

MAKING OF COMMUNITY IN THE MARGIN:

THE CASE OF OKMEYDANI

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## Thesis Abstract

Fırat Kurt, “Making of Community in the Margin: The Case of Okmeydanı”

This thesis aims to understand the experience of living in the margin in Turkey through the accounts of the inhabitants of one of marginal districts, Okmeydanı. To achieve this purpose, this work focuses on a community in Okmeydanı, whose members identify themselves the local people of Okmeydanı. Taking the shared understanding of the members of this community as the point of departure, this thesis analyzes the making of community in the margin and scrutinizes two common issues in the narratives of the local people of Okmeydanı: public representations and degeneration.

In this direction, first of all, how the local people appropriate, renounce and reproduce the representations of marginal districts within different public spheres is examined. At the end of this part, it is concluded that the marginality and normality constantly produce each other and the marginalized learn how to marginalize others to imagine their own community and their own norms. Then the other common issue, namely degeneration, is subjected to an analysis focusing on the transformation of built life in the district. This part of the thesis examines how the local people narrate the transformation and what kind of function this narrative structure operates. By analyzing what kind of themes can find a place and what kind of themes cannot in the narratives of degeneration, this part of the thesis concludes that the sense of belonging to Okmeydanı and to the imagined community of its local people is produced to stage political demands within the discursive frame allowed by neoliberalism. The study comes to an end by a critical remark that speaking of marginality and imagining alternative politics requires a reflection on the ways of speaking against hegemonic understanding in order to avoid reproducing the hegemonic language.

## Tez Özeti

Fırat Kurt, “Marjinde Cemaat İnşası: Okmeydanı Örneği”

Bu tez, Türkiye’de marjinde yaşama deneyimini, marjindeki semtlerden biri olan Okmeydanı’da yaşayan insanların anlatıları üzerinden anlamayı amaçlıyor. Bu çalışma, bu tür bir anlamayı mümkün kılmak için Okmeydanı’nın yerlisi olarak kendilerini tanımlayan bir cemaate odaklanıyor. Bu cemaatin üyelerinin ortak anlayışını çıkış noktası olarak alan bu tez, marjinde cemaatin inşasını ve Okmeydanı yerel halkının anlatılarındaki iki ortak meseleyi, kamusal temsiliyetleri ve yozlaşmayı, tahlil ediyor.

Bu doğrultuda, öncelikle yerel halkın farklı kamusal alanlardaki marjinal semtler temsiliyetlerini nasıl benimsedikleri, reddettikleri ve tekrar ürettikleri inceliyor. Bu bölümün sonunda marjinalliğin ve normalliğin sürekli birbirlerini ürettikleri ve marjinalize olmuşların kendi cemaatlerini ve bu cemaatin normunu tahayyül edebilmek için başkalarını nasıl marjinalize edebileceklerini öğrendikleri sonuç olarak belirtiliyor. Daha sonra bir başka ortak mesele olan yozlaşma, semtin fiziksel yapısının dönüşümüne odaklanan bir analize tabi tutuluyor. Tezin bu bölümü yerel halkın bu fiziksel dönüşümü nasıl anlattığını ve bu anlatının yapısının ne tür işlevleri gerçekleştirdiğini inceliyor. Bu bölüm, ne tür temaların bu yozlaşma anlatısında kendine yer bulabildiğini ve ne tür temaların bulamadığını analiz ederek Okmeydanı’na ve semtin yerel halkının oluşturduğu hayali cemaate aidiyet hissinin, neoliberalizm tarafından belirlenmiş bir söylemsel çerçevede siyasal taleplerin dile gelmeleri için üretildiğini iddia ederek sonuçlanıyor. Bu çalışma marjinalliği konuşmanın ve alternatif siyasetleri tahayyül etmenin, hegemonik dili yeniden üretmekten kaçınmak için, hegemonik anlayışa karşı konuşma yolları üzerine yoğun bir biçimde düşünmeyi gerektirdiği yorumuyla sonlanıyor.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The margins in the cities are exceptional places in the sense that they contain the traits of social and political characteristics of a larger scale, the scale of city, the scale of nation or even the scale of globe. Marginal space is where the general is concretized and practiced. Yet what makes them margin is the articulation of the generality (national ideology, the project of modernization or whatever at stake in your concern) within singularity, regarding that it is disturbing or challenging to employ political and cultural projects to some places, i.e. margins (Das and Poole, 2004; Asad, 2004; Ferme, 2004; Üstündağ, 2005). In this sense, margins are thought with the state as Asad says “the places where state law and order continually have to be reestablished” (Asad, 2004: 279). However, it would be wrong to assume that the state mentioned here is a unitary body which merely consists of institutions and agents. On the contrary, the boundaries of the state is not fixed and the significance of margins lies in its potential to analyze the different ways of determining membership and inclusion, inside and outside, the law and the exception (Asad, 2004: 278). Thus the state here starts to refer the law and the general through which the hegemonic relations within society are constantly reproduced and transformed<sup>1</sup>. Accordingly margins are not simply geographical places whose boundaries are determined but anywhere in which these different ways of determination are

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<sup>1</sup> Here I use the term hegemony with reference to the reading of Gramsci by Roseberry: “which is not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination” (Roseberry, 1994: 361)

contested and negotiated. Margins give us traces of a general perspective because the problematic articulation thereof render what is the general distinctive and apparent, which would be latent otherwise (Das, 2004).

However, marginal places are generally sought by scholars in postcolonial contexts, the peripheral areas of cities, or sometimes in socially excluded groups and ethnicities. But today the most promising analyses of anthropology are coming from scholars having an eye searching for the marginality within least expected places, the most ordinary places from where many people do not see anything interesting, rather than from scholars whose field is quite striking and promising (Pred and Watts, 1992; Pred, 2000; Comaroff, 2001) . The reason behind this phenomenon is, as far as I can comprehend, the anthropological research after the 1980s aims to uncover the mechanisms of society and its political signification in everyday life by focusing on the concrete experience of people. This theoretical and practical turning from savage places to modern urban space gave us necessary tools to think the ordinary with theoretical understanding accrued in the intellectual history of modernity. However it does not mean that the margins are out of date, or that they have been stripped of their importance; on the contrary, they still are significant for the comprehension of the social and political constitution of human life. The difference is that anthropology does not necessarily seek its object of concern in the marginality of margins but in the mundane of the margins, which makes the margin as marginal. It is because an exception, a margin, is not an exception or a margin due to its “margin”ness; such an explanation would be tautological. Its mundane carries its discontent and struggle within itself, and what an anthropologist should look for are the effects of its ordinary in the process of being and staying a margin. The effects of the practices and circulation of information in the margin (in Okmeydanı for my thesis) create the

meaning of the life in margin as they do in any other place (Lee and LiPuma, 2002). From this perspective, anthropological research in general and this study in particular focus on the functions and effects of the circulatory movements of things and words rather than focusing on relations of causality between past and present, the events and their aftermaths (Portelli, 1991). Sociological and anthropological explanations focusing on the historical and structural causalities have a propensity to penetrate a reality outside of the field, a reality which is not questioned but whose effects are taken for granted. From this perspective, my purpose in this thesis is not to inquire the factuality of the narratives; I consider the narratives as a production of truth and reality in their effects no matter whether they are based on true or untrue beliefs, reality or unreality<sup>2</sup>. As Portelli points out:

...Therefore, there are no 'false' oral sources. Once we have checked their factuality and credibility with all the established criteria of philological criticism and factual verification which are required by all types of sources anyway, the diversity of oral history consist in the fact that "wrong" statements are stil psychologically 'true' and this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts (Portelli, 1998: 68).

However, to analyze narratives and practices in the margin is not an easy task. The components of social and political life in the margin are so dispersed and smoothed out that the traits which give us the clues to understand the social and political in general are not apparently distinctive, and for most of the cases these

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<sup>2</sup> Turkey is a country which verifies and supports this claim frequently. The historical debates concerning political issues like the Armenain question or the Kurdish question strive to cover or uncover the historical factuality of the events as causes of those questions on the one hand. However, on the other hand –at the level of everyday life- the historical or so called scientific studies are not regarded as departure points for people and most of the time ordinary citizens are in favor of appropriating the official discourse as real (Armenians as mass murderers i.e.) and act as if those claims were true without hesitation. In accordance with my concerns here, the practices of people, whether they are based on truth or not, operates in its socio-political reality and those practices can be our departure points to understand the inner dynamics of the social and political situation today (such as everyday fascism in Turkey).

traits are those one can consider as the most normal aspects of the life in a margin. In this sense, the anthropological turn has two effects on the research agenda of the scholars: first, it opens a new way of field understanding; modern cities and their inhabitants begin to be a subject of interest. Before, they were taken to be in the field of sociology, for they were “normal” in contrast to the “savage”; they need to be commented on and analyzed rather than to be uncovered. Secondly, those who look at the margins for a better understanding of the general (city, nation and globe) began to channel their concentration towards the normal within the margin, and find out that there is no normal at all but just margins everywhere in the sense that sustaining the norm and transgression of the law are inherent to every power practice regulating out lives. (Benjamin, 1969; Agamben, 2005; Schmitt, 1985). Thus what seems most normal and most expected can be the locus of marginality through which we can read the constitution of the general and its norm, the presence of the state and the dynamics of socio-political life in Turkey.

Given this frame, the reader is likely to think that I, as an anthropologist, had such a conviction and perspective that during my fieldwork I had detected and immediately interpreted the traces of everyday life in Okmeydanı and its historical narration by inhabitants. To tell the truth, it is not an easy task and I had failed to see what is in front of me for a long time. Indeed what is most visible eluded me and stayed invisible for months. The reason is simple; people want to talk to me about how the urban transformation project secretly aims to destroy their district, how the state wants to degenerate and corrupt their children, the kind of people who came there and made Okmeydanı an uninhabitable place, how “the real” inhabitants (“the”

local people)<sup>3</sup> had lost their sense of solidarity, what happened to their old way of living etc. I had literary drowned by a bulk of issues which seemed to have first degree priority for a research conducted in Okmeydanı. However, taking them as facts of Okmeydanı did not bring me anywhere. Their accounts, no matter how important they were, were hardly providing me with the necessary insight for understanding the general. All the issues (public representations, Kurdish migration, apartmentalization, inflow of strangers, loss of security and intimacy etc. ) were narrated as exceptions exclusive to Okmeydanı. Only after my debates with Sirman and my friends, I began to suspect the exception in the narratives and its functions. Rather than taking the narratives as facts, I approached the issue from a critical perspective and focused on the function of the narratives in the context of daily practices which I had the chance to see during my participatory observations. Thereafter the idea of an analysis of collective belonging to the margin and making a community of the real *Okmeydanlı* in order to understand the norm and its margins in Turkey was shaped. Consequently, this thesis became an attempt to inquire how the local people of Okmeydanı (as a margin) define their belonging to the district, how the local people make that belonging unitary and constitute a community of *Okmeydanlı*, what kind of spatial, social and cultural work operate as the denominators of this community, which functions they carry today and what kind of dialogues they create with respect to the norm (the norm of general, the norm of the public, the norm of the state).

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<sup>3</sup> From now on, I will call my informants “the local people” because those who settled in Okmeydanı –specifically in Mahmut Şevket Paşa Mahallesi- around the 1970s call themselves as “the local people” or “the real *Okmeydanlı*”. These people consider themselves as the original inhabitants of the area because all the multistory buildings in the district were constructed on the lots of their *gecekondu* houses. Considering that I am interested in how these people constitute a collective belonging to the place, the imaginary community of the real Okmeydanlı will be my subject in this study.

Before stating the structure of the thesis and its method of analysis, I have to explain what kind of data I will use. In the field, I have encountered testimonies about the past of the district, its social and political history, its problems, and the present situation of social and political life in Okmeydanı. In the second chapter, I will focus on how the local people get into relations with the different representations of Okmeydanı in different public spheres and how those relations produce specific kinds of belonging to Okmeydanı, which make possible to speak of the community of the local people. I will not focus on the whole spectrum of representations in that part but I will use the examples which are in accord with the narratives of the local people. In other words, I will exemplify the different public representations which are only mentioned in my field research. This is in line with my aim to finding out how local people produce their imaginary community through their dialogical and dialectical relationships with different public spheres. In the third chapter I will use the narratives focusing on the “degeneration” of Okmeydanı. Those accounts will provide me with the necessary interpretations by the local people concerning the past and the present situation of the district. There are many continuities and disruptions regarding everyday life in the district from its first settlement in the 1960s to the present. There are very limited archival materials to verify my field research about the matters I am analyzing and it would seem, *prima facie*, a defect in an analysis using the historical accounts of informants. I do not intend, however, to use testimonies about the past of the district as a factual base upon which I make my arguments. Rather I purpose to approach historical accounts as a way of imagining and remembering the earlier ways of the constitution of communal and public aspect of social life in the margin. I will take the historical accounts as facts, not because their factuality is out of question but because what is important for me is that the

historical accounts in which intimacy and security had a functional and operational role in social life have its own functions today. No document can prove the exact functions and qualities of that. Nevertheless, the new social structure of the district has its own discontents about the current way of life in the district, its own interpretation of the transformation. Therefore the traces of Okmeydanı before the 1990s provide me with an instrument to understand social life and politics in Okmeydanı today.

To understand Okmeydanı with these concerns, I have focused on a specific part of the district, namely Mahmut Şevket Paşa Mahallesi. I chose that quarter of the district for several reasons. Firstly, Mahmut Şevket Paşa is a place which is still considered as the heart of Okmeydanı in the sense that most of the political activities take place in this part. More than 20 political organizations (nearly all of them) are located in this part of the district. Secondly, the composition of the people in this part is much more heterogeneous to the extent that one cannot explain the social and political condition of that quarter of the district merely through ethnicity, religious sect or place of origin. It is especially important for me considering that this diversity allows me to refrain from essentialized analysis attributing the marginal position of the place to origins of people (Alevi, Kurds, people from Tunceli, etc.)<sup>4</sup>. I am not rejecting the significance of such social and political characteristics; yet to show the complexity of life in a margin, Mahmut Şevket Paşa provides me with an opportunity of speaking marginness from many different registers. They are not only enriching my understanding but also they make possible to speak of the same with alterity. It is

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<sup>4</sup> In Turkey, there is a general tendency to attribute reactive and dissident activities to the people from specific place of origin, ethnicity, and religious sects. For example, Alevi and their districts are considered as dissident or revolutionary as a reaction to the discrimination they are subjected to because of their religious views. I believe such perspective would be restrictive our understanding with regard to the conflictual nature of hegemonic struggles in which everyone can be subjected to the violence of the norm, can be excluded or discriminated.

the very reason why I will not specifically annotate my field entries from which register they are speaking (whether they are Alevi or Sunni, Kurdish or Turkish, from Sivas or Erzincan). I specifically chose the intersection points of narratives from very different registers in order to transcend the essentialized identities and to comprehend a particular identity<sup>5</sup>: being from Okmeydanı (*Okmeydanlı*), belonging to the community of the real *Okmeydanlı*. Although Okmeydanı is a district larger than Mahmut Şevket Paşa, this part of Okmeydanı is conceived as “the real” Okmeydanı and the people from Mahmut Şevket Paşa as “the real” *Okmeydanlı*. It is the reason that thereafter I will call Okmeydanı when I speak of Mahmut Şevket Paşa, and *Okmeydanlı* (from Okmeydanı) when I speak of the people living in Mahmut Şevket Paşa. The last reason that I focus on this part of the district is that the place witnessed one of the most comprehensive transformation of built environment in the 1990s. In all Okmeydanı, Mahmut Şevket Paşa is a quarter in which the transformation from Gecekondu houses to multistory buildings had been experienced most rapidly and most radically. “Apartmentalization” was largely completed within only a couple of years. New buildings replaced old *gecekondu* houses with nearly 6 or 7 stories within an apartment building. Thus the architectural transformation along with the social and political life in the district was quantitatively experienced in Mahmut Şevket Paşa at its limits.

At this point, it is necessary to give the history of Okmeydanı briefly and then I will explain how I am going to utilize this historical context for my argumentation. The first settlers of the district were Albanian farmers but as there is no Albanian in the district anymore, my story starts with the second comers, those who migrated from Sivas, Erzincan, Giresun, Ordu, and some other rural areas. This migration took

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that all identities are essentialized and performative at the same time. However, for my concerns here, an identity bound to a specific place, viz. Okmeydanı, and its marginal connotations are the main denominator to understand “the norm-al” with “margin”.



place between the 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s. In Turkey this period witnessed a huge population inflow to urban areas from the countryside and the way in which these migrants settled into the city turned into an issue which has been discussed for the last three decades. These shanty towns have been called as “*gecekondus*” and they have accommodated those who came to the city with relatively little capital. Taking the fact that these people were the poorest of the urban population and most of them belong to Alevi sect into the account<sup>6</sup>, revolutionary movements were strong in most of the Gecekondu areas. In many places, like Armutlu, Sarıgazi, 1 Mayıs Mahallesi, Örnektepe etc. revolutionary groups organized land distribution for settlers, kept local order, organized political movements (to demand title of deeds, infrastructure, wage increases etc.), and even provided infrastructure (including sewage systems and water supply). Within this context, these marginal places were seen as “places where even the police could not enter” and they were part of a dissident (or as some call revolutionary) public. The social and political life there had/has been influenced and shaped through the codes of this public. This way of living did cease to exist, “places where even the police could not enter” were practically eradicated after the 12 September 1980 coup d’etat. Yet after 1984, the revolutionary groups began to recuperate though they did not yet manage to achieve their erstwhile straight. This period can be considered as a return of “normal” life in the margin and “the places where even police could not enter” were once again places state forces could hardly enter. Around the 1990s, the *gecekondus* of İstanbul faced a threshold; many districts had the opportunity to have title deeds and to build apartments in place of *gecekondus*. It is striking that places like

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive explanation of the relationship between Alevi sect and political dissidence, see: Engin, İ. (2004). Aleviliğin/Alevilerin “ideolojikleştirilmesi-marjinalleştirilmesi çabalarına bir örnek: radikal bir Alevi kadro hareketi ve dergisi Kızıl Yol”. In Engin, İ. (Ed.), *Alevilik* (pp. 531-545). İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi.

Okmeydanı in which people could not obtain title deeds had entered the stage of construction as well. And it was a really fast architectural transformation that within two or three years the whole silhouette of the district had changed. This entailed a whole series of human relation -private, communal and public- that also underwent a transformation. New ways of living, new approaches to the problems of the district and its inhabitants, new ways of interpreting the general (of İstanbul, Turkey or the Globe), novel ways of conducting inter-personal and social relations began to develop.

In order to analyze the community of the real *Okmeydanlı*, a specific social, political, and historical belonging to the area, I will search for the common elements in the narratives of local people, which, pace Bauman, provide the shared understanding necessary to imagine any community (Bauman, 2001a: 11). However, the commonality (shared understanding) does not only unite but also distinguish and define its limits with this distinction. Although Benedict Anderson seems to refute my argument with excluding face-to-face communities (proximate and intimate communities) from his articulation, at the end he makes a similar remark and states:

...All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. (Anderson, 1991: 6)

Thus, taking commonality as an essential part of any collective belonging and that of making/imagining communities, I assert that there are two common narratives which discuss several issues. The first one is the narration about the different public representations of marginal districts in general and Okmeydanı in particular. The other is the issue of degeneration which connects the history of Okmeydanı to its

present condition. In the second chapter, I will discuss the concepts of public sphere and representation and try to show their significance to understanding to imagine a community in the margin. I will argue that the representations within two different public spheres (“the” public sphere and dissident public) determine the modalities of belonging to that community by appropriating some of these representations, renouncing some others and reproducing those representations in order to create their own norms and margins.

In the second chapter, I will focus on the narratives about “degeneration” in Okmeydanı. I will argue that the issue of degeneration is narrated in a way that works as a bridge between the past and the present of Okmeydanı. Furthermore the ways of questioning the degeneration at the local level determine the framework in which people comprehend the transformation of the district. This framework consists of two focal points: security and intimacy. I want to analyze the local interpretations of the loss of security and intimacy through close examinations of the narratives in which some other social and political aspects of the transformation are excluded. I want to understand the function of this selective narration and problematization and subsequently I want to expose the functions of those ways of articulating the issue. I want to emphasize the agency attributed to the state in the narratives of degeneration vis-à-vis the agency of the local people and try to explain to whom those narratives address. For this purpose, I will show the dialogue between the narratives of degeneration and that of the urban transformation project which threatens the houses of local people as well as their social lives. I will argue that the degeneration discourse in Okmeydanı is an attempt to attribute a pejorative agency to the state not to reject the hegemony of the state policies, but to appropriate it in a certain way. From that point, I want to uncover the traces of a neoliberal weltanschauung

(worldview) which penetrates the every aspect of daily lives and shapes what we can speak and to whom we can speak.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MAKING OF A COMMUNITY IN A WORLD OF REPRESENTATION

In this chapter, I want to analyze the narratives of local people about the ways of representing Okmeydanı and other marginal districts within two different publics; the dissident public and “the” public. The aim of this chapter is not to understand different representations of different public spheres. I will not particularly analyze, in this sense, the divergences and commonalities of public representations. My departure point is not the materials display various representations regarding the marginal districts; I am basically interested in how local people see those representations and what kind of reactions they give concerning the issue. The purpose of this approach is to understand and examine the dialogical relationship of the local people of Okmeydanı with respect to two different public spheres. I assert that such examination can pave the way for an interpretation focusing on the different definitions of being “of a margin” and the ways of belonging to a margin (Okmeydanı for the present work). Furthermore, such analysis, if I will be able to do it, can also illustrate the simultaneous constitution of the norm and the margin within the social in Turkey and more importantly functions between the norm and the margin help the way the dialogical structure constitutes both. Consequently I will not look for the “factual” or “real” representations of Okmeydanı and other marginal districts; I will analyze and exemplify only the representations mentioned by my informants in Okmeydanı.

At the end of the chapter, I will assert that the circulation of particular public representations in Okmeydanı produces a definition of “the local people of Okmeydanı” through dialogical responses to and interplays with those representations. I will assert that belonging to the margin are constituted in two ways: First, the local people in a dialogue with the dissident public’s representations appropriate some representations (like labor, struggle, and morality) and deny some others (as the enemy of the state or potential militants) and thus attribute distinctive normative traits to themselves. The second part of this constitution, I contend, is the dialogical and dialectical relation of the local people with “the” public. I will try to show that this relation is a way for the local people to be articulated to the norm of “the” public (read as the norm of general or the norm of the state) by two means. First, the local people demarginalize themselves by disproving the representation spaces like their circulating within the public sphere (like the marginal districts as a source of crime, that of terrorism, the inhabitants of *gecekondus* as invaders etc.). Secondly the local people in Okmeydanı mimic and reproduce the marginalization strategies of “the” public and implement them to marginalize their own others (Kurds) thus producing a belonging with exclusion.

First of all, however, I have to clarify some of theoretical tools I will use in this chapter. The term representation is crucial to understand its function within the public sphere. The term is generally defined as the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language (Hall, 1997: 17). Yet the issue has been discussed to the extent that the term does not simply consist of a strict linguistic structure in which referee and referent are placed in a secure way. Representation is rather a relation, pace de Lauretis (1987: 3). This relation is a scheme through which meaning is produced. I am referring to Mitchell’s argument of representation here

(Mitchell, 2000). To understand ways of belonging to the margin through dialogical relations of the local people with different public spheres, it is important to show that representations of the different public spheres, following Mitchell, have two functions which are also relevant for my case. On the one hand, the representation implicitly denies its own reality; there is always a possibility of a lack, a possibility of misinformation/unreality, that is, the possibility that “it is not the case”. On the other hand, “in asserting its own lack, a representation claims that the world it replicates, projects, reorganizes, enacts, or endows with meaning and structure must be, by contrast, original, material, immediately present, complete in itself, without lack, undelayed, filling its own time and space –in a word (what we imagine as) real, colonial European modernity stages the endless set-up that pictures and promises us this complete, unmediated, self-present, immediate reality” (Mitchell, 2000:18). This is important for me in the sense that different public representations endow the local people of Okmeydanı with a stage in which they can assert their truths, the truth of Okmeydanı. The truth produced within a relentless oscillation between what is represented (that is the truth) and what is not represented or misrepresented (that is untruth) provides the local people with the norm of that truth; the norm of belonging to Okmeydanı as a marginal district. Thus those representations in different publics, in a dialectical manner, determine the terms and modalities through which the local people can talk and create a specific mode of belonging. However, I have to add that the creation of the belonging I will investigate here is a process closely related with the concept of public sphere.

In 1962, Habermas’s *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* was published and the horizon of the social sciences changed to the extent that it became nearly impossible to write something about the circulation of ideas and events in a society

without referring to that monumental work. For my purpose, the concept of the public sphere is important for it is a mode of relating rather than a structure or a space. It is significant, at least theoretically, because the mode of relating does provide the participants reflexive and self-creating circulation which can produce the active participation of the people in the production of ideas and opinions. Yet the Habermasian concept of the public sphere attributes a characteristic which constantly criticizes state policies to that reflexive circulation and production by positing the (bourgeois) public sphere against state authority (Habermas, 1991). From that point, Habermas describes the public sphere as the condition for reasoned debates and communicative rationality. The role of power and that of hegemony in the public sphere are seriously disregarded by Habermas and this deficiency is rigorously analyzed by many scholars (see Kelly, 1994 and Calhoun, 1992). However the relevance of the term for an analysis of contesting discourses is also displayed. The formation and subsequent reproduction of hegemony in the public sphere are showed in accordance with successes and failures of public staging –“conflictual emergence of the public sphere”- (Gambetti, 2005). Regarding the Kurdish question in Turkey, Gambetti argues that the public sphere provides a ground in which

that antagonism [the Kurdish question] may indeed hinder contact between conflicting parties, but it nevertheless imposes itself as a *common* reality to both sides. The reality of conflict simultaneously separates and connects the two parties... Political and social actors find themselves generating new practices or responding to new demands. (Gambetti, 2005: 17).

Although the emphasis Gambetti puts on the relatively productive side of the public sphere is important, what concerns me more here is her point that the public sphere generates and provides a common reality with respect to the particular



articulation of that reality by different sides. In my case, the local people of Okmeydanı speak and narrate within a scheme produced by different public spheres. This scheme has a specific regime of truth –a “common” reality- through which the local people in Okmeydanı define themselves and create a belonging to the locality. However, my case is different than Diyarbakır in which a certain recognition of the Kurdish issue is produced “without any reasoned debate taking place between the parties” (Gambetti, 2005: 69). The local participation to the public sphere is not reflexive, as Warner would put it (Warner, 2005), because the local people of marginal spaces have no chance to make their voices heard in the mainstream media and even they can speak publicly, they have to borrow the language of that public (Champagne, 1999: 51). Instead the local participation to debates consists of appropriations, renouncements and reproduction of the modalities of representations and reproduction of norms which belong to different public spheres. However, it can be argued that the community of the local people in Okmeydanı has its own public sphere which produces the circulation of information in making and delimiting their community. Yet such analysis needs to explain the precise mechanisms of this circulation. My field research shows no evidence that the coffee houses or meeting places operate this function at level of the local people. There is no, as far as my observations indicate, spatial or printed mediators in making of such public. Accordingly I cannot find any reason to come up with a term like the public of Okmeydanı, but I can focus on the community of the real *Okmeydanlı* whose commonality lies in the historical background and narrative construction of some issues, especially representation and degeneration. The impacts of the different public spheres come forth at this point. The issue of representation appears in the narratives as a kind of dialogue in which the local people speak with different public

spheres and their representations. Although there are no reverberations of the local people's voice within these public spheres, there is still a dialogue which is important for my concerns here. This dialogue is an imaginary conversation between the local people and the various representations about them in different public spheres. It is imaginary in the sense that the local people speak as they are speaking to these public spheres as if their voices are going to be heard. Yet this dialogue is far from being pointless considering the fact that it produces a common language and a shared understanding for the local people. This shared understanding makes possible that these people can identify themselves as the real *Okmeydanlı*, who are real addressees of the representations in different public spheres. In this sense, I believe it is important to trace the common elements of the narratives in order to understand the imaginary community of the local people.

Now, I have to clarify a distinction about different public spaces, which I have already used up until now: "the" public and dissident public. As much as it seems to follow the distinction between "the" public and "a" public made by Warner, my usage of the definite article "the" is different than his. He uses the distinction as:

*The public is a kind of social totality. Its most common sense is that of the people in general. It might be the people organized as the nation, the commonwealth, the city, the state, or some other community...*

*A public can also be a second thing: a concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public. (Warner, 2005: 65-66)*

I instead, use the article "the" to signify the mainstream media and its representations of Okmeydanı and other marginal districts. It is "the" because the local people refer to the main stream media as the common sense of people in Turkey, generality. On the hand I use the adjective "dissident" to signify a leftist

discourse about marginal districts (*gecekondu* places, whether they are dissident or not). Speaking in the terminology of Warner, they are both part of “the” public.

However, as I am not interested in different public spheres per se but in the dialogue that the local people create with those publics, my departure point is how the local people in Okmeydanı name and conceive different publics. This is the reason why I can easily categorize several diverse discourses of different publics into two.

Because my informants, while speaking of the representations of marginal districts in general and Okmeydanı in particular, create the distinction between “the” public (as the main denominator of Turkish society, as generality) and dissident public (as how the leftist or revolutionary people speak of Okmeydanı). This is also because I prefer to refer to those publics in accordance with the direction of narratives I have collected during my field work. Now I can start my analysis with the representation of Okmeydanı with reference to the dissident public and examine what kind of effects it produces in Okmeydanı.

### The Representation of Okmeydanı in the Dissident Public

Though there is a remarkable similarity between Okmeydanı and other marginal districts, like Örnektepe, 1 Mayıs Mahallesi, Gazi Mahallesi etc. the inhabitants of the district are well aware of the fame of where they are living. Today, considering more than 20 different political organizations which actively conduct their operations within the district, Okmeydanı is still identified with adjective clauses like “place even police cannot enter”, “the liberated territory”, “the fortress of revolutionaries”. It is one of the most politically active districts in İstanbul and within a year countless demonstrations and press declarations have taken place there. Many politically

(in)famous organizations located their centre of operations within the district. However, the adjectives mentioned above are a source of controversy in the district; they are not taken as given or mere facts. Some inhabitants see them as pejorative exaggerations that these kinds of public representations render social and political life in the district harder to sustain or promote. The people rather tend to be more moderate in their political views unlike those who are favor of a more radical district in which political organizations conduct their operations more effectively. Yet the latter is also a group of people who believe these definitions are insubstantial and far from the real conditions of Okmeydanı. Their accounts show that the district is degenerate to such an extent that it is hard to call it revolutionary district or a liberated.

All these testimonies are about a particular representation: Okmeydanı as part of a dissident public whose concerns can be categorized within leftist or revolutionary movements. There is one more public representation of Okmeydanı. There are lots of news in mainstream media, which report events and conditions in marginal districts and comment on them. Of course there is not a strict border between different publics in Warner's sense; many usages, descriptions and idioms are transferred between these two spheres. For example the famous idiom "the place even police cannot enter" is used by both, yet the dissident public discourse uses it to mean "the place is relatively free from state repression and its consequent fascism" or "a discourse utilized by the state and *its* media in order to destroy that partial preservation from state violence". On the other hand, the public uses the same idiom to say "the place is under the control of terrorists or the place where the state has no authority". Thus the dialogical relations of the local people with these two different significations should be analyzed separately.

One of the recurrent tropes of the discourse of the dissident public in Turkey are marginal districts which are called “liberated areas”. It is not surprising that after the September 12, not only headquarters of revolutionary and dissident organizations, but also most of their offices were located in these areas. Considering that the coup d’état created a significant regression in revolutionary movements, many other districts in Turkey and especially in İstanbul could no longer serve as a base for the operations of leftist organizations. Many district like Gültepe, Örnektepe or Ümraniye, which were once considered as fortresses of revolutionaries, became inaccessible for their political operations. As a reaction, revolutionary movements relatively intensified and condensed their activities in places where they were strongest and well established. Consequently, the revolutionary movements in Turkey now believe that a revolutionary civil war will pave the way for socialism and communism and marginal districts will be the starting point.

The gecekondu of big cities, those of İstanbul in the first instance, are the sites where revolutionary war is intensified. In a sense, gecekondu cities are cities wrought by civil war. Fascism is preparing for the civil war. All the gecekondu, all the poor cities are ours. In order to overcome this war, we should confine the enemy into the urban centers, by organizing the people of gecekondu to their smallest unit and creating the unity and solidarity of gecekondu.<sup>7</sup>

The above quote clearly shows that revolutionary politics and its dissident public have serious political expectations from marginal areas of İstanbul. These expectations of course come with representations regarding those areas. In the

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<sup>7</sup> “Mahalleler Bizimdir; Faşist Teröre Terk Etmeyeceğiz”, *Devrimci Sol*, June 1996: 8. "Başta İstanbul gecekonduları olmak üzere, büyük kentlerin gecekonduları devrimci savaşın şiddetlendiği alanlardır. Gecekondu kentleri bir anlamda iç savaş kentleridir. Faşizm, iç savaşa hazırlanmaktadır. Bütün gecekondu, bütün yoksul kentler bizimdir. Bu iç savaşı kazanmak için gecekondu halkını en küçük birimine kadar örgütleyerek, gecekonduların birlik ve dayanışmasını yaratarak düşmanı kent merkezlerine hapsedmeliyiz."

dissident public, the marginal places including Okmeydanı are represented in a particular way. As expected, the discourses of the dissident public examine the conditions of the marginal places and conclude that the inner contradictions of the logic of capitalism are most apparent within the margins of the cities:

There was some hinted meaning behind bourgeoisie's use of the expression of '*varoş*'. Because they see that the gecekondu areas are the places where the systemic crises are utmostly felt, the contradictions between the people and the establishment get sharpened at the very most and that these areas constitute the greatest threat against their power in the cities. What they have seen throughout the history of struggle in the gecekondu that took place for about 20-25 years browbeats them. It is not in vain that Sabancı spews out his grudge against the gecekondu at every turn.<sup>8</sup>

In this respect, Okmeydanı and other marginal districts are imagined as the locus of antagonism and as a result, these places, it is assumed, carry specific characteristics. They are defined as "poor" districts and workers' districts because the historical background of Gecekondu districts clearly shows that the immigrants from rural areas were employed as workers in factories and as low-ranking civil servants in state institutions and municipalities. Nearly all my informants in Okmeydanı, over 35 years old, had worked in such jobs. Their first political affiliations had been shaped by their working histories and the social life in Okmeydanı in which people shared similar work places and practices. Most of my informants over 35 state that they either had worked as civil servants (garbage men, truck drivers, construction machine operators, workers in the state economic enterprises etc.) or as workers in private shipyards around Haliç. Okmeydanı, as a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. "Burjuvazinin korkusunu dile getirirken "varoşlar" demesi boşuna değildi. Çünkü yoksul gecekondu bölgelerinin sistemin krizinin en açık hissedildiği, halkın düzenle çelişkilerinin en çok keskinleştiği yerler olduğunu ve iktidarları için kentlerdeki en büyük tehditi oluşturduğunu görüyor. Gecekonduların 20-25 senelik mücadele tarihinden gördükleri gözlemlerini korkutuyor. Sabancı'nın gecekonduculara her fırsatta kin kusması boşuna değildir."

part of marginal districts within discourses of the dissident public has been represented as an area of restlessness against capitalism and a place in which revolutionary communities exist. The expectations from Okmeydanı and its following representations within the dissident public can be categorized in three levels; I want to discuss these three ways of seeing Okmeydanı and the dialogical relationship of the local people with these ways.

First, the dissident public generally assumes and asserts a specific kind of history for the marginal district. This historical understanding constructs a legendary past for marginal districts, through which certain characteristics are attributed to similar places today and their residents. This perspective can be found in many leftist and revolutionary journals and bulletins. Considering that I am not interested in the different representation of such historical outlook within the dissident public but how dwellers of Okmeydanı see those representations, I will give you one of the quintessential examples of the historical narrations about marginal districts, which my informants constantly refer to.

After 1977, the poor people of gecekondus struggled with the state, had to clash with the state in order to construct a place to take shelter in, to protect her/his gecekondus against demolition, and for the provision of road, water, and electricity. And the revolutionaries have stood by these poor people who migrated from their hometown to arrive in cities, in search for a place to take shelter, and they guided the struggle of these people by organizing and educating. Whilst the people of gecekondus coalesced with the revolutionaries, the gecekondus neighborhoods became one of the prime targets of fascist terror. We can say that neighborhoods are the sites where anti-fascist struggle got most violent up until 12 September. The people of poor gecekondus, in spite of all the attacks and massacres from the state and the NAP (Nationalist Action Party, F.K.), faced up to pay the price and resisted with the revolutionaries, died as martyrs and refused to surrender to the fascist terror.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. "1977'lerden sonra yoksul gecekondus halkı başını altına sokacağı bir dam yapmak, yaptığı gecekondusunu yıkıma karşı korumak, yolu, suyu, elektriği için devletle mücadele etmiş, hep devletle çatışmak zorunda kalmıştır. Devrimciler de yerinden yurdundan kentlere göçüp gelen, başını sokacak

Though there are countless analyses like that, the account above, as short and brief it may be, gives us some clues how the dissident public narrates and imagines the histories of these places. The main emphasis of this narration is on how those people had/have struggled for their basic needs (housing, infrastructure, subsistence etc.) against state authorities and forces. This history of struggle points to the past and present of oppressed working class, how they fought against the forces of capitalism (the police, state institutions, fascist groups supported by state etc.), how they built a life against injustice and repression, and how they sustained that life without submission. Furthermore, the emphasis on “the price had been paid” signifies that the struggle within those districts had caused great losses which are both a source of pride and an impediment for forgetting their histories. As I have already explained, I am not questioning the factuality of this historical understanding, yet it has certain effects over the way local people talk and act.

Okmeydanı in this sense is specifically important. It was not build by political organizations like 1 Mayıs Mahallesi, Gülsuyu or Örnektepe; as one of my informants says “it is because the militants who had worked in those areas were mainly from Okmeydanı”. Though there could be some exaggerations in this point, all my informants agreed that in the period between 1970 and 1980 with reference to the role of Okmeydanı in revolutionary activities. Okmeydanı was a source of revolutionary militants active in other urban margins and a suitable place for military operations carried out by revolutionary organizations. In total, I have conducted over

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bir dam arayan bu yoksul halkın yanında olmuş, onların mücadelesine öncülük etmiş, örgütleyen, eğiten olmuştur. Gecekondu halkı devrimcilerle bütünleşirken gecekondu mahalleleri de faşist terörün başlıca hedeflerinden biri olmuştur. Diyebiliriz ki 12 Eylül'e kadar anti-faşist mücadelenin en şiddetli yaşandığı yerlerdir mahalleler. Devletin, MHP'li faşistlerin tüm saldırılarına, katliamlarına rağmen yoksul gecekondu halkı bedel ödemeyi göze alarak devrimcilerle birlikte direnmiş, şehitler vermiş, faşist teröre teslim olmayı reddetmiştir.”



50 interviews, formal and informal, with local people in Okmeydanı and I had the chance to observe that nearly all people who were actively engaged in political activities during that period went to other urban margins for political operations (house building, organizing people, providing infrastructure etc.). Moreover, as it could be expected from a place like Okmeydanı, there were many casualties among those who were revolutionary militants or at least sympathizers. The place is narrated by local people and other leftist or politically organized people as “a place exporting revolutionaries” (*devrimci ihraç eden mahalle*).

I have not met anyone who refuses this historical narration. But this does not mean that all the people in the district appropriate and accept this representation of Okmeydanı without hesitation. They are well aware how the dissident public sees Okmeydanı and its history of resistance. I have already mentioned that in the course of my field work I encountered two groups of people who have settled the area during the 1970s; one is more moderate in political view and the other is more radical (regardless of their ethnic and religious origin). The latter group is generally content with the historical background of the district and its appropriation by dissident public. One of them said:

Okmeydanı is still a source of praise in leftist circles. I mean, when one says Okmeydanı, you take a minute and think. It has a past, a prestige. Though, unfortunately, that heritage is disappearing bit by bit. Nevertheless, our youth have been politically more conscious than their seniors. No matter how much degradation occurs, they are still better than the others. And this is thanks to the revolutionary past of the neighborhood. Every family has some memory, perhaps a martyr.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Okmeydanı hala sol çevrelerde övgü kaynağı. Yani insanlar Okmeydanı diyince bir durup düşünüyor. Geçmiş saygınlığı var. Gerçi yavaş yavaş o miras da kayboluyor ya. Yine de gençlerimiz burada büyüdüklerinden siyasi olarak daha bilinçli oluyorlar. Ne kadar bozulma da olsa yine diğerlerine nazaran iyidirler. İşte bunun sebebi de mahallenin devrimci geçmişi. Her ailenin bir anısı belki bir şehidi vardır.”

The account is not exceptional in Okmeydanı; many organizations, former revolutionaries and sympathizers have told me similar things. The representation of Okmeydanı and its “legendary” resistance during the golden era of leftist politics are assumed to be a protection against the corruption of the district. It is a defense mechanism through which people can remember values, merits, virtues and principles of old social and political relations. Those people point that a lot of transformations and changes happened in the social and political life of Okmeydanı (which I will analyze later) and go on to say that the characteristics just mentioned were an outcome of old social relations. Nearly all people in Okmeydanı are in agreement with the statement that the transformation of social and political life is the main source of degeneration of the district and their “legendary” history of Okmeydanı was a product of that social and political structure. Thus this historical representation is a kind of prolongation of the old social relations which cannot be performed properly in the present conditions of the district. This is the reason why one of my informants with whom I am close told me “Okmeydanı is consuming its legacy”<sup>11</sup>. The people who are still politically active or strong sympathizers assert that the historical legacy of Okmeydanı is one of the few things that create a common ground among its residents and ensure their belonging to the district. The belonging in the margin is mediated through its historical connotations; heroism, prices that have been paid, clashes with the police and fascist groups, demonstrations attended by ten or twenty thousands people etc. According to the local people, there are not individual success stories in the historical legacy of the district, but their collective bravery and unselfish devotion. This narration removes the singular subjects from the

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<sup>11</sup> “Okmeydanı cebinden yiyor.”

scene and provides uniformity to imagine a socio-political life which is believed that once existed.

I have encountered many conversations between my informants; they talk about the old events they participated in. Old and middle aged people, especially men, go to coffee houses and tell the stories of past events to each other. Many young men and women have heard these stories maybe millions of times; they know who did what in those times in detail. This passage of information from a revolutionary generation to the new one is widely believed to be an important component of the dissident culture of the district. The representation of the historical legacy of the district within the dissident public provides a sense of belonging to Okmeydanı for the young generation. One of my young informants told me that;

It is a pride to be from Okmeydanı, wherever you go, political groups wonder about the neighborhood. They exaggerate the place. After all, they fairly learned it after the anti-NATO demonstrations. They suppose that all the people in the neighborhood are revolutionaries....And they also hold back a little bit in there. And the johnnies posing as revolutionaries play upon this. It's as if the struggle in the neighborhood is like the way how blades (*delikanlıs*) behave.<sup>12</sup>

Relatively older informants also point to the same tendency within youth culture in Okmeydanı and state that “young people here go outside and show off that they are from Okmeydanı”<sup>13</sup>. Thus based on the statements and accounts of the people with relatively radical political views, the historical representation provides two things: first, it works as a way of protection; through public affirmation, the old social and political way of living is affirmed and desired as an objective. It is said

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<sup>12</sup> “Okmeydanılı olmak bir gurur, nereye gitsen soruyorlar orada siyasetler nasıl filan diye. Çok büyütüyorlar gözlerinde. Bu Nato eylemlerinden sonra iyice tanıdılar zaten. Tüm mahalleliyi devrimci zannediyorlar... Bir de şey var, biraz çekiniyorlar tabi. Burada devrimci pozlarında dolaşan tiplerde bunun ekmeğini yiyor. Mahallenin mücadelesi sanki şey gibi delikanlı derler ya o tür.”

<sup>13</sup> “Buranın gençleri de gidip dışarda ben Okmeydanlıyım diye caka satıyorlar.”

that many components of this kind of life have lost (solidarity, familiarity, confidence etc.), yet it is still imaginable within the borders of the district. In this sense, it is not a coincidence that the slogan “another world is possible” is still one of the most effective and widespread slogans in the district. It is important considering that social structure is a framework which determines what is imaginable and what is not (Castoriadis, 2007; Taylor, 2002). The second function of the historical representation of the district is to bridge two generations. It is a cultural and historical transference from the past to the present. However, this transference is not the relocation of a certain subjectivity from a generation to another, but a way of creating new subjectivities within the same geographical area and that of agency which ensures belonging. They are new because the historical imagination, as it is, has a historical side; yet the current conditions of the district are far from being what they once were. I will analyze later at length the transformation of social and political life in the district, but for my purpose it should be added that present conditions of the district are radically different than thirty years ago and as a result do not allow to sustain old social and political practices. Thus through the affirmation of the dissident public, the historical narration of the district does not recreate old agencies and socio-political lives but creates a sphere of imagination in which local people use these modalities within the present condition of the district to make several demands.

The dialogical relations of local people with the historical representation of the marginal district within dissident/leftist public have another side. My informants with more radical political views point that telling the history of the margins creates certain expectations from these places. I will analyze these expectations later. For now, my concern is to talk about the discontents of these people. One of my informants has told me:

Informant: The leftists coming in from the outside have an envision of Okmeydanı. When they come here, they get disappointed. They suppose that here is like what it used to be in the 70s. Anyhow, what place is as before. Okmeydanı is still the best. Do you know how it is in Gazi, or in 1 May Neighborhood?

Fırat: I kind of how it goes in there. They are not that well.

Informant: Yeah. They suppose that life is what it used to be, but now the people and the relations are not like the way they were in the past. Now everybody is preoccupied with their own matters.<sup>14</sup>

The significance of this account is that the historical representation of the marginal districts assumes the continuation of old social and political structure within these areas. The analysis below from a revolutionary journal exemplifies this assumption:

Certainly, after all these experiences, the oligarchy can see that gecekondus are the achille's heel of the cities and that revolution blossoms here. It is why it takes relevant precautions from their front. It attacks using every method, every tactic. But all these are futile. Up until today, it has not been able to choke off the struggle of the people and it will not be able to stop it.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that the political unrest within marginal districts is imagined as something ahistorical and essential. Politically active people and strong sympathizers in Okmeydanı complain of this attitude in an indirect manner. It is indirect because they do not say the revolutionaries disregard the social and political transformation

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<sup>14</sup> "I: Dışardan buraya gelen solcuların kafasında bir Okmeydanı var. Buraya gelince hayal kırıklığına uğruyorlar. Sanıyorlar ki buralar 70lerdeki gibi. Neresi kaldı ki? Okmeydanı yine en iyisi, bir Gazi, bir 1 Mayıs Mahallesi ne halde biliyor musun?

F: Az çok biliyorum, pek iyi durumda değiller.

I: Ha işte. Zannediyorlar eskisi gibi hayat, ama eski insanlar eski ilişkiler yok artık. Herkes kendi derdinde şimdi..."

<sup>15</sup> "Mahalleler Bizimdir; Faşist Teröre Terk Etmeyeceğiz", *Devrimci Sol*, June 1996: 8. "Elbette bu kadar şeyi yaşadıkten sonra oligarşinin de gecekonduların kentlerin yumuşak karnı olduğunu, devrimin burada gelişip güçlendiğini görememesi düşünülemez. Gördüğü içindir ki o da kendi cephesinden tedbirler alma yoluna gidiyor. Her yöntemi, yolu deneyerek saldırıyor. Ama tüm bunlar yine de boşunadır. Bugüne kadar halkın mücadelesini durduramadı, bundan sonra da durduramayacak."

within Okmeydanı but they claim that “the revolutionaries do not just get it”. The example below can clarify this:

They don't know here, but they try to make politics in here. They suppose that here is the Okmeydanı of the 70s. And then, nobody gives a support. Five or ten people clamours and then begin to clash. By any means, they can't go down to the level of the people. I think this is the greatest drawback in Okmeydanı. There is a need for esteemed revolutionaries who are integrated with the people, just like in the past. Yet these types are always far off from the people. They don't know the problems of the neighborhood. Some people from outside the neighborhood told them about here and then they come.<sup>16</sup>

This testimony and its similar versions are prevalent among local people in Okmeydanı, no matter what their political affiliation is or which ethnicity they belong to. The structure of this way of complaining shows that the historical representation of marginal districts hides the fact that the mythical history of Okmeydanı was an outcome of specific socio-political and cultural relations within the district and the transformation of these relations made it impossible to maintain that structure. That is because they complain that the revolutionaries do not understand the needs of the district, they still try to pursue the old objectives like collective action against the oligarchy or capitalism of the USA. Thus the historical representation of the marginal districts has advantages and disadvantages for the social and political life in Okmeydanı: on the one hand it attempts to protect the ideals of the old socio-political structure and to provide the necessary belonging to those ideals. It reproduces a social norm which would otherwise be lacking in the

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<sup>16</sup> “ Burayı bilmiyor burada siyaset yapmaya çalışıyor. Sanıyor 70ler Okmeydanı. Sonra kimse destek vermiyor. Çıkıyorlar beş on kişi bağırıp çağırıyorlar, çatışıyorlar. Halka inemiyorlar hiçbir şekilde. Bence Okmeydanı'nda en büyük eksiklik o. Eski devrimciler gibi halkla kaynaşmış saygın kimseler lazım. Bu tipler hep halktan uzak. Mahallenin dertlerini bilmiyorlar, dışardan onlara bir Okmeydanı gösterilmiş geliyorlar.”

district. On the other hand, however, it fails to comprehend the current situation of the marginal districts.

There is a second group of people in Okmeydanı too: people whose political views can be categorized as more moderate and middle-of-the-road. They have no current affiliation with radical leftist parties and organizations even though many of them had personal histories with leftist groups in the district in this way or that. Most of them vote for the CHP (Republican People Party) today but then again they attend demonstrations against issues concerning demolitions in the district. *Alevi*s in this group do also attend demonstrations about the *Alevi* cause (like 2 July commemoration of Sivas Events, 12 March Gazi or 24 December Maraş). This second group is much more compromising in political views and they are discontented with how the dissident public sees and narrates marginal districts, particularly Okmeydanı. As nearly all people in Okmeydanı are struggling to obtain title deeds for their houses, this group supports the revolutionaries in actions and demonstrations about this issue. In this regard, the dissident public representation of the history of marginal districts is still important and necessary for the second group because the history of Okmeydanı as a struggle contains traits of a labor history. As I have shown above there is a significant emphasis on how the local people in marginal districts built their houses. The narrative is about how people endured much suffering and difficulty during the construction of *Gecekondu* houses. Furthermore it is also stated that the governments of the 1960s to the 1980s actively promoted the construction of *gecekondu*s at the margins of the city in order to supply necessary labor power for the newly emerging industry around big cities. This point has been examined by scholarly research and it is generally accepted as a fact (Şenyapılı,

1982; Danielson and Keleş, 1985; Keyder, 1987; Keyder, 2000). A local bulletin below exemplifies this understanding:

They came to İstanbul from all quarters of Anatolia. They began to work in the dockyards and factories along the shores of the Golden Horn. When nobody solved their sheltering problems, they solved them by themselves. When their incomes did not suffice to buy a dwelling or rent a house in the center of the city (in those times, our Albanian citizens, who stayed outside the city and farm the fields that are near the places where they work, put their lands for sale), these needy workers bought these lands and resolved their problems by constructing village-style houses. No one even bought a modicum of land without paying the price. For if there had not been the land mafia and the administrators of the times behind the Albanian citizens who sought the lands, the first 15-20 houses that were constructed 40 to 50 years ago upon these lands would have been pulled down. And if they had not allowed the construction of any other house, if they had asked 'where is your title deed', no one would have bought these deedless lands and current problems would not be alive. And then, who are really responsible for this situation?<sup>17</sup>

The local people in the district use this aspect of historical representation; to underline struggle in which they were once engaged to build their houses. This struggle connotes the value of labor and workers' rights. Thus the history of struggle legitimizes the property claims. All people in Okmeydanı appropriate this historical perspective and assert that their houses are rightfully their own property even if state authorities think otherwise. The discourse of the dissident public in this particular sense is important for the local people to speak to the state authorities, the general public, and the dissident public. However, the historical representation also creates

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<sup>17</sup> *Gelecek Dergisi*, Special Issue: 1, 2005. "Anadolu'nun dört bir yanından iş için İstanbul'a gelmişler. Haliç'in kıyılarındaki tersane ve fabrikalarda çalışmaya başlamışlar. Barınma sorunlarını çözen olmayınca kendi bildikleri gibi maddi güçlerine göre bu sorunları çözmüşlerdir. Aldıkları ücret konut satın almaya ve şehrin merkezinde ev kiralamaya yetmeyince (o zamanlar şehrin dışında kalan çalıştıkları iş yerlerine yakın tarlaları ekip biçen Arnavut vatandaşımız arazilerini satışa çıkarmıştır) bu ihtiyaç sahibi işçiler de bu tarlalardan yer satın almışlar ve içine köy usulü evlerini yaparak sorunlarını çözmüşlerdir. Hiç kimse bedelini ödemedi bir karış toprak almamıştır. Çünkü bu arazileri satan Arnavut vatandaşların arkasında arazi mafyası ve asıl sattıran o günkü yöneticiler olmasaydı, 40-50 sene önce bu arazilerin üstün ilk yapılan 15-20 ev yıktırılır, başka evin de yaptırılmasına kesinlikle izin verilmeseydi, o zaman "tapun nerede" diye sorulsa idi kimse bu tapusuz arazileri satın almaz, bugün bu sorunlarda ortada olmazdı. Bu durumda gerçek sorumlular kimlerdir?"



dissatisfaction among the people from second group. The theme of struggle used in narrating the history of marginal districts connotes not only the labor and toil of poor people in building their houses but also connotes the war waged against state authorities and police forces. Though they are considered as sacred and noble parts of the history by dissident public, many local people from the second group told me that the overemphasis on the conflict with the state has detrimental repercussions for political causes of the district, videlicet title deeds. They believe that when it is continuously said that people in Okmeydanı are in conflict with the state, it becomes harder to settle the issue of title deeds.

I don't have any doubt from their good faith. But there is always some news that goes 'Okmeydanı is good, Okmeydanı is well'. It is always the period of the past revolutionaries that are recounted. And then, somebody from outside would think that here is a hole of terrorists or the fortress of the revolutionaries. In fact, there is not such a thing. Okmeydanı has changed a lot, people changed a lot. But unwittingly, we probably led people to remember the old Okmeydanı and its struggles. And then the police and the state want to take revenge and always mark here as unfavourable areas.<sup>18</sup>

The above quote shows that people fear that the government and police might retaliate by not granting the deeds. Although the historical representation of the marginal districts is quite useful in a particular sense, its dialogical relation is not limited to these districts and the dissident public. Thi history is also heard and seen by "others" who do not share the same feelings about the issue. In light of the conviction that the general view of Okmeydanı is a contested matter, the second group is much more in favor of keeping calmness. They generally state that the

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<sup>18</sup> "Ben onların iyi niyetinden kuşku duymuyorum. Ama işte hep Okmeydanı şöyle, Okmeydanı böyle diye haberler çıkıyor. Hep eski devrimcilerin dönemi anlatılıyor. O zaman dışardan bakan insan şöyle düşünüyor burası işte terörist yuvası, devrimcilerin kalesi. Yok öyle birşey aslında. Çok değişti Okmeydanı, insanlar değişti. İşte farkında olmadan ama farkında olmadan insanların hep eski Okmeydanını işte mücadelelerini hatırlamalarını sağlıyoruz. Polis de devlet de intikam almak istiyor o zaman, burayı hep sakıncalı bölge belliyorlar."

revolutionary past and present of the district is a different issue from the “real” problems of Okmeydanı and revolutionary and leftist people/groups should be more careful about possible misunderstandings.

So far I have analyzed the historical representation of marginal districts in general and Okmeydanı in particular within the dissident public. I have tried to examine this perspective in a dialogical relation with the local people (who I have divided into two for analytical reasons). I aimed to show the appropriations, interpretations, relocation and rejection of this history by local people. The historical representation and imagination of marginal places allow us to depict a political and social milieu within a political agenda. It is hard, maybe impossible, to analyze and explain all the political interests and expectations in detail. Nevertheless I contend that the historical representation and imagination generate expectations regarding marginal districts and consequently attribute some characteristics to these places and even produce them. This is an imagination of marginal districts for the dissident public sphere and it is an attempt to explain the present conditions of marginal districts and their inhabitants.

Neighborhoods have an incontrovertible significance in our struggle, not only militarily, but also politically, and they will continue to have such significance. In this instance, we are not attributing a subjective importance, a mission to neighborhoods. Either from the point of class alliances, the composition of the alliances, or the military tactics and strategies, this is seen as a necessity in the class war that takes as its aim a revolution. When one looks at it from the point of class, the workers, civil servants and the unemployed, who are the real mass force of the revolution, are in this working place; and militarily, rebellions and barricades basically occur in these sections of the city.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Mahalleler Bizimdir; Faşist Teröre Terk Etmeyeceğiz”, *Devrimci Sol*, June 1996: 8. “Askeri anlamda da, politik anlamda da mahallelerin mücadelemizde tartışılmaz bir yeri vardır ve hep olacaktır da. Bu noktada mahallelere subjektif bir önem, misyon atfediyor da değiliz. Devrim hedefli bir sınıflar savaşının ister sınıf ittifakları, bileşimi açısından, ister askeri taktik ve stratejileri açısından bakılsın bu zorunluluk görülür. Sınıfsal açıdan devrimin temel kitle kuvveti olan işçisi, memuru,

The main axis at which different revolutionary discourses coalesce is the depiction of the marginal districts as a centre of discontent and unrest. The underlying assumptions and preconceptions within these representations produce a particular kind of social and political character of the districts and their inhabitants. They are not factual traits; on the contrary they are analytical and practical tools produced through the discourses of the dissident public. I have shown that the historical representation is embraced or renounced according to various positions and criteria. The same mechanism works to imagine and represent the characteristics of marginal districts and their inhabitants. The vision of *gecekondus* and their residents are discursively produced through the representation of their historical background. I will analyze these characteristics now.

First of all, according to the representations within the dissident public, the marginal districts in İstanbul were built by poor working class people who migrated from rural areas and they are still assumed to be so. However this has changed following postfordist transformation in the Turkish economy (Köse and Öncü, 2000). My own observations and interviews with the local people make this point clear. The first generation came to the district during the 1970s and started to work as low ranking civil servants or as workers in private shipyards around Haliç. However my informants indicate that the work places and practices of the inhabitants have changed substantially. Now nearly no one who works in a large factory because most mass production plants moved outside of the city. The few people who work in the civil service jobs were either employed long ago (in the 1980s or early 1990s) or are

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işsiziyle emekçiler bu çalışma alanındadırlar; askeri anlamda ise ayaklanmalar, barikatlar esas olarak kentlerin bu bölümlerinde hayat bulur.”

employed in temporary jobs as the municipalities and state institutions in which such work is found have changed their employment policy regarding low ranking jobs. These institutions no longer employ people with long term contracts (*kadrolu*) anymore but hire people with short term contracts (*sözleşmeli*). Consequently the new generation within the marginal districts has no chance of finding a secure long term job unless they are university graduates, which in fact is a very rare phenomenon.

The employment structure of Okmeydanı has thus changed and the youth unemployment rate has risen. On the other hand, those who had the chance to find a job are generally employed as temporary workers in the civil service or as workers in small scale production units (textile workshops, carpentry etc.) and in the service sector (in fast food restaurants or cafes, in shopping malls etc.). Such jobs in the private sector are ironically short term as well, considering the fact that those people change their jobs (in terms of both sectors and work places) frequently. This employment structure does not sustain the old familial way of living based on a single breadwinner even when the rent is not taken into the account. Adding to these circumstances the fact that state authorities do not allow building *Gecekondu*s at the margins of the city anymore, living in İstanbul is almost impossible for new migrants (Işık and Pınarcıklıoğlu, 2002: 172-175). As I will show in the second chapter, the Kurds who migrated to the city after the 1990s and 2000s succeeded to some extent in settling in the city but their case is *sui generis* and requires more attention.

If there is no or little chance of sustaining subsistence level within the current employment structure of the city, how can people in Okmeydanı continue to reside in the district? The main reason is of course that they do not pay rent, because they live in the apartment flats which were built on erstwhile *gecekondu* land. Secondly, most

of them (except Kurds) migrated to the city during the 1970s and 1980s when they had the chance of finding a stable job which they are still working on or they have already retired. Thirdly, and maybe most importantly, after the construction of apartments in the place of Gecekondu, the inhabitant coming to the district during the 1970s and 80s own more than one flat in the newly built apartments. One Gecekondu turned into an apartment building which has maybe 12 flats, 6 went to the contractor and 6 went to the “owner” of the land. Although people I have talked to point out that the additional flats are generally used for children and brothers/sisters, in many cases people collect rent from the flats, or sell them. To support this claim, it should be noted that even when all flats were occupied by family members, there is usually a shop (*dükkan*) at the entrance of the apartment building. This shop could be used by its owner either to open up a business (as retailer sellers, groceries or for a particular period carpentering and textile) or to rent at relatively high prices (ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 tl)<sup>20</sup>.

I have analyzed the employment structure to show that the representation of the marginal districts as working class districts and imagining their inhabitants as labourers are problematic for the local people of Okmeydanı. These people do not unquestionably accept the characteristics which the dissident public attributes to them but they appropriate, reject or reshape those representations according to the context in which they live. It is certainly true that there are many debates within the dissident public about issues such as how to define working class and the position of marginal districts for the revolutionary movements. Besides, the views that I have referred to above are not undisputed within the dissident public. Yet they are very common and widespread and more importantly my field work showed me that the

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<sup>20</sup> For a similar observation about the profits deriving from Gecekondu areas, see also Buğra (1998).

local people know almost no other way of representing and imagining the space they inhabit. Remembering my theoretical point of departure to the effect that I will not scrutinize the factuality of the narration but their effects and functions, I believe it is perfectly relevant to look at how people react to the representations and imagination which are, in their view, prevalent within different public spheres<sup>21</sup>. Let me turn to the analysis of the dialogical relation between the dissident public and local people. The theme that the revolutionaries do not understand the local situation continues to be relevant. Many of my informants have pointed out that the revolutionary people coming to the district have unsubstantiated expectations from Okmeydanı as a result of its depictions within the dissident public:

They suppose that here is a neighborhood of the labourers. There is not many labourers here, and the ones still living are powerless. After the building contractors came here, the people of Okmeydanı got rich and began to give no heed to politics. Revolutionaries are still looking for the people of Okmeydanı shorn of houses, apartments, and cars. But the result is apparent: people are watching the demonstrations from their houses, coffehouses or local clubhouses. And the revolutionaries can't reach them. They can't deal with the real problems of Okmeydanı. Then what happens? The movement regress further.<sup>22</sup>

In the *gecekondu* period, Okmeydanı was quite different. In every respect. People were more friendly with each other, bonded with each other by heart. They depended on each other. There was an exorbitant poverty. There were not three houses, one car, and a shop, like the way it is now. When people's matter was a bread, politics was the unique hope. But now the situation is different, people want to protect what they have

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<sup>21</sup> Considering that the debates about the definitions of working class and the position of *gecekondu* areas within the revolutionary movement are very dispersed to the point that one can hardly be informed of all the discussions, the local people in Okmeydanı have only a general idea of the debates and they appropriate the most common forms of representations as given.

<sup>22</sup> "Burayı emekçi mahallesi zannediyorlar. Artık kalmadı emekçi burda olanlar da güçsüzler. Mütahitler girdikten sonra zenginleşti Okmeydanı halkı, siyase yüz vermez oldu. Devrimciler evleri, apartmanları, arabaları olmayan Okmeydanı halkını arıyorlar hala. Ama sonuç ortada; halk evlerinden, kahvelerden, lokallerden izliyor eylemleri. Devrimciler de onlara ulaşamıyor, Okmeydanının gerçek sorunları üzerine eğilemiyorlar. O zaman ne oluyor hareket daha da geriliyor."

now, if the revolutionaries make a case of this, they may get some chance.<sup>23</sup>

Okmeydanı is a fortress, a likely story. They don't even know the people in the neighborhood and proclaim here as a fortress. Politics stuck to the pre-1980 period. This is the truth of the matter.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear in these accounts that the local people do not believe that the revolutionary and leftist organizations understand the present condition of the district properly. The historical representations and their consequent imagination of the people of marginal districts operate with distinctive concepts regarding the categories of labour, workers, and socio-political milieu encircling these people. The short circuit appears when the imagined people do not coincide with the "real" people in the district. But it disappears when they agree with each other in one way or another. Let me exemplify this accord with an interesting case which I had the chance to see, participate and follow.

In 3 March 2008, a meeting was held in Simge Düğün Salonu<sup>25</sup>. It was held due to previous events which shocked the district. In 2 March 2008, I was making one of my ordinary visits to my informants, my friends, in Okmeydanı but people were quite anxious and worried because a raid of state inspectors to the textile workshops within the district had taken place. My informants told me that the all workshops (ranging from middle to small scale) were closed due to that raid. Many workshops either have no licence for production or employ workers without social

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<sup>23</sup> "Gecekondu döneminde Okmeydanı çok farklıydı. Nereden bakarsan bak. İnsanlar daha kaynaşmıştı, daha gönülden bağlıydı. Mahalleli birbirine muhtaçtı. Fakirlik diz boyu o dönem. Şimdiki gibi üç ev bir araba bir dükkan yoktu böyle şeyler. İnsanlar ekmek derdindeyken siyasetler tek umuttu. Şimdi durum başka, insanlar ellerindekini korumak istiyor, devrimciler bu taraftan bastırırsa belki birşeyler olur."

<sup>24</sup> "Okmeydanı kaleymiş! Daha mahalleyi tanımıyor, burayı kale ilan ediyor. Siyaset 80 öncesine takılmış. İşin gerçeği bu."

<sup>25</sup> Düğün Salonu is a term to designate a place generally rented for a reception following a wedding, an engagement, or a circumcision. But in Okmeydanı it is also a place for political meetings where issues at stake are discussed and decisions for action taken.

insurance illegally. We had no chance of understanding what was happening when a wave of rumours hit the district: a small scale producer had shot two inspectors with a shotgun in Dikilitaş, then another had shot one inspector and “put a bullet in his head” saying “enough!” in Örnektepe, then another had shot two inspectors and killed his own wife and children. There was no way of verifying any of these claims yet they were enough to mobilize people, which is something hard to achieve for any political organizations within such a short time. Then it was said that small and middle scale workshop owners had gone to one of the most radical political organizations in the district in order to arrange a meeting to discuss the issue. This surprised me because it was really hard to believe. The manufacturers, however small or middle-sized, going to a revolutionary party because inspectors had shut them down, imposed fines on them for employing workers without social security was really quite unexpected. After that, a meeting was announced and all the people of Okmeydanı were called to attend the meeting in which, supposedly, an issue concerning the whole district would be discussed. At the meeting, things became clearer and made more sense. The owners stated that they were not employers but workers:

We are not bosses! We are the real labourers.<sup>26</sup>

Who are really crushed are the workshop owners, we work for nights for a chickenfeed. Our workers gain more than us. We continue to work in fear that they would become jobless.<sup>27</sup>

Fellas, this is not a control, but a pressure. For it is a miracle to work under such conditions, it is not a reality. Workers are a miracle, employers are another.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “Biz patron değiliz! Asıl emekçi bizleriz.”

<sup>27</sup> “Burada asıl ezilenler atelye sahipleri, üç kuruş paraya geceler boyu çalışıyoruz. İşçilerimiz bizden çok kazanıyor. Onlar işsiz kalmasın diye biz zararına çalışmaya devam ediyoruz.”



We are not there alone; there are workers alongside us.<sup>29</sup>

As can be seen in the quotes above, throughout the meeting, the textile workshop owners tried to present themselves as members of the working class. It was a clear attempt to articulate their social position within the district with the imaginary of the revolutionary groups. By aiming to get revolutionary support in the district, these business owners tried to mobilize a collective movement against the government for conducting the raid after a widespread public reaction against the Davutpaşa accident<sup>30</sup>. During the meeting, those workshop owners were constantly using the revolutionary terminology of the dissident public and thus attempting to strengthen the connection between the revolutionary imaginary and their own practical positions. They narrated their situation as a dissident position. The indications of that strategy can be seen in the accounts above clearly, but their words also connoted many idioms and usages other than working class position as well.

The Ministry of Finance announced that they recruited 10,000 agents. But one recruits agents against the opposing front, against the enemy. They avowedly mark us the downtrodden as an enemy. They perceive the enterprises that have to work informally as enemies.<sup>31</sup>

The aim is to decrease the labour force, to weaken the working class. They want to get someone work for 250 liras outside the city. We are also against this exploitation.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Bu denetim değil baskıdır arkadaşlar. Çünkü bu şartlarda çalışmak zaten mucize, gerçek değil ki. İşçiler bir mucize, işveren başka bir mucize.”

<sup>29</sup> “Burada sadece biz yokuz; yanımızda çalışanlar da var.”

<sup>30</sup> In 31 January 2008, a workshop producing sparklers without licence exploded and 20 people have died.

<sup>31</sup> “Maliye bakanlığı açıklama yapmış 10000 ajan aldık diye. Ajan karşı tarafa, düşmana karşı alınır. Bunlar biz ezilmişleri açık açık düşman belliyorlar. Kayıt dışı çalışmak zorunda kalan işletmeleri düşman olarak alıyorlar.”

<sup>32</sup> “Amaç işgücünü düşürmek, işçi sınıfını zayıflatmak. Şehir dışında 250 tl’ye eleman çalıştırılmı istiyorlar. Biz bu sömürüye de karşıyız.”

In any case, it is not possible to obtain a certificate of approval and these buildings can't fulfill the required conditions. The buildings here don't have any certificate or a deed anyway. People worked tooth and nail to construct these buildings and they weren't given any deed. How would these workshops get certificates of approval?<sup>33</sup>

The state encumbers the responsibility of Davutpaşa to us. The remedy is to lay the responsibility upon the government and get unionized. It is necessary to prepare a manifesto in this terms. We will give minimum wage, become legalized and determine the contract price. Thanks to organized struggle, we will avoid contract price cuttings.<sup>34</sup>

The accounts above are full of revolutionary discourses and analyses; for example statements above imply that the state sees them as a potential threat like the revolutionary movement. Furthermore, these statements see the state as conspiring against the working class in Turkey. This theme is also widespread within the dissident public –state conspiracies and hidden agendas against revolutionaries. In addition to that, the emphasis on the collective organization, made by workshop owners, displays remarkable similarities with the discourse promoting the collective organization among oppressed classes. Thus I contend that the dialogue between revolutionaries of the district and workshop owners is shaped through the sphere of representation within dissident public. Yet there is not a direct transformation from the discourse of dissident public to the practice of workshop owners; it is a space of power struggle in which camps present themselves to each other. Compromise is achieved within this sphere through demands and concessions. I have no knowledge about the negotiations behind closed doors, but in the meeting the revolutionaries pushed to arrange a march and a demonstration to make it as radical and militant as

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<sup>33</sup> “Ruhsat almak zaten mümkün değil, bu yapılar gerekli şartları sağlayamaz. Zaten buradaki binaların ruhsatı tapusu yok. Halk dişini tırnağına katarak inşa etmiş buraları, tapu vermemişler. Nasıl bu atelyeler ruhsatlanacak?”

<sup>34</sup> “Devlet Davutpaşa'nın sorumluluğunu bize yüklüyor. Çare hükümeti sorumlu tutmak ve sendikalaşmak. Bu çerçevede bir manifesto hazırlamak gerekir. Asgari ücret vereceğiz, yasallaşacağız, fason fiyatı belirleyeceğiz. Örgütlü mücadele ile fason fiyat kırmalarının önüne geçeceğiz.”

possible. The workshop owners, on their part, tried to maintain their “sensitive” position between the position of the oppressed and the position which is close to the state discourse of law and order. This is the reason for the arguments concerning what should be done. Some revolutionary groups proposed to walk to Taksim Square, a place which is strictly prohibited for demonstrations by the state. Then the short circuit between the imaginary and the practical reappeared instantly:

To those defending that we should go to Taksim: We don’t go to Taksim, cannot do illegal things. We must organize a protest march to AKP (Justice and Development Party) building and we must do it with the people of Okmeydanı, together with our workers. Let’s go there and leave our keys and call the press.<sup>35</sup>

We cannot succeed by provoking people toward squares. We need to have an agreement with other regions. Otherwise, they will tear us and break into pieces.<sup>36</sup>

We must be careful in deciding how to react. Both the state and the media is ready to depict us as terrorists. Let’s do not display an undesirable image. For there will be workers with us. Suppose we get into trouble; who is gonna care of the workers’ families? We are thinking of our workers.<sup>37</sup>

Okmeydanı has already a bad reputation. The state and the media are looking for a victim. Don’t make us come to the fore like bait.<sup>38</sup>

The equivalence between the people of representation and the “real” people of Okmeydanı cease to operate here. One side demanded revolutionary support in

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<sup>35</sup> “Taksime çıkalım diyenlere: Biz taksim meydanına çıkmayız, biz illegal işler yapamayız. AKP binasına bir yürüş düzenlemeliyiz. Okmeydanı halkını da katarak AKP binasına gitmeliyiz. İşçilerimizi de yanımıza almalıyız. Oraya gidip anahtarlarımızı bırakalım, medyayı çağıralım.”

<sup>36</sup> “Öyle milleti gaza getirip meydanlara dökmekle olmaz. Diğer bölgelerle de anlaşmak zorundayız. Yoksa bizi paralarlar, lime lime ederler.”

<sup>37</sup> “Vereceğimiz tepkiyi belirlerken dikkatli olmalıyız. Hem devlet hem medya bizi terrorist gibi göstermek için hazırda bekliyor. İstemediğimiz görüntüler vermeyelim. Sadece biz olsak başka, yanımızda çalışanlarda olacak. Bize birşey olsa onların ailelerine kim bakacak. Biz burada işçilerimizi düşünüyoruz.”

<sup>38</sup> “Okmeydanı’nın adı çıkmış zaten. Devlet ve medya kurban arıyor. Öne çıkıp kendimizi yem etmeyelim”

order to organize local people in a demonstration against inspectors' raid. They presented themselves as oppressed proletarians, and even as the enemy of the enemy (of the state in this case). At this stage, the imaginary characteristics attributed to Okmeydanı within the dissident public are in accord with the position which workshop owners took in this process. However, when the revolutionaries proposed that the owners of the small businesses comply with that representation fully (marching on Taksim, protesting the government militantly), the equivalence was damaged; but a point of compromise was eventually found. The revolutionary groups partially supported the demonstration, brought people there and shouted slogans agreed by all parties (like "We are people, we will win", "Tax, persecution, torture: that is AKP", "AKP is harmful to health and people")<sup>39</sup>. The 200 demonstrators could not go to the AKP building because the process of compromise had not finished and there was still a dispute regarding whether they should go there or not. In the end, a press declaration took place. Demonstrators marched within the borders of the district. The event was represented within the dissident public as an uprising of the oppressed of Okmeydanı.

As it is known tens of workers have lost their lives as a result of industrial accidents in Davutpaşa and Tuzla. Responding to the reactions against these accidents AKP initiated attacks to the tradesmen in order to take revenge. AKP sent revenue officers against the tradesmen of the poor districts who acted like debt collectors and imposed penalty on every single tradesman. Eventually the tradesmen revolted because of the collectors imposing penalties on every inspected shop that reached to millions without earthly reason.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Respectively: "Halkız Haklıyız Kazanacağız, Vergi Zulüm İşkence İşte AKP, AKP Halka Sağlığa Zararlıdır"

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.ozgurluk.org/news.php?h\\_newsid=4583](http://www.ozgurluk.org/news.php?h_newsid=4583): "Bilindiği gibi Davutpaşa'da ve Tuzla'da meydana gelen iş kazalarında onlarca işçi yaşamını yitirmişti. İş kazaları sonrası oluşan tepkilerden sonra AKP tüm esnaflara intikam amaçlı saldırılar başlattı. Maliye müfettişlerini İstanbul'un yoksul semtlerindeki esnafların üzerine salan AKP adeta tahsildar gibi davranan bu müfettişlerle her esnafa ceza üstüne ceza yazdılar. Girdiği ve denetlediği her esnafa sudan sebeplerle milyonlara varan ceza kesen tahsildarlar sonunda esnafları isyan ettirdi."

On the other hand, the workshop owners had succeeded in organizing over 200 people and made their voices heard. Each side entered the scene according to their concerns. The workshop owners' fear of "to be misunderstood" was prevented through a series of negotiations and concessions. This fear was about the modes of visibility within different spheres; how the revolutionaries perceive the "real" conditions of local tradesmen, how the public in general perceives Okmeydanı and its inhabitants, and how the state perceives political action in the margin. However, this hesitation is not only negative in the sense that they refrain to do some thing; on the contrary, it is productive in the sense that the hesitation is a manifestation of a greater framework in which the local people (in this case the owners of the small businesses) re-configure their belonging in accordance with different public spheres and their norms.

#### The Representation of Okmeydanı in "the" Public

Up until now, I did look at one part of the public perception of Okmeydanı (the perception of the dissident public) and its dialogical relationship with local people. Now, I will concentrate upon the codes and modes of visibility within the public sphere in general. A careful reader should have already realized the anxieties regarding this perception on the part of textile workshop owners in Okmeydanı. Both revolutionaries and workshop owners have appropriated and renounced different imaginaries of Okmeydanı according to their concerns about how they will be represented within different public spheres. But "the" public sphere creates remarkable self-reflection for local people; they are very much concerned with "what the media will say about their demonstrations" or "whether they will announce them

as terrorists or provocateurs” as they have done frequently. Local people in Okmeydanı frequently complain about the representations of the district and its inhabitants within “the” public sphere. It is important to note that this public representation is not necessary about Okmeydanı directly, but it is enough to create a reactive circulation of that representation when a pejorative report on any marginal district in İstanbul appears. In my field research, there are some recurrent themes in reactions to these representations. The ones I can discern are the discourses about “the liberated area”, “the fortress of terrorists”, “a place full of criminal types”, and “the invaders of public lands.”

The first theme is very important for both local people and revolutionary groups in Turkey. In the 1950s and 1960s, the discourse of development and its policies shaped the main agenda for all underdeveloped countries (Guinta, 1993; Şenses 2001, Başkaya 2000). In accordance with the popularity of the concept in those years, the State Planning Organization<sup>41</sup> started to conduct new 5 years development plans which were based on import substitution industrialization as of 1962 (Boratav, 1998: 94). Development discourses created a widespread belief and trust among every segment of the population in Turkey that poverty and underdevelopment would eventually be eradicated. *Gecekondu* districts, the underdeveloped spaces of the city, cast their votes to right wing parties (the Democratic Party and the Justice Party respectively) in the hope of becoming affluent, modern, and urban at last (Erman, 2001). However development economic policies resulted in catastrophic consequences like high inflation and financial crises (especially for the working classes around the third world) and started to be criticized severely in academic and political spheres (Şenses, 2001: 108). In Turkey, Ecevit

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<sup>41</sup> Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı.

undertook the task of that criticism and aligned it with a leftist discourse. The leftist worldview began to spread over the country and the urban poor channeled their attention and votes towards Ecevit and revolutionary movements. The organization of *gecekondu* people by revolutionary groups was represented in the mainstream media as an uprising, a creation of areas liberated from the authority of the state (Erman 2001, Aslan, 2004). The revolutionaries of the time, for their part, saw these spaces as the locus of struggle and resistance in which the inner contradictions of capitalism were most apparent (Aslan, 2004: 84). After the 1980 coup d'état, many allegedly liberated areas were “cleaned” (like Gültepe or Örnektepe) and many others were weakened by constant police raids and violent suppression (like Okmeydanı, 1 Mayıs Mahallesi, or Ümraniye.)

In leftist discourse, the term “liberated areas” means “the place is relatively free from state repression and fascism” a meaning best exemplified by the expression “places where even the police cannot enter”. However the public representation of these developments was substantially different and their political and social consequences for the district were significant. My informants in the district (no matter what their political affiliations is) point out that the mainstream media has generally used the term “liberated area” to mean “places which are in control of terrorists”. In the same manner the idiom “the places where even the police cannot enter” was taken to mean “terrorists are controlling the district and preparing to attack innocent people and hard working state officers”. In accordance with the discourse of the dissident public, the local people point out that this specific public representation purposely tried to provide a legitimate ground for upcoming police raids. There some examples of this claim:

Wherever there is political dissident instead of prostitution, gambling and drugs it will be labeled as 'rescued zone' by the regime. It will say 'attack, slaughter, burn and destroy!' They have always told the same lie whenever they wanted to attack a worker district, to shed blood in a student house or to blockade villages and poor cities. The same story had been told for decades. The same scenario: make it be in the news of bourgeois media, repression and slaughter come thereafter...

(...) Because there live poor people. That is, people critical of the regime, facing the hunger and the injustice; and therefore a potential threat for the regime whose revolt arouse fear. Because of this, these districts must be besieged and hold under pressure where people must be daunted with slaughter and torture. In order to weaken its organization solidarity must be destroyed.<sup>42</sup>

(Concerning a headline about Armutlu as "the liberated area") But we can examine Sabah newspaper. How an extraordinary coincidence was this that the tomorrow's paper which under normal circumstances would have been captioned under boasting headlines like 'Haven't we told', 'Sabah's warnings get results' rather reflect a mode of being caught in the act. Almost an embarrassment. It seems they were afraid of not being convincing. This 'coincidence' is not being mentioned. Sabah is telling us an extraordinary salutary parable. Yet, it is all about the coordination of the intelligence service and the police with the media. In the name of whom was the quite-new Tayfun Hopalı there who is being introduced as a star candidate. For whom is he working? It is sure that Sabah was informed of the operation beforehand. Police correspondent Tayfun Hopalı has evidently close contact with the security forces. Well then, was the headline of Sunday's Sabah ordered by the police? Was the aim to clear the ground for the operation? Well, is there something beyond the fact that this issue does not draw attention of any paper or journalist and I am not able to see it as a non-professional. Isn't it a strange practice that the media and police department work arm in arm and report news. Does the Press Council think to investigate the issue? Isn't it frightening that there is a possibility a journalist might have invited a police operation with deadly results.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.ozgurluk.org/kitaplik/webarsiv/vatan/vatan115/kurtaar.html>: "Fuhuş, kumar, uyuşturucu yoksa, muhaliflik varsa, orası bu düzenin gözünde "kurtarılmış bölge"dir. Saldır, katlet, yak, yık "bunlar olacak" der! Onyıllardır hep aynı yalanı söylediler. Ne zaman bir emekçi mahallesine saldırmak isteseler, ne zaman bir öğrenci yurdunda kan dökmek isteseler, ne zaman köyler, yoksul kentler ablukaya alınmak istense hep aynı yalanı söylediler. Hep aynı masal onyıllardır anlatıldı. Senaryo da hep aynıdır: önce burjuva basına haberler yaptırılır, sonra baskı, katliam... (...)Çünkü oralarda yoksul halk yaşar. Yani bu düzene muhalif, bu düzenin açlığını, adaletsizliğini yaşayan, bu nedenle de düzen için hep potansiyel tehlike olan, isyanından korkulan insanlar yaşar. Bu nedenle kuşatılmalı, baskı altına alınmalı, katliamlar, işkenceler yapılarak gözü korkutulmalıdır. Örgütlenmesini zayıflatmak için dayanışmasını, yardımlaşmasını yoketmelidir."

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek\\_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=627](http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=627): "Ama Sabah gazetesini sorgulayabiliriz. Bu ne olağanüstü bir tesadüftür ki ertesi gün normal şartlar altında 'Biz dememiş miydik', 'Sabah'ın uyarısı sonuç aldı' ve benzeri böbürlü makamı manşetlerle çıkması beklenen Sabah'ta bir suçüstü yakalanmışlık hali. Neredeyse bir mahcubiyet. İnandırıcı olmayacağından korkmuş besbelli, okurlarına bu 'tesadüften hiç söz etmiyor. Sabah, bize olağanüstü bir ibret meseli yansıtıyor."



My informants in the district confirm this interpretation and say that marginal districts including Okmeydanı have been represented in the media as places of terror and places which should be cleaned. The mainstream media creates this effect, according to their interpretations, by selecting visual materials and specific parts of the events happening in the district. It constructs a representation and visualization of the marginal districts which makes targets for security forces:

The media depicts Okmeydanı as a terror base on purpose. Their aim is to clear the ground for urban renewal. During the protests the media totally neglects what the police do. Whereas they cry out as terrorist whenever the protestors respond to police. Then people from every other parts of Turkey believe that Okmeydanı is the home of furious killers.<sup>44</sup>

The account also provides the reason behind those representations but I will analyze them later. However, the effect of the representation of the district in the country is not exaggerated. People in the cities far from Okmeydanı perceive the place as a battlefield. A columnist from Alanya has this exact image of Okmeydanı in his head while speaking of the Kurdish guerrilla movement:

We said, all the statesmen whether civil or from the military should be in Diyarbakır. We should not leave Diyarbakır to Leyla Zana, Osman Baydemir and alike. We said that these places shouldn't turn to rescued zones like Istanbul's Okmeydanı. If needed we should held meetings of

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Ama, istihbarat ve polis teşkilatı ile medyanın eşgüdümü konusunda. Dumanı üstünden tüten, star adayı bir gazeteci olarak lanse edilen Tayfun Hopalı orada kimin adına bulunuyor? Kim için çalışıyor? Sabah'ın polis operasyonundan önceden haberi olduğu anlaşılıyor. Polis muhabiri Hopalı besbelli emniyet güçleri ile yakın irtibat kurabilen bir gazeteci. Pekiyi Sabah'ın Pazartesi günü manşeti polis tarafından sipariş mi edildi? Amaç, operasyona zemin hazırlamak mıydı? Pekiyi bu konunun hiçbir gazete ve gazetecinin ilgisini çekmemesi bir anlama geliyor da meslekten olmayan ben mi anlamakta zorlanıyorum? Medyanın polis teşkilatıyla kolkola haber hazırlaması nicedir yadırganmayan bir teamül müdür? Basın Konseyi bu konuda bir araştırma yapmayı düşünmüyor mu? Gazetecinin, ölümle sonuçlanan polis operasyonlarına çanak tutmuş olma ihtimali korkutucu değil mi?"

<sup>44</sup> "Medya Okmeydanı'nı bilerek terör yuvası gibi gösteriyor. Amaçları kentsel dönüşüme zemin hazırlamak. Burda bir eylem oluyor polisin yaptıklarını görmüyorlar, göstermiyorlar. Ama eylemciler karşılık versin hemen teröristler diye bağırıyorlar. Sonra türkiyenin her köşesinden insan Okmeydanını gözü dönmüş katillerin yuvası sanıyor."

the Council of Ministers or Council of National Security in Diyarbakır for a few months successively.<sup>45</sup>

The second theme which recurrently appears within the public sphere is crime. Especially after the 1990s, the *gecekondu* areas started to be considered as the source of criminality. 1 May 1996 was a threshold for the usage of the term “*varoş*” instead of *gecekondu*. Since its first public usages<sup>46</sup>, the term *varoş* connotes violence, social disarray, terrorism, and radical religious movements (Etöz, 2000; Erman, 2001). What now exacerbates the situation is Kurdish population who came to the city as a result of forced migration. They have become a constant source of fear for those who live in middle and upper class districts. Consequently, the places where those people live (the *varoş*) are represented as uncanny places in which anything can happen to “decent” people. Furthermore, the former revolutionary districts, which are still called “liberated areas” by the mainstream media, were linked by the discourse of criminalization of urban space as their reputation as “the fortress of terrorists” was very suitable for such conceptualization. The logic was simple: terrorists need financial sources and, being illegal organizations, the most viable solution for this matter is to engage in criminal activities. This logic of the public representation of dissident activities is widespread in Turkey, especially with regard to the Kurdish guerilla movement. The mainstream media in Turkey take for granted that the PKK is financed by drug traffic. In the same manner nearly all

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<sup>45</sup><http://www.yenialanya.com/yazarlar.aspx?KatAd=Yazarlar&KatId=9&YazAdi=Sabih%20Samur&YazId=91&MakaleID=9529&YazTek2=918273645> Tüm devlet erkânı sivil ve askeri ile Diyarbakır’da yer alsın, dedik. Buraları Leyla Zana ve Osman Baydemir gibilere bırakmayalım, dedik. Buralar İstanbul’un Okmeydanı gibi kurtarılmış bölgesi olmasın, dedik. Gerekirse Bakanlar Kurulu ve/veya MGK toplantılarını en az birkaç ay üst üste Diyarbakır’da yapalım, dedik.

<sup>46</sup> To see one of the first public usages of the term, Bila 1996. It is not surprising the article was written just after 1 May 1996, in 6 May 1996.

revolutionary organizations are represented as criminal groups. The former chief of police of Istanbul states in an interview:

(About setting public transport vehicles on fire during demonstrations) These places are burnt under the image of terrorist organization. Like America's Harlem. Tomorrow even the state forces will fail to get access to these districts, and you cannot do it as a person as well. They will create a universe of their own together with the criminals who will be released into various districts of Istanbul. You won't find criminals in these rescued zones anymore. Look at the regions where such events took place in the past... In 70's Ümraniye was the district with the biggest social incidents. What happened to Ümraniye in the course of time? People somehow got the possession of the land and constructed big buildings. Today everyone got huge buildings there. They have gained wealth from the land, the buildings. People seeking for rent and members of the organization with an ideology act together here. A resistance is obtained against the state. Terrorist and ideological organizations at the fore with the enclosure of the land, construction of the buildings and making illegal money at the background.<sup>47</sup>

Drug dealing, theft, racketing, prostitution, homicide, usurpation, rape... All those are favorite themes for the third pages of the mainstream media and blaming marginal districts for the rise of crime is a generally accepted attitude. The reverberations of the criminal representation of the marginal districts within Okmeydanı are similar to those that follow the district's depiction as a "liberated area". Though people accept that crime is/was a great problem for Okmeydanı, they further state that the crime rate in the district is lower than in many other places. They say that there is a process of corruption in the social and political life of

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=215972> (About setting public transport vehicles on fire during demonstrations) Terör örgütü görüntüsü altında yakılıyor bunlar. Asıl neden kurtarılmış bölge yaratmak orada. Amerika'nın Harlem'i gibi, yarın devlet gücüyle giremez, şahıs olarak da sokulamazsın oraya. Suçlularla birlikte kendilerine bir âlem yaratırlar orada. Suçluları İstanbul'un muhtelif semtlerine salarlar. Bu kurtarılmış bölgelerde suçluları bulabilirsiniz bulun bakalım artık. Geçmiş dönemde olayların cereyan ettiği bölgelere şimdi bir bakın... 1970'lerde Ümraniye en büyük toplumsal olayların yapıldığı yerd. Ümraniye zaman içinde ne oldu? insanlar bir yolla arsa sahibi oldu ve bu arsaların üzerine büyük binalar yapıldı. Şimdi herkesin kocaman binaları var. Zenginleştiler arsadan, binadan. Rant kazanmak isteyenle, ideolojisi olan örgüt mensubu hepsi beraber hareket ediyor buralarda. Devlete karşı bir direnç sağlıyor. Terör örgütleri, ideolojik örgütler ön tarafta, arsa çevirmeler, bina yapmalar, yasadışı yollarla para kazanmalar arka tarafta duruyor.

Okmeydanı and that this resulted in the criminalization of the youth to some extent, yet this, they argue, is overemphasized by the media and the state institutions for several reasons. These intentionally aim to direct the public attention to Okmeydanı by presenting it as a “dangerous place” so that the state and big capitalists can legitimize their plans for the area. The geographical location of the district within the city is so central that if urban transformation is undertaken in the district, some groups which are close to the government of the time would benefit from the project greatly.

So it is the same issue. It is like saying that these places are bases for terrorism. You see, these are efforts toward depicting Okmeydanı as a criminal place. There is a severe smear campaign. You know that incident of rape. It is told that people are afraid of going out at nights. It is true that in early 2000 there was such an issue but with the intervention of the political organizations a consciousness was raised again and crime diminished. It is like other places. Is there any place without crime? Okmeydanı even can be the last in criminality. It is one of the secured districts. But some sections have plans on Okmeydanı. They have already prepared to sacrifice Okmeydanı while we have been watching... In 1999 the state put the revolutionaries to the sword, so they began to lose power, and banditry emerged. These criminal organizations made people to think like that ‘It would be different if the revolutionaries would have been there’. They still say this. Aren’t there similar events in Beyoğlu or elsewhere? Yes there are. But there is a deliberate smear campaign directed toward these districts. We will of course oppose this.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “Yazı Dizisi: Metropol Sürgünleri-3, Okmeydanı Beyoğlu’nun Arka Bahçesi”. *Birgün Gazetesi*, 13 March 2007. Yani aynı mesele. Burası terrorist yatağı derlerkenki gibi. İşte Okmeydanı suç yuvasıymış gibi gösterme çabaları. Çok ciddi bir karalama kampanyası var. Şu tecavüz olayını biliyorsun. Geceleri dışarı çıkamıyor insanlar diye anlatıyorlar. Tamam 2000 başlarında böyle bir mesele vardı ama siyasetler devreye girince, tekrardan bir bilinç oluşunca suç çok azaldı. Yani her yerdeki kadardır. Suç olmayan yer mi var? Hatta belki en az suç Okmeydanı’ndadır. En güvenli yerlerden biri burası. Ama işte çeşitli kesimlerin hesapları var Okmeydanı hakkında, onlar Okmeydanı’nı çoktan gözden çıkarmış da zemin hazırlıyorlar. Biz de izliyoruz... 1999 yılında devletin devrimcileri kılıçtan geçirmeye başlamasıyla devrimciler zayıfladı, çeteleşmeler kendini gösterdi. Bu çeteleşme şunu söyletti insanlara "devrimciler olsaydı böyle olmazdı". Hâlâ da söylüyorlar. Burada olan olaylar Beyoğlu’nda ya da başka yerde yok mu? Var. Ama bilinçli bir karalama kampanyası uyguluyorlar bu mahallelere. Burada yapılan şeylere tabii ki karşı geleceğiz.1.34

As it can be seen in the above accounts, the representation of the district as the locus of crime is a process of legitimization in the view of Okmeydanı inhabitants. The interesting point of these assertions is the fact that the local people of Okmeydanı conceptualize the discourse of criminalization within the public sphere as functioning through a process of marginalization. The narratives of local people point out that the state seeks public legitimization for the destruction of Okmeydanı and the mainstream media (which is supposed to be in the hands of people closely engaged with a statist discourse) is involved through specific forms of representations. My field research showed me that the local people comprehend the process as an exception. These people constantly state that the aforementioned representations of marginal districts serve hegemonic powers and purpose to show these districts as a place in which “the state of exception” rules all the time. However, following Benjamin, I will argue at the end of the chapter it is not an exception but a general rule for all unity constitution processes (Benjamin, 1969: 257). But before going into such analysis I have to continue to give all aspects of public representation of the marginal districts, Okmeydanı in particular.

The last theme that I want to discuss about the current representation of the marginal districts is the discourse of invasion. The representation of the *gecekondu* has changed since its first appearance in the 1950s. I have analyzed some of these above but for the time being, I will focus on the period after 1990. It is not a coincidence that the representation of the *gecekondu* population as invaders corresponds to the time when the structural transformation in *gecekondu* areas occurred and the people in those areas were relatively getting wealthier. The *gecekondu* districts started to be transformed into a hybrid form in which *gecekondus* were turned into apartments without any city planning. During this process the public

sphere produced a new discontentment about those places; whether they were politically marginal or not, they were thought as invaders who occupied public lands (Erman, 2001). Though they were considered poor and unfortunate before 1990s (whether they were politically dissident or not), the profit emerging out of apartmentalization in the *Gecekondu* areas made a philanthropist discourse impossible. These claims have some relevance and the unjust economic profits from *gecekondu* areas are clearly demonstrated by scholars (Buğra, 1998, Keyder 2000). However, as Wedel points, it is suspicious that the representation of *gecekondu* areas in the mainstream media as places of unearned income and speculation was intensified after the urban transformation projects are introduced (Wedel, 2001).

The belief that the people in *gecekondu* areas illegally occupy public lands is still widespread. However, many of these places are now registered and the people in those areas have their title deeds; they are legalized to some extent (Keyder 2000). On the other hand, there are still many districts and houses which have not yet obtained an official title deed. Most of those still illegal areas are marginal and revolutionary districts and Okmeydanı is one of them. There are lots of reasons why Okmeydanı has not obtained title deeds and I will explain them later. But now it is important to note that within the public sphere, the marginal districts are represented as “invaders” of public property. This representation accords well with the line of representation of the marginal districts as “terrorist” and “criminal”. People in Okmeydanı assert that like the other pejorative representations, the discourse of invaders is a product of marginalization and of manipulation. It is marginalization because the historical background of Okmeydanı act as the ground for the hate generated in the public sphere and seen as a wound on the surface of the city. The mainstream bourgeois media constantly tries to eliminate the potential threat of these

oppressed people who are still a source of anxiety in the public sphere. Okmeydanı residents see this as manipulation with the state and the media trying to convince the public that Okmeydanı and the other politically marginal districts (Armutlu, Gülsuyu etc.) are illegally constructed, occupying public property. Thus following Warner, the public sphere speaks to the general, common sense, to us; it says “they are stealing from you” (Warner, 2005: 77). This becomes a call according to my informants, for the media to assert that it is certainly necessary to demolish these places:

In the media Okmeydanı is associated with theft and occupation. Those who say that... Where were they when we have arrived here? Why could not they tell that to our grandfathers? It is because they were in need of them. Now it is over. Okmeydanı became a central place and therefore gained value, so they want to evacuate us. Besides, everyone bear Okmeydanı ill-will. They have suffered so much from us. We must be awake against that. People become corrupted here in many ways but the general sensibility about this issue remained same. Everybody is aware of this ugly game here.<sup>49</sup>

A news report in a bulletin which was written after the 2005 Kulaksız demolition provides another example of a dialogical relation with the public representation. In the bulletin, it is said that a columnist tried to represent *gecekondus* as stealing state land and the people from Okmeydanı went to him to explain the situation. The bulletin concludes by asserting Okmeydanı would not be silent in the face of this kind of misrepresentations anymore. There is a piece from the mentioned/complained article:

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<sup>49</sup> “Medyada Okmeydanı işgalci hırsız diye gösteriliyor. Biz buraya ilk geldiğimizde neredeydi bunu söyleyenler. Dedelerimize niye söylemediler. O dönem ihtiyaçları vardı. Şimdi işleri bitti, Okmeydanı merkezi bir yer oldu değerlendi bizi atmak istiyorlar tabi. Bir de tabi Okmeydanına karşı herkesin garezi var, çok çektiler bizden. Buna karşı uyanık olmak lazım, buranın insanı da birçok açıdan bozuldu ama bu konudaki hassasiyetleri değişmedi. Ortada dönen çirkin oyunun herkes farkında.”

Metropolitan Municipality Chief of Reconstruction Şimşek Deniz asserted 218 thousand among 1,5 million buildings are on the public land. This numbers reveal that from 1960s onwards İstanbul had been yağmalamak in the full sense of the word. It would be theft if you put a pen in your pocket in any public office and you will be imprisoned. Yet, if you steal public land rather than pen they will compete with each other in providing you sevices like electricity, road, water, bus and sewerage.<sup>50</sup>

According to local people in Okmeydanı, this kind of representation is widespread and they are intentionally written. It addresses “the public” to show how the “invaders” have stolen from her. In the news, it is said:

After his article blaming those consructing buildings on public land in Vatan newspaper on 26 August 2005 many from Okmeydanı called Mustafa Mutlu to protest him. In addition to this a four people committee from our commission (Ali Çetkin, Rüstem Karakuş, Ali Güler, İlknur Bektaş) had visited him in her office to tell the truth and to make him correct his article. He had corrected the article saying that people of Okmeydani are mağdur rather than thieves. From now on, in order to remind the truth we will visit all the media institutions describing us through unproper concepts such as occupiers and thieves.<sup>51</sup>

To finish describing this dialogue, we need to turn to the response from Mustafa Mutlu, which is also mentioned in the bulletin:

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<sup>50</sup><http://www10.gazetevatan.com/root.vatan?exec=yazardetay&sid=&Newsid=59359&CategoryId=4&wid=102> Büyükşehir Belediyesi İmar Müdürü Şimşek Deniz, İstanbul'daki 1,5 milyon yapıdan 218 bininin Hazine arazisi üzerinde olduğunu açıklamış. Bu rakam da gösteriyor ki 1960'lardan bu yana İstanbul, kelimenin tam anlamıyla yağmalanmış! Herhangi bir kamu binasından tükenmez bir kalemi alıp cebinize koysanız, bunun adı "hırsızlık" olur ve hapse atılırsınız. Ama devletin kalemini çalacağınıza gözünüzü karartıp, arazisini çalarsanız, bir de size kanalizasyon, elektrik, yol, su, otobüs hizmeti vermek için yarışrlar.

<sup>51</sup> Gelecek Özel Sayı: 1, 2005, “26 Ağustos 2005 tarihli yazısında Hazine arazisi üzerine ev yapanları hırsızlıkla suçlayan Vatan Gazetesi köşe yazarı Mustafa Mutlu’yu çok sayıda Okmeydanlı telefonla arayarak protesto etti. Ayrıca komisyonumuzdan dört kişilik bir heyet (Ali Çetkin, Rüstem Karakuş, Ali Güler, İlknur Bektaş) kendisini bürosunda ziyaret ederek gerçekleri anlattı ve yazısını düzeltmesi istendi. Bunun üzerine ertesi gün yazısını düzelten Mustafa Mutlu Okmeydanlıların hırsız değil mağdur olduğunu yazdı. Bundan sonra bizim hakkımızda işgalci, hırsız ya da benzeri yakışsız kavramları kullanan bütün basın kuruluşlarını benzer şekilde ziyaret edip gerçekleri hatırlatmaya devam edeceğiz.”



My yesterday's article "Well done Kadir Topbaş" was aiming at all the public land occupiers. I have not received a single reaction from Sultanbeyli, Ümraniye and Gazi neighborhood.. But some citizens of Okmeydanı almost attacked me. All of them telling the same as if they have agreed before: " 50-60 years ago our fathers and grandfathers came here illiterate. When they were looking for a land in order to construct a house to live some people from Albania showed them fields of Okmeydanı and said 'These lands belong to me, I can sell them to you'. Our fathers believed and the money. Then the state brought electricity, water and roads to the squatter houses built on these lands. Now you cannot say we are thieves!" True... In the case of Okmeydanı I cannot tell the people are thieves and I did not....They can be regarded as "mağdur" at the most. Since they have paid for 'stolen goods' ! Another example: In 1970s there a swindler appeared with the nickname Sülün Osman. He chose Beyazıt Clock Tower and Galata Bridge as his place. Whenever a poor-fellow with a wooden suitcase, indicating that he has just arrived to İstanbul, appeared he fooled him by saying 'let me sell you this bridge, you will sell tickets and swinging in the money'. Now I am asking you the beloved squatters of Okmeydanı: what if this poor-fellow grandchildren argue claim for Galata Bridge and say 'it is my property, because our ancestors paid for it'. What would you think? What should be done today? Of course the state should be responsible for the mistakes of former administrators and problems should be solved 'in place'. Housing estates should be constructed in the regions whereupon you have rights of property. But in return, you have to give up seeking rent profit from the land that does not belong to you.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup><http://www10.gazetevatan.com/root.vatan?exec=yazardetay&sid=&Newsid=59431&Categoryid=4&wid=102> Dünkü "Bravo Kadir Topbaş" başlıklı yazım, İstanbul'daki tüm Hazine arazisi yağmacılarını hedef alıyordu. Sultanbeyli'den, Ümraniye'den, Gazi Mahallesi'nden tek bir tepki bile almadım. Ama Okmeydanı'nda yaşayan bazı vatandaşlarımızın deyim yerindeyse saldırısına uğradım. Hepsi ağız birliği yapmışcasına aynı şeyi anlatıyordu: "Bundan 50-60 yıl önce babalarımız, dedelerimiz İstanbul'a geldiklerinde okuma yazmaları bile yokmuş. Başlarını sokacak bir ev yapabilmek için arazi aramaya başladıklarında, karşılına Arnavut asıllı birileri çıkmış ve Okmeydanı'ndaki tarlaları gösterip, 'Buralar benim, istediğiniz yeri size satabilirim' demiş. Babalarımız da onlara kanıp parayı vermişler. Daha sonra da devlet bu arazilere yapılan gecekondulara elektrik, yol, su götürmüş. Şimdi siz bize hırsız diyemezsiniz!" Doğru... Ben Okmeydanı örneğindeki vatandaşlarımıza hırsız diyemem, zaten demedim de... Onlara hırsız değil olsa olsa "mağdur" denilebilir... Çünkü paralarını bir "çalıntı mal"a kaptırmışlar! Size bir de örnek vereyim: 1970'li yıllarda, Sülün Osman lakaplı bir dolandırıcı türemişti. Beyazıt Saat Kulesi'ni, Galata Köprüsü'nü kendisine mekân seçmişti. Ne zaman karşısına elinde tahta bavulıyla İstanbul'a yeni geldiği belli olan bir gariban çıksa, "Gel şu köprüyü sana satayım. Gelen geçene bilet keser, paraya para demezsin" diye onu kandırırdı. Şimdi size sorarım, Okmeydanı'ndaki sevgili gecekondulu sakinleri: O gün Sülün Osman'a para kaptıran garibanların çocukları, torunları bugün çıkıp, "Galata Köprüsü benim malım. Çünkü büyüklerimiz burası için para ödemiş" dese ne düşünürsünüz? Peki bugün ne yapılmalı? Devlet, eski yöneticilerinin hatalarının diyetini elbette ödemeli ve sorunu "yerinde" çözmeli. Sizlere, "zilliyet hakkı"na sahip bulduğunuz bölgelerde sosyal konutlar yapmalı. Ama sizler de aslında size ait olmayan bu arazilerden büyük "rantlar" ummaktan vazgeçmelisiniz.

The dialogue above illustrates my point nicely. Remember that I began my analysis about the public representation with the theme of “liberated area”. This indicates the representation of *gecekondü* inhabitants as “terrorists”, and then local people as terrorists transformed into local people from whom a lot of “criminal” types are produced. Now these “criminals” turn into “invaders” in which all people in Okmeydanı are included. This specific form of criminality is based on a specific conception of law through which the codes of legal and illegal are hegemonically produced in the public sphere. Yet this is a shifting process in which the conflicting groups struggle to define what is legal and what is not. Thus, 1.36 tries to present the marginal district as an example of transgression of “state law”. It is a common discursive strategy that if you try to support something, you should criticize it as well so it would appear as an objective analysis. The case is the same of the local people’s accounts, where Mustafa Mutlu defines “state law” as the preservation of public property though he also agrees that the state is also at fault: the state and its institutions provided infrastructure and public service to those who violated the rights of the public. The circulation of this specific form of legality is not exclusive to Mutlu’s article; indeed the Turkish public sphere always creates a sense of just and unjust by including what it excludes. If the state violates human rights it is a shame but the culprit is the government or specific individuals (*münferit*), never “the state”. Thus the integrity of “the state” is reaffirmed, and the remedy is never substantial or radical but just to save the day<sup>53</sup>. In this sense, it is not surprising that like many of his colleagues Mutlu states that the authorities were wrong and they undertook illegal actions for populist reasons, but now what is past is past and the current municipality will rightly demolish the houses of those people and take what belongs to the state.

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<sup>53</sup> The debates around 1982 Constitution Law is a well known case for this understanding. Although nearly all segments of the political life in Turkey complain about the constitutional law, for 25 years none of the governments coming to the power have changed it but just made countless amendments.

The answer to this assessment is also strange: the people from Okmeydanı state that they do not anything wrong. But the assertion is different from the representation in the dissident public; they assert that they are not thieves, that they bought the lands they now occupy from the people who inhabited the place at that time. The rejections are based on the affirmation of the legal structure: land ownership. The local people state that they did not know they had occupied the land illegally, as if they would not buy, if they knew land belonged to the public.

The local people in my interviews as well as the bulletin mentioned above point out that their labor over the area makes the place their own; they built their houses with their hands and they shed blood and tears to build the walls of their houses. This narrative style is in accordance with the dissident public's representation. Moreover my interviewees also state that their ancestors and (in some cases) themselves thought that the land belonged to the Albanians from whom they bought them. Thus we have two aspects of the same story: on the one hand, the idioms of the leftist discourse (hard work, struggle, solidarity etc.) are used for claiming ownership of land. On the other hand, the language of "the law" is used for the same reason when saying they bought the land from owners. I assert that the difference between these two accounts, two rationalities, is about the discursive reservation the local people have. For the general public, they use the reasoning which implies private property: they say that they "bought" the land, they paid its price. For the dissident public, they adopt the discourse of labor and work in order to claim the right of the lands. Before the law, as in Kafka's novel *the Trial*, they demonstrate a sense of respect towards the law, because they demand the title deeds –lawful affirmation and recognition of ownership- from the gate keeper. Consequently the people of Okmeydanı adopt the codes of the public sphere in order

to create a dialogue with those who set the rules (state and public institutions). Thus they learn and use de-marginalization as a way one of the “real” problems of Okmeydanı can be solved. This is a passage from the margin to the norm, from exclusion to inclusion. On the other hand, they still refer to the dissident public whose many members have defended the district against the state forces (polices, municipalities, media etc.). They try to preserve their belonging to and inclusion with those who are excluded. Although the norm and the law of this other public are still considered as noble and worthy as having, they refer to that norm cautiously as I have demonstrated in the case of textile workshop owners. Therefore, the belonging and inclusion to different publics, the norm and the margin, is achieved through two different sets of representation and its dialogical relations (representations). The two visions are represented to two discrete publics. Their functions and effects differ and, as I will show at the end of the chapter, their consequences are significant concerning the constitution of the sense of belonging- of the community. But for a last thing I have to scrutinize another aspect of public representation.

#### The Archive of Marginalization: The Narratives about the Former Public Perception of Gecekondu People

It is always better to start by listening to the life stories of the local people to begin field research, if you are not very much familiar with the field. Because no matter what you are searching for in a specific place, there are lots of traces you can find in their life stories and the way they narrate them (Portelli, 1991: xii). My informants have told me many things about their previous experiences about being in a margin of İstanbul. One of them is particularly important for this argument. Most of the local

inhabitants have come to Okmeydanı during the 1970s, as I have already stated, and they have endured a lot of difficulties: lack of infrastructure, improper living conditions and continuous social exclusion. I have already analyzed the representations of marginal districts within the public sphere and showed marginalization and exclusion. Now I will look at the previous modes through which marginalization was articulated in the narratives of local people. I will specifically examine the narratives rather than archival data because I am mainly interested in the social and political traits and functions of marginalization within the margin today. Thus what they remember and how they recall the previous ways of representative marginalization is more important than the factual ways of representation. However, I will support their claims with academic studies examining the issue of *gecekondu* and their public visibilities in order not to prove that they are telling the truth but to show the traces of previous marginalizations of Okmeydanı inhabitants.

There are lots of themes in the previous ways of marginalization of the district and its inhabitants within the larger framework of representation of *gecekondu* areas. My informants told me that though their district and they are marginal in many respects, they themselves and the district have changed a lot. I will analyze these themes (especially the issue of degeneration) in detail in the third chapter. For the time being, I want to focus on one of them. My informants point out that there are great transformations in the district, which cause the “degeneration” of Okmeydanı, yet there are also transformations in the ways of living which resulted in restructuring the relationship between modern urban space and the margin. It was clearly stated to me by nearly all my informants that at the time they first came to İstanbul, to Okmeydanı, they or their ancestors had lacked the codes of a modern urban life style; they did not know how to behave in public places (Taksim square,

parks, etc.), how to dress, and even how to communicate with the people in İstanbul who had settled the city long ago and considered as “İstanbulians”<sup>54</sup>:

Our fathers suffered much when they arrived here. It is not merely constructing squatter houses. There was job but nobody was considering you as a person. They were regarding us as invaders coming from the countryside. There was nothing in terms of money brought from the village. They were employed in the worst jobs. I mean they worked in the constructions or worked as porters in the marketplaces. Most of them initially stayed in bed-sitting-rooms and those living in the city found them strange, excluded them. They had adaptations problems and became secluded in Okmeydanı.<sup>55</sup>

When I have arrived I was living at a bed-sitting-room. We were living 7-8 people in a room under inhumane conditions. Everbody tried to bring his family to İstanbul. At those times all the poor people who came to Okmeydanı lived in these rooms...We were excluded too much. I mean you don't know the customs and rules of the city. You follow what you have learned in the village. With everything, your appearance and attitude you are different.<sup>56</sup>

I was 8 years old when I came. We went to a house in Hacıhüsrev. We hired it from a guy called Hacı. Then he learned that we are Alevi. We were living 9-10 people in the house. He tried to send us away, he said ‘These are Alevis, lots of people in a room’. He came and pulled out the roof in the winter, can you believe it? We were left there under snow. Thereafter my mom found another house. This time she did not tell how many people we are, she just said ‘me and my two daughters’ so that we could hire. Then the woman realized we are crowded. We explained the situation, that we had to lie not to live in the street. Thanks to her she showed understanding.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> For a broader discussion concerning the İstanbulians –the real people from İstanbul (İstanbulu)- see also Bartu (2001) and Öncü (2000).

<sup>55</sup> Babalarımız buraya geldiğinde çok çekmişler. Sadece Gecekondu yapımı filan değil. İş var ama sana insan gözüyle bakan yok. Bizi köyden gelmiş istilacılar olarak görüyorlarmış. Köyden getirdikleri pek birşey yok para babında. En kötü işlerde çalışıyorlar, işte amelelik yapıyorlar inşaatlarda, pazarlarda, halde hamallık yapıyorlar. Çoğu ilk geldiğinde bekar evlerinde kalmış (....)de. Şehirli insanlarda garipsemiş dışlamış bunları. Uyum sağlayamamışlar, kapalı kalmışlar Okmeydanı’nda.

<sup>56</sup> Ben ilk geldiğimde tarlabaşında bekar evinde kalıyordum. Yedi sekiz kişi bir odada insanlık dışı şartlarda yaşıyorduk. Herkes ailesini İstanbul’a getirmek için çalışıyordu. Okmeydanına o dönem gelenlerden parası olmayanlar hep bu bekar odalarında yaşadılar... Çok dışlanıyorduk o dönem biz; yani bilmiyorsun şehirde adab kural nedir. Köyden öğrendiklerini uyguluyorsun. Her şeyinle, kıyafetin halin tavrın bir başka görüntün var yani.

<sup>57</sup> İlk geldiğimizde buraya 8 yaşındaydım. Hacıhüsrev’de bir eve geldik, küçücük bir yer. Hacı diye bir adamdan kiraladık. Sonra duymuş biz aleviyiz, evde de 9 10 kişi kalıyoruz. Bizi evden atmaya çalışıyor; diyor “Bunlar aleviler içiçe yaşıyorlar, birsürü insan tek odada kalıyor”. Kış vakti geldi çatıyı söktü, inanabiliyor musun? Biz öyle kar altında kaldık... Sonra annem başka bir ev buldu. Bu

The accounts above give us a general perspective of the situation in Okmeydanı during the 1970s. Remembering the fact that nearly all the *gecekondu* owners had come to the district within that period (the local people of Okmeydanı, the real *Okmeydanlı*, as Okmeydanian vis-à-vis İstanbulian), most of my informants had encountered similar marginalization and exclusion processes. When they mention the first time they came to the district, their narratives generally focus on the public perception about them at the time. As it is clear in the above accounts, the pejorative distinctiveness they carried was a sign from which one could not escape easily. Their bodies, their movements, their clothes, their families kept reminding them that they did not belong to the city where they work and live. The perception of *gecekondu* people within the public is their first marginalization; it is earlier to the representations of the marginal districts as liberated areas, the source of terrorism, the home of criminals and invaders (Erman, 2001). If the later version of marginalization has a hybrid characteristic which contains both political and social reasons for marginalization and exclusion, the earlier ways are relatively more social. My informants recount that it was not that their political affiliation disturbed the people in İstanbul, but how they looked and how they acted. It is important that they still remember this marginalization and thus provide me with necessary accounts to follow the line of a history of marginalization which is a part of the communal memory in Okmeydanı.

According to my informants, the vision of “*Okmeydanlı*” as “large families”, “employed in the worst of jobs” (construction laborers (*amele*), porters (*hamal*) etc.),

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sefer söylemedi tabi kaç kişi olduğumuzu, iki kızım bir ben dedi. Ancak tutabildik. Sonra o kadın öğrenmiş kalabalık olduğumuzu. İşte durumu anlattık, sokakta kaldık mecburen yalan söyledik diye. Sağolsun kadın anlayışlı çıktı.

“those who are still village people” and “those who do not know urban culture” has vanished. This is a success story. The local people “the real *Okmeydanlı*” learned how to behave in the city and they no longer stick out in public places now. The old representation does not correspond anymore to the way they are now. One of my informants said:

Okmeydani people know how to behave and what to put on anymore. Easier said than done, they have been living here for about forty years. There is still a longing for the village; for the life there or something tho. But they also adopted the city life. New generation is Istanbulite from head to toe, yet being much of wannabes, but they haven't gone through the difficulties that their fathers did. Their only problem is unemployment.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear from the above that the new generation feels no problem with urban life style whereas their fathers had learned it in time. As they managed to build *gecekondu*s, they then managed to turn *gecekondu*s into apartments, their material success has spilled over to social life and reached some measure of inclusion and demarginalization<sup>59</sup>. In this particular sense, the term “real *Okmeydanlı*” designates two characteristics. First, the term stands for those who struggle against moral deficiencies, political corruption and economic exploitation, as I have analyzed before. This first characteristic speaks to the dissident public. The second characteristic signifies those who struggled against marginalization and exclusion within “the” public sphere (public perception) and succeeded to some extent. Thus marginalization in the margin appears as a simultaneous process of exclusion and

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<sup>58</sup> Okmeydanı halkı artık nasıl davranması nasıl giyinmesi gerektiğini öğrendi. Dile kolay kırk yıldır buradalar. Gerçi hala bir köye özlem duyma, oradaki hayatı arzulama filan var ama şehir hayatını da benimsediler. Genç nesil tamamen İstanbullu zaten, gerçi özentisi çok ama babaları gibi bir zorluk da çekmediler. Tek sorunları işsizlik.

<sup>59</sup> However this success story is mainly limited to the relative social inclusion to the urban sphere. The discourse of degeneration accompanies the process and transforms it to a story of loss regarding the social norms and proper ways of living. I will analyze this aspect in detail in the following chapter.



inclusion. This simultaneity is important in understanding the effects and functions of marginalization.

### Conclusion: Belonging to a Margin through Demarginalization and Remarginalization

In this chapter, I have analyzed the codes and modalities of representations of marginal districts within different public spheres and their dialogical relations with the local people living in one of those districts, viz. Okmeydanı. I have pointed that two different public spheres, that is the dissident public and the public, produce two discrete ways of representation through which local people are included and excluded simultaneously. Accordingly, the inhabitants of Okmeydanı get into a dialogical relation with those representations, which local people use to negotiate the terms of demarginalization and inclusion. Yet there is another function of marginalization.

What is marginalization? Marginalization is a process through which the norm, the general, the totality are produced and articulated to everyday life incessantly. It constitutes totality, belonging (the identification with the general or the “rest”), and unity through various representations and depictions. The state, the public and the community creates their own totality, their sense of belonging and its unity by excluding and marginalizing the other, more properly by producing “the other”, its margin (Das and Poole, 2004). It is not a conscious performance. It means that the state, the public or the community does not aim to marginalize in order to create its integrity. There is no integrity before marginalization; they coexist with relentless simultaneity. To understand this point, I prefer to refer to Lacan. Lacan has pointed that “the Other” is not a way of producing identity (which means self

integrity/unity), the self. The self appears at the very moment of the appearance of the other; the self is no more than othering (Lacan, 2006: 79-80; Stavrakakis, 2002: 17). Thus state, public and community coexist with their margins. It is the very reason why Benjamin says “the state of exception is the rule” because the unity of the totality is all about delimitation, determining the margin; and the rule and the exception are equivalent (Benjamin, 1969: 257).

Yet the marginalization for the marginalized is not a one way street, when an entity defines its margin, either margin is transformed from the other to the same (normalized or neutralized) as a result of the process or it transforms the totality and itself and produces a new entity. I have tried to exemplify and analyze the ways of creating unity (a collective belonging) through dialogues with two different publics. Before the 1980s, the constitution of unity in Okmeydanı was largely created in a struggle against the state which was a political opponent at the time and against the public which excluded them socially and politically according to the appearance of the inhabitants (their looks, size of family, behavior etc.). However, it is widely narrated that the sense of homogeneity and belonging within the district was achieved not only through dialogues with the state and the public but also through the aesthetic and social structure within the district at the time. That structure changed and new modes of belonging were needed. I will analyze the transformation of the built environment and social structure at the margin in the second chapter. But the new modes of belonging that the transformation necessitates are also relevant here. I assert that within the dialogical relations described above, the inhabitants of Okmeydanı as the margin had/have not only learned the ways of demarginalization and inclusion, but also learned how to marginalize others for the constitution of their social integrity, i.e. their local community. Thus I contend that the local people keep

the codes of marginalization in reserve and use them to recreate a sense of belonging to their own community in Okmeydanı. The most remarkable example of this process is the issue of Kurdish people in the district.

After 2000, Okmeydanı witnessed a wave of Kurdish immigration to the district. No one exactly knew why and where they came from, but most of the local people in the district are in an agreement with the statement that the political and social conditions in Okmeydanı have deteriorated after Kurdish population in the district increased. When I asked what the most important problem of Okmeydanı is, my informants –nearly without exception- say three things: title deeds, degeneration and Kurdish people as a source of degeneration.

A lot is changed after the Kurds arrived, but in bad terms. People got broken off from each other, the air got nasty in the neighborhood. I mean I don't blame this situation tho.<sup>60</sup>

I heard this statement several times and it is very common for local people to accuse Kurdish people for the current condition of the district. But what is interesting comes forth when I ask them why and how Kurdish people degrade the district. They start to explain the reasons one by one and the themes which they use to explain the negative effects of Kurdish migration include a number of truth statements: First Kurdish people are terrorists. Their case is justified to some extent because the state violated them for a long time. Yet their political cause is overshadowed by their militant methods which are generally interpreted as out of joint.

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<sup>60</sup> Kürtler geldikten sonra çok değişti Okmeydanı, ama kötü anlamda. İnsanlar birbirinden koştı, mahallenin havası bozuldu. Yani suçlamıyorum ama durum bu.

Look, I wanna have a word on Kurdish struggle: now, we are against the state this is all right; we know what happened. But they don't know how to do politics tho. Bang off, leap out, throw molotov, burn down the buses. Then the neighborhood reacts, there it is, people look with hatred.<sup>61</sup>

They set forth violence a little too much. Naturally, the media uses it. But they are not wrong, let me tell you something: there was an action here the other day; they prepared some molotov cocktail against the police. This is not all right but let's say it happened. Apparently the police didn't show up and they threw the molotovs at the cars from that overpass. Apparently one of them hit a car which has a pregnant woman inside. God forbid, nothing happened. But what's this? They throw the molotovs in order not to waste them.<sup>62</sup>

Okmeydani is full of PKK people; constantly peeping out in action. There's no peace left for us.<sup>63</sup>

Politically active people, as it can be seen above, understand the issue not as pure terrorism and sheer violence. However their conceptualization also connotes the term "terrorism" with emphasis on excessive violence and political mayhem. On the other hand, the people in Okmeydanı, who are not politically engaged, see all the Kurds in the district as members of the PKK. They claim that those people are the ones who terrorize the district and spoil the public image of Okmeydanı. They state further that the most important reason behind the degeneration of the district is the exponentially increasing Kurdish population.

Another theme is the accentuation of the criminal nature of Kurdish people. Many people in the district stated to me that even though not all, many Kurds are

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<sup>61</sup> Bak ben kürt mücadelesi hakkında bir şey söylemek istiyorum; şimdi devletin karşısındayız bu konuda eyvallah, neler oldu bitti biliyoruz. Ama bunlar da nasıl siyaset yapılırlar bilmiyorlar. Hemen fırla dışarı molotof at, otobüs yak. Sonra mahalleli tepki veriyor, insanlar işte nefretle bakıyorlar.

<sup>62</sup> Yani burada şiddeti fazla ön plana çıkarıyorlar. Medyada bunu kullanıyor haliyle. Ama haksız da değiller sana birşey anlatayım geçen gün burada eylem oldu bunlar molotof hazırlamış polise karşı. Bu da uygun değil ya hadi oldu diyelim. Polis gelmemiş bularda şu üst geçitten arabaların üstüne atmışlar molotofları, hamile bir kadının bulunduğu bir arabaya denk gelmiş. Allahtan bişey olmamış da. Ama var mı böyle birşey ya, molotof boşa gitmesin diye atıyorlar.

<sup>63</sup> PKKli dolu artık Okmeydanı sürekli çıkıyorlar eylem yapıyorlar huzurumuz kalmadı.

“dark” people in the sense that they are engaged in criminal, illegal, and immoral relations.

I can't say all of them are completely nasty, sure there are good ones among them. But it is one out of a hundred. The rest is drug, hijacking, theft, what ever you are looking for.<sup>64</sup>

... Illegitimate stuff is many. We don't blame all of them. The guy steals, does that, when he's arrested he is off with saying that he is for DTP.<sup>65</sup>

Now that one should be politically alert when talking about Kurds. Especially, when nationalism is rising as such. But this is a reality, the Kurds are tend to gang up a bit in Okmeydani: illegal stuff, drugs etc. are in the control of Kurdish mafia. That's the reason why you cannot say Okmeydani people's anxieties are mistaken.<sup>66</sup>

The account 1.49 illustrates an attitude typical of the local inhabitants who are still politically active. Though they do not want to fall into a position which they see as a state position, they affirm that Kurdish people in general are more prone to perpetrate crime. The fear of criminality is directed to the Kurdish population, and yet Okmeydani has rarely witnessed crimes which were committed by Kurds. I came to this conclusion because the local police officers that I had the chance to speak to clearly pointed that other than political criminals (it means leftist revolutionaries and the Kurdish movement), there is a very low rate of crime in the district. Furthermore, when I asked what kind of criminal activities were perpetrated by Kurds, the local people can not give an example but just a statement like “you know, they do such things”. The function of this diversion is analyzed a little bit later. But now let me

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<sup>64</sup> Şimdi hepsi kötü diyemem, iyi olanlarda vardır aralarında. Ama yüzde bir. Diğerleri uyuşturucu, gasp, hırsızlık ne ararsan var.

<sup>65</sup> ... Gayrimeşru işleri de çok. Hepsini suçlamıyoruz. Adam hırsızlığını yapıyor, şunu yapıyor, yakalandığı zaman ben DTPliyim diyor. İşin içinden sıyrılıyor.

<sup>66</sup> Şimdi siyaseten Kürtler hakkında dikkatli konuşmak lazım. Hele milliyetçilik bu kadar yükselirken. Ama şu bir gerçek Okmeydani'nda az da olsa Kürtler çeteleşmek eğiliminde, yasadışı işler, uyuşturucu vs. Kürt mafyası kontrolünde. O yüzden Okmeydani insanının bu kaygılarını tamamen yersiz olduğunu düşünemezsin. 1.49

continue with other themes through which Kurdish people are located within the dialogical space of everyday.

The use of the term “invaders” to signify Kurdish people in the district is very prevalent. Many of my informants told me that Kurdish people in Okmeydanı aim to get control of the district. Because the district is relatively safe, considering the positive content of the term “liberated area” (that is to say, relatively free from state oppression), Kurdish people try to turn the district into a fortress of the Kurdish movement in İstanbul.

This place is literally invaded. PKK will make this place its castle. The state allows it because Okmeydanı is the castle of revolution. So that they can enter the neighborhood more easily. This situation suits both sides’ books. We are crushed in between.<sup>67</sup>

Yet they are not only renting houses but also buying them. In short, total invasion. I hear myself, with my ears, the guy saying ‘from now on here we are’<sup>68</sup>

When the local people describe Kurds more specifically, the pejorative perspective above continues within the narratives. If the traits attributed to Kurds can be subsumed under political representation, these more specific descriptions can be seen as social representation of the Kurdish people among the local people of Okmeydanı. Accordingly, the local people in Okmeydanı state that Kurds are not wanted or welcomed within the district because they rent the flats of Okmeydanı and then they live there with up to 20 people. They have dozens of children, because

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<sup>67</sup> Burası resmen istila edildi. PKK burayı kale yapacak. Devlette buna izin veriyor çünkü Okmeydanı devrimin kalesi. Böylece daha rahat girebilecekler mahalleye. İki tarafın da işine geliyor bu durum. Arada biz eziliyoruz.

<sup>68</sup> Artık sadece kiralamıyorlar ev de satın alıyorlar. Yani tamamen istila. Ben kulaklarımla duyuyorum ya adam diyor “bundan sonra burada biz varız”.

Kurds do not think of their children's future and their education. They just bear them and throw them into the streets.

They came here after 2000. Then people were puzzled of what was going on. All wacky people... They came as tenants, they smashed up the houses. They come as two persons then they happen to end up thirty. Uncles, siblings, a thousand relatives... After all, each of them has ten children. They have babies without thinking. The folks here are foresighted and enlightened people, naturally they find it strange.<sup>69</sup>

Most of my informants point to the "indecent" and "inhuman" ways Kurds live in and work. They are crowded, dirty; they work in the worst jobs as porters, laborers, garbage collectors. If they do not work in those lowest ranking jobs, they are employed in textile workshops for the lowest wages, thus reducing wages in general and many people in Okmeydanı became unemployed. Moreover, regarding the population of Kurdish people per family, they work for less but as they are numerous, they earn more than anyone else. It is considered unfair because they make other people (local inhabitants) unemployed within this process.

As I said, they live 20 people in one apartment. They do all kinds of jobs. No matter how much they get paid, they never mind what kind of work they do. Being 20 people together, that household gets 4-5 billion. Then u happen to see that they had bought a house. In this way they conquer the neighborhood.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Buraya geldiler 2000'den sonra, insanlar şaşırıldı ne oluyoruz diye. Acayip acayip adamlar. Kiracı olarak geldiler evleri mahvettiler. İki kişi geliyor bakıyorsun yirmi otuz kişi olmuşlar. Amcaları, kardeşleri, bin tane akrabası. Zaten onu geçtim her birinin on tane çocuğu var. Düşünmeden çocuk yapıyorlar. Buranın insanları ileri görüşlü aydın insanlardır, bu tür şeyleri garipsiyorlar haliyle.

<sup>70</sup> Dediğim gibi bir evde 20 kişi yaşıyorlar. Her tür işlerde çalışıyorlar. Ne kadara çalıştıkları önemli değil, hangi işlerde çalışıyorlar bakmıyorlar. Yirmi kişi olunca o eve 4-5 milyar giriyor. Sonra bakıyorsun ev almışlar. Böyle böyle ele geçiriyorlar mahalleyi.

As far as I observe, the last social trait of Kurdish people is that they came from a rural area and they do not know how to behave in a city. Their clothes and their looks always signify their backward village origin. It is a common complaint that Kurdish people are violent and that they do not know how to communicate. For example, a café owner told me that when a dispute occurs between him and a Kurdish man, the Kurd one brings dozens of people along and tries to assault him. Although such confrontations happened to him several times, no serious incident has happened up until that day, thanks to his connections with revolutionary groups. Yet this representation is so widespread that even small children use the same structure to define Kurds. The daughter of one of my informants, who is only 10 years old, told me:

Informant: Kurds are overcrowded, being slanted to doing drugs and violence. They instantly lay into the fight all together.

Daughter: Mom, tell him what happened at the park. A Kurdish woman and another woman squabbled. Apparently they did not let her in the queue for the swing. Woman said she would call her relatives and they would smash all of them.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear that the testimony of the little girl contains similar discursive elements which are in circulation in everyday dialogues within the district.

Above I have presented the ways of representation of Kurdish people within the district. Those representations include themes like “Kurds as terrorists”, “Kurdish people as criminals”, “Kurdish people as invaders”, “Kurdish people with large families”, “Kurds having a lot of children”, “Kurds who work in indecent jobs for low wages”, and “Kurds who belong to the rural culture and do not know urban behavior”. All these ways of representations correspond exactly to the representation

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<sup>71</sup> Görüşmeci: Kürtler kabalık, uyuşturucu ve şiddete eğilimli. Hepsi birden kavgaya dalıyorlar. Kızı: Anne anlatsana o parkdaki olayı. Kürt bir kadınla başka bir kadın tartışmışlar. Kadına salıncak sırası vermemişler. Kadın dedi çağırıırım sülalemi hepinizi öldürürler.



of marginal districts and their inhabitants, which I have examined in this chapter. As we already saw, the local people of Okmeydanı consider similar representations of themselves as a way of marginalization and exclusion which are performed for several purposes including the demolition of the district and degeneration of the political dissidence. The point here is that the marginalization process does also teach how to marginalize to create social unity, a sense of community. It is not a coincidence that one of the few things that the local people in Okmeydanı share are representations of Okmeydanı thus turning this representation into a means of making of their own community. In this sense, the identity of the “real” *Okmeydanlı* is largely based on the marginalization of Kurdish people. The through which this marginalization is effected are exactly the same as the modes that they were once, and still are subjected to. By pointing the marginal nature of the Kurds, the local people create a totality and a homogeneity -the identity as *Okmeydanlı*-, while at the same time demarginalizing themselves and including themselves in the norm. While he speaks of the postcolonial context, Taussig states “the self is inscribed in the alter that the self needs to define itself againsts.” (Taussig, 1993: 252). Bauman and May make the same point for every communities:

An out-group is precisely that imaginary opposition to itself that the in-group needs for its self-identity, for its cohesiveness, for its inner solidarity and emotional security. (Bauman and May, 2001b: 31)

I believe that this structure resembles the discussion about Orientalism remarkably. Said, in his monumental work, shows that the west defines itself through the definition of the other –the east/orient– (Said, 1995). Yet there are strong criticisms against his work, such as having totalized the orient “while defending it from the negative stereotypes of the West” (Zubaida, 1990: 360). As Zubaida shows,

Timothy Mitchell successfully demonstrates that the west and modernity are only possible with the performance of a distinction between the west (modernity) and east, through simultaneous and continuous exhibition of this double difference (Zubaida, 1990; Mitchell 1991, Mitchell 2000).

In this manner, to marginalize is to invite to the norm; it is an invitation to return from deviation to the general course. Thus it is, in a way, inclusion; you either include the other qua the other or pave the way for the transformation of the other to the same. This is the very reason why the margin and norm coexist. When local people in Okmeydanı show how marginal Kurds are, they become more normal, they belong to the norm more than Kurdish people do. Two forms of belonging appear instantly and simultaneously; to the public and to the community of the real *Okmeydanlı*. The reason of the conveyance of the marginalization is that the totality and its delimitation -its margin- coexist but not in a stable manner. The boundaries between the margin and the norm liquidly change (Bauman, 2000: 193). These boundaries have to be reproduced. The historical and social memories of the local people in Okmeydanı work as reserves for this reproduction. Consequently, the formerly marginalized can be significant agents for the reproduction of marginal representation.

CHAPTER THREE:  
COMMUNITY, TRANSFORMATION AND DEGENERATION

In the previous chapter, I have tried to show that the representation of marginal districts within the public and the dissident public provides the local people with the necessary tools to recreate integrity and totality through which the sense of belonging and commonality can be produced. These tools are the sources of demarginalization and remarginalization; as they demarginalize the local inhabitants some of the time they let those people marginalize the other groups, especially Kurds at other time. I have tried to show that the margin coexists with the norm and their dialectical relations are important to think of politics today.

Yet the modalities of the constitution of a sense of community I have mentioned in the first chapter are only a single part of the everyday life in Okmeydanı and there are several other social and political mechanisms through which the local inhabitants produce their belonging to the district. Following Üstündağ, the narratives constituting belonging provides the clues needed to interpret not only Okmeydanı but also the world we are living in.

In other words, through the term belonging, questions of attachment to people, things and places, the language within which these are articulated and felt (narrativity and performativity), and the ways in which all of these constitute experience and subjectivity (political, gendered, moral, ethnic, classed and so on) could be brought to the forefront. Accordingly, migration has been partially rescued from being dealt with through the worn out paradigms of modernization and urbanization and access to capital and power and has instead become a way of talking about desire

and loss, and morality and political community—all those categories that give meaning to how modernization, urbanization, capitalism and political power are lived, experienced and narrated (Üstündağ, 2005: 79).

In the light of this perspective, I want to take a theme which is the most common issue for people who define themselves as “being from Okmeydanı” (*Okmeydanlı*). The local people, without exception, complain about a process called “degeneration” (*yozlaşma*). For the local people, the theme degeneration works as a production of collective belonging to the space with interpretation and understanding of their own situation, that of “where they are at” (Gilroy, 1991). The term degeneration is central for the definition of Okmeydanı and its interpretations. The narratives I have collected during my field research show me that the issue of degeneration has a distinctive narrative structure in which a lot of social, political, and economical components of the life in Okmeydanı brought together. Moreover, the narratives of degeneration start with a historical depiction of Okmeydanı before degeneration. This historical outlook provides the local people with the ideal norm which is supposed to fill the discontentment of the present situation and with a common history which recompenses the sense of estrangement they are experiencing today. As Tonkin points, the remembering is an oscillating process between the world and the self (Tonkin, 1995: 105); consequently the intersection points within the historical narrations of Okmeydanı can give us traces necessary to think of outside of the self—the local community or the general. In this sense, it is not surprising that the historical narration of Okmeydanı is a necessary component to understand what degeneration means in Okmeydanı today, how it connects the local people to each other, and maybe more importantly why it connects at all.

I hope to answer a series of questions at the end of the chapter. Why do people see the transformation of the district as degeneration rather than normalization of a *gecekondü* district? Why do they start their depiction of the degeneration by describing Okmeydanı before the 1990s? How do they relate the process of apartmentalization with degeneration? What kind of social life and norms they imagine and attribute to the past of the district and through which mechanisms were those norms and characteristics lost? What are the recurrent themes in the narratives of degeneration and what are their functions? These are just some of the questions in my mind.

In this chapter, I firstly want to describe the history of *gecekondü* areas in general so as to trace the similarities and differences between Okmeydanı and other districts. Secondly, I want to talk about the commonalities in the narratives of the district's history. This part will give me insight to discern the specificity of Okmeydanı as it is described in the narratives. I will try to show that the issue of intimacy/familiarity on the one hand, and security on the other hand are constitutive traits for the local people to speak of degeneration. In the third part, I will closely examine how security and intimacy was imagined as the most significant experience of Okmeydanı before the 1990s. I will argue that the narrative representation of old Okmeydanı asserts that the local people are the agents of sustaining and producing control/security and intimacy/familiarity. The same narrative structure posits the state as the main perpetrator destroying solidarity and resistance. In the fourth part I will specifically and exclusively focus on the appearance of degeneration in the narratives of the district. I will try to understand the issues of insecurity, estrangement and ambivalence and how they are articulated to the community of local people in Okmeydanı. I will analyze in detail the components of degeneration

narratives and the discontent with the condition of Okmeydanı after the 1990s' apartmentalization. I will also argue that degeneration and all the mentioned deficiencies in the district are attributed to the state in remarkable accord with the historical narrative. I will state further that in the narratives, the partial recuperation and resistance against degeneration are seen as the social and political merits of the local people. Thereafter, I will show that all these degeneration narratives exclude some other elements of social life in Okmeydanı. I will show that the changing character of labor power, working practices, provision of social security and education are not included as a part of transformation and degeneration. In the conclusion, I will discuss the reasons why some parts of transformation (estrangement, strangers, crime, apartmentalization etc.) are seen as degeneration and some others are only recalled in nostalgic yearning and in private conversations as if they were not significant. I will try to argue that the degeneration narratives are the ways the local people speak to the state, shape their demands, and provide the ground for appropriating the norm of the state (the norm of the general). I will argue that the issue of title deeds and urban transformation project are the main incentives and means for that appropriation. Following Berlant, I will contend that the emphasis on security and intimacy throughout the narratives concerning degeneration (from the historical depiction to the evaluation of the present situation) are determined by the neoliberal characteristic of the state. Demanding from the state to regulate or consider security and intimacy, i.e. *operating emotions*, does notably correspond to the neoliberalism reigning over the world today (Berlant, 2004: 4). Furthermore I want to argue that the emphasis on security and intimacy is a way of asserting the agency of the local people in front of the state and to show that this agency is not reactive as it seems, on the contrary this assertion is in line with neoliberal politics

which seeks deregulation and empowerment of local actors (Rose, 1996: 56-57). I will also show that in a very similar manner, the local people cannot speak of the postfordist transformation of labor, working, social security and services. As long as the issues are removed from the agenda of the state (that is social state) like provision of employment and social security, the local people cannot speak of them because there is no addressee for such issues anymore.

### Gecekondu in Turkey

*Gecekondu* as a term means “built over night” and it really corresponds to the literal meaning it designates. After the migration wave of the 1950s, there was a serious housing problem. It was a dilemma because newly blossoming industries within the urban areas (especially in İstanbul) desperately needed labor force which lacked in the big cities at the time. Yet the new comers did not have enough financial resources to settle in apartments or any other urban accommodation. People from rural areas had no choice but to build their houses on public or private lands. The state had implicitly agreed to this kind of transgression though the demolitions took place in small numbers. However few in numbers they may have been at the beginning of the period, immigrants found a way to prevent demolitions to some extent. They rapidly built their houses because to demolish a completed house was much more difficult and socially/publicly displeasing. Thus the *gecekondu*s built in one night so as to make an outsider see a silhouette of a house no matter how indecent it may be to live in. These houses were built on slopes close to factories and were empty.

*Gecekondu* districts began to appear in this context. As mechanization in the agriculture increased exponentially, the labor power required in agriculture decreased. Along with the introduction of fertilizers on a large scale, the prices of

agricultural products fell to the point that small scale agriculture became economically insufficient for many villagers (Robinson, 1958; Kıray, 1998; Karpat, 1976; Şenyapılı, 2004; Keyder, 1987). However, at the beginning neither the urban public nor the central government was content with the emergence of *gecekondu* districts (Şenyapılı: 2004). After the developmentalist discourse accelerating the agricultural transformation was introduced by the Democrat Party in the 1950s, the *gecekondu* areas started to be seen as a transitional phenomenon and the inhabitants of *gecekondu* houses were eventually expected to turn into modern/urban citizens (Karpat, 1976; Erman, 2001). In the 1960s, the Justice Party started to promote *gecekondu* settlements openly as a result of its populist policies as well as the increasing need for labor power in the developing industrial sector (Buğra, 1998: 307). However, the 1970s witnessed a shift in this approach. On the one hand, the public perception of *gecekondu* areas started to be shaped around the concept of “liberated areas” and on the other hand, leftist politics channelled their operations and organizations towards those districts. Rather than being the vote reserves for right wing parties, the *gecekondu* districts turned into loci of dissident politics (Erman, 2001). But the 1980 coup d’état changed the whole picture: leftist organizations were disbanded to a large extent, their operational capacity decreased significantly, and the *gecekondu* areas started to be “places the police could enter”. As a result of the neoliberal policies of Özal and his subsequent decentralization of state institutions, municipalities became the main addressee for the demands of *gecekondu* people (Ergüder, 1989).

The neoliberal agenda of the 1980s resulted in the legalization of *gecekondu* settlements with “title allocation document” (*tapu tahsis belgesi*) and a comprehensive decentralization of the municipal system. These policies aimed to



bring spontaneous apartmentalization in *gecekondu* districts, which was supposed to lower the costs of planning and construction of organized and planned apartment districts. Permission given to construct multistory houses was assumed to activate the internal dynamics in the local land market and attract the interest of construction firms (Demirtaş, 2007: 116). The lands of *gecekondus*, consequently, were rapidly commercialized and considerable profits could be derived from them (Buğra, 1998). Apartmentalization became a widespread phenomenon and the silhouettes of *gecekondu* districts, with small exceptions, turned into places with tall buildings and narrow and labyrinthine cobbled streets.

#### The Common Historical Narration of Okmeydanı and its Emphasis on Degeneration

The history of Okmeydanı narrated by the local people is by and large in accordance with the general historical background of *gecekondu* areas. However there are a lot of deviations from the common history of *gecekondu* districts and I contend that those divergences are closely related to the marginal position of the district then and now. My informants started to tell the history of Okmeydanı as a narration of degeneration and the collapse of the existing social and political life. They depict a beautiful milieu before the 1990s' concretization process (*betonlaşma*), and then they narrate a period of decay although there are some recuperative moments within it. Now I will give you a brief account of this history as it is narrated and afterward I will dwell on some of its recurrent themes. But it is important to note that these are not the all things they say about the past of the district. My informants have told me a lot of things concerning the previous condition of the district and that of local people. Yet when I ask them about the current condition of Okmeydanı, they started to give

me a story which displays how splendid the Okmeydanı of the *gecekondu* houses was and how it turned into such a hybrid place in which the old social relations disappeared and a sense of insecurity and estrangement started to dominate its life.

The story of Okmeydanı starts with the migration process of local people to the district. Although the first new comers arrived in Okmeydanı between the 1950s and the 1960s, most of my informants came to the district between 1970 and 1980. But the structure of the narration remains unchanged for the local people, considering that the information flow is shaped within the context in which migration is closely related with kinship and place of origin. Consequently everyone in Okmeydanı told me that the district was created on the lands occupied by Albanians. It is not clear how the Albanians came and settled; some tell a story to the effect that Atatürk gave the land to these people after an unknown migration of Albanians to Turkey. Some tell another story in which it is Fatih Sultan Mehmet provided Albanians with those lands so they could cultivate it to meet the needs of the city. At the beginning of the 1960s, the immigrants coming from all over the country began to settle to the district and they bought land from Albanians. My informants emphasize that they did not know that the land was owned by the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation, which was established by Fatih Sultan Mehmet himself to keep the land as a military training area until the end of the time (İşli and İşli, 1993). After the first settlement, immigration rapidly increased. As it is told by many informants, there was no land available after the end of 1970 so the leftist organizations had no chance to distribute lands for the new comers as was the case for 1 Mayıs Mahallesi or Örnektepe. The houses were built as independent, detached units with their gardens which separated houses from the street. Streets were shaped according to the mutual agreements between concerned households, those who were directly affected by the contours of

the street because there was no urban planning conducted by either state authorities or any revolutionary organization. In this sense, the streets and their position within the district, as my informants point, were the spaces over which different conflicts and subsequent agreements took place. The streets had important social functions besides this relatively conflictual nature: people sat on the streets, cracking sunflower seeds, and seeing who was coming and who was going. My informants frequently describe how the streets were much more friendly places than to the extent that one could wander around without any sense of insecurity. People felt a warm and friendly atmosphere enveloping the district just by passing through the streets. There were also public places in which people could see each other and meet people from a different place of origin. These public places were the coffee houses in which people carried out discussions about politics and the problems of district as well as speaking about daily issues which produce proximity and intimacy between unrelated people.

The revolutionaries of that time are depicted as “real” revolutionaries who looked just like ordinary people in Okmeydanı. No matter how many revolutionaries lived in the district, the state and police forces did not dare enter. As a result of the proximity provided by the architectural structure and its consequent sense of security, there was a strong local resistance against the state especially in issues concerning everyday life. My informants told me that the strong political and social solidarity among the local people at the time made the district safe from fascist groups, police forces and state officers. Particularly last group, the state officers, was a consistent treat for the local people since illegal use of land and electricity within the district was a common rule. Although I have stated at the beginning that I will not delve into the matter of validity and factuality of the historical narrations, it may be rewarding to substantiate the argument with a little piece of historical data. Here is a

part from one of the leading newspapers in Turkey, Cumhuriyet (10<sup>th</sup> May 1972), mentioning collective action taken by the local people in Okmeydani against state authorities:

Despite all its dangers the folks here (Okmeydani) have been using the electricity in this way. Despite all sequels, prosecutions and fines... Bro, the power line has downright 220 volts. The nylon cables do not have the capacity to bear this power. Melting with time it becomes conductive, causing death. In spite of this fact, the electricity is drawn out off to the houses and the state property is used illegally. İETT administration gave 10% of them to the courts, the investigations were held against them. Some of the cases ended with 3-6 months imprisonment and the executions were deferred. Other cases are in process. The three state officials who led to the opening of the case were beaten by the people of the neighborhood and they stayed in the hospital a couple of days. After this incidence no state officials went to Okmeydani and Çağlayan.<sup>72</sup>

The above quote is a publicly known incident indicating the relatively out of reach status of the district for the state. Along with this local sovereignty against state inspectors, the local people speak of the relative immunity of the district against police forces which are still defined as enemies of the district and the revolutionaries living in the area. They state that security within the district was, like the infrastructure, provided according to the local rules defined by the inhabitants and revolutionary groups. They say the police and state forces did not aim to ensure security just wanted to destroy the ways security was created because such an act was understood by state authorities as a challenge to the sovereignty of the state. I

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<sup>72</sup> Bütün tehlikelere rağmen yıllardan beri buranın insanları (Okmeydani) böyle elektrik kullanmaya devam edegelmişler. Yapılan ihbarlara, açılan kovuşturmalara ve cezalara rağmen... Haval hattın üzerinden tam 220 volt geçmektedir. Naylon kablolar bu gücü taşıyacak durumda değildir. Zamanla eridiğinden, üzerine dokunmakla iletken olmakta ve ölüme yol açmaktadır. Buna rağmen evlere elektrik çekilerek devletin malı kanunsuz şekilde kullanılmaktadır. İETT idaresi bu durumda elektrik kullananlardan ancak 10 unu Adliyeye vermiş haklarında soruşturma açtırmıştır. Davalardan birkaçı 3-6 aylık cezalarla sonuçlanmış ve cezalar tecil edilmiştir. Diğer davalar ise devam etmektedir. Davanın açılmasına sebep olan üç idare memuru semt sakinlerince dövülmüş, yedikleri dayaktan günlerce hastanede yatmışlardır. Bundan sonra hiçbir memur Okmeydani ve Çağlayana uğramamıştır.

will analyze this aspect in detail after giving you a general narrative of the history of the district and its degeneration but it is important to note that the emphasis on the local conduct of security through intimacy and familiarity is a central theme in the narrative of old Okmeydanı. Though the ways of conducting security were closely connected to political affiliations within the district, those affiliations are narrated with strong connotations of familiarity and proximity as in the case of former revolutionaries being depicted as one of them.

The structure of narration about Okmeydanı shows a remarkable rupture at this point. After depicting how beautiful the appearance of Okmeydanı was, how intimate the interpersonal relations within it were, and how a sense of security had been felt at the time in the area, the picture of Okmeydanı turns into a dark, shadowy place in which one misses the former intimacy and propinquity, one feels a strong sense of insecurity, creating a yearning for the times when there was no doubt about safety. All this turn comes forth when the words “concretization” (*betonlaşma*) and apartmentalization (*apartmanlaşma*) are uttered. My informants say there was a raid of building constructors (*müteahhit*). These sinister people, as it is narrated by most of my informants, convinced the local people to convert their beautiful *gecekondu*s to apartment buildings. Starting around 1989, most of the *gecekondu*s turned into apartments within only 3 years. Through transformation of built environment, there was a great change in every aspect of life in Okmeydanı. My informants began to complain about the new appearance of the district: the buildings they say became uglier, lots of concrete blocks created a gloomy atmosphere, and the streets turned into suffocating labyrinths within which one constantly feels uneasiness.

Along with the transformation of the physical appearance of the district, there were several social consequences as well. Many people came to the district as

tenants; they were total strangers to the local people in contrast to the migration process between the 1960s and the 1980s, which was a result of either kinship ties or place of origins. They had no way of registering the tenants. Admittedly there were many different place of origins and unrelated people in the district before the 1990s, yet by living together in a *gecekondu* district and struggling against state forces collectively, they had the chance of creating a local belonging through which people could identify themselves as *Okmeydanlı* (from Okmeydanı, belonging to Okmeydanı). After concretization, those who identify themselves with the locality faced a problem which was difficult to solve: the name *Okmeydanlı* had once connoted the place, the people living in that place and their ways of living within it; yet there are now lots of other people who do not share those traits except that of living in the same district. The concretization and the following increase in population are connected to strangers immediately within the narratives of local people. When I asked them to recount the history of Okmeydanı, my informants took the question as a chance to show how Okmeydanı degenerated and transformed even though the local people in collaboration with revolutionary organizations produced a kind of preservation of Okmeydanı as if the former social and political structure has been kept intact. The whole story was told to me by nearly all my informants to prove that “you think Okmeydanı is a special place but you should have seen it before, it was much more than you can imagine” and it is a way of asserting that “...and all this degeneration is about apartmentalization and strangers coming to the district”. I will give you a detailed analysis of the representation of the history of Okmeydanı within local people’s narratives later on. So it is better to give a general outline of this historical narration for now and to continue with the depiction of the district after concretization. The narrative structure thus connects the architectural

transformation with the inflow of strangers to the district and then the narratives of local people start to link strangers with the decay of social life and the fall of moral values in Okmeydanı.

My informants identify strangers as the main cause of degeneration; when they came, the sense of familiarity was gone. Since then, the streets have been full of people whose faces are unfamiliar. The circulation of people is so fast that once you think you know some one, s/he disappears the next day and you begin to doubt who s/he was really. Public places like coffee houses became unsuitable because many people who are not known by the local people came and there is no way to register them. The cause of uneasiness is mainly because of the possibility that s/he might be an undercover agent (*sivil*) or a sinister person who plans to harm others.

Furthermore, as revolutionary groups are still strong in the district today, one can be labeled as a militant even if it is not the case<sup>73</sup>. The apartments exacerbated the situation because *gecekondu*s had provided necessary social and physical structure through which familiarity could be constructed. People started to live with strangers in the same building without knowing their names or who they were. The feeling of insecurity intensified. In addition, the crime rate started to increase. Thefts, murders, robberies, rapes, drug trafficking, prostitution, racketing, gangs began to be seen, crimes which were totally unknown until that time, they say. Local norms were suspended. Insecurity and severe ambivalence haunting the district led people to break old social ties; they started to go to village associations (*köy dernekleri*) in which only people from the same place of origin can enter and enjoy old coffee houses practices. The coffee houses did not vanish during this process; on the contrary their numbers multiplied. Yet the new coffee houses were different than

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<sup>73</sup> In Turkey, it is generally known that such sort of accusations and illegal punishments by state authorities are so widespread that the term “execution without trial” (*yargısız infaz*) is a part of everyday speech to name this propensity.

their predecessors; my informants underline that in practice, the new coffee houses are exclusively for the people from the same place of origin. It is in practice because there are no visible signs which signal such distinction as it is the case for village associations. But everyone knows which coffee house belongs to which groups; one belongs to the people from Erzincan, another to the people from Hafik. At the same time night clubs in which women sex workers are employed and the coffee houses in which people gamble came into the scene. Even local people, my informants specifically highlight, are involved with those places.

Fortunately, the end of the millennium and its first months witnessed a great achievement in the struggle against degeneration within the district and a recuperation period followed. The political organizations led people through this recuperation. But at this point I have to give you some information about the revolutionaries in the district in accordance with the accounts of my informants. The revolutionary groups were so strong until the 12 September coup d'état that along with the alliance of the local people, Okmeydanı was, as it is told, impenetrable for police forces and state officers. But the 12 September was a breakdown as was the case for the whole country. Many militants were arrested and sentenced and political cadres were disbanded because they either had to leave the country or were in jail. The police began to control the district. However, 1984 was a resurrection and revolutionary groups took back the district from the hands of state security forces. But the transformation in the built environment –concretization- had decreased their efficiency and capacity to operate and the police started to enter the district again. The year 2000 was another resurrection; the discontent about degeneration, among the residents of Okmeydanı, resulted in a propensity to support revolutionary groups. My informants say “the people (local people) realized how important the



revolutionaries for the district”. They led local people. Many demonstrations took place within the district against degeneration. The name “degeneration” started to be uttered to designate the current situation that the district is in and the solution for it. Demonstrations turned into attacks to the places well known for prostitution and gambling. Molotov cocktails were thrown and many raids were conducted. Revolutionary squads started to watch the district, they fought against local gangs. Many were seriously wounded; even some revolutionaries were killed during confrontations. In the end, the district was allegedly cleared; the night clubs were forced to close (except three of them, it is said that they have close friends in the government and police department), gambling was ended, drug dealing was stopped, thefts and robberies significantly decreased and public places (in this case, parks) became secure again (especially for women).

However, nearly all my informants underline that the current situation of Okmeydanı was and is far from what it was. It is true that the degeneration within the district was stopped to a great extent but the sense of security they once had never returned. There are still strangers residing in the district and the sphere of the unknown is still large. It is particularly clear in the statement which was made several times by nearly all the local people I met: “yes the streets are cleaned and we appreciate it so much. Yet it does not mean everything is alright, no one can know what people are doing in their flats”. The statement shows that the sense of insecurity cannot be overcome with the presence of strangers. In addition to the strangers who came to the district until 2000, another migration wave aggravated the already existing uneasiness within the district. The historical narrative takes a final step and it explains the current condition of the district with reference to that last migration process. After 2000, the Kurdish population increased within the district; the local

people do not know where they came from but it was and still is clear that Kurdish people deteriorated the social and political life in the district significantly. In the previous chapter I mentioned the representation of Kurdish people in the accounts of local people and following the same representation, the historical narrative of the district concludes with a negative view of the effects of Kurdish migration on the district. The final stroke came from these people: being “terrorists”, “criminals”, “savages”, “invaders”, and “crowded dirty families”, Kurds produced further estrangements and insecurities within the district. Some of my informants even argue that Kurds are the sole reason of the condition Okmeydanı is in. Though they are relatively small in number, this view (Kurdish people as the reason which destroys the intimacy and security) is shared by most of my informants.

So far I have described the general outline of how local people narrate the history of Okmeydanı. I have not substantiated this history with my informants’ accounts because first, there is no single account exemplifies the structure of the narration briefly. There are many interruptions and divergences which make it impossible to come up with a single example. I have tried to give you the sequential/temporal structure and the recurrent themes through which “a” history and “a” presence in the district are produced in the dialogues with local people. The second reason is that, following the first reason, the available data I can use is much more suitable for a thematic analysis. Two themes emerge continuously in the historical representation: familiarity and intimacy on the one hand, and security and social control on the other hand.

Concretization operates as the turning point of local history giving rise to the two themes of history in Okmeydanı. As I will try to show you below, the transformation in the built environment articulates familiarity/intimacy and

security/control to the construction of local community and the belonging to that community. I have no factual data to confirm the validity of the argument that the transformation in the built environment resulted in new possibilities and impossibilities regarding the constitution of local identity. We know that single story houses within gardens are a feature of *gecekondu* areas and a few of them are still left standing in Okmeydanı. But, of course, there is no way of knowing whether this ensured intimacy and security as claimed in the narratives. Furthermore this study does not aim to analyze the transformation per se. The questions I am interested in are: why do my informants make connection between the structure of the buildings and the quality of social life? Why do local people see “strangers” and feel “insecure”? What does this mean? Are these two aspects the only things which have changed or are there any other characteristics and traits that have also changed but that are barely mentioned in the narratives? Are there any other reasons for or consequences of the changes in the district which appear in different contexts than the story of degeneration and history? And why do these two aspects come out so strikingly obliterating others? What does this foregrounding of security and familiarity tell us by excluding other aspects and to whom is this narrative addressed?

These are very serious problems and they have to be handled carefully, for the possibility of overinterpretation and misinterpretation is always present. My participant observation and the narratives I have collected will be my main sources. I will analyze how the accounts of transformation can explain familiarity and security in the narratives. To start such a close examination, I propose to follow the same sequential structure in the historical narratives of the district. Firstly I will analyze the narratives of the district before concretization and specifically focus on how

intimacy and security are articulated to those narratives. Then I will go on with a close reading of the testimonies mentioning concretization and what was lost of the old way of life. After covering both side of the narration, I will start to look at the points which are related to the process of concretization but get to be articulated only in other contexts.

### The Nostalgic Constitution of a District: An Intimate and Secure Place

One of my closest informants told me once: “When there were *gecekondu* houses around, people could see each other; they were chained to one another”<sup>74</sup>. The expression is very important as it is very poetic; nearly all of my informants mention this mutuality of the gaze when speaking of *gecekondu* houses. Statements such as “every one knew each other”, “we saw each other everyday”, and “we greeted every one as we walked through the streets” are very common. The *gecekondu* times are described as offering people a large visual field so that one could see many things at the same time. An inhabitant could see all his/her neighbors when s/he get out of his/her house. Some of my informants point that the architectural traits of *gecekondu* houses were very suitable for this omniscient gaze. A *gecekondu* house is an independent and detached unit surrounded by a small garden. Considering the fact migrants from rural areas, including the local people of Okmeydanı, were deprived of necessary financial and legal sources to live in modern apartments in the city or to build apartments in empty lands, houses in Okmeydanı had to generally accommodate a large family in a limited number of rooms and a small garden.

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<sup>74</sup> “Burada gecekondu varken insanlar birbirlerini görebiliyorlardı, insanlar birbirlerine mahkumdular”.

Enlarging the home or garden was nearly impossible since it was either a matter of money or appropriating empty lots around. The latter case was also dangerous since ongoing migration put land at a premium and conflicts would always be possible. In this context, the garden had two functions, my informants tell me: first they could be used to enlarge the house when financial conditions got better or family size increased even more. Secondly, the migrants coming to the district were rural people used to live and work on the land. Gardens were used to cultivate, supply water for the house, and for daily leisure<sup>75</sup>. The last feature is especially important because the social use of the garden is closely related to leisure practices. Meals were eaten in the garden and it was always possible to invite a guest to share the food. Circulation of neighbors within the street and the district was high because every *gecekondus* had a garden and reciprocity (in terms of food) between houses was very common.

When here was a squatter we were more close to each other. That is, you go to somebody's garden, eat there, they offer you fruits. They come to you as well. In Okmeydanı, we were like a family, nobody was bewareing of another.<sup>76</sup>

The familiarity among neighbors was created by this practice of reciprocal exchange and enlarged to cover the inside of the houses as well. It is commonly stated that the inhabitants at the time used to go to each other's houses at night to drink tea and coffee and to converse with each other. What is underlined in these narratives of reciprocity is that religion and place of origin were not important.

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<sup>75</sup> It would be helpful to note that the features and functions of the garden in this context are very similar to other places and cultures. Delaney displays a similar structure for the porches of houses in US, a social phenomenon which had lasted until the 1950s (Delaney, 2004: 56-57).

<sup>76</sup> Buralar gecekonduyken hepimiz daha iç içeydik. Yani gider oturursun birinin bahçesinde yemek yersin, meyve ikram ederler. Onlar sana gelir. Okmeydanında hepimiz bir aile gibiydik, kimse kimseden sakınmazdı.

Let me tell you something, when this place was a squatter, this was a very closed society, or we were too social. For example, here across to our house there were people from Ordu or Giresun, we visited each other. Let me say, in Ramadan, we did not fast, but they visit us and we ate our lunch. In 12 Imams, we fast and we went to their houses.<sup>77</sup>

What is described is a kind of harmony that seems strange today. Mauss states that exchange is a significant mediator through which different communities are defined. The gift is also significant for inter-communal relations and for the production of belonging to the space which is shared by multiple communities (Mauss, 2000). Accordingly, I contend that the high sociability between different communities is closely related with the architecture of the time. As my informants say, the gardens were the points through which people saw each other and acquaint themselves with the other people. The significance of the garden is the possibility of surveillance it allows. That one can see the other and be seen by the other continuously results in either animosity or familiarity. Of course the sphere of vision can/could also be hostile in Okmeydanı. There are stories of enmities between neighbors but they are relatively small in number and furthermore they are related with land disputes. Besides, those disputes, as it is told by many of my informants tended to be short-lived considering that the constant threat of demolition and raids by state inspectors required a strong solidarity among inhabitants and the intimate social life and thus forced them into quick reconciliations.

Another aspect of the architectural significance of garden is its position between house and street. Gardens in *gecekondu* areas are a gate opening to streets; while you are eating or resting you are in the view of the public, because it is not

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<sup>77</sup> sana bir şey söyleyeyim mi burası gecekondu semtiyken o kadar kapalı bir toplumdur ki, ya da çok sosyaldık mesela burada karşımda ordulu Giresunlu vardı biz birbirimizle çıkardık mesela, diyelimki ramazanda biz oruç tutmazdık yemek yerdik onlar gelirdi biz yemeğimizi yerdik ondan sonra ramazandı 12 imamlar geldiğinde biz oruç tutardık onların evine giderdik.

only your neighbors who can see you but also anyone passing through the street can see you. Yet the public characteristic of streets in Okmeydanı does not mean modernity in the sense of anonymity (Berman, 1995). On the contrary, the local people describe the whole area including streets with expressions signifying a sense of propinquity. Being adjacent to each other, the *gecekondus* in Okmeydanı created streets that were all similar. These similarities include architectural, social and economic aspects. Architectural similarities are mentioned above. The social similarities are generally related to the habitus of the local people. The migrants came from rural area and though there were remarkable distinctions within the daily practices in discrete villages, pace Bourdieu, a rural life style was articulated to the urban sphere in similar ways (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). In this respect, the architectural similarities between *gecekondu* houses can also be read as a consequence of a combination of rural practices and the exigencies of migration to urban areas. Last but not least, there are significant similarities in their economic position. Yet what is more significant is that the historical narration of the district and that of degeneration do not refer to this aspect. These similarities are narrated in different contexts and the points excluded from the historical narrative are important in interpreting the structure of the narrative and the way degeneration is explained. I will tackle this issue in the following part of the chapter. For the time being, let me continue with the analysis of the built environment and the social structure.

The streets in the district are described as an expansion of the garden. If gardens are understood as a combination of more private and less public characteristics, the streets are less private and more public because the leisure activities (eating dried fruit and nuts or chatting with local people) had taken place with the constant company of acquaintances. In the garden, friendly encounters were

simply possible but they were not main incentive to spending time in there. As for streets, my informants say that they went out in order to see the people of the district. They narrate streets as space of socialization. There was a continuous flow of people in the street at the time but its velocity and composition differed from the modern urban space. It is interesting that my informants remember the composition of the people instead of the velocity. Velocity came to the scene when they speak of the jobs they were employed in. It is important for my argument but it firstly requires providing the reader with a meticulous analysis of the narration of degeneration, only then can I analyze velocity. While my informants complain of concretization, they speak of the composition of the people in the streets. They recurrently emphasize that they see the people they know in the streets. They say they were like a family outside their houses:

That is, in that period we were like a family here; when you go out, everyone knew each other, said hello to one another. In those times we were seeing each other. You know, the solidarity was much better.<sup>78</sup>

The metaphor of family is prevalently used by my informants to depict the social life of the district before concretization. It is not really exclusive for Okmeydanı considering that familial codes in the social life of Turkey have a prominent place through which the modernity has been experienced in Turkey (Sirman, 2004, 2005). However, I believe that this historical representation of social life in Okmeydanı is also closely associated with the narratives of *gecekondü* architecture. The detached but adjacent houses are depicted along with a sense of proximity through which people could get acquainted with each other. In this

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<sup>78</sup> Yani o dönem burada hepimiz bir aile gibiydik; dışarı çıktığında birbirlerine selam verirdi herkes, tanırlardı birbirlerini. Hergün görüyorduk birbirimiz o zamanlar. Dayanışma çok daha iyiydi yani.



context, the familial proximity of the household could expand to the other people in the district by the space created by gardens. Taking the narratives and architectural structure into account, gardens and streets were the imaginary conduits of socialization in the margin. Apart from gardens and streets, the coffee houses were also important in being acquainted with people from different regions and of different religious sects.

You cannot compare the coffee houses of those times to today's'. They were not exclusive for the other people, to such degree. People from every different group were coming. It was possible to find all the people of the neighborhood in coffee houses. Laz, Kurd, Alevi, all kinds of people. People from various places of origins saw each other.<sup>79</sup>

This depiction of coffee houses is important in the sense that they are seen to extend familiarity to people from other streets and through a set of exigencies (that I will mention later), a solidarity is imagined and narratively constructed for that period. Here, I should note that the functions of coffee houses in Turkey are similar to that. According to Sirman, coffee houses are significant places in which equality among strangers is produced and consequent commonality ("communitas" in Turner) is created;

These agonistic exchanges striving to produce equality often take place in the coffee shop, around drinking table, or in front of vending kiosks. Rounds are bought, cigarettes offered, card games played with a strict view to ensure that no exchange will disrupt the assumed egalitarian nature of the relationship. (Sirman, 2004: 6)

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<sup>79</sup> Yani şimdi o zamanın kahveleriyle bunlar karşılaştırılmaz. Bu kadar içe kapanık değildi oralar. Her kesimden insanlar gelirdi. Tüm mahalleliyi orada bulabilirdin. Lazı, kürdü, alevisi hepsi ama. Farklı yerlerden insanlar birbirlerini görebiliyorlardı.

On the other hand, the definition of strangers are not bounded with place of origin, ethnicity or religious sect as it is pointed in the narrative I have quoted. This aspect of the coffee houses is again not exclusive to Okmeydanı and in fact the function of coffee houses as a meeting place for different people goes back to the Ottoman period<sup>80</sup>. However, the significance of the narratives mentioning coffee houses before apartmentalization lies its emphasis on visibility (the ability to see other people frequently and regularly) and its functions. I contend that the narratives of my informants point that the sphere of visibility which is shaped by architecture and social structure of the time was constitutive for their local community (the community of Okmeydanı). In other words, the historical construction of the sphere of visibility (whether it is factually relevant or not) produces an imagined community of Okmeydanı before the 1990s and provides the local people with a possibility of belonging to that community today. This belonging connotes the intimacy of family in narratives and it is not surprising considering the shifting lines between private and public in gardens, streets, coffee houses and even in *gecekondu*s. This intimate belonging paves the way for an imagined sense of security through which local people in Okmeydanı understand their current social conditions. Now I have to consider how this theme of security takes place in the historical representations of the district and to analyze how it is narrated by the local people.

The intimate and familiar atmosphere narrated by my informants is infused by a strong sense of security. The theme security is sometimes implicit in the historical accounts. The intimate social relations are overemphasized to give this sense

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<sup>80</sup> Cengiz Kırılı, in his thesis on Ottoman coffee houses in İstanbul between 1780 and 1845, points that although it is generally assumed that the coffee houses within the period were public spaces through which the ethnic and religious boundries are reproduced and sustained, the period on which he focuses clearly shows that the coffee houses were places in which people from different religions and ethnicities come together, exchange information and converse with each other (Kırılı, 2000).

People from all generations long for the past, so I miss Okmeydanı of that period. Whenever a man said take this to my house, you would take that thing to his house. The woman did not ask, who send this to me, this was not the case. The doors were open to everybody. Everybody visited each other. Everybody saw each other. Everybody was in the neighborhood till night. After I just returned from military service I go out to the street; the boy in the street asks me, 'who you are'. You don't recognize, you don't know. Everywhere is full of people you've never seen.<sup>81</sup>

The above account was given after I and my informant talked about the crime issue in the district. The same points are frequently mentioned when the local people speak of the history of Okmeydanı (especially before concretization period). Some of the times my informants explicitly and directly mention that the fear of crime was something unknown in Okmeydanı:

Ganging, thieving, usurpation were not an issue in that period. I know it from myself, I could go to all the houses without nobody saying anything, like you were a member of a family. Anyhow, the doors were open. There wasn't locks, they were not needed, that you knew everybody.<sup>82</sup>

The historical narrative of the district provides local people with the imagination necessary to explain their current condition in the district. In the subsequent part of the chapter I will analyze the issue of security after concretization via these historical representations. For now, it is important to note that intimacy and security are not insignificant themes for which local people nostalgically yearn; on

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<sup>81</sup> "Her yaştan insan geçmişi özler ya, ben de o zamanın (before the 1990s) Okmeydanını özliyorum. Herhangi bir adam birşeyi al bunu evime götür dediği zaman alırdım onun evine götürürdüm. O kadın ne sorardı bunu kim göndermiş diye; öyle bir dava yoktu. Herkesin kapısı açık. Herkes herkese gider. Herkes birbirini görürdü. Herkes akşama kadar mahallede. Şimdi sokağa çıkıyorum, ben askerden geldim, sokaktaki çocuk sen kimsin diyor. Tanımıyorsun, bilmiyorsun. Daha önce görmediğin adamlar hertarafı sarmış."

<sup>82</sup> Çeteleşme, hırsızlık olayları, gasp filan o dönemde söz konusu değildi. Kendimden biliyorum her eve girer çıkardım kimse birşey demezdi. Sanki aileden biriymişim gibi. Kapılar zaten açık, kilit olayı yok. İhtiyaç yok ki. Herkesi tanıyorsun zaten.

the contrary these are most impending issues through which the inhabitants must give meaning, speak to different agents, and create a belonging and identify themselves according to the structure of that belonging.

Narrating security in the district of the past gives us the necessary context to problematize the imagined social structure of the time. Setha Low gives remarkable insights for this connection when she talks about very different contexts:

Based on an ethnographic study of public space and power in Latin America, I demonstrated that the interaction of social production –the social, economic, ideological, and technological factors involved in the physical creation of the material setting- and the social construction- the phenomenological and symbolic experience of the setting- determine the meaning and form of architectural design (Low 2007: 256).

And she continues to state that;

In other words, a built environment is co-produced through a complex interplay of social production and social construction that creates a site (Low 2007: 256).

In this regard I want to analyze the sense of security according to how the local people of Okmeydanı associate security and intimacy with different architectural structures in their narratives. Such analysis can provide the possibility of understanding how the local people explain the transformation of built environment and which kind of functions their narratives operate in giving a meaning to this process. Taking into account that the architectural structure and the social relations interactively produce each other, this cyclical structure is important to produce the sense of security but this sense occurs by no means without any mediation. The articulation of intimacy and security come out in these interstices as mechanisms of social control (or imaginations about social control). Bauman

provides us with an approach that can broaden our perspective. He argues that social control in the towns before modernity was sustained through the social structure in which people can see each other continuously. He defines this mechanism as symmetrical control because every one sees and controls each other without a central organization like police forces or state institutions. He further states that this structure had ended as a result of huge inflow of strangers but this point will be examined when I will talk about the period after concretization and its consequent inflow of strangers to the district (Bauman, 1987: 58-62). What is important here for us to understand is the nature of symmetrical control and its relation with the architectural structure.

Remembering the accounts of intimacy, the local people depict familiarity within the district with constant references to the architecture of *gecekondu* houses. My informants recount that the sphere of visibility was much wider than today's Okmeydanı and everyone was visible to each other. Neighbors were like family members in the sense that they could enter the houses without being noticed or rather without causing inconvenience. Of course these narratives contain a lot of exaggeration but it is evident that the imagined family of Okmeydanı is constituted on the basis of this visibility. If anyone did something wrong, it was expected to be seen by this family. The accounts of my informants indicate that this symmetrical control created a strict prevention against the transgression of the law of community (like theft, prostitution, using drugs, gamble etc.) and thus provided security for the district. Moreover this control produced an integrity and belonging through which the local people at the time identified themselves as *Okmeydanlı*. The forms of social control also allowed people to register events and people in Okmeydanı. I develop the concept of registering in order to explain the sense of security gained by locating

people in the district even when they are not seen. In other words, the historical narrative of the district emphasizes that having the knowledge of “who”, “where” and “when” was an important source of the imagined security at the time. My informants state that in Okmeydanı before concretization people knew each other by the space they occupy. It was known very well whose house was where. My informants frequently refer to the spatial mapping strategy based on such registering when they speak of the local people, even though some of them do not live in Okmeydanı anymore. They say that that person had lived at right side of the park or this person had a *gecekondu* two houses behind another person’s. To know who lives where is a way of ensuring that if something goes wrong, you know where to find him/her. Time also was another element to place people: people knew when someone goes to work, when s/he returns, when he goes to coffee houses, or when s/he sits on the garden. It is important to remember that these people had worked in similar jobs (in the municipality and dockyards especially) and the temporal arrangements of their lives were basically shaped by this employment structure but my informants do not like to talk about the kinds of work people were engaged in when talking about the degeneration of the district and its historical background. This reticence will be an important part of my argument.

The social construction of security within the historical narratives of the district is not an arbitrary emphasis as nearly all the accounts I was able to obtain make the same point. I argue that the reason behind the emphasis on security is to claim that the people of Okmeydanı were able to handle security issues of the district and to create a safe environment to live in. Intimacy and familiarity I have analyzed function as the basis of this claim; the “natural” environment created by the “real” *Okmeydanlı* provided the possibility for the social control and security. At the end of

the chapter I will argue that the addressee of this assertion is the state and its neoliberal incarnations. Yet there is still a lot to understand the imagination of security in the district before concretization, so I will skip another aspect which is also substantial for my argument.

Up to now I analyzed the theme of security through the architectural structure of the district and its consequent social characteristics including the sense of intimacy. I have supplemented my analysis with visibility as a material result of the architecture and the techniques of registering that visibility allows. Yet I have stated in the second chapter that any community and its belonging, even if it is a marginal one, require a marginalization of another, creating an excluded in accordance with the creation of unity. Now I will look at the representation of the state within the historical narratives of Okmeydanı because as far as I can see, the historical imagination holds the state as the other of Okmeydanı, as its enemy. The police force, civil servants, and fascist groups, which are thought as a part of institutional practice of the state, are all included as others in those narratives.

When my informants talked about how secure Okmeydanı was, they insist that the state security forces (official and undercover ones), the public civil (who try to demolish the district and to control the place by penalizing unauthorized use of public services –like it have been demonstrated above with the news of Cumhuriyet), and fascist groups were the outsider they had to struggle against. It is stated that the people in Okmeydanı were not only successful in maintaining order within their social life but also in maintaining order against those coming from the outside trying to destroy the status quo of the district. While narrating how they maintained the order in Okmeydanı before the 1990s, the political characteristics of the district become more apparent than ever. This struggle is nearly legendary and it is stated

that the revolutionary organizations were very different than their current versions in many aspects. Thus I have to provide the reader with a general overview of the revolutionary organizations within the historical imagination of the district before the times of concretization.

Accounts clearly state that the revolutionaries did not often engage in the issues regarding the social order within the district unlike today. They entered the scene of social order only when something extraordinary happened like someone informing the police of a fugitive revolutionary. This kind of transgression was taken as a serious betrayal and resulted in the death of that informer. Besides the fact that my informants point that it was a rare phenomenon, it is worth to point that this kind of punishment was conducted out of public sight, where no one could see what happened but everyone knew about it. This attitude, according to my informants, is in contrast to the mentality of revolutionaries today. The sphere of visibility now is the central frame in which the definition of “being revolutionary” is made and the performance of revolutionary acts is exhibited. The stereotypical outfits (which are distinct from the ordinary people), the revolutionary demonstrations within the district (besides demonstration against demolitions, they are relatively new and were introduced just after the 1990s), or protesting graffiti on the walls (which also belong to the period after the 1990s) are all parts of this new ways of conducting the sphere of visibility.

On the other hand, the familiarity and intimacy I have analyzed above are also used to describe the revolutionaries of the time.

The revolutionaries were different in that period. The revolutionaries were not apart like these. So to say, there was not much difference among us, they were more close to the people. They were wearing dress like us; but they were clean not like a vagrant. Their clothes were ironed, when



you saw in the streed, you would pay respect to them. They were setting an example for the local people, they were shaving everyday and going out after that. There was a revolutionary morality like that. Before 90's, there was an cultivated atmosphere, and all people were esteem of those cultivated revolutionaries. This is not about being Alevi, everybody complied with it. But the revolutionaries were the ones who were educated and who knew the manner of behavior.<sup>83</sup>

The intimacy had disappeared. Formerly, there was salutation (selamunaleyküm). In those days, you would not be suspicious about the intimacy of the leftists. The revolutionary organizations are excluding themselves, they think they know everything. Never be a worker, he says he knows more than me. Today's revolutionaries are separated from people. They don't know the meaning of work or labour but here they try to tell about it to me. Can you believe it, he has never worked in his life and he is telling me what! Previously the revolitonaries were the ones who are among people. After working all the day in docks, they came here and did the political activities. When he was among the people, you did notr suspect about him. When the man comes and asks me 'Is there a problem?', this makes me disconnected. What is the the different between rightist mafia? The way he asks is the problem. In the past, they came here ask if we were fine or not. There were people who knew good manners.<sup>84</sup>

The above descriptions of the revolutionaries of the past point to three distinctive features which are absent in their contemporary counterparts. These traits reveal the current unease among local people and they speak to the revolutionaries in a dialogical manner. To start with, revolutionaries of the past looked like everyone else in the district; there was no visual sign to designate a revolutionary. This might

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<sup>83</sup> O dönem devrimcileri şimdikilerden çok farklıydı. Devrimciler ayrı durmuyorlardı bunlar gibi. Yani fark yoktu aramızda, çok daha halka yakın bir durum vardı. Bizim gibi giyiniyorlardı ama temiz, öyle serseri değil. Utülü filan baktın mı saygı duyardı herkes. Örnek insanlardı hergün traş olur sokağa öyle çıkarlardı. Öyle bir ahlak vardı, devrimci ahlakı. 90 öncesi ortamda okumuş ve okumuşlara saygı gösteren bir çevre vardı. Bu alevilikle alakalı değil herkes katılıyordu. Ama o devrimciler eğitimli ve uslubu bilen adamlardı.

<sup>84</sup> Samimiyet ortadan kalktı. Eskiden selamunaleyküm vardı. Eski solcuların samimiyetlerinden şüphelenmiyordun. Örgüt kendini soyutluyor, herşeyi ben bilirim diyor. İşçilik yapmamış, işçiliği benden iyi bildiğini söylüyor. Şimdiki devrimciler halktan çok kopuk. İş emek nedir bilmezler gelir bana anlatırlar. Haytında hiç çalışmamamış inanabiliyor musun gelmiş bana ne anlatıyor. Eskiden devrimciler halktan insanlardı. Akşama kadar tersanede belediyede çalışır gelir burada siyasi faaliyet yürütürdü. Halktan olunca samimiyetinden kuşkulalmazdın. -Adam bana gelip sorduğunda "sorun var mı?" ben kopuyorum. Ülkücü mafyadan ne farkın kalıyor. Soruş tarzı sorunlu. Eskiden burada gelir hal hatır sorardı, ne var ne yok diye sorardı. Adabı bilen adamlar vardı.

seem uninteresting considering the fact that the most of the revolutionaries also came from Okmeydanı in general, but I remind you that the narrative makes a point of underlining this difference. For example, my informants say that those people dressed in the same way as the local people, which is not the case any more. They had worn clean clothes and shaved regularly. They seemed, as it is generally stated, tidy and manly (*adam gibi*). These are all seen to be in opposition to present day revolutionaries. Many informants argue that the revolutionaries then were setting an example for children and the other men and women in the district; they were the idols of local people. Secondly, my informants state that the revolutionaries at that time worked in similar jobs. This is a sign for the people I have interviewed that the revolutionaries knew what labor and laborer meant. As a revolutionary who fought against the exploitation of labor power and for the working class, they knew the living and working conditions of the working class, which is something lacking today. Thirdly, the old revolutionaries knew the everyday life in the district very well. The historical narratives emphasize that the revolutionaries of the past had the manners (*adap*); they knew how to speak to the local people (in the streets and in coffee houses), how to treat them (neither distant and aloof nor casual and informal – *laubali-*), and how to offer something to and demand help from people. I contend that the narratives of the revolutionaries are important in the sense that they amalgamate intimacy/familiarity and security/control into a single representation. Along with the revolutionary struggle against the state and capitalist groups, these people were the actors of protection against the demolition of the district (remember that the demolition is understood as a plot conducted by governments and big capitalists) and assaults by the police forces and civil servants. Thus the revolutionaries are described as one leg of social control that served to maintain

order. While the local people maintained the social order within the boundaries of Okmeydanı through visibility and familiarity, the revolutionary groups maintained order and security within the social and political arena. The narratives indicate that even at this level, the same familiar and intimate aspect of control operated even if the scope was larger than the previous one. The revolutionaries were one of them; this expression reproduces a sense of symmetrical control even when the nature of the relationship is dramatically different. The conflict between the state and the revolutionaries is narrated as a part of the social structure of old Okmeydanı. In the level of narrative, the success of struggle against state forces is linked to the local people but not in an immediate fashion as it is case in social control within the district. However, the emphasis on the similarity between revolutionaries and the local people creates a bridge between the local people and the control of state forces. Being “like one of them”, revolutionaries represent the social and political strength of the inhabitants per se at the time. Thus I argue that the same assertion I have presented above subtextually reappears; “we were able to control the district and sustain security even against the forces outside (the state) which attempt to destroy that balance”. This will be again an important part of my argument to the effect that the addressee of the historical narrative is the state and the people’s expectations from it. Now, if I was able to depict the place of revolutionaries within the historical narrations of the district, I can continue to analyze the role of the state before concretization in those narratives. This role will be helpful to understand how the local people speak to the state at the end of the chapter.

The state in its various forms appears within the narratives as the other of the district. The local people narrate the times before concretization as marked by a strong sense of unity and integrity against the state and its agents. These accounts, as

I have already stated above, revolve around several themes: the demolitions in the district, the police force attempting to control the area, and fascist groups attacking the district. I assert that the narration of the architectural and social structure of the time is made possible by imagining a sphere of visibility in which familiarity and symmetrical social control are mutually constituted and this complex structure is seen as determining the modes of encounter with the state.

The first and the greatest threat for the security of the local people are the demolitions in the district. This was and still is an impending threat for the people of *gecekodu* districts. The possibility that only thing they have can be taken away from their hands requires a strong sense of solidarity against state forces (demolition teams assigned for the task by the government, the police forces or the municipality). Having the knowledge to fight against state forces, revolutionary organizations assembled meetings in coffee houses to arrange demonstrations and organize resistance against demolitions. Solidarity was a requirement to resist the demolitions since, as the historical accounts point, the demolitions at the time came unexpectedly. A crowd was needed to deter the state forces. My informants assert that large crowds could be mustered because of the common cause (in this case, demolition) and an intimate social life through which people could safely assume that the person next to him/her will not leave.

The historical accounts portray a second scene in which the state appears as an intruder aiming to destroy social solidarity within the district. The police force is a key factor here. The famous title “a place where even the police cannot enter” was, according to my informants, much more relevant in those days than now. The police force was able to enter the district only with a raid supported by a heavy backup of police officers. These raids aimed to apprehend specific revolutionaries and to

intimidate local people with revolutionary tendencies. Yet my informants point that those raids was relatively few in number and a continuous control over the district by the police was out of question. For the police, patrolling the area with few officers was like a suicide, there could be deadly attacks from revolutionaries who were supported by the local people.

A couple of days ago, they arrested three boys from ... organization in front of our eyes. They laid them down, beat them, swore to them. Even, they shot to a citizen from upper floors who protested them. In the past, four of them would come to Okmeydanı and took those kids... That was impossible! They could not get out of here.<sup>85</sup>

The emphasis of the account above is the strong solidarity with the expression “in front of everyone’s eyes”. I think it is not a coincidence that the issues about visibility, intimacy and security operate in such instances. The strong social control is the ground over which the local people imagine security within the district. This control, along with the familiar revolutionaries, can uphold its sovereignty even against state forces. This assumption can be verified, if we consider the undercover police officers (*siviller*). Undercover police officers are one of the most frequently mentioned issues regarding the current insecurity reigning over the district. My informants, nearly without exception, state that they are now unable to identify who is an undercover police agent and as a result they can not trust people easily anymore. The historical narratives are full of successful unmasking of undercover officers. Visibility provided the local people with the necessary tools to identify those intruders. The local information network was so efficient that if someone came to the district, everyone knew there was an unknown person wandering around. The

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<sup>85</sup> Geçenlerde iki üç ...li genci burada herkesin gözü önünde tutukladılar. Yere serdiler, dövdüler küfrettiler. Hatta karşı çıkan üst katlardan bir vatandaşa ateş bile ettiler. Okmeydanı’nda eskiden dört kişi gelecek o çocukları alacaktı. Mümkün değil! Çıkamazdı buradan.

revolutionaries and local people watched his/her movements, and searched him/her if they deemed it necessary.

Police could not enter here. But undercover police could. But formerly, we knew who was the undercover police, who was the citizen. When a pedlary enters, we realize it. What can a pedlary do in this neighborhood, can he sell something? One day (...) caught one of them, took to a nook corner. It was a place that no one could see him. Put the gun and ordered 'get undressed!'. Miserable, he was trembling. We searched on him but could not find anything. Then we released him. He ran away. In reality, he lost his way. But commonly, those were police. Then we sent them back.<sup>86</sup>

Even the undercover police could not enter in this neighborhood, before concretization. Even if they came, everybody was aware that it was police. They took him to a corner, search on him and expel after beating him. There was a solidarity of this kind.<sup>87</sup>

These accounts give us an important clue about the imaginary construction of the district within the historical narratives. The narratives are all about how intimacy and social control produce a remarkable unity and solidarity that allows local people not only register each other completely but also register its enemies. In this sense, the only stranger for the district was its enemy –state–. The control of those strangers was incessantly sustained so the sense of security and that of intimacy was not only maintained but also reinforced. The mythical narratives concerning the fight against state forces produce another level of belonging for the local people through which they can imagine a more coherent sociability within the district. Remembering that the historical narrative has a dialogical aspect, these themes are also speaking to the

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<sup>86</sup> Buraya polis hiç giremiyordu. Ama sivil polis gelirdi. Ama biz kim sivil kim vatandaş biliyorduk eskiden. Bir seyyar satıcı girdi mi hah derdik düştüler. Ne işi var seyyar satıcının bu mahallede. Burada mı iş yapacak. Bir gün (...) yakaladı bir tanesini, çekti kuytu bir köşeye. Kimsenin görmeyeceği bir yer. Dayadı silahı, soyun dedi. Zavallı tir tir titriyor. Aradık falan hiç birşey çıkmadı. Sonra saldı kaç kaç gidiyor. Meğer yolunu şaşırmış. Ama genelde sivil çıkarlardı. Biz de adabınca geri yolardık.

<sup>87</sup> Betonlaşmadan önce buraya sivil polis de giremezdi. Girerdi ama hemen insanlar anlardı. Köşeye çekip ararlardı, dövrler mahalleden kovarlardı. Öyle bir dayanışma vardı.

present situation in the district. In this sense these accounts provide specific interpretations for the meaning of strangers in the today's district, the allegedly conflictual relationship between the state and local people, and even the function of revolutionary organizations today.

Fascist groups before the 12 September coup d'état were a part of the state's violence and intrusion in the district and made the function of revolutionaries even more apparent. Revolutionary groups are imagined as a product of the social structure based on intimacy and confidence by extending social control and security to a larger domain. Revolutionary groups were deterrents against the infiltration of fascist groups and they would patrol the district against fascists as well as police forces. In this perspective, my informants frequently say that without revolutionaries the district could not exist:

Before 80's there was clashes all the time. Leftists were always in front of the door. My mother gave them food all the time. We could stay there, thanks to them. If there wasn't state, the fascists would kill us. If the politicians were not here between 76 and 80, we could not survive here. Not because demolishing, we could not live here. Why, because here was a liberated district. They could not enter here. Not just the police, fascists could not come forward from the crossroad to here. They would not allow us to live here.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, I assert that the historical narratives aim to represent the social intimacy and confidence that ensured social and political resistance which in turn allowed the life in the district to continue. The significant emphasis, I believe, is the agency of the local people in creating the atmosphere of the district. The historical narratives

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<sup>88</sup> Sürekli çatışma vardı 80 öncesi. Solcular hep kapıdaydı, annem sürekli yemek verirdi. Onlar sayesinde orada kalabildik. Devlet olmasa faşistler keserdi bizi. Bak şimdi biz burada duramazdık siyasiler burada olmasaydı 76 dan 80 e kadar. Yıkılır değil yaşanmazdı, niye çünkü burası kurtarılmış bölgeydi. Buraya giremezlerdi. Polisi geç sağcılar dörtyoldan buraya gelemezlerdi onlar yoksa yaşatmazlardı bizi burada.

complain about the intrusive agenda of the state and thus they pave the way for an interpretation of the causes of degeneration. As I will show you in detail in the following part, the local people blame the state for the degeneration of the district and apartmentalization thereof. I argue that the historical articulation of the imaginary social structure of the time (however it may be relevant) provides the local people with an assertion that they were able to maintain social order within the district and it was the state who always wanted to destroy social life in the district. Within the same trajectory, the role of the state as a pernicious actor penetrates into the discourse of degeneration after the 1990s as the initiator and agent responsible for the process of degeneration.

To sum up, I have analyzed two themes which incessantly (re)appear within the historical narrative of Okmeydanı, i.e. intimacy and security. The ideal social norm imagined by my informants revolves around these concepts. By scrutinizing the historical narratives depicting Okmeydanı before 90s, I tried to understand the narrative constitution of intimacy and familiarity in accordance with the architectural structure of *gecekondu* houses. My aim is not to find factual verification for the narrated social milieu but to demonstrate the link local people make between material structure (architecture) and social structure. Along with an architectural configuration, the local people imagine a particular life in the district, which produces codes of familiarity and intimacy. I contend that the familiarity depicted in those representations produces a sense of confidence that resulted in a sense of security whose absence today is a great source of unease among the inhabitants. To say it in more analytical manner; (I) the historical representation relates the physical structure of the *gecekondu* era with the imagined intimacy and familiarity. (II) Intimacy and familiarity are the ground upon which social confidence and reciprocal



social control could be produced simultaneously. (III) The second aspect paved the way for the sense of security for which the local people long so much.

This triangle constitutes the ideal norm for my informants. My informants' accounts imagine this norm as a product of their agency and a *sine qua non* of their existence during the time narrated. The norm was sustained by those people within the boundaries of the district without any mediation; in other words, the historical representation points that neither state authorities nor political organizations were needed for a sense of security to exist within the district. Only intruders –outsiders like undercover police agents- made the contribution of the revolutionary groups and their knowledge necessary. Yet the ideal norm was again sustained by a specific kind of revolutionary who could act according to that norm. It is the reason why they depict the revolutionaries of the time as “one of them” and imagine as people who could be registered with familiarity and intimacy. Thus the security provided by the revolutionaries is imagined as an extension of the existing social structure. On the other hand, the danger and insecurity came only through the state and its agents (the police, undercover agents, fascist groups, demolition teams, state inspectors etc.). The narratives assert that the ideal norm of their social existence had been successfully defended against this enemy until the 1990s –concretization-. So the narrative gives us two agents; the state as a negative one and the local people as positive one. These two agencies, however simple they may seem, are the crucial components for the local interpretation of the current situation of the district. Accordingly the whole story that I have analyzed in this part is a dialogue between the local people (my informants) and the other actors. This dialogue speaks *about* and speaks *to*. It speaks about the present of Okmeydanı not in the sense that there is something really at issue in Okmeydanı, but in the sense that the local people see

something as an issue and other things as not. The selection of problems of Okmeydanı defines to whom the dialogue is addressed. Why is it that there is no place in the historical representation for working histories or local struggles about health, social insurance, and education? These issues are important since unemployment, lack of social security, and poor education possibilities for young people are so endemic problems in Okmeydanı. I believe the answers lies in the question of to whom the dialogue addressed. However this last question needs further background; because the picture is meaningful only with the narrative explanations of corruption and degeneration. So I will look at the other half of the historical narration (after the 1990s). Then I will analyze the off-screen of the complete historical narration; what is not told in the narratives of degeneration and I conclude my chapter with why they are not told.

#### The End of a Dream: Estrangement, Degeneration, Insecurity

The historical narration of the district displays a remarkable breakdown with the transformation of the built environment. My informants emphasize that within roughly 3 years, the whole silhouette of Okmeydanı changed dramatically. Along with the architectural transformation, nearly all aspects of social life in the area turned into something which the local people complain about. The historical representation starts with the physical aspect and then continues with the social side of the phenomenon. I will follow the same sequence in my analysis.

In 90, all the days were construction. Constructors, like marketing people, spreaded over everywhere. They sold the people the houses. Because of this, we rapidly became like this.<sup>89</sup>

The above account, with very little variations, is the general point of departure for people to tell how Okmeydanı turned into a dark, gloomy place. The building contractors are depicted as “those who come from nowhere” and “those who deceive/persuade people to build apartments in place of *gecekondu*”. This representation is meaningful as I will show that the local people see the state is responsible for the degenerations of the district and the narration of the building contractors serves this interpretation efficiently. For now, let me continue my analysis with the transformation of physical space based on the new architectural structure.

The building contractors brought a new face to the area; the apartment buildings with 7 or 8 stores/floors rose quickly. The houses, gardens and streets which played important roles for the constitution of the social imaginary vanished. The visibility through which the local people could get to know each other and control each other in a symmetrical manner became impossible to sustain. In one sense, the proximity was intensified; the density of people per square meter became much higher than life in *gecekondu* houses. In an apartment built at the place of one *gecekondu* house, there could be 20 flats which accommodated up to 100 people. However, proximity and intimacy/familiarity are diverged in apartments. Now proximity means a density full of strangers and thus a sense of insecurity and a constant threat. Remember the function of the garden; a twilight zone which mediates the private area with the public sphere. The possibility to see and to be seen

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<sup>89</sup> 90 yılında hergün inşaat. Müteahhitler pazarlamacı gibi birden etrafı sardı. İnsanlara şu kadar ev vs. diye pazarladı. İlla ev olsun, hızlı bir şekilde bu hale geldik.

is not a threat but poses the possibility of invitation. Inviting friends and neighbors was seen as part of social life. But in apartments, invitation is narrowed down to closest friends, and the proximity created by the new architecture came to mean an uninvited gaze or threat. The account below exemplifies this aspect of the transformation.

This is worse than squatters. We are looking inside of each others' houses. When I drink tea in my balcony in the morning, the man on the other side stares at me. In the era of squatters, you were sitting in your garden, it was clean. Now we hand down to each other. Her son, husband look at each other as they are falling from the balcony. If I have a squatter of my own with a green garden, nobody can look at my house.<sup>90</sup>

Visibility is no longer able to sustain the old social structure which is narrated as a mythical life infused by familiarity and security. The physical and architectural possibility of symmetrical control in which people can see and control each other simultaneously and continuously is now gone. This is, to a different degree, also relevant for a similar place viz. the street.

People from all generations long for the past, so I miss Okmeydanı of that period. Whenever a man said take this to my house, you would take that thing to his house. The woman did not ask, who send this to me, this was not the case. The doors were open to everybody. Everybody visited each other. Everybody saw each other. Everybody was in the neighborhood till night. After I just returned from military service I go out to the street; the boy in the street asks me, 'who you are'. You don't recognize, you don't know. Everywhere is full of people you've never seen.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> "Şimdi daha kötü gecekondudan. İç içe bakıyoruz. Sabahleyin çay içsem balkonumda, karşımda adam 'beee' diye bakıyor. Gecekondu zamanında bahçe içerisinde oturuyordun, temizdi. Şimdi birebir içimize sarkıyoruz birbirimizin. Oğlu kocası böyle balkondan düşer gibi birilerine bakıyor. Kendime ait güzel bir gecekondum olsa, bahçeli yeşil. Kimse benim evime bakamaz."

<sup>91</sup> "Her yaştan insan geçmişi özler ya, ben de o zamanın (before 90s) Okmeydanını özleyorum. Herhangi bir adam bir şeyi al bunu evime götür dediği zaman alırdım onun evine götürürdüm. O kadın ne sorardı bunu kim göndermiş diye; öyle bir dava yoktu. Herkesin kapısı açık. Herkes herkese gider. Herkes birbirini görürdü. Herkes akşama kadar mahallede. Şimdi sokağa çıkıyorum, ben askerden geldim, sokaktaki çocuk sen kimsin diyor. Tanımıyorsun, bilmiyorsun. Daha önce görmediğin adamlar her tarafı sarmış."

The spread of insecurity over the district reaches public places as well. The old coffee houses in which different people (in terms of place of origin, religious sects, and ethnicity) met and saw each other turned into exclusive places in which only those whose places of origin are the same can enter and enjoy. The former social control cannot be applied to the coffee houses anymore. If the coffee houses were opened to everyone in the district, then unfamiliar and dangerous strangers could come as well. There is no way to register them spatially as was the case before the 1990s or to create acquaintance through seeing. Consequently the same strategy (symmetrical control) is recreated on a smaller scale. Village associations were established, and the coffee houses became exclusive to a specific place of origin. People started to go to places in which who can be seen was in a way regulated and determined. This allowed recreating the lost sense of security to a certain extent. This is a limited success because scope of solidarity was narrowed down in accordance with the difficulty to cover people whose origins were unknown. The exclusivity in search of security intensified the process of estrangement among the local people. The situation can be seen clearly in the accounts below:

Coffee houses came to an end because of the village associations. The rest are similar to the village associations, the coffee houses of the people who are from Sivas, Erzincan or Giresun. At least their name is coffee house.<sup>92</sup>

After this place is full of strangers, people became asocial. They returned to their villages. They found a place to shelter but they played into the hands of those who want to shatter the neighborhood.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Kahvelerde bitti bu köy dernekleri yüzünden. Kalanlarda bir nevi köy derneği, işte Sivash kahvesi Erzincanlı kahvesi, Giresunlu kahvesi. En azından adı kahve.

<sup>93</sup> Yine de sen ben girsek bir bakarlar kim bunlar ne istiyorlar diye. İletişimimiz koparıldı. Buralar yabancılarla dolunca insanlar iyice içe kapandılar. Kendi köylülerine döndüler. Kendilerince sığınacak bir liman buldular ama mahalleyi parçalamak isteyenlerin ekmeğine yağ sürdüler.

After the increase of the village associations, the solidarity ended. When these places were introduced, everybody turned into his own small world. The coffee houses were much better than the village associations, there was every kind of person in the coffee houses; Laz, Kurd. You see the same people in the village associations. They close themselves; only spend time with the people from their village. When you go the association of Hafik, indeed I am from Sivas, they look at me as I am a stranger. Because of that, the coffee houses are better, conversations were much more better.<sup>94</sup>

What is important about this interpretation of the new venues for socialization in the district is not only the relationship between architecture and social control, but also the subject of this transformation. The above accounts implicitly indicate a third person singular pronoun -someone or something- establishing these new places of socialization. However, many other accounts explicitly accuse the state for the implosion of social life within the district. My informants frequently told me that the state had conducted a policy of “divide, break, and destroy” in Okmeydanı.

Look carefully the developments after 90; building permits, village associations, pubs, night clubs, gangs, drugs. All the time state is supporting them. The only goal is to anaesthetize the people of Okmeydanı, to bring them to their knees.<sup>95</sup>

In the narrations of local people, the state as a tranquilizer reappears in the different stages of the degeneration of Okmeydanı. Like a drug dealer, the state is

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<sup>94</sup> Köy dernekleri ne zaman çoğalmıştır dayanışma bitmiştir. Herkes içine kapandı bu mekanlar gelince. Kahveler köy derneklerinden iyiydi, kahvede her tür insan vardı, lazı kürdü. Köy derneklerine gidince kendinden başka kimseyi görmüyor insan. Kapatıyorlar kendilerini, sadece kendi köylüleriyle oluyorlar. Şimdi şu Hafiklilerin derneğine girsem, Sivaslıyım aslen, adam bakıyor kim bu diye? Sivil miyim diye korkuyor. Sivil olsam ne olacak? O yüzden kahveler daha iyi, kahvelerde daha güzel muhabbet ediliyordu. -

<sup>95</sup> “Dikkatli bak 90 sonrası neler neler çıktı; inşaat izinleri, köy dernekleri, barlar, pavyonlar, çeteler, uyuşturucu. Devlet destekliyor bunları hep. Tek amaç Okmeydanı halkını uyuşturmak, yola getirmek.”

sinister and makes the people of Okmeydanı inert. As the last account demonstrates, the agency of the state is constantly returning trope in the narratives of local people. Along with my analysis this theme reappears and helps me verify my argument at the end of the chapter. For the time being, let me continue with the examination of narratives about degeneration. To understand better how the local people interpret the transformation of the district, I have to focus on the theme of the stranger.

### Strangers

All my informants point that the familiar and intimate atmosphere of the old social structure is a past they long for. Along with the huge inflow of unknown, foreign people to the newly constructed multistory buildings, the sense of strangeness reached the every corner of the area. This sense created a serious estrangement which is also related with the reconfiguration of social relations that I have partially discussed above. A coffee house owner (exclusive to people from Erzincan) states this feeling quite strikingly: “I myself became a stranger here after the 1990s”<sup>96</sup>. The expression is descriptive for the all narratives I have collected. The local people state that estrangement is a direct result of the increase in the number of strangers who cannot be kicked out as they could do for peddlers. But who the strangers are is a controversial question even considering that the nature of the stranger is its intractability.

The metaphor of “strangers” is generally used as a metonymy for the Kurds people in the district. As is stated in all the accounts, the Kurdish migration to Okmeydanı took place after 2000, with the Kurds constituting a majority of the other

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<sup>96</sup> “90 sonrası ben kendim bile yabancı oldum burada”

for the local people. Yet this explanation is insufficient regarding the fact that narratives point the 1990s as the turning point after which strangers began to appear in the district. I argue that the reason behind this shift is the same local knowledge which I have called registering. The historical accounts point to a form of social control based on visibility and a spatial registering of the individuals. Visibility is impossible to serve as the sphere of control today and spatial registering is all the much more problematic given that in the place of a *gecekondu* housing at most a couple of dozen people, now nearly 100 people live. But the logic of registering through visibility was reproduced to control the people in the district. The most suitable candidates for such registering are Kurds.

My informants frequently describe Kurds in a pejorative manner. I have already discussed the extent and function of those representations in the first chapter. What I want to add here is that detecting Kurds through imaginary qualities functions in the everyday life in Okmeydanı as a reestablishment of the sense of security. The Kurds, as strangers and consequently as the undisputable source of degeneration, are identified with traits like “place of origin”, “number of children”, “manner of behavior” and “clothing”. It is a very well known fact that nearly 2 years ago, the local people of Okmeydanı who are naturally the owners of the flats in the district, assembled a secret meeting (allegedly without informing the political organizations in the area) and informally decided to not rent their houses to Kurds. The place of origin is the main denominator for such discrimination because it assumes that the imagined Kurd totally corresponds to all the traits cited above. The political organizations, however, intervened in the process and put a stop to such intensive precautions. I personally do not think the real disincentive was the political organization since the all my informants –Kurdish or otherwise- clearly indicate that



the Kurds generally tend to pay higher rents for the flats in order to break down the unwillingness of the owner to rent their flats to a “stranger”. However, my interest lies in unearthing how the local people interpret changing social and built life and how they strive to come up with a “norm” which will regulate social life as it was the case before the 1990s. As registering by “place of origin” fail for this or that reason, they employ another trait as a code of the norm which has already lost: number of children is asked to prospective renters. Still it is not difficult to handle such question since Kurds can lie as can anyone else. The question of “the manner of behavior” and “clothing” appears in case these two other indicators fail to detect Kurds. I have two explanations for this phenomenon. First, the Kurdish imagination is not a unitary one. Indeed it is; but in the level of “objet petit a” as Kurdish people with capital K (de Lauretis, 1987). The pejorative usage of the term Kurd includes all traits mentioned above but it is not an uncommon statement that “of course not all Kurdish people like that”. This maneuver signifies that the symbolic and reality do not always correspond. There is always a possibility of belonging to the other Kurds who are “not like that”. So the array of Kurdishness varies and the Kurds who who try to settle in the district use this possibility as a tactic. The second reason that can explain the phenomenon is the financial aspect. Kurds work with their all family members so they can endure ethnicity-based price oscillations. I believe these two reasons are both relevant however to different degrees. One of my Kurdish informants illustrates the two-sided phenomenon very clearly:

After 2000 it became difficult to rent house to Kurds. First they ask how many children do you have. If you say the truth they wo't give you the house. They are saying that Kurds came and Okmeydanı is degenerated. But the prices of the estates increased. But nobody is mentioning this. In

Kurds, everybody in the family works. Children as well work for a living. We pay higher rents in these conditions.<sup>97</sup>

But registering strangers as Kurds is not an exclusive strategy for renting houses. Social exclusion is another aspect, through which the dangerous strangers can be contained within a sphere of security. The traits mentioned above function as a tool for the local people to determine who can be dangerous to know. If anyone has visible signs of Kurdishness, s/he would most probably be avoided. Yet this registering, seemingly as efficient as visibility was before the 1990s, fails to some extent and contributes to the sense of estrangement among local people. The quote “I myself became a stranger here after 1990” is meaningful here. One of my female informants, who resembles Kurds because of her dark skin, complains about the confusion regarding those registers when she moved to another flat in the district:

When I rented this house I was wearing a red scarf. During one month anybody did not talk to me. Then a woman asked me where am I from, I said I am from Sivas. They asked me why did I not tell them that. They thought I was Kurd, that’s why nobody talked with me.<sup>98</sup>

This confusion is not a rare example of the ambivalence reigning over the district. The fear of undercover police is so prevalent that everyone can be considered as one of them. It is the reason why one of the accounts above illustrates how the people in a village association are suspicious of my informant as an undercover police officer. Considering the fact that even strategies of registering

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<sup>97</sup> 2000’den sonra Kürtlere ev verme zorlaştı. Sordukları ilk soru kaç çocuğun var. Doğruyu söylesem vermezler, yalan söylemek zorunda kalıyoruz. Diyorlar Kürtler geldi Okmeydanı bozuldu. Ama emlak fiyatları yükseldi. Ama bunu kimse konuşmuyor. Kürtlerde herkes çalışır. Geçim için çocuklarda çalışır. Biz bu şartlarda yüksek kira ödüyoruz.

<sup>98</sup> “Ben evi taşırken kırmızı bir şal takmıştım. 1 ay hiç bir komşu kadın gelip benimle konuşmadı. Sonra sordu biri nerelisin diye dedim işte Sivaslıyım. Niye söylemedin dediler beni Kürt sanmışlar o yüzden gelmemişler.”

Kurds can fail, undercover police agents are not easily identified. Before the 1990s, the low population density and the relatively slow circulation of people had rendered social control possible but the architectural transformation and subsequent inflow of strangers changed this. Now, apartments are full of strangers who are spatially close to the local people but personally distant. This aspect of the stranger, namely the eerie combination of proximity and distance, is inherent to the experience of modernity in urban sphere (Simmel, 1971: 145). Bauman refers to this ambiguous condition of the stranger as the divorce of physical density from the intense sociability (Bauman, 1993: 86). Furthermore he adds that the insistence of staying as stranger as against going away is what makes them uncannier (Bauman, 1991: 86)<sup>99</sup>. The outcome of this “modern” transformation in Okmeydanı is the harsh ambivalence against which local people have fought and tried to delimit but only succeeded to a limited degree until today. Ambiguity has many aspects: uncertainty about title deeds, the expected urban transformation project, and an unordered social life. The first two of these will be analyzed later, but the latter is also important to understand the interpretations of insecurity in Okmeydanı. The confusion about who is who and the indeterminable characteristics of strangers are reasons creating insecurity. I have already exemplified the ambiguity in registering Kurds and undercover police officers, but there are countless accounts showing the same confusion for very different groups and peoples. A leftist says:

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<sup>99</sup> It is really interesting that Marshall Berman makes a similar remark about a poem of Baudelaire, the eyes of the poor. Baudelaire depicts a couple who are disturbed by the stare of a poor family in a Parisian coffee house. Berman interprets the scene as that the abjectness of the poor family, the reason why the poor are problem, lies in the fact that they will not just go away (Berman, 1995: 209). In my opinion, this picture is only meaningful with a cross reading. Setha Low, in a very different context, states that when the people in gated communities live with strangers (ethnic difference is the denominator for the definition of strangers here) they get used to each other through constant contacts and conversations (Low, 2004: 142). What she misses is that the people in gated communities share what the couple and the poor family do not share in the poem of Baudelaire, the economic class. In this respect, the local people of Okmeydanı have the dream of doctor and lawyer tenants, which refer to a distinctive social and economic position, as against the current tenants who are poor and generally Kurd.

They always confuse PKK and Kurds. Recently our friends went up there to intervene an event, then I went there, people were talking as if Kurds saved that woman<sup>100</sup>

Another one:

We found out that there is a house which is used for prostitution over there. Our friends went there and did the necessary. The people were saying that thanks to Kurds that they saved them.<sup>101</sup>

On the other hand one of my Kurdish informants states a similar problem:

We were worried about the danger posed by criminal types at the park above. Especially at nights, women had to call their friends to cross the street. We went there and sold tea. We fought, we beat them and we took the park. We brought peace (huzur) and security to the park. The park became a secure place, a place suitable for families. People started to come along and enjoy the natural atmosphere. Then ... (a leftist organization) took it from us. We had no power to resist like we do now. And the people think that it is them who saved the park. Everyone thinks the same. As if it was not us.<sup>102</sup>

Another Kurdish informant talked about another story which resembles the prostitution case my leftist informant talked about above. I am not sure whether they were speaking of the same event or not and it was not possible to clarify the issue at the time.

Up there (the place called Anadolu Kahvesi) there was a couple having inappropriate relations, we were hearing rumors about them. Nobody was doing anything about it. We have always been sensitive to these kind of issues. Our youth went and talked to them. Next day the man had disappeared because he was frightened. After that we did not hear anything about him. You know what is so tragic, everybody thinks ... (a revolutionary organization) did it. It is not important that who is the

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<sup>100</sup> Bizi sürekli PKK ile Kürtlerle karıştırıyorlar. Geçenlerde bizim çocuklar yukarda bir olaya müdahale etmişler sonra gittim insanlar konuşuyor işte Kürtler kurtardı kadını diye.

<sup>101</sup> Yukarda fuhuş yapılan bir ev tespit ettik, arkadaşlar gitti gerekeni yapmışlar. İnsanlar aralarında konuşuyorlarmış Kürtler sağ olsun bizi bunlardan kurtardılar diye.

<sup>102</sup> This account was noted in English because there was a possibility of police search at the time so I had to note them in English as a relative precaution.

perpetrator, but in this way our contributions to the neighborhood are being ignored.<sup>103</sup>

Maybe the best account I have about the overwhelming ambivalence in the district belongs to a man I had the chance to speak to on the street. He stated that he had lived in Okmeydanı for nearly 40 years and then he began to complain about the demonstrations held by PKK members. Yet the demonstrations he mentioned were conducted by a variety of actors in the district and only a few of them included members of the Kurdish guerrilla movement.

–If the police doesn't come here, if it does not agitate, there won't be any incident. But PKK has strengthened here, always makes demonstrations. They're going out everyday. Recently, they were demonstrating, it was two days ago. (a demonstration held by leftist groups collectively) They are young kids, it's a pity. The police was attacking them, so that they are members of PKK. It has been one or two weeks, they arrested these youth ((he mentions about the arrest of young militants of Revolutionary Path) They are giving Okmeydanı a bad reputation.

–Isn't there any other political group? Is there only PKK?

–Dominantly PKK and House of People (the association controlled by Revolutionary Path).

–Close to the Park

–Yes. PKK claims that they founded the park. (In fact, the Revolutionary Left asserts the right of usage of the Park). They changed its name. The name of the park is Fatma Girik Park (A film actress and a former major of the district) They have a militant her name is Sibel Can (Turkish Arabesque Singer) I guess, they call the park with her name. (Sibel Yalçın –a militant of Revolutionary Left who killed by police to save his comrades when she was 17 years old).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Yukarıda (the place called Anadolu Kahvesi) para karşılığı münasebetsiz ilişkilerde bulunan bir kadın ve kocası olacak adam hakkında şeyler duyuyorduk. Kimse birşey yapmıyordu. Biz bu konularda hep duyarlı olmuştuk. Gençlerimiz gittiler, konuştular. Adam korkudan ertesi gün kaybolmuş. Bir daha haberi gelmedi. Ama acı olan ne biliyor musun, herkes... (a revolutionary organization) yaptı sanıyor. Önemli olan kimin yaptığı değil ama bizim mahalleye katkımız gözardı ediliyor böyle böyle.

<sup>104</sup> —Buraya polisler gelmese, tahrik etmese olay çıkmaz bence. Ama burada PKK çok güçlendi, hep eylem yapıyorlar. Hergün çıkıyorlar. İşte şu geçenlerde bir gösteri daha yaptılar (a demonstration held by leftist groups collectively) iki gün önce daha. Gencecik çocuklar yazık değil mi? Polis de saldırıyor bunlar PKKli diye. Bir iki hafta oluyor tutukladılar bunların gençlerini. Okmeydanı'nın da adını çıkarıyorlar.

—Başka siyaset yok mu burada sadece PKK mi?

—En çok bunlar bir de halkevi var aşağıda.

—Parkın orada.

The abovementioned ambivalence in the everyday life of Okmeydanı is a direct consequence of the transformation of the district, resulting in the impossibility of maintaining the old ideal norm regulating the social encounters within the area. The norm my informants imagine once regulated the area through intimacy and familiarity has a definitive function within the narratives as I have presented in the case of representation of the district before the 1990s. The familiar and intimate constitution of sociability in line with the built environment which makes interpersonal relations meaningful within the narratives cannot function today. Even though we have not a thorough factual verification for the former sociability, pace Portelli, the narrative constitution of social and political life provides the local people with an ideal norm through which they interpret today's Okmeydanı (Portelli, 1991). The ideal norm is not something with which people can operate in a stranger world. Of course it is a part of the ideal norm, especially considering that the norm they long for creates an imagined community. However the real function of such longing lies in its dialogical use and I will show why and how the myths of old Okmeydanı and its norm make possible the local people to speak to the state and its own norm. Ambiguity plays a critical role because it leads me to see how the local people through these narratives enter into dialogue with the state. What a careful examination of these narratives show is a causal relation between the architectural transformation, estrangement, ambivalence and insecurity. The trick of the magician is the roles of discrete agencies for the social reconfiguration of the district. These different roles attributed to different agents can be understood in a framework which

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—Evet. O parkı da PKK liler biz kurduk diye iddia ediyorlar. Adını değiştirdiler. Orası Fatma Girik parkıdır. Bunlar Sibel Can diye mi ne bir militanları varmış onun adını vermişler

assigns responsibility for degeneration and for relative recuperation. So I will continue my analysis by now turning my attention to the issue of insecurity as a result of ambivalence on the one hand, and an uneven reestablishment of the social control, on the other hand. In order to see the agencies of degeneration and recuperation within the narratives of local people, we have to focus on how the local people narrate the degeneration process in terms of responsibility (who is responsible for degeneration and who is for recuperation).

My informants' narratives draw a picture of Okmeydanı in which strangers come to the district, causing ambivalence and estrangement among the local people. Ambivalence and estrangement are the themes which appear mostly in contexts referring to the sense of insecurity in the district. I am intentionally using the term insecurity because our conversations with the local people point that Okmeydanı is not a dangerous place, it is much more secure than many other districts in İstanbul. They never use the adjective "dangerous" to describe Okmeydanı. A few interviews with police officers of Şişli, Beyoğlu and Kulaksız police stations verified the low level of crime incidents in the district. I have explained more clearly the public representation of Okmeydanı as a source of crime in the first chapter. But the local people were still insisted in using the term "insecurity" (*güvensiz*) though they stated that there was no intensive criminal activities in the area. Thus I have concluded that the term insecurity refers not only to a criminal threat but to a variety of issues which are at the end connected to the alleged hidden agenda of the state. According to my observations and conversations with the local people, the range of insecurity includes the issues of ambivalence, strangers, apartments, degeneration, the problem of title deeds, and the impending urban transformation. I have already analyzed how the first three of them interactively contribute to the sense of insecurity. Now I will turn my

focus to the issue of degeneration as a result of the coming of strangers and ensuing ambivalence.

According to my informants, degeneration which they take to mean the loss of old ideal norms started after the concretization of the district. The local head of a leading revolutionary organization in the district narrates the issue for a leftist newspaper in the following way:

I came here, to this neighborhood from Sivas in 1979. Those days people were building the gecekondus collectively. During the municipal elections in 1982, the roads of the neighborhood were builded. After 1989, with the coming of the contractors and the concretization, the collectivity among the people of the neighborhood disappeared. MHP won the next municipal elections, then CHP got it again, in the end Okmeydanı became a concrete jungle which is out of breath. Meanwhile, a degeneration occurred in which we don't know and control each other. Formerly there were efforts to stop the influx of the bad things to here, now that frustration, that sense of owning the neighborhood is on the wane.<sup>105</sup>

Though the account does not give us a comprehensible analysis about how and by which mechanisms the social life before the 1990s had vanished, I have already tried to understand the issue through a close reading of the narratives of inhabitants. The connection between the new social structure as a consequence of architectural transformation and the moral degeneration in the district is especially apparent in Musa's words. All my informants agree that after the 1990s, the ideal norm of the old district and its social practices disappeared and an "immoral economy" started to operate within Okmeydanı. This immoral economy is named

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<sup>105</sup> Ben 1979'da Sivas'tan geldim bu mahalleye. O zamanlar insanlar gecekondularını el birliği ile yapıyorlardı. 1982 yılındaki belediye seçimlerinde buraya yol yapıldı. 1989'dan sonra müteahhitlerin girmesi ve apartmanlaşmayla birlikte mahalleli arasındaki kolektif dayanışma da yok oldu. Sonra belediye seçimleri oldu tekrar, MHP'li bir belediye aldı, sonra CHP'ye gitti ve hava almayan bir beton yığınınna dönüştü mahalleler. Bu arada da birbirimizi tanımadığımız, birbirimizi denetleyemediğimiz için yozlaşma da açığa çıktı. Eskiden insanların buraya kötü şeyleri sokmamaya yönelik çabaları vardı, şimdi o heyecan, sahiplenme duygusu zayıfladı.



“degeneration” by revolutionary organizations and they see it as a simultaneous and intentional (on the part of the state) strategy to undermine local support in most of the former revolutionary districts in İstanbul. In this regard, there seems to be a linguistic transference from revolutionary organizations to the local people but I am not well qualified to discuss this aspect, partially since my concern is a little bit different. Yet, the range of application of the term degeneration within everyday usage can be seen in in-dept interviews. The term is most frequently used on the one hand to designate criminal acts such as theft, prostitution, gangs, drugs, robberies, and rape; on the other hand, it is used for crimes such as political and social inertia, gambling, and selfishness. It is often narrated that the moral and criminal are closely interrelated in a spinal cycle of deterioration. This structure of causality is one of the three sources of the sense of insecurity in Okmeydanı. The other two are the ambiguity concerning the ownership of the lands their apartments occupy (via title deeds and urban transformation) and the ambivalence brought by strangers, which is something I have discussed above.

As it is stated by everyone in Okmeydanı, degeneration had been the biggest problem for the local people until 2000, which is ironically the date when the number of the Kurdish population in the district begins to rise. The most frequent stories about degeneration I have encountered focus on prostitution, gambling, drugs, and gangs. Prostitution and gambling go hand in hand in the narratives because the main actors on those scenes are the local inhabitants themselves. My informants recount that night clubs were widespread between 1996 and 1999. These were places where the local people went to chat and flirt with “prostitutes” even though the drinks were much more expensive than in normal/decent pubs. Families got uneasy about the situation and discord spread. The husbands became habitués of the night clubs and

even some nights the district witnessed fights in front of those clubs, some resulting in serious injuries and deaths. On the other hand, gambling took place in the new coffee houses that I have mentioned above and the local people of Okmeydanı frequently visited those places. Even some of my interviews with the local people turned into a series of confession about how bad they were, taking each other's money (*rızk*). Musa gives an exemplary account in the same interview from which I have quoted above:

They sell drugs in front of schools, they orient our girls to prostitution. There are some houses (used for prostitution) that we have found out, they know it but turn a blind eye on it. There is gambling in some coffee houses in the neighborhood. These negative incidents break up and disperse the families. In 1996-1998 period there were a lot of demonstrations here. What's more, there was an increase in the numbers of shops selling alcohol without license. Because here is seen as the backyard of Beyoğlu, these kind of places were moved to Okmeydanı. Eventually, these places turned in to pubs and night clubs. In 97' we collected 1500 signatures to avoid these places in the neighborhood. We went to the head of the district (*kaymakam*), did not give an answer to us. We appealed to the municipality, they told us that it is the police who conduct Okmeydanı, they knew that those places were operated without license, but they had nothing to do about it. Yet, if a restaurant does not have a license, the municipality immediately closes it. Anyhow, they closed those places for 25 days, in order to prevent peoples' reaction, then they moved on. When the oppositions of the people were dense, the owners close them by themselves.<sup>106</sup>

The part I have taken is an example of the degeneration process; it also implies the agency of the state behind the scene. I will closely examine this aspect as

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<sup>106</sup> "Yazı Dizisi: Metropol Sürgünleri-3, Okmeydanı Beyoğlu'nun Arka Bahçesi". *Birgün Gazetesi*, 13 March 2007. ...Hap satılmaya başlandı okulların kapılarında, genç kızlarımızı fuhuşa yönlendiriyorlar. Tespit ettiğimiz evler var mesela onlar da biliyorlar buraları ama göz yumuyorlar. Mahallemizde kumar oynatıyorlar bazı kahvehanelerde. Bu olumsuz gelişmeler aileleri parçalıyor, yıkıyor. 96-98 arası burada yürüyüşlerin çok olduğu bir dönemdi. Bir de ruhsatsız içkili mekânların yoğunlaştığı bir zamandı. Beyoğlu'nun arka bahçesi olarak görüldüğü için o mekânlar buraya taşınmaya başlandı. Sonra da bu yerler en son bar, pavyona dönüşmeye başladı. Buraların kapanması için 97'de 1500 imza topladık ve önce Kaymakamlığa gittik, bize cevap vermedi. Belediyeye gittik, Okmeydanı'na polisin baktığını, buraların ruhsatsız olduğunu ama bir şey yapamayacaklarını söylediler. Ama mesela lokanta işleten bir esnafın ruhsatı yoksa belediye hemen kapatıyordu. Yine de halkın tepkisini önlemek için 25'er gün kapattılar bu mekânları, sonra devam ettiler. Halkın tepkisi yoğunlaşınca mekân sahiplerinin birçoğu kendiliğinden kapattı.

my purpose is to show that the kind of dialogues above calls the state to take action in a neoliberal manner by accusing the state of introducing the process of degeneration while seemingly fighting against it. But for the time being, I have to delve into the representation of degeneration in the narratives of local people to complete the picture.

In a manner similar to the process described above, gangs became a source of trouble for the district; they were racketeers, haggling passers-by, selling drugs, degenerating the youth. What is interesting about thi picture is that the accounts relate that the first members of those gangs were among the children of the local people. Yet my informants somehow link the rise of gangs with the raid of strangers. Of course one might contend that as the social control based on former ideal norms is gone, the control of the self (their own families) like that of strangers became impossible. However it is interesting that they narrate the process of degeneration as something totally out of their control and outside their participation. Their agency is appropriated only when local people took the matter in their hands to clean the district and it is against the state plans to cause the degeneration of the district. For example when they speak of the fight against gangs which was conducted by the members of revolutionary groups, they call the revolutionaries “our boys”. However, as I have showed above, it is also a common complaint that revolutionaries are not like them. They became one of them only when a successful action (like driving gangs away) was accomplished.

In general, the struggle against degeneration has been the main agenda of revolutionary organizations for nearly 15 years. This policy has many purposes including the fight against crime, renewal of political consciousness, and resumption of the old ideal norm. As I have already argued, this project and its discourse are

appropriated by the local people in a particular way that I will not analyze. Yet my purpose is still relevant considering that I am interested in the expressions and apparitions of the term degeneration in everyday encounters. Local people see themselves as the main actors of the struggle against degeneration. Musa, even as a member of a revolutionary group, emphasizes the role of local people in the recuperation process and states that:

Recently, people are gathered again. We are trying to make a campaign against degeneration. Actually it is a problem that the state has to solve. It is written in the constitution, too. Yet the state is immediately reacting a democratic demonstration, but not see when a burglary happens, if sees, do not do anything about it.<sup>107</sup>

The account is significant as well as widespread in Okmeydanı. The narration attributes the agency of recuperation to the local people who are considered as still having the ideal norm which defines Okmeydanı before the 1990s. The local people talk about recuperation as a direct consequence of remembering their lost values and traits. Many informants point that there is a strong tradition of social and political resistance against unfairness and immorality. They say Okmeydanı has a tradition, a history, a legacy through which local people display a morality and a norm. Though the process was initiated by revolutionaries, the local people gathered thousands of signatures, participated in several demonstrations against night clubs and drug dealers, and even assaulted those places. The narratives show that after the closing of the night clubs, the fight against degeneration continued for one or two years intensively. The skirmishes between gang members and revolutionaries took place at

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<sup>107</sup> Son zamanlarda insanlar yeniden bir araya geldiler. Yozlaşmaya karşı kampanya yürütmeye çalışıyoruz. Aslında bu sorun devletin çözmesi gereken bir sorun, Anayasa'da da yazar. Ama insanların demokratik bir eyleminde karşısına hemen dikilen devlet, bir hırsızlık olduğunda bunu görmüyor, görüyorsa da hiçbir şey yapmıyor.

this time (approximately between 1999 and 2002). Those incidents, as I have pointed out, are narrated as victories of “our boys” against “the corrupt”.

This narrative is a way of extending the sense of community the local people have. The narratives place the revolutionaries before the 1990s as part of the district. The same procedure is working here to some extent. When they speak of the events they were in some way involved in (like the fight against degeneration), the identity of Okmeydanı starts to include revolutionaries; however when the matter is much more general to society and not directly related with the district (like social security, working conditions, or minimum wage), the revolutionaries turn into pretentious youngsters who do not know “the real issues of Okmeydanı”. It is quite striking that the same tactic is employed to define Kurds as explained above. This possibility of being “one of us” or “acceptable to us” is based on a particular way of life, public appearance, family structure which can be defined as modern. I argue that a specific kind of community defines and delimits the sphere of social and political ideal (the norm) in the district. This community has a dialogical aspect which speaks to the state and makes certain demands from it. Those demands are closely related with the “real issues” of the district. In this sense, the narration of the fight against degeneration corresponds to some of the real issues. But what is more important is that the narratives of degeneration attribute agency to the people of Okmeydanı in the same way that historical narratives do. My informants, I argue, claim that they are the agent protecting the district, saving it from corruption, pursuing a decent and harmonious life. And they are doing it in spite of the sinister agenda of the state and its policies. Yet as I have pointed earlier, this vilification of the state does not correspond to the studies focusing that how unexpected alliances are established between people in *gecekondu*s and the central government. Üstündağ argues in a

very different context that people in *gecekondu* areas (specifically in Esenyurt) create such an alliance by redirecting corruption charges and accusation of injustice from the central government to the local authorities (Üstündağ, 2005). However, my case display that the local people do not direct their accusation anywhere but directly to the state. Yet this produces another kind of alliance which needs to be analyzed in order to understand the cultural and political mechanisms of governing in the new world order. To achieve this purpose, I have to add a significant dimension of the narratives, viz. the state.

### The State

The state appears everywhere in the narratives of local people about the current situation of the district. The historical narratives contain a little about the state and its agency and even when it is mentioned, it simply says “we could protect the district against the state in terms of social and political matters.” Still, the agency of the state is always depicted in a pejorative way. The uses of the term also continue to designate a strong resistance against state authority and praise for the revolutionary dreams. Yet this is only a first impression. I will try to show that the case is the reverse and is peculiar to Okmeydanı because of its historical background and current situation. To scrutinize the phenomenon of the state within the narratives of local people, I propose to make a distinction which is obvious in my interviews. This distinction is between the direct manifestation of the state and its spectral apparition. My informants mention, on the one hand, the personal and material encounters with the state (as direct manifestations) and on the other hand they explain the problems of the district with reference to the hidden agenda of the state (as spectral

apparitions). Thus in the latter case, there is not a material action of the state that we can verify by observation, because even the local people cannot provide me with concrete examples of such acts. However, this double form of state as represented in narratives points to interesting forms of addressing the state and representing the district.

The direct manifestation of the state consists of three recurrent themes: the police force, the issue of title deeds, and the urban transformation process. The police is the main instrument of violence of the state, aside from the military. For a politically marginal district like Okmeydanı, as it is the case for all the others, the frequent confrontations and encounters with police officers are a part of everyday life. The significant point concerning the police force is that it is either absent or overpresent. When they are needed, as when there is criminal activity, they do not show up. But when they are not needed they are present to annoy people. They use brutal force against “innocent” demonstrations; instead of criminals, they arrest those who fight against criminals; they adorn the district with checkpoints and search ordinary local people yet they do not check drug dealers and gangsters. Ercan states in a newspaper:

Beyond all these, there is double standard. In some districts, security is provided, in some districts, not. We cannot see any police when we say that there is burglary in Okmeydanı, but when there is a press declaration, police comes here, before hours. There is burglary, usurpation, prostitution, everything, here. There is not any house which is not burgled. People went to police station and informed about it, but they could not get any results. In some places some measures are taken in order to prevent these incidents but in such places the state is doing everything to get rid of these places. In order to demolish the revolutionary dynamic, they open the way for the things that the youth would demand.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Tüm bunların ötesinde çifte standart uygulanıyor. Bazı semtlerde asayiş sağlanırken buraya hiç dokunulmuyor. Okmeydanı'nda hırsızlık olayı var dediğimizde hiçbir polis göremeyiz mesela, ama

And when Musa mentions about the local resistance against night clubs, he points:

For example, in 98' there was a fight in one of those places. The chief of police of that period, Hasan Özdemir, amass here five thousand police. Snow masked snipers, black uniformed officers. Exactly five thousand police.<sup>109</sup>

This specific manifestation of the state exacerbates the sense of insecurity in the district to the point that my informants say that the state is the source of insecurity instead of being its provider. Furthermore, the rumors about the number of undercover police agents contribute to this sense of insecurity. As I have explained above, the possibility of someone being an undercover police agent is so high that the sense of insecurity has another dimension which is directly linked to the state as a cause of insecurity.

Another manifestation of the state is with regard to title deeds. Nearly everyone in Okmeydanı went to the Directorate of Foundations (*vakıflar müdürlüğü*) or the Office of Title Deed (*tapu dairesi*) at least once and they have lots of stories of how the state (as municipalities, title deed bureaus or offices) is unable or unwilling to issue their title deeds. The problem arises from the fact that they are in fact squatters on the lands that belong to a foundation (Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakfi). My informants say that when they settled in the area, they thought that the lands belong to the state. Indeed I have shown in the first chapter that the local people claim they

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basın açıklaması denildiğinde saatler öncesinden gelir polisler. Bugün buralarda hırsızlık, gasp, fuhuş her şey var. Hırsızlığa maruz kalmamış ev kalmadı. İnsanlar karakola gidip şikâyet ettiler, ama hiçbir sonuç alınmadı. Başka yerlerde bir takım önlemler alınıyor ama bu tür yerlerde devrimci dinamiğin tasfiye edilmesi için her şeyi yapıyor devlet. Var olan devrimci dinamiği yok etmek için gençliğin rağbet edeceği şeylerin önünü açıyor.

<sup>109</sup> Ama mesela 98'de tek bir kavga oldu bu mekânlardan birinde. Dönemin emniyet müdürü Hasan Özdemir buraya 5 bin polis bir den yığıdı. Kar maskeli, keskin nişancı, siyah giyimli vs. Tam 5 bin polis.



had paid the price of the lands to the Albanians and with this claim they try to create a dialogue with the state in monetary terms. However, according to my informants, the state authorities have two claims; one is that the land belongs to the foundation so they cannot do anything about ownership. Secondly, the land of Okmeydanı is a historical site (*sit alanı*), and the laws force them to demolish the district.

My informants contend, on the other hand, that the historical claims of the state authorities are based on the obelisks which were erected in order to signal the place an arrow (which was shot by an important person of the time-like a Sultan) had fallen. The local people see those obelisks as mere stones which are used by the state to legitimize the demolition of the district. They state that these are ordinary stones and most of the texts inscribed on the surfaces are gone. They say “the state sees the stones but cannot see the people in the district”. The aspiration to be seen by the state is the significant part of my argument. It points to the fact that the local people do not reject the state but want to be recognized by it, to be seen and embraced by it. It is important to understand this longing for recognition for my analysis. I hope it will make clear and meaningful that it is not a coincidence that the narratives of local people, whether focusing on the past or the present, revolves around the issue of security and intimacy. Now we need to look at the last manifestation of the state, the urban transformation project, to see how these issues are linked to the desire to speak to the state.

The urban transformation is one of the main agendas of the public sphere as well as that of the state. In Okmeydanı, urban transformation gradually became a major threat. First the rumors started to the effect that the project would include Okmeydanı in the future. The ambiguity concerning the issue was clarified to some extent when the official web site of the İstanbul municipality clearly stated that the

greatest demolition would take place in Okmeydanı. The uneasiness among local people spread quickly; many demonstrations were organized, and signatures protesting the plan of municipality were collected. The expression of the discontent was again quite similar to the discontent about the title deeds and obelisks. Many of my informants complain that the state via urban transformation project sees the area as an “empty place” without any inhabitants. As the state sees the obelisk instead of seeing local people, the state again sees the field/area not the people live therein.

They have this urban transformation project. They see us as an empty area in this project, as if there is not any people living here, they say ‘we have a new plan for this neighborhood, you will not benefit from this plan. If you are land owner, we will settle you to another place, then you will become indebted to us and pay it.’ They do not consider the tenants, the people who own five storey buildings. They give only one apartment and you get into debt for it, we are against this.<sup>110</sup>

According to all my informants the reason behind that attitude is the extreme value of land in Okmeydanı and the dissident stance of the local people. The first reason is told by my informants as “the houses of Okmeydanı would be 500,000 or 1,000,000 tl if the title deeds were issued”. The high profitability rate in the area is something which “the state and powerful capitalist would not allow the local people to enjoy” (*bize yedirmezler*). The aspiration to be seen by the state comes again forth here with the plea “include us in the plan as well”. I have countless narratives concerning this aspect, all very similar to the interview in Birgün. Ercan clearly illustrates my point:

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<sup>110</sup> Onların şimdi bir Kentsel Dönüşüm Planları var. Bu planda burayı boş bir arazi olarak görüyorlar, sanki burada insanlar yaşamıyormuş gibi, 'biz buraya yeni bir planlama getireceğiz, bu plandan siz faydalanamayacaksınız. Ev sahibiyse biz seni başka bir yere yerleştireceğiz, ondan sonra sen orada bize borçlanacaksın ve ödeyeceksin' diyorlar. Kiracıları düşünmüyorlar, 5 katlı evi olanı düşünmüyorlar. Sadece bir ev veriyorlar ve seni tekrar borçlandırıyorlar o ev için, biz de buna karşı çıkıyoruz.

Actually the interest of the capital is here because the place of Okmeydanı is valuable. It is close to E-5 and E-6, it is near to the city center, thus they will sell the lands for lower prices to their supporters. At that time, the value of an apartment here will be five hundred billion or one trillion. For that reason they say to the people of Okmeydanı “you will go to the remotest places of the city, you will go to where we show or to wherever you can go. Then they will make here a different place. We are saying that include us into that plan. In this latter case, schools, parks, everything can be constructed. But they have in their minds to build skyscrapers here, because the ground is solid. Their target is different. To break up the district, to end the struggle here are their other targets.<sup>111</sup>

The negative role attributed to the state defines two hidden agendas which are interrelated; to exclude local people from the high profits which will be derived from the exchange value of the land in Okmeydanı. Secondly, the local dissident solidarity, which is assumed as an alternative authority and control mechanism in opposition to that of state, is a target for state forces because it is a challenge against the state on the one hand, and it is an obstacle for the demolition of the district and transforming the area as a center of capitalist relations (with skyscrapers and huge modern residences) on the other hand. The problem of title deeds exacerbates the situation, considering the fact that there is a constant possibility of demolition in the district and the local people have no legal rights to resist such operation. The only power they have is their solidarity organized around political organizations. This is the reason why large numbers of people are attracted to the demonstrations against demolitions and urban transformation. The only nodal point that connects all local

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<sup>111</sup> “Yazı Dizisi: Metropol Sürgünleri-3, Okmeydanı Beyoğlu’nun Arka Bahçesi”. *Birgün Gazetesi*, 13 March 2007. Aslında bütün sermayenin gözü burada, çünkü Okmeydanı'nın yeri güzel. E-5'e, E-6'ya yakın, şehir merkezine yakın, dolayısıyla buraları birilerine peşkeş çekecekler. Burada o zaman yapılacak bir dairenin değeri 500 milyar ile 1 trilyon arasında değişecek. Onun için de burada yaşayan insanlara siz bizim gösterdiğimiz şehrin ücra köşelerine, nereye olursa artık, çekilin gidin biz burayı başka bir şey yapacağız diyorlar. Biz diyoruz ki bu plana bizi de dahil edin. Okul olur, park olur her şey olur o zaman. Ama buranın zemini de sağlam oluşu için onların kafalarındaki, buraya gökdelenler dikmek, amaç farklı yani. Mahalleliyi buradan dağıtmak, mücadeleyi kırmak da diğer amaç.

people (original inhabitants) is their apartments. Many slogans against state were shouted in demonstrations. However in my interviews, in accordance with the account of Ercan, the local people demand the state to include them in the urban transformation project. They do not want to lose five houses and take one flat outside of İstanbul. The process generally works in this way in Turkey and indebts people live in the areas of transformation. Moreover they add another demand which is also very significant. They do not want to be spread over İstanbul (to different districts, different housing estates built by Housing Development Administration of Turkey - TOKİ). They want to stay together. This togetherness, however, does not include all the population of Okmeydanı but the local people who shared the same history. One of my informants exemplifies this discourse:

I don't think that anybody will be against the transformation. But it differs from transformation to transformation. If he will extirpate me, if he throws me to another place, this is not transformation. I am not against the transformation, but I want to live in the same place in better apartments. I would give my two apartments in return to a better apartment. But this is my place, I do not want to be separated from here, I work here, my home is here, my friends, relatives are here.<sup>112</sup>

The account signifies many things; first the state is invited to bargain (including the number of houses to be exchanged). Secondly the emphasis over the continuity of social life in the district is important. Yet this is not, I contend, out of social gratitude (the nostalgic yearning for the past) or a mere fidelity to neighbors. It is a fear of the possibility that the sense of insecurity and estrangement can deteriorate further. The same informant (who is from Sivas) clearly states:

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<sup>112</sup> Değişime kimsenin karşı geleceğini sanmıyorum. Ama değişimden değişime fark var. Beni buradan söküp atacaksa, başka bir yere götürüp şey yapacaksa o da değişim sayılmazki. Ben kentsel dönüşüme karşı değilim ama beni buradan atıp sürmeden yine birşey yapacaksa burada yapsın ben de bu aynı yerde yaşayayım daha iyi konutlarda. İki konutumu verip adam gibi bir evde oturmak isterim. Ama burası benim yerim kopup gitmek istemem çalışıyorum evim burada arkadaşlarım akrabalarım.

I grew up in this surrounding so, I acquired some attitudes. I have a certain life style and certain habits. If I am sent to another place, they cannot change my habits immediately, thus there should be a period of time. That time I will be a stranger for them. I will be from Mardin for them. If someone takes me to Etiler, I will be a Kurd of Mardin for Etiler.<sup>113</sup>

I propose to read these lines with the account above from the same informant.

Together they give us another reason about their fear of urban transformation. They are afraid of being estranged and marginalized by other people, like they do to Kurds. Yet the above quote also gives us the motive behind the demand from the state. They want the state to see them, to take them into the account but in a specific way: without transforming it, without turning them into strangers. They demand the state to regulate their inner most feelings –the sense of estrangement-. This is a very postmodern gesture because the point is to be embraced by the totality and its norm via singularity. The local people demand to be articulated to the state the way they are (with their social life). Of course “what they are” consists of friends, families and a familiar atmosphere around the district not of revolutionaries who are already containing the risk of being “other than us” (in contrast to “one of us”). This is perhaps the reason that the local people say if the state issues the title deeds or provides a reasonable solution (such as the one my informant states above) to the urban transformation problem, there would be no place for revolutionary organizations in the district. I therefore contend that charging the state with a hidden agenda has a specific function. This charge attributes the corrosive aspect of the transformation of the district to the state on the one hand, and the

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<sup>113</sup> Ben bu çevrede yetişmişsem belli şeyler almışım, belli yaşam tarzından geldiğim için belli alışkanlıklarım var. Başka bir yere gönderseler bu alışkanlıklarımı değiştiremeyeceğime göre belli bir zaman geçmesi lazım. O zaman ben onlar için yabancı olacağım, ben onlar için Mardinli olacağım. Beni Etilere de götürse ben Mardinliyim.

constitutive/recuperative agency to the local people, on the other. Yet this is not a complete rejection of the state as a whole, as it would seem prima facie. On the contrary it is demanding the presence of the state as a whole, in all its aspects. This is the reason why the local people call the state to regulate their innermost feelings (the sense of estrangement-the sense of intimacy); they do not demand jobs, social security, or education from the state as their history are fraught with such struggles. On the contrary, they only recall security and intimacy of the past. I hope I will clarify and substantiate this point thoroughly in the conclusion. However, I have to complete the picture with the issue of the spectral apparition of the state before I can complete this argument.

The spectral apparition of the state is a term I use to designate the presence of the state in the district which has no valid verification or proof other than rumors and common sense. The undercover police agents are one such example. As I have explained, these agents are described as being untraceable and indistinguishable from the normal people in contrast to the pre-90s period when they could easily be discerned. The state and its instruments are imagined as having totally penetrated the district, having become almost a part of it. Anyone can be one of them (so everyone can be “other than us”) and thus dangerous and harmful. The statement of a carpenter in the district illustrates the point:

–I think they(the undercover police) all know everything about the events. They know who is doing what. Who is shopping from which marker, who is from which political group. They have many people who are traveling around.

–I know. They were telling me, they knew who is the undercover police. Saying this or that.

–There are some ordinary men that you would never be suspicious about. It could be your neighbor or a shopkeeper. If it is the the bottle gas man,

he can get into all the houses. And he has a transmitter. How can you figure it out?<sup>114</sup>

It is obvious that the spectral apparition of the state as allegedly omnipresent undercover police agents is a source of insecurity. It was so before the 1990s, but to uncover such an officer was an easy task. Now they are a constant source of insecurity and it exacerbates the sense of estrangement by making trust almost impossible. One of my informants brilliantly underlines this aspect by saying “sometimes I even doubt that I may be an undercover police agent!” However, this agency of the state corrosive to the life in Okmeydanı is not limited to undercover police agents. Nearly all negative aspects of contemporary Okmeydanı are in a way attributed to the state. These negative aspects of life in Okmeydanı can also be considered as spectral apparitions since the whole explanations regarding their occurrence revolve around the notion of the hidden agenda of the state. I am not saying that these charges are false, on the contrary taking into the account that the history of Turkish Republic is full of hidden agendas (as it is the case of Ergenekon or Susurluk file). However, my point is to understand how these accusations function.

The agency of the state as degeneration includes all the problems concerning security and intimacy. The local people strongly assert that the building contractors and the permission for building apartments are a part of the state’s hidden agenda aiming to destroy solidarity and resistance in Okmeydanı. Strangers are another part through which the state attempts to corrupt the district and to turn it into somewhere

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<sup>114</sup> –Bence bunların (sivillerin) olaylardan herşeyden haberi var. Kimin ne yaptığından haberleri var. Kim hangi bakkaldan alışveriş yapıyor, kim hangi siyasetten. Bunların el altında dolaşan birçok adamları var.

–Biliyorum, artık tanıyorlarmış sivilleri söylüyorlardı. Şu şudur bu budur diye.

–Onların başka hiç tanıyamayacağın sıradan insanları var, hiç şüphelenmeyeceğin. Komşun olur, burada esnaf olur. Bir tüpçü olsa her eve giriyor çıkıyor. Telsizi de var. Nasıl anlayacaksın.

like Tarlabası or “the backstreets of Beyoğlu”. The crime, gambling, gangs, prostitution, drugs are the ways through which the state drugs<sup>115</sup> *Okmeydanı*. The accounts above blame the state for not preventing such criminal activities. Even Kurds are sometimes thought as in an accomplice with the state:

The tenants are from south east Anatolia. In my opinion they came here from Tarlabası. The state did it on purpose. Okmeydanı is a castle, the state knows this. Now I am habitant of this place. Look how many habitants are there. But when there is a fight, Kurds come with 50 people.<sup>116</sup>

The narratives represent the state as “unable or unwilling to issue title deeds”; “seeing the stones instead of people”; “seeing the empty place but not the people”; “bringing building contractors and apartments”; “degenerating Okmeydanı”; “promoting the crime and immorality” and finally as “preparing to demolish the district with the urban transformation project”. All the representations indicate a point of confrontation with the state. The assertion of such a stance of confrontation and feeling of animosity is narratively substantiated by the local people by representing the local people (themselves) as the agents of partial recovery. The historical representation of Okmeydanı is important here because the historical narratives attribute the agency of the constitution of the sense of security and that of intimacy to the local people at the time. The narratives depict a historical picture of Okmeydanı in which the local people sustain control and security via their intimate

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<sup>115</sup> I deliberately use the verb “to drug” because the local people in Okmeydanı generally use “uyuşturmak” to recount degeneration in the district. It is also interesting that the few police officers I had chance to speak to use the same word to describe the young revolutionaries in Okmeydanı: “they are all drugged”. I believe a study focusing on the relationship between the language of crime and the language of politics in Turkey would be fruitful for analysing neoliberal reconfiguration of the state. For an analysis which seeks similar questions, see Comaroff and Comaroff (2006).

<sup>116</sup> Kiracılar güneydoğudan. Tarlabasından buraya geldiler bence. Devlet bunu bilerek yaptı. Okmeydanı bir kaledir, devlet bilir bunu. Şimdi ben buranın yerlisiyim. Buranın yerlisi ne kadar bak, ama Kürtler bir kavga olur 50 kişi gelirler.



and familiar way of living. Above I have already presented something quite similar; the ongoing degeneration is said to be halted to some extent by the local people. The narrative constitution of the local people as ameliorating and recuperating the process of degeneration seems the exact opposite of the imagined function of the state as the degenerating and corroding agent. However my thesis advisor warned me about the apparent contradiction between these two sides in the narrations. Following her comments, I contemplate over the issue and review my notes and recorded interviews.

At this point something is surprised me. When the local people talk of the degeneration and the fall of the former ideal norm, they do not mention issues like employment, social security or education for which they had fought for a long time. They informed me about these aspects not in the conversations focusing on degeneration, but in the nostalgic accounts of their past in the district, their youth, their childhood. They blame the youngsters (revolutionary or not) for being uncultivated, unemployed, vagabonds, bloodsuckers of fathers. However, while they relate the sense of insecurity and estrangement with the architecture, strangers (Kurds and the others), or the state, they do not seem to complain about their children and their neighbors apropos of anything at first glance. Considering that what is not mentioned is constitutive for an understanding of what is mentioned (de Lauretis, 1987 and Zizek, 1994), I will now briefly look at the other side of history, a dark side on which the light is cast when the issue is not seemingly related with the degeneration of the district.

## The Dark Side of the Story; the Penetration of Capital: Temporality, Structure and Culture

The interviews I conducted shows that the only discontent is not degeneration based on the intimacy and security. These issues which produce discontent are interesting in the sense that they do not relate to a specific discourse as it is the case for degeneration. In contrast to the narrations of degeneration, these problems do not provide a basis for social and political resistance against the state. Certainly it would be wrong to expect the local people to connect every issue to the state and its policies, yet it is also meaningful to look at which themes are discussed with reference to the state and its hidden agenda and which are not. It is only in this way that the function of the themes selected in reference to the state can be understood. I call this part “the dark side of the story” for the issues I will mention here are frequently spoken in contexts where the state retreats and other actors emerge. This is why, I contend, my informants have extremely dispersed reference points for issues of social security and also so on as against the issues of estrangement and insecurity for which reference point is the state without exception. For the other issues, my informants refer to registers like modern youth culture, personal degeneration as a consequence of increasing wealth, Kurdish insatiability, lack of moral strength or regard for their fellows etc. Though it can be assumed that my field research is not sufficient to connect those divergent accounts in a single analysis, it is still meaningful to note that the case of degeneration is much clearer and common. The function of the degeneration narrative, in this particular sense, is sociologically relevant and the diversity of discursive structures with which other issues are discussed signifies a relative incoherence. I assert that incoherence exists here

because those issues are not easy to be placed in the new world order, and there is no register to allow them available to the people of Okmeydanı.

The most significant issue that I want to talk about in this part is employment. The history of labor power in Okmeydanı is no way different than that of Turkey. The first migrants of Okmeydanı had been employed as porters, labourers, etc. Thereafter, the local people who came to the district between 1960 and 1980 started to work in docks around Haliç and in municipalities as low level civil servants like garbage men or drivers. In the conversations not focusing on degeneration (like stories of nostalgic yearnings or intimate chats after the recorder is turned off, or after I stop taking notes), people start to tell stories about the trade unions, working practices, and labor movements of the time. The type of work in the past seems to have a number of characteristics: social security (and health insurance) was common, employment security was relatively high, working hours were inflexible, and the circulation of labor power among different sectors was limited. Most of the local people are now retired or they are still working in the same jobs so as to complete a couple of years necessary for their retirement. It can be easily argued that the former social life of the district had been shaped by the employment structure of the time. Working in the same place creates a common practice for the daily lives of the inhabitants; they were members of the same trade union, they were seeing each other while working, they were going to work at the same time and coming from work at the same hour. Those shared practices had an obvious contribution to the social life; the imagined ideal social norm which sustained the sense of security and that of intimacy at the time had been produced by such a daily routine. Yet my informants' accounts as I have showed above link the existence of the norm to two themes, specifically intimacy and security, with reference to the architecture, the social and

spatial proximity this produced and the possibility it provided for symmetrical social control. There is no space within these accounts for employment and the experience of work at the time. I assert that that these themes have no place in the narratives of degeneration is a consequence of the cultural modalities of neoliberal (or advanced liberal) world which has no space for these kinds of themes to be addressed to the state. This approach can be further verified if we look at the accounts charging youth culture or young revolutionaries with being irresponsible, lazy, vagabonds or blood suckers unlike themselves and the former revolutionaries. But now, there is no way to speak to the state and its neoliberal policies regarding the issues of employment. Nearly all my informants know that there are no stable and secure jobs in the private or public sector. They point out that the municipality employs people with short term contracts and low wages and the renewal of such contracts are not very frequent and even if contracts are renewed, wages tend to stay constant (unlike the 1990s). Thus there is a shift from the central policies creating insecurity and low payments to blame personal/generational deficiencies.

The same narrative structure can easily be found when local people are complaining about Kurds. The local people generally accuse the Kurds of working for low wages and causing unemployment (especially among their children). Yet they also mention the free market economy (specifically China) caused the textile industry to deteriorate to the extent that the number of workshops in Okmeydanı has decreased by 90 per cent. The case I described in the first chapter can be another example: the textile workshop owners in collaboration with political organizations complain about the raids of the state inspector to close workshops employing workers illegally, and they assert that it is impossible to pay the wages people demand and the social insurance payments at the same time. They even say that

halving the social insurance payment will not be a solution since they already pay none of it and barely survive. The demand from the state is to retreat from the district so as that they can deal with the situation by themselves. The local people can argue even after the meeting that unemployment is due to the insatiability of Kurds who work for less. Thus I believe that the contradiction cannot be explained by the lack of information of the local people but a result of an ideological enframing of the issues.

The same strategy may be found in discussions about the uncultivated young generation. The lack of necessary education (including high schools and universities) is narratively related to the laziness of the youth, although many of our conversations point that the local people know, but cannot accept as fact, that the state is unable to provide education. The young people and the revolutionaries in the district are defined as knowing nothing about the world and the country they live in; they do not read anything including the bulletins they hand out. Yet the complaint is directed towards personal insufficiencies and deficiencies and there is no clear confrontation with the state as it is the case for degeneration or architecture or urban transformation.

I have argued above that the narratives represent the state as “unable or unwilling to issue title deeds”; “seeing the stones instead of people”; “seeing the empty place but not the people”; “bringing building contractors and apartments”; “degenerating Okmeydani”; “promoting the crime and immorality” and finally “preparing to demolish the district with the urban transformation project”. However the state as “degenerating Okmeydani through its education policies” or “transforming employment” or “not ensuing social security and employment stability” does not appear in the narratives. Of course it can be argued that the former representations are about the unique relationship between the state and

Okmeydanı, in other words those representations are specific to Okmeydanı. On the other hand, it is very difficult for the local people to produce such representations because they are not directly related with the district but with the whole country in its totality. Yet I would reject this inference since what happens in Okmeydanı is not specific to it. The title deeds, urban transformation, the criminality and degeneration are not exclusive themes for Okmeydanı, but a part of general policy of the state in all marginal areas or poor districts. Thus the appropriation of themes in the first part (title deeds, obelisks, apartments, criminalization, urban transformation etc.) as an exclusive policy of the state and the appropriation of the latter ones (transformation of education, employment, social security, health care etc.) as general state policy allows me to examine the function of this distinction/selection as part of a neoliberal discourse. However what is important here is that the interpretation by the local people of some of the state policies as part of a hidden agenda is not a rejection of the state or the sign of an antagonism between the state and the people of Okmeydanı. What is not said against the state makes me think of “what can be said” in a dialogue (however imaginary) with the state, in which local people make their demands in that I would like to call neoliberal terms.

#### As a Conclusion: The Marginalization of Normalization

Before connecting all the issues into one comprehensive analysis, I have to briefly recapitulate what I have done so far. I started my analysis with “the general history of *gecekondu* areas in Turkey” in order to provide the reader with a general understanding of areas alike Okmeydanı and consequently with enough knowledge to see *similarities* and *differences* between Okmeydanı and the other *gecekondu*

districts (whether they are revolutionary areas, former revolutionary areas or have never been revolutionary). Then I continue with “the common historical narration of Okmeydanı”. This part is written to clarify the temporal and sequential order of the story of Okmeydanı from beginning to the present. In my field research, the historical narrative of the district was a part of my conversations with the local people. Without asking my informants, all of them tried to tell me the story of degeneration in Okmeydanı. First they depict the ideal/mythic version of Okmeydanı which belongs to the period before the 1990s; then they start to narrate the degeneration of the district, reaching up to the present. Two themes in those narratives that appear recurrently are: Intimacy and security. To discover why they (re)appear persistently, I analyzed these two themes in accordance with the temporal horizon which is provided by the common historical narration of Okmeydanı. Thus I divided the subsequent part into two; “the nostalgic representation of Okmeydanı before the 1990s” and “the end of a dream” as the representation of Okmeydanı after the 1990s.

In the “nostalgic representation of Okmeydanı”, I embark upon an analysis of the architectural structure of the time in accordance with the narrative depictions. Then I continue with use of architecture and the spatial arrangement of the district and its social functions within the narratives of local people. At the end of the chapter I have made several remarks: (I) in the narratives, the physical structure of the district and its usage before the 1990s prompt a depiction of a social life based on intimacy and security. (II) Intimacy and security interactively produce and are produced by a social life based on symmetrical control and visibility. (III) This picture provides the local people with a sense of security for which they are longing today. Then I argued that two aspects of this representation are important: first it

overemphasizes the issues of security and intimacy. Secondly, the local people narrate themselves as being the actors who are responsible for creating the sense of security and intimacy.

In “the end of a dream”, I started with architecture again and showed that (I) the local people believe architectural transformation resulted in a huge inflow of strangers. (II) Along with the new architectural structure and the inflow of the strangers, a severe sense of ambivalence started to reign over the district. I analyzed in detail the consequences of ambivalence and demonstrated its corrosive effects which make it impossible to sustain the old social norms and lives. The symmetrical social control and intimacy among inhabitants are narrated as vanished in this process. (III) Moreover the sense of ambivalence created a social estrangement among the local people. After pointing those three features of the narratives about the degeneration, I concluded that all of these are part of the sense of insecurity which the local people articulate as the loss of intimacy and security of the former social life of the district. Then I have closely examined the narrative explanations of the transformation of the district from an ideal to a degenerate place, and I have come to the conclusion that the local people define two agencies in this process; one is responsible for the fall, and the other is the agent responsible for sustaining what is left from the early period trying to restore the old norms in Okmeydanı. The former agent in narratives is the state; it is represented as the locus of negativity, as “bringing building contractors to the district in order to break the solidarity”; “unable/unwilling to issue title deeds and leaving the local people in a serious state of ambiguity”; “causing the inflow of strangers and even the increase of the Kurdish population”; “encouraging criminals and exacerbating the moral degeneration”; and finally “aiming to demolish Okmeydanı through the urban transformation project”.



On the other hand, the agency of local people is represented as resisting against the hidden agenda of the state summarized above. With their “history”, “legacy” and “tradition”, they see themselves as mounting a strong resistance against the process of degeneration and even succeeding to some extent.

However, lastly I have shown that loss of security and intimacy are far from being the sole problems of the district. There are many things that have changed and their negative influences can be detected by examining conversations which do not focus on the issue of degeneration and through our field observations which is shared by the local people as well (for example the transformation of work and the retreat of the state from the social sphere).

On the basis of my analysis from the beginning of the chapter to here, I assert that the representation of Okmeydanı as passing from the ideal social life to a degenerate state is a story of marginalization. Yet this story of marginalization narrates a general, normal, transformation process of all *gecekondu* areas in Turkey as a whole. In Turkey, nearly without exception, *gecekondu* houses turned into apartments by the permission of municipalities. This permission paved the way for the inhabitants of *gecekondu* houses to give the land their houses occupy to contractors in return for several flats in the apartments which were built in those lands. For the aspiration to be modern and “normal” (belonging to the norm of the modern urban space), they exchanged their old living environment. The state policy initiated and supported this transformation in order to compensate for its failure to provide jobs, wealth and services (Keyder, 2000). This is the reason behind why many studies read the process of architectural transformation as a success story (Ayata, 1996; Erder, 1996; Erdoğan, 2001; Erman, 2003). Furthermore, narrating the process as a success story does not only belong to academic field but, as Üstündağ

shows, the inhabitants of *gecekondu* areas also narrate apartmentalization as their own success stories, as how they have become modern citizens and urbanites (Üstündağ, 2005). According to those stories, both the state and the people in *gecekondu* areas see the transformation as part of a process of modernization and, in this specific sense, as a part of normalization. However this modernization project fails in a specific manner. It created a hybrid form of urban space fraught with narrow streets, ugly buildings, “dangerous” tenants on the one hand; big apartments and their “rich” owners on the other hand. This form creates its own norm which makes holding these contradictory components of the social life in former *gecekondu* districts together possible. This norm is constituted as following: modernization turned into a success story for the owners and marked the beginning of a cycle of poverty for the tenants<sup>117</sup> (Pınarcıklıoğlu and Işık, 2001). It is the only way for the inhabitants of former *gecekondu* houses to be articulated to the norm of generality (the norm of the state)<sup>118</sup>. This model is the norm and marks a process of normalization for marginalized, even in hybrid terms, applies to Okmeydanı too. The picture depicted by the local people of Okmeydanı as a process of degeneration is, in effect, a picture of normalization for Okmeydanı; it is the modernity of Okmeydanı,

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<sup>117</sup> Üstündağ shows that the poor tenants are articulated to this hybrid norm through stories of suffering and bad luck, which, at the end, mask the unequal social and economic relationships producing their poverty. This kind of appropriation of the hybrid norm by the poor is also their only way to belong to the modernity in marginal districts (Üstündağ, 2005).

<sup>118</sup> I use “the norm of the state” and “the norm of generality” synonymously. Remembering my definition of hegemony (a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination), I assert that a mentality –a state of mind- which functions in a (somewhat) structural manner that we call the state is unlikely to be challenged by the general norm of the society (the norm of general). They should be, to a large extent, coextensional regarding the fact that there cannot be two hegemonic discourses which are contradictory at the same time. For a contradiction among different discourses or norms, there should always be a distinction between hegemon and dominated, norm and margin, law and transgression. In this sense, I tend to put the state as hegemon and alongside the norm of generality, because it seems to me unlikely that a norm of the general (a hegemonic norm) and a norm of the state would be contradictory to each other. Of course there is constant struggle between the hegemonic discourse and dominated ones and there is always a possibility for every discourse to be hegemonic. This is the reason why Allan Pred calls every discourse, other than hegemonic one, *would-be* hegemonic (Pred, 1995: 20-21).

not the modernity of an upper-class district like Etiler. However it is important to ask at this point: how we can explain the fact that the local people in Okmeydanı see this architectural transformation as a story of marginalization (of degeneration) instead of a story of success?

The answer to this question is basically that the state has not yet issued title deeds for Okmeydanı and consequently has a legal advantage in its project of urban transformation in Okmeydanı. Normalization and its hybrid norm are seen as marginalization by the local people because it is a constant threat to any form of belonging. Consequently, it is out of question for the local people of Okmeydanı to appropriate that hybrid norm when urban transformation project would demolish their houses. The ambivalence reigning over the district is a manifestation of the impossibility to be a part of Okmeydanı defined by the hybrid norm mentioned above. Without title deeds, Okmeydanı, whose position in İstanbul is seen to be at the heart or the centre by the local people, is one of the cheapest districts in the city. Although it is close to many centers of İstanbul (like Taksim, Beşiktaş, Topkapı) and it is modern in many terms, the rents and real estate prices are very low.

Thus the local people are in an equivocal position: on the one hand, my informants state “unfortunately you cannot find any doctors or lawyers as tenants here”, they have to live with those who migrated from rural areas (Kurdish people) or poor people who cannot afford high prices. These “other” people are in a sense the objects which remind them of the fact that they couldn’t modernize enough to live with doctors or lawyers. However what makes the situation equivocal is that they do not sell their houses and try to settle somewhere else. At first I thought that it is because they do not want to break off their old social ties. This is one reason indeed with an unexpected turn. The main reason for their unwillingness becomes apparent

when I find out that a particular expression is widely used by the local people: “A flat after the urban transformation will cost between 500,000 and 1,000,000 tl” (as against approximately 100,000 tl per flat today). The local people thus have the little choice of either living in an insecure, estranging district or selling their houses and going to somewhere else but abandoning the prospective income which will come from the flats when the title deeds are issued or the urban transformation takes place in a way that will include them.

The role of the state in the current state of ambivalence in the district is clear in this specific sense (about title deeds and the urban transformation). Yet the story of marginalization tells much more than issues of title deeds and urban transformation. Remembering that insecurity and estrangement are the main themes of the story of degeneration, I argue that security and intimacy are the main reference points for the local people in order to speak to the state. These themes are also contributing to the shift of agency in the architectural transformation (apartmanlaşma) from the local people to the state. As I have stated above, in Turkey the modernization of *gecekondu* areas and turning them into districts full of apartments are the result of the collaboration between the state and *gecekondu* inhabitants. After all, it is the local people who sold their *gecekondus* to building contractors in return for apartment flats. The local people of Okmeydanı attribute this agency to the state with an explanation of a hidden agenda working exclusively in Okmeydanı. As I have shown above, the state is held responsible for the coming of the building contractors. However, the refusal of their complicity and blaming the state is not an ideological cover for their participation; it is rather a way of belonging to the general norm (the norm of the state). This gesture is not a refusal to acknowledge complicity, but it is the result of an impossibility to speak according to

any other norm. There is no other way to speak to the state. The only terms they can speak to the state in is through security and intimacy.

Blaming the state is not limited to the buildings (title deeds, the urban transformation and building contractors) but includes all the parts of the degeneration discourse: strangers, crime, and immorality. But I have also shown above that the local people are the ones “who went to night clubs and gambled in the new coffee houses”; it was their children “who used and sold drugs, and created gangs”; it was the local people “who rented their flats to strangers and Kurds for higher prices”; it was the local people “who went to the village associations and exclusive coffee houses”. Yet the state is narrated as a tempter, a provoker, and an initiator. The state is narrated as that “which tries to turn Okmeydanı into Tarlabası (backstreets of Taksim) with nightclubs and coffee houses in which people gamble”; “which promotes theft, drug dealing and using, and gangs”; “which channel strangers to Okmeydanı with apartments which are built by the state as a part of its hidden agenda”; and “which even brought Kurds to the district”. The state has done and has been doing all those things according to its hidden agenda which aims to destroy both the solidarity and the material wellbeing of the district to use the valuable lands for capitalist purposes. I am not interested in the factuality of those assertion, they might be true. My purpose, as I have repeated countlessly during my analysis, is to understand the function of this narrative shift. It is for this reason that I have included the way agency is apportioned in the narratives of the local people and which issues they do not mention in accounts of the degeneration.

The other side of transformation is the agencies of the local people as occluding and reversing the degeneration process. The historical representations, I contend, aim to give us a picture in which security and intimacy were sustained by

the local people even in the presence of the malicious interests of the state. It basically says “we were able to sustain security and social control by ourselves even against the state”. The narrations concerning degeneration (the narration of the present in a sense) produce a context in which the local people are still effective in protecting the district from the outside threats (the state and its agents -stranger, Kurds, undercover police agents, criminals, immoral people etc.). New ways of regulating the ambivalence and controlling the district are produced by the local people. This narrative structure posits the local people against the state with reference to the continuous conflict through which the local people define themselves and attribute a positive agency to themselves. I argue that the meaning of this positing is the claim, which is the same as that in the historical narratives, that “we are still able to sustain social control and security to some extent even in the presence of relentless attacks from the state”.

This shows that the local people narrate Okmeydanı with the historical representation and the story of degeneration in a dialogical way. This dialogue include many sides; old and new, modern and rural, the same and the other, or the local people and the state. I have intentionally emphasized the last couple, not only because it is more explanatory (or more fundamental) than the others, but also because my purpose is to understand advanced liberalism. I contend that this liberalism lies deep in that dialogue. The narrative that I have given you so far is a dialogue of which three features are essential. (I) the dialogue personalizes (making the whole process exclusive and intentional to Okmeydanı) the state with a narrative marginalization of the process which hegemonic discourse sees as normalization. This exclusivity provides the local people with means of speaking to the state with the terms defined in a world of neoliberalism. The second feature comes forth this

point: (II), the specific dialogue I have analyzed excludes the issues and themes which have no correspondence in the world of neoliberalism. The local people of Okmeydanı have a legacy, a history, a tradition as my informants say, yet they work to sustain issues of security and intimacy not those of labor, poverty, exclusion, or social policies. They had, in the past, fought for and suffered from those themes and issues as well, and these appear constantly between the lines of our conversations. But these themes, as I hoped I showed above, are unable to create a dialogue with the state. They are dispersed and without reference in contrast to the issues of security and intimacy (as estrangement). What can be spoken and what cannot be are determined by the neoliberal enframing which excludes the themes and issues that are as important as the other components of the degeneration discourse. And this brings us to the last trait of the dialogical structure of narratives.

(III) Security and intimacy frames the dialogue with the state. I argue that the demands inherent in those narratives are in fact about the issues which are constantly broached in the narratives: security and intimacy. The plea “include us to the plan” is crucial to understand what the local people demand from the state. They want to be seen by the state (instead of stones or empty places), to be embraced by the state with its norm. They long for the normalization which was once promised but failed. However the embrace they demand is a substantially different form of inclusion than that developmentalist state had offered before. They do not want a normalization that will transform their lives; they recognize their singularity and want to be included as they are. Following Jameson, the cultural logic of late capitalism and its ideological functioning are very well in line with this attitude of the local people. This new cultural logic “allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different,

yet subordinate, features (Jameson, 1991: 4)”<sup>119</sup>. The local people can expect nothing from the state but to allow themselves to maintain their social existence which is already deteriorated due to the transformation of built life in the district. This is the reason why they do not want to be separated from each other; not because they want to protect or recreate their old local community, but because they do not want to feel estranged in Okmeydanı or in a new locality. They do not want to be like Kurds (Mardinli or Diyarbakırlı in my interviews). They are afraid of to be the strangers/the others for the other communities (like imagined communities of Etiler or Akmerkez). They call to a state which is powerful and omniscient to regulate their innermost feelings (intimacy and estrangement), a state which will take their emotions into the account. This calling state is so neoliberal in this sense; moreover it consequently will respect their singularities. The whole picture displays an echo of the postmodern cultural politics of the neoliberal state.

To make this point clear I should explain the term neoliberalism I use for my argument. Neoliberalism, pace Dean, is mode of problematization of the welfare state and its features such as bureaucracy, rigidity, and dependency formation. The logic of neoliberalism recommends the reform of individual and institutional conduct so that it becomes more competitive and efficient. Neoliberalism seeks to effect this reform by the extension of market rationality to all spheres, by the focus on choices of individuals and collectives, and by the establishment of a culture of enterprise and responsible autonomy (Dean, 1999: 210). The emphasis here is the empowerment of different actors for the various regulations of the social life, which are conducted by the developmentalist/welfare state. Rose explains the phenomenon as following:

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<sup>119</sup> Zizek also makes a similar argument with a close reading of Jameson’s text and concludes that the respect for particular within neoliberal universalism is an ideological mechanism purposing to reproduce capitalism hegemony (Zizek, 1997: 44). He further argues that such kind of embracing the particular is far from being anti-nationalist. On the contrary, its longing for authentic and self-enclosed communities is an inverted and disavowed racism (pp. 50).



Although strategies of welfare sought to govern through society, “advanced” liberal strategies of rule ask whether it is possible to govern without governing society, that is to say, to govern through the regulated and accountable choices of autonomous agents –citizens, consumers, parents, employees, managers, investors- and to govern through intensifying and acting upon their allegiance to particular “communities” (Rose, 1996: 61).

The emphasis on the empowerment of the communities in the process of the neoliberal transformation is significant for my argument. Regarding the fact that the local people in Okmeydanı demand the state to empower themselves for the sustaining security, the neoliberal connotations within the narratives of degeneration is clear<sup>120</sup>. However, to explain why the local people long for a state which takes their desire of not being strangers of some other people, we have to refer Berlant (2004). She employs the term “an emotion in operation” to explain the mechanisms of the empowerment mentioned above (Berlant, 2004: 4). She points out that by operating compassion, the neoliberal logic (in her terms: Republican thought) makes the empowerment of communities possible:

In asking individuals and local institutions to take up the obligation to ameliorate the suffering that used to be addressed by the state, compassionate conservatives see themselves as moral actors: for rather than imposing solutions from on high, as it were, compassionate conservatives believe that local institutions will best be able to serve the less fortunate persons who come forward for help. All social membership is voluntary in this view. By insisting that society’s poorest members can achieve the good life through work, family, community participation, and faith, compassionate conservatives rephrase the embodied indignities of structural inequality as opportunities for individuals to reach out to each other, to built concrete human relations. (Berlant, 2004: 3)

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<sup>120</sup> For a similar observation about the empowering communities for the governing social sphere, see Comaroff and Comaroff

Thus longing for the embracement without transformation and for the state which consider their sense of estrangement corresponds to the logic of neoliberal empowering. The local people want to prevent a forthcoming estrangement by emphasizing that the state is unable to provide security for the area and if the conditions of the old social environment are restored, they will sustain order and control more efficiently. Cruikshank's observation would be explanatory for our point:

By politicizing and governmentalizing as many areas of social life as possible, by multiplying as far as possible the number of public spheres, citizens were held responsible for the promotion of social stability. (Cruikshank, 1996: 245).

The transference of agency from the local people to the state in the narrative contributes, if not produces, the demands from the state, which I have just mentioned. The state is responsible for the current degeneration in all its aspects and local people are responsible for the ideal condition of Okmeydanı before the 1990s and for the partial security in the district now. I argue that this frame implies that they did/do not want the state to provide security with the police force but leave it to the social control of the local people. They further argue that they have lost their capability to ensure security because of the state. They demand the state to recognize this capacity and develop policies accordingly. They hope for an urban transformation project that will replace Kurds, dangerous poor tenants, and undercover police agents with tenants who are doctors or lawyers. Thus the whole picture is reversed: the refusal of accepting local agency is a way of claiming for agency. To blame the state is a way of stating demands in a manner of neoliberalism, which determines what can be problematized –security and intimacy not labor, social security or education. Through urban transformation, a possibility to retrieve the old

secure and familiar life appears in the horizon, but without jobs, political concerns, or social insurance.

Consequently, a total rejection of the state can be a strong call to include it, the state of exception can be the norm, and those who are the most marginal have the possibility to turn into the most normal (if it is really possible). The prima facie confrontation can be read as a conversation with the state. But I repeat that it is not because the local people in Okmeydanı are opportunist in a political sense or accomplices of the state. The world we live in cannot provide the people with a language in which we can demand out-of-date things like jobs, justice, social security or social equality. It is our responsibility to create that language; pace Benjamin it is our responsibility to create a real state of emergency.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

*“...understanding is limited, but misunderstanding is limited, too”*

*Maurice Blanchot (1981)*

In this study, I analyzed how the sense of belonging to a marginal district is produced to stage political demands within the discursive frame allowed by neoliberalism. My departure point is to understand marginality in a margin from the narratives and accounts of those who are considered as marginal. Okmeydanı in this sense was a field in which people constantly talked about the condition of the district in terms of their own experiences and several representations produced within different public spheres, which continuously influence their everyday life. Thus I have come to the point that if anyone wants to understand marginality in Okmeydanı, s/he should also understand how the inhabitants place themselves in it while speaking of Okmeydanı and defining its problems. I asserted that the narratives about Okmeydanı provide some inhabitants (who came to the district between 1960 and 1980 and had *gecekondu* houses whose lots are occupied by apartments today) with a shared language through which they imagine a community of the real *Okmeydanlı*. In this light, I focus on the two most common themes within the narratives I have collected during my field work: how the different public spheres narrate marginal districts and their consequent effects on the everyday life of the inhabitants. This side of my study

can be conceived as the dialogue the local people enter into with the world outside – with different public spheres and their different norms, with which the norm of the community of the real *Okmeydanlı* is constantly defined and accorded. On the other hand, the people I have interviewed continuously talk about the degeneration of the district as a way of connecting the imagined past to the present and thus a way of creating a narrative unity in which the local people can position themselves. This side of the study can be conceptualized as a dialogue of the local people entered into with the world inside –with their current selves, former selves, and their current others. Within this structure I tried to analyze and understand the functions these two sides have and I asserted that they are two distinct modes of constituting the district as a community. In this sense, the meaning of being from Okmeydanı, the real *Okmeydanlı*, is defined through how other people see Okmeydanı and how they see themselves. These are the most common issues the local people discuss and therefore are constituting of community and identity.

In the second chapter, I started my analysis with the question “what do local people think of their representations in the public sphere?” I firstly showed that the relevance of the concept “the public sphere” as a scene in which meaning is produced through the circulation of information and ideas. However I have argued that unlike the views of Habermas or Warner, public spheres are not reflexive at local level. The dialogical relations of the local people with respect to the different public spheres are reflexive and dialogical in the sense that they appropriate, renounce or reproduce, in their daily lives, the representations of their locality by various publics. I divided the representations within public spheres into two: “the” public and the dissident public, the mainstream media/public and revolutionary public respectively. I showed that these publics produce two kinds of representations regarding marginal

districts in general and Okmeydanı in particular. Consequently these two public spheres provide the local people with two different norms and registers regarding the meaning of Okmeydanı as a place. With regard to the dissident public, the local people appropriate some representative descriptions (like labor, struggle, and morality) and renounce some others (as enemies of the state or potential militants) according to the context, and subsequently create the norm of what Okmeydanı is and of who the real *Okmeydanlı* are. On the other hand, I also tried to shed light to the dialogical and dialectical relation of the local people with “the” public. I argued that this relation is a way for the local people to be articulated to the norm of “the” public (the general norm or the norm of the state) in two ways. First, the local people demarginalize themselves: they prove, through constant refutations and rejections of the representations circulating within the public sphere (showing marginal districts as a source of crime, of terrorism, the inhabitants of *gecekondu*s as invaders etc.), that they are not marginal as “the” public representations claim. I emphasized that this gesture is not being against the hegemonic articulation of marginal districts to the norm of the totality. On the contrary, these refutations pave the way to the articulation to that norm towards which they are ostensibly antagonistic. Secondly the local people in Okmeydanı learn the representative strategies of marginalization in the process of resisting those representations. Furthermore, the local people mimic and reproduce the ways of marginalization produced within “the” public and they use them to marginalize their others (Kurds) in the process of producing/imagining the community of the real *Okmeydanlı*. I have ended my chapter by remarking that anthropological and subaltern studies should carefully approach the margins because there is a relentless dialectic between the norm and the margin, and the marginalized can turn into the agent of marginalization.

In the third chapter, following the concerns of the preceding chapter, I focus on another theme which recurrently appears in my conversations and interviews with the local people in Okmeydanı. The most important problem they emphasize is the degeneration of the district which they say started at the beginning of the 1990s and is still going on today. The story of the degeneration in Okmeydanı is a narrative which connects the past with the present. The narratives concerning the degeneration of Okmeydanı produce a common language through which local people can define their community with reference to their common understanding of the present of Okmeydanı. I have examined the conditions and functions of this communal discourse through a close inspection of the narratives about degeneration. I believe such an examination is necessary to understand the difference of Okmeydanı from other marginal districts including those which are considered as revolutionary and those named as *gecekondu* districts. Many anthropological studies show that inhabitants of the marginal places (especially *gecekondu* areas) narrate apartmentalization as their personal success stories (Nazan, 2005; Tuğal, 2003). I have analyzed the narration of degeneration with respect to the architectural transformation of the district. These narratives of degeneration based on architectural transformation provide me with a general imaginary about Okmeydanı which includes what was/is/should be the social norm of the district and what corrupts or reinforces this norm. The norm is most apparent in two themes which are intermittently referred to by the local people: intimacy/familiarity and security. The narrative of degeneration produces a story depicting a loss of intimacy and security in Okmeydanı. I aimed to understand the emphasis on the security and intimacy with a close reading of the accounts of local people that I have collected during my field work. In order to achieve this purpose I have employed a structural division through

which I could focus on the periodization the narratives perform and the explanations and understandings of the local people regarding the issues of security and intimacy.

A brief history of *gecekondu* areas in İstanbul provided a general understanding of areas like Okmeydanı and thus with the knowledge needed to see similarities and differences between Okmeydanı and other *gecekondu* districts. Thereafter I focused on the narratives concerning Okmeydanı before the 1990s when the apartments had not yet replaced *gecekondu* houses. I looked at how intimacy and security appear in those narratives and concluded that the ideal norm of Okmeydanı is constituted around those two concepts. I pointed out that according to the narratives, the architectural structure of the time provided the local people with a possibility of symmetrical control through which they could see and control each other and thus imagine a social milieu based on security and familiarity. Furthermore, I have stated that the narrative representation of old Okmeydanı also makes an assertion that the agents sustaining control and intimacy were the local people. In the third part of the chapter I have scrutinized the degeneration in narratives. I have pointed that the beginning of degeneration in Okmeydanı is positioned with the building contractors and the transformion of *gecekondu* houses into multistory buildings. This then allowed strangers to come and rent the flats and thus changing the old social structure. A sense of estrangement began to reign over the district and local people started to complain about the loss of intimacy and familiarity. The sense of estrangement exacerbated with the increasing crime rate and moral deterioration (gamble, prostitution, drugs etc.). A recuperation process followed that period and the district was partially cleaned by the local people in collaboration with the revolutionaries in the district. Yet the narratives I have collected underline the feeling that Okmeydanı is far from being like what it was;



strangers (the tenants) continue to be a source of uneasiness and the increase in the number of Kurdish people in the area aggravate the situation. I have emphasized that the general explanation for the loss of intimacy and security is that the state deliberately attempts to corrupt Okmeydanı and spread the sense of insecurity through several strategies including building contractors, apartments, strangers, undercover police agents, policies promoting crime and immorality, the ambiguity concerning title deeds and the urban transformation project so as to destroy the solidarity among the local people and then demolish Okmeydanı in order to appropriate its prime lands. On the other hand, the narratives of degeneration attribute agency to the local people as the protectors of the old social norms which are hardly sustainable against these attacks of the state.

My argument for the second chapter is shaped in a small section where I look at what is not mentioned in the narratives of Okmeydanı. I demonstrated that security and intimacy are not the only denominators of social life in Okmeydanı before or after the 1990s' apartmentalization. Pace De Lauretis, I argued that what is not seen in a picture is as important as what is. In this regard, the story of degeneration and the fall of old social norms in Okmeydanı produce the way of belonging to the community of the real *Okmeydanlı* –the local people- and provide this community with a common historical narrative which emphasizes some parts of social life in Okmeydanı and excludes others. What are not mentioned in the narratives of degeneration include the structure of work, the daily practices of working in factories, dock yards or municipalities, the social security which was prevalent among the local people at the time, their struggles for jobs, social services, education etc. Those themes, I have pointed, appear in contexts different than the issue of degeneration (like private conversations or nostalgic yearnings for the past). I have

pointed out that although those issues can be a source of discontent, they are not attributed to the state unlike the issues of security and intimacy.

At the end of the chapter I have argued that the local people posit themselves as the agents sustaining the ideal social norm against the state as the agent corroding the social solidarity in order to create a dialogue with the state. I have examined the narratives of the urban transformation project which is expected to come to the district and demonstrated that the themes of security and intimacy are closely related with their demands from the state regarding this very important issue. The local people want the state to transform the district by including them into the project. The fair policy they assert is that the state gives them the flats from the apartments that will be built as a result of the urban transformation project. Even if the state should place them into another area, their social environment should be protected and taken into the account because they do not want to be “strangers” of some other people. From these two points I have concluded that the total rejection of the state in the narratives of degeneration calls and summons a presence of the state which is neoliberal to the extent that it takes the innermost feelings of the people into the account, namely the state which should prevent the people from estrangement. This part articulates an urban transformation model that differs from that of the state. It asks for inclusion in social wealth and prosperity, it speaks against new forms of marginalization entailed by the way the city is being transformed. Moreover, I have showed that another expectation from the urban transformation project also reinforces my argument. The local people frequently state that if the value of their houses increases with the title deeds or the urban transformation project, their tenants will be affluent and cultivated people like doctors and lawyers instead of dangerous poor tenants and Kurds. Thus I have claimed that the narrative of degeneration as a

loss of security and intimacy is a way of calling to the state in a neoliberal manner. I have also asserted that the reason why some issues are not mentioned within the narratives of degeneration is that there is no way to call the neoliberal state to act in such matters. I have argued that the neoliberal framework penetrates to the every aspects of the social life, it seems impossible to speak to the state on issues like labor, social security and education. I have pointed that this situation is not because the people in Okmeydanı are accomplices of the state but it is because there is no language in the world of neoliberalism to demand things like work, social security or education from the state.

This thesis is an attempt to understand marginality in Turkey by examining ways of belonging to a marginal district in İstanbul, namely Okmeydanı. However what this study lacks are the voices of those I had no chance to mention or even hear: women, Kurds, or children. I believe their accounts and experiences will enrich future studies and provide us with a better understanding of marginality. For this study, my main motivation is my discontent with the ways of speaking of marginalities in the social sciences in general and in anthropological studies in particular. I have tried to show that a margin is necessarily in interplay with the norm, and the language which we use to resist the hegemony of the norm can very well be the limits of our understanding of the world, the local and the people. To assert an alternative to the hegemonic norm, the rule of the world as one of my informant puts it, we have to criticize how we speak of marginality, exclusion or injustice and to whom we speak. I believe only after such reflection can we create a language through which it will become possible to speak against hegemonic power, a language which will produce the real state of emergency (Benjamin, 1969).

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