authoritarian regimes is discussed as the mere repression of the contentious politics.

The reason behind the lack of explanation about depoliticization under authoritarian regimes, it is explained that depoliticization techniques don't seem to

be appropriate for an authoritarian government (Unger et. Al, 2014). Studies examining depoliticization in the context of authoritarization exist, notwithstanding their small number (Carlin, 2006; Peng, 2023; Trzcinski, 1991). Depoliticization is a tactic used by authoritarian regimes to liberalize the market, stabilize society, and bolster their hold on power (Bates et al., 2014; Beveridge, 2017; Fong, 2019; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Tubilewicz, 2016).

Under authoritarian regimes, as the power is centralized and democratic norms are eroded, individuals might feel that their voice and vote matter less, leading to political apathy. Levinsky and Ziblatt (2018) examine how the erosion of democratic norms can lead to apathy and disengagement among citizens.

As authoritarian politics produces performative policies to showcase its power, it produces flashy politics rather than real policy discussions. This creates a perception among individuals that there will be no impact on political decisions, leading to indifference. The divisive nature of populist rhetoric can create an 'us vs. them' mentality. Those who don't feel represented by either side can become disillusioned and apathetic. Disillusioned and apathetic citizens, feeling left behind by mainstream politics, may be more susceptible.

There are few studies on the depoliticizaion in authoritarian contexts. Weeden (1999) states that the passive compliance of citizens in Syria under Hafez al-Assad also showed the power of the regime. The cynical apathy of the people occurred to be left in peace (1999, p.147). According to her, the state power shows its existence and capacity through the official language and symbols. This performance of the state is used to prevent people from engaging in political engagement before it begins.

Regarding the case of Okmeydanı, although numerous dynamics are at play, state interference is a significant factor in these transitions. Therefore, depoliticization here involves the suppression and limitation of agencies by state pressure, and agencies being unable to organize protests, participate in protests, leave the neighborhood, experience apathy, and result in polarization among the residents of the neighborhood in response to these pressures.

2.3 State, space and depoliticization: Repression and cooptation

This study analyzes two kinds of state practice at the urban margins as the reasons behind depoliticization of the district. These tools of the state has been used as control the society. Dikeç's research (2001) suggests that certain spatial traits inherent to specific cities render them more resilient against forces of depoliticization. In this context, a pertinent question emerges: What spatial attributes previously fueled Okmeydanı's politicization and then contributed to its recent shift towards depoliticization? While numerous studies have delved into the varied sources of mobilization within urban spaces and how this diversity might bolster political mobilization (e.g., Nicholls, 2008; Uitermark & Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016), there's a limited examination of the reasons behind the heightened politicization in some cities and predominant depoliticization in others.

Urban spaces have traditionally been viewed as potential buffers against the depoliticizing effects of police repression and austerity measures (Mouffe, 2005; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). Such spaces are often seen as relational catalysts for social movements and activist centers. Moor’s study particularly delves into two British cities, Manchester and Bristol, historically recognized as hubs of environmental resistance. Despite facing common depoliticizing challenges like

austerity, anti-squatting laws, police repression, and growing activist disenchantment, the cities exhibit distinct political trajectories. In Manchester, the traditional environmental resistance appears to give way to alternative movements lacking critical depth and confirmation. Contrastingly, Bristol showcases a harmonious blend between these alternative movements and conventional environmental resistance initiatives. Moor (2020) highlights this gap, pointing out notable exceptions like Nicholls and Uitermark (2016). Routledge (2010) similarly focuses on the spatial differences influencing these dynamics. Furthermore, Moor (2020) notes that the equilibrium between the forces of politicization and depoliticization tends to fluctuate over time. To understand how depoliticization takes place in an urban margin, I will examine the relationship between diverse state practices and depoliticization.

2.3.1 Penal state and depoliticization

Neoliberal transformations go hand in hand with penal state practices that become essential tools for managing the urban poor (Garland, 2002; Gilmore, 2007; Simon, 2007; Wacquant, 2009). Reflecting on the management of urban poverty in the US metropolis, the neoliberal transformation includes "the amputation of its economic arm, the retraction of its social bosom, and the massive expansion of its penal fist," says Loic Wacquant (2009, p. 4). The double poverty regulation occurs through "joint action of punitive welfare-turned-workfare and an aggressive penal bureaucracy" (Wacquant, 2013). Authorities curbed group dissent using stringent laws and policing measures, while vulnerable communities faced heightened surveillance, policing, and imprisonment (Harvey, 2005). Various opposition groups

were labeled as 'terrorists' or 'drug traffickers' in these efforts to suppress them (Harvey, 2005).

In discussing the outcomes of state control methods in urban peripheral areas, Auyero (2013) classifies the state's presence in segregated urban zones into three distinct types. The first type refers to urban areas where the state is absent, termed governance voids (Anderson, 1999; Bayat, 2000; Venkatesh, 2008; Williams, 1992). The second type is characterized by areas where the state's approach is aggressive (Crossa, 2009; Goffman, 2009; Müller, 2011; Rios, 2010;). The third type denotes areas where the state's presence is sporadic, selective, and often contradictory (Auyero, 2013; Rodgers, 2006). In the categorization of Auyero, the analysis of the state as "intermittent, selective, and contradictory" is explained as the 3rd category. By referring to Nungent's definition of governing state, Auyero (2012, p.6) defines the state as "both an abstract, macro-level structure and a concrete, micro-level set of institutions with which the urban poor interact in direct and immediate ways."

When evaluating the state practices in Okmeydanı through the lens of these three categories of state (non-existence) at the urban margins, it's clear that referring to it as a 'governance void' is inaccurate. Almost every aspect of daily life appears subjected to some form of governance practice. Considering the establishment of the Kalekol, there's evident militaristic intervention. As for the third category, it has been described as intermittent, selective, and contradictory. However, the police practices in Okmeydanı, while selective and contradictory, are becoming more entrenched and consistent rather than intermittent. Therefore, the state's existence in Okmeydanı is a blend of militarist, selective, and contradictory.

The police's contradictory presence stems from, on the one hand, being constantly in the district to suppress and immediately intervene in any social

movement or protest, while on the other hand, not addressing the drug issue frequently raised by the inhabitants, allowing the drug trade to continue in the area. In addition, the presence of the police reproduces violence and fosters an atmosphere of insecurity and fear. This raises questions about how such an extensive drug trade can flourish there and why residents feel a pervasive sense of insecurity in daily life. While the "localized states of exception" created by police raids highlight the state's arbitrary power (Rodger, 2006), the police are actively involved in upholding an unequal social order under the guise of public security (Fassin, 2013).

Yonucu (2022) explained the main result of the counterinsurgency policies toward the working-class Alevi neighborhoods as de-politicizing these neighborhoods. She argues that although fragmentation of populations is a significant effect of counterinsurgency, its aim is depoliticization. She defines the transformation of the revolutionary groups in Istanbul's dissident working-class neighborhoods as transformation "from a protector whose presence was seen as integral to the community's survival to a figure who stands at the threshold of security provision and security threat." (Yonucu, 2022, p.6)

The Turkish counterinsurgency's focus on working-class Alevi neighborhoods stemmed from leftist politics and these areas being considered "spaces of intervention". Dikeç (2007) critically examines the concept of "spaces of intervention," emphasizing that state interventions in regions inhabited by marginalized communities might not always benefit those areas. He proposes that such interventions are influenced by broader economic, political, and social dynamics and can intensify inequalities and injustices in urban peripheries.

In the context of Türkiye's urban peripheries, Yonucu (2022) posits that police actions in working-class Alevi areas reveal the persistent influence of Cold

War and post-colonial counterinsurgency tactics on Turkish urban policing. Yonucu (2022) explores the concurrent existence of rigorous police surveillance and revolutionary vigilante and gang activities in these neighborhoods from the mid-2000s onward. This juxtaposition reflects the Turkish state's policing and counterinsurgency approaches targeting the Alevi and Kurdish communities, signifying an aggressive quelling of "population dissent against the state" (Yonucu, 2022, p.5). “The frequent sightings of patrol vehicles, the ubiquity of surveillance cameras, and the conspicuous police presence are emblematic of “endocolonization”— governance and policing modalities devised to regulate and suppress dissent” (Yonucu, 2022, p.4).

2.3.2 Welfare state and depoliticization

While the studies on the state practices at the urban margins and specifically working-class Alevi neighborhoods only underlines police repression, these districts are ideologically at the margins and are increasingly becoming the city's poorest and most disadvantaged areas economically. In Wacquant's book (2009) "Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity," the US criminal justice system and social assistance programs are given special attention. He uses examples from the United States as major themes to explain how authoritarian governments and neoliberal policies affect the criminal justice and social protection systems. Wacquant explores how social assistance programs have been affected by neoliberal policies and how this has led to the expansion of the criminal justice system. He discusses the connection and reciprocal interaction between the "penal state" and the "welfare state," contending that these two categories of states are related to each other. According to Wacquant, in authoritarian regimes, social assistance programs

often decrease, while the criminal justice system expands. During this process, the state's priority shifts more towards punishment and surveillance, while the scope and impact of social services and assistance diminish. This situation typically has more pronounced effects on marginalized segments of society, particularly disadvantaged groups like the poor and ethnic minorities.

However, it is important to note that debates in the literature highlight that this is not a universal rule and can vary depending on different reasons and conditions in each country. Etchemendy (2004) argues that welfare expansion or reduction patterns during neoliberal transitions vary based on regime type, with authoritarian regimes tending to expand welfare; studies show most redistributive regimes are authoritarian, using social assistance to control dissent (Albertus, Fenner & Slaner, 2018; Chen, Pan & Xu, 2016; Rudra & Haggard 2005; Ho et al., 2022). In this regard, as the AKP authoritarianizes, it simultaneously increases punitive policies and repression against targeted segments, while also consistently augmenting its authority and power through social assistance. As seen in the table below, the social protection[4] expenditures increases in the last 9 years. Therefore, when examining the state practice in Okmeydanı, it is necessary to look at both the penal and welfare branches of the state, and at this point, a gap in the literature is encountered.

[4] The social protection benefits provided by the Ministry of Family and Social Services of the Republic of Turkey encompass social assistance for 8 risk/need groups: illness/health care, disabled/incapacitated, retired/elderly, widowed/orphaned, family/children, unemployment, housing, and social exclusion.

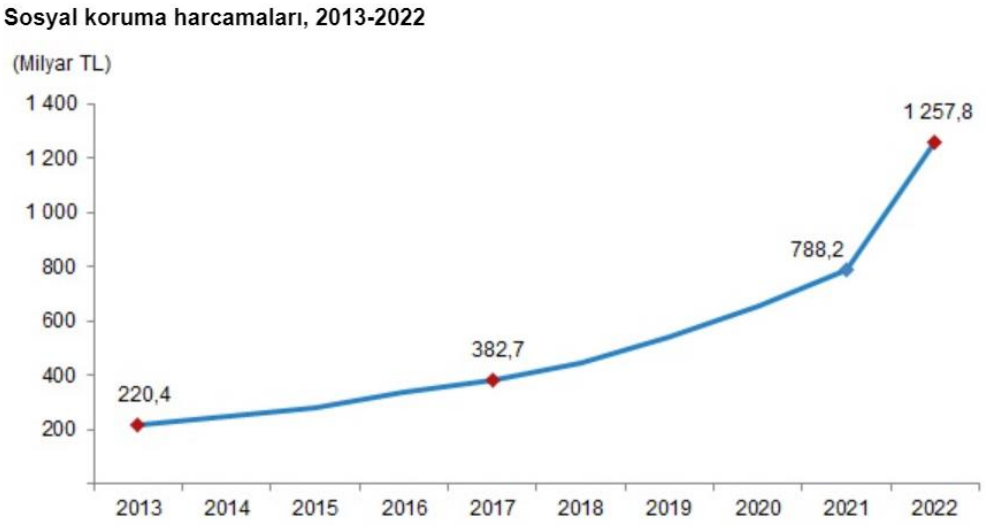

Table 1. Social Protection Expenditures of Turkish Government, 2013-2022
Source: TUIK

The welfare state is debated in the literature for its aim to control marginalized and impoverished sectors, particularly through social assistance programs. Auyero (2010) posits, overt violence against urban poor populations represents just one dimension of state control. Despite the intensified police practices in Okmeydanı, individuals remain reliant on street-level bureaucracy, particularly regarding social assistance. Thus, according to Auyero's (2012) definition, they also assume the role of "patients of the state". He examines how the state intervenes in impoverished and marginalized communities through the services it provides in the poor neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. According to Auyero's perspective, the welfare state is mostly responsible for controlling and directing the lives of its "patients." He contends that the welfare state serves as a social control mechanism in addition to offering assistance and social services. In this situation, the welfare state becomes involved in the lives of marginalized people or groups, frequently in an effort to control their conduct, handle social issues, and uphold the social order.

Auyero (2012) indicates that these state tactics, initially overtly violent, subtly transition into more insidious strategies, culminating in the formation of

‘patients of the state’. This evolution is palpable during the interminable waits at welfare offices, where the resulting uncertainties contribute to the implicit ostracization of the urban poor. Auyero (2012) argues that this perpetual waiting state cultivates a dominating dynamic between the state and its impoverished populace. Immersed in the confines of welfare offices, these individuals are trapped in a relentless cycle of uncertainty.

He draws attention to the ways in which welfare policies and programs can be used as tools for normalization, discipline, and surveillance. These programs have the power to monitor beneficiaries’ activities, impose disciplinary actions for non-compliance, and condition aid on adherence to specific guidelines or behaviors. Furthermore, the welfare state’s ability to provide resources and assistance can also serve to calm oppressed people’ concerns and lessen their discomfort, which helps to reduce the likelihood of unrest or resistance. According to Auyero’s analysis, the welfare state functions as a social control mechanism that molds and controls the lives of its “patients” in order to further larger political and social goals, even while it provides essential help to vulnerable groups.

Similarly, Tilly (2007) elaborates that street-level bureaucrats often enforce these "invisible elbows" and predominantly target marginalized urban groups. Tilly discusses the ways in which social mechanisms, often subtle or unseen, shape and influence people's behaviors and relationships within societies. While the term "invisible elbows" is not directly defined by Tilly, it is often used to describe the unseen forces or informal networks that impact individuals' actions and decisions in social, economic, and political contexts. These "invisible elbows" can include social norms, networks of influence, informal power structures, and other factors that operate beneath the surface of formal institutions and regulations.

The study of social welfare frequently explores the reasons underlying the creation, growth, and reduction of welfare initiatives. Some studies stress political incentives, while others credit structural or political catalysts like political rivalry or societal disturbances for the creation of such programs. It is analyzed that welfare programs primarily surge to quell societal unrest or in response to challenges posed by political adversaries or the working class. Piven and Cloward (1977) argue that welfare programs are strategically introduced during tumultuous times to manage and alleviate unruly segments of the population. They contend that such programs ensure societal stability and modulate the labor market. Therefore, the recipients of these benefits often find themselves reliant on state support.

Fox and Cloward (1977) examines the history of poverty and public welfare programs in the United States, addressing the state's control and regulatory functions over the poor.Particularly, they argue that the assistance provided by the state shapes and controls the poor within certain norms and behaviors. Additionally, they discuss how public welfare programs may render the poor passive and restrict social mobility.

Over the past two decades in Türkiye, expanding social assistance programs has been a pivotal strategy for the government to secure the allegiance of economically disadvantaged demographics (Arın, 2002; Aybars & Tsarouhas, 2010; Çelik & Koray (eds.), 2015; Kutlu (ed.), 2018; Yoltar, 2009; Yörük, 2012) Despite a rise in social aid initiatives, particularly targeting Kurdish communities in impoverished urban areas, the trend appears to diverge from Wacquant's theory, which associates a decline in relief efforts with amplified criminalization. Yörük (2012) investigates the question that whether the swift expansion and unequal distribution of social welfare programs in developing countries can be attributed to

pressures stemming from grassroots political movements? The present study investigates the state of affairs in Turkey and finds that social assistance programs there favor the Kurdish minority and its surrounding regions disproportionately, with a special emphasis on internally displaced Kurds living in urban and metropolitan areas. The results show that Kurdish ethnic identity appears to be the main factor of eligibility for social welfare assistance, rather than higher poverty rates among Kurds, which could account for the significant ethnic differences in welfare provision. This observation strongly shows that the Turkish government manages Kurdish unrest in the country through social welfare programs. Social aid seems to be distributed in regions where political involvement and poverty cross rather than just based on levels of poverty.

Recently, in Türkiye, the state's intensified criminalization of these politically charged neighborhoods coincides with an uptick in social aid. The consistent surge in social assistance spending in recent years can quantitatively evidence this. Social assistance programs in Türkiye have often been interpreted as mechanisms to quell social unrest and bolster voter support (Buğra & Candaş, 2011; Eder, 2010; Özdemir, 2020). The cooptation by the state through social assistance into the everyday life in Okmeydanı that examined in the present study shows one of these mechanisms. It reveals that by penetrating into everyday life, the social assistance programs causes diverse faces of depoliticization such as fragmentation, apathy, and distance inhabitants from the contentious politics. Yörük (2012) posits that structural explanations fall short of deciphering the distinct focus on Kurdish ethnic identity within Turkish social assistance initiatives. He suggests that political perspectives are better equipped to unravel complexities that structural viewpoints cannot. The overarching narrative of Türkiye's social assistance policies indicates a

transformative effect of the Kurdish conflict on structural determinants of social policy, subsequently leading to an ethnic divide (Yörük, 2012). Yörük underscores the need for a political rationale in understanding the disproportionate assistance provided to the Kurdish community, as politics is deeply intertwined with Kurdish ethnic identity.

Yörük (2012) probes the influence of grassroots-generated pressures on the accelerated growth and ethnically/racially skewed distribution of social assistance schemes in emerging markets. He observes that Kurdish migrants in impoverished neighborhoods have a higher tendency to avail themselves of social assistance compared to other demographic groups. Further emphasizing this point, Yörük (2012) contends that the Turkish administration's propensity to extend social aid is not solely based on economic deprivation but on the politicization of the impoverished.

Additionally, a prevalent notion links social assistance programs to electoral gains in Türkiye. Various scholars argue that the AKP's electoral success can be attributed to its social policies, suggesting that electoral motives lie at the heart of these programs (Buğra & Candaş, 2011; Koray & Çelik, 2015). Although Okmeydanı is not a district where AKP can get the highest votes, the social aid in the district has caused polarization within the district and suspicion toward the contentious politics in the district.

Not only related to gaining electoral votes, in urban areas where AKP is not likely to receive votes, the possibility of receiving social assistance, the ambivalent existence of social assistance programs, and the uncertainty surrounding them have led to atomization and apathy toward contentious politics. While in the field, the belief among opposition groups is quite the opposite. They argue that there is an

inverse correlation between contention and aid, and they discuss that due to protests in the neighborhood, the government cannot provide assistance to the neighborhood. The conditionality, uncertainty in the distribution of aid, and the disconnect between aid-providing institutions, in other words, the governance of aid by state institutions, also increase the dominance of aid in daily life.

Similarly, Yoltar (2019) highlights how the vagueness and inconsistencies in the allocation of green cards in Adıyaman have allowed for tactical opportunities yet have also led to disempowering outcomes. She contends that rather than being a distant or abstract entity, the state manifests profoundly in Adıyaman. Specifically, she posits that through intricate, opaque, and unpredictable government mechanisms like the Green Card, the state takes on a commanding, omnipresent role, casting a 'magical presence' over the daily lives of the residents of Adıyaman. Another example of the impact of the ambivalent existence of welfare state is William's (2011) study on welfare state dynamics within a Muslim community, emphasizing how residents often perceive the state's presence through its absence and inaccessibility. He suggests that while the community experiences neglect from the state, they don't interpret this as its inefficiency. Rather, they have fostered defensive mechanisms in response. Even though a welfare program designed for weavers exists, it remains largely inaccessible to the Muslim inhabitants, serving more as a tool for the state's legitimacy than a genuine aid mechanism. The nuanced interplay between the state's perceived presence and actual absence has catalyzed the emergence of these defensive entities in the Muslim community. Yet, while these defensive measures can be interpreted as acts of resistance or subversion, they don't typically usher in substantial shifts in overarching structures.

In summary, a complex interplay of governing processes impacting the lives of marginalized urban inhabitants is revealed by the delicate interaction between the welfare state and depoliticization. Although research emphasizes how increased criminality and social assistance expansion coincide in politically sensitive areas, the reality in Turkey paints a more complex picture. The distribution and effects of social help in urban areas go beyond electoral considerations, despite the propensity to associate social assistance with electoral wins, especially by the AKP. Social assistance programs' ambiguous existence and the uncertainty surrounding their distribution fuel atomization and apathy toward divisive politics, especially in places where the ruling party is not well-liked by the electorate. This situation highlights the necessity of conducting a comprehensive analysis of state actions, including the welfare and penal branches of government. Furthermore, research indicates that political viewpoints provide important new information on the unequal distribution of aid, highlighting the close relationship between politics and ethnic identity in the formation of social welfare programs.

2.3.2 Depoliticization, urban violence and gender

Urban spaces offer numerous mechanisms and opportunities to address violence, largely due to their access to economic resources and the presence of institutional support systems. However, the urban setting can also be a breeding ground for heightened violence due to various structural dynamics. Factors such as poverty, involvement in certain occupations, substandard living conditions, and the physical layout of urban zones can intensify the prevalence of violence (McIlwane, 2013, p.65). Violence molds one's understanding of reality and alters interpersonal dynamics in daily life (Coronil & Skurski, 2006; Jimeno, 2001). While everyone in

Okmeydanı is affected by the conflicts and various forms of violence, it's evident that men and women undergo these experiences distinctively. Both empirical interviews and theoretical discussions confirm this divergence in experiences between genders.

The scholarly discourse contends that women bear a greater brunt of economic and political violence than men. The battles women face against everyday violence resonate with discussions on women's agency, framed as endeavors to lead a 'normal' life amidst pervasive violence (Bustamente et al., 2022; Chant,2013; Datta, 2016; Das, 2004; Fenster, 2015; Hume & Wilding, 2020; Moser, 2001; McIlwane, 2013; Moser & McIlwaine, 2014; Muggah, 2012). The intricate connection between gender and urban spaces is underscored (Mills, 2007). Hume and Wilding (2020, p.2) posit that the nuances of gender within urban violence are molded by the unique interplay of cultural and political dynamics, actors, and localized practices in any given area. They draw attention to the intricate and sometimes conflicting strategies women adopt influenced by these local practices.

According to Standing et al. (2016), it's essential to discern the violence influenced by other disparities, especially income and economic inequality inherent in impoverished urban communities in informal settlements, as these can be direct catalysts for violence against women and girls. In underdeveloped urban areas, gender disparities amplify violence against women and girls, particularly when economic hardships emphasize these inequalities (Bustamente et al., 2022; Hindin & Adair, 2002; Rodriguez et al., 2014).

The pertinent issue of how these violent urban spaces actively limit women's agency is especially significant when examining Istanbul's urban fringes. Echoing the feminist sentiment that "the personal is political" (Nelson & Seager, 2005, p. 2), there's a conscious political intent in focusing on embodiment, thereby exploring the

more private facets of everyday existence such as the body, intimacy, and domestic life (Moss & Dyck, 2003). However, as McIlawane (2013, p.69) underscores, no singular causal factor, particular location or level, is responsible for violence. Rather, it's an interplay of multiple elements that might result in an environment where political, economic, and social violence becomes more probable.

Understanding a woman's use of space can elucidate her ability to evade abusive dynamics, while Auge's concept of 'non-places' highlights the challenges of creating safe environments. Identifying meaningful spaces, integral to personal identity, inform immediate refuges and the long-term establishment of secure homes (Bowstead, 2011). When discussing domestic violence and its perceived private nature, Humphrey (2004) suggests that a "localized sovereignty," even within larger sovereignties, provides the household head with a domain to control life and death. Efforts to bring gender violence into the public discourse mark a significant transition in distinguishing between the private realm of family and kinship and public institutions, on the other hand.

In Okmeydanı, women encounter various forms of gender-based violence, influencing their perspective on the district's political transformation. These forms range from physical and economic to psychological. Over the past two decades, factors like demographic changes, production and property relations shifts, state interventions via social assistance, and policing have distinctly impacted the women in the district. The surge in gender-based violence is attributed to changing migration patterns, rising poverty, an unstable and informal job market, and the ongoing process of urban transformation. This violence is exacerbated by increased responsibilities within large family units, financial hardships, declining reproductive

health, employment restrictions imposed by spouses, and limited participation in public spheres.

In the district, a salient issue for women emerges from the interconnectedness of diverse forms of violence, each intensifying the other and profoundly limiting their daily experiences. The multiple forms of violence intersect, subjecting women to varying degrees of harm across public and private spaces. Hume and Wilding (2020) note the significant influence of local dynamics on the gendered politics of urban violence, highlighting women's multifaceted and often paradoxical strategies in response. Given this context, understanding how urban spaces saturated with violence limit women's agency, as posed by McIlwaine (2013), remains a pivotal concern for urban fringes in Istanbul.

The gendered consequences of depoliticization have not been sufficiently examined, and this thesis aims to address that gap. Grounded in the patriarchal transformation of the country, this research asserts that investigating gender inequality and the gender-based consequences of depoliticization offers a nuanced perspective. By assuming that the political realm itself is gendered, the study contends that the depoliticization process is inherently gendered as well. Consequently, this approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of depoliticization discussions within the broader context of authoritarian transformation.

Regarding how depoliticization discussions are applied in gender politics eclectically, Ylöstalo (2020) points out that the evolution in gender politics can be understood through the lens of depoliticization. Beier and Çağlar (2020), when examining the European Gender Action Plan, suggest that it turns intricate social dynamics into technical matters, thus depoliticizing gender equality and framing it as a technocratic, data-driven form of politics. In a similar vein, Szczepanikova (2010)

posits that NGO support can depoliticize refugees, presenting them more as beneficiaries of the host society. Horton (2017) delves into the impact of the microfinance movement on women-led collective initiatives, indicating that microfinance initiatives occupy a middle ground between depoliticized NGOs and outright political activism. The transformation of the women's movement into civil society organizations is discussed in the context of gender-based violence activism becoming influenced by global power dynamics, reproducing these hierarchies. This transformation is described as the activism against gender-based violence evolving into an institutionalized, bureaucratic structure facilitated by international financial support (Mojab, 2009). Kandiyoti (2009) defines this process as donor-driven gender activism post-2001.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of urban margins in Okmeydanı reveals a multifaceted and dynamic socio-political landscape marked by the pervasive influence of neoliberal transformations, penal state practices, and gender-based violence. The neoliberal paradigm, intertwined with penal state practices, manifests in the economic disempowerment, social alienation, and heightened surveillance experienced by the urban poor. Loic Wacquant's characterization of the neoliberal transformation as the amputation of economic opportunities, retraction of social support, and expansion of penal control aptly captures the profound impact on Okmeydanı, where punitive welfare-turned-workfare and aggressive penal bureaucracy intersect.

The state's presence in urban peripheral areas, classified into governance voids, militaristic approaches, and sporadic selectivity, underscores the complex

nature of state control. Okmeydanı experiences a blend of militaristic, selective, and contradictory state interventions, as seen in the establishment of Kalekol and the evolving police practices. The state's focus on working-class Alevi neighborhoods reflects counterinsurgency tactics, contributing to the depoliticization of these areas and instilling fear among residents. The coexistence of rigorous police surveillance and revolutionary activities signifies an aggressive suppression of population dissent against the state.

Examining the welfare state practices reveals a gap in the literature, as the focus on police repression neglects the parallel role of social aid and welfare initiatives. Despite intensified, selective, and contradictory police practices, individuals in Okmeydanı navigate the bureaucratic complexities of social assistance, assuming the role of "patients of the state." The study of social welfare in Türkiye demonstrates a divergence from Wacquant's theory, with increased social assistance coinciding with intensified criminalization, challenging traditional expectations.

The dynamics of urban margins extend to gender-based violence, where women bear a disproportionate burden shaped by economic, political, and social factors. The feminist perspective emphasizes the political intent in focusing on embodiment and the need to distinguish between the private and public realms. The interconnectedness of diverse forms of violence limits women's agency, with economic hardships, shifting demographics, and ongoing urban transformations contributing to heightened vulnerability.

In essence, the urban margins of Okmeydanı represent a complex interplay of neoliberal policies, state interventions, welfare practices, and gender-based violence. The unique challenges individuals face in this marginalized community necessitate a holistic understanding transcending conventional disciplinary boundaries.

Addressing the multifaceted dimensions of urban life in Okmeydanı requires comprehensive and intersectional approaches that consider the economic, political, and social intricacies shaping the experiences of its diverse inhabitants.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction: Why political ethnography

This study draws from four years of comprehensive ethnographic research, encompassing methods like semi-structured interviews, walk-in interviews, participant observation, visual data, and archival research. Such a layered ethnographic approach provides a robust foundation to understand the varied intricacies of everyday life in the district. Considering the marginalized structure of the district, political ethnography allows researchers to "display the thickest information" about the society (Geertz, 1973) and uncovers both visible and often overlooked “invisible relations between different political actors” (Yashar, 1999, p.7; Auyero & Joseph, 2007, p.5).

Political ethnography is a pivotal tool to comprehend “the impact of large political transformations in everyday life” (Auyero & Joseph, 2007, p.2). While quantitative methods in political science face criticism for their inadequacy in comprehending the subtle, invisible relations between different political actors, mainstream ethnography has similarly been critiqued for its need for more focus on politics and political entities. Auyero (2012) contends that mainstream ethnographic research often overlooks the “day-to-day intricacies”, neglects their “implicit meanings”, and fails to capture the depth of “its passions and its sacrifices”—nuances that quantitative methods struggle to discern. While political ethnographic research delves into the power dynamics inherent in all social life, on the flip side, it emerges as an indispensable method for unpacking politics. In this approach, people

take center stage as crucial study sites rather than merely elections and states (Wolford, 2007).

As a socially, economically, and politically segregated district, Okmeydanı's socio-economic makeup necessitates political ethnographic research to analyze everyday life dynamics deeply. As they currently stand, mainstream data sources are ill-equipped to fully understand and delve into the intricacies of daily life, inequalities, injustices, and the resistance against these inequalities, injustices, and state repression in Okmeydanı. Media portrayals of the Alevi working-class neighborhoods in Türkiye often frame them with militaristic narratives, using descriptions akin to bombs or high-explosive weaponry. Such representations perpetuate warlike metaphors in the public's perception of these spaces (Yonucu, 2014). Headlines like "Dangerous tension in Okmeydanı" and "Okmeydanı became a war zone" are among the most striking examples of news title that displays how the district is portrayed in the mainstream media. Notably, the same or similar headlines have been recycled across different years - 2009, 2012, 2013, and 2014, to name a few. Such representations consistently label the urban margins as dangerous places.

While it's undeniable that violence and police raids are prevalent in the district—a core focus of this study is to delve into the dynamics of such violence—it's essential to note that mainstream media often paints a one-dimensional picture, suggesting the district revolves solely around police raids or violence. Relying exclusively on mainstream media depictions to understand the district would be inadequate and potentially misrepresentative. For this reason, the present study endeavors to move beyond these limited perceptions by conducting multi-layered ethnographic research.

Another important source, namely statistical data, will not be sufficient and reliable to understand the neighborhood, similar to mainstream media sources. The inherent complexities of these conflict-ridden areas, combined with the knowledge production norms in Türkiye, render them statistically elusive. In urban margins, even primary data such as population figures are suspect, as Perouse (2011) suggests. This challenge is not unique to Türkiye; it can also be considered a common problem for urban margins in the international literature. Bourgois (1996) contends that statistics often fail to accurately capture the lived realities of the urban poor and other marginalized groups. For example, he points out that while official statistics might suggest economic growth and a drop in drug use for New York City's El Barrio, the persistent social suffering experienced by its residents tells a different story. Thus, even in the face of seemingly positive statistics, such spaces' more profound struggles and realities may remain obscured.

While there's a growing body of neighborhood-specific quantitative data for Istanbul, the current datasets need to be more reflective of the neighborhoods' realities, day-to-day life, and civic politics. Notably, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) recently made a dataset based on neighborhoods available. While the data from the municipality illustrates the district's socioeconomic marginalization, it falls short of representing the political climate or the dynamics of contentious politics. For instance, when analyzing cultural structures and data from IMM on visual arts, cinema, and libraries, there needs to be more socio-cultural spaces within the three neighborhoods. The dataset offered by IMM overlooks the alternative arenas of leftist politics in the district. However, this study is centered on evaluating the evolution and trajectory of contentious politics and the public spaces birthed from these political activities in the district. Given this focus, solely relying

on these datasets would be neither adequate nor accurate. A comprehensive ethnographic research approach is essential to effectively analyze the intricate dynamics of civic politics in everyday life.

Despite all the dynamics that make political ethnography a necessary research method to understand the everyday life and political transformations in the neighborhood, the use of political ethnographic research methods in Istanbul's racially segregated working-class neighborhoods is not without its controversies. Considering Türkiye's authoritarian transformations, debates surrounding ethnographic research in authoritarian settings suggest that data from interviews and fieldwork might not always be verifiable (Brown, 2023). The district's oppressive atmosphere and prevailing fear often inhibit interviewees from speaking freely. During the research, some participants asked me to refrain from recording our conversation when taking notes and recordings. Furthermore, many interviewees only began commenting about the police and revolutionaries once I assured them the recording was turned off. For instance, a grocery shop worker cut our conversation short when the topic shifted to the police, remarking, "We are tradespeople; I cannot speak further".

Therefore, the manipulative nature of the mainstream media sources mentioned above, the inadequacy of statistics, the possibility that even alternative media sources may not cover the daily protests in the neighborhood, and the potential repression in the country hindering people from speaking openly in interviews all make a multi-layered analysis a necessity. In essence, "political ethnography immerses researchers directly within political processes, allowing them to witness and understand these dynamics firsthand, rather than relying solely on testimonies, written records, or other indirect sources of information" (Tilly, 2007, p.248).

Understanding how individuals engage with state power necessitates delving into unseen relationships, subtle interactions, and the ambiguous realms where these interactions occur—areas that political ethnography seeks to illuminate (Woldorf, 2007). By examining 'the concealed backstage of politics,' political ethnography reveals the layers beneath official rhetoric and illustrates its manifestations in daily life (Auyero, 2012; Weeden, 1999).

3.2 Positionality: Ethnography at home

In doing ethnographic research, my research position and how to conduct ethnographic research in the district where I was born and lived for 30 years sometimes facilitated the research, and sometimes vice versa. In literature, insider and outsider positions define the researcher's position and relation with the field. As discussed in the literature, doing it where you belong and where you live makes it seem like you have a single identity. But we have different identities, and this can make a difference between you, even if the area you do research in is where you live. In addition, although it is sometimes very easy to reach them, sometimes people have a harder time explaining it to someone they know. Another difficulty is that since you are equipped with knowledge of the daily lives of so many people, you sometimes have difficulty looking at and analyzing the data you have. I have encountered all of these problems in the field, and at this point, I have constantly struggled to position myself somewhere between the inside and the outside of research. Before conveying my experiences, I will discuss how these positions are conceptually discussed in the literature.

Native ethnography, which has been used to define people conducting research in their community, has been defined as “people who were formerly the

subjects of ethnography become the author of studies of their group" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p.2). However, recently, the position of native ethnographers as an insider, regardless of their multiple identities, has been criticized. By asking, "How native is a native ethnographer?" Narayan (1993) criticizes the idea that native ethnographers are insiders without considering their complex backgrounds and multiple identities. She opens the way to question the ethnographer, insider, and outsider position.

When criticizing the distinction between native and non-native, Narayan (1993) states that cultural factors such as class, gender, and education could outweigh the identities. She underlines the polarization emphasized by the traditional view between absolute and native anthropology. The traditional view differs from fundamental anthropology in that "a native anthropologist would forward an authentic insider's view to the profession" (Narayan, 1993, p. 682). Narayan (1993) states that the idea of the native ethnographer as an authentic insider was the view of the colonial era.

With globalization and the flow of trade, politics, and media, identities have become more complex. Instead of considering native ethnographers as insiders by only looking at their relations with their communities, "shifting identities in relationship with the people and issues as anthropologists seek to represent" should be focused on (Narayan, 1993). Like Narayan's emphasis on multiple identities of individuals, Merton (1992) emphasized that individuals have a status set, not a single status. She states that we do not only belong to communities we were born in and are 'the community of professional academics.' She refers to Renato Rosaldo's (1989) emphasis on the 'multiplex subjectivity of anthropologists with 'many crosscutting identifications.' She refers to Tedlock's (1991) question of why an anthropologist

who did long-term fieldwork cannot be respected as a "partial insider" since they become bicultural with long-term fieldwork. Moreover, she emphasizes that "all of us are indigenous somewhere, and the majority of anthropologists at some time deal with their communities."

Messerschmitt (1981) signified the critic's insider position and how 'they cannot detach from their cultural understandings,' which is why they cannot see the roots of the patterns taken for granted in everyday life. Narayan (1993) stated that all ethnographers have multiple identities and can sometimes be insiders. She emphasized that ethnographers who did not research in their community can have long-term relations and be regarded as insider ethnographers.

Van Ginkel (1998) emphasizes that insider status causes people to have more profound knowledge about macro society. However, it is also stated that since the insiders have close relations, it would prevent them from discussing social norms with informants. Van Ginkel (1998) argues that while a non-native ethnographer has problems entering the field, for a native ethnographer, it is difficult to "get out to enable them to have an ethnographic gaze in familiar social environments" (Van Ginkel, 1998, p.58).

Reflecting on my fieldwork experiences considering the existing literature, it becomes evident that my engagement was multifaceted, intersecting with various scholarly debates. Such a dynamic field setting necessitates a continuous reevaluation and adjustment of one's position throughout the research process. During the 4-year ethnographic research in the district where I was born and lived for 30 years, I experienced the insider and outsider positions discussed above. These definitions can be used in those situations, as well as the challenges and advantages of being an insider and the struggle to find a middle ground.

Based on this discussion in the literature, even though I call myself an insider in Okmeydanı, these are not strict statuses but fluid (Contreras, 2015). It is essential to find “the place between” being an insider and an outsider in the district (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). During my research in Okmeydanı, at some points, I tried to be an outsider to understand the relations better, eliminate the disadvantages of being an insider, and realize “the routine” of my life as a part of the research.

I felt the disadvantages of being close to society during the initial research periods. For example, at some points, to see the police everywhere was a "routine" for me. Therefore, it took much work to ask questions about the police's existence there. Alternatively, I needed to recognize how the political claims included in the agenda of the district's contentious politics were that wide. In other words, it took time for me to realize how the slogans on the walls and the graffiti are essential to understanding the district.

Sometimes, I witnessed very similar stories. I experienced what Aslı described, with the school service not entering the neighborhood during my high school years during 2003-2007. On the one hand, when I heard a similar story from Aslı in 2019, I was disappointed that nothing had changed about the district's image for the rest of the city. I also felt sorry for the discrimination Aslı experienced. At such moments, there were times when I focused only on the story and then told my own experience. Of course, on the one hand, this facilitated the flow of the conversation. On the other hand, there were times that the interview turned into a mutual experience sharing and moved away from what I wanted to ask.

Not surprisingly, this wasn't the only example I encountered in the interviews with similar experiences. I, too, experienced all the ambivalence felt by women in the analysis sections, where I touched upon the perception of the neighborhood.

Therefore, even though I did not start the research to examine women's experiences in the first place, I always knew that if I did not do this, what the research says about the neighborhood would be incomplete. Meeting with women was important because I have stories that I know and have experienced, and as a woman, I've lived through the gendered dynamics of growing up in the neighborhood. We all experienced and saw for years that while there were constant protests in the neighborhood, women could not attend the protests because they did housework. Besides, whether their husbands would allow them to work all the time or not was a casual conversation we always heard in daily life.

By seeing and experiencing the pressure that a place like a neighborhood, where everyone knows each other, puts on women, I came across and confronted again in the field that an analysis of daily life and political transformation in the neighborhood is necessary from a gender-based perspective. Notwithstanding all the similarities, the analysis of the depoliticization process explores differences, such as socio-economic status, ideological perspectives, age, and the duration of time spent in the neighborhood. The dynamics of living in this neighborhood as a woman are thoroughly examined within this context. Despite this, the experience of violence experienced by women who bore all the responsibilities of large families and who were known to be subjected to violence by their husbands stood out as a fact that all actors in the neighborhood saw, knew, accepted, but ignored. As Hammersley (1995) states, access is an ongoing issue during the research. The difficulties and conveniences in the field that I experienced due to being a native researcher revealed that the issue of access in ethnographic research goes beyond just entering the field and accessing the data.

3.3 The case selection: Why Okmeydanı

Okmeydanı stands alongside other areas in Istanbul, such as Gazi, Armutlu, Gülsuyu, and 1 Mayıs neighborhoods, recognized as "Alevi working-class neighborhoods." These neighborhoods took shape in the 1960s, stemming from the influx of rural Alevi migrants during Türkiye's accelerated urbanization era. These migrants established their distinct political and social networks in these locales, transforming them into bastions of leftist politics in Istanbul. Tensions and clashes with state authorities have been a feature of these neighborhoods since their inception. Numerous political incidents historically molded both the nature and image of these areas. In 1977, significant devastation struck the 1 Mayıs neighborhood, leading to intense confrontations between the police, revolutionary factions, and residents. Thousands of shanties faced demolition, and several inhabitants lost their lives in the clashes that ensued during this process. As Aslan (2001) asserts, none of the past demolitions resonated with public sentiment as profoundly as the upheaval in this central neighborhood, commanding the attention of both civil and official institutions.

The 1996 conflicts in the Gazi district[5] stand out as a pivotal moment in the history of these neighborhoods, catapulting them into the awareness of those beyond their borders. Examining the Cumhuriyet newspaper archives reveals columns describing these neighborhoods and interviews with their residents, primarily post-90s. The clashes and protest movements significantly defined the political fabric of Alevi's working-class neighborhoods in Istanbul. Significantly, while the Gazi massacre occurred in the Gazi neighborhood, it influenced the patterns of leftist

[5] The main breaking point in the Gazi district's history is the massacre on 12 March 1995. Coffee-houses of Alevi groups were fired and an elderly prestigious figure of the Alevi community died. The clashes continued for four days, 22 people died and 155 were wounded.

mobilization and perceptions of other Alevi working-class neighborhoods in Istanbul.

Neighborhoods are multifaceted spaces and embrace socio-cultural and political dimensions (Lefebvre, 1991). These areas are pivotal administrative units, forming the nexus of state-society relations (Erman, 2001). In essence, neighborhoods serve as intersections where state policies and citizen realities converge. Furthermore, neighborhoods arenas where established powers are perpetuated and contested (Erman, 2010, p. 172). Castells (1983) envisions neighborhoods as battlegrounds for contention and negotiation. Similarly, Sampson's (2012) research, rooted in data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, underscores the role of neighborhoods in influencing social outcomes. He posits that these areas are not passive settings but dynamic entities instrumental in molding social life.

While the political history of Alevi working-class neighborhoods often leads to their portrayal as a homogenous entity in Türkiye's urban lexicon—a perspective occasionally echoed in this study—they exhibit significant variations. Their geographical location, demographic makeup, and closeness to labor zones differ from one neighborhood to another. Moreover, as Erman (2011) underscores, their relations with state power, political involvement, and geographical positioning vary. It's essential to acknowledge that these urban spaces and their inhabitants each have unique experiences when it comes to "building, improving, and (not)defending their homes, neighborhoods, and communities" (Erman, 2011; Yonucu, 2022).

Drawing from the concept of the relational politics of space (Massey, 2005), the dynamics of migration flows, labor, housing, identity struggles, and state force oppressions in the neighborhoods of the Okmeydanı district spotlight distinct

moments of power and resistance intersecting. Field research highlights the district's unique character, shaped by its geographical position within the city, varied migration waves, the presence of left-wing organizations, multifaceted state interventions, and resistance movements.

Selecting a racially segregated working-class neighborhood in Istanbul, like Okmeydanı, provides a rich context for unraveling state-society relations in Türkiye and the evolving nature of contentious politics. Das and Poole (2004) assert that examining the state through the lens of urban peripheries reveals its strategies for managing and regulating marginalized groups. Such an analysis highlights the boundaries of state power and sheds light on its governance mechanisms over these populations. Okmeydanı, on the one hand, is a place that can be examined as an Alevi working-class neighborhood, and on the other hand, as a place in the middle of labor relations and urban tensions among the working-class Alevi neighborhoods category, offers an important option to understand state-society relations and examine state power.

Geographically, Okmeydanı stretches across the municipalities of Kağıthane, Şişli, and Beyoğlu. The district's intricate fabric includes neighborhoods that Halil Rıfat Paşa, Mahmut Şevket Paşa, Piyalepaşa, Fetihtepe, Kaptanpaşa, Piripaşa, Örnektepe, Sütlüce, and Halıcıoğlu. However, this research specifically zooms in on three locales: Fetihtepe, Piyalepaşa, and Mahmut Şevket Paşa (MŞP) – highlighted in Figure 1. Although Okmeydanı's contentious political past encompassed a wider area, recent decades spotlighted these three neighborhoods, centralizing contentious politics and the Alevi community. Consistently marginalized, these regions exemplify Wacquant's definition of urban marginality, representing a "macro societal drift towards inequality" (1998, p.1639). Municipal data from Beyoğlu and

Şişli accentuates their distinct demographic, economic, and social profiles compared to their neighboring areas.

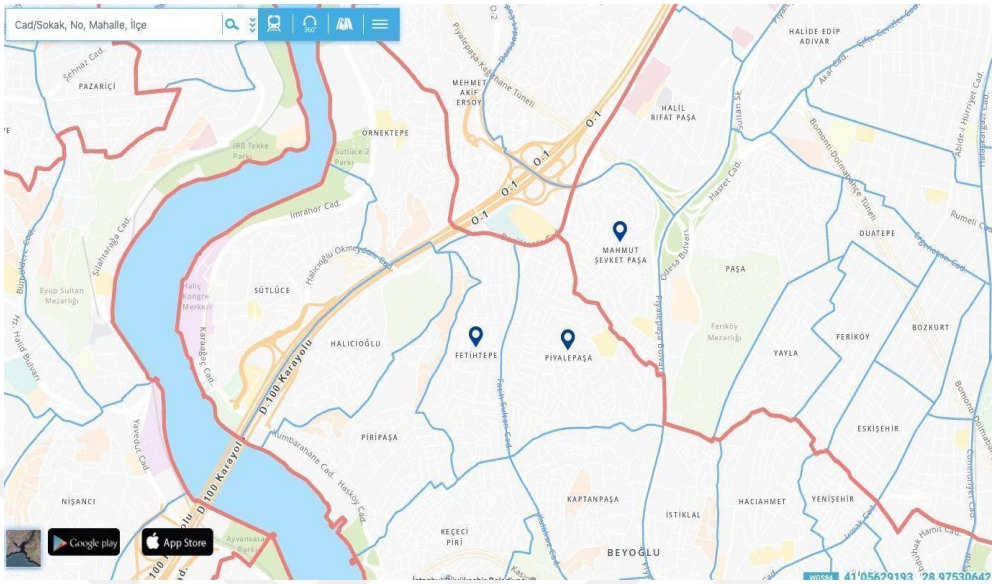

Figure 1. Three neighborhoods of Okmeydanı

Based on the Beyoğlu Strategy Plan, Piyalepaşa is characterized by medium-density residential and commercial zones. As depicted in Table 1, the housing and commercial sectors in Piyalepaşa are proportionally balanced. The predominant age demographic ranges between 20-64, and a significant portion of the population has attained an educational level below high school graduation. The neighborhood lacks designated areas for social and cultural activities. Fetihtepe exhibits characteristics parallel to those of Piyalepaşa. Its demographic composition and education levels closely mirror those of Piyalepaşa. Most of Fetihtepe's residents fall within the 20-64 age bracket and have completed primary or elementary education. In contrast to Piyalepaşa, commercial zones in Fetihtepe are less prevalent. The neighborhood does not host any social-cultural or health facilities. I consider these three neighborhoods as a whole, and the area I define as Okmeydanı encompasses all three neighborhoods.

Table 2. Neighborhood Profiles

NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILE		PİYALEPAŞA NEİGHBORHOOD RECORD	FETİHTEPE NEİGHBORHOOD RECORD
NEIGHBORHOOD STRUCTURE	Population	21,830	14,560
	Housing Zone	5,8 ha.	11,5 ha.
	Trade Zone	4,5 ha.	2,5 ha.
	Total Area	49,3 ha.	32,8 ha.
	Density	639 ki/ha.	621 ki/ha.
	The number of buildings	2,590	1,852
REINFORCEMENT AREAS	Park areas	1,0 ha	0,1 ha
	Educational areas	1,4 ha	0,1 ha
	Social-Cultural Facility Areas	0 ha	0 ha
	Health Areas	0,04 ha	0 ha
DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE	0-19 years old	28%	28%
	20-39 years old	33%	32%
	40-64 years old	33%	34%
	65 years and	6%	6%
EDUCATION LEVEL	Elementary School	23%	23%
	Primary Education	28%	29%
	High-School	19%	19%
	Graduate	8%	8%

Source: IMM Beyoğlu Strategic Plan (2022)

While Okmeydanı is often portrayed with a singular, homogeneous identity—typically tied to its Alevi roots—its political landscape is notably diverse. Throughout my interviews with inhabitants, this heterogeneity in political attitudes surfaced repeatedly. Indeed, as Figure 1 highlights, there are distinct political boundaries across the neighborhoods. This is particularly evident in discussions about protest locations and routes within the district. Figure 2 delineates areas that have been hotspots for demonstrations, consistent with descriptions from activists about their preferred marching routes.

Tracing back to the 1970s, this mosaic of political leanings in the district has influenced state interventions and contentious politics. For instance, in battles over housing and urban transformation, these differing political orientations hinder the formation of unified, enduring resistance movements. For this reason, although the neighborhood is generally known as a liberated area of leftist politics, it is also a meeting point for opposing radical ideologies in the neighborhood's history, which still partially survives today.

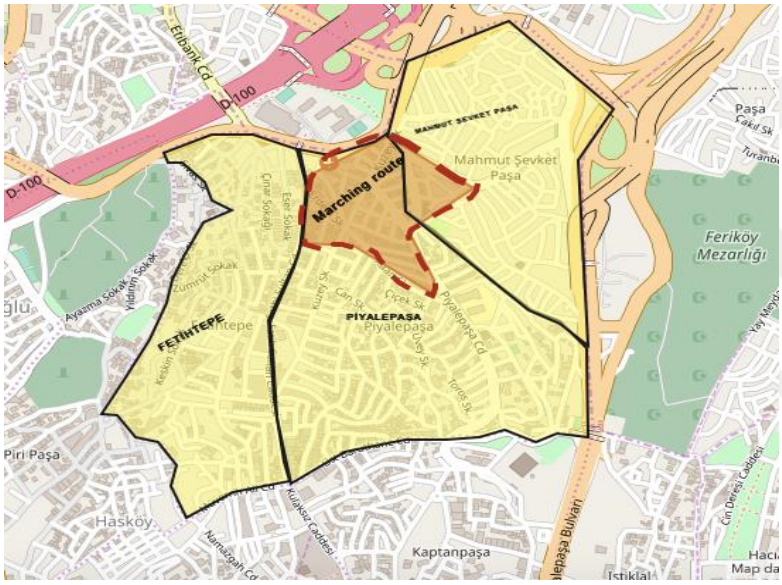

Figure 2. The borders of the neighborhoods and the area of demonstrations[6]

One can easily discern the differences between neighborhoods in Okmeydanı by observing the graffiti and nameplates of political associations that adorn its streets. This district's internal complexities were aptly described by Karakaş (2014) in a news article addressing violent clashes that erupted in 2014. Karakaş notes:

> "Okmeydanı, thrust into Türkiye's spotlight due to four fatalities just the previous summer, encapsulates two contrasting living spaces separated by unspoken boundaries. The 'upper neighborhood,' a stronghold for numerous

[6] The borders of the area called the "marching route" are drawn by the author based on the narratives and participant observations at the district.

> leftist organizations, sharply contrasts with the 'lower neighborhood,' dominated by nationalist movements. Residents from both areas have been acquainted with political tension for many years." (Karakaş, 2014).

This stark dichotomy underscores the rich tapestry of political beliefs and affiliations in Okmeydanı, a feature that often sets the stage for both cooperation and conflict. Election outcomes in Okmeydanı stand as a testament to its political diversity. As highlighted earlier, the Piyalepaşa and Fetihtepe neighborhoods fall under the Beyoğlu Municipality's jurisdiction, a stronghold of the AKP for years. In contrast, the MŞP neighborhood is governed by the Şişli Municipality, a domain where the CHP has a significant presence. Examining the election results from the Piyalepaşa neighborhood across 2011, 2015 (both June and November General Elections), and 2018 cycles underscores this diversity. The AKP consistently emerged as the top party in each of these elections. However, a noteworthy trend is evident in the 2018 general elections, where the AKP and CHP experienced a vote dip, while the HDP saw an uptick in its vote share. This fluctuation further emphasizes the district's intricate political landscape.

Election outcomes from Fetihtepe mirror those from Piyalepaşa, with the AKP, CHP, and HDP consistently emerging as the top three contenders. Both neighborhoods witnessed a decline in votes for the AKP and CHP, but the HDP experienced a surge in vote share. In contrast, the MŞP neighborhood distinctly leans towards the CHP as its leading party. Yet, the overarching trend across all these neighborhoods is the waning support for the AKP and CHP, juxtaposed with a growing preference for the HDP.

Table 3. Election results of The Neighborhoods

Neighborhood	Piyalepaşa			Fetihtepe			Mahmut Şevket Paşa (MŞP)		
Political Party	**AKP**	**CHP**	**HDP**	**AKP**	**CHP**	**HDP**	**AKP**	**CHP**	**HDP**
2018 General Elections	6945	3620	2190	4885	2123	1136	2547	5389	3167
2015 November General Elections	8111	4239	1822	5880	2384	1055	2953	6096	2560
2015 June General Elections	6609	3974	1956	4717	2276	1151	2372	5819	2705
2011 General Elections	7963	4897	Sırrı Süreyya Önder (945)	5815	2751	Sırrı Süreyya Önder (558)	3062	7266	1234 (Sırrı Süreyya)

Source: Turkish Supreme Election Council

In addition, the two images below also show that understanding Okmeydani's authoritarian transformation in the macro is possible with a nuanced analysis in the micro. Labor struggle, labor, feminist struggle, and left struggle show that there is a place where they all intersect. Figure 3 displays a message referencing the tragic Soma mining disaster of 2014, which claimed the lives of 301 miners. There is a picture of a miner juxtaposed with "Soma". In this picture, a slogan has been used for miners in the country, expressing how miners sacrifice their lives, "Those who gave a lifetime for a handful of the soil".[7] There were demonstrations across the country. One of these protests even led to bigger conflict in the district. Next to the Soma slogan is an image of a porter representing one of the most important authors in Turkish literature, Yaşar Kemal. Yaşar Kemal is an author within the socialist

[7] On May 13, 2014, in the Soma district of Manisa, a tragic event occurred that led to the deaths of 301 workers. This incident stands as the most significant work-related tragedy in the history of the Turkish republic and is noted as the gravest disaster in mining history. In response to the catastrophe, protests erupted across the country, with the residents of Soma leading the outcry.

realism literary movement who intertwines the lives of Anatolian people with socio-political themes, and through the characters he creates in his works, he holds a significant place for the leftist movement in Türkiye.



Figure 3. A portrait of contemporary Turkish literature writer Yaşar Kemal on the wall, a picture of a miner dedicated to the Soma massacre"[8]

Similarly, Figure 4 offers an illustrative snapshot of the district's layered socio-political landscape. A manually written job posting is on a workshop's shutters on a building's ground floor. It says: "Machine operators experienced in female clothes and female assistants are sought. Note: Meals are provided". This advertisement, indicative of the district's dynamic nature, shares space with politically charged graffiti. To one side, the slogan "Feminism is for all[9]" proudly stands, signed by Women's Defense, one of the women's feminist groups in the country, emphasizing the district's ongoing dialogue around gender rights and equality. Next to this slogan, a tribute reads, "Comrade Mehmet is immortal," serving as a memorial for an activist. Apart from these slogans and the job posting on the wall, some are painted

[8] The photo was taken by the author. In Soma, 301 workers died. "Those who give a life for a handful of coal" is written on the wall.

[9] Feminism is for everyone is the title of the book Bell Hook, a prominent American feminist theorist and writer. Hook (2020) in her book "Feminism is for everyone" aims to define an inclusive definition of feminism. She defines it as "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression."

over with white and are no longer readable. The slogan "Feminism is for everyone" is written on this white paint. These white patches and erased texts reflect tension between district actors, such as police, cleaning crews, and revolutionaries. Moreover, this mural, in essence, condenses the long-lasting interplay between work, activism, memory, and erasure in Okmeydanı.



Figure 4. A textile mill and the slogans and job adds on its wall[10]

3.4 Qualitative methods

I started ethnographic research on 26 February 2019, following a police raid on a center affiliated with one of the district's radical groups. The fieldwork extended to the beginning of 2023. Throughout nearly four years of ethnographic research, I employed various qualitative data collection methods, including interviews, participant observation, photography, and archival research.

3.4.1 Interviews

I conducted forty semi-structured interviews with a diverse group that included inhabitants, members of leftist organizations, Muhtars, healthcare workers,

[10] The photo was taken by the author.

hairdressers, and shopkeepers. These interviews ranged in duration from 15 to 90 minutes. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 65 years. I engaged with various local figures, including Muhtars and municipal employees. To broaden the range and diversity of interviewees, I ventured into various communal spaces in the district, like parks and waiting areas outside Muhtars' offices. The interviews encompassed a variety of district stakeholders, ranging from Muhtars to activists. As such, the questions were tailored to each interviewee's unique role within the district and their level of involvement in everyday life. For instance, Muhtars were questioned about street-level bureaucracy, their interventions, and any temporal shifts therein—conversations with active members of the leftist groups aimed to chart their position and history within the district. Furthermore, queries were designed to compare their past activities and recent endeavors. Consequently, the interview questions honed in on inhabitants' perceptions of the district, their allegiance to local leftist organizations, their views on political mobilization, and their stance on the presence of state forces in the area.

Notably, 25 out of the 40 interviewees were women. Initially, I did not aim to focus on how women experienced the political transformation in the district. I aimed to grasp how all inhabitants experience this transformation. However, during the first interviews that I made with diverse actors in the district, the data I obtained revealed that all women, regardless of the differences in their age, ethnicity, income level, and education level, have experienced both violence, poverty, and the politics in a different way and mostly in a severe way. For this reason, I interviewed women living in the district. I examined their ambiguous and critical perspectives toward the past and present, politicization and depoliticization, and police and leftist groups. To delve into the experiences and perceptions of women, I sought out spaces in the

district where women typically congregated. For instance, I ventured into a shop to interview a woman, only to find her conversing with friends who had dropped by. Over time, I transitioned from posing questions to listening as they spontaneously shared their insights about the district and personal experiences.

3.4.2 Archival research

The newspapers were a vital source for grasping the historical background of the district. The newspapers helped to make a historical analysis and displayed mainstream debates about the district. The news analysis provided grounds to understand the relations between state practices, leftist politics, and the community. In addition to making a historical analysis, the media sources were also used to examine protest trends in the district.

Methodologically, the historical analysis of the district was based on archival data that included an analysis of Cumhuriyet newspaper archives between 1960-2002 using the name of the neighborhood "Okmeydanı" as the keyword. To analyze the protest trends in the district, Cumhuriyet, Milliyet, sendika.org, Bianet, Birgün, and Evrensel were analyzed for the last 20 years (between 2002 and 2022), and 158 articles have been obtained that are about the protests in the district. Although mainstream newspapers have a biased perception of the urban margins, and so does Okmeydanı, the existence of alternative media sources such as sendika.org and Birgün provided more extensive news resources. Although the newspaper analysis did not show the exact numbers of the events, it displayed the repertoire of actions, changes in these repertoires, which events repeated each year, and which events are no longer held.

In addition to the media sources, the archival sources of the leftist organizations in the district were also used. The monthly bulletins of leftist groups in the district helped analyze these groups' political attitudes and agendas. The alternative archival sources, in addition to the mainstream media sources, filled the gap in the written data about the socio-political history of the district and the current situation. Then, the archives of the Türkiye Social History Research Foundation (TÜSTAV), the annual reports of the Human Rights Association (IHD), and the Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye (THIV) on human rights violations were also used.

3.4.3 Photography as an ethnographic method

Ethnographic research has incorporated photography as a means of data collection (Wright, 2023). All photographs this study featured were taken from an anthropological perspective (Edward, 1992; p.3). Taking photos served as a medium to engage with residents who might otherwise remain elusive. However, given the environment's repressive nature, certain inhabitants resisted photography and were disinclined to have their streets captured on camera. For instance, in August 2022, following the conflicts surrounding the Fetihtepe Urban Transformation Project (UTP), I photographed various district streets. Upon seeing me take pictures, an older woman inquired if I was documenting another UTP planned for the district. Her apprehension stemmed from the fear that her home might be next in line for demolition. This initiated our conversation about the district's urban transformation journey.

Photography served purposes beyond just connecting with inhabitants. The district's political landscape was vividly reflected on its walls. Capturing and

presenting images of these walls is vital for this thesis to comprehend the local political assertions and identify active political groups, as elaborated in Chapter 5. Furthermore, the district's socio-economic fabric is also decipherable from its walls. As discussed in Chapter 6, the job advertisements and the stipulated working conditions within these ads offer invaluable insights into the economic realities of everyday life. Monitoring the graffiti and announcements on the district's walls is significant. I was kept abreast of protests and various events by patrolling the streets. The walls and graffiti, intrinsic to the district's identity, effectively became 'interviews' for this research.

3.4.4 One year of participant observation

After conducting several interviews, I realized that I was engaging with inhabitants of similar backgrounds. I recognized the need for participant observation to connect with more diverse inhabitants. Moreover, due to the prevalent police repression and fear in the district, many inhabitants were hesitant to respond to specific questions I raised during the interviews. They exhibited selectivity in their responses, especially when queried about police repression and their critiques of the political actions taken by leftist groups. At this juncture, the imperative of undertaking participant observation, combined with the insights I gleaned from my 2014-2016 ethnographic study on an educational movement in Okmeydanı, guided my decision-making in identifying a suitable area for this endeavor (Murat, 2022).

At this juncture, the necessity of participant observation, combined with insights from my 2014-2016 ethnographic study on an educational movement in the neighborhood, guided my approach to identifying an appropriate area for this endeavor. While solely interviewing activists did not yield comprehensive insights

into the neighborhood's daily life, posing questions to individuals during events at an association facilitated a sense of trust. This, in turn, led to more candid responses. Furthermore, observing an association engaged in political activities within the neighborhood for several years and has been instrumental in shaping its dynamics provides insights into the evolution of politics in the area — a central inquiry of this research.

While conducting my interviews, I contacted an activist from a solidarity cooperative in the district for a discussion. She agreed, but we couldn't schedule a suitable time for our meeting. However, two weeks later, she contacted me, mentioning the cooperative's need for a volunteer teacher. I seized the opportunity to volunteer, expressing my desire to proceed with my research.

The association coordinated free courses for district children, complementing the consumption cooperative activities with this act of solidarity. Through the children's parents, these courses extended their reach to a broader segment of the community. My tenure as a volunteer teacher provided a firsthand view of how such a solidarity initiative functioned and the residents' response to it. Furthermore, I could interview inhabitants whom I could only access through their collaboration. Throughout the participant observation, I grappled with balancing my roles as a volunteer and a researcher. At times, this dual role posed challenges. There were weeks when I couldn't conduct any interviews, concentrating solely on the courses. I needed to ensure that the children and their parents remained engaged and committed to continuing the classes.

Being involved in the cooperative's free course initiative allowed me to join cooperative meetings and attend their organized picnic. Furthermore, this involvement allowed me to connect with activists from other organizations in the

district, leveraging the cooperative's established relationships. For instance, a human rights association planned to host a festival for children in Okmeydanı. They utilized the office of another organization situated adjacent to the park. Given that they weren't familiar with the district's families, the human rights association expressed a need for volunteers from other groups. I actively engaged in the festival, walking the streets to inform children and their families about the event and offering face painting for the children. This experience allowed me to observe residents' responses to community events and gauge participation levels.

During this period, the fieldwork and my role as a researcher became focal points of the study. The association closure, where I conducted my participant observation, was a testament to my argument about discontinuing political activities. The association I observed faced potential closure due to financial challenges, difficulties covering rent, diminished neighborhood participation, and a shortage of volunteers backing the activists. When I concluded my fieldwork, I was the sole volunteer teaching courses at the cooperative. The period during which I communicated my inability to continue the courses for various reasons has proved contentious. Ultimately, I became convinced that the activity of giving courses did not benefit the cooperative, the children, or my research. Both entering and exiting the field presented their own sets of challenges. Departing from the courses instilled in me an ethical burden, thinking my exit might hamper the cooperative's ability to host any activities. When I discussed my feelings with the activist, she persuaded me to persist with the courses for another two or three weeks. We carried on this until the Kahramanmaraş earthquake on February 6, 2023.[11] Post-earthquake, discussions

[11] The 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, or the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes, struck on 6 February with magnitudes of 7.8 and 7.5 in the Pazarcık and Elbistan districts of Kahramanmaraş, respectively. The earthquakes impacted a total of 11 provinces. Official figures report at least 50,783 fatalities in Türkiye and at least 8,476 in Syria, with over 122,000 injured. The Turkish Government

about the courses faded among activists, children, and parents. Nevertheless, the cooperative initiated activities to show solidarity with the affected region, and we orchestrated these efforts within the district.

In summary, the fieldwork spanned from February 2019 to February 2023. The dynamic and unpredictable nature of the research environment rendered it a non-linear journey. Furthermore, this volatility within the research setting influenced the methodology and the organization of the field research. I employed the aforementioned qualitative methods throughout these four years. In the subsequent section, I detail the three phases of the fieldwork.

3.5. Three phases of the fieldwork

In this section, I will explain in which periods I used the abovementioned methods. This phase narrative is important because, in these four years, the world's and Türkiye's developments were at a level that would significantly affect ethnographic research. The first of these was the pandemic that started in March 2020. Then, there were the February earthquakes, during which this research was finalized. The country's deepening economic crisis and impoverishment were other important parameters that affected this research. Therefore, I discussed it as the first phase from the beginning of the field research until the pandemic, the second phase in the pandemic process, and the third phase, which lasted between lifting the pandemic bans and the February earthquakes.

declared a Level 4 emergency, the highest alert reserved for significant disasters and pandemics, calling for international aid. Additionally, a state of emergency was declared in 10 affected provinces for three months. role of civil society in the aftermath was noteworthy, with various organizations launching rapid and effective campaigns to address many challenges in the affected areas.

3.5.1 The first phase of fieldwork – February 2019 and March 2020

The first phase was characterized by a blend of qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, photography, participation in local events, and direct observations. The beginning of my fieldwork was challenging, given my living situation. Once I settled there, I struggled to decide where and how to commence my research. In February 2019, one night, nine police vehicles arrived and conducted patrols surrounding the park. The police patrolled the park, checking for anyone hidden and taking photographs. Their show of force was directed at the specific political group they were targeting and the entire district. However, despite nine vehicles around the park, only a few inhabitants living around the park seemed to take notice or show interest. At that moment, I wondered why no one appeared interested, or they weren't even watching from their balconies. Have they had we all grown weary of witnessing street clashes from our vantage points? Was it possible that in previous years, police forces with such a strong presence had regularly patrolled these streets and lingered in the park?

I began taking field notes and observing political and social gatherings on the street that day. In March 2019, Türkiye held local elections, making it a prime time for political parties and organizations to host events in the district. I attended a gathering organized by the neighborhood association on one of the district's main streets to introduce the local candidates. Yet, there were only a few such events in the district. Later, I discovered from a poster on a street wall that the Şişli municipality would be holding a neighborhood assembly in July 2019. This assembly took place in the park where many leftist organizations gathered. The primary audience for the event was the local inhabitants, and many were eager to participate, raising questions and voicing demands about their lives. For an extended period, the budget assembly

meetings of the Şişli Municipality were the sole gatherings held in the park. This prompted me to reflect on the politics and ongoing transformation in the district. Observing the inhabitants' reactions to the neighborhood assembly made me realize the importance of the district's state bureaucracy. Subsequently, I initiated my interviews, beginning with the Muhtars of three neighborhoods.

I visited the park to converse with women and conducted some informal interviews. During this time, I noticed a disparity in perceptions between the Muhtars, activists, and women. Notably, women exhibited more ambiguity toward the district's politics. Furthermore, the district's clashes impacted women more significantly than men. After realizing that the inhabitants held varied perceptions, I continued my interviews with various district actors. During the initial phase of my fieldwork, I began taking photos. Some captured events organized within the district, while others showcased slogans painted on the walls. The district's walls are arguably the best sources of information regarding various organizations' programs. Consequently, I relied heavily on these walls throughout my fieldwork to stay informed about local events.

As March 2020 arrived, so did the COVID-19 pandemic. The event depicted in Figure 5 was the last one held in Okmeydanı. I photographed the poster at the park's entrance, intending to attend. However, due to concerns about the pandemic, I couldn't participate. Subsequently, I paused my fieldwork and interviews, as the nature of my research didn't conform to online interviews.



Figure 5. A panel invitation poster for mobilizing against "Canal Istanbul."[12]

Despite the challenges, I was still in the district, and observing its experience with the pandemic and associated lockdowns proved valuable. This ushered in the second phase of my fieldwork.

3.5.2 The second phase of the fieldwork – March 2020 - May 2021

Even though I was in the district through this period, I couldn't conduct any interviews. However, I was able to observe how the district navigated the pandemic. Additionally, I utilized this time to conduct archival research for my thesis. During the pandemic, the police used a vehicle to broadcast the message, "Dear Istanbulites, please return to your homes for your health." However, the announcement wasn't made by a typical police car but by the "Akrep" vehicles, which had been in the district for a long time. Throughout the pandemic, the police patrolled the streets,

[12] Figure 5 showcases a poster advertising an event centered around the controversial "Canal Istanbul" initiative, a testament to Okmeydanı's active engagement with pressing national issues. Organized by the Okmeydanı Democracy Platform at a local wedding venue, the event occurred on the eve of pandemic-related restrictions. The Canal Istanbul project12, envisioned as a grand infrastructural undertaking, proposes to carve an artificial maritime channel connecting the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea.The photo was taken by the author.

issuing verbal warnings from these Akrep vehicles. Some evenings, they patrolled the park with advisories like, "Folks, please head home." When the police announced lockdowns, children would run at their sight and chant slogans.

The pandemic experience provided significant insights into the social and economic structure of the district. Despite the curfews, a majority of Okmeydanı inhabitants continued to work. As elaborated in Chapter 6, the district houses informal textile and manufacturing workshops. As a result, the legal measures implemented by the government did not encompass these informal workers. In some instances, workshops shut down without compensating their employees. However, other workshops persisted in their operations without adhering to health guidelines.

3.5.3 The third phase of the fieldwork - May 2021 – February 2023

In mid-2021, a few protests were made after the end of curfews and the normalization. For instance, in March 2021, there was a demonstration against the AKP government's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention.[13] Women attended this demonstration wearing masks. On 18 May, another gathering took place to protest Israel's actions against Palestine. In June 2021, a Şişli Municipality meeting occurred, followed by another demonstration against the country's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. In May 2021, I began my interviews, opting for open-air spaces suitable for pandemic conditions. The third phase of my fieldwork was marked by participant observations, during which I conducted some interviews with women in the district. As detailed in the "Participant Observation" section, I started offering free courses to children through a cooperative.

[13] Istanbul Convention is a worldwide international human rights treaty that aims to prevent gender-based violence. Türkiye became the first signatory country in 2011 in Istanbul. In March 2021, Türkiye denounced its withdrawal from the convention.

Concurrently, I engaged in other events hosted by the cooperative and various organizations.

June 2022 marked a new chapter for Okmeydanı in the context of this study. In that month, the Fetihtepe Urban Transformation initiative commenced. As a result of the project, both police violence and resistance to it intensified across three neighborhoods. Additionally, residents of all neighborhoods felt under threat. Consequently, my fieldwork pivoted to investigate the urban transformation in Fetihtepe and its implications for daily life within the district. The resistance against the police repression and the project persisted between July and August. By September, the old apartments had been razed, paving the way for new construction.

The Fetihtepe Urban Transformation project dominated the district's discourse for nearly three months—a surprisingly brief duration for such a pivotal change. Given that this study aims to discern why civic politics in the district became more constrained, evolving into a post-political mode, the fieldwork homed in on Fetihtepe and its associated protests in Summer 2022.

After September, I resumed my responsibilities at the cooperative, continuing the courses—this final phase of the fieldwork extended until February 2023, when a severe earthquake struck southern Türkiye.

3.6. Conclusion

The choice of political ethnography as the primary research method for this study stems from a careful and nuanced consideration of the complexities inherent in Okmeydanı's socio-political fabric. By engaging in a four-year immersive ethnographic exploration, employing methods such as semi-structured interviews, walk-in interviews, participant observation, visual data collection, and archival

research, this research seeks to unravel the intricate dynamics of everyday life in the district. Political ethnography emerges as a pivotal tool, enabling a profound understanding of the multifaceted layers that constitute Okmeydanı. Geertz's notion of 'thick description' becomes particularly relevant in capturing both the visible and invisible relations between different political actors, a task challenging for mainstream quantitative methods. The study recognizes the limitations of mainstream ethnography and quantitative methods in grasping the nuanced intricacies of politics and political entities, emphasizing the need for a method that delves into the subtle power dynamics inherent in social life.

The socio-economic and political segregation of Okmeydanı further accentuates the necessity for political ethnographic research. The district's marginalized structure demands an approach that transcends mainstream data sources, which are often inadequate to comprehend the daily life complexities, inequalities, and resistance against state repression in this distinct urban space. Political ethnography remains indispensable despite the challenges posed by conducting ethnographic research in an authoritarian setting, where fear and oppressive atmospheres may inhibit open communication. The manipulative nature of mainstream media, the inadequacy of statistics, and the potential repercussions of speaking openly in interviews underscore the necessity for a multi-layered analysis. Immersing researchers directly within political processes becomes instrumental in witnessing and understanding these dynamics firsthand, providing a more nuanced perspective than relying solely on indirect sources.

The section on positionality delves into the complexities of conducting ethnographic research in a neighborhood where the researcher has deep personal ties. The insider-outsider dichotomy is problematized, highlighting the need to consider

the researcher's complex background and multiple identities. The challenges and advantages of being close to the community are acknowledged, emphasizing the constant negotiation between the insider and outsider positions throughout the research process. In essence, this methodology chapter positions political ethnography as a methodological cornerstone, not without its challenges, but imperative for comprehending Okmeydanı's intricate political landscape. The subsequent chapters will draw on the insights gleaned from this methodology, delving deeper into the various dimensions of contentious politics, everyday life, and political transformations within the district.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING OF A CONTENTIOUS SPACE

4.1 Introduction

This section examines how Okmeydanı became a liberated zone for leftist politics historically. It elucidates the district's history of being a contentious space through contentious politics related to the demographic structure, labor relations, and property relations between 1960 and 2002. In the beginning, Okmeydanı as a squatter space was a part of the rapid urbanization process in Istanbul in the 1950s. However, it followed a different path from other squatter spaces formed in those years, with the identity characteristics of the migrating population, the labor relations created by the district's proximity to the factories, and the left politics that settled in Okmeydanı through these. Herewith, Okmeydanı became one of the politically marginalized areas of Istanbul.

Starting from this point, this chapter asks the following question: Why did Okmeydanı become different from most squatter spaces in Istanbul and become a political, marginalized zone? A “multilevel structural process” analysis is made to answer the question by investigating the relations between economic structure, state power, and the political agencies inside and outside the district (Wacquant, 2015; Auyero, 2000). The historical analysis of the contentious politics related to the demographic structure, labor relations, and property relations provides a ground to understand the district's political transformation after 2002.

In the section below, I will examine the periods from 1960-1980 and 1980-2002 in the district. However, before delving into the district's history for each

period, I will briefly touch upon the social, economic, and political transformations that occurred in the country during these two eras.

4.2 Everyday life and contentious politics in Okmeydanı between 1960 and 1980

4.2.1 Everyday life and contentious politics in Istanbul between 1960 and 1980

The phenomenon of squatters in Türkiye emerged because of the structural changes caused by the Second World War (Şenyapılı, 2004). With the changing structure of the agriculture sector, increasing landlessness and unemployment in rural areas caused migration to urban areas (Arat & Pamuk, 2019). As a result of that demographic flow, the urban population increased rapidly; the rate of urban population was %25.1 in 1950, and it increased % 31.9 by 1960 (Şenyapılı, 2004).

Rural migrants who came to the city mainly for economic reasons settled in the labor areas in Istanbul. They had two main problems: employment and housing. The squatter dwellers started their political transformation as villagers, then became rural migrants and low-income workers in the city (Karpat, 2016, p.20). Migrant workers, who settled in the city in the 50s, became a class in the 60s and a frightened force in the 70s (Koçak, 2011). The process was defined as the proletarianization of the new migrants, and Istanbul turned into a working-class town.

With the migrant population increasing in the cities, housing problems and squatting as a solution to this problem occurred (Kıray, 1971). Urban growth was seen as a solution for the new low-income urban dwellers. Proximity to factories and production centers was a decisive factor in squatter settlements (Karpat, 2016). Rural migrants settled on the lands that belonged to the state, municipalities, or individuals illegally. Keleş and Ünsal (1982) said that slum dwellers, most of whom are workers and poor, were the consumers of the complex market, and due to the significant

increases in land prices and slum costs, low-income families built their shanty houses.

People bought and obtained urban lands in different ways. Most people bought their lands from individuals. The second group encircled the treasury land. The third group indicated that they purchased their land from individuals surrounding the treasury lands. Some people also bought urban land from the market. It shows that defining squatter residents as “invaders” is reductionist. Like other housing types, squatters also had market relations (Türkün, 2013). As early as 1948, there was news in the media that speculators were emerging in some districts of Istanbul, either by closing and selling plots or by building shanty houses on the land they closed. As pointed out in a study by the State Planning Organization (DPT), 56% of the squatters have taken over the grounds on which they lived illegally, based on transactions such as a promise to sell property; 19% stated that they bought from a broker (Aslan, 2020).

Although this process had been defined as people coming to the city and directly settling on the land, more actors were included. Aslan (2020) states that the involvement patterns of settlers in the urban spaces did not emerge when individuals and their families came to a part of the city and settled their squatters. It was a complex process involving more than one actor and a commercial relationship. As consumers of this market where shanty trade was carried out, the settlers bought the land they built for slums from speculators with money.

Negotiations with the governments over the slums made squatter inhabitants seen as a vote depot, and squatter settlements obtained political importance. Politicians accepted squatter inhabitants as vote storage, strengthening their bargaining power (Şenyapılı, 2004). The coalition government prepared the first

draft law under the presidency of İsmet İnönü in 1963 and 1964. With the votes from the squatter settlements, the Bülent Ecevit government took most of the votes in 1973, and the CHP decided to give all squatter movements their land titles to the squatter at the end of 1973 (Karpat, 2016, p.102).

The settlers and their efforts to build houses for themselves were the welfare system of Türkiye in the 1960s (Başlevent & Dayıoğlu, 2005). Erman (2011) defines this period as a populist urban coalition. The politicians needed loyalty; industrialists profited from cheap labor, and residents required housing (Erman, 2011). The state was more interested in national industrialization rather than social welfare. The rural population was seen as a vote base and actors for cheap labor accumulation.

In the 1960s, social rights and social justice were on society's agenda. The 1960s had been defined as the heyday of the Turkish left since diverse social struggles, such as youth movements, peasants' mobilizations, working-class actions, and urban guerrilla activities, increased (Benlisoy, 2018). With the 1961 Constitution, the right to unionization was recognized, and for the first time, unionization was under constitutional guarantee. The number of trade unions increased (Koçak & Çelik, 2016). The union rights in that period prepared a ground for the politicization of the working class. Moreover, it improved the capacity of the working-class movement to influence and mobilize society (Özsever, 2021).

In the second half of the 1960s, the first reactions were made against the low wages and increasing prices. The working-class movement grew via strikes and the occupation of factories. The June 15-16, 1970, protests, which began as a movement against the state-sponsored support of the trade union bureaucracy, became an important historical turning point for the working-class struggle in Türkiye.[14]

[14] In 1970, CHP and AP deputies prepared a draft law to change the Trade Union Law and the 275 number law of strike and lock-out. Under the name of "creating strong trade unionism," it has been

In the 1960s, because of the absence of a welfare state, local solidarity dynamics formed the new settlement zones of rural migrants. It was a period when the working-class movement became an essential actor in the urban solidarity movements and mobilized in the squatter areas (Koçak, 2008). Then, from 1974 to 1980, leftist politics became a necessary dynamic of the squatter spaces in Istanbul. Aslan (2021) states that protests of the squatter dwellers for urban public services and the building process of the squatter neighborhood occurred together. In other words, a struggling line that provided integration into the city, such as transportation, sewage, communication, water, and electricity, and the solution to the housing problem of the proletariats (Aslan, 2021).

When it came to the end of the 1960s and 1970s, one of the essential features of the slums was the emergence of political-social movements as a dynamic that intervened in the space by building slums (Aslan, 2004). Housing problems became a part of the class struggle. The 1978 movement had strong relations with the squatter movement.

A significant development after the second half of the 1970s was the establishment of shantytowns in various parts of the city due to urban political movements (Aslan, 2004). The opposition and non-system movements that developed throughout the city and the country started to produce intervention practices. Public lands, previously looted by speculators all over the city and sold to the needy, were now confiscated "in the name of the public (Türkün, 2013, p.74).

aimed at restricting trade union mobilization and the rise of the strike. DISK established Constitutional Resistance Committees. After four days, the draft was taken at the assembly protest on 15 June 1970. On the first day, 70 thousand workers entered factories and waited without working, and they started marching out of the factories. On 16 June, there were more workers on the streets. On June 16, 1970, a state of siege was declared. TİP and CHP applied to the constitutional court, and the court canceled the law on 8-9 February 1971. The changes to the trade union law had been made through 80 coup d'etat. https://www.evrensel.net/haber/115298/buyuk-isci-direnisi-15-16-haziran

The leftist movements mobilized in the squatter spaces for the lack of public services and to set better living conditions (Aslan, 2020).

In the 1970s, socialist newspapers included demolition news. Squatter's struggle lasted until the 1980 coup d'état. Afterward, all squatter spaces became a part of the "rant policies" (Aslan, 2021). As the 1970s squatter struggle had an essential place on the agenda of the radical leftist movement, the inhabitants and the workers' resistance to the demolitions were frequently featured in the media organs of the leftist organizations.

4.2.2 Everyday life and contentious politics in Okmeydanı between 1960 and 1980

Being the living space of the working class, the neighborhood became one of the enclaved zones of the 1960s. Erman (2010) differentiates the political struggle in the neighborhoods such as Okmeydanı. She stated that the battle of the squatter residents to protect their houses against the state was not peculiar to these neighborhoods. However, what differentiates them in making these protests was that they were created within a framework of the leftist ideology. This created strong relations between the inhabitants and space (Erman, 2010, p.179).

The history of Okmeydanı, which was entirely foundation land, goes back to the 15th century to the times of the invasion of Istanbul. It was established as an archery place, the first sports area, and the most significant and oldest arrow monument (Guven, 1995). All the lands in Okmeydanı belonged to the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation. There were a few settlements in the early 1900s. Following the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, Albanians settled on the foundation lands in Okmeydanı; they gardened and established dairies there. Although a few Albanian populations have been in the district recently, some inhabitants said they bought their homes

from Albanians. Similarly, some inhabitants referred to their Albanian neighbors during the interviews for questions about the district's history and said, "You should talk to our Albanian neighbor; his family came to Okmeydanı first." With unoccupied foundation lands and factories around it, the district became a settlement zone for new migrants to the city.

Okmeydanı was one of the areas that were suitable for the settlement of the rural migrants due to its empty lands and proximity to labor zones. The industrial facilities on the northern shores of the Golden Horn and the Bomonti district greatly impacted the rapid settlement of this zone. Haliç, Eyüp, and Yedikule were the zones of factories filled with working-class squatter neighborhoods. Being juxtaposed to the Golden Horn basin and the factories within the city, Okmeydanı became one of the labor areas in the 1960s. As a result of the migration flow, the ridges of Okmeydanı and the area around Piyalepaşa Boulevard, which stretches between Kasımpaşa and Çağlayan today, was almost filled with settlements in the 1970s. The spatial development of the city reached from Kasımpaşa to the north of the Golden Horn and from Okmeydanı to Çağlayan in the north.

Particular groups of migrants came to the same places from certain villages. Low-income families survived in the urban areas by coming to the places where their relatives lived (Erman, 2010; Karpat, 1976;). The first rural migrants at the end of the 1950s came from Sivas and started settling in Okmeydanı (İlknur, 2014). The migrants settled into Okmeydanı, mostly from Erzincan, Sivas, Tunceli, and Giresun. Everyone first came to their relatives from the village to work. Gülay (25), who was born and raised and currently works in Okmeydanı, tells the story of her family coming from Sivas:

> "My family was one of the first to settle in Okmeydanı. We have been here for 55-60 years. My grandfather's father came from Sivas. He escaped from

> poverty in the village and came to Istanbul. Someone from Pervari village was living there (pointing to a street in the neighborhood) and came to him. He was already going to a relative; people from the town would visit a relative first. "

Similarly, Gülizar (62), who has been in the district since 1960 and still lives there, said that her whole family came from Sivas, and the street they live on now was named after their surname. Sezin (65) stated that all their relatives were in Okmeydanı when they first came to the district: "They were all from the same countryside, Akpınar, Eymir, Hafik, Düer, Karlı.[15] My husband's relatives and his aunts are all here. We were always together."

Settlement in Okmeydanı increased over time. According to news published in Milliyet on 2 September 1973, there were no dwellings until 1968, and in 1968, there were 40 dwellings; in 1972, there were 80 dwellings in Okmeydanı. With the growing settlements in the area, the government tried to limit them through regulations. Gizem expressed what her family told her about their settlement in the neighborhood as follows:

> "It was muddy around here; there were no houses, a couple of numbered slums around here—there is no sign, no state, nothing. You were coming; you were finding space and making a place. As the state progressed, a title deed, etc., turned out. When my grandparents first came, the place where they settled was not owned, then they moved to another place where we live now. There was an owner of this place; they said, I gave you this; you took this. " And it was written by a literate person."

When looking at how the settlement and containment of the lands developed in the district, as mentioned in the research above, different cases emerged in land ownership:

> "There were Albanians here as invaders. They were gardening. It was in their possession…They engaged in armed conflict with people from Alucra[16] who wanted to build settlers on their land. We, the people from Hafik, were not involved in this conflict. We did not give any money. However, those who

[15] Districts of the city of Sivas in the central Anatolia
[16] Alucra is a town and a district of Giresun Province in the Black Sea region of Türkiye.

> came after us gave money. People from Alucra went to the region after us. After people from Alucra, people from Erzincan[17] came. (İlknur, 2014)

In the interviews, the discourse of "invader" was emphasized from time to time, and people said that they bought their land by giving money:

> "The house is ours, but we are in conflict with the state. We look like occupiers, but we paid taxes for the year we built the house" (Gizem, 25).

In the news titled "A heartbreaking Neighborhood" on 29 February 1964, Cumhuriyet Newspapers said that:

> "Many people in this city came from their hometown with a few thousand liras and got rich by owning a piece of land, building one floor then another and opening a body shop, a coffee shop, or a hardware store under it. Çağlayan, Okmeydanı, Kuştepe, Gültepe etc. are examples of it. After the number of people in this district increased considerably quickly, they wanted and bought roads, electricity, water, and buses from the municipality. Let us prevent the continuation of these places with tolerance in various periods and tolerance in critical moments. If necessary, let us widen the city up to plans, not for the pleasure of those who took their quilts and came here to establish a reign over time. This conduct in Okmeydanı should be stopped."

Besides being one of the squatter areas established with the arrival of rural migrants, the ethnic identity of the migrants was essential in making the district contentious. The district became one of the few areas where the Alevi population resided in Istanbul. The first close contact of the Alevi population with leftist politics corresponds to the first years of migration to the city, the 1960s-70s. The historical moment between 1960 and 1980 created an intertwined relationship between the Alevis and the left, which is challenging to separate regarding the country's political history. The Alevi population had political engagements in their countryside before they migrated to Istanbul. Alevi's identity strengthened the leftist organization in Okmeydanı due to the strong relationship between leftist politics and Alevi's identity

[17] A province in the Eastern Türkiye.

in Turkish politics. Sezin, who came to Okmeydanı, where her husband's relatives live, from Sivas in 1982, said that:

> "I am leftist; I mean at that time since I was 20-25. When I was a girl in the village when Deniz Gezmiş was executed by hanging, I remember that they were stuck in our mind, then I came here, and I continued to be leftist".

A news article from Kurtuluş Yolu newspaper, as revealed in Figure 6 below, shows the demonstrations of squatter residents in Okmeydanı (Kurtuluş Yolu, October 15, 1970).


GECEKONDUMUZU YIKMAYIN
YOKSA, APARTMANLARI İŞGAL EDECEĞİZ!

Figure 6. News on workers' protest against squatters' demolition, 1970
Source: (Kurtuluş Yolu, 1970)

People who came to the city to escape from the poverty in their villages faced deep poverty in the district. They had no economic power, and the state did not support fundamental necessities such as food, housing, or jobs. An interviewee said that there was no social state practice during their arrival, and there was no municipal support, comparing it with today's municipal support as the following:

> "There was no municipality then; now it exists. At that time, no one was helping you; they were not taking care and saying that if you were poor, you would suffer. No one was giving you a diaper, a normal diaper. I was using bags instead of diapers. Current municipalities are helping well. I was so poor that there was no help, and no one took my hand. However, now they are doing it; they say go apply to the municipality."

Moreover, the district needed more infrastructure when people built their homes on these lands by their means. An interviewee 58 years old, Ayşe, narrated their living conditions in the 1970s as follows:

> "There was no water, no electricity. Here in Feriköy, there was water on the slope. We used to go there with my mother and sister to carry water. Later, water was brought to our neighborhood. There was a hole below the ballpark. We used to go down; there was a bowl below, and we would fill out buckets. We were getting electricity with runaway wires. Some people died from electric shocks from those who received them with stray cables. There was nothing in the neighborhood. We brought into existence these spaces. "

The news from those dates also showed the district's infrastructural problems from another side. As revealed in Figure 7 below, the news emphasized that the residents were not disturbed by the danger of the exposed electrical cables. However, the residents stated that people died because of the stray wires. Ayşe (58) said, "We were getting the electricity with stray wires; people died while doing it."


ÖLÜME MEYDAN OKUYANLAR

Elektriğe para vermiyorlar...

İhsan ONUR

Okmeydanı ve Çağlayan'da oturanlar bu durumdan oldukça memnunlar!

Figure 7. Newspaper report on illegal electricity use in Okmeydanı

The family networks and solidarity among migrants became essential sources of living. Erman (2010) stated that the neighborhoods and networks were the social capital of the city's new residents. Ayşe (58) explained the solidarity networks through housing as the following:

> "Let us say a family came from a village. The ground was drawn immediately. Let us build a two-bedroom, one-living room shanty. They are poor people. Let us do this for them. The people collected some of the money among themselves. The hardware store contributed by giving the materials at wholesale prices. Houses were built for these people from night to morning."

Gülizar emphasized the solidarity networks of everyday life in the 1960s-70s:

> "We were the only house with a phone. Everyone would come to us; our door and table were open."

The political dissent in Okmeydanı was through leftist organizations, hometown associations, and neighborhood associations. The most critical issue of the struggle in the district was the struggle for housing. While at first, the state violence and conflict mainly were over squatter struggles, it became the scene of various clashes between state forces and leftist groups towards the end of the 70s with increased conflicts throughout the country. In these years, leftist associations were established in the neighborhoods of Okmeydanı. With the working-class character of the demography in the area and the relations between the Alevi identity and the leftist movement, Okmeydanı became one of the enclaved zones of the leftist movement.

Örnektepe, a part of Okmeydanı, was necessary for the leftist movement. OKDER (Okmeydanı Social Assistance and Solidarity Organization) was an essential factor in the political mobilization in the neighborhood. There were other actors from different political factions. It is stated that land occupations had been made during the association meetings. It was discussed which areas could be occupied and given to the people, whereas empty lands were discussed (Öztürk, 2016). Public policies that developed in this framework required the legalization of squatter settlements. Beautification Associations (Güzelleştirme Dernekleri), which can be regarded as neighborhood-based solidarity associations established in these shantytowns in the following periods, were again accepted and approved by the public, as Şenyapılı (2004) stated, and even public administrators participated in the

opening of some of these associations. In this way, the neighborhoods were legalized quickly and met with public services" (Arslan, 2020).

The neighborhood associations were critical actors in the housing struggle in that period. Solakçeşme[18] The Development Association and Piri Reis Beautification and Development Association were among the first organizations. They had activities with political party organizations or leftist groups. CHP's neighborhood associations were also active in this period. According to Eren, the first leftist association in Hasköy was the "Hasköy Beautification Association". [19] The association dealt with water, roads, and settlements (Eren, 2019).

The years between 1974-1976 were defined as the revolutionary movement launched in Okmeydanı. The Hasköy People's Houses had relations with them. The revolutionary movement in the neighborhood had a moral perspective. Eren states that the revolutionary movements in Hasköy and Okmeydanı united. Hasköy Solidarity Association was established in 1977 in Okmeydanı (Eren, 2019).

> The association was on the second floor of a settler. The fascists targeted the associations. There was a 24-hour watch around the association to protect it from any attack. During the day, a person in front of the association with a gun was waiting. During the night, they were waiting inside the association or at the building across the association. (Eren, 2019, p.99)

On the way to the 1980 coup, a massacre was committed against Alevis in Kahramanmaraş[20] in December 1978. With the end of the massacre, martial law was

[18] A street in Fetihtepe neighborhood

[19] One of the neighborhoods in Beyoğlu and next to the Fetihtepe neighborhood. Hasköy was a neighborhood leftist organizations settled at the end of 1970s.

[20] The Maraş Massacre occurred in Kahramanmaraş in December 1978, and the attacks were generally made Against Alevis. More than 200 houses belonging to Alevis were burned, and nearly a hundred workplaces were destroyed. At the end of the trials that lasted for 23 years, 22 people were sentenced to death, 7 to life imprisonment, and 321 to 1-24 years. Sixty-eight people who were essential to the massacre could not be reached. The massacre was seen as one event that led to the September 12 coup d'etat. According to the National Intelligence Organization, the "Turkish-Kurdish" issue was also a factor in the start of the events. https://tr.euronews.com/2021/12/19/maras-katliam-nedir-olaylar-nasil-basladi-neler-yasandi

declared in 13 towns, including Istanbul, on the same day. The years 1979 and 1980 were when house raids by the police increased.

> With the Maraş Massacre, martial law was declared in many cities, including Istanbul. Hasköy Public Solidarity Association (Hasköy Halkla Dayanışma Derneği) was closed under martial law. I do not know if martial law closed the association or if there was no need for a legal association under martial law. (Eren, 2019, p.102).

> In those days, Hasköy was under a kind of fascist occupation. Hundreds of armed nationalists from outside were walking around Hasköy chanting slogans, looking for leftists to "take account." The revolutionaries of Hasköy retreated to Okmeydanı. Strangely armed men with droopy mustaches were walking in front of our house. A few days later, the revolutionaries came down from Okmeydanı, and there were no more fascists in Hasköy."(Eren, 2019, p.112).

To sum up, Okmeydanı became an example of the urbanization dynamics in the country at a time when urbanization occurred with the mass migration movements between 1960 and 1980. In other words, empty foundation land became a settlement for migrants due to its proximity to factories. Immigrants established their living spaces with their networks. However, the developments that made Okmeydanı special were the Alevi identity of the migrating population and an organized working class, and it became an area where left organizations could be mobilized. It was a process in which the districts' social and political codes were formed, and oppositional politics and public spaces were produced, which differentiated Okmeydanı from other shantytowns.

4.3 Everyday life and contentious politics in Okmeydanı, 1980-2000

4.3.1 Everyday life and contentious politics between 1980-2000 in Istanbul

The 1980 coup had a devastating impact on the social and political structure of the country. The junta closed several political organizations and suppressed trade union activities, and the state suppression of leftist politics increased. Many organizations

and political parties were shut down, and the working-class opposition that had arisen in the late 1970s was suppressed.

One of the significant outcomes of the coup d'etat was the dispersion of the spaces of labor—the economic policies following the coup dispersed production distances. Factories within the city moved out of the town, and the traditional worker basins dispersed. Therefore, in addition to the dispersion of the production spaces, the housing zones of the working class in the city. Working-class public areas were distributed with the closure of Paşabahçe Şişe Cam Factory, the last worker basin separated. Boratav (1991) states that the dominant attitude toward urban laborers was an oppressive and rigid policy toward their unionization and wage demands while placing them in the category of "urbanized, squatter, poor and consumer." From this point of view, turning the needs of urban laborers to "municipality services, reconstruction permit, land title allocation." The political, organizational, and ideological defeat resulted from the military coup in 1980 (Benlisoy, 2018).

The pressure created by the 1980 coup d'etat on the social movements began to lose its effect towards the 90s. Wage losses and impoverishment became the main reasons behind the uprising in the 1990s. With the "1989 Spring Protests" initiated by public workers for political and economic claims, the working-class movement increased in the country. The "1989 Spring Protests" was the first significant labor movement following the 1980 coup. Around 600 thousand public workers protested the lack of progress in the collective bargaining negotiations between the Coordination Board, formed by 26 unions affiliated with Türk-İş[21], and three public employer unions (Çelik, 2015). Spring protests opened the way for the rise of rights-based struggles of the 1990s. Strikes, resistances, factory occupations, marches,

[21] Türk-İş was founded in July 1952 by the 10 federations and trade unions. It is Türkiye's first trade union confederation.

rallies, demonstrations, and general strikes left their mark these years. Çelik (2015) states that the 1990s was when the most intense strikes occurred in Turkish workers' struggles regarding the number of workers participating and the working day spent on strike. 1995 was when the highest number of workers went on strike in the history of Türkiye."

As provided by the Global Contentious Politics Dataset (GLOCON), especially in the second half of the 1990s, social movement across the country increased.

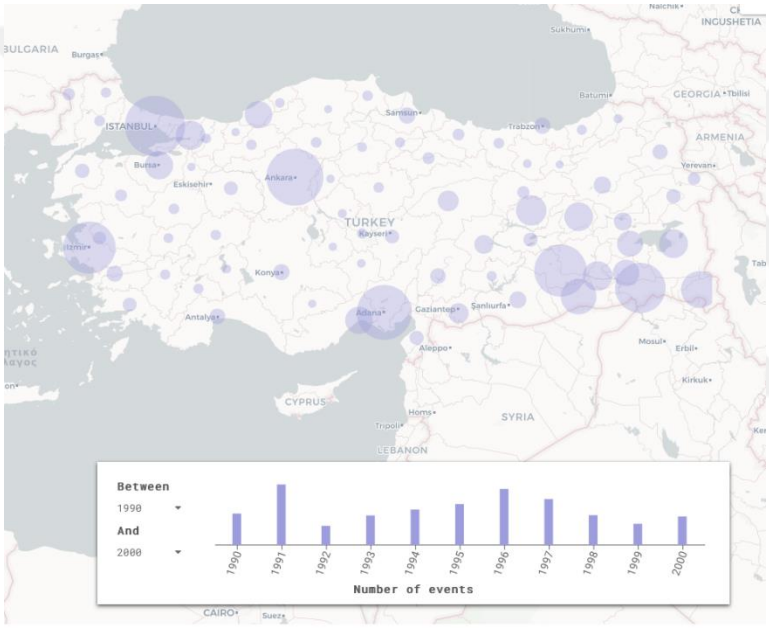

Figure 8. GLOCON[22] data for the number of events in the 1990s

1 Minute of Darkness, the headscarf struggle, journalism and freedom of expression campaigns, tuition protests at universities, resistance against the

[22] Global Contentious Politics Dataset (GLOCON) is the inaugural protest event database spanning multiple countries in the Global South, utilizing local sources for automated data collection. GLOCON catalogues various event types such as demonstrations, rallies, strikes, clashes, and political violence, providing event data for India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, and Argentina, with details on time, location, participants, and organizers.For more information: https://glocon.ku.edu.tr

gold mines in Bergama, conscientious objection movement, and urban movements that have evolved into the struggle against urban transformation were significant political protests of the 90s (Mater, 2014).

The Susurluk incident and the protests that developed after it occupied an essential area in the social mobilization of the 90s. In the Susurluk district of Balıkesir on November 3, 1996, the network of illegal relations that emerged with a truck and a Mercedes collision was on Türkiye's agenda. Links with the state, mafia, and politics spilled out from the fake license plate Mercedes with many fake documents and heavy weapons. To protest, the lights of the houses are turned off at 21 o'clock every evening. The action, which started on the night of February 1, 1997, gradually became massive. The people began to diversify the move by using their creativity: lights were turned on and off, and sounds were made with whistles and pots on the balconies. The action also took to the streets; citizens began to organize protests with their candles (İnce, 2014).

While the 90s was a period in which social mobilization gradually increased, it was also when the Kurdish and leftist movements were under intense state pressure (Yonucu, 2017). The Anti-Terror Law (TMK)was enacted on April 12, 1991. Fifteen political parties were closed by the constitutional court. "The People's Labor Party (HEP), attended by 18 Kurdish deputies elected from the SHP list in the 1991 general elections, was closed in 1993". The Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖDP) dissolved again in 1993, and the Democratic Party in 1994 (Mater, 2014).

The last period of the 1995s was a necessary year for the leftist organizations and the leftist struggle in Türkiye. The main breaking point in the history of Alevi neighborhoods is the massacre on 12 March 1995 (Gazi katliamının 26. yıldönümü:

Katiller cezalandırılmadı, 2021). The Gazi massacre riots have a virtual space in the history of leftist politics in the politicized working-class neighborhoods. Unidentified persons attacked four coffee houses of Alevi groups and a patisserie. An elderly, prestigious figure of the Alevi community died. The clashes continued for four days; 22 died, and 155 were wounded. The Gazi massacre is essential for the relations between the state and the working-class Alevi neighborhoods and the recognition of the community by the rest of the city. The news article about the squatter areas of Istanbul and the political communities was written following the massacre. Therefore, this period caused significant social, political, and economic transformations in Istanbul and the Alevi working-class neighborhoods.

The capitalist city's unequal development processes and urban segregation resulted from the capitalist mode of production laws that strengthened in the 1980s (Türkün, 2013). The economic policy based on the urban area caused the rapid increase in the living spaces of the working class, made these spaces crowded, reconstructed apartments, and became heterogeneous in terms of style and ethnicity (Koçak, 2011). The new urban government was characterized by competition and discriminatory practices over the urban territory. The land that was left to the use of poor migrants at the beginning of the urbanization period had been claimed by significant capital (Işık & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001). The state was critical in transferring the profit through the public-private sector coalitions (Kuyucu & Ünsal, 2010). At the beginning of the urbanization period, the squatter residents had bargaining power across the municipal authorities. The first period of urbanization was a "soft and integrative" process because the rent gathered from the urban land was shared among squatter owners and small-scale developers.

When it comes to urban politics, the period before 1980 referred to a different "urban regime" from the post-1980s urban regime (Erman, 2011) and post-1980s were the years of "urbanization of capital" (Şengül, 2009). Despite this "urbanization of the capital" and the analysis emphasis a discontinuity in the urban regime, the state's stance to gecekondu (informal settlements) remained consistent despite notable changes in development and urban governance laws. While market changes impacted industry pay and agricultural practices, the government did not enforce property rights and instead pursued populist urban initiatives aimed at gecekondu inhabitants (Arslanalp, 2015; Buğra, 1998). Laws were introduced to give property titles subject to the need that district municipalities prepare "improvement plans" and to codify rights related to land use. These plans sought to legalize homes in certain zones, end ineffective gecekondu prevention measures, and codify settlement patterns. But rather than having social housing for low-income communities as a larger objective, this legislation was primarily focused on one-time legalization (Arslanalp, 2015; Buğra, 1998).

Due to the state evacuation and firing on the villages in Southeastern Anatolia between 1985 and 1995, a large Kurdish population in rural areas of southeast and eastern Anatolia was forced to leave their settlements. Seventy-four percent of the population of the region were forced to migrate to urban centers, and 40 percent of those who went to the cities migrated to the city centers in the west, such as Istanbul, İzmir, Adana, Mersin, Bursa, and Antalya. The migrated population, which had no human capital and was not supported by any state mechanism, settled in the poor neighborhoods and shantytowns of the cities (Yükseker, 2006).

This displacement had socio-economic, political, and legal consequences for the displaced population. They faced social exclusion in the cities they migrated to,

worked in precarious jobs with low wages, did not fully participate in labor, and had difficulties accessing their education and health rights. Therefore, the socioeconomic conditions of new migrants of those times differed from the economic and social conditions of the previous migrants, which was called a "rupture in the migration process" (Işık & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001, p.174).

4.3.2 Everyday life and contentious politics in Okmeydanı between 1980-2000

As a result of the 1980s coup, many associations and organizations were closed. When we look at the news, the number of protests is deficient compared to the 90s. Among 108 news articles published in Cumhuriyet from 1980 to 2002, only five emerged between 1980 and 1989. The news between 1980-89 are the following: In the news in 1981, the raids on leftist organizations and the operations held in the neighborhoods including Okmeydanı were mentioned (March 1981); The robbery in a milk warehouse in Okmeydanı, in the news about the raids and actions of the police against Devyol members (April 1981); The applications of the landlords to the Council of State against the demolition decision (May 1981); The news about the removal of earthquake victims from the houses built for the Van earthquake[23] victims in 1976 (August 1983); The protest against the demolitions when Turgut Özal came to the opening of a high school in the neighborhood (January 1981).

[23] On November 24, 1976, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.0 occurred in the province of Van, which is located in the country's soothers. In the earthquake, 3.840 people died, and 497 people were injured; 9.232 houses were damaged so that they could not be inhabited. In the same year, residences under "Van Blokları" were built in Piyalepaşa Neighborhood in the Beyoğlu District of Istanbul for the earthquake victims. The story of the destruction of the Van Blokları continues until today. Van Blokları has been renovated. It was announced in 2017 with the news that the urban transformation in Okmeydanı would begin with Van Blokları: "Van Blokları will be the place where we will hit the first pickaxe" "The people of Van, who live in the Van Blokları in Okmeydanı, are also entitled."



Figure 9. News on the eviction of Van earthquake victims from social housing in Okmeydanı[24]
Source: Cumhuriyet, August 1983

The leftist movement that lost its power after the 1980 coup canalized its practices in the segregated political neighborhoods. The state repression and the rising social mobility in Okmeydanı in the 1990s were revealed by both news reports and the narratives of the inhabitants:

> "State pressure has never been absent here. In the '80s, tanks settled on the streets. Snipers waited on the roofs during the protests of the Sivas massacre in the 90s. The district was one of the places where articles 141 and 142 were felt the most.[25]

[24] The photo used in the news was taken by Ender Erkek.
[25] Articles 141 and 142, which were added to the Turkish Penal Code in 1951, penalizing the establishment of an organization aimed at establishing the domination of any social class over other classes or abolishing a social class and making propaganda in this direction, continued on April 12, 1991, when these articles were repealed. The articles were against the communist and socialist movements and ideology. Many intellectuals and leftists were arrested for these articles. The Anti-Terror Law was accepted on the day that articles 141 and 142 of the Turkish Penal Code were abolished. While articles 141. and 142. referred to the danger of communism, it was a law targeting membership in the TMK terrorism. Article 1 of the Anti-Terror Law, which entered into force in 1991, was as follows: Terrosim; using for and violence; by using one of the methods of pressure, intimidation, threat, threatening political, legal, social, secular and economic order specified in the constitution, disrupting the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation, endangering

> " As I said, we did not go out much in the '80s because of fear. There were too many conflicts between right-wing and left-wing groups. We were around 8-9 years old at that time. I remember the gunfire and clashes of that period. My sister could not go to school. I remember it so that she would not go away. There were many political clashes in the schools."
>
> "Bullets were passing us at the time of the 1980s. There were barracks. The police and soldiers all searched our homes during the coup. We were hiding the book at home."

While there were political changes after the coup d'etat, as mentioned in the above section, it was a period when the informal economy increased. Golden Horn Basin and the factories there moved out of the city. With the increasing informal economy and subcontracting throughout the country, the textile industry, where most new migrants worked, increased in the district. One of the leftist organizations tried to collect data on the textile industry in Okmeydanı, and the activist stated that "Okmeydanı became a large factory with 20,000 textile workers."

Housing, one of the main issues in the establishment of the district, was shaped by the regulations in the 1980s and the reactions against these regulations. Amnesty Law, also called Özal Affı, enacted in 1984, redefined the residents' property rights.[26] The district has been trying to be legally open to construction from this time.

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the existence of Turkish Republic and weakening the state authority. They are all kinds of criminal actions to be taken by a person or persons belonging to an organization to destroy or seize fundamental rights and freedoms, disrupting the internal and external security of the state, public order or general health.

[26] The Law on "Some Transactions to be Applied to Buildings Contrary to the Zoning and Slum Legislation and Amending an Article of the Zoning Law No.6785," adopted on 24.03.1984 with the number 2981, is like an amnesty, as its name suggests. In the law, shanty houses and structures were built in violation of the zoning legislation; it is classified as "to be protected", "to be protected by improving," or "those who cannot benefit from the provisions of this law". It is stated that licenses can be given to the structures to be protected and protected by rehabilitation. In other words, it is the essence of this law that the buildings constructed in violation of the zoning and squatters' legislation should be legalized within six months by applying to the municipality or the Governor's Office and that the shanty houses are first given a title deed allocation document and then the improvement development plans.
(http://www.mimarlikdergisi.com/index.cfm?sayfa=mimarlik&DergiSayi=417&RecID=4520)

The process started with Amnesty Law, which did not progress quickly in Okmeydanı. When looking at the news in 1993, it is said that the legalization could not be carried out on the square to a large extent. Mainstream media continued to describe its inhabitants as occupiers. Figure 9 below, in the news titled "20.000 foundation plots have been occupied for 30 years" (November 1993), it was stated that the land mafia founded the whole of Okmeydanı, and there was a tax loss because it was not legalized.



20 bin vakıf arsası 30 yıldır işgal altında

İstanbul'da Okmeydanı, Eyüp, Beykoz, Kağıthane ve Hasköy'de vakıflara ait arsalar üzerine kurulu onbinlerce yasadışı binadan belediye ve devletin de gene trilyonlarla ölçülen vergi geliri kaybı var

MEHMET GÜÇ

İstanbul'da vakıflara ait 20 bin parça gayrimenkul 30 yıldır işgal altında. Bugünkü değerle yaklaşık 6 trilyonluk gayrimenkulün işgalcilerine satışı için 1984 yılında başlatılan tapu işlemleri, yaklaşık 10 yıldır bitirilemiyor. İşlemleri bitirilemeyen Okmeydanı, Eyüp, Beykoz, Kağıthane ve Hasköy'deki arsalar üzerine kurulu on binlerce binanın yasallaşmaması nedeniyle belediye ve Maliye'nin gelir kaybı da trilyonlarla ölçülüyor.

İstanbul'un üçte birinin tapusuna sahip Vakıflar Ge-

Bir parsel değil, bir ada değil, bir semtin, Okmeydanı'nın hemen hemen tümü arsa mafyasının el koyduğu vakıf arsaları üzerine kurulu. İstanbul'un Hasköy, Eyüp, Beykoz, Rami gibi semtlerinde de durum çok farklı değil.

Figure 10. News report on the ecroachment upon foundation lands
Source: Cumhuriyet, November 1993

In the news titled "Okmeydanı is on sale" (September 1995) in Figure 10 below, it is stated that nine neighborhoods in Okmeydanı, Piyalepaşa, Fetihtepe, Keçecipiri, Piripaşa, Kulaksız, Sütlüce, İstiklal, Kulaksız, Kaptanpaşa, were put on sale. The article also states:

"Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation has decided to sell the lands in Okmeydanı that have been occupied for years. If the sale decision is implemented, the lands on which thousands of buildings and workplaces will be sold to the occupying owners first."



Okmeydanı satışa çıkarıldı

ANKARA (AA) - Fatih Sultan Mehmet'in "Okmeydanı üzerinde kuş uçurulmuyor" dediği, yıllardır gecekonducuların işgali altında bulunan vakıf arazileri satışa çıkarıldı. Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü'nün yönetimindeki vakfın arsa ve arazileri, Bakanlar Kurulu kararı ile aynı kurum tarafından rayiç bedelle satılacak.

Vakıflar Genel Müdürü Fadıl Ünver'den alınan bilgiye göre İstanbul'un Okmeydanı olarak bilinen bölgesinde gecekondu ve işyeri yapılarak işgal edilen, mülkiyeti Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakfı'na ait hayrat türü 1 milyon 200 bin metrekare arsa ve arazinin 950 bin metrekaresi, önümüzdeki günlerde satılacak. Kamulaştırılan arsa ve arazilerin 250 bin metrekaresi ise park, bahçe, yeşil alan ve yol olarak kullanılacak.

Arsa ve arazilerin üzerindeki binlerce binanın yıkılamaması ve doğrudan doğruya satış imkânının bulunamaması dolayısıyla özel olarak çıkarılan Bakanlar Kurulu kararı ile arsa ve arazilerin, işgalci sahiplerine satılmasına imkân tanınan Okmeydanı 5 mahalleden oluşuyor.

Arsa satışları taksitle

Kararın uygulanması halinde, Okmeydanı'ndaki arsa ve araziler öncelikli olarak işgalci sahiplerine satılacak. Arsa ve arazileri rayiç bedeli üzerinden alamayacak durumda olan işgalcilere taksit imkânı da sağlanacak. Okmeydanı'ndaki arsa ve arazilerin satışı sonucunda elde edilecek yaklaşık 7-8 trilyon lira, vakıflar mevzuatı çerçevesinde rant geliri elde edilebilecek yeni yatırımlara kanalize edilecek ve ayrıca tarihi eserlerin restorasyon ve bakımında da kullanılacak.

Geçen yıllarda 3.500 kişi Vakıflar İdaresi'ne başvuruda bulunarak tapu tahsis belgesi isteğinde bulunmuş, ancak Taşınmaz Kültür ve Tabiat Varlıklarını Koruma Kurulu'nun kararı gereğince hak sahiplerine bu belge verilmemişti. Vakıf arazileri üzerindeki 5 büyük mahallede, çok katlı binalar da dikkate alındığında 15 bin adet meskûn nitelikli bina bulunuyor ve 50 bini aşkın kişi yaşıyor.

Arsa ve araziler, 1950 yılında yapılan kadastro işlemleri sonucunda 133 adet parsel, 1 milyon 217 bin 269 metrekare olarak Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakfı adına tapuya tescil edilmiş. Ayrıca, 1984 yılında yürürlüğe giren 2981 sayılı İmar Affı Kanunu uyarınca da bölgenin 1989-1990 yıllarında yapılan imar-ıslah planlarına göre 4.200 adet imar parseli, 950 bin metrekare alan olarak tapuya kaydedilmiş.

1946'dan itibaren yoğun şekilde gecekondu işgaline maruz kalan bölgede, imar planlarına ve mevzuatına aykırı olarak düzensiz ve sağlıksız şekilde cereyan eden gecekondulaşma olgusuna, zaman içinde belediye ve çeşitli kamu kuruluşları tarafından yol, su, elektrik, kanalizasyon, cami, okul, park, bahçe gibi her türlü altyapı imkânı götürülerek yerleşik bir düzen hâli kazandırıldı. Başlangıçta tek katlı ve basit malzemelerle yığma olarak yapılan gecekondular, zaman içinde mahiyet değiştirerek yerlerini çok katlı betonarme binalara bıraktı.

► Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakfı, Okmeydanı'nda yıllardır işgal altında bulunan arsaları satma kararı aldı. Satış kararının uygulanması durumunda halen üzerinde binlerce bina ve işyeri bulunan arsalar öncelikle işgalci sahiplere satılacak. Satışlardan elde edilecek 7-8 trilyon lira, diğer vakıf eserleri için kullanılacak.

Figure 11. Newspaper report on occupation of foundation land in Okmeydanı
Source: Cumhuriyet, November 1995

The news dated June 1997 titled "The joy of title deeds in Şişli" in Figure 11 below mentioned the title deed distribution carried out in the MŞP within the framework of the "slum transformation model" of Şişli Municipality. In the news, the mayor of Şişli states that "the citizens do not want the police and the municipal police to come face to face with the people because of the lands occupied by the citizens."



Şişli'de tapu sevinci Şişli Belediye Başkanı Gülay Atığ, "Şişli 20.20 Projesi"nin hedeflerinden olan "gecekondu dönüşüm modeli" çerçevesinde, 1200 kişiye tapu dağıttı. Okmeydanı Mahmutşevketpaşa Mahallesi Muhtarlığı önünde düzenlenen törende konuşan Belediye Başkanı Gülay Atığ, vatandaşın işgal ettiği araziler yüzünden polisin ve zabıtanın halkla karşı karşıya gelmesini istemediklerini söyledi. Mahmutşevketpaşa Mahallesi'ne ait tapuların ilk bölümünü geçen yıl nisan ayında dağıttıklarını anımsatan Gülay Atığ, daha sonra yurttaşlara tapularını dağıttı. Tören sonrasında, Atığ ve beraberindekiler mahalle içinde yapımı süren cemevini ziyaret ettiler.

Figure 12. Title deed elation in Şişli: Municipality distributes property titles
Source: Cumhuriyet, June 1997

While the news of deed joy was shown on the one hand, protests against the demolitions were also held in the district during this period. In 1997, the Dolapdere-

Piyalepaşa Implementation Development Plan came into effect. A massive protest, as seen in Figures 12 and 13, was taken against the enactment of this plan. The plan was canceled two years later by the Istanbul 5th Administrative Court. The news stated, " Inhabitants stated that the decision was against Istanbul's zoning plan and said that the plan's main purpose was to provide profit to the capital."



Yıkım kararına tepki

Bedrettin Dalan döneminde hazırlanan Kasımpaşa, Okmeydanı ve Hasköy'de 100 bin kişiyi ilgilendiren imar planı Beyoğlu Belediye Meclisi'nce kabul edildi

İstanbul Haber Servisi-Kasımpaşa, Okmeydanı ve Hasköy'de büyük yıkımlar ile yeni yol ve iş merkezlerinin yapımını öngören "Dolapdere-Piyalepaşa Uygulama İmar Planı"nın Beyoğlu Belediye Meclisi'nce kabul edilmesine sivil toplum kuruluşları ve bölgede oturan yurttaşlar tepki gösterdi. Yıkım kararı uygulandığı takdirde yaklaşık 100 bin kişinin evlerinden ve işyerlerinden olacağını belirten Kasımpaşa ve Okmeydanı halkı, dün Beyoğlu Belediyesi'ne itiraz dilekçelerini verdi. Belediye önünde bir açıklama yapan "Plan Takibi İçin Yurttaş Komisyonu", Bedrettin Dalan döneminde hazırlanan ve Recep Tayyip Erdoğan döneminde yürürlüğe konulan imar planının, İstanbul'un nüfus planına aykırı olduğunu belirterek planın asıl amacının Kasımpaşa ve Okmeydanı'nı "ulusal ve uluslararası sermayeye peşkeş çekerek rant sağlamak" olduğunu savundu. Beyoğlu Belediyesi önünde toplanan yurttaşların protestosuna uğrayan Belediye Başkanı Nusret Bayraktar, gösteri sırasında dışarı çıkarak yıkım yapılmayacağını söyledi. Yurttaşların tepki gösterdiği Bayraktar, "Provoke ediliyorsunuz" dedi. Beyoğlu Belediyesi Başkanı Yardımcısı Halil Bakırcı ise bir yandan "kendilerinin hiçbir şekilde yıkım yapmayacağını" belirtirken diğer yandan "planın mutlaka uygulanacağını" belirtti.

Bedrettin Dalan döneminde hazırlanan ve Tayyip Erdoğan döneminde Büyükşehir Belediye Meclisi'nden geçerek Beyoğlu Belediye Meclisi'nde kabul edilen "Dolapdere-Piyalepaşa Uygulama İmar Planı"na tepki gösteren yurttaşlar ve "Plan Takibi İçin Yurttaş Komisyonu",dün Beyoğlu Belediyesi önünde bir gösteri yaptı. Komisyon Sözcüsü Durmuş Mert, söz konusu planın halktan gizlendiğini ve halkın görüşü alınmadan uygulamaya sokulduğunu savundu. Yurttaşların bu plandan tesadüfen haberi olduğunu belirten Mert, "Yaklaşık 100 bin insanı mağdur durumda bırakacak olan bu plan, hukuka ve demokrasiye aykırı olmasının yanı sıra, sosyal sonuçları düşünmeden yapılmış bir plandır" dedi.

"Plan Takibi İçin Yurttaş Komisyonu"nun kurulmasına destek veren İnsan Yerleşimleri Derneği adına konuşan şehir plancısı İkbal Polat, söz konusu planın içeriğinde üçüncü boğaz köprüsü ile kent içi ulaşım bağlantı yolları öneren büyük ulaşım projelerinin yer aldığını, ancak bunların İstanbul'un nüfus planına uygun olmadığını söyledi.

Gazetecilerin sorularını cevaplayan Beyoğlu Belediyesi Başkan Yardımcısı Halil Bakırcı ise, "Bizim tarafımızdan hiçbir yer yıkılmayacak, ancak imar planı uygulanacak" dedi. Bakırcı, bir gazetecinin "yıkım olmadan yeni yollar, yeşil alanlar ve iş merkezlerinin nasıl yapılacağı" sorusunu da "Biz sadece dar yolları genişleteceğiz, istisnai durumlar dışında yurttaşlar eskimiş evini kendisi yıkacaktır" diye yanıtladı.

Kararın, İstanbul'un nüfus planına aykırı olduğunu belirten yurttaşlar, planın asıl amacının sermayeye rant sağlamak olduğunu savundular. (Fotoğraf: İPEK YEZDANI)

Figure 13. News on the inhabitants' reactions against demolition[27]



'Dolapdere-Piyalepaşa İmar Planı'na davul-zurnalı protesto

Okmeydanı, Kasımpaşa ve Hasköy'de büyük yıkımları öngören 'Dolapdere-Piyalepaşa İmar Planı'nı protesto eden 1500 kişi, davul-zurna eşliğinde yürüyüş yaptı. Yürüyüş Dikilitaş Parkı'ndaki "protesto şenliği" ile sona erdi. (Fotoğraf: İPEK YEZDANI)

'Susma, sustukça evin yıkılacak'

Figure 14. News about the demonstration against demolitions in Okmeydanı[28]

Another critical aspect of the 90s for Okmeydanı was its demographic change. The district continued to be an arrival space for migrants. However, migration dynamics

[27] The photo used in the news was taken by İpek Yezdani.
[28] The photo used in the news was taken by İpek Yezdani.

in the late 1990s differed from the previous ones. Everyday politics and solidarity networks in Alevi's working-class neighborhoods were relatively open to the new migrants (Aktaş, 2019). The process that started in the 1990s with the Kurdish migration paved the way for forming a new radical generation in the Alevi working-class neighborhoods. The Kurdish political movement also strengthened in Okmeydanı in that period.

In the 90s, in addition to the housing struggle, important events shaped the district's political identity. Firstly, as mentioned above, the Gazi massacre affected Okmeydanı and other working-class Alevi neighborhoods. The massacre made these spaces known to the rest of the city and differentiated them. The Gazi massacre also holds its place in the memory of the inhabitants.

Another important event that is thought to have changed the district was the murder of the policeman standing guard in front of the True Path Party in 1996; the person who fired a bullet at the police took shelter in Okmeydanı, where she was killed in a clash. Some neighbors stated that the area had been impacted by the clashes between police and the protests after this clash. A police officer waiting in from the True Path Party Istanbul building was killed in July 1995; Sibel Yalçın, who was killed by police, hid at home in Okmeydanı, and the police killed her in the conflict. [29]

[29]Her name had been given to the park in the middle of the neighborhood. The formal name of the park is Haşimişçan Park. But after Fatma Girik was in şişli municipality, the park called her name. But now, the park has been called Sibel Yalçın both by residents, mainstream media, and alternative media. Sibel Yalçın Parkı has a vital role in the political structure of the neighborhood; all of the leftist groups hold their events at this park. The park's name also reflects a conflict in the neighborhood between police and the protestors. A police officer in front of the Right Way Party İstanbul building was killed in July 1995. The woman, Sibel Yalçın, who killed the police, hid at home in Okmeydanı, and the police killed her in the conflict. Her name had been given to the park in the middle of the neighborhood by the revolutionary groups. The formal name of the park is Fatma Girik Parkı. Nevertheless, the park has been called Sibel Yalçın by residents, mainstream media, and alternative media. In the events by Şişli Municipality, the name Fatma Girik Parkı was used.

Afterward, the district mobilized against the Susurluk incident in 1996. The district participated in minute darkness protests in the most massive way. Figure 14 shows this popular nationwide event, "One minute's darkness for the sake of perpetual light," continued in Okmeydanı.



'Çeteler Meclis'te' "Sürekli Aydınlık İçin 1 Dakika Karanlık" kampanyası kapsamında İstanbul'un çeşitli semtlerinde gerçekleştirilen kitlesel eylemlerde "çeteler ve şeriatçılar" protesto edildi. Kampanyanın başlangıcından bu yana her gece yürüyüş düzenleyen Okmeydanı halkı, önceki gece de dövülerek öldürülen gazeteci Metin Göktepe, Antalya'da kampanya sırasında gözaltına alınırken yaşamını yitiren Celal Cankoru ve Esenler'de polis tarafından öldürüldüğü öne sürülen Nurettin Demir'in fotoğrafları ile sokak sokak dolaştı. 3 bin kişilik topluluğa, Grup Yenigün marşları, fotoğraf sanatçısı Mehmet Özer de okuduğu şiirlerle destek verirken "Halkların katili Susurluk devleti", "Kahrolsun MİT, CIA, kontrgerilla", "Çeteler Meclis'te, öğrenciler hapiste" sloganları atıldı. Kadıköy Altyol, Beylikdüzü, Ümraniye Mustafa Kemal Mahallesi, Alibeyköy Saya Yokuşu, Bağcılar Yüzyıl Mahallesi, Hacıhüsrev ve Örnektepe kitlesel eylemlere sahne oldu. Eylemler sırasında 5 kişinin gözaltına alındığı öne sürüldü. (BERTAN AĞANOĞLU)

Figure 15. News a demonstration in the district against the Susurluk even in February 1997[30]
Source: Cumhuriyet, February 1997

For example, in Figure 15 below, the news says that: "As part of the re-launched "one minute's darkness for the sake of perpetual light" protests, a group of approximately 200 people gathered Okmeydanı in the evening and carried a banner "The Susurluk gang, the murderer of Metin Göktepe."[31] The structure and peculiarities of the contentious politics in the district turn the protests against Susurluk into a commemoration for the murdered journalist Metin Göktepe.

[30] The photo used in the news was taken by Bertan Ağanoğlu
[31] Metin Göktepe was a photojournalist who was tortured and brutally murdered in police custody in Istanbul on January 8, 1996.



Işıklar Göktepe anısına söndü

"Sürekli Aydınlık İçin Bir Dakika Karanlık" eylemcileri, ışıklarını önceki akşam gazeteci Metin Göktepe için söndürdüler.
Okmeydanı'ndaki Keskin Sokak'ta toplanan yaklaşık iki yüz kişilik kalabalık, meşaleleriyle gecenin karanlığını aydınlatırken "Metin Göktepe'nin katili Susurluk çetesi" pankartı taşıdı. Afyon Ağır Ceza Mahkemesi'nde önceki gün görülen Metin Göktepe davasında sanık 8 polisin 19 ay sonra tanıklarla yüzleştirilmesinin gecikmiş bir tutum olduğunu belirten eylemciler, karşılıklı "Metin nerede - Metin burada" sloganları attılar. Sınır Tanımayan Gazeteciler Örgütü'nden (RSF) yapılan açıklamada da Göktepe davasında alınan keşif kararının olumlu bir adım olduğu belirtildi.
(Fotoğraf: AYKUT KÜÇÜKKAYA)

Figure 16. Commemorating Metin Göktepe at the demonstration for Susurluk[32]

During the protests, the police took extensive security measures. The protests demanded that the gangs be exposed and those responsible brought to justice in the actions by the ODP in the People's Houses in Okmeydanı Fatma Girik Park (Dokunulmazlığa karşı 1 dakika karanlık, 1997)" The news declared that almost 200 people gathered in the neighborhood. Sezin, 65 years old, related her memory of the protests and discourses in the media as the following: "We were playing pots and pans. They said Alevis blew the candle; we were participating in the protests." (Kazan'ın açıklaması üzücü, 1997).

The second half of the 1990s became the year of increasing prices. Moreover, People's Houses, a solid leftist group in the neighborhood, explained their political plan as a "Struggle for rights." Protests for education, housing, and increasing prices were made—these protests were in the neighborhood. For example, as displayed in Figure 16, protests against the increasing prices were held.

[32] The photo used in the news was taken by Aykut Küçükkaya



Katılımcılar, hükümeti halkın sorunlarını geri plana attığı için eleştirdi. (Fotoğraf: KADER TUĞLA)

Halkevleri zamlara karşı yürüdü

İstanbul Haber Servisi - ANASOL-D hükümetinin art arda yaptığı zamlara kitle örgütlerinin gösterdiği tepki sürüyor. İstanbul Halkevleri, Okmeydanı'nda düzenlediği yürüyüşle zamlara karşı çıktı ve geri alınmasını istedi. Halkevleri yöneticilerinden **Ertuğrul Bilir**, ANASOL-D hükümetinin de emekçilere kaşıkla verdiğini kepçeyle derhal geri alarak sermayenin hükümeti olduğunu şaşmaz bir şekilde kanıtladığını söyledi.

ANASOL-D hükümetinin finansman açığını ve 8 yıllık kesintisiz temel eğitimi gerekçe göstererek yaptığı zamlar, dün İstanbul Halkevleri'ne bağlı bir grup tarafından protesto edildi. Okmeydanı Örnektepe Etibank Caddesi'nde kurulan pazar yerinde toplanan yurttaşlar, ellerinde zamları protesto eden dövizler taşıyarak ve sık sık **"Zamlara hayır", "Zamlar kader değildir", "Susma, sustukça sıra sana gelecek", "Söz, yetki, karar; iktidar halka"** şeklinde sloganlar atarak yürüdüler.

Halkevleri yöneticilerinden Ertuğrul Bilir de İstanbul Halkevleri adına yaptığı açıklamada, hükümetin MGK destekli olduğunu ve halkın tüm sorunlarını geri plana ittiğini savundu. Bilir, hükümetin daha öncekilerden bir farkının olmadığını belirterek şöyle dedi: **"Emekçiler olarak daha yoksul ve niteliksiz bir hayatı yaşamaya mahkûm bırakılmak istemiyoruz. Zamlar her gelen hükümetin yapmak zorunda olduğu bir şey değildir. Zamların geri alınmasını, özelleştirilmenin durdurulmasını, emekçilere insanca ücret verilmesini, Güneydoğu'daki kirli savaşa son verilmesini ve her tür adaletsiz uygulamanın sona erdirilmesini istiyoruz."**

Figure 17. Protests against the increasing prices[33]

As seen in Figure 18 below, when protests against the increasing prices are made, the conflicts within the district are also revealed. The news stated that the shop owner was threatened by a group called Kasımpaşa because they did not apply the decided price increase for the bread in the district.



KADINLARDAN EKMEK ZAMMINA PROTESTO - Okmeydanı Mahmut Şevket Paşa Mahallesi sakini bir grup kadın, ekmeğe yapılan zammı alkışlı eylemle protesto etti. Ekmeğin 25 bin liradan satılmasına tepki gösteren kadınlar, alınan zam kararına uymayarak 15 bin liradan ekmek satan Mithat Paşa Caddesi'ndeki Onur Market önünde toplandılar. Ellerindeki tencere kapaklarına vurarak alkışlı protesto eylemi yapan kadınlar; zam kararına uymadığı için Kasımpaşa'daki "ülkücü ekmek mafyasına bağlı silahlı kişilerce tehdit edildiğini" öne süren market sahibi Kadriye Soydan'a destek olduklarını söylediler. (Fotoğraf: KAAN SAĞANAK)

Figure 18. The protest by women against the price increase in bread[34]

[33] The photo used in the news was taken by Kader Tuğla
[34] The photo used in the news was taken by Kaan Sağanak

As a period of increased mobilization and conflicts in Okmeydanı, May Days also conflicted at the end of the 90s. Especially 1 May 1998 was an important date for Okmeydanı (Kaya, 2014). During the May 1st demonstrations, a protester, trying to escape the police, crashed into an open building on Fatih Sultan Mehmet Avenue in Okmeydanı. However, the building belonged to the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and many nationalists were there. The nationalists mercilessly started beating the young protesters. In an attempt to avoid further harm, the young person hung down from the third floor by clinging to the window. The nationalists, however, pulled the person back into the building from a lower floor and continued to assault them (Vurduk ki düşmesin, 1998).

To sum up, while the district was still under the influence of macro-political, economic, and social transformations in the 1980s, it realized this period as a place where mobilization increased, and its specific political and social networks were woven due to its oppositional character and political structure that had begun to settle in the previous period**.**

4.4 A hub of socio-political activism in the early 2000s

Early in the new millennium, Okmeydanı saw a number of demonstrations that reflected many social issues. Beginning in February 2003, anti-war protests broke out in response to the US invasion of Iraq. These demonstrations, which continued throughout the early 2000s with banners denouncing American military operations, culminated in clashes against President Bush's objectives and NATO Summit policy in 2004. In 2005, the opposition to military projects remained strong, making Okmeydanı the center of anti-war sentiment across the country. As a result, even though anti-war feeling was felt throughout the nation, Okmeydanı became a focal

point for these demonstrations, attracting participation from beyond the country. During this time, Okmeydanı gained notoriety in the media as a hub for large-scale anti-war protests (Öfke sokaklardaydı, 2004). The "One Minute for the Darkness of Permanent Light" protest, sparked by the 1996 Susurluk incident exposing state-mafia ties, played a crucial role in Okmeydanı's political mobilization during the early 2000s.

The haunting memory of the Sivas Massacre on July 2, 1993, where 37 Alevi intellectuals tragically lost their lives in the Madımak district, remains vivid in Okmeydanı's collective consciousness. In the aftermath, protests gradually evolved into annual commemorations. The level of participation and the nature of these events have varied over the years. Notably, the 2010 commemoration featured diverse activities, including theater performances by local women and protests against rising costs. The Okmeydanı Democracy Platform honored the intellectuals, artists, and writers who perished in the Sivas Madımak Hotel with a march and press release, drawing approximately 300 participants. Banners and slogans such as "Do Not Forget Sivas Massacre" and "Long Live the Brotherhood of Peoples" echoed through the streets, symbolizing a unified call for justice. While commemorations occur every 2-3 years, some years pass without such events, underscoring the enduring significance of the tragedy within Okmeydanı's Alevi community.

Concurrently, the district faced socio-economic challenges, leading to labor unrest. Demonstrations advocating for job security and fair employment conditions became commonplace. During the early 2000s, Okmeydanı experienced a surge in labor unrest due to widespread informal and precarious employment. Demonstrations demanding job security became routine, with notable events such as a gathering of 70 workers outside Okmeydanı Cemevi in July 2005. They marched through the

streets chanting slogans like “We demand jobs!” and “End uninsured work,” highlighting the precariousness of their employment situation. The district’s garment workshops, a staple of its economy, faced closure and layoffs, leading to protests against government inspections and fines. These demonstrations emphasized the challenges faced by both workers and business owners and called for legislative action to safeguard workers’ rights.

In response to workplace fatalities in the Tuzla shipyards, a demonstration in June 2008 drew participation from various organizations and political parties, demanding improved safety measures and unionized insurance for workers. Similarly, a protest in November 2008 opposed rising prices, reflecting the community's struggle to cope with economic hardships. Efforts in 2009 resulted in the opening of a health center in MŞP, following a grassroots campaign supported by 5,000 signatures and extensive negotiations with local authorities. Additionally, concerns over education led women from MŞP to advocate for a kindergarten, ultimately resolved through dialogue between parents, school authorities, and community organizations.

May Day protests have been an emblem of the labor movement in the district, reflecting not only the struggles against informal labor and low wages but also the broader significance of workers' rights. Historically, these protests have been characterized by tension and occasional violence, particularly evident in OkmeydanıThe intensity of conflicts during these events has varied over the years, with some years marked by heightened confrontations, such as the 2007 May Day, where clashes between protesters and police escalated rapidly. Despite prohibitions on celebrating May 1st in Taksim Square in recent years, some groups in Okmeydanı persistently aimed to march there, underscoring the symbolic importance of the

location. While celebrations occasionally occurred in Taksim, restrictions imposed by the government often led to heavy police presence and conflicts, highlighting the ongoing struggle for the right to assemble and protest freely (Yılmaz, 2021).

The historical significance of May Day for the district and its associations prompts early preparations for the protests each year. In March 2022, the cooperative organized a strategic meeting, inviting members from the district, with a particular focus on engaging women, a key demographic. These meetings play a crucial role in mobilizing the local community and fostering solidarity among residents. They provide a platform for discussing and addressing the pervasive issues facing the district, ensuring that the voice of the community is heard and represented in the ongoing struggle for workers' rights and social justice.

The Gezi protests, which were a significant social movement across Turkey, were the most important events in the district during the first half of the 2010s. Alongside the Gezi protest, the district, together with other Alevi working-class neighborhoods, also made it to the country's agenda. The violent clashes during the Gezi protests can be seen as a juncture point for the existence of police forces in the district. Four people, Berkin Elvan, Burakcan Karamanoğlu, Ayhan Yılmaz, and Uğur Kurt, died during the clashes in the district during the Gezi protests. Gezi protests launched as an environmental movement against the urban transformation project of Gezi Park at Taksim and converted into anti-government protests that permeated the whole country in May 2013. The movement has been a breaking point for the state’s existence in marginalized political neighborhoods. Gezi protests evolt sparked in many neighborhoods (Tuğal, 2013); however, Alevi and political neighborhoods became places where increased state violence and policing continued as a rule after Gezi protests (Yonucu, 2014).

On June 16, 2013, the day after police intervention in people at Gezi Park, in the very early hours of the morning, Berkin Elvan, 15 years old, living in the neighborhood, was shot in the head by a pepper gasses capsule thrown by police in Okmeydanı. Following his shooting, many protests took place in the district, most of them being intervened by police, followed by increasing police crackdowns. Berkin stayed in a coma for 289 days and died on March 11, 2014. After the police intervention in his funeral ceremony on March 12, 2014, when people walked from Okmeydanı to Taksim, conflicts spread to Okmeydanı. Two contradictory groups had severe strife in which they used firearms. On March 13, 2014, Burakcan Karamanoğlu, a 19-year-old boy living in Dörtyol, was killed in the clashes between two opposing young groups.

On May 22, 2014, a small group of high school students made a demonstration for Berkin Elvan and the Soma mine disaster, which caused the death of 301 miners on May 13, 2014. Police intervened in the protest and used firearms, and a police bullet killed Uğur Kurt while he was in the yard of Cemevi for his relative's funeral ceremony. After his death, clashes between police and leftist groups continued during the week. During clashes between police and protesters after the end of Uğur Kurt, Ayhan Yılmaz, standing in the street, was killed. When we analyze the news from May 2013 to 2015, we see that police attacks and clashes in the neighborhood continued after the Gezi protests.

In summary, Okmeydanı became a thriving hub of socio-political activity in the early 2000s, characterized by a number of rallies and demonstrations addressing social, political, and economic issues. The district was vital to the fight for May Day demonstrations, labor rights activism, and the remembrance of past tragedies like the Sivas Massacre. These demonstrations connected with larger national and

international movements in addition to reflecting the concerns of the local community. Furthermore, the district underwent notable disruptions amid the Gezi demonstrations, marking a pivotal moment in its interactions with state authorities and law enforcement agencies. The terrible incidents that transpired throughout these conflicts highlighted how serious the district's activism is. Okmeydanı's dedication to social justice and group efforts endures in the face of constant obstacles and persecution, demonstrating the tenacious nature of grassroots movement in underprivileged urban communities.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 4 extensively examines the transformation of Okmeydanı from its inception to 2002, shedding light on its evolution into a space of contention. The central inquiry guiding this exploration is how Okmeydanı became a politically charged zone, distinct from other squatter settlements born during Istanbul's rapid urbanization in the 1960s. Focusing on key elements such as labor and housing struggles, the chapter provides a comprehensive analysis grounded in newspaper analyses, archival research, and semi-structured interviews. The bifurcation of the timeline into 1960-1980 and 1980-2002 allows for a nuanced understanding of Okmeydanı's historical dynamics. As we progress in our research journey, the groundwork laid in this chapter becomes a crucial backdrop for comprehending Okmeydanı's political transformation post-2002. The intricate interplay between economic structures, state power, and political agencies, as analyzed through a 'multilevel structural process,' provides a framework to grasp the district's trajectory.

CHAPTER 5

DEPOLITICIZATION OF A CONTENTIOUS SPACE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the evolution of contentious politics in Okmeydanı over the past two decades, demonstrating a trajectory toward different modalities of depoliticization in the district. Before delving into the reasons for this depoliticization, the chapter examines what makes a space depoliticized. The number of protests, changes in frequency, scale, and longevity of protests, as well as the diversity of the repertoire of collective actions in the district, have been analyzed to uncover the dynamics of politics in the area. The protests during the Fetihtepe Urban Transformation Project have been scrutinized to examine the dynamics of current conflicts in the district. Additionally, municipal activities, as a new actor in the district, are analyzed to reveal a post-political modality of depoliticization. By defining depoliticization as a process, this chapter also analyzes the increase in contentious politics in specific issues as a possibility of repoliticization in the district.

5.2 The diminishing presence of protests on the streets

Methodologically, the historical analysis of Okmeydanı involved delving into archival data, specifically examining Cumhuriyet newspaper archives spanning 1960-2002, employing the keyword "Okmeydanı." For the investigation into protest trends over the past two decades (2002-2022), mainstream newspapers such as Cumhuriyet and Milliyet, along with alternative sources like sendika.org, Bianet, Birgün, and Evrensel, underwent scrutiny. The dataset of 158 articles related to protests in the district was curated. While mainstream newspapers may exhibit a

biased perception of urban margins, including alternative media broadened the scope. The media analysis spanning 2002-2022 provides a holistic view of the district's politics and the frequency of protests. Cumhuriyet, Milliyet, sendika.org, Bianet, Birgün, and Evrensel were examined during the last 20 years (between 2002 and 2022) in order to study the district's protest patterns. 158 articles concerning the protests in the district were found. While Okmeydanı and mainstream newspapers share a prejudiced view of the urban periphery, alternative media outlets like sendika.org and Birgün offer a wider range of news sources.

It is crucial to note that not every protest or dissent in the district received coverage in mainstream or alternative media. Instances where the same protest appeared in multiple news articles were counted as a single occurrence, with recorded information encompassing the protest's headline, date, and subject. While the newspaper analysis might not capture every event, with the data obtained from newspaper analysis, the changes in action strategies, the diversity of the action repertoire, and the ups and downs in the issues addressed can be followed.

It is imperative to emphasize that neither mainstream nor alternative media sources provide a thorough picture of the district's protests and opposition. This neighborhood is known for its oppositional views and political activism, as I have mentioned before. But the mainstream media frequently ignores the frequency of nonviolent protests in the area, focusing only on the violent ones. Because of this, it is inadequate to base analysis exclusively on articles from mainstream newspapers. Scholarly publications emphasize this constraint even further by pointing out that popular media might not provide an unbiased representation of communities such as this one.

Furthermore, the restrictions also apply to other media outlets, who might not be able to fully report on every nonviolent demonstration, regardless of its importance. This deficiency presents a problem for academics who want to measure levels of conflict using media analysis alone. Therefore, a multifaceted strategy that combines media research with ethnographic observations and interviews is necessary for a detailed understanding of protest dynamics.

According to Uysal (2017), even major newspapers could miss the small-scale dynamics that exist in communities like this one, implying that determining dispute levels based just on newspaper data might result in an incomplete picture. Therefore, in order to obtain a thorough understanding of the complexities of protest action within the area, it is essential to supplement media analysis with qualitative methodologies.

In conclusion, although newspaper analysis provides insightful information about temporal trends, its limitations demand a comprehensive strategy that incorporates a range of data sources. Through the combination of ethnographic observations, interviews, and critical analysis of media depictions, scholars can cultivate a more sophisticated comprehension of the dynamics of contention in politically engaged communities such as Okmeydanı.

Historically, the district boasted a rich repertoire of actions that played a pivotal role in the inhabitant's social fabric. These actions ranged from traditional protests to more culturally rooted forms of resistance like theater, concerts, and picnics. Moreover, educational initiatives, forums, and petition campaigns were essential channels for mobilizing and voicing dissent. Over time, Okmeydanı has seen a noticeable shift in its protest tactics. While diverse protests have dwindled, commemorations have become the main form of collective action.

The data about the repertoire of actions obtained from the news analysis, as illustrated in Table 4, highlights a richer repertoire of actions in earlier years, including diverse activities like petition campaigns, leaflet distributions, theatrical performances, picnics, and concerts. During the interviews, inhabitants reminisced about the events they once regularly attended, indicating a recent decline in such activities. Hence, despite the fluctuating frequency of protests in recent years, there's been a marked reduction in the variety of protest actions.

Table 4. Repertoire of Action in the District

Repertoire of actions in the district	
Protests	Social events
Marches	Forums
Hanging banners	Petition campaigns
Call to action	Picnics
Distributing leaflets	Concerts
Public statement	Survey
Graffiti	Theatre performance
Funeral Protests	Open-air cinema
Commemorations	Free educational activities

The graffiti in Figures 19 and 20 shows that current political developments are visible in the neighborhood, but activism is no longer the same. The graffiti in Figure 19 reflects the uproar surrounding the controversies at Boğaziçi University in early 2021. The depiction of handcuffs on a university gate symbolizes the curtailment of academic freedom and autonomy.[35] The slogan in Figure 20 showcases the district's

[35] On January 4, 2021, Melih Bulu was appointed as the trustee rector to Boğaziçi University by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. As the reactions turned into protests, the police locked the campus

pressing concern: escalating poverty. The walls of Okmeydanı, in their silent defiance, bear witness to the struggle against rising costs. Free access to necessities became a discourse following the economic crisis brought about by the pandemic. This further establishes Okmeydanı's identity as a hub of resistance and civic engagement, where walls become canvases that chronicle the nation's political heartbeat.[36]



Figure 19. The slogan "No handcuffs to the University" is written on the wall of a house.[37]



gates during the demonstrations held on January 4. Since that day, the Boğaziçi resistance the faculty members and students initiated continues (Boğaziçi Üniversitesi'ne kelepçe takılması tepki çekti, 2021

[36] The photo was taken on 3 March 2021 by the author.

[37] The photo was taken by the author.

Figure 20. The slogan "Take back the electricity price increases" written on the wall[38]

5.3 Protests and the gradual decrease of resilience and endurance of protests

Over the past two years, the sole event encapsulates the current political mobilization in the neighborhood. Leftist groups no longer host events at the park. If they do organize any event, it's typically held at their offices with a limited audience rather than at the park's amphitheater. Crucially, these groups no longer orchestrate large-scale events that aim to engage the entire district. From past news archives, it is seen that in previous years, not only were there frequent events held in the park, but the participation in these events was also high. The first photo below, Figure 20, is from the children's festival by one of the leftist organizations in the district in 2011. In the first photo, Figure 21, more people attended the event. Furthermore, the movement's demands were placed around the park as slogans.



Figure 21. A view from Halkevi çocuk şenliği August 21, 2010
Source: (Okmeydanı halkı şenlikte buluştu, 2010)

[38] The photo was taken by the author.

In addition, the amphitheater of the Park, which has been used as a place for most of the political gatherings in the district, is not used because of the lack of attendants to the events. For example, a children's fest in October 2022 was contained in the street since there were few children. The fest was organized on the street in front of one of the leftist organizations in the district.



Figure 22. An event for children in front of a leftist organization in September 2022[39]

One of the first areas where the aforementioned post-political transformation is observed is the decrease in protests described in Chapter 4 and the change in the form of the few existing activities currently held in the district. Sibel Yalçın Park, once a bustling hub for political events in the district, has seen a significant decline in activity. Only three events were made over the past three years, and the Şişli Municipality convened them. The first event occurred on 15 July 2019, and the

[39] The photo was taken by the author.

second on 21 June 2021. The previous two events at Sibel Yalçın Park, attended by the inhabitants, were "*Mahalle Meclisleri"* organized by Şişli Municipality. This shift from numerous leftist groups' activities to municipality-led events underscores the changing political landscape of the district. Such municipality events were previously uncommon in the park, further highlighting this transformation.

5.3.1 The economic challenges for the leftist groups to continue their activities

The association closure, where I conducted my participant observation, was a testament to my argument about discontinuing political activities. The association I observed faced potential closure due to financial challenges, difficulties covering rent, diminished neighborhood participation, and a shortage of volunteers backing the activists. When I concluded my fieldwork, I was the sole volunteer teaching courses at the cooperative. The period during which I communicated my inability to continue the courses for various reasons has proved contentious. Ultimately, I became convinced that the activity of giving courses did not benefit the cooperative, the children, or my research. Both entering and exiting the field presented their own sets of challenges. Departing from the courses instilled in me an ethical burden, thinking my exit might hamper the cooperative's ability to host any activities. When I discussed my feelings with the activist, she persuaded me to persist with the courses for another two or three weeks. We carried on this until the Kahramanmaraş earthquake on February 6, 2023.[40] Post-earthquake, discussions about the courses

[40] The 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, or the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes, struck on 6 February with magnitudes of 7.8 and 7.5 in the Pazarcık and Elbistan districts of Kahramanmaraş, respectively. The earthquakes impacted a total of 11 provinces. Official figures report at least 50,783 fatalities in Türkiye and at least 8,476 in Syria, with over 122,000 injured. The Turkish Government declared a Level 4 emergency, the highest alert reserved for significant disasters and pandemics, calling for international aid. Additionally, a state of emergency was declared in 10 affected provinces for three months. role of civil society in the aftermath was noteworthy, with various organizations launching rapid and effective campaigns to address many challenges in the affected areas.

faded among activists, children, and parents. Nevertheless, the cooperative initiated activities to show solidarity with the affected region, and we orchestrated these efforts within the district. Other leftist groups in the district closed their bureaus not only because of police repression but because of the increasing rents; they could not pay their rents. Moreover, the inhabitants and members of the activists could not pay their membership fees, and the organizations could not afford their expenses.

5.4 The ascent of municipal politics in Okmeydanı

The core of this chapter centers around the assertion that a pivotal shift has occurred in the district's political landscape: the absence of protests and the ascent of municipal politics at the expense of contentious politics. The shifts in the political landscape have reshaped how politics is conducted. As the dynamism of contentious politics dwindled, the arena of political engagement gravitated towards municipal politics and muhtars. The ascendancy of municipal politics, propelled by increasing police violence and waning support for leftist factions, signals a notable transformation. While this transformation was taking place, there was a discernible demobilization of protests in the district, and both pro-government and anti-government municipal stakeholders and muhtars assumed a key role in district politics.

In Turkey, the process we refer to as depoliticization and the post-political modality of depolitization, where the transition from oppositional politics and street protests to municipal policies occurred during authoritarian transformation, manifests itself in various ways in the literature. For example, Baiocchi's (2005) "Militants and Citizens" explores the civic implications of this shift from authoritarianism to

democracy. He emphasizes the crucial relationship between civic engagement and local governance in strengthening democratic frameworks.

Considering Okmeydanı, questions arise: Are the inhabitants similarly leveraging local governance platforms, like "Mahalle Meclisleri" meetings of the municipality, to assert and claim their citizenship rights? How do these growing municipal engagements align with Okmeydanı's slide into depoliticization? To what extent has the move to municipality-led forums replaced traditional dissent spaces, altering political engagement in the district?

In Okmeydanı, the concept of post-politics, as described by Swyngedouw (2017), manifests as a shift from grassroots movements to state-sanctioned municipal meetings. "Post-politics refers to the subordination of the political to the unquestioned framework of representative democracy and the doctrines of neoliberal economics" (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). Recently, political claims have been dominated by municipal politics. In particular, within the MŞP, the Şişli municipality has played a pivotal role in daily political and socio-cultural events. The participatory budget meetings of the Şişli Municipality were not limited to the MŞP neighborhood but were conducted in all Şişli districts. Even though these meetings took place throughout Şişli, event organizers singled out the uniqueness of MŞP. In our discussions, they did not define what they meant by "different and political". However, they conveyed that this "difference and political nature" is widely recognized and, as such, does not require elaboration.

Two meetings have been held, MŞP. The first was on 15 June 2019. The meeting was held in the amphitheater of Sibel Yalçın Parkı. In the forum, the inhabitants were asked what they wanted in the neighborhood. The demands of the inhabitants were the following:

Table 5. Notes from the 1st Şişli Municipality Meeting in Okmeydanı

- Initiatives on urban transformation
- A tea garden within the park
- Designated spaces for women producers to sell their goods
- A food cooperative
- A transparent municipal administration
- Child-friendly green spaces
- A rehabilitation center for substance-addicted youth
- Complimentary gym access for young individuals
- Sports courts for children
- Art-focused studios
- Gym availability after 5 p.m. and during weekends for working professionals
- ATM installations
- A science center tailored for children
- Construction of pedestrian-friendly pathways
- Collaboration with disabled individuals
- Public restroom facilities in parks
- A new kindergarten in the vicinity
- Local parking facilities

Source: www.benimbutcem.sisli.bel.tr

In the meetings, implicit references were made to the political structure in the neighborhood, referring to the area's design, on issues such as why no one explicitly mentioned political discussions while people were expressing their demands, such as why there is no ATM[41] in the neighborhood. The first meeting took place, although with little participation, before the pandemic, and the demands of inhabitants were expressed.

[41] In a news search regarding the removal of ATMs for security reasons, it is noted that ATMs were removed in Gaziantep in 2016 due to potential attacks (Valilik ve emniyet çevresinde tehdit oluşturan ATM'ler kaldırıldı, 2016).

It was proposed that the second summit take place on June 21, 2021. Since this community would be more difficult to construct than other neighborhoods, the event organizers stated that they intended to hold the budget meeting before moving on to other neighborhoods. However, a number of female activists demanded that an association representative be ejected following a harassment instance that occurred during the meeting. After that, there was a fight, and the event was called off. On August 23, 2022, a third meeting took place in a different park or street within the MŞP neighborhood.



Figure 23. Municipality event on 21 July 2021[42]

It's evident from looking into the participatory budget meetings that announcements were made to everyone in the neighborhood. These budget meetings took place in the neighborhoods' public areas, particularly in the parks or squares that are most often visited. The mayor and other local officials asked the locals about the neighborhood's urgent problems and what they thought should be done about them. They also offered perspectives on problems that would require more work than they could handle right away and workable solutions. Infrastructure and basic necessities for the

[42] The photo was taken by the author.

whole metropolitan environment were discussed. While the data about the Fetihtepe and Piyalepaşa neighborhoods were generated as part of the IMM Beyoğlu Strategic Plan, the "My Budget" project of the Şişli Municipality offers additional insights. However, this data isn't directly comparable to that from the neighborhoods in Beyoğlu. My Budget project is defined as the following:

> "With 'My Budget,' beginning in 2021, we initiated Türkiye's most comprehensive participatory budgeting process. Under the guidance of Şişli Municipality and Şişli City Council, we emphasized active citizen participation at the neighborhood level for the first time."[43]

After the meetings, the municipality published notes from the discussions, and all requests were listed on the website. Furthermore, updates were provided, indicating which of the residents' needs had been addressed and completed following the meeting. In the context of the participatory budget for MŞP, the Neighborhood House was inaugurated under the 'Social Support' category and began its operations in tandem with the Science House. Additionally, as a second measure of social support, it was communicated that the 'Neighborhood Kitchen' would commence operations once an appropriate venue for establishment and expansion was identified. The third item on the list was a search for an ideal public area for the 'Animal Park.' Lastly, the fourth intervention pertained to adjustments to the pavement, falling under the category of 'urban infrastructure and superstructure.

The document that was made public said that the required planning is in progress. Sixth on the list is 'Rehabilitation and Afforestation of Parks.' It is said under this subject that rubber flooring has been installed and iron railings have been renovated at Dr. Haşim İşcan Park's[44] playground. The "Children's Playground" is another area of interest. There, it is stated that a "Single tower playground and

[43] See https://benimbutcem.sisli.bel.tr/tr/icerik/Katilimci-Butce/Benim-Butcem-Nedir/6e
[44] It is the official name of Sibel Yalçın Parkı.

swing" would be installed soon. The four points in question should have been included in the participatory budget. They are as follows:

Table 6. Şişli Municipality Budget Meeting Notes

Issue	**Explanation**
Bank ATMs	Currently in the planning stage with ongoing efforts.
Urban Transformation	The Urban Transformation Strategy Document is awaiting approval from the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation, and Climate Change. The 1/5000 plan for Şişli is on the IMM Assembly's agenda.
Title Deed	Work on entitlement and planning is ongoing, led by the office jointly established by our municipality and IMM Imar A.Ş.
Overhead Lines	A proposal to move 50 overhead lines underground has been forwarded to Bedaş by the Directorate of Technical Works.

Source: www.benimbutcem.sisli.bel.tr

These demands, typical of any regular urban life, were also articulated in the requests for Muhtars published by the Metropolitan Municipality's Directorate of Muhtars, even if not during a meeting organized by the Şişli Municipality. In the context of municipal politics in Istanbul, the Şişli Municipality discloses all its meetings, associated notes, and every action related to the participatory budget project on its website. On the other hand, municipal actions meant to serve as social resistance inside the district serve as an example of how municipalities are currently playing the role of opposition throughout the nation.

The budget project was specific to Şişli Municipality, leaving Fetihtepe and Piyalepaşa without a similar initiative. Beyoğlu's strategic plan by IMM recorded Muhtar's requests. From 2017-2020, Piyalepaşa had 1089 submissions to the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality: 70% about Social Service, 3% each for Emergency

Response and District Inspection. Key demands from IBB Muhtarlıklar Müdürlüğü included mosquito and flea spraying, Social Structure, Transportation and Infrastructure, and requests for urban transformation. For the Fetihtepe neighborhood, 86 submissions were made to the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality between 2017 and 2020, addressing local issues. Of these, 68% pertained to Social Services, 5% to Natural Gas, and 6% to District Inspection. Reviewing the IMM Headman Demands, the main requests include:

Table 7. Demands Fom Muhtar Office of Fetihtepe Neighborhood

Issue	**Number**	**Explanation**
Habitats	64	Issues like the health center's entry regulation and mosquito and flea infestations need spraying.
Social Structure	32	Needs like food for street animals, park amenities, financial support, home care services, and requests for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Children's Journal.
Transportation and Infrastructure	35	Requirements such as mandatory disinfectants in public transports, waste management in Hasköy Park, traffic safety improvements, and updating IETT bus stop announcements for clarity
Public Areas	13	Cleaning requests and addressing barbecue ban violations.
Culture	4	
Economy	2	

Source: www.benimbutcem.sisli.bel.tr

5.5 Short-term protests: An example of depoliticization or repoliticization

In the process of depoliticization, the political initiatives of leftist organizations in the neighborhood, especially the women's movement, paved the way for sporadic protests and gatherings in certain periods. However, this can be assessed from two perspectives. Despite the overall decline in societal opposition nationwide, it reflects the ongoing practices of the women's movement and their manifestation in the neighborhood. Another assessment is that it serves as an example of depoliticization in the neighborhood, with protests remaining feeble, failing to gain mass support, and lacking continuity.

5.5.1 Istanbul Convention protests

Istanbul Convention is a worldwide international human rights treaty that aims to prevent gender-based violence. Türkiye became the first signatory country in 2011 in Istanbul. In March 2021, Türkiye denounced its withdrawal from the convention. On November 13, 2021, women in Okmeydanı made a press declaration about the suspicious death of Münevver Akyol on November 9, who was subjected to violence by the man she was married to. As seen from the banners in Figure 24, women also protested Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.



Figure 24. A protests against the death of women in the neighborhood [45]
Source: (İleri Haber, 2021)



Figure 25. Okmeydanı Women's Platform's poster "The Istanbul Convention is ours, we do not give up" on the wall

On June 28, 2021, many protests were held following President Erdoğan's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. Women also protested for the Istanbul Convention in Okmeydanı (Okmeydanı'nda kadınlardan polis ablukası altında İstanbul Sözleşmesi eylemi, 2017).

[45] "We are the Istanbul Convention!" "Not suicide but murder," "Women's Struggle Will Win," "Woman is woman's home," "Femicide is political," and "Implement 6284" were written on the banners held by the women."(Okmeydanılı kadınlar intihara sürüklenen Münevver Akyol için seslendi: "İntihar değil cinayet, Münevver için adalet, 2021).



Figure 26. Six women carry a banner: "The Istanbul Convention is Ours, We Will Not Give Up! Women of Okmeydanı"
Source: (İleri Haber, 2021)

To conclude, the protests against Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention underscore the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. Women in Okmeydanı and across the country have demonstrated their commitment to upholding the principles of the convention through various forms of activism, from public declarations to distributing informational materials and organizing rallies. Despite challenges and setbacks, their determination to protect women's rights and advocate for the convention's implementation remains steadfast.

5.5.2 Fetihtepe Urban Transformation Project Protests

Another example that can be considered is the protests against the Fetihtepe Urban Transformation Project, which began in the summer of 2022. The protests during this period are a strong example of depoliticization. Urban transformation has long been on the neighborhood's agenda, involving the entire community in mass actions. However, following a prolonged legal struggle, the project commenced with intense

and violent police pressure. People were forcibly evicted from their homes. There was resistance against this, but it could not continue under intense police pressure. Subsequently, over a month in the neighborhood, actions were taken, visits from various institutions were made, and meetings were held, but these efforts did not sustain continuity. In other neighborhoods as well, facing projects that could potentially be implemented at any time, we can observe examples of depoliticization in the neighborhood, both in terms of its causes and the protest process, such as people leaving the neighborhood, indifference, police pressure, and the state's cooptation of certain groups. The Okmeydanı Urban Transformation Project, initiated in the Fetihtepe neighborhood and anticipated to expand to other district neighborhoods, aims to fundamentally transform the socio-economic and political identity of the entire area. Protests against the Fetihtepe UTP and the intense police violence quelling opposition to the process serve as a pertinent example for understanding the district's recent trajectory, characterized by police repression, demographic shifts, and urban transformation.

On July 19, a meeting was convened with neighborhood representatives and lawyers. A lawyer briefed attendees about the ongoing process, noting that different interests were at play based on individual ownership. The emphasis during the gathering was on the importance of collective action. A representative from Tozkoparan, another neighborhood where demolitions began in August 2022, also provided insights. Banners from the event displayed messages such as, "Yesterday you promised flat-for-flat, but now you've saddled us with lifelong debt," "We don't want binding agreements; we demand legal contracts," "We refuse to be indebted for life," and "Transformation should benefit people, not profits."

However, the protests were short-lived. The project kicked off in October, and the opposition demonstrations persisted until September 2022. It's worth noting that while similar protests in the 1990s and early 2000s often expanded into broader oppositional politics in the district, merging with various struggles, the resistance against the Fetihtepe Urban Transformation was limited, culminating after just a month of active dissent.

In conclusion, the protests in the district against the Fetihtepe Urban Transformation Project provide a lens to study the changes in the scale and longevity of public dissent. While the opposition movements of previous decades often expanded and lasted longer, merging with diverse causes, the recent urban transformation struggle in Fetihtepe was notably brief. This shift in the district's social mobilization is marked by the inability to hold longstanding memorial ceremonies and the absence of new public spaces. The subsequent sections will further dissect the contexts underlying this change in social mobilization and its primary reasons.

5.6 Conclusion

To conclude, Chapter 5 delves into a comprehensive exploration of contentious politics in Okmeydanı spanning two decades, from 2002 to 2022. Focused on understanding the frequency and nature of protests during this period, the chapter critically assesses the district's contemporary landscape of political dissent. Utilizing narratives from residents and activists and conducting a thorough analysis of newspaper protest events, the chapter sheds light on a notable decline in political activism. The findings indicate a substantial reduction in the number, scale, duration, and diversity of actions orchestrated by left-wing factions over the years. Recent

political dynamics reveal a significant transformation: traditional forms of activism, protests, and social gatherings have waned, giving way to initiatives led by municipal actors.

The subsequent sections intricately detail the diminishing presence of protests on the streets, highlight noteworthy protests over 20 years while examining the diminishing resilience and endurance of such actions, scrutinize the decreasing participation of inhabitants in political events, and analyze the economic challenges leftist groups face in sustaining their activities. The emergence of a post-political modality of depoliticization is underscored, signaling the ascendancy of municipal politics in Okmeydanı.

This chapter, therefore, contributes to the understanding of Okmeydanı's evolving political landscape, emphasizing the nuanced interplay between historical patterns of contention and the emergence of new actors, particularly municipal entities, in shaping the district's political trajectory. As moving forward in the subsequent chapters, this study will further unpack the implications of these depoliticization trends, explore potential avenues for repoliticization, and delve into the complex dynamics between local governance and contentious politics in the district.

CHAPTER 6

ENTRENCHED POLICING IN THE DISTRICT: PERSISTENT YET SELECTIVE REPRESSION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

6.1 Introduction

The police presence and activities in Okmeydanı between 2002 and 2022 are covered in detail in this chapter. In particular, it examines the ways in which police repression affects controversial civic politics, including protests, social and political gatherings, and the leftist-supported district's solidarity mechanisms. Fieldwork, interviews, and press analysis reveal a lengthy history of intense police supervision and control in the district. The noticeable police presence, their many interventions during protests and daily activities, and the general climate of fear and repression are essential to understanding Okmeydanı's depoliticization process and changing political environment.

Policies focused on police repression and securitization have had a nationwide impact during the last 20 years (Berksoy, 2013; Gönen, 2016; Kıvanç, 2020). There was a noticeable pattern in Turkey from 2007 to 2019 where the government often imposed protest bans (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2020). According to fieldwork data, Okmeydanı has been disproportionately affected by the "regular and widespread" suppression and restrictions on protests that are similar to those in the larger Turkish context, but the district also offers distinct experiences with police repression. These encounters touch on more complex intersections of the district's identity, class, and geographical dynamics than just outright prohibitions on public demonstrations.

The portrayal of Okmeydanı in the media from 1960-2022 consistently frames the district within two primary narratives: confrontations between the police and protesters; and the existence and practices of police in the district. This recurrent theme isn't just limited to media representations; it's deeply ingrained in the lived experiences of the district's residents. From the eldest to the youngest, every interviewee has, at some point, directly encountered the police in their daily life. This omnipresent policing is palpable not just from the frequent references during the fieldwork but is also evident in more tangible markers such as the establishment of the "Kalekol" in 2017, the persistent public order measures around it, the ever-present scorpions[46] patrolling the streets, and even in the distribution of informational materials about the Women Emergency Assistance Notification System (KADES) on the streets.[47]

The information obtained from Okmeydanı highlights a persistent pattern of police oppression that is deeply embedded in the district's past. However, an interesting paradox emerges: if Okmeydanı has consistently been a point of dispute since its inception, despite constant police repression, then why has the area suddenly begun to depoliticize as a result of current policing? Has the district's police use of force and interventions changed at all throughout the years?

An obvious strategy to promote depoliticization in urban environments is increased police presence and order. By silencing critics, this tactic seeks to quell conflict and disprove politics. This pattern has been documented in a number of

[46] Akrep ("Scorpion") is a Turkish infantry mobility vehicle. The vehicles were employed not just for light reconnaissance but also for light attack, perimeter control, escort, and counterinsurgency.

[47] Women's Emergency Support Notification System (KADES) is an official application offered to users to prevent bad acts such as violence and harassment that women and children are exposed to. It was prepared by the General Directorate of Security and its first emergency response application you will think of in case of emergency. Women who have been subjected to violence by their spouses or others, or who are likely to be subjected to violence, can quickly reach the Women's Emergency Support Notification System (KADES) established for this purpose through their smartphones.

anthropological studies that explore urban peripheries. They have elucidated how a conspicuous police presence contributes to the depoliticization of marginalized urban zones (Auyero, 2000; Borneman, 2009; Bourgois, 2001; Elias, 1994; Yonucu, 2022). According to John Borneman's 2009 work, dissident voices and activities can be effectively silenced and subjugated by using the fear that arises from police surveillance.

Wacquant (2008) analyzes the penal state practices, including policing, strengthening inequalities, and contributing to the repression of political expression and depoliticization of marginalized populations. Similarly, Goffman (2014) explains daily interactions between inhabitants in suburban and the police. The overarching aim is to engender a controlled, harmonized urban environment where contentious voices are subdued and the dominant narrative is unchallenged.

As a center of communist ideology and the location of important Alevi and Kurdish communities, Okmeydanı has constantly been under attack from the Turkish government. However, the dynamic of state interventions is changing, as evidenced by the increased violence against Alevi communities after anti-terrorism laws were implemented, the skirmishes that followed the Gezi Protests, and the subsequent construction of the Kalekol in the district. These events indicate that state strategies are not uniform. Such incidents demonstrate how the state's methods and repression apparatuses change and adapt in response to both internal and external circumstances and demands. The purpose of this section is to outline the many strategies that the police have used, highlighting the flexibility and variety of state actions within the area.

6.2 The evolution of Okmeydanı: From activists' enclave to state's security fortress

I was raised in Okmeydanı, so for the past 30 years, I've had a front-row seat to watch how police forces have changed in our community. They haven't always taken the same or consistent stance on repression. Rather, I've seen times when their interventions have evolved in terms of their shape and intensity, frequently becoming more aggressive, which illustrates a dynamic rather than static interaction between district and state policing.

The presence of the police forces in the district can be categorized and examined in three phases for the last 20 years. The first one is the increase in the use of violence within the district, the second one is the continuous increase of unpredictable and arbitrary interventions of the police forces into everyday life, and the last one is the settlement and territorialization of the police forces presence in the district by establishing a Kalekol at a juncture point of three neighborhoods. The gradual consolidation of the police in the district can also be illustrated as the following: A Toma settled at the entrance of the district at the beginning of the 2010s; then armored vehicles started to patrol the streets daily and intervened in the political and social gatherings in the district in the aftermath of the Gezi protests; lastly, a Kalekol established at a juncture point of the district. With this gradual settlement of the police forces into the district in the last 20 years, the visibility, practices, and repression of the police in daily life have increased in recent years.

As the police expanded control and influence over specific geographic areas, a process known as territorialization, their intensified presence in the region, exemplified by the establishment of Kalekol, led to heightened arbitrary practices. This, in turn, resulted in the increasing suppression of political activities and social mobilization in the district. The pressure on the political and social mobilization

within the district came as the police violently attacked the protests, made arrests, used pepper spray and firearms, and waited at the entrance of the neighborhoods and the main streets of the neighborhoods. The practices and the police presence in the district prevented gatherings from protesting any issue and mass actions as in the past. However, it also affected people's choices about whether to go out. Over time, people hesitated to go out on the streets and participate in any social and political activity.

Firstly, in 2007, the counter-terrorism law, the Gezi protests in 2013 and the subsequent clashes, the killing of Prosecutor Mehmet Kiraz in March 2015, and the establishment of a police outpost in the neighborhood were events that significantly influenced police practices in the neighborhood. Since the 2013 Gezi Protests, Okmeydanı has witnessed the tragic deaths of five individuals—Berkin Elvan, Burakcan Karamanoğlu, Ayhan Yılmaz, Uğur Kurt, and Rasid Oso (a 7-year-old child)—either directly by police action or during skirmishes between protestors and law enforcement. In addition to these fatal confrontations, residents have endured escalating and often arbitrary police interventions. This includes the unsettling practices of helicopter raids that illuminate homes, the blaring of national anthems from armored vehicles navigating through residential streets, day-time patrols where armored vehicles disrupt pedestrian and vehicular traffic with their sirens, and seemingly deliberate police indifference to drug trading within the district.

This intensifying police presence culminated with the establishment of the 'Kalekol' in 2017, solidifying and spatializing the force's dominance in the district. This chapter will sift through the existing literature on policing practices in marginalized urban areas, delving into the evolving nature of law enforcement

activities in Okmeydanı and evaluating how these transformed dynamics contribute to the district's depoliticization.

Over the past two decades, securitization and criminalization have played pivotal roles in Turkish society. Notably, modifications in the "terror" definitions in the 2006 Anti-Terror Law, coupled with alterations to police responsibilities and authorities in the 2007 Police Duties and Powers Law (PVSK), have significantly propelled the rising police repression and consequent depoliticization of working-class Alevi neighborhoods, including Okmeydanı. These legal changes amplified the police's authority and interference in daily life. Consequently, this shifted perception of "state enemies" began to encompass oppositional politics and the Kurdish and Alevi communities increasingly.

The Anti-Terror Law No. 3712, enacted in 1991, underwent revisions in July 2006. In June 2006, the "Law No. 5532 on Amendments to the Anti-Terror Law" was enacted. Provisions were added that expanded the scope of criminal liability, notably encompassing children and youth aged 12-18. This new legislation enabled the labeling of low-income urban demographics as criminalized entities. These modifications in the anti-terror law effectively criminalized targeted populations, particularly undesired class and ethnic groups (Aytemur, 2015; Gönen, 2008). The 2006 amendments, which contradict the Convention on the Rights of the Child, dictate that children aged 15-18 who face accusations under the Anti-Terror Law are tried in adult high criminal courts. Moreover, these children are denied access to alternative measures to detention, which are otherwise available under the Child Protection Law.

According to Yonucu (2018), 2006 marked a significant shift for Alevi working-class neighborhoods as police repression intensified, leading to civil and

political constrictions. An unambiguous division between allies and adversaries of the government was introduced with the 2006 Anti-Terror Law amendment. . In March 2006, an incident in Diyarbakır resulted in the death of 10 individuals, including five children. Following this, 203 children were taken into custody, 91 of whom were arrested. Subsequently, on June 29, 2006, provisions encompassing children and young individuals aged 12-18 were incorporated into the Anti-Terror Law. Darıcı (2009) notes that Kurdish immigrant children moving to urban areas began to be perceived as threats to the state and order rather than merely being seen in the context of legal infractions. Following this regulation in 2006, in 2007, the AKP administration amended the Police Duties and Powers Law (PVSK) No. 2559 through the Internal Security Package. This revision gave the police the "discretionary authority to employ force and weapons."

After the police were granted these powers, 403 deaths were caused by police between 2007 and 2020. Ninety-three of these were kids. The killings were ascribed to suspicious circumstances within police precincts, police shooting, armored vehicles, or other police transit methods. In addition, there was an increase in the number of instances where police broke into homes and killed people. At the same time, as the power and capricious behavior of the police grew in the eastern and southeast of Anatolia, so did the frequency of police raids in Istanbul's working-class Alevi areas. Yonucu (2018) delves into the influence of the anti-terror law in transmuting young socialist guards in working-class Alevi communities. The transition witnessed is from a form of unarmed vigilance, open to the public and inclusive, to a militarized variant. Yonucu argues that Türkiye's dominant classes leveraged the anti-terror law as an instrument to suppress dissenting political viewpoints. This suppression primarily targeted historically marginalized groups like

the Kurds and Alevis and their inhabited spaces. Nonetheless, despite this repression and the resultant militarization of certain factions, the era also saw the sustained presence of civil and inclusive political engagements led by various leftist collectives.

From 2006 to 2013, political dynamics within the district remained vibrant and diverse. Even under restrictive policies post-2006-2007, not all opposition movements turned towards armed resistance. Indeed, suggesting that all political activity in the district shifted to militant avenues would disregard the continued existence of diverse and civic political engagements. A range of non-violent civic actions persisted between the legislative amendments and the outbreak of the Gezi protests. These included petition campaigns to rename streets in honor of Hrant Dink, demonstrations opposing price increases, expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians, battles to continue health services, musical concerts, children's festivals, and ongoing advocacy for housing rights.

The Gezi protests evolved into nationwide mass demonstrations, marking a social mobilization Türkiye hadn't seen in years. Protesters, diverse in identity and class, participated in significant numbers. Throughout the protests, the police exerted disproportionate force (Koloğlu et al., 2015). The expansion of the Gezi protests into Alevi neighborhoods and the subsequent police violence, combined with the deaths of seven Alevi youths during the protests, spurred discussions regarding the connection between these protests, Alevism, and areas predominantly inhabited by Alevis (Karakaya & Yıldız, 2014). While all Gezi participants faced state marginalization (Arslanalp & Erkmen, 2022; Atak, 2017; Uysal, 2017), neighborhoods with an already marginalized political stance underwent intensified violence and marginalization (Tuğal, 2013).

While the primary fieldwork for this thesis commenced in 2019 to detail the evolution of police presence in the area, I also drew upon observations I made in Okmeydanı between 2014 and 2016 during my master's thesis research. Given that these years spanned the aftermath of the Gezi protests, the data from this period offers insight into the escalating daily visibility of the police in the district.

The Gezi Revolt began as an environmental movement in response to the urban transformation project of Gezi Park in Taksim. However, by May-June 2013, it had morphed into nationwide anti-government protests. This movement marked a turning point in the state's presence in marginalized political neighborhoods, particularly regarding the visibility of the police, their arbitrariness, use of violence, and their permeation into all areas of daily life, as well as the mechanisms they employed during this process. While the Gezi Revolt ignited protests in various neighborhoods (Tuğal, 2013), the aftermath was particularly pronounced in Alevi and political neighborhoods, where heightened state violence and policing became the norm (Yonucu, 2014).

Following the Gezi Revolt, four individuals lost their lives in subsequent clashes in Okmeydanı. On June 16, 2013, just hours after the police intervened against the protesters at Gezi Park, 15-year-old Berkin Elvan, a neighborhood resident, was struck in the head by a pepper gas canister fired by the police in Okmeydanı (Berkin Elvan'ı Kaybettik, 2014). After Berkin was shot, numerous protests erupted in the area, with many facing police intervention, leading to escalated police crackdowns. Berkin remained in a coma for 289 days before passing away on March 11, 2014. Following police interference at his funeral on March 12, 2014, as mourners marched from Okmeydanı to Taksim, clashes expanded throughout Okmeydanı (Türkiye'nin birçok kentinde Berkin Elvan eylemler, 2014).

In addition to the confrontations between the police and protestors, two opposing factions engaged in violent conflicts, even resorting to firearms. On March 13, 2014, Burakcan Karamanoğlu, a 19-year-old resident of Dörtyol, lost his life amidst these clashes between the two rival youth groups (Okmeydanı'nda Bir Genç Daha Öldürüldü, 2014).

The police's excessive force, which escalated to a consistent state of emergency in the district, intensified over time (Yonucu, 2014). The police increasingly resorted to using tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets to disband protestors during every gathering and demonstration in the area. In the subsequent days, on May 22, 2014, a small group of high school students organized a protest in memory of Berkin Elvan and in response to the tragic Soma mine accident that claimed the lives of 301 miners on May 13, 2014. During the police's intervention in this demonstration, live ammunition was used, resulting in the unfortunate death of Uğur Kurt, who was in the courtyard of the Cemevi attending a relative's funeral (Polisin Vurduğu Uğur Kur Yaşamını Yitirdi, 2014). Following his death, violent confrontations between the police and leftist groups persisted throughout the week. Amid the clashes between police and protesters after Uğur Kurt's death, Ayhan Yılmaz, who was on the street at that time, lost his life (Okmeydanı'nda Bir Kişi Daha Öldü, 2014).

Following this incident, the Istanbul Courthouse Attack occurred on March 31, 2015. The public prosecutor Mehmet Selim Kiraz, who was conducting the investigation of the Berkin Elvan case, was taken hostage by members of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C), which is/was one of the organizations with strong presence in Okmeydanı. Following the incident, the building was evacuated and security measures were taken by the police. The

organization members presented a list of demands to the police, threatening to kill the prosecutor. During the approximately nine-hour-long incident, Prosecutor Kiraz was killed by DHKP-C militants. The two attackers were also killed. Following the incident, clashes broke out in Okmeydanı and Gazi neighborhoods.

After the Gezi Revolts, Okmeydanı began to experience what can be described as a "state of exception" (Yonucu, 2014). It's also significant to explore how the conflicts in Okmeydanı were addressed in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. From 2001-2022, the Assembly received 24 inquiries about Okmeydanı. Of these, 14 were specific to incidents in the district from May 30, 2013, to November 12, 2014. These inquiries especially focused on the death of Uğur Kurt due to police gunfire and related events during that period. This was a time marked by frequent police raids on associations linked to leftist organizations in the district. The police employed various tactics during these raids, with many operations supported by helicopters. On multiple occasions, "helicopter-borne operations" were conducted targeting leftist organizations in the area. These helicopters would hover over the neighborhood for extended periods, casting lights onto homes from above.[48]

State interventions in Okmeydanı extend beyond just the use of force. The police's actions, like removing signage from leftist organizations, exemplify the state's presence (Polis Okmeydanı Halkevi'nde nöbet tutanlara saldırdı, 2016). Moreover, the state's involvement manifests in more mundane and insidious ways: from police patrols playing nationalist songs, sounding sirens arbitrarily, disregarding the drug trade, and even obstructing public transportation services. All

[48]Helicopter-Supported Operations' that it has been ongoing for some time, May 2014 https://m.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/155950-okmeydani-na-helikopterli-baskin, December 2015, October 2016 https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/okmeydaninda-helikopter-destekli-operasyon-619035, Şubat 2017, https://www.evrensel.net/haber/307977/okmeydanida-helikopter-destekli-operasyon, September 2021 https://www.gazetevatan.com/gundem/okmeydaninda-helikopterli-operasyon-gozaltilar-var-1029909

these measures paint a picture of persistent, pervasive state intervention in the day-to-day lives of Okmeydanı's residents. After the turmoil of the Gezi protests, an armored water cannon vehicle, specifically designed for riot control, known as Toma, was positioned at the entrance to the neighborhood. By June 2014, this vehicle had become a common sight on the main street of the MŞP neighborhood. The frequency of police patrols also increased during this period. Additionally, the police were seen encouraging young groups to play Mehter, a form of Ottoman military music, and a patriotic song, "*Ölürüm Türkiye*."[49]

During this time, while police vehicles broadcast the Mehter anthem in Okmeydanı, revolutionaries countered by playing revolutionary music loudly from the teahouse in Sibel Yalçın Park. It became a regular morning ritual in the district for the streets to echo with revolutionary songs and protest music around 9 a.m. Auyero (2013) observes that the sounds of 'sirens, loud commands, and routine shoot-outs' indicate the state's violent presence in urban margins, manifesting through various forms of governmentality. The police make their presence felt in the neighborhood with sirens and national anthems, showcasing their authority and deeply embedding themselves into the daily lives of those in urban margins (Garmany, 2014).

In 2017, a tragedy occurred when an armored police vehicle known as "*akrep*" ran over and killed eight-year-old Rasat Oso in broad daylight. The routine patrols of these armored vehicles have become a daily event in the district. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the community received notifications

[49] Lyrics of the song: Baş koymuşum Türkiyemin yoluna/ Düzlüğüne yokuşuna ölürüm/ Asırlardır kır atımı suladım/Irmağının akışına ölürüm Türkiyem.

about lockdown timings and other announcements not from ordinary police cars but from these imposing armored vehicles.

6.3 Kalekol presence: Transforming the district into a "Secure Citadel"

The establishment of the Okmeydanı Kalekol in 2017 was part of a broader nationwide securitization strategy spearheaded by the government and the Ministry of Interior. Termed as “modern castles” by the ministry, these Kalekols serve as fortified police stations with enhanced security features, including expansive compound walls. Efkan Ala, the Interior Minister, then announced the construction of Kalekols in Kurdish cities and "strategic districts" within Istanbul and Ankara.

As of now, there are five Kalekols situated in Istanbul. The inaugural one was established in Başakşehir in 2017. Notably, four out of these five are located within working-class Alevi neighborhoods: Gazi Kalekol in the Sultangazi district, Sancaktepe İlçe Emniyet Müdürlüğü Kalekol in the Sarıgazi district, Mustafa Kemal Kalekol in the 1 Mayıs district, Okmeydanı Kalekol in Okmeydanı, and Şehit Erdem Özçelik Kalekol in Başakşehir. The decision to set up these Kalekols is a testament to the state's reinforced military presence. According to a news article, "Istanbul has become safer with the introduction of 'modern castles' or 'Kalekols.' These structures, operational in six high-conflict areas of Istanbul, are pivotal in combating crime and criminals." (Istanbul modern kalelerle daha güvenli, 2018)

As shown in Figure 27, a space in front of an elementary and high school in Okmeydanı has been progressively transformed into the "Kalekol." This site is the intersection of three neighborhoods: Fetihtepe, Piyalepaşa, and MŞP. Numerous police vehicles, including the armored Akreps and Tomas, are stationed at this convergence point. As depicted in Figure 28, Kalekol's placement is strategically

situated at the crossroads of the three neighborhoods explored in this study. Thus, it stands equidistant from all three areas.

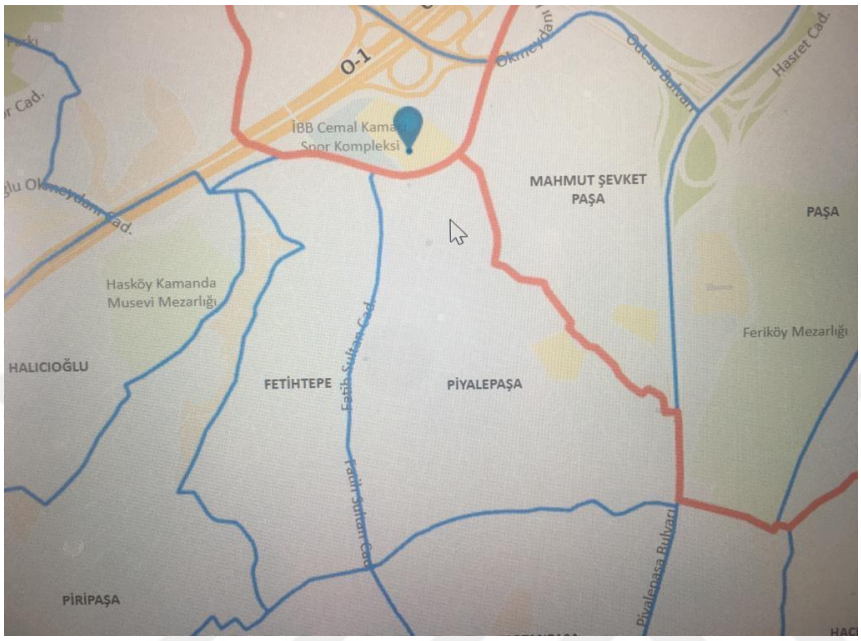


Figure 27. Okmeydanı Kalekol is located at the juncture point of three neighborhoods[50]

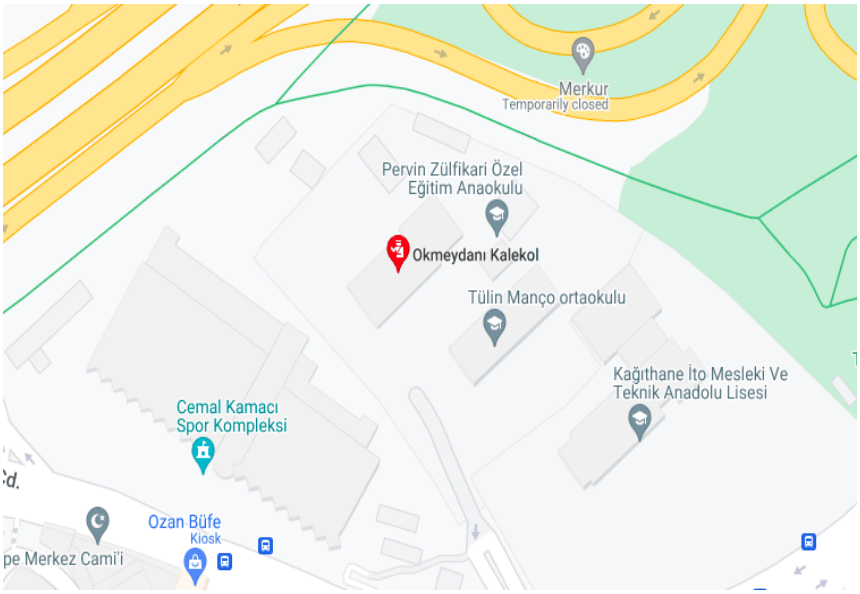


Figure 28. Okmeydanı Kalekol on Google Maps [51]

[50] The figure has been created by the author.
[51] The figure has been created by the author.

Alongside the establishment of Kalekol, police operations and securitization measures in Okmeydanı have been portrayed in pro-government media as standard procedures to manage what they term a "danger zone." During these security checks, vehicles traversing the streets undergo rigorous inspections, and individuals are subjected to frisking and General Data Collection (GBT) inquiries. These controls often lead to the closure of entry and exit points in the neighborhoods.

The report indicates that during security checks at the Okmeydanı Kalekol point, 90 security personnel were involved. In December 2022, during a public order investigation, entrances and exits at critical junctures of the district were closely monitored, leading to individual checks of 1,190 people, 219 vehicles, and 127 motorcycles. The investigation yielded the confiscation of two unlicensed firearms and 43 bullets. Additionally, traffic teams penalized 41 vehicle drivers, resulting in the suspension of five vehicles from traffic. The total fines imposed on vehicle owners amounted to 27,365 TL. The news report depicted the scene in front of the Kalekol with police officers on high alert, vigilantly monitoring their surroundings, armed with automatic weapons (Kalekollar vatandaşa güven, suçlulara korku salıyor, 2018).



Figure 29. Armored vehicles left the Kalekol area to do security checks in the neighborhood in May 2018



Figure 30. Security control was carried out in front of Kalekol in April 2018

I witnessed a routine security check firsthand during an interview with a young local in early March 2020 across the Kalekol. After completing a round, five armored vehicles patrolled the street and positioned themselves in front of the Kalekol. The officers disembarked from their vehicles and conducted General Data Collection

(GBT) checks on the passing cars for about 10 minutes. After this, they climbed back into their vehicles, made another patrol round, and entered the Kalekol area.

6.4 Entrenching and selective policing

The police's presence and mannerisms within the district can be characterized based on Auyero's classifications: "intermittent, selective, and contradictory" but not intermittent, permanent. Actions such as community-supported policing, security controls, the KADES initiative, and the police's tolerance of drug dealers in the area exemplify these fluctuating, selective, and sometimes conflicting practices (Auyero, 2013). As depicted in Figure 31—captured beside the main road that serves as the entrance to both Kalekol and the two schools—the phrase "Security for the people" is painted on a wall, accompanied by the emblem of the security forces.

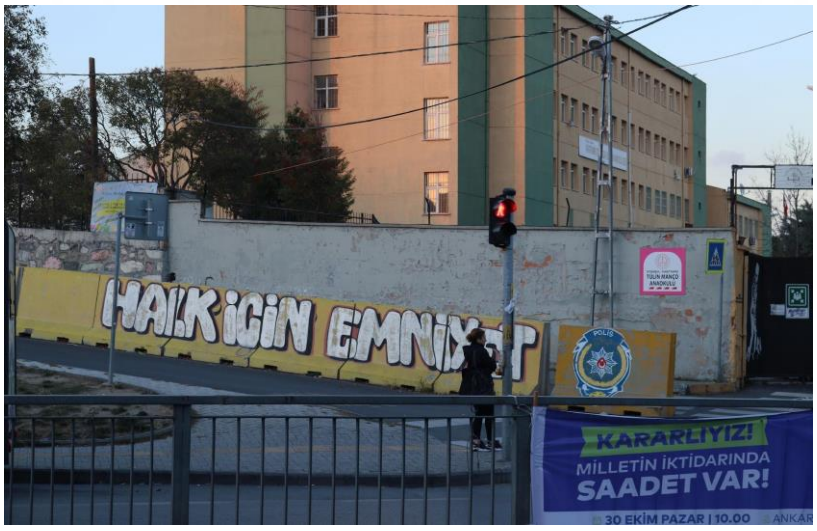


Figure 31. On the fortification wall and the wall in front of the high school garden, “Security for the People” is written.[52]

[52] The photo was taken by the author.

The headlines and narratives of news articles discussing Kalekols underscore the state's dominance within the district. Phrases like “Kalekols instill trust in citizens and fear in criminals” and “The police did not fly a bird but kept watch with automatic weapons” indicate this theme (Okmeydanı’nda özel harekat polisi destekli dev uygulama, 2021). While these news articles depict security checks being conducted, showcasing the Akrep vehicles and other police cars within the Kalekol vicinity, they also include images of police officers engaging amicably with the elderly and children in the area, like the photo from the news that revealed by Figure 32 below (Kalekollar vatandaşa güven düşmana korku salıyor, 2018).



Figure 32. Police take photos with children in the Sibel Yalçın Park during the “public order enforcement”

The news reports indicate that Kalekol units, equipped with a comprehensive range of vehicles and tools, have substantially curtailed the crime rate through their unexpected raids and operations in areas prone to frequent incidents. They have consequently established a reputation for promoting peace and trust within the community (Kalekollar vatandaşa güven düşmana korku salıyor, 2018). During the

security checks, officials also provided information about KADES, which will be analyzed in the last chapter, an initiative aimed at combating violence against women:

> “The squads, originating from the Okmeydanı Kalekol point, established fixed and on-foot patrol points, monitoring the neighborhood's entry and exit locations. While these checks were conducted to ensure public well-being and safety, information about the "Hanımefendi Support Application" (KADES) was also disseminated."

Establishing the Kalekol was gradual, with no significant news coverage of its inception. Even before the 2010s, the police had become a regular presence in the daily life of the district. Still, their visibility surged following the Gezi protests and was further solidified with the introduction of the Kalekol. Determining the exact date of the Kalekol's establishment in the district proved elusive for residents. As someone who lived in Okmeydanı then, I wasn't even aware of its creation. Similarly, while interviewees mentioned the constant police presence in front of the two schools, none specifically referenced the "Kalekol." Rojda, a long-time resident who also runs a restaurant in the district, mentioned she only became aware of the Kalekol's existence when police officers, who had come to her restaurant for lunch, talked about it.

Although there are strict security measures in place, residents have frequently brought up the selective and inconsistent police tactics. Residents questioned why the police were not stopping the growing drug usage and trafficking in the community. Given the increased security and constant presence of the police, locals are dubious about the continuation of the drug activity in the region. The nexus between the police and gang groups is a central theme in literature exploring the dynamics between the state and urban poverty. Auyero (2013) delves into the intricate relationship between the state and drug dealers, framing it as a mode of governing

the urban margins and highlighting the state's inconsistent presence or, at times, calculated absence. Leeds (1996) posits the drug trade and its overt criminal violence as a mechanism for states to cloak the more insidious structural violence they perpetrate.

Residents underscore the connection between the police and the drug dealers. One resident pointed out drug trafficking as the most pressing issue in the neighborhood, commenting, "In every 200 meters of our neighborhood, we can spot 2 or 3 dealers. How is it possible that the police don't see them?"[53]

On the walls of the neighborhood, anti-drug slogans can be seen. In a photo taken in September 2022[54], the message "End Drugs - Okmeydanı Youth" is prominently displayed on the wall of the district's busiest secondary school.



Figure 33. The slogan "end to drugs" on the wall of an elementary school

Women were complaining about drug users and drug dealers:

> "There have been shocking events on this street that have deeply affected me. Only a few buildings from mine, unfamiliar people were coming and going.

[53] Outation in Turkish:" Mahallede 200 metrede bir 2,3 tane torbacı var. Polisin bunu görmemesi mümkün mü?". Cumhuriyet, 19 February 2016.
[54] The photo was taken by the author.

> Judging from their appearance, you wouldn't suspect the kind of business they were involved in. Surprisingly, even young girls were among those making purchases. This activity persisted for 7-8 months. Many residents reported it, and the police conducted several raids. On one occasion, they caught a man in the act."

The lack of intervention by the police regarding drug dealers has long been a point of criticism. Women have highlighted instances where police officers connected with drug users or dealers. Even though police patrols are a frequent sight in the neighborhood, residents claim that the police often don't respond to calls related to issues such as theft and altercations.

> "There was a robbery in our neighborhood. Despite our calls, the police didn't respond. Even though they're frequently in the area, they don't seem to show up when we need them. 'Akrepler' is always around; why don't they come when summoned?"

Recently, the proliferation of drug dealers and their expanding presence has become a pressing issue for Okmeydanı. On March 26, 2016, key political entities within Okmeydanı convened with local inhabitants, representatives of leftist groups, and deputies from the People's Democratic Party (HDP) to address the pressing challenges faced by the neighborhood. The discussions were mainly about the police's excessive use of pepper gas, the escalating drug trade, and the refusal of public transport vehicles to serve the neighborhood. Filiz Kerestecioğlu, a deputy from the People's Democratic Party, asserted during the meeting that the government tacitly backs drug dealers as part of its strategy to push forward its urban gentrification agenda (Okmeydanı halkı uyuşturucuya ve çeteleşmeye karşı yürüdü, 2016). On October 1, 2016, a protest against drug usage was staged in Okmeydanı to rally against the escalating drug sales in the area. During the demonstration, Ali Kenanoğlu, a former HDP deputy, stressed:

> "Globally, governments tend to turn a blind eye to the influx of drugs and gangs in areas of resistance. The same mindset prevails in Türkiye; they aim

> to turn Okmeydanı into a hub for drug activities, but we won't stand for it." (Yüncüler, 2016).

6.5 The role of police repression in depoliticization of the district

6.5.1 Police violence against any peaceful civic protest

One primary reason is the escalating police violence towards all civic protests in the district. While there have been instances of armed protests resulting in violent confrontations and police intervention, law enforcement has not hesitated to intervene even in peaceful civic demonstrations. An activist from a leftist group in the district shared that as the frequency of protests and political activities waned, several leftist organizations disbanded, unable to sustain their activities in the face of intensified police repression. Those organizations that remain feel an even greater strain and pressure. “Numerous organizations in the district have shut down. If the other leftist organizations in the district could take action, it would also pave the way for us." Another resident commented on the police violence against the district's youth and leftist organizations, stating: ″They've decimated our youth; many are now in prison, and our associations have been shut down." An activist stated:

> “After July 15, 2016, the pressure on the district increased substantially. It's no exaggeration to say that dozens of the community's youth were arrested or compelled to leave the country. The level of police violence skyrocketed, with incidents so severe that they even brandished weapons at young children on the streets. This escalating violence dampened the spirit and enthusiasm for participating in district movements. The onset of the pandemic further stifled any remaining momentum for action in the district."

He mentioned that they made efforts to remain active even during the pandemic. Moreover, three leftist organizations took a stand against the 'gang' violence in the district. He noted that this was the first protest in a long while, and it took the police by surprise. An activist from a leftist group in the neighborhood explained that they've had to strategize their protests and events discreetly without publicizing them

within the district. This caution stems from experience; whenever they made an announcement, the police immediately intervened to prevent the event. The activist also revealed that the police often contacted the families of young activists in an attempt to intimidate them, even inquiring about the company their children kept.

> “We numbered just 25, but, without exaggeration, there were 500 police officers. They were stationed at every neighborhood corner, creating an imposing presence. The police tried to silence us, forbidding us from chanting our slogans and threatening us with assault and arrest. Despite their intimidation, we carried out our protest."

To avoid police repression during their protests, organizations now opt to stage their demonstrations without any prior announcements within the district: “Recently, we've chosen to conduct our protests without public announcements. This change in approach is a direct result of police pressure. They preemptively show up whenever they get wind of our planned protests."

When they choose not to publicize an upcoming protest, it's not just the police who remain uninformed but also the residents. As a result, turnout at these unannounced protests is typically low. He further explained: ”We don't publicize the protests within the community, so attendance was limited. Still, we received support from residents who cheered from their windows. With no police presence, we were a group of 50 people." Ergin also mentioned that the police inquired if they had any plans for Newroz.

6.5.2. Fear to participate in protests and be a part of any social and political gathering

Even though the presence of the police has become normalized, with some interviewees noting they no longer distinguish it from daily life, the ingrained fear remains a significant barrier to political actions. As highlighted in the following

quotations, local women describe the police presence as “an entity that just stood there”:

> "The police no longer instill a sense of trust in me, and they don't seem proactive about situations anymore. I've become so accustomed to seeing them that their presence no longer affects me as it once did. Before, if they showed up, it indicated something significant; I'd be curious about the unfolding events, feeling an internal stir. Now, even if I see them ten times a day, I'm largely indifferent." (Suna)

> " It's become routine, like watching an ant move back and forth. I used to fear them, especially when they'd bring out pepper spray or similar tools. We'd wonder, 'Has something happened?' But now, we're not afraid. Why should we be? I suppose they're just stationed there to prevent incidents." (Fatma)

> “We've become so accustomed to their presence. When we see them outside our neighborhood, we wonder, 'What are they doing here?' It feels like our neighborhood is their primary station.”(Gizem)

The police persistently employ various tactics in everyday life to deter social and political gatherings. One interviewee noted that while the police haven't resorted to physical violence recently, they have increasingly turned to psychological tactics. She recalled a meeting organized by the People’s Houses in the district addressing impoverishment. Even though it was a modest gathering, police officers stationed themselves outside the organization's venue throughout the event. She observed that, as in recent instances, the police consistently attempt to disrupt spaces where district residents come together for discussions. She added, "While the police used to suppress us with merciless physical force, they now leverage psychological strategies." This revised version streamlines the narrative while maintaining the essence of the original content.

A young man recounted an incident where, as he attempted to park his car in the neighborhood, a special operations police officer yelled at him, insisting he not park there. He expressed his fear, especially since the officer was brandishing a long-

barreled weapon. Many residents shared similar sentiments, noting that the mere sight of the police on the streets evokes anxiety.

> "I become anxious even when I'm not doing anything wrong. They don't hesitate to use violence on citizens when necessary. One time, pepper spray even reached the balcony door of my parents' home. Their willingness to resort to violence, without consideration for children or women, leaves me constantly on edge". (Zehra)

Another interviewee shared that due to the aggressive police presence, she refrained from joining lawful demonstrations within the district, such as the May 1st protests. She remarked, "May 1st is a legitimate demonstration. You have every right to participate. However, given the overwhelming police presence in the district on such occasions, it's intimidating. I'm genuinely fearful of venturing out at that time."

Consequently, this fear discourages residents from engaging in social or political events within the district. One clear illustration of how this apprehension hinders participation came when an educational initiative, which began in the district and later expanded to multiple neighborhoods, couldn't take root locally. Despite recognizing their children's need for such educational opportunities, many residents refrained from sending them, fearing potential confrontations (Murat, 2022).

6.5.3 The fatigue of inhabitants regarding the conflicts

Skidmore (2003) analyzes people's "fear of surveillance, 'of being crushed'... culminates in inaction and in alienation for the Burmese. As long as there is a conflictual environment through clashes between the police and protesters or police raids, even if the residents support organized socio-cultural activities or protests, they no longer wish to have any events organized or participate in them. Any political and social action in the district means conflict for the inhabitants. Based on their experiences, this conflict can harm themselves, their children, their relatives, and

their everyday life practices. The presence of the police has been seen as a barrier to disputes within the district:

> "Why should I be upset? They come and go. It's preferable this way. Better than incidents or any disturbances occurring. There's no harm. They just come and leave."(Fatma)

> "I'm not fearful anymore. I used to be, but now it doesn't scare me. Truly, others aren't affected either. We never feared the leftists, but I would always wonder about the weapons they might use. With the associations shut down and the constant police presence tailing our every move, it feels safer on the streets. The environment is more at ease now." (Sezin)

> "I'm not intimidated by the police. Even when they warned of using pepper spray, my response was always that I'd simply head home." (Suna)

6.6 Conclusion

In summary, Chapter 6 extensively explores the intricate dynamics of police repression in Okmeydanı, spanning 2002 to 2022. The central inquiry revolves around the impact of heightened police presence on the district's recent shift toward depoliticization. Through a thorough examination of evolving police practices, notably the establishment of the 'Kalekol' outpost in 2017, the chapter unravels a complex interplay between policing strategies and the political fabric of the district.

The media portrayal and firsthand accounts of Okmeydanı residents emphasize a longstanding history of intense police scrutiny, fostering an environment characterized by fear and repression. Despite the district's historical role as a hotspot of contention, recent police tactics seem to have ushered in a unique form of depoliticization. This paradox prompts a deeper analysis of how contemporary policing strategies diverge from the past and what implications they hold for Okmeydanı's dynamic political landscape.

The strategy of increased police presence, aimed at suppressing discord and neutralizing political activism, aligns with the broader trend of depoliticization in marginalized urban zones. Ethnographic studies on urban fringes, including the works of Auyero, Bourgois, Elias, and Yonucu, further corroborate the pivotal role of conspicuous police presence in shaping depoliticized urban environments.

Findings from Okmeydanı indicate that as police visibility and repression escalated, residents felt an augmented sense of pressure, resulting in a reluctance to engage in street activities and public gatherings. This heightened police presence effectively restricted social and political interactions, steering Okmeydanı toward a trajectory of depoliticization. The intricate interplay between policing strategies, political dynamics, and residents' lived experiences underscores the necessity for a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to the evolving political landscape in Okmeydanı.

CHAPTER 7

COOPTATION BY SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REGIME

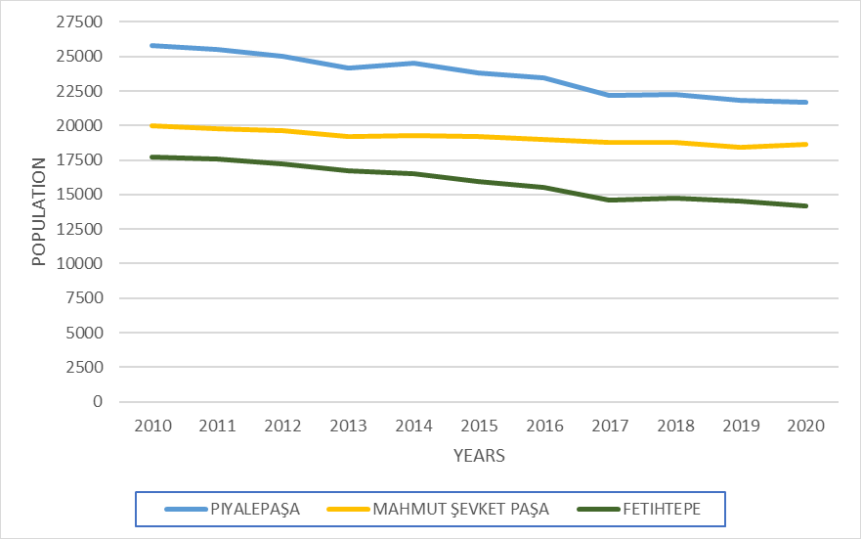
7.1 Introduction

The state's presence in Okmeydanı is not solely through the police force. The welfare policies of the neoliberal state have penetrated everyday life. Social assistance as a way of managing poverty and the issue of property ownership have become an important part of the state's influence on everyday life in Okmeydanı. A confusion arises regarding the manifestations of state power in the neighborhood through social assistance and the urban transformation process. Furthermore, extending beyond this confusion, it leads to disagreements and divisions among the inhabitants, accompanied by a distancing from the leftist movement in the neighborhood. Thus, the state not only influences the depoliticization process in Okmeydanı through police repression but also through forms of cooptation in everyday life. This demonstrates that depoliticization in Okmeydanı has reasons beyond police pressure, and depoliticization is not just a reduction in the number of actions but also involves apathy toward politics, exit from the district, and atomization among the inhabitants.

Established as a migrant magnet, Okmeydanı has recently drawn people from diverse global locations, leading to concerns among longtime residents about a perceived dilution of its original identity. The continuous migration to Okmeydanı, shaped by kinship networks, has traditionally maintained the district's Alevi and Kurdish populations, yet current demographic changes suggest a noticeable transformation in its enduring character. Residents who settled in the district during the 1990s and earlier often expressed discontent about the evolving demographic of the area.

Over the past decade, there has been a prevailing sentiment of long-standing Alevi families departing from the district, as evidenced by a consistent decrease in the registered population across Piyalepaşa, MŞP, and Fetihtepe neighborhoods from 2010 to 2021.[55]

Table 8. Neighborhoods Population between 2010 and 2021



Source: TUIK (2022)

Despite TÜİK data suggesting a decline in registered population, Okmeydanı is consistently described in local narratives as an evolving hub for various migrant groups, with recent influxes primarily comprising Syrian refugees attracted by informal labor opportunities, contributing to the district's diversification. Fetihtepe and Piyalepaşa, as shown in Figure 35, exhibit the highest immigrant densities, emphasizing the significance of understanding attachment dynamics, mobility,

[55] These numbers are taken from the Turkish Statistical Institute, Demography and Population data.

settlement, and access to urban services, particularly for the predominant Syrian migrant group in Beyoğlu.

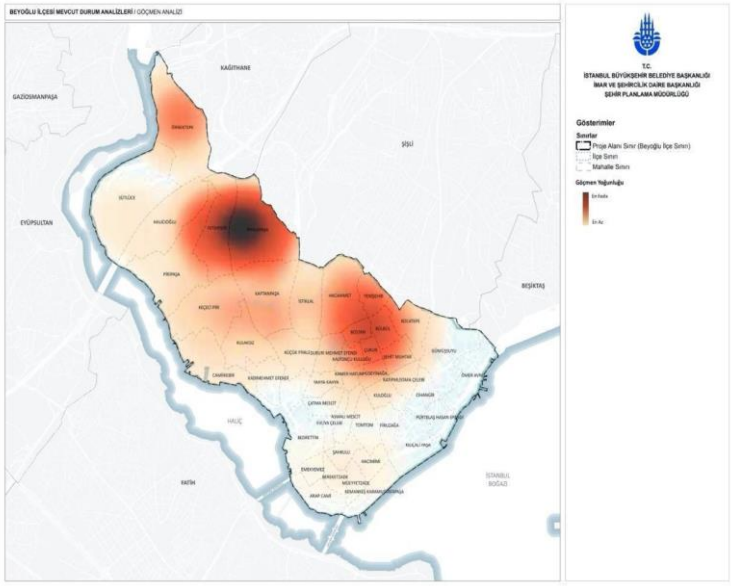


Figure 34. Migration analysis of Beyoğlu [56]

A considerable number of unregistered Syrian migrants in Beyoğlu are drawn to settle in Okmeydanı due to abundant job opportunities, as highlighted in a recent report and affirmed by the analysis of the hierarchy graph depicting immigrants' initial settlements in Türkiye based on their country of origin. Changing demographic dynamics, though not a primary factor for the district's depoliticization, play a role in influencing its politics, undermining solid relations between revolutionary groups and inhabitants; however, a significant outcome is the rise in atomization and discrimination within the district, with each successive wave of migrants expressing discriminatory sentiments towards those who arrived after them,

[56] See https://sehirplanlama.ibb.istanbul/beyoglu-senin/#analiz

particularly observed among the Alevi and Kurdish populations against more recent arrivals, including migrants from Syria and other nations.[57]

The district's experience has led to heightened atomization and fragmentation instead of unity, affecting social mobility in a context of discrimination. While the initial foundation story of Okmeydanı suggests that political unity formed through solidarity networks among migrant groups, recent narratives depict a neighborhood becoming alienated from migrants, particularly the newly arrived ones who struggle to establish such networks. The preference for Okmeydanı by immigrants is driven significantly by informal labor opportunities, yet opposition to migrants in the labor market creates polarization among workers, contributing to the overall increase in discrimination and polarization.

7.2 Poverty, social aids and cooptation

Okmeydanı, initially developed in the 1960s to house industrial workers, has evolved into a vibrant working-class community known for its heavy reliance on the informal economy. This neighborhood, which serves as a home to a diverse array of residents, including those marginalized within the city, has been aptly likened by some to a "large factory" with a workforce of 20,000. Its enduring appeal lies in the opportunities the district provides for employment, particularly through its numerous manufacturing workshops. This economic foundation is evident not only in the

[57] In September 2021, the Okmeydanı Democracy Platform organized a panel on "Immigration, Racism, and Chauvinism," addressing AKP's migration policies and advocating for refugee political mobilization; however, despite discussions, the newly migrated populace remains largely disconnected from the district's political fabric, exacerbating existing sentiments of discrimination and polarization. In addition to existing discrimination, the language barrier, particularly in effective communication in Turkish, hinders immigrants' active participation in everyday life and interactions within the district, as observed during a Human Rights Association (IHD) event where two girls, unable to understand Turkish, remained unengaged, highlighting the challenges of integrating and engaging with new migrant groups.

physical presence of these workshops but also in the multitude of job advertisements scattered throughout the area.

Predominantly textile-focused workshops in Okmeydanı, often situated on ground floors or basements, operate under precarious conditions without proper oversight, hygiene, or ventilation. Advertisements for jobs, ubiquitous in the district, not only reveal the demand for labor but also indicate the informal nature of employment, with many workers receiving weekly wages and only a minority being insured. This prevailing informal labor system not only affects the economic well-being of the inhabitants but also shapes the socio-political fabric.

During fieldwork in the district, collecting data from textile workshops presented challenges, as engaging with owners and employees for conversations and photographs was difficult; however, Figure 36, depicting the manufacturing sector distribution in Beyoğlu, highlights Piyalepaşa and Fetihtepe as hubs of manufacturing concentration, predominantly in textiles.

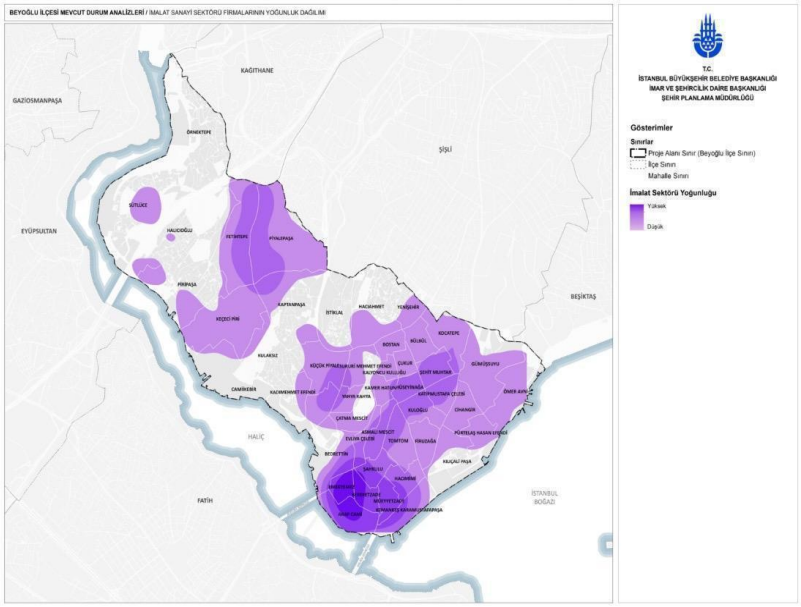


Figure 35. Distribution of the manufacturing sector in Beyoğlu

Most workshops in the district, primarily garment-focused and located on the ground floors or basements, operate under precarious conditions with inadequate ventilation, hygiene, and oversight, as evidenced by Figure 36 showcasing a textile workshop on the ground floor of a building and the challenge of identifying these workshops due to inconspicuous signage and the need for indicators such as machinery noise or workers taking breaks for identification. Despite the absence of visible signboards, Okmeydanı's status as a hub for unregistered work is evident through numerous job advertisements posted throughout the district, revealing the informal working conditions within garment workshops and providing specific details about the nature of employment, as seen in Figure 36 showcasing a collection of ads on a shop board in Piyalepaşa.

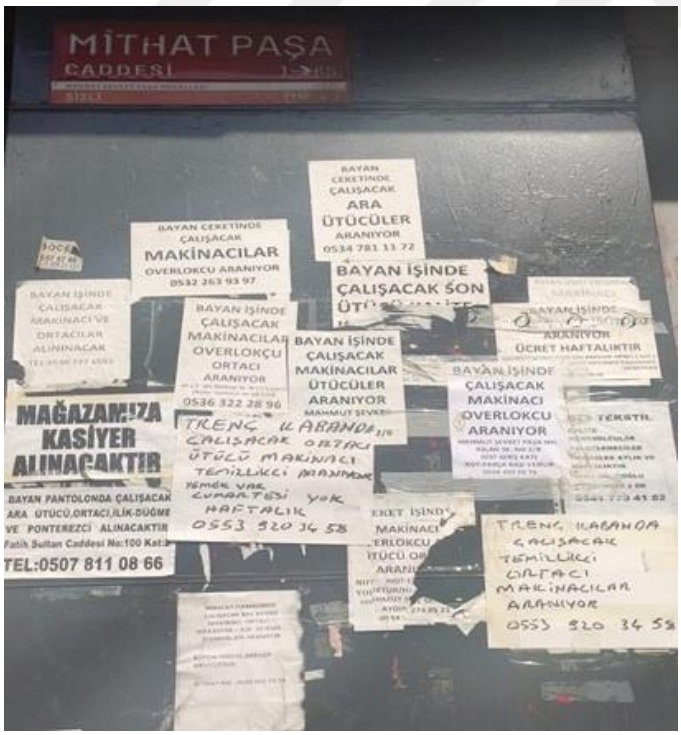


Figure 36. A wall full of job ads[58]

[58] The photo was taken by the author.

Job advertisements in Okmeydanı's textile workshops reveal widespread informality, with many workers receiving weekly wages and few having insurance; the pandemic further exposed their vulnerabilities, as state assistance targeted registered employees, leaving informal sector workers unsupported, and the vaccination program initially overlooked unregistered workers, particularly impacting them during economic crises (Menekşe & Karakurt, 2014; Polat, 2021). Okmeydanı not only functions as a central hub for its own garment and manufacturing workshops but is also recognized by employers from various Istanbul districts as an ideal recruitment location, exemplified by a bus stop advertisement targeting garment workshops in other districts and calling for various positions, with weekly wages specified. In Okmeydanı, walls showcase job advertisements for workshops alongside leftist slogans and graffiti, portraying the district's dual reality with visible signs of precarious working conditions dominating the streets and subtler informal operations beneath the surface. This integration of informal work into the neighborhood's political fabric is evident, reflecting a coexistence of injustices and resistance.

As a low-income district, with the migration waves and being an area of informal labor, the district continues to be where the disadvantaged groups of the city settle. The per capita income analysis in Figure 44 below reveals that the Fetihtepe neighborhood has the lowest per capita income in Beyoğlu. The Piyalepaşa neighborhood is among the neighborhoods with the second-to-last per capita income.

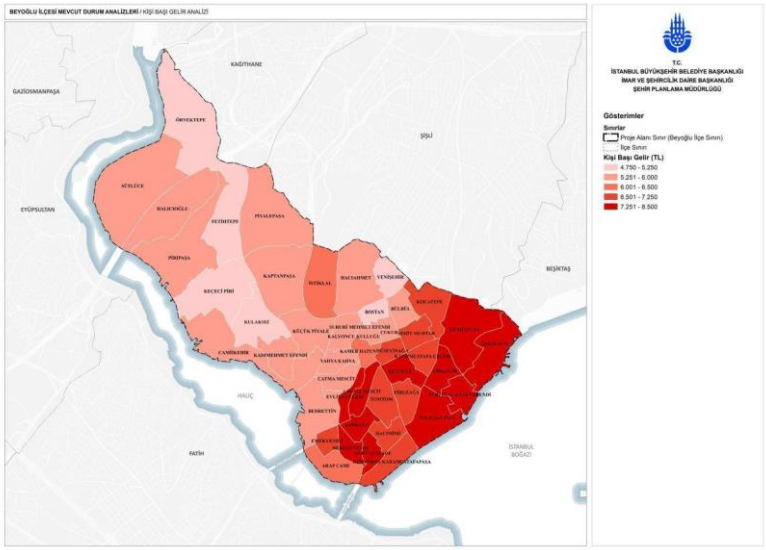


Figure 37. Per capita income analysis of Beyoğlu

According to the "vulnerability" analysis in Figure 45 below, the demographic and economic structure analysis of the Beyoğlu district prepared by IMM displays that Fetihtepe is among the neighborhoods where vulnerability is very high in Beyoğlu and Piyalepaşa is among the neighborhoods where vulnerability is high.

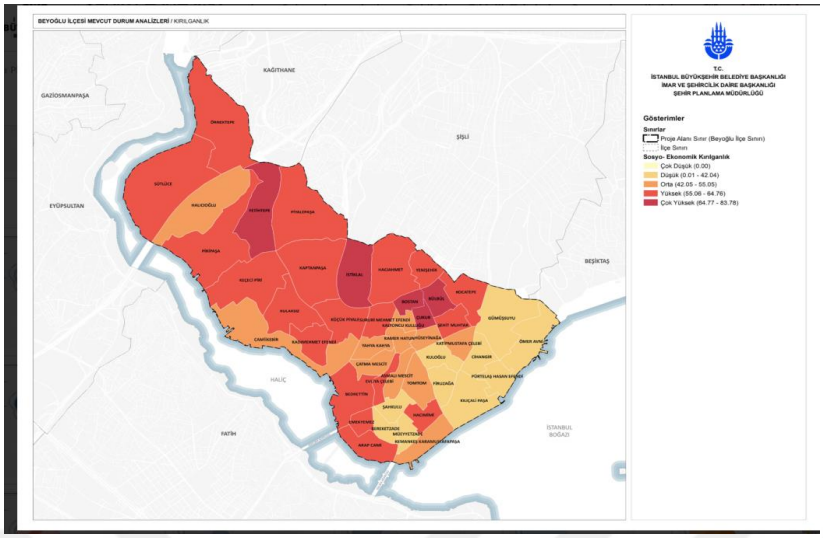


Figure 38. Vulnerability analysis of Beyoğlu

7.2.1 Social assistance

The interviewees' narratives during the fieldwork also support the per capita income and vulnerability analysis mentioned above. In three neighborhoods, many families live with a minimum wage, work in textile workshops under unregistered and unsecured conditions, and require municipal and social aid to afford their basic needs.

The resident's candid acknowledgment of dependency on municipal aid sheds light on the vulnerabilities within the community, particularly emphasizing the challenges faced by households with irregular income due to seasonal employment patterns. The state's role in providing aid becomes a central aspect of neighborhood life, influencing both the local political landscape and the lived experiences of residents. By openly acknowledging reliance on state assistance, the resident implicitly reveals a level of dependency that may intertwine with the political

processes of the neighborhood, suggesting a form of cooptation through welfare practices.

> “I am getting aid from the municipality. We cannot get by without help anyway. My husband is disabled. He works for one period and does not work for another period. The textile work stops when it is festies and stops for two months. After that, when the season changes, it stops again. So, my husband works for two months and does not work for the other three months; it is always like this. We cannot get along without help; why should I hide it?”

Following the previous quote, the subsequent excerpt emphasizes the community's dire economic situation and their reliance on assistance and state support. The resident explicitly states, "We cannot afford our lives. The minimum wage is too bad. Everything is costly. We cannot afford it. We see everything, but we cannot do it." These statement starkly articulates the financial struggles faced by the residents, highlighting the insufficiency of their income to meet basic needs. These sentiments further underscores the interconnectedness of economic precarity and the necessity for external support, elucidating the pervasive reliance on aid and state assistance within the district.

The narratives paint a picture of financial instability, particularly for tenants, where even dual income is deemed insufficient for recreational activities. Together, these testimonies exemplify the persistent struggle to afford a decent standard of living and engage in societal activities, illuminating the persistent economic hardships within the community.

> “It is even harder when you are a tenant. If there are two people, let us husband and wife work together, you can go for a trip on the weekend. If you only work, you become dependent on your husband.”

> “My husband is salaried; he works for minimum wage. He gets many tips in the summer; we live more comfortably. He works in the tourism business when there are no tourists in winter… He had his car before; he sold it, and he takes tourists around.”

In the case of Okmeydanı, Figure 46 below shows the number of households applying for Social Assistance in the districts of Beyoğlu within the scope of the current situation analysis of Beyoğlu District. Piyalepaşa and Fetihtepe neighborhoods have the highest number of social assistance applications within the Beyoğlu district's borders.

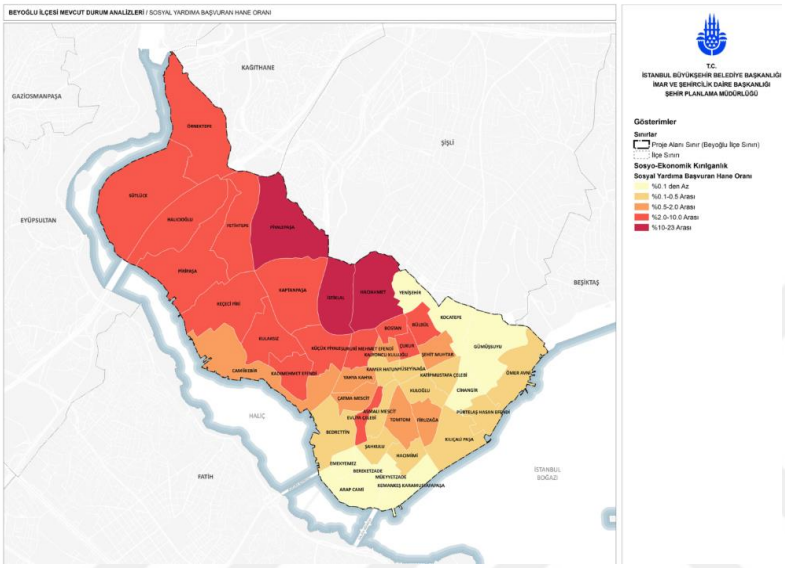


Figure 39. The analysis of the number of households applying for social assistance in the Beyoğlu district

The AKP's way of managing the poor over social assistance and the way the inhabitants criticize the leftist radical groups simultaneously in the district created an ambivalent perception toward the state. The existence of social assistance, the rumors about social help, and the process from applying to obtaining the assistance reflected the “invisible elbow” of the state in Okmeydanı (Tilly, 1996). The point that triggers this political transformation, which makes the existence of the state ambivalent here, is not the existence of these aids, but the way they are provided and the perception created in the neighborhood about them. Whether people get or do not get social aid, the possibility of getting social aid, the reality that there are people who are getting aid is a critical discussion among the residents. These poignant narratives from Suna

shed light on the intricate dynamics of social assistance in Okmeydanı, underscoring a pervasive sentiment among residents that 'everyone is getting help except me.' Suna's account unveils the intimate and often challenging encounters with state officials tasked with distributing aid. Her mention of relatives receiving assistance further emphasizes the interconnectedness of social aid within the neighborhood's social fabric. Suna's personal experience, notably the officers' insistence on formal documentation and a rental contract, unveils a bureaucratic hurdle that residents encounter when seeking support. Her 12-year tenancy, marked by trust and timely payments, clashes with the bureaucratic insistence on documentation, revealing a disconnect between the lived experiences of residents and the formalities imposed by the state.

This disjunction not only speaks to the challenges of accessing assistance but also raises questions about the fairness and transparency of the state's distribution practices within the Okmeydanı community. Suna said that “ “Everyone is getting help except me." Then she added:

> "Relatives take help, my sister-in-law. Another one. She also lives in this neighborhood. They (officers) come and look at the house. When I called, they came and looked at my house. I said the house is not mine; I am renting; you could ask the neighbors. Then, they say, "Bring your contract." I have been sitting for 12 years; there is no contract, and we trust each other. I pay on time every month. We do not have a contract; I would show it if there were; there is no need for such a thing. I said he did not believe it; he could have researched it if he wanted to". (Suna)

The account from Sezin, below, encapsulates the multifaceted nature of social assistance in Okmeydanı, revealing the intricate process and challenges faced by individuals in their pursuit of support. Sezin's acknowledgment of receiving a widow's pension, coupled with the meticulous scrutiny of her living conditions during the application process, highlights the detailed and invasive nature of state assessment in distributing aid. The mention of applying to multiple municipalities further accentuates

the widespread reliance on assistance and the bureaucratic hurdles residents navigate. Despite Sezin's receipt of aid, her detailed financial breakdown exposes the inadequacy of the support provided. Her widow's pension of 250 TL, coupled with the high rent of 850 TL, underscores the stark economic challenges residents confront even with state assistance. Moreover, Sezin's entrepreneurial spirit, demonstrated through selling handicrafts and fiber, reflects the community's resilience and resourcefulness in supplementing insufficient aid. This testimony contributes to a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between state assistance, individual livelihoods, and the strategies employed by residents to cope with economic hardships in Okmeydanı.

> "They give to the poor. Let us say I get it. I am getting help. I do not have anything. I receive a widow's pension. One parcel arrives per month. They also gave me 100 TL, and I went shopping. I also applied to Şişli municipality; I applied to Edirnekapı. They search your house; whether you have a house or what is on it, everything comes out anyway. Moreover, they come home and look, they ask, what do you have? Do you have a son? I say they do not live with me. So, I am a person who gets help right now. It is not enough—a widow's pension of 250 per month. I pay 850 rent. There is also a shopping card for 100 TL per month. I sell handicrafts and fiber and put them in my sister's shop. We are doing it. I give it to the shop next door; my sister sells it here". (Sezin)

This quote below from Sezin serves as compelling evidence reinforcing the argument that the distribution of aid has given rise to rumors within the community, further exacerbating a sense of atomization. Sezin's observation that Kurds receive aid, seemingly based on unverified assumptions about their economic conditions, underscores the prevalence of misinformation circulating through the neighborhood. The notion that aid is selectively provided to those with children creates a divisive narrative, contributing to a fragmented social fabric within the community. This revelation highlights the intricate dynamics of aid distribution, not only as a means of material support but also as a catalyst for social perceptions and divisions among residents in Okmeydanı.

> "Kurds receive aid. They are in excellent condition, the rich are buying, and they also have houses. They all have houses in the building where I live, but I do not. They are getting milk. They give milk because they have children; I applied, and they say they give it to those with children". (Sezin)

Beril, too, says that a different group and AKP supporters received the aid. "I see Easterners and Black Sea people more. AKP supporters get". Similarly, the quote from Zühre, below, suggests a belief that social assistance is distributed based on individuals' affiliations with the ruling party. Zühre illustrates this point by mentioning her family members who, despite needing help, were allegedly denied aid because they did not support the AKP. She goes on to propose hanging an AKP flag and photo, implying that party members may receive more assistance. Zehra's statement reflects a perception that political loyalty influences the allocation of aid, creating a potential disparity between those affiliated with the AKP and others.

> "For example, they are my aunt; my brother works alone, they apply for help and do not give. I told Suna (her sister-in-law) to let us hang the AKP flag. Hang a photo too… Maybe AKP members will get more help. They get more. For example, on the 4th of March last week, I was looking at this street. I liked it very much; I said to my wife, "Look, the children have received milk, so I am thrilled." (Zühre)

This excerpt from Zühre sheds light on the prevailing skepticism regarding the equitable distribution of aid within the community, indicating a suspicion that assistance is not exclusively reaching those in genuine need. Zühre's critique, asserting that aid 'applies to everyone, not just those who need it,' underscores a pervasive sentiment that the allocation process may lack precision. The example she provides, highlighting instances where multiple working individuals in a family receive aid, further accentuates the perceived injustice and raises questions about the transparency of the aid distribution system. Zühre's comment implies a degree of social criticism towards those who, despite not being in dire straits, avail themselves of the assistance, creating a complex and potentially divisive discourse around the perceived fairness of aid allocation in Okmeydanı:

> "It applies to everyone, not just those who need it. I want those in need to buy it. Some people are in bad condition; I want them to take it. For example, 4 or 5 people work in a family; you see there are help cards, you get milk, and people say it is a sin; why do you buy it? People cannot say anything. When he says he cannot take it, he may not want it; it is a sin. People who need it get it. " (Zühre)

This quote underscores the argument that the distribution of aid is perceived as neither fair nor just. The interviewer asserts that those who are well-off, even with textile ateliers, cars, and luxurious homes, still access aid due to a lack of formal documentation. The sentiment expressed in the quote suggests a critical view of the system, highlighting a perceived disparity where individuals with apparent affluence receive assistance, potentially at the expense of those in greater need.

> "Aids is not fair at all. Those who are well-off get it, and most of them do. Moreover, there are many. They are in excellent condition, have textile ateliers and cars, and their homes are luxurious, but they come and get aid. Because they do not have anything on them formally, their house and car are on someone else." (Feyza)

The testimonials from Feyza and Sezin below, collectively unveil the intricate relationship between social aids and the state's role in Okmeydanı. Feyza's poignant admission that survival is impossible without assistance paints a vivid picture of economic precarity, particularly for households with irregular income due to seasonal employment. The reliance on aids becomes a necessity, challenging the conventional narrative of self-sufficiency. Sezin's juxtaposition of state assistance with the harsh realities faced by the youth in the district adds a layer of complexity to the discourse. While recognizing the state's role in providing aid, Sezin critiques its broader impact on the community, emphasizing the adverse effects on the younger generation and the closure of vital associations. The second Feyza introduces a subtle complexity in the perception of state aid, oscillating between a sense of entitlement and gratitude. The ambivalence expressed, ranging from frustration over perceived mismanagement to occasional acknowledgment of the state's supportive role, underscores the multifaceted

nature of the state's influence on residents' lives. Collectively, these narratives deepen the understanding of the state's role in Okmeydanı, revealing a complex interplay of dependency, critique, and occasional appreciation for the aids provided.

> "We cannot survive without help. My husband is already disabled. One day, he works; the other, he does not work. The textile business is on holiday; it stops for two months. After that, the season keeps changing. Two months he is working, three months he does not have a job, always like that. We cannot get along without aids; why should I hide? (Feyza)
>
> "It (the state) helps, but that is a separate issue; it ends the lives of our youth; they are all imprisoned now, and all our associations are closed. " (Sezin)
>
> "Sometimes we say it is our money; it is our thing; the state takes it from us and gives it to us. Sometimes, we pray that it is good that aids is given. I mean, you pray for them when you have to. I say the state looks after us; it is good; give the devil his due. Sometimes I swear (do not write it), and sometimes I say god bless the state. Sometimes, I say it is good; what would we do now if they did not?" (Feyza)

In conclusion, the stories that the fieldwork interviewees told emphasized the vulnerabilities and economic realities that the community faced. The open admission of reliance on local assistance highlights the difficulties faced by households with variable earnings, especially in light of seasonal work schedules. These testimonies underscore the state's pivotal role in aid provision, influencing the local political climate as well as the everyday lives of its citizens. But they also show a complicated interaction between reliance, criticism, and sometimes even gratitude for the assistance received. The testimonials highlight the complex dynamics of social assistance distribution and its effect on the social fabric of the community by illuminating the district's widespread reliance on aid and state support. Moreover, the stories expose inequalities and feelings of injustice in the aid distribution process, upending traditional ideas of fairness and openness. Overall, these testimonials highlight the need for more study to address the complex socio-economic issues faced by marginalized populations and increase our understanding of the complicated

interaction between governmental support, individual livelihoods, and community resilience in Okmeydanı.

7.3 Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the reason police repression is effective is because the neighborhood's cohesiveness has already been eroded and fragmented. The atomized people then become rivals to one another as they incorporate into the system with a second layer of uncertainty brought about by property politics and social assistance. The migration the district has received and the fact that it continues to be a place where the most demographically disadvantaged people come and settle, as well as the poverty of the newly arrived population and their inability to establish ties with the existing political mechanisms, have weakened the connection between the inhabitant’s Alevi-Kurdish identity and the political structure identified with it. People also require assistance because of the unregistered labor market and the everyday rise in poverty. Social assistance's dominance in daily life increases the district's atomization and obscures the state's perception.

Stated differently, the state controls everyday existence not only by enforcing poverty but also by the police repression discussed in the chapter before. Their daily survival depends on their capacity to accept help. However, people are being uprooted and losing their houses as a result of the most recent urban transformation projects. As a result, they become more vulnerable. Stated differently, the state meddles in daily affairs through neoliberal means. This leads to a lack of interest in political mobility, which is heavily suppressed by the police. The research shows that people become less able and motivated to engage in bigger political processes when they struggle with day-to-day survival and pressing issues. It puts immediate

necessities ahead of long-term political and social problems. It results in a further downturn in civic engagement, which is already suppressed and repressed globally.

CHAPTER 8

WOMEN'S AMBIVALENT PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF DEPOLITICIZATION IN OKMEYDANI

8.1 Introduction

This chapter examines women's nuanced perceptions and lived experiences in the district as they navigated the terrain of depoliticization and its tangible reflections in their daily lives. When women confront their everyday life experiences triggered or caused by this political transformation, such as its impact on the sense of belonging to the neighborhood, the positive or negative effects on their participation in public spaces, the creation or non-creation of solutions for caregiving responsibilities, as well as the struggle against poverty and male violence, their contradictory perceptions and experiences towards this depoliticization process become more pronounced. The "ambiguity" in women's reflections on the district's depoliticization urges a critical examination that moves beyond a binary portrayal of a transition from ‘tranquility’ to 'violence' or its reverse. It emphasizes that the shift into depoliticization is not a static outcome but an evolving process continually shaped by women's multifaceted identities and experiences in the sociopolitical landscape.

To discern women's views on Okmeydanı's political metamorphosis, this chapter investigates the sites at which women interact with traditional political activities and where they align with post-political trends. Women's experiences of the district's political shifts are intrinsically tied to their everyday concerns: navigating public spaces, managing care duties, confronting economic pressures, and handling male-inflicted violence.

In their roles as agents in public spaces, navigators of economic hardships, and caregivers, women in the district confront multifaceted manifestations of physical, psychological, and economic violence that underscore the intersectionality of urban and gender-based violence. Their tactics for navigating various forms of violence are deeply influenced by the district's shifting processes of politicization and depoliticization. In particular, the evolution of spaces within the district, in line with these political transitions, is directly molded by women's experiences with violence and their continuous strategies of resistance against it. Drawing from Cumbers et al. (2010), who advocate for a deeper understanding of agency amid urban violence, a gendered lens, particularly a "spatially situated gendered account of violence" as put forth by Hume & Wilding (2020), becomes indispensable when examining the political transformation in an urban margin.

The shifts in street politics deeply resonate within domestic spaces, marking depoliticization process as inherently gendered. The delineation between public and private spheres is blurred. Violence isn't isolated to just the home or the street; it emerges in both domains, occasionally catalyzing one another (Jagori, 2011). Therefore, in a place where inequalities exist on the street and the street undergoes transformation, women's both public and private lives are affected in various ways. This also indicates that the transformation itself is gendered.

8.2 Between belonging and strangeness

When it comes to the issue of political transformation in the district, one of the most significant concerns women raise is about loosing the sense of belonging they have established with the community. The women's narratives evoke a feeling of alienation from the familiar district they once knew. They highlighted the district's

shifting demographics. In addition, they remarked upon the noticeable absence of leftist groups and politically engaged youth from the district, a phenomenon this study terms 'depoliticization'. Women expressed a sentiment of residing in an altered realm, akin to what Stabrowski (2014) describes as ‘everyday displacement.’ This sense of familiarity is considered important for the continuity of everyday life in a place like Okmeydanı. Such a neighborhood cultivates a sense of belonging and collective identity (Mills, 2007, p.336). Within urban settings marked by daily violence, familiarity protects against the inherent unpredictability and insecurity.

When reflecting on the district's past, women fondly remembered when they recognized every face in the area, contributing to their sense of safety and belonging. When talking about the politics in Okmeydanı, women constantly referred to the times when they felt closer to the place, when they thought they belonged, and when they felt alienated.

> “I was very courageous; I think I got that courage from Okmeydanı. We were young, there were plainclothes police, but we were going out at night without fear… A protest might come out… but now “a rapist” might come out. I was unafraid of the protests because I knew revolutionaries would not harm me; their problem was not with me. However, now the rapist may turn directly towards me. ” (Yeşim)

For Yeşim, although in the past, there was the possibility of clashes in the district, the recent possibility is worse than that. She argues that she is worried to encounter with a “rapist”. She emphasized the insecurity both in the past and present but the for her the source of this insecurity changed. Although the previous conflictual politics was a violent-prone space, she also stated that this familiarity in the district gave her the guarantee to be protected:

> “I realize now that I was not bothered by the protests in the past. The streets were fairer. People were fairer. It was a time when there was the mentality of “the girl of the neighborhood.” You were the girl of the neighborhood, and they were trying to protect you. They did not want you to be spoken against.” (Yeşim)

In the literature on urban margins, this sense of familiarity is generally examined in terms of creating a sense of security. Yonucu (2014) posits that such feelings of safety in Alevi working-class neighborhoods arise from this familiarity, serving as a buffer against the inherent insecurities of the district. Despite the challenges of conflict and violence, recognizing community members and fostering close relationships instilled a sense of security among residents. However, there were also expressions indicating that this familiarity is gendered and reflects women's ambivalent experiences.

The fieldwork highlighted that alongside the positive connotation of familiarity in women's lives, this sense of familiarity also encompasses a restrictive and oppressive impact on their daily lives. While the absence of familiar faces made the district feel more insecure for some women, this sense of familiarity and belonging paradoxically imposed certain constraints on their daily lives. The familiarity that acted as a shield against insecurity and violence in the district also perpetuated traditional gender roles, giving rise to male figures and organizations that cast protective roles over women. This sense of familiarity, akin to living with an extended family throughout the district, inadvertently exerted pressures on women, confining them within certain behavioral norms. Gonca (60), despite her deep involvement in the district's political organizations and sense of unity and significance, aptly captures this duality. She said:

> "If I were elsewhere, I would have had more freedom. I could have indulged in fun activities, worn mini skirts, and lived unrestrained. But here, I feel bound by this unspoken responsibility."

Just as this sense of familiarity involves the difference between the past presence and current absence of revolutionary youth in the district, and despite the restrictive nature of all this familiarity, another ambivalent issue created by neighborhood

politics for women is the practice of leaving home, using the street, the existence of public spaces, and the ability to participate in these public spaces.

In addition to the senses of belonging and strangeness, the ambivalent experiences of women stands out for its similarities in terms of interventions in the daily life practices of both police and revolutionary youth during politicized times in conflictual periods in the district. Other studies on working-class Alevi neighborhoods also emphasized the similarities between young people's patterns and police practices. (Yonucu, 2014). Suna, the 37 years old woman living in the neighborhood, narrated her experience both with the police and the revolutionary as two similar practices:

> " I was talking on the phone on my balcony; police forces came to the park…I never hesitated from the police before that day. However, that day, he had such a look… I said I was not looking at them… I shuddered even though I did not do anything."(Selin, 40)

> " Once, on the day of the clash, while I was hanging laundry on the balcony, the revolutionary youths got angry and asked me to come inside." (Selin, 40)

The revolutionary youth, who historically appeared protective, are recently becoming individuals who look the same as the police. It is also possible to explain this through the transformation and militarization of civil politics, as described in Yonucu's book. So, this similarity between the police and the youth can be evaluated due to the transformation of politics in the neighborhood. One of the points that shows this ambivalence is, as will be described in the following section, the absence of revolutionary youth and the transformation of the district's political structure being pointed out as the source of alienation from the neighborhood.

In summary, Okmeydanı's investigation of the relationship between strangeness and belonging sheds light on the intricate relationship between gendered experiences, communal identity, and political change. Despite changing political and

demographic environments, women in the area show a strong sense of loyalty to their town and bemoan the loss of familiarity and sense of belonging. Feelings of insecurity and alienation are exacerbated by the departure of familiar faces, especially leftist organizations and politically active youngsters, in contrast to recollections of a former neighborhood where people felt safe and appreciated. This feeling of familiarity does, however, come with limitations since it also upholds social conventions and traditional gender roles, which limit women to particular behavioral standards. The ambiguity of familiarity is emphasized even more by the parallels between women's experiences with police involvement and youth revolution, obfuscating the distinction between defenders and oppressors in their daily lives. These conflicting experiences influence women's opinions of their neighborhood as the political structure of the district changes, emphasizing the complex relationship that Okmeydanı has between security, identity, and community involvement.

8.3 Participation in public spaces in Okmeydanı

One of the most prominent features of the neighborhood during field research was the social environment it provided, serving as a space for socialization. The usual political character of the district was used to produce more social and socializing spaces. When women talking about the district, they highlighted the socializing alternative is produced in the district by leftis organizations.

In Okmeydanı, women's stories vividly illustrate the interplay between public and private spaces, especially in the district's shifting political landscape. The evolution of public spaces in the district, their production, use, and transformation, is deeply impacted by the overarching narrative of depoliticization. The fieldwork

reveals that "getting out of the house" is a significant daily challenge for women in the district. The patriarchal family structure imposes extensive care responsibilities on women; many are prohibited from working by their husbands despite existing financial struggles, and the frequent clashes between police and revolutionaries have made public spaces, like parks, less accessible. The increasing drug trade and gang violence in the district issues further make the streets unsafe.

A significant dynamic shaping the decision to go out or stay in Okmeydanı is the presence and practices of conflict on the streets, the police's presence and practices, and the presence and practices of revolutionary groups. In Okmeydanı, the dynamics of the street — characterized by protests and clashes — play a significant role in shaping women's interactions with public spaces. The disturbances and associated violence impede women's socialization within the community. A 27-year-old woman who has spent her entire life in the area succinctly captures this sentiment, saying: “The politics in the neighborhood keeps us confined to our homes.” (Yeşim, 27).

The tumultuous protests in the district curtail the day-to-day activities of women. As Villareal (2015) articulates in her article, violence confines individuals' daily routines. Thus, the charged political atmosphere hampers venturing onto the streets and amplifies women's susceptibility to male aggression in these environments.

The political violence and changing political structure differentiate women's experiences of migration and their experiences of socialization in the district after the migration. Thelocal skirmishes within the district influence inhabitants' decisions to venture outside. Heightened police presence and aggression have notably diminished the community's use of parks. Fear and people's reluctance to leave their homes and

gather are identified as the primary outcomes of the police repression. The detrimental effects of the fear instilled by police forces include causing individuals to remain in their homes, heightening suspicion among community members, and disrupting social life in urban areas (Villareal, 2015). Hume &Wilding (2015) argued that street violence significantly shapes everyday choices, from interacting with the community and local store visits to merely walking to a nearby residence.

Although the isolation aftermath of the migration process is a common repercussion, the social and political structure of Okmeydanı make this experience different.[59] The political structure of Okmeydanı used to produce spaces for socializing and participating in public life in the district outside the parks. However, on the other hand, political violence prevented even going out on the streets. The most significant impact of the political transformation in the neighborhood was the decrease in social and cultural gatherings due to the street being under police siege. In addition to that, the diversity of public spaces where women in the district participated narrowed.

The fieldwork revealed that solidarity relations and politics have replaced the disappointment created by migration when the residents first settled in the district with a feeling of belonging. During the interviews, women emphasized attending concerts and activities at the park. Besides that, there have been examples of forming solidarity mechanisms with the recent migrant groups in the district. The Women to Women Refugee Kitchen (Kadın Kadına Mülteci Mutfağı), with the support of OKDER, can be an example of forming solidarity networks with the migrants. The organization was also closed.

[59] It has been emphasized that migrant women and children living in inadequate and overcrowded dwellings have almost no socializing places except for a few parks in the district (Kaya Erdoğan, Kurtuluş & Yükseker, 2022).

On one hand, while the socialization and more politically oriented socialization of leftist organizations diminished, socialization practices offered by municipalities increased. Neighborhood Houses (Mahalle Evleri) are centers where programs within the scope of psycho-social and socio-economic support are implemented to meet the needs of women, children, youth, elderly, men, disabled, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees or LGBTI+ individuals living in the districts. MŞP Neighborhood House offers literacy, lacing, basket weaving, and amigurumi courses. It aims to provide children and young people with courses to support their school lessons. In addition to these services, there are literacy courses for adults and illiterate neighborhood residents. Neighborhood House also offers hobby courses in many fields. For example, in February 2023, the "We Talk About Our Legal Rights" seminar was held.

To sum up, the examination of public space involvement in Okmeydanı highlights the complex relationship among political processes, gender norms, and social interactions. The social fabric of the neighborhood, which is defined by its political identity, has changed significantly, impacting women's access to and availability of public spaces. Women's mobility and socialization have been impeded by the prevailing political upheaval, which is typified by protests and conflicts, hence strengthening patriarchal norms that keep women confined to their homes. Women's participation in public settings has been restricted by this climate of political violence, which has also made them more susceptible to male assault. In addition, the community's social and cultural gatherings have changed as a result of the shifting political climate, with a discernible decline in these events brought on by greater police presence and repression. In spite of these obstacles, neighborhood projects and solidarity networks like the Women to Women Refugee Kitchen and Neighborhood

Houses provide glimmers of resiliency and group support. In the future, creating secure and welcoming public areas will continue to be essential for advancing gender parity and communal harmony in Okmeydanı.

8.4 Care burden shapes perceptions of depoliticization

A woman who gave birth three months ago, Deniz, said that she had no family in Istanbul, and she and her husband were alone in Istanbul. Since she does not know anyone in the district and cannot go outside without her husband, she has not been out since her child was born. She said the sun in the park hurt her eyes because she had not been outside for a long time.

The patriarchal family structure in Türkiye hinges on the unequal distribution of care responsibilities disproportionately shouldered by women. This burden becomes even more pronounced as the size of the family grows.

Women often resided in what Kandiyoti (1988) termed a "patrilocal extended household" (p.278). The act of family reproduction carries political implications. Nancy Fraser defines reproduction as the entire range of tasks tied to sustaining physical and social existence, encompassing 'childbirth, child-rearing, tending to family members and friends, household care, sustaining communities, and nurturing relationships' (Fraser, 2017, p.21). These caregiving responsibilities can limit women's engagement in public domains.

Most women who migrated to Okmeydanı followed a family member who had previously settled in the district. Many became part of larger family units through marriage or accompanying their parents and siblings seeking work. Many women in Okmeydanı highlighted their experiences living in large family units. Therefore, examining the link between women's care responsibilities in Okmeydanı

and the district's oscillating journey from politicization to depoliticization is imperative.

The Beyoğlu District Household Size map, depicted in Figure 51 below, highlights Fetihtepe and Piyalepaşa neighborhoods, marked in red, as areas with the largest average household sizes in Beyoğlu—exceeding 3.6 individuals per household. Fieldwork corroborated this data, confirming the prevalence of large, extended families in many households.

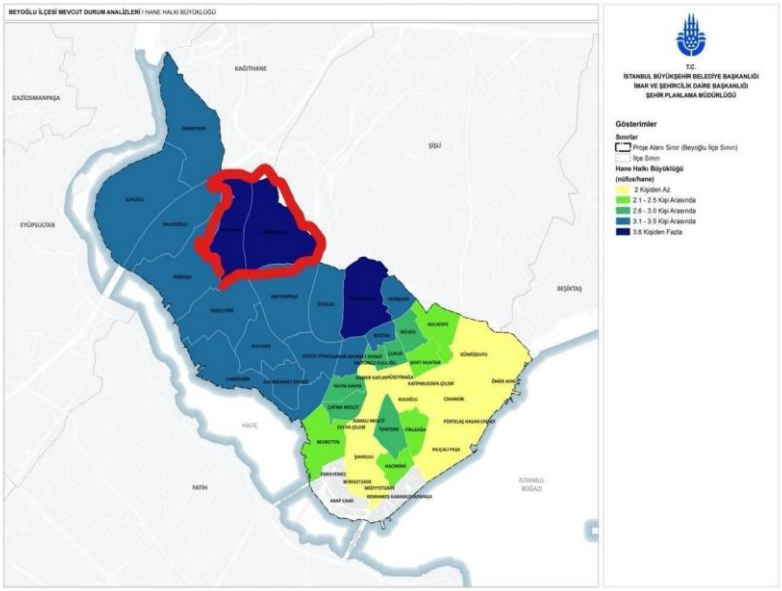


Figure 40. Household Size of Beyoğlu District[60]

To manage their living costs, these extended families often cohabitated, intensifying the domestic responsibilities shouldered by the women. Women's traditional roles were preserved or became more pronounced within this setting. As Sema stated, one of the dynamics of urbanization in its entire period is that families live together for economic reasons. For example, Sema said that her brother-in-law was helping with the rent of the house, and if he left the house, they would have difficulties affording

[60] See https://sehirplanlama.ibb.istanbul/beyoglu-senin/#analiz:

the cost of the house: “I have a brother-in-law, and he will go. He was helping with half the rent. We will have a hard time when he leaves.”

Despite not being sufficient for the neighborhood population in all three neighborhoods, neighborhood nurseries were opened by the municipality. However, as indicated by Harita95, these same neighborhoods lag in accessibility to public kindergartens. Given the significant child population in the district, there's a pressing need for more attentive planning and resource allocation. Women's caregiving responsibilities and the demand for related services were addressed and actions were taken by leftist organizations in the neighborhood. Similarly, they have also been brought up in recent times with municipal services. In 2005, women from MŞP spearheaded a petition drive advocating for kindergartens in their vicinity.

Various leftist groups in the district coordinate voluntary education initiatives for children. These often cater to primary school students, providing supplementary support for school subjects, though some activities are geared towards early childhood. These educational spaces serve a dual purpose: they offer children a constructive environment to spend time in while also providing relief to women burdened with care responsibilities by allowing them some time apart from their children. Additionally, these initiatives act as a conduit to engage women with the activities of the leftist groups. On the one hand, considering women's childcare responsibilities, there was an ongoing politicization based on their needs. During my time as a volunteer educator, there was a constant emphasis on encouraging mothers to participate in this solidarity movement in some way.

In the district, leftist movements emphasize that the care burden on women is a barrier to their participation in public spaces and activities. When inviting women to attend meetings, the availability of child-friendly spaces is frequently stressed as a

significant factor influencing women's decision to participate. Hence, even if events and meetings occur within the district, many women cannot attend. Early discussions at the cooperative that I made participant observation underscored this issue, noting that women's domestic responsibilities, especially childcare, often prevented them from engaging in the cooperative's activities.

It was discussed that there is a need for childcare services and spaces for children to participate in women's involvement in neighborhood protests and other socio-cultural and political activities. In the event invitation of the cooperative, we conveyed that lessons would be provided to the children by volunteer instructors during the meeting. Having two separate spaces in the cooperative was important during this process. We took the children as they came into a separate room and created a space for them to do drawings. Meanwhile, another volunteer teacher and I took turns conducting activities with the children.

Women were observed attending only when they could bring their children, and when provisions were made for childcare, they could actively engage in the discussions. Therefore, the domestic responsibilities shouldered by women often impede their ability to participate in political events in the district. In past years, leftist groups made political claims regarding the lack of these institutions in the district, collected petitions, and organized actions.

8.5 Fighting poverty: Insecure work, unemployment, and social assistance

This section explains how women were exposed to economic violence and how this economic violence interacted with their perceptions toward depoliticization in the district.[61] Regarding urban poverty, both previous research and the results of the field

[61] Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Türkiye, Women's Report: the average number of OECD countries in the gender gap in employment is 14.5 percent; while it is 10 percent in the

research showed that women are in a constant state of management. This is to manage the 'house,' the 'man,' the 'looks', and 'prejudices' on the street, and the 'livelihood' in the economic crisis. [62] Women struggling with poverty face the problems of marriage at a young age for financial reasons, not having access to education rights, not being able to work due to the burden of care responsibilities, not being able to access health services, birth control tools, and menstrual products, not being able to access justice when exposed to violence.[63]

Most women in Okmeydanı work in the textile sector. They face poverty, insecurity, and sexual abuse in unregistered work. As mentioned above, Okmeydanı has become a source of informal labor for industries like other informal settlements in South Africa and Brazil (Perlman, 2005; Samson, 2008; Senyapili, 1982). The fieldwork showed that these informal jobs are evaluated in terms of providing women an opportunity to work close to their homes and in harmony with their family lives. Although informal and insecure jobs reproduce inequalities (Erman, 2002; Eroğlu, 2009; Kandiyoti, 1988), they have been seen as an alternative to being involved in the labor market, especially by women in the district. Most of the women I interviewed worked in unregistered and irregular jobs in the district. A women said that "Right now, I am taking care of the baby; I go and fetch it, lay it down, let it eat and drink." Another one said:

> "I was working; I was independent. I was doing housework; I was cleaning stairs and washing carpets. I could afford my children's education like this. My daughter is helping a little, and I am doing handicrafts myself. I buy my son's drinks and cigarettes".

standard of EU countries, it is 39.1 percent in Türkiye. Türkiye is one of the countries with the highest female unemployment rate. The unemployment rate of young women is double the official data. 13.3 million women cannot participate in working life because they give unpaid care work. 3 out of 10 women work informally. More than 1.2. a million women work both part-time and informally. Considering the pandemic and economic crisis, female labor participation decreased in Türkiye and worldwide.

[62] Derin Yoksulluk Ağı Hacer Foggo

[63]https://derinyoksullukagi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/22164_DYA_TaleplerBilgiNotu-copy.pdf

These precarious working environments in Okmeydanı expose women to poor working conditions. Zühre summarizes the working conditions and the injustice and precariousness she was exposed to as follows:

> "We had no insurance, no overtime, and the boss was abusing our rights. We worked until 9-10 p.m.; he would not pay us. He called it "sacrifice." He told us to "sacrifice." We suffered a lot by making sacrifices. When we entered the winter, he cut half of our weekly payments; textile was saving itself. Nobody was saying anything. He was cutting 10 and 20 TL from the weekly costs of mechanics and 50 TL from us. I became an overlocker. I was getting 420 TL. It has been six years since I quit my job. Now, they are earning 1000 TL per week.

In the interview and conversations, women in Okmeydanı interpreted working in these workshops as liberating and getting out of the house, as well as getting rid of their livelihoods, regardless of whether they had ready-made garments or not. Beril said "In Okmeydanı, we are freer, more comfortable economically; those who want to work can find a job today."

It cannot be considered that women want these jobs because they do not question or because women do not know and criticize the working conditions there. When evaluated in terms of their living needs, women see garment workshops as the only area where they can work. When talking about working in the garment workshops in the district, by emphasizing their education level and family life, women stated that they have no hope of finding a job other than jobs in Okmeydanı. Moreover, with their previous experiences and what they heard from their neighbors and friends about the jobs, they also feel confident professionally here.

> "I have neighbors working here; they go to work for half a day, we drop the kids off to school together, then they rush to work, they will work part-time and earn money, and they are so happy and free. They make money; you can understand it from their clothes and everything. Okmeydanı is very advantageous in that respect; women are free, and anyone who wants to work has a job immediately; there is no need to go to another district away from home. A workshop is across from my neighbor's house; she goes to the

> opposite sidewalk and goes straight home during the break. Her husband comes, cooks for him, eats, and then returns to work. Of course, those who want more money go to another job to have insurance and retire. If she has no children at home, he will work elsewhere if her children are all grown up." (Beril)

In addition to the insecure working conditions, women asserted that even if they work, they do it without the knowledge of their husbands.[64]

> "Of course, if someone cares for my children today, I will immediately work and support my husband. Since we have not studied, I can work primarily in textiles. If I work in textile, I earn more than my husband, not less than 1000 TL per week. "

> "I want to work very much, but my husband does not allow it. Sometimes I say, let me come to the textile shop with you, but he does not allow it. I am cleaning a lad; he does not know about it".

> "I want so much work; he does not allow it. Sometimes, I said, let me work in textile, but he did not allow it. I am cleaning a ladder; I do not tell him."

> "We came in 2007. I came with my family. We were all here to work. We all started to work. Only my mother stayed at home. When my brother got married, his wife came. I worked in textile. My sister, younger and older sisters, and brothers worked in the textile industry. I worked until I got married. When I got married, my husband did not want me to work, nor did my father-in-law. I want to work; it would be good to contribute to my own house. It is hard to make your living when there are children."

One of the women I had an informal dialog with within the park stated, "I would like to be outside the home. And then she said, "My husband would not let me work."

In the gathering on 10 December 2022 in the *Life in Anadolu Cooperative* in Okmeydanı, public announcement short videos of Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation were displayed. After the videos, a circle was formed by women, and it

[64]https://arastirma.disk.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Turkiye-Isci-Sinifinin-Gorunumu-2021-Iscilerin-Calisma-ve-Yasam-Kosullari-Ile-Kanaat-Deneyim-Ve-Tutumlari-Alan-Arastirmasi-Sonuclari-web.pdf According to the DİSK-AR 2021 Worker Outlook report, with the amendment made in the civil law in Türkiye in 1922, the article that a woman should get permission from her husband to work was abolished. However, traditional value judgments continue in this regard. In the research, when asked whether women should get permission from their husbands to go to town, 4 out of 10 workers stated that men are the family's sole decision-makers. Along with these traditional judgments, the number of those who display a more egalitarian attitude with the transformed family structure in Türkiye is not to be underestimated. In the studies, it was seen that 57.2 percent of women thought that a woman did not need her husband's permission to work, while this rate remained around 30 percent for men

was asked which video women were affected by or wanted to talk about. Helin, who escaped from the war in Syria in 2013 and migrated from Damascus to Okmeydanı, stated that the video in which the husband did not let his wife work.[65] She said:

> "I felt the same thing. I was affected. It was the same with my husband. Since we came here, he said you would work after the children's birth. I cared for them. It continued like this. Time spent. It has been nine years. I have not said it before anywhere; it is the first time I am talking about it."

The video that Helin mentioned explained economic violence. The woman in the video explained to her boss that she did not want to continue working. Then her husband appeared and said, "See, it was not that hard. Smoothly, you will sit at home and take care of your children. I will take care of you; I will take care of my house".

As seen from the quotations above, women in Okmeydanı want to work in these jobs despite all the insecurity and lousy working conditions in these garment workshops. First, they need to contribute financially to the family's livelihood. However, although women's husbands work in precarious, low-paying jobs in or outside the neighborhood, men prevent women from working. On the one hand, they cannot work because their spouses do not allow them, and on the other hand, their child, elderly, or broader family care responsibilities also prevent them from working. The reasons that put women back from working in Okmeydanı are not different from the data on women's participation in working life in Türkiye.[66]

Women struggle with poverty in different ways and social assistance is an important alternative. The moments that women think about their encounters with the state are both during the violent clashes and the social aid application and obtaining processes. Reflecting on their encounters with the state, women in Okmeydanı find

[65] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDEzqBwbf8o

[66] According to TUIK's July- September employment statistics, 33% percent of women do not participate in employment due to being busy with housework. What is not exciting but striking is that the number of men who cannot participate in working life because of housework is 0. See https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Isgucu-Istatistikleri-III.-Ceyrek:-Temmuz-Eylul-2022-45656:

themselves at a crossroads of conflicting emotions, a sentiment encapsulated by Feyza's nuanced expression. Whether navigating the complexities of neighborhood clashes or engaging with the state through the social aid application processes, women like Feyza grapple with a spectrum of feelings. The gendered lens through which these interactions are viewed adds an additional layer of complexity, as women navigate the dual roles of beneficiaries and critics, acknowledging the state's support while also harboring frustrations and occasional anger. This intersection of gender and state interactions forms a crucial aspect of the narrative, unveiling the intricate dynamics that shape women's perceptions and experiences within the Okmeydanı community. Fatma stated: "(Referring to the social aids) "Sometimes, I think "state" takes care of us, so it is nice to give the devil her due. Sometimes I am angry with it."

In the given quote, Feyza serves as a central figure illustrating the pivotal role women play in accessing support from the state. Her reflections on the aid application and acquisition process reveal a complex emotional landscape shaped by economic hardships and a desire for better opportunities. Feyza articulates a sense of melancholy, expressing a poignant wish for alternative employment options for her husband, lamenting the lack of insurance, and underscoring the precariousness of their current situation. The acknowledgment of her husband's unsecured employment highlights the vulnerability inherent in their circumstances, as she contemplates the potential benefits of an insured job for their long-term security. Her reference to unsuccessful attempts with İşkur adds another layer to her narrative, portraying the challenges faced by individuals seeking alternative employment avenues. The concluding question about the distance of the help, while conveying a pragmatic view, also encapsulates the complex mix of gratitude and frustration experienced by

individuals navigating the aid process. Feyza's account, therefore, serves as a microcosm of the broader experiences of women in Okmeydanı, portraying their agency in seeking state support while also shedding light on the structural challenges and emotional toll inherent in the process. Women are the leading actors in getting support for aiding the state. Feyza explained her feelings about the aids and the process from application to obtaining the help:

> "What it feels… it feels different… We feel so sad; we wish there were a job… my husband had a better job… for example, my husband does not have insurance; he works without insurance… It would be better for us if it were an insured job. He could retire now; God forbid, we have nothing if something bad happens. How many times have I been to İşkur? They did not call. So it is better, though; how far is this help?"

She stated that her husband wants to do something other than apply for aid. She said:

> "He says, 'Let it go.' He says, 'We do this every year.' He is partially right—partially out of necessity. If I didn't need it, would we bother going? Would other people bother? If they don't need it, no one would bother with it.The state also knows you need it. The officers come and look at the house. They look after the house every year…We renewed the application documents. The officer arrives and sits at home, asking questions such as: What salary do you get, how much money do you get, how much do you spend? I said… If we do not need it, would people go?

In examining the various facets of women's interactions with the state, particularly in the contexts of neighborhood clashes and the intricate processes of social aid acquisition, a nuanced narrative emerges within the fabric of Okmeydanı. The testimonials, exemplified by voices like Fatma's, illuminate the multifaceted role of women as both recipients and negotiators of state support. The expressed gratitude and occasional frustration underscore the complex relationship between women and the state, revealing a dynamic interplay of agency, vulnerability, and resilience. As primary actors in accessing aid, women navigate not only the bureaucratic intricacies of the application processes but also the structural challenges and emotional toll inherent in seeking support. These narratives unravel the gendered dimensions of

state interactions, showcasing the intricate web of emotions, expectations, and pragmatic considerations that define women's experiences in Okmeydanı.

8.6. From neighborhood watch to state intervention: Protecting 'the girls of the neighborhood' and KADES's role in combating male violence

In the interviews, physical male violence consistently emerged as one of the most frequently mentioned challenges faced by women in the district. Women often referenced instances of domestic violence they had personally experienced, as well as incidents involving their mothers and neighbors. Domestic violence is a recurring theme in personal experiences and incidents involving relatives and neighbors. Güzide, who was working as the hairdresser in the district, defined herself as one of the actors who knew everything about the domestic life of her customers, saying,

> "The most pressing issue in the neighborhood is domestic and psychological violence women exposed to. Everyone here knows each other, and we've heard the most unsettling stories. This has almost turned us into feminists. The question remains: should we speak up or remain silent? Lately, we've encouraged women not to stay silent, but sometimes, we still choose to hold our tongues."

One of the areas that facilitates learning about women's everyday struggles is the district's hairdresser. Cantek (2017) stated that it is a place where body politics and gender roles are established, destroyed, re-established, and tasted. During the interviews with the women, the violence they experienced and its effects on them confirmed what Güzide had heard and known.

The experiences of male violence has been explained as a factor women chose to be political. Feyza expressed the violence her mother was subjected to and how this affected her perspective on equality and politics:

> “My father was often physically abusive towards my mother; he had the strength to do so. What troubled me the most was the disparity. If there was a

> mutual fight, it might seem balanced. Outwardly, my father appeared passive outside but dominated my mother at home. Witnessing that imbalance made me realize the lack of equality has haunted me since childhood". (Feyza)

Then she narrated how the violence her father inflicted on her mother angered her:

> “I came close to taking my father's life twice. If no one had intervened, I might have gone through with it; such was my enthusiasm to end him. But when he fell ill and lost his faculties, he wanted to live with me, seeking solace. I couldn't bear to live with him. He hoped to be with me, yet his death came during my refusal. I felt like I had already mentally severed our bond. I don't feel remorse. I'm not saying he deserved such fate, nor would I say he didn't. If he had been with me, I would have confessed to the doctor within days that I was on the brink of ending him because of our tumultuous relationship. There's so much pent-up anger.” (Feyza).

Then she narrated the violence her husband exposed to her:

> “I got married at 18, and by the same age, I became a mother. What did I gain? It was as if I sought shelter from the rain only to find myself amidst a hailstorm. I was trying to escape the turmoil at home, not necessarily the pressure but the constant strife. I thought getting married would provide an escape, a peaceful home. And even though I was still in the same neighborhood, I hoped for a change in my world. But it remained unchanged; I merely traded one form of strife for another. My husband tried to assert dominance over me. I resisted; he would retort that I knew what I was getting into. When I was working post-marriage, the disparity in our earnings hurt his ego, especially when I earned more. And then there was the societal pressure, the constant murmurings of neighbors, and the need to conform to their expectations. I felt like I was constantly battling it all." (Feyza)

Feyza's narrative above displayed the imbalance of power and aggression in her family life. Her emotions fluctuated between anger and estrangement toward her father and her husband. And her experience showed the complexities of domestic relationships and the emotional turmoil it caused.

The domestic violence women exposed was implied as a fact of everyday life that stands in the middle, but no one wants to speak up about it. It was seen as an unfortunate and unspoken norm. In some cases, reaching the narrative of women’s experiences of domestic violence was compelling. By referring to domestic violence, Gonca said, “We get used to it. We do not even mention about it.”

Male violence women were exposed to at home and in the district, and women's protective strategies against male violence shaped their interactions with district politics. In their narratives about the past, women often perceived revolutionaries as protectors against male aggression in the past. When talking about her interaction with the revolutionaries in the district, Sena, who is 60 years old and has been living in Okmeydanı around 45 years, said that revolutionary youths promised to protect her from her husband, but they did not do so. She is still looking for an answer to why they did not protect her:

> “The revolutionaries assured me they'd protect me from my husband and stand by me. I aided them, shielding them from the police. They vowed to intimidate my husband, even to attack him. Yet, they left and never returned. I often ponder if perhaps they were apprehended."(Sena)

In Sena's recollections, the district's revolutionaries are still cast in a protective and nurturing role. Consequently, she wonders why, years ago, revolutionary youth failed to honor their commitment to shield her from her husband’s violence. Revolutionary groups would verbally or physically confront men who abused their wives, constantly gambled, or were habitual drinkers. Wives' complaints about their husbands' gambling and drinking at these venues often instigated beer house raids.

Thus, when examining the role of revolutionary politics in women's memories, it consistently appears as a guardian, shielding women from their husbands' violence while upholding the district's moral values. In essence, past politics in the district is recollected as a sanctuary for women escaping male aggression. The district's public spaces allowed women to distance themselves from domestic abuse.

The question that emerges is how women currently perceive the influence of district politics on the male violence they face today. The absence of former revolutionary figures from the district's narratives suggests a shift in the area's socio-

political landscape. While the intersection of public and private spaces remains significant, the district's politics no longer offers the protection against male violence it once did. Instead, it has transformed, sometimes restricting women's strategies against male violence, even increasing their vulnerability, or offering new avenues for resistance. What happens in the district often finds its way into homes, and conversely, household matters often spill out into the streets and influence local politics.

> “In the past, men might have abused women behind closed doors in their homes. Outdoors, I'm unsure if they could act the same way. There was always someone on the street who might have reacted directly. Now, people think, 'Why should I involve myself in such situations?” (Gonca)

Gonca's observation underscores how the evolving political dynamics and shifting local atmosphere in the district influence male behavior towards women. She posits that with the absence of revolutionary groups and familiar faces in the area, men feel more emboldened to perpetrate violence against women openly on the streets. In her view, the revolutionary youth once protected many women in the district, shielding them from male aggression. Thus, in her perspective, today's streets offer less protection and security for women against male violence. This observation was similarly noted by Maclin (2022, p.6), who alluded to a similar dynamic, suggesting that streets became the primary environment for young men to amplify their sexual assertiveness. Their study portrayed these streets as a liminal space between larger societal structures and more localized male-dominated spaces. Another woman, who was born in the district and still lives in there, said:

> "For a period, I felt incredibly brave, and I believe that courage was instilled in me by Okmeydanı. When we were younger, even with undercover police around and the possibility of Molotov cocktails being thrown, we'd venture out fearlessly into the night. We might encounter a protester back then, but now we might face a rapist. I was never afraid of the protester because I knew they meant me no harm; their issue wasn't with me. In contrast, a rapist would pose a direct threat." (Yeşim)

She contrasts the past with the present, noting that where revolutionaries once stood, there are now "rapists" in the district. Expanding on this comparison between the old and the new streets of the district, she remarked:

> "In retrospect, the protests back then never bothered me. The streets felt more just, and so did the people. There was this sense of 'neighborhood girl.' Being the girl of the neighborhood meant they tried to protect you; they didn't want anyone speaking ill of you." (Yeşim)

In the narratives above, women depict the home as an unsafe environment due to the violence they endure, with no local mechanisms to shield them. Furthermore, the streets once deemed relatively safe, now carry the constant risk of male aggression. This blurred line between public and private spheres became a point of discussion during the pandemic, as public areas were perceived as potential sanctuaries for domestic abuse. This sentiment is also echoed in the graffiti and wall writings throughout the district. In Figure 52 below, a slogan is written, “Staying at home is not enough to stay alive, “ by Women's Defense, a country-wide feminist group. The slogan above highlights the poignant reality: while women might remain indoors to protect themselves from the pandemic, it doesn't necessarily place them beyond the reach of danger. Although this thesis does not delve extensively into pandemic-specific factors, it's imperative to emphasize that the "stay at home" directive not only amplified domestic violence during that period but also shed light on the inherently dangerous nature of houses for women.



Figure 52. The slogan "Staying at home is not enough to survive" is written on the wall of a building[67]

At this point, one of the most pressing questions, recalling the 'police repression' section, is why women feel insecure at home and on the streets, even with the prevalent presence of so many police officers and in a place where *Kalekol* exists. During field research, when women spoke of violence inside the home and from men on the streets, they did not mention the presence of the police in the district as a protective actor. Their ambivalent remarks about the presence of the police, or what can be termed as the police's contradictory practices, were only mentioned in the context of why the police intervene with political movements and groups but do not protect the district from drugs.

However, when looking at the news regarding the police's security measures, it is also noted that along with public order practices, the expansion of KADES, an application by the Ministry of Interior, has been implemented within the district. Since the opening of the fortress in 2017 in the district, there has been a marked increase in the police's public order and security measures. Starting in 2019, these

[67] The photo was taken by the author.

measures have incorporated information about KADES. During these public order operations, the strategies and procedures established by the state to counter violence against women were relayed to the district's women by the police.

KADES is an official mobile application launched by the Ministry of Interior in May 2018. It was devised to counteract harmful acts such as violence and harassment faced by women and children. It is the foremost emergency response tool the General Directorate of Security crafted. Through smartphone alerts, the system provides swift access to the Women's Emergency Support Notification System. Thus, once registered with their Turkish ID numbers, women can directly reach the 155 Police Emergency Call Center by activating their device's location information with a single push of a button during emergencies. The KADES system promptly dispatches the closest team or patrol to intervene and halt any ongoing victimization of women (Elmacıoğlu, 2022). In contrast to other regions, where KADES promotions were presented as standalone informational events, in Okmeydanı, the introduction of KADES and the information disseminated to the district's women were intertwined with security checks involving a significant police presence, including several scorpion units. As suggested by the headline of a news article, it's apparent that these briefings occurred during heightened security measures, with entrances and exits to the district restricted. As depicted in Figure 61 below, on one of the district's bustling inner streets, a female and a male police officer distribute brochures to local women, introducing them to KADES (Kaya, 2021).

Just as in the prior news coverage, the promotion of KADES in June 2021 coincided with police security searches in the district. The news article led with the headline, "The police searched the place thoroughly", and was immediately followed by the subheading, "Women were informed about KADES." This sequence

underscores the intertwined nature of heightened security measures and the initiative to inform women about protective services in the district.



Figure 41. Female and male police officers introducing the KADES application to women passing by in the neighborhood

The explanation in the news is the following:

> "Today, between 14.00-17.00, the Şişli District Security Directorate teams conducted patrols in the Okmeydanı District, focusing on informing residents about KADES. The police teams made 1,148 inquiries and briefed hundreds of women about the KADES application. The officers, through ring and foot patrols, were stationed at four fixed points on various streets and avenues. Their primary goal was to promote the KADES application, which protects families and prevents violence against women. As part of their efforts, they made 1,148 inquiries, identifying one individual with an outstanding warrant. Moreover, the teams educated 326 women about KADES and distributed informational brochures."

The mediators did not mention anything about KADES. In the cooperative, during the event held on November 25th for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, there was also no mention of it. Different leftist organizations in the neighborhood are holding information seminars on combating

violence against women and mechanisms to which women can apply. As revealed by Figure 56, at the Life in Anatolia Cooperative event, Purple Roof Women's Shelter's public service announcement videos were watched, and a conversation was held with women.



Figure 42. Women are watching a video about the violence against women shown by Purple Roof Women's Sheltering[68]

Although it was difficult for women to share their experiences of violence in this event held at the cooperative, the fact that these videos have only recently appeared, that such events have not been held at the cooperative for a very long time, that such events have not been held at the cooperative for a very long time, actually shows that it is now more challenging to carry out activities related to the lives of women in the neighborhood and their daily lives.

As shown in Figure 57 below, the feminist struggle of leftist organizations is also on the neighborhood's walls, although some were later crossed out like other

[68] The photo was taken by the author.

slogans. Historically, the district's politics have been seen as a “solution” to domestic violence or physical gender-based violence women are exposed to. It can be interpreted as the “spatiality of women’s lines of flight” (Bowstead, 2011). Therefore, it is explained that when women go to the street or somewhere within the district, it becomes a strategy to escape domestic violence.



Figure 43. The obscured wall graffiti reads: "Masculinity kills, feminism saves, women's defense.”[69]

In Okmeydanı, the street dynamics influenced by protests and clashes impact women's interactions with public spaces. These disturbances curtail women's social activities. The volatile political atmosphere of the district amplifies women's vulnerability to male aggression. The evolving relationship between women and politics in the district is evident in the changing role of revolutionary politics. Historically, the district's politics were seen as a remedy to domestic violence. The strategy of seeking solace in the public spaces of the district as an escape from

[69] The photo was taken by the author.

domestic violence remains consistent, emphasizing the blurred lines between public and private realms.

8.7 Conclusion

Chapter 8, delving into the distinct ways women navigate the political evolution in Okmeydanı, offers insights into the underlying reasons behind their multifaceted experiences. In tracing the complex terrain of Okmeydanı's political evolution through the lens of women's experiences, this chapter unravels the intricate interplay between shifting socio-political dynamics and gender-based violence (GBV). The multifaceted narratives woven by women in the district illuminate the nuanced impact of depoliticization on their daily lives. Rather than perceiving depoliticization as a linear trajectory, this exploration foregrounds the ambivalent subjectivities of women, emphasizing that their journey from politics to depoliticization is an ongoing, dynamic process shaped by their multifaceted identities and experiences in the sociopolitical landscape.

Historically, leftist factions were perceived as protectors of women in Okmeydanı, shielding them from male aggression and domestic violence. However, with the diminishing presence of these groups and the district's shift toward depoliticization, the protective structure against male violence has waned. Streets, once seen as refuges from household strife due to the protective watch of revolutionary groups, have transformed into perilous terrains marked by increasing male aggression. The absence of traditional protectors has inadvertently heightened the vulnerability of women to domestic violence.

Conversely, some women favor the move towards depoliticization, appreciating the decline in political violence and finding the state machinery more approachable in their everyday lives. However, this shift has its own set of

challenges. The unpredictable nature of street politics has increased the vulnerability of women, placing them at the crossroads of public disturbances and personal hardships. The fluctuations in street politics intensify women's gender-based vulnerabilities and experiences of violence, leaving them navigating the line between public confrontations and domestic challenges.

The impact of the district's transformation on women's experiences with GBV, particularly during the shift from an era of politicization to one marked by depoliticization, is revealed through narratives capturing intensified domestic responsibilities, health concerns, economic coercion, and struggles accompanying urban renewal. The traditionally gendered dimensions of contentious politics have gravitated towards municipal avenues and street-level bureaucracy, signifying a contraction in public spaces available to women for resisting gender-based violence. This transition underscores the need for nuanced approaches to address the evolving challenges women face in Okmeydanı amid the complex interplay of political and gender dynamics.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

As the result of a thorough investigation into Okmeydanı's depoliticization, this thesis captures the intricate relationship between state practices and inhabitants. Okmeydanı, with its founding story in the 1960s, its political organization, its cultural codes, its economic structure, its population, opens a ground to examine the relationship between the state and society and how authoritarian neoliberal state practices manage everyday life in a political space through different means. The previous chapters provide a detailed analysis that uses many levels of research, including historical analyses and in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, to reveal Okmeydanı's history. The study's assertions are supported by numerous district-wide researches. Historical evaluations of contentious politics and state actions between the 1960s and 1980s and the 1980s and 2002 give a framework. After then, an examination of contentious politics and protests using excerpts from newspapers and interviews shows how the political climate in the district has evolved.

Analysis chapters that followed, which paint a picture of the political situations of the past and present, examined in detail repression of the state through police violence and cooptation of the state through social assistance and urban transformation regime. After that, I examined how both the state practices, the resistance against it and the depoliticization it created are experienced and perceivecdby women in a ambivalent perspective. The study contributes to depoliticization literature through three key analyses: depoliticization under authoritarian transformation, the impacts of neoliberal authoritarian state interventions on depoliticization, and a gendered analysis of depoliticization.

Examining this urban margin presents a unique story with different combinations of class, space, gender and ethnicity. On the one hand, tells the story of how the authoritarian neoliberal state practice in Turkey tries to control the most marginal part of the society through penal and welfare practices, and how both these state practices and the impact of these practices on the neighborhood are experienced by the women in the neighborhood, and on the other hand, Additionally, this research provides a platform to discuss and compare examples from Turkey and globally, focusing on the neoliberal state's mechanisms to control marginalized groups, gender inequalities resulting from authoritarian neoliberal practices, and grassroots responses to them.

The central argument of the study is how cooptation and repression are used by the state to seize political space on the urban margins. The initial inspiration for this study came from the observation that, on the one hand, police violence dominates the district's atmosphere of conflict, oppression and fear are rampant, and all evaluations of the district are filtered through the prism of police violence; on the other hand, the story of poverty is marginalized and ignored when examiningthe state's use of violence as a control mechanism and the mechanism of police violence. But given the state policy as well as the opposition in what is considered a working-class area with high rates of unemployment, insecure employment, and informal labor, is it really possible to draw conclusions outside of this political-economic context?

When examining the state-society relationship in these spaces or the intervention of the state, the analysis independent of its class structure ignores the story of how it became a historically contentious space. In other words, when we look at the story of its establishment, we are talking about the establishment of Alevi

poor worker families who migrated from their villages, in a period when there were no welfare state practices and they built their own solidarity networks and leftist organizations were also active in this process.

Unquestionably, significant elements include the bond between Alevi identity and leftist politics as well as the rising rate of police violence. However, this neighborhood was near labor pools when it was first built. However, when companies relocated outside of the city owing to the prevalence of the neoliberal labor regime, this area later became places of informal labor. Furthermore, although these unofficial labor regions drive people in these places even further into poverty and instability, they also produce dynamic, flexible spaces in terms of population. To sum up, the contentious structure of the district is born out of the interaction of state policy, class and identity.

In other words, this shows that the issue of social assistance, which has so far been ignored in terms of Alevi working class neighborhoods and has been mostly associated with places where the AKP receives votes, functions as an important tool in controlling Alevi working class neighborhoods. It also shows that we need to analyze these neighborhoods not only through the repressive arm of the state but also through dual practices, two hands of the state.

Both the literature on state practices and the state at the urban margins tell us that we need to examine how the state governs urban margins through dual mechanism. Morgan and Orloff (2017) argued that a variety of actors contribute to the establishment of the state's social control and authority. A variety of social actors and institutions also contribute to the power and social control of the state. A multitude of diverse players working together form the state's authority and social control rather than just one particular institution or process. The media, corporate

enterprises, municipal and federal governments, civil society organizations, and other social groups are examples of these actors. Diverse mechanisms work together to establish and uphold the state's authority and social control. This lends credence to the notion that numerous hands contribute to the state's existence rather than just one central authority (Morgon & Orloff, 2017).

Bourgois's(1996) study indicates the impact of economic and political transformation on the increasing inequalities and exclusions within the cities. He analyzes the 'dynamics of social marginalization and alienation" (Bourgois, 1996; p.58). The history of marginalization of El Barrio, the clashes between Puerto Rican population and Mexican migrants, and the ethnographic method Bourgois applied in the inner-city talk about more than the area itself.

Loic Wacquant's studies on urban outcasts and suburban studies in the early 2000s displaythe narratives that consider both penalization and welfare policies together. The was the first to look at neoliberal governmental activities in low-income districts. In "Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality" work, Wacquant (2008) examines the effects of neoliberal policies on impoverished communities by conducting a comparative analysis of these neighborhoods across many nations.

Advanced marginality is a new kind of marginalization that is common in post-industrial cultures, according to Wacquant (2008). Complex social, economic, and political forces are at play, with marginalized people struggling with issues including unemployment and insecure employment as well as the erosion of established employment arrangements. A transition from concentrated urban poverty to diffused pockets of deprivation throughout urban landscapes is marked by advanced marginality. Neoliberal policies, urban restructuring, deindustrialization,

and globalization all have an impact on it. This idea provides a framework for comprehending urban poverty in the modern era, highlighting the necessity of thorough investigations that take into account numerous structural factors.

In his study "Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity" (2009), Wacquant explores the evolving role of the state, balancing coercion and redistribution. He highlights the shift from the welfare state to a penal state, where poverty is increasingly regulated punitively in the neoliberal era. This transformation is situated within the historical context of neoliberalism's rise amid financial crises and challenges to welfare state foundations. As neoliberalism gained ground, market-oriented policies eroded welfare structures and social investment, leading to a focus on punitive measures to control poverty and social instability. Wacquant attributes these changes to broader trends like deindustrialization and globalization, arguing they've weakened social safety nets and expanded government control over marginalized populations.

Wacquant often discusses the interplay between welfare and penalization, core tenets of neoliberal state policies, to elucidate how the state governs society. He contends that the neoliberal state utilizes both welfare programs and criminalization to maintain social control. Welfare policies encompass aid-oriented practices such as social assistance and job training, while penalization policies involve harsh security measures like police surveillance and punishment, primarily targeting the poor and marginalized. By employing these tools simultaneously, the neoliberal state aims to sustain social order and foster dependency among impoverished groups. Welfare programs provide financial support, increasing reliance on the government while pacifying social discontent, while punitive measures ensure social control and quell potential uprisings. In essence, Wacquant argues that welfare and punishment

policies work hand in hand to reinforce the state's authority over different societal segments, with welfare fostering dependency and punitive measures exerting pressure on marginalized groups.

At this point, the question of why the studies on Alevi working class neighborhoods focuses ignores the redistributive effect of state power while solely focusing of coercive practices of the state arise. While significant police pressure is evident, the state's "second hand" in regulating day-to-day affairs is essentially being disregarded. Right now, the main problem is that oppositional identities and social aid aren't taken into account together. Stated differently, the AKP administration exploits social assistance as a political instrument, dividing resources among its own politically divided constituencies. Social aid has always been seen by the AKP as an electoral tactic, with a special emphasis on areas where the party finds supportive. It is frequently stated that significant social help is given in areas of dispute, even though the relationship between contentious politics and social assistance has lately been studied. On the other hand, new research has examined the connection between social assistance and controversial politics and protests in Turkey. Through communities in Turkey dubbed as "Islamist neighborhoods," the transformation story of marginalized, underprivileged regions with their distinct political and sociocultural identities was investigated.

The story of the integration of a marginal space into the system through different mechanisms of the state was also examined in a study in Okmeydan, Turkey, with a different political structure and ethnicity. Cihan Tuğal (2009) examines how Islamic movements and ideologies in the Middle East have been incorporated into the existing political and economic systems, allowing for the continuity of capitalist structures. He uses the term “passive revolution” to describe

instances where ruling elites manage to absorb and co-opt potentially revolutionary movements or ideas, channeling them into more moderate and manageable forms. This process helps the existing power structures adapt to the challenges without facing a radical overthrow. As emphasized by Tuğal (2009), ruling elites can sometimes absorb and direct social movements that are potentially radical.

Actually, both identity-wise and ideologically, the region that Cihan Tuğal examined, Sultanbeyli, is not a district similar to Okmeydanı, but the methods used for integration into the system show similarities. In this context, "evolution into manageable forms" refers to the process by which societal changes, even if not revolutionary, can take on more controlled and manipulable structures. I explore how the experiences of the Alevi working class, in the absence of a revolutionary upheaval, underwent a transformation that allowed them to be governed and managed within the existing system. Through police repression and social assistance, this space and its inhabitants were actually made more manageable.

In Cihan Tuğal's works, municipalities, playing a central role in this process, can support efforts to absorb and direct social movements. Municipalities can impact society through service delivery and social assistance. This includes activities such as providing healthcare services, educational programs, or economic support. Such services demonstrate that municipalities are effective tools for meeting societal needs. Municipalities possess the potential to influence political processes by encouraging and directing societal participation. This involves efforts to channel the energy of social movements into more manageable and institutionalized channels. Municipalities can influence societal change processes by supporting ideological transformations or providing political guidance. This can be effective in shaping the values, norms, and political goals of the community. By intervening in various

aspects of daily life, such as urban planning, infrastructure development, or security policies, municipalities can impact societal change. These interventions can influence the dynamics of society.

The mobilization created by the AKP through social aid was analyzed through spaces and groups that are mostly Sunni and likely to have ties with the party. In "Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare", Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward (1971) argues that welfare policies not only respond to poverty but also serve a structural function in society by regulating and controlling the poor. Piven and Cloward contend that welfare, far from eradicating poverty, can contribute to the creation of a dependent class, perpetuating cycles of reliance rather than fostering empowerment. Therefore, why don't we think about these perceptions and governing mechanisms that will be created in society with social aid for oppositional and poor spaces? The story of the integration of a marginal space into the system through different mechanisms of the state was also examined in a study in Okmeydan, Turkey, with a different political structure and ethno-religious identity. They highlight the intertwined nature of welfare with social control mechanisms, asserting that these programs act as a social safety valve in times of economic and social unrest. Piven and Cloward (1971) explore the political consequences of welfare policies, suggesting that changes in these programs reflect broader shifts in political and economic ideologies.

Based on these inquiries, this study looks at the ways in which authoritarian neoliberal state practices use a variety of presence and absence strategies to try and maintain control over this volatile space. These strategies include repression, instilling fear, and simultaneously depressing the populace and making them dependent on government assistance. It describes how these actions are intended to

destroy all local civic movements and turn social solidarity into atomization. In order to fully understand the complex dynamics of state involvement and its effects on marginalized populations, more research is required. This will help to illuminate the various social control and resistance mechanisms ingrained in welfare state policies.

When it comes to the results of the diverse practices of the state at the urban marins, it is explained as the depoliticization of the district. In her last article, Yonucu (2023) argues that contrary to studies that suggest that alienation and politicization decreased after police violence, anti-police and political attitudes continue in another Alevi working class neighborhood. Her research that focused on the activist in the district ends in 2016. She says that the resistance stories of the past, which she calls inspirational hauntings, shed light on the current struggle. In the interviews I conducted, on the other hand, the resistance in the past is more often compared to the present and leads to a more critical and negative view of the present. Yonucu's research focuses on the function of martyrdom in offering moral advice for everyday tasks. Her ethnography shows how the political perspective of martyrs influences people's daily life and is reflected in place names, books, artwork, music, graffiti, celebrations, and subjects of discussion among youth. She explains the revolutionary past as an important reason behind inhabitant’s political choice ethically.

Yonucu's view that resistance in these neighborhoods continues to exist, especially in relation to past loyalty and commitment, can also be interpreted through my analysis of the recent street protests in the neighborhood and the question of whether we can evaluate it as the arrival of street protests and resistance with the Istanbul contract protests in the neighborhood and the protests in the Fetihtepe Urban Transformation process. Leftist organizations, particularly those aligned with the

women's movement, initiated sporadic protests during the overall decline in political opposition. However, interpreting these protests requires a nuanced approach. The Istanbul Convention protests offer another facet, focusing on gender-based violence prevention.. However, while echoing the spirit of re-politicization, even these protests face challenges in sustaining long-term impact. On the one hand, they signify the persistent practices of the women's movement amid depoliticization, showcasing localized manifestations of societal resilience. On the other hand, these protests can be viewed as depoliticization within the neighborhood, marked by their limited mass support, feeble impact, and lack of sustained continuity. Another illustrative example of depoliticization is the protests against the Fetihtepe Urban Transformation Project that commenced in the summer of 2022.

Despite the project's long-standing presence on the neighborhood's agenda and the initial mass involvement, the protests faced an abrupt end under intense police pressure during forced evictions. Subsequent efforts, including actions, institutional visits, and meetings, failed to sustain momentum. The district witnessed similar depoliticization dynamics in response to potential projects in other neighborhoods, characterized by resident migration, indifference, police coercion, and the state's cooptation of specific groups.

In a setting where cooptation and repression are commonplace, listening to neighborhood members' experiences without a gendered lens will yield partial and skewed results. This intricacy is made clear by women's narratives, which encourage academics and decision-makers to take a more all-encompassing approach to regional political changes. While state practices—police pressure preventing women from participating in "everyday mundane life" by limiting their movements outside and trapping them in cycles of poverty and insecurity, along with struggles with

forms of violence like caregiving, male violence, and being denied the right to work—also contribute to gender-based disparities, we can examine how politicization and depoliticization have produced gender-based outcomes separately. Through the lens of women's experiences in Okmeydanı, the gendered consequences of depoliticization become apparent beyond conventional conceptualizations. The study highlights how crucial it is to approach depoliticization and post-politics from a gendered perspective, contending that it would be impossible to conduct a thorough examination of the changes to public space without taking gender-based violence and inequality into consideration.

To conclude, acknowledging the limitations related to the district's structural position and challenges in exploring inhabitants' experiences under an authoritarian regime and during a pandemic, the study recognizes the potential intensification of depoliticization in the district during the research period. While rooted in academic discourse, this research also engages with the lived realities of Okmeydanı's inhabitants, navigating the intersections of politics, space, and gender. As the study concludes, it opens avenues for future research, urging scholars to delve deeper into the complexities of depoliticization under authoritarian regimes and its profound impact on gender dynamics within urban margins. Okmeydanı's political metamorphosis challenges the notion of a linear political trajectory. Instead of viewing depoliticization as a singular, static transformation, this study advocates for a more nuanced understanding, recognizing political shifts' evolving and ambivalent nature.

As the study concludes, it highlights the necessity of further research on state practices and depoliticization at the urban margins under authoritarian regimes. The nuanced interplay between politics, depoliticization, and gender in shaping the

trajectory of spaces like Okmeydanı opens avenues for future research. Policymakers, activists, and researchers are urged to consider the nuanced dynamics that define contemporary political landscapes and contribute to meaningful interventions for a more inclusive and politically engaged future.

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 17.06.2021-17977

T.C.
BOĞAZİÇİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER YÜKSEK LİSANS VE DOKTORA TEZLERİ ETİK İNCELEME KOMİSYONU
TOPLANTI TUTANAĞI

Toplantı Sayısı	:	18
Toplantı Tarihi	:	17.06.2021
Toplantı Saati	:	13:00
Toplantı Yeri	:	Zoom Sanal Toplantı
Bulunanlar	:	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Yasemin Sohtorik İlkmen, Prof. Dr. Ebru Kaya, Prof. Dr. Fatma Nevra Seggie
Bulunmayanlar	:	

Ezgi Murat

Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler

Sayın Araştırmacı,

"Kent çeperlerinde şiddetin gündelik deneyimi: Okmeydanı örneği" başlıklı projeniz ile ilgili olarak yaptığınız SBB-EAK 2021/37 sayılı başvuru komisyonumuz tarafından 17 Haziran 2021 tarihli toplantıda incelenmiş ve uygun bulunmuştur.

Bu karar tüm üyelerin toplantıya çevrimiçi olarak katılımı ve oybirliği ile alınmıştır. COVID-19 önlemleri kapsamında kurul üyelerinden ıslak imza alınamadığı için bu onay mektubu üye ve raportör olarak Ebru Kaya tarafından bütün üyeler adına e-imzalanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla, bilgilerinizi rica ederiz.

Prof. Dr. Ebru KAYA
ÜYE

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr.Ebru KAYA
Raportör

SOBETİK 18 17.06.2021

Bu belge 5070 sayılı Elektronik İmza Kanununun 5. Maddesi gereğince güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.

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