

Whose Land? Whose Villages?

The Vanishing Settlements of Istanbul's Northern Forests

Cihan Uzunçarşılı Baysal



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Cover photo: Urbanization by Explosion: The Third Airport across Tayakadın village land.

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“Our animals are gone, our meadows are gone. The public land is gone, our own lands are gone. Do you know how I feel? You know when the wind blows and scatters all the grains of sand, and a grain of sand doesn’t know where it has landed, you know, that’s me...”

Hayri Koyuncu, farmer, in *Construction of the Third Airport*, documentary directed by İmre Azem, 2018.

“My grandfather is the founder of this village. The fifth generation is growing up now, I mean our family’s fifth generation. They destroyed our forest. They destroyed our beach. They destroyed our meadow. Now they tell us, ‘Go, live.’ How are we supposed to live? Could you tell us that?”

Ağaçlı village head, C. Y. Hekimoğlu (interview with author, 2019).

Abstract

Eight communities¹ have been displaced from their ancestral habitats with the transformation of these lands through top-down mega-projects. This oral history research project arose out of concern for the populations that have been settled for tens or hundreds of years in lands they had inherited from their forebears, which served both as their living space and their source of livelihood. Without such memorialization, their rural communities and their lands would be erased from the collective memory of the city, with their unique histories and cultures. Against such a ruthless urban-transformation process, this study seeks to familiarize the reader with the story of these communities in Istanbul’s Northern Forests. For today’s Istanbulites, these communities are so close, and yet so far.

Due to restrictions of time and space, the focus of the project falls on the following three topics: (1) The foundation of the settlements, significant records of collective memory; (2) Turning points in their history, the impact of the mega airport on their lives and (3) Ties of the local people to their lands.

Keywords: Mega-projects, Canal Istanbul, Istanbul Airport (The Third Airport), Northern Forests Settlements, Oral History.

¹ These eight villages are Ağaçlı, Yeniköy, Karaburun, Durusu, Balaban, Tayakadın, Baklalı and Dursunköy. Seven of them are from Arnavutköy District, while only Ağaçlı is in Eyüp District. All are either along the Black Sea and/or around the Terkos Lake, the settlements most affected by the Third Airport project. They all lie on the route of the Canal Istanbul project, too, which also will impact them significantly.
Unless otherwise indicated, the photos are credited to the author.

Introduction

As our vehicle drives on through tens of excavation trucks along the motorway that has relentlessly torn through the Northern Forests and destroyed the habitat of all living beings in the region, from creepy-crawlies to wild animals and the whole of the flora and fauna. We see, on both our left and right, the countless plants and facilities that have desertified the landscape they have invaded. The Third Airport² underground construction site, stone quarries, cement plants, silos, prefabricated production facilities, unfinished units of the airport, jet-fuel storage tanks, cranes, construction machinery, high-voltage lines, and wind-power plants, etc.

Toward the end of our route, the mega-airport looms onto the stage. It is a true stroke of genius on the part of the entrepreneurs who destroyed the forest ecosystems and otherwise compensated by planting trees along both sides of the new motorway. We now see how the transplanted saplings have all dried out. Spewed out by the mega-city, stray dogs and water buffalos, forced out with their former ponds, now wander the now-arid land. Physically exemplified before us is how the city swallows up its countryside and colonizes it according to its own needs. On our way to the settlements of the Northern Forests of Istanbul, we are witnessing how “the city is everywhere and in everything”³ by exploding outside into its rural periphery, a process defined by Henri Lefebvre as urbanization via implosions and explosions.⁴

“Our village has become a construction site”: Defiantly voiced at Ağaçlı village, our first stop, these words echoed throughout our onward journey. We are on the road to record first-hand accounts of the Northern Forests’ settlements in the impact zone of the Third Airport and Canal Istanbul (henceforth, the Canal) projects. This study is an attempt to understand the history of the local people that has been no subject of concern for the mega-city urbanites—and perhaps even for those who opposed the mega-projects and penned counter-reports—and to reveal the turning points of that history, particularly in conjunction with the Third Airport.

The proposed Canal is an artificial waterway that would run parallel to the Bosphorus and connecting the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, thus, to the Aegean and the Mediterranean. Its environmental impact assessment (EIA) report admits, since the settlements in the north of Arnavutköy District will be impacted more by the project, internal and external migration will intensify in these regions.⁵ In the absence of the

² Now officially named Istanbul Airport, it is referred to as the Third Airport throughout the text.

³ Neil Brenner, “Urban Theory without an Outside,” in Neil Brenner, ed. *Implosions / Explosions Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization* (Berlin: Jovis, 2014), p. 16.

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, “From the City to Urban Society,” in Brenner, *op. cit.*, 36–51; Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, “Planetary Urbanization,” in *ibid.*, 160–63.

⁵ Çınar Mühendislik Müşavirlik AŞ [Çınar Engineering and Consultancy Corporation], “Kanal İstanbul Projesi” (Kıyı Yapıları, [Yat Limanları, Konteyner Limanları ve Lojistik Merkezler], Denizden Alan Kazanımı, Dip Taraması, Beton Santraller Dahil) Çevresel Etki Değerlendirmesi Raporu [The Canal Istanbul Project (Including Coastal Structures [Marinas, Container Ports and Logistical Centers], Reclaiming Land from the Sea, Dredging and Concrete Plants) Environmental Impact Assessment Report] (Ankara: Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communication, General Directorate of Infrastructure, December 2019), Appendix: pp. 36–189, (2019), Appendix, 36–189.

required legal safeguards,⁶ one could say that forced evictions and displacements are expected in these settlements.



Figure 1: Urbanization by Explosion: The Third Airport spreading across Tayakadin.

The local people, under pressure from mega-projects, are strikingly reliving the same fate as their forebears who, because of wars,⁷ interethnic violence, population transfer/demographic manipulation⁸ and treaty-regulated population exchanges,⁹ had been forced to migrate from the Balkans and Crimea, starting from the 18th century and had been resettled in the region. It is the turn of their grandchildren now. Being forced to migrate from the lands they have taken root in, they, too have become “the children of war and migration.”¹⁰ However, this time, they are not faced with the army, artillery and arms of the enemy. Rather, global capital, needed to implement its mega-projects, during the most recent stage of capital accumulation, has set about destroying their living spaces, equipped with the legal devices provided by holders of political power.

This, precisely, is why this oral history research project set out to achieve: To listen to and record the testimonies of the people of the areas targeted by the urbicide of the Third Airport project, accelerated by the Canal and Yenişehir (the New City) development plans, before their unique urban-rural landscape is dissolved and their population dispersed. Theirs are settlements along the Black Sea shore of the Northern Forests and those located around the Terkos Lake that have been selected for ‘development’ and impacted the most by the Third Airport. They will be further affected by the Canal, if that project is realized.

⁶ See UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 7: “forced eviction,” 20 May 1997, paras. 15–16, contained in document E/1998/22, Annex IV, <http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/GC7.pdf>.

⁷ The Ottoman-Russian Wars: 16th – 20th centuries and The Balkan Wars: 1912–13.

⁸ Peter A. Andrews, ed, with the assistance of Rüdiger Benninghaus, *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1989); Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey: A Study of Irredentism* (Hamden CT: Archon, 1981), esp. Chapter 5, “Pan-Turkism in the Republic of Turkey: Back into the Mainstream,” 144–75; (Andrews: 1989; Landau: 1981; Nebahaddin Kirmaci, “Nationalism-Racism-Turanism in Turkey,” in Kemal H. Karpat, ed., *Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1968).

⁹ 1908 population exchange with Bulgaria and the Lausanne Treaty, 1923.

¹⁰ Inspired by Nail Yılmaz and Akif Pamuk’s *Geçmişin Sesinden Arnavutköy Savaşın ve Göçün Çocukları [Children of War and Migration: Arnavutköy in the Voice of the Past]* (2017), Arnavutköy Municipality Publications.

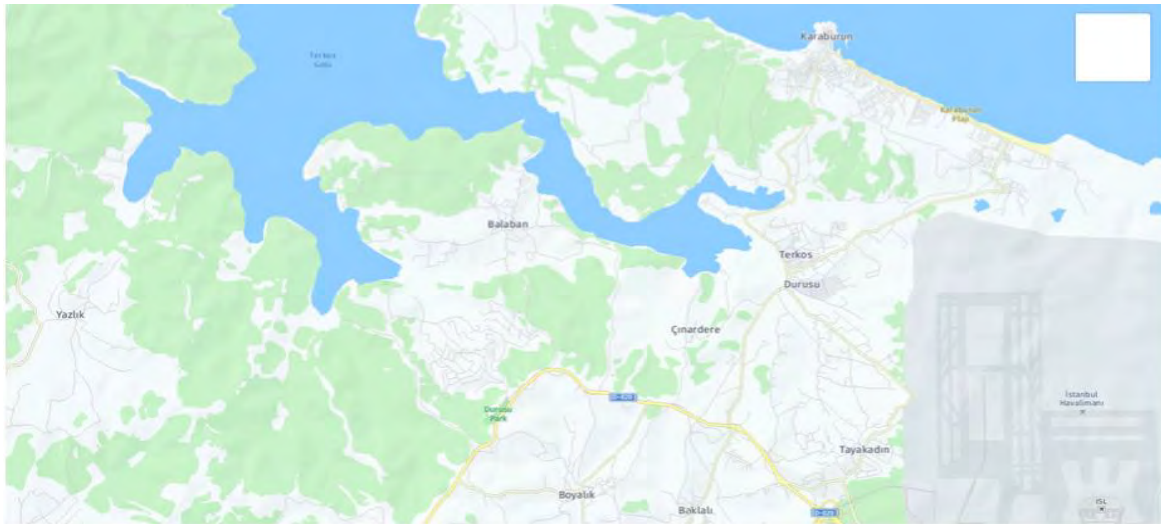


Figure 1: Map showing the villages visited: Karaburun, Durusu, Balaban, Tayakadın and Baklalı. Not shown are Yeniköy and Ağaçlı, which lay on the Black Sea coast to the east of Karaburun and the Third Airport, and Dursunköy, in the south of Baklalı.

Due to restrictions of time and space, the focus is on three topics: (1) the foundation of the settlements, significant records of collective memory; (2) turning points in their history, including the impact of the Third Airport (3) the ties of the local people to their lands.

Background: A Third Airport for Istanbul

People living in the settlements along the Black Sea shore and around Terkos Lake on the European side of Istanbul could not have known how the ‘good news’ of a third airport for Istanbul, announced on 30 October 2010 by then Prime Minister (now President) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, would turn their lives upside down. In fact, since meeting the need for a third airport in addition to the Atatürk and Sabiha Gökçen airports had long been on the city’s agenda, due to the increase in Istanbul’s air traffic, the announcement was not that surprising.

"Istanbul is marking a historic day. Türkiye is marking a historic day. The biggest airport of the world and six continents is going to rise here ... We are building not just an airport, but actually a monument of victory today."

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the ground-breaking ceremony of the Third Airport (7 June 2014)

The Atatürk Airport, which was situated on the European side served not only as Istanbul’s, but Türkiye’s main gateway to the world. With 61.3 million passengers, following London Heathrow and Paris Charles de Gaulle airports, it ranked third busiest in Europe in 2015. With the additional international terminal building, it was expected to raise its capacity to 75 million passengers per year.¹¹

In 2013, it received the “Best Airport” award in southern Europe at “The World’s Best Airports Awards 2013” organized by Skytrax, a leading Research Group based in London,¹² and in 2016, it was awarded for most-improved service quality in Europe by

¹¹ “Despite heavy traffic, Istanbul’s Atatürk Airport ranks first in Europe in improving service quality,” *Daily Sabah* (1 March 2106), <https://www.dailysabah.com/tourism/2016/03/01/despite-heavy-traffic-istanbuls-ataturk-airport-ranks-first-in-europe-in-improving-service-quality>.

¹² “Istanbul Ataturk Airport chosen the Best Airport,” *Istanbulview* (12 April 2013), <https://www.istanbulview.com/istanbul-ataturk-airport-chosen-the-best-airport/>.

the votes of hundreds of thousands of passengers.¹³ In 2018, it ranked 10th in international passenger traffic¹⁴ and 17th in the world for total passengers. It used to be an important intercontinental passenger hub till it was closed on 6 April 2019.¹⁵

The Sabiha Gökçen Airport is situated on the Asian side of Istanbul. Opened on January 2001, the airport was built to address the increasing air passenger demands and take the burden of the Atatürk Airport. The Sabiha Gökçen has received more than 35 million passengers by 2019.¹⁶ A second runway was inaugurated on 25 December 2023, which will increase the hourly capacity from 40 to 80 aircraft movements, making the airport hope for double the capacity.¹⁷

When the need for a third airport emerged to satisfy the booming national and international flight demands on Istanbul in the future, the Silivri district, to the southwest of the European side of Istanbul, was selected as the location of the new airport in accordance with the Istanbul Environmental Plan,¹⁸ considered the city's constitution, and approved in 2009 by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Assembly.¹⁹ The selected location to the southwest was important for the sustainability of Istanbul's north, where the city's forest land, water basins, meadows and agricultural areas were located. The Environmental Plan warned against any urban growth toward the north and emphasized that any urban development had to be along the east-west axis, along the shore of the Marmara Sea.

It warned that any development toward the north that would pose a significant threat to forests, water resources and the Bosphorus had to be restrained, stating that:

“in the vulnerable geography comprising forest areas, water resources and agricultural fields, Istanbul has had a linear accommodation system along the Marmara Sea. Because this vulnerable natural structure needs to be protected absolutely for the existence and sustainability of the city.”

And concluded instead the:

“Proposed macroform for Istanbul is based on developing on an East-West oriented axis (linear structure along Marmara Sea) and toward environmental sustainability principles, and strongly based on controlling expansion of city toward the North.”²⁰

Another two years had to pass until it became fully clear what the good news announced in 2010 actually meant. The Third Airport Project revealed in 2012, surprisingly, had been planned not for Silivri, but in the north, in violation of the city's

¹³ *Daily Sabah* (1 March 2106), op. cit.

¹⁴ Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı, Devlet Hava Meydanları İşletmesi Genel Müdürlüğü, “İstatistikler,” 15 September 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180915044114/http://dhmi.gov.tr/istatistik.aspx>.

¹⁵ “New Istanbul Airport Operational – Atatürk Airport Closed,” *Istanbul Insider* (6 April 2019), <https://theistanbulinsider.com/new-istanbul-airport-operational-ataturk-airport-gradually-closing/>.

¹⁶ Anadolu Agency, “Istanbul's Sabiha Gökçen named 'Best Airport of 2019,’” *Daily Sabah* (7 December 2019), <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/2019/12/07/istanbuls-sabiha-gokcen-named-best-airport-of-2019>.

¹⁷ “Yeni pist ile Sabiha Gökçen Havalimanı 37 milyon yolcu ağırlayacak,” *Dünya* (25 December 2023) <https://www.dunya.com/amp/ekonomi/yeni-pist-ile-sabiha-gokcen-havalimani-37-milyon-yolcu-agirlayacak-haberi-714468>.

¹⁸ Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) Department of Housing and Urban Development Directorate of City Planning, “Istanbul Environmental Plan 1/ 100,000 scale,” (2009), <https://mpgm.csb.gov.tr/1-100.000-olcekli-i-82132>.

¹⁹ At the time, the majority in the municipal assembly belonged to the ruling Justice and Development Party.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

constitution, the Istanbul Environmental Plan. Opponents revealed that the aim was not solely an airport but more; i.e., paving the way for an Aerotropolis:

“The 3rd Istanbul Airport that is aimed to be one of the biggest airports in the world when completed and will take up a surface area of 76.500.000 square meters and is said to have 150 million passenger capacity was put out to tender on 3rd May 2013 by the Infrastructure Investments General Directorate of the Turkish Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications with a build-operate-transfer model. The highest amounted tender in the history of the Republic of Türkiye, this was won by Cengiz - Kolin - Limak - MAPA - Kalyon²¹ Joint Undertaking Group with a 10 billion and 247 million Euro cost and 22 billion and 152 million Euro tender price and its authors as Grimshaw, Nordic Office of Architecture and Haptic Architects. In the project area, a 1.301.128 m² terminal area, 4 terminal buildings, 165 passenger boarding bridges, 3 technical blocks and air traffic control towers, 8 control towers, 6 independent runways, 16 taxiways, an apron area of 6,5 million m² with 500 airplane capacity as well as auxiliary facilities such as a parking lot and a parking garage with a total of 70 thousand vehicle capacity, an aviation medical center, hotels, a fire station and a garage center, sanctuaries, a congress center, power plants, refining and garbage treatment plants (are planned) within a vast field extending from Kemberburgaz to Hadımköy.²²

As the project’s EIA reports admit,²³ Istanbul is seen as an *aerotropolis*.²⁴ Or, to use a more accurate description, areas of the city that had remained untouched for centuries were being sacrificed for an aerotropolis that would swallow them with numerous projects as it expands and turns the wheels of the economy. It is precisely for this reason that, while the Atlanta Airport, the airport currently/previiously with the highest passenger capacity in the world with 95 million passengers, is spread across 1,625 hectares, the Third (Istanbul) Airport, with a capacity one-and-a-half times more than Atlanta Airport, takes up 7,650 hectares, an area much larger than necessary, 6.172 hectares of which was forest.²⁵ Similarly, the Northern Forests Defence (NFD) foresaw:

“In short, both local and global construction and real estate companies and architectural firms are greedily looking forward to the 3rd Airport’s being turned into an attraction center and, thus, circumjacent lands’ being opened to projects. The necessity for a third airport on the excuse of transportation, service, passenger traffic, etc. is all verbiage, but the plunder of the last green land of Istanbul is the truth.”²⁶

NFD warned that the rentier economy would steamroll over the ecology, sustainability and future of the city:

“The area intended for the 3rd Airport project falls within the Northern Forests of Istanbul. The project area spans a field of 10 km by length and 7.5 km by width amongst the Villages Yeniköy,

²¹ These construction firms are dubbed “Developers of Erdoğan,” getting each and every public tender in the country.

²² Northern Forests Defence (NFD), “The Third Airport Project vis-à-vis Life, Nature, Environment, People and Law,” 15 May 2015, p. 18, https://hlrn.org/img/documents/3rdAirportProject_24052015.pdf.

²³ In order to fend off court cases filed against the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report of the ecocidal project, 3 different EIA reports were prepared, yet they are insufficient, copy-and-paste reports. It is nevertheless possible to observe the ecocide that will be carried out even from these poorly prepared reports.

²⁴ “Aerotropolis is a combine-term [polysynthetic term] made up of the combination of the words ‘aero’ for air, and ‘tropolis,’ the suffix of metropolis, or large city. Istanbul, the locomotive of our country’s economy, fully fits this definition...” Aktel Mühendislik [Aktel Engineering], “İstanbul Bölgesi 3. Havalimanı: İstanbul İli, Arnavutköy Eyüp İlçeleri Nihai ÇED Raporu” [“Istanbul Region the 3rd Airport: Final EIA Report, Istanbul Province, Arnavutköy and Eyüp Districts] (Ankara: Republic of Türkiye, Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communication, General Directorate of Infrastructure, 2013), p. 2.

²⁵ T.C. Ulaştırma Denizcilik ve Haberleşme Bakanlığı Altyapı Yatırımları Genel Müdürlüğü: İstanbul Bölgesi, “3. Havalimanı, Nihai ÇED Raporu,” [“3rd Airport, final EIA report”], April 2013, pp. 1, 35, 36, 198, 264, 265, https://cdn.teyit.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/nihai_ced_istanbul.pdf.

²⁶ NFD, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Akpınar and Ağaçlı in the north of Istanbul. In this region skirting along the coast of Black Sea are woods, forestlands, lakes, ponds, brooks and sand fields. The side effects to emerge both during the construction and operation processes and after the launch taken into account altogether, the opening of the North that has so far remained the most intact area in the city to infrastructure and construction projects means that the sustainability of the city is under threat.”²⁷

Meanwhile, the Istanbul Canal proposal has become known as the Erdoğan’s ‘crazy project,’ subject to mounting criticism and apparent disagreement among politicians. Shortly after its government approval in 2021, more than 120 retired Turkish ambassadors warned that the project could jeopardize the 1936 Montreux Convention, which regulates the use of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, and negatively affect Turkey’s “absolute sovereignty” over the waterways.²⁸ Moreover, an open letter signed by 104 retired Turkish admirals caused an uproar by likening it to Türkiye’s era of serial coups.²⁹ Nonetheless, with the relocation of the Canal route further to the east, to an area adjacent to the Third Airport and the Third Bosphorus Bridge, preparation began to design the region as a magnet for construction of all kinds.³⁰

Although the EIA reports stated that 2,5 million trees would be felled for the Third Airport project, calculations carried out via Google Earth by KOS/NFD in 2019, after the project was completed, revealed that 13 million trees were sacrificed,³¹ destroying the majority of the area’s fertile agricultural lands and meadows, in addition to 70 wetlands. An area of 7,650 hectares was literally and figuratively uprooted: “We are building an airport, they are trying to prevent us. We will finish it by uprooting [anything in the area] one by one.”³²

Fertile land and forest ecosystems that have remained untouched for centuries through various civilizations were now being exposed to construction and profiteering, first with the Third Bosphorus Bridge (Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge) and its link roads (the Northern Marmara Motorway, a toll motorway coded O-7) and now with the Third Airport. If the final yet most insane piece in the mega-package, Erdoğan’s Canal project is realized, it will be the final nail in the coffin of this ancient city with a history that goes back 8,500 years.

As Şengül underscores:

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁸ “126 emekli büyükelçinin Montrö açıklaması yeniden gündemde: Kanal İstanbul’dan vazgeçilmelidir” [“126 retired ambassadors’ Montreux statement on the agenda again: Canal Istanbul should be abandoned”], *Sputnik Türkiye* (2 April 2021), <https://anlatilaninotesi.com.tr/20210402/126-emekli-buyukelciden-montro-aciklamasi-1044175531.html>.

²⁹ Matthew Norman, “Will Turkey’s Enormous Istanbul Canal Project Move Ahead?,” *Greek Reporter* (8 March 2024), <https://greekreporter.com/2024/03/08/turkey-istanbul-canal/>; “Ministry says Kanal Istanbul project in progress, contradicting AKP mayoral candidate,” *Turkish Minute* (15 March 2024), <https://www.turkishminute.com/2024/03/15/ministry-said-kanal-istanbul-project-in-progress-contradicting-akp-mayoral-candidate/>; “Montrö bildirisi: 104 emekli amiralin imzaladığı metne hükümetten sert tepki, savcılıktan soruşturma” [“Montreux declaration: Strong reaction from the government to the text signed by 104 retired admirals, investigation from the prosecutor’s office”], *BBC Türkçe* (4 April 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-56628996>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

³¹ “They Said ‘We Will Cut 2.5 Million Trees for 3rd Airport’ They Cut 13 Million Instead,” *Bianet* (23 June 2019), <https://bianet.org/english/environment/209630-they-said-we-will-cut-2-5-million-trees-for-3rd-airport-they-cut-13-million-instead>.

³² www.diken.com.tr, (1 May 2015).

“We are facing a government that has tasted the profit of rentier capitalism. For a long time, and mostly in Istanbul, this government has expanded development rights, seized public land or *gecekondü* [shanty housing] in order to profiteer from the city and use that profit to consolidate its power. They had accumulated a lot of capital from this ruse before, too, but they had to share it with various other parties. One day they realized that if they played the same trick using empty land outside the city, with water basins and agricultural land, they would not have to share their ill-gotten profit with anyone whatsoever. And there is only one area large enough to pull off that trick, and that is the wide expanses in the north of its metropolis, most of it forest and water basins, a place where no one had dared touch to this day.”³³



Figure 3: Map indicating a mega package, comprising three devastating mega-projects: The Canal is denoted by the long red line, stretching from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. Its New City sits in the yellow section; and both overlap with the “Reserve Area,” enacted in 2012. On the upper left is the Third Airport- also included in the Reserve Area- right next to the opening of the Canal in the north. The Third Bridge and its auto routes are shown by yellow lines. Source: <https://en.megaprojeleristanbul.com>.

Foundation Stories

General Overview of History and Demographic Structure

After conquering Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453, Mehmed the Conqueror attached equal importance to the settling of populations both within and outside the city walls. One of his aims was to remedy the security vulnerability caused by areas outside the city walls remaining empty, and another, which concerns our topic, was to put fertile lands here to good use so that they could cater for the various needs of Istanbul.³⁴ This area provided agricultural products, as well as animal products such as meat, milk, cheese and cream for Istanbul, while also supplying fuel in the form of firewood and wood charcoal. We learn from historical documents that in the late 16th century and early 17th century farms and dairy farms, mostly belonging to members of the military

³³ Tarık Şengül, “Yeni İstanbul tahayyülü!” [“A new Istanbul vision!”], *BirGün* (9 December 2017), <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/yeni-istanbul-tahayyulu-194703.html>.

³⁴ Bozdoğan and Yılmaz, p. 20.

class, began to increase in this area. In addition to these private farms, there were also farms of the Hazine-i Hassa (the Sultan's private treasury) and Palace members.³⁵

Migration waves from Crimea to Anatolia that followed the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774), continued with the Ottoman-Russian wars, Balkan Wars and population exchange agreements made with Bulgaria and Greece, transforming the physical and demographic structure of the area. Migrants were settled in lands that were part of state and private farms and their settlements were antecedents of today's Northern Forest settlements.³⁶ Children of war and migration continued the agriculture and husbandry they had practiced in their places of origin in these fertile lands too, transferring their knowledge and experience from one generation to the next.

Hitherto inhabited mainly by Balkan migrants, the area witnessed a third wave of migration from rural Anatolia in the 1950s induced by mechanization of agriculture (push factor) and industrialization in the cities (pull factor). From this period on, the area hosted the different cultures of a heterogeneous population. Changes in demographic structure accelerated with the elevation of Arnavutköy to *belde* (town) status in 1987, and district status in 2008. The district's population is 282,488 (2019), with the majority living in rural areas. The largest group is those registered in Istanbul, which includes Gajal³⁷ and Balkan migrants (30,751), followed by those registered in Erzurum (28,627).³⁸

Stories of Founding Ancestors³⁹

Agriculture and Livestock-farming Villages

Villagers at Ağaçlı, Yeniköy, Balaban, Tayakadın, Dursunköy and Baklalı narrated in detail the stories of the settlements' foundations, usually referring to a founding ancestor, a sacred tomb or family, and there were many common points. In some villages, it was the grandchildren of the founders in person who recounted the story.

Ağaçlı, where the first visit was made, is not part of Arnavutköy District like all the other villages, but of Eyüp, or Eyüp Sultan, as it is currently called.⁴⁰ Sabahattin Çalışır, a member of the sixth generation of settlers, told the story of the village's foundation:

"My father was born here, grew up here, he was born in 1910. His father is here. Hacı Şakir (his father's grandfather) is the first to complete the hajj from this village. The deeds are in his name. At Aydos (Bulgaria) they said, 'the Ottomans will disperse at the Plevne (present day Plevne) Battles.'⁴¹ I think it's called Boğazköy now, its name has changed. That's where they came from, 20

³⁵ M. Taner Koltuk and S. Atilla Sağlamçubukçu, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Arnavutköy* [Arnavutköy in Ottoman Documents]. Istanbul: TC Arnavutköy Kaymakamlığı [Republic of Türkiye, Arnavutköy District Governorate], 2013), pp. 19–20.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 23.

³⁷ Gajal settlements date back to the era of Mehmed the Conqueror and earlier, and are defined as locals, sedentary populations that did not come here through migration.

³⁸ Çınar Mühendislik, Appendix 36, p. 69.

³⁹ Throughout the text, unreferenced quotes are from individuals who did not state their names during coffee house chats. Here, only the names of the village coffee houses are cited. Those who did provide their names are quoted with their full names.

⁴⁰ Under a single village head's office, Yukarı Ağaçlı [Upper Ağaçlı] with 40 households and Aşağı Ağaçlı [Lower Ağaçlı] with 150 households.

⁴¹ The 8 July–10 December 1877 Plevne defense battles during the 1877–78 Ottoman-Russian Wars.

carriages, and they set up the village. First, they went down to the sea, to the shore. But it didn't work out there. Aşağı Ağaçlı (Lower Ağaçlı) didn't exist back then, it was founded later, the first village is this one. They cleared the forest and founded the village here. Originally, the name of the village wasn't Ağaçlı, its first name was Kömürcüyanarı, but it was Ağaçlı when I was born. There is a drinking fountain next to our mosque. The inscription on the fountain records the village's name as Kömürcüyanarı."

As for Aşağı Ağaçlı (Lower Ağaçlı) that was founded later:

"There are some who came with the War of 93 (the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, named as such for the year 1293 in the Islamic calendar), and some who came with the population exchange in the Republican era (1923). Some families are from Greece, some from Albania, but most are migrants from Bulgaria. For most of them, this village was the second stop. They first came as far as a certain point, and from there they came here. The original name of this settlement is Mesudiye. We have an elderly resident, born in 1920, who is thankfully still with us. His identity card records the name of this place as Mesudiye."⁴²

The journeys of people who had to migrate or were forcibly displaced from the Balkans because of wars and clashes are stories of suffering, losses and ordeals. The Patriyot,⁴³ who came from Saloniki to Yeniköy as part of the population exchange between Türkiye and Greece in 1923–24:

"[We] witnessed a lot of wars, faced disorder. They came in floods, all the folk, the women and children, too. They worked as farmers, they were exhausted. My grandmother and my mother's uncle, when people chatted to them, they would comment, 'You are people who have lived in two worlds'."⁴⁴

Yeniköy farmer Mustafa Bozkurt shared with us the painful story of mass migration in 1924 from Kozana (modern day Kozani), a city 160 kilometres to the west of Saloniki:

"There were 500 of our people as a village, at least 150–200 of them died on the road. They made it to Saloniki, they waited for a ship for two or three months. Hunger, misery! British ships came, cargo ships, under the tough conditions of the time. They loaded the people up like herds of sheep... It was all terrible suffering."

Although we do not know the details, one could say that the stories of those forced to migrate from Türkiye, severed from their roots, were not much different. Rum (Orthodox) families and their children visited Yeniköy every year until recently, sought out their homes and pursued their memories. (Today, only two Rum houses remain standing.) Balaban village head Harun Demir recalled, I went to Greece, and the people in Greece asked me about Yeniköy. Their grandfathers lived here, back in the day. They often come from Greece to visit, to see where their grandfathers, their forebears lived."

During the coffee house chat at Ağaçlı, people also mentioned the Rum villages in the area. Their population probably migrated during the 1923–24 population exchange:

"When my grandfather and his family came here and founded the village, there were Rum here, but not in this village but in others, in villages in this area. They learned about wood charcoal from

⁴² Ağaçlı village head, Cemil Yiğit Hekimoğlu.

⁴³ Within the scope of the Türkiye-Greece Population Exchange, the two states subjected their citizens to forced migration on the basis of their religious affiliation. Since the criterion for transfer was religion, among Muslims that arrived from Greece, there were Pomak, Ulah, Albanians and Patriyot, in addition to Turks.

⁴⁴ A family from Yeniköy village.

the Rum. For instance, Kemberburgaz was a Rum village, it was called Pırgos. They made *torluk*,⁴⁵ that is wood charcoal. They used to take charcoal to the Ottoman Palace.”⁴⁶

Ottoman title deed registries indicate that Bulgarians, Armenians lived and worked in Tayakadın village, and that there were Jewish property owners as well but this group did not reside in the village⁴⁷. The Bulgarians in Tayakadın were exchanged during the 1908 population exchange, and in turn, the Muslim populations of Turkish origin were resettled from Bulgaria. None of the Bulgarian timber houses survived. Today, we do not know how the original settlement looked.

The families departing from Bulgaria had left as if they were to return to their homeland:

“We prepared the feed for the chickens and the grass for the animals and handed over the keys to the neighbor next door, told them: ‘Look after them, make sure they don’t go hungry.’ As if we were going to return. So, we left, with a few pieces of belongings, by carriage to Varna, and from the harbour to Istanbul.”



Figure 2: The chest that traveled from Bulgaria to Tayakadın.

The story of Yeniköy village is no different: “Our family said they left their animals behind, and even their jackets hanging up on the hall stand.”

For those who were forced to leave, it is the same story in Ağaçlı, too:

“The house we live in now was known as Frenk Çiftliği (European Farm).⁴⁸ It belonged to a Rum of Italian origin. My grandfather, Mehmet, who came from Vize (a small town in the west) served as his keeper. The man had a lot of animals, he had everything. Then one day he said, ‘Mehmet Agha, Atatürk⁴⁹ has come to power, we can no longer stay here.’ And that was it.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Torluk, a hearth covered with earth, designed to produce wood charcoal.

⁴⁶ Sabahattin Çalısır, Upper Ağaçlı village.

⁴⁷ Halit Demir from Tayakadın village narrates the migration story of his ancestors.

⁴⁸ According to official records, there was a settlement called Mesudiye and two farms known as Tophane and Frenk Çiftliği where the Ağaçlı village is now. Candan Bilgin and İbrahim Yarıs, *İstanbul’un 100 Köyü* [100 Villages of Istanbul] (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür A.Ş. Yayınları, 2022), p. 86.

⁴⁹ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is the founder of the Turkish Republic.

⁵⁰ Necmettin Atasoy, Ağaçlı village.



Figure 3: Baklalı village and its water buffalo.

The way in which those who were forced to migrate entrusted their belongings, their properties and their herds to their neighbors, as if they were going to return, seems to be the fate of the region, and happened to both sides.

A significant detail pointed out in the foundation of Aşağı Ağaçlı was the fact that it was the “second stop” for migrants, and this is in fact valid for the majority of these settlements. Migrants often did not approve of the places they were first shown for settlement, came to this area and continued their lives here. The reason for this was the fact that the Northern Forests were able to provide the necessary circumstances to carry out their former activities in their homelands, such as agriculture, livestock breeding, forestry and hunting, through which they made their living. In the words of the family from Yeniköy:

“I heard all about this from our forebears, from my grandmother and grandfather. Let me then tell you what they said. They first took them to Adana. But they said, we can’t live here, it’s too hot. No forests, no meadows. Then they took them either to İzmir or Antalya. But they didn’t like that either. Then they brought them here, to Yeniköy. All the families are from the same village. No strangers. We are all tied to each other. They came here and saw the forest. So they said, fine, we like this. Because they were going to breed animals, goats, sheep, chickens. Because that’s what they had learned from their elders.”

The village of Balaban, founded on a hill with a magnificent view at the end of a promontory extending toward the Terkos Lake, was elected an exemplary village of Istanbul.

A similar story was told in Balaban by Kesire Hanım who is over 90:

“First they came to Kapaklı. But they said, there has to be water where we settle, we must go hunting, in other words, it must be close to nature, and it can’t be low land. This is a hill. We call it ‘the axe-head.’ It was a mountain. Everyone clear cut the forest and took the deed for the land.”



Figure 4: The beautiful Balaban and its coast on the Terkos Lake.

When migrating populations arrived in Balaban during the Balkan and Russian wars in 1876–77, the area, including the Terkos Lake, was part of the Valide Sultan Endowment:

“So, they demanded land from the authorities. A person named Solak Ağa, whose grave is there in the cemetery, he was the first to make a demand. Then our grandfathers came from Bulgaria and asked for land from the sultan’s vizier. They responded by saying, if you make up a certain number of households, then we will give you land, and they did. So, they opened the forest and settled in the opened land to found the village. My father’s side is from Bulgaria. My mother’s side, their fathers were four brothers, they are from Romania, from the shores of the Danube River. But the area they are from, it used to belong to Bulgaria back then. The person we refer to as Solak Ağa is from Albania. 90% of the village is from Bulgaria.”⁵¹

On the other hand, deed registries reveal that the people of Balaban settled on Islamic collective-endowment land of their own account and established a village of migrants, and they were subject to an annual rent of 35 gold lira⁵². The main street where the coffee house is located bears the name of founder Solak Ağa.

Tayakadın, too, was endowment land during the Ottoman era, and its former name is Daye Hatun.⁵³ Like other settlements, Tayakadın became home for those escaping war and clashes in the Balkans:

“According to my calculations based on what my paternal grandmother told me, we arrived here in 1907-8. When Bulgaria declared independence, my grandmother said that her father said, they have declared independence, they won’t let us survive here, let’s return to the motherland. This village is mostly from Şumnu (Shumen) and Aydos. Aydos is a town, Şumnu is a city. That’s where they came from.”⁵⁴

Like the other settlements, Tayakadın, too, was a second stop for the migrants:

⁵¹ Balaban village head.

⁵² Recep Bozlağan and Nail Yılmaz, *Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Arnavutköy [Arnavutköy from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic]* (Istanbul: Arnavutköy Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2015) , p. 26.

⁵³ *Daye* means nanny. Daye Hatun was the nanny of Süleyman the Magnificent’s oldest son, Mehmet.

⁵⁴ Halit Demir, Tayakadın village.

“Then the Ottomans showed our family a site, first it was Safraköy, which is called Sefaköy today. ‘Go to Sefaköy,’ they said. It is a very valuable area of Istanbul today, but it wasn’t suitable for wheat farming then; it wasn’t fertile. You don’t see that now, but this village made its living from the forest. So, they came here and saw that it was similar to Bulgaria, there were fields, there was the forest, they could produce wood charcoal. ‘This area is suitable for us,’ they declared, and they settled.”⁵⁵

The most heterogeneous population among settlements visited for the purpose of this article was in Tayakadın. Tayakadın has received migration from various parts of Anatolia. The reason the new arrivals chose Tayakadın is precisely the same as those who came before, agriculture and livestock breeding:

“Tayakadın is an interesting place. To our right, there is the Sinop neighbourhood, downhill, the area which we call Beşmahal, is the Van neighbourhood, right below the village. Downhill from the mosque is the Muş neighbourhood. High up on the hill there is the Malatya neighbourhood and, next to it, the Erzurum neighbourhood.”⁵⁶

Like Solak Agha of Balaban, the earlier *gajal* settlements visited for the this oral history, Dursunköy and Baklalı, also have founders referred to by their names. The founder of Dursunköy is Tosun Baba. Mehmet Bey is 70 years old and a member of one of the oldest families of the village. He firmly protects his thousand-donum land⁵⁷ which he has inherited from his forebears, continuing to practice farming, despite all the tough challenges:

“*Gajal* means local, those who came here the earliest. For instance, they came from Central Asia and settled here. Dursunköy, Baklalı, Boyalık and Yassiören are *gajal* villages. There were already 3–5 homes here. Then, my grandfathers came from Central Asia. In other words, they became *gajal*, in ancient times. We have our Tosun Baba here. His tomb is within the mosque’s grounds. The name of the village was Tosunköy, then it became Tursunköy, and in the 60s it became Dursunköy, during my father’s time as village head. I’m over 70 now and I am here. My grandfather is here, my father is here. They rest here. All my ancestors are there in the mosque’s cemetery. And since they came, we have been occupied with agriculture and livestock breeding. There used to be water buffalos during my childhood, too. They used to have them pull carriages. There were a lot of animals kept in Istanbul, so they would take hay to Istanbul, on horse carriages and oxcarts. They would set out at night. There was a *han*, a traditional commercial building in Rami, that’s where they went. If they had wheat, then they would take a sack or two of wheat, too, sell it and make a living. Hard times. They would sell brushwood, fell trees, sell firewood. We would go and sell that at villages along the seashore. We had no money. That’s how we grew up.”

Dursunköy Village Head Güngör Özer states that 15–20 families founded the village and that, according to what they heard from the elders, the village was 480 years old, but that an English researcher who examined old tombstones stated that the village was 620 years old. The tombstones in question are those in the mosque courtyard, mostly derelict Ottoman tombstones. This is also where the grave of founder Tosun Baba is. When we exit the mosque courtyard from the back door, a few old houses and a historical public fountain greet us. The public fountain has been transformed into the neighboring hardware dealer’s storage depot.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Tayakadın village head Solmaz Bozdemir.

⁵⁷ 1 donum = 1 decare or 0.1 hectare (1,000 square meters).

The other *gajal* settlement, Baklalı, is estimated to be 500–600 years old. Evliya Çelebi,⁵⁸ in his *Book of Travels*, states, “In the west of Istanbul there are 70 well-maintained villages with forests, game reserves, vineyards and gardens” and, among them, counts Tırkeşe,⁵⁹ Kitele, and Baklalı.⁶⁰ In 1662, on his way to Durusu, he stayed at Baklalı for two days, rode horses, went hunting and played the traditional game of *cirit*, or *jireet*.



Figure 5: One of the very few old timber houses in the region which has survived.

“Located in a valley, there are vineyards and gardens, game reserves, a public bath and a recreational area. It is called Baklalı because broad beans (*bakla*) are widely cultivated here.”⁶¹ We also come across the name Baklalı in Ottoman documents dated 1712 and 1751,⁶² under the heading “Appointment of Imam and Hatip [Orator] to the Keylun Ali Paşa Mosque.” There was a large caravanserai where the mosque is now:

“There was a very large *külliy*e (complex) here. Not only a caravanserai, but also a school, mosque, guesthouse, a stable, anything you can imagine: A very large structure made of stone and wood. In fact, it had its own endowment in Crimea. During the more powerful era of the Ottoman Empire, the person who had the complex built, designated the endowment, but when Crimea was lost, funds stopped coming. The income of the village was not enough to renovate those buildings. And there was no external support in the 60s and 70s. There was no awareness regarding such structures either. So, of course, it collapsed. In the 70s,

⁵⁸ “Derviş Mehmed Zillî (1611–1682), known as Evliya Çelebi, was an Ottoman explorer who travelled through the territory of the Ottoman Empire and neighboring lands over a period of forty years, recording his commentary in a travelogue called the *Seyâhatnâme* (*Book of Travels*). The name Çelebi is an honorific title meaning ‘gentleman’ or ‘man of God’,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evliya_Çelebi.

⁵⁹ The current name is Tırkköşe. Turkish Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ) has a project there, purported to be for the employees of Turkish Airlines, but will probably turn out to be a luxurious project for the upper-middle classes. It is called the Airport City.

⁶⁰ Seyit Ali Kahraman and Yücel Dağlı, *Günümüz Türkçesiyle Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi: İstanbul* [*Evliya Çelebi’s Book of Travel in Contemporary Turkish: İstanbul*] (İstanbul: YKY, 9th edition, 2011), p. 445.

⁶¹ Seyit Ali Kahraman, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi*, 6. Cilt, Podgoriçe, İştib, Vidin, Peçoy, Budin, Üstürgon [Estergon], Ciğerdelen, Macaristan, Öziçe, Taşlıca, Dobra, Venedik, Mostar, Kanije [Evliya Çelebi’s *Book of Travel*] (İstanbul: YKY, 2nd edition, 2017), p. 182.

⁶² Koltuk and Sağlamçubukçu, *op. cit.*, pp. 194–97).

Then we completely demolished it and built the mosque in its place. The minaret is old, though.”⁶³

The roof of the caravanserai’s bath drew Evliya Çelebi’s attention because it was made of roof tiles, in contrast to village houses covered with indigenous materials such as reed and straw. In local architecture we see the influence of the flora of the Terkos Lake area:

“Back then, the Terkos Lake had not been transformed into a dam. There was no dam holding the water. It filled up in the winter. The water receded in the summer. And when the water receded, the reed bed emerged. We used to go there in autumn, collect reeds and make them into bundles to be used on the roofs of buildings. It was both economic and it prevented both the cold and the heat; you could do it with your own means. So back in the day, the only building with roof tiles must have attracted his attention, and he wrote about it.”⁶⁴

Aynur Şen, an estate agent and from one of the oldest families of the village, recounts the story that the children of Molla Tahir, one of Mehmed the Conqueror’s tutors, founded Baklalı:

“We are a *gajal* village. They call us *gajal*. We are the locals. There are no migrants in this village. Even if there are any, they entered the families as brides. My grandmother’s grandmother’s grandfather is known as Hacı Ali. He was the imam of Zeyrek Mosque [The Monastery of the Pantocrator].⁶⁵ From there, he came and settled in Hacımaşlı, the neighboring village. And from there, he came here.”

Evliya Çelebi, too, states that the village is part of Mehmed the Conqueror’s foundation.⁶⁶ In the coffee house, Ali Bey, one of the oldest inhabitants of the village, says that Baklalı is 600 years old. The population of the settlement has dropped because people have migrated to Durusu village where there are more jobs, and to Istanbul:

“For many years, people migrated out. The village is very old. If you were to add up its entire population, it would reach tens of thousands, but there is no way to find these people, because they migrated to the center of Istanbul, let’s say 200 years ago”

Today, although the majority of Baklalı’s population is *gajal*, the village’s demographic structure has changed with migrants who came and settled in the periphery of the village:

“We have received a lot of migration from the Black Sea coast: Trabzon, Of, Rize, Sinop. They purchased land here and settled. A little further on, the Germe neighborhood is all Black Sea migrants, Çınardere neighborhood is the same: 740–750 voters, half and half. A local has at most 10 donums of land.”⁶⁷

The Çanakkale War, known in English as the Gallipoli Campaign, holds an important place in the collective memory of the region. It is almost everywhere in both the memories and the memorials of the settlements. There are a Roman column and

⁶³ İmam (prayer leader in a mosque) of Baklalı village.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ “Zeyrek Mosque or Monastery of the Pantocrator is a significant mosque in Istanbul, made of two former Eastern Orthodox churches and a chapel. It represents the most typical example of architecture of the Byzantine middle period in Constantinople and is, after Hagia Sophia, the second largest religious edifice built by the Byzantines still standing in Istanbul.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeyrek_Mosque.

⁶⁶ Kahraman, *op. cit.*, p. 182).

⁶⁷ Ali Bey; Baklalı.

ancient Ottoman gravestones in the enclosed cemetery of Baklalı Mosque, where there is also a mausoleum of a Çanakkale martyr.



Figure 6: The dismal condition of the old Ottoman Fountain in Dursunköy.

In the cemetery at Balaban village, on the other hand, the massive Çanakkale Martyrs Memorial amazes visitors. The oldest resident of the village, Yusuf Sağlam, told us, “No doubt, there were many martyrs in Çanakkale who went to war from this area. 66 went and only 5 returned.” The Balaban village head also stated that only 3–4 men who went to serve at Çanakkale returned. Çanakkale was remembered at the interview held at Ağaçlı, too. In Sabahattin’s words: “My mother was only a year-and-a-half, and my uncle was three when my grandfather Hüseyin fell martyr in Çanakkale.” From Tayakadın, many went not only to Çanakkale, but also to the Balkan Wars and the Southern Front:

“Migrants who were of military age were conscripted, first for Çanakkale and then to be sent to the Southern Front. Only the elderly men, women and children were left in the village. We know the names of those who had children. But we do not have records of the single men who went to war. From among the soldiers sent to various fronts, only one man, Ahmet Yemişken, made it back. He was Ali’s (Yemişken) grandfather.”⁶⁸

On the basis of interviews, once could say that the idealist teachers, schools and institutions of the Republic are among the significant components of collective memory. As the quote, “They were the [true] teachers!” reveals, there are no longer the same teachers, or the schools where there were even agriculture courses:

“There was a Village Institute in Lower Ağaçlı. It was actually an orphanage, but there was a village institute within its grounds. I even received agriculture courses there, for three years. How to cultivate, how to create a garden. There were 25 teachers. They were the [true] teachers! They would screen movies at the orphanage hall every week. The teacher would take us there. The Korean War had begun, and they would show films from Korea.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Halit Demir from Tayakadın.

⁶⁹ Sabahattin Çalşır, Upper Ağaçlı village.

Thus, the walls of many coffee houses feature photographs of their old schools and teachers. In this context, it is also necessary to mention the Atatürk statues and busts in almost every corner of Balaban and an adorned entrance embellished with Atatürk reliefs. According to the village head, “This is how [the people from] Balkan and Rumeli are. We cannot do without him. Rumeli is different.”



Figure 7: The mausoleum of a Çanakkale martyr and the Roman column at Baklalı graveyard.

Spaces of Labour: Karaburun and Durusu

The foundation of Karaburun and Durusu, unlike the other settlements, is not related to migration or population exchange; they are labor spaces. One could mention internal migration due to those who initially came here from nearby villages to work and settled here. The population of these settlements has been described as “assembled from the outside.” It was as a result of the lighthouse constructed by the French in 1860, the International Ship Rescue Company established by the English in 1870 in Karaburun, and the pumping station established by the French in 1883 in Durusu to supply water for Istanbul that these two settlements became spaces of labor.

As these examples show, transformation did not take place from the inside and through the investment of the state or local entrepreneurs, but by the hand of the local representatives of Europeans who did business with the Ottoman Empire. The light railway⁷⁰ (1884) that operated between Karaburun and Durusu and transported the coal from the Black Sea area to the steam-operated pumping station was a further site of employment. The lighthouse, the ship rescue company, the pumping station and the light railway provided employment for the people of the region for many years.

“Our village is old, from the time of the English and the French. The French built the lighthouse. They recruited lighthouse keepers from the Turks. The keepers are still from the same families, from father to son. The English set up the ship rescue. Then our grandfathers came. That was how it was founded. People worked at the Coastal Safety Directorate. The branch in Durusu was

⁷⁰ Coal brought by ship from the Black Sea area to Karaburun would then be transferred via the light railway line to the pumping station in Durusu. When coal-operated machines were discontinued in 1967, the light railway line was used for passenger transport to Karaburun beach until 1975. Then the engine and carriages were abandoned, and the railway was dismantled. Tayakadin blogspot, 1 January 2019, <http://tayakadinli.blogspot.com/>.

transferred to İSKİ [Istanbul Water and Sewerage Company] in the 1950s. And they also worked on the light railway line, carrying coal.”⁷¹

The process was similar in Durusu:

“Back then, since transportation was not as easy as today, they naturally recruited workers from local folk. Everyone went there. And it was a comfortable environment because almost everyone knew each other. A good environment, a better standard compared to village life, with social rights and a pension.”⁷²

“What’s more, there is this thing inside the Terkos Lake with some huge chimneys. There used to be some water pumps there. We never got to see it work. It used to work with coal, pumping water to Istanbul. It was a work district, so people headed there. Mostly from mixed backgrounds, from here and there, people who came for work and settled. To give you a guess, until ten years ago, around 300–350 workers at least worked there.”⁷³

As in Karaburun, in Durusu, too, the same profession continued in the family, from grandfather to grandchild:

“We have worked at İSKİ, all three generations. Either your father worked there or your grandfather. Since the work is about manual labor, there is a lot of recruitment from this area”⁷⁴. This is also the reason why İSKİ is a special place for the local people: “We have always perceived the Terkos branch of İSKİ as our own. For many years no one caused harm to a single brick of that place.”⁷⁵

Historical records show that, in the earliest period, there was a military unit deployed in Karaburun against the Russians.⁷⁶ Local people, however, state that the military unit had been deployed there against pirates, since the Terkos Lake was a convenient shelter for pirates in the past, when the lake was still connected to the Black Sea. The foundation of the village is said to go back to Captain Ahmet and Sergeant Mehmet, who chose to stay in Karaburun when the military left the area. The army’s ammunition depot was transformed into a mosque in 1850. Old Ottoman cannons are on display in front of the village head’s office and the village coffee house.

As for Durusu, it is possible to trace the journey of water to Istanbul here, with its ancient aqueducts, water pipelines, İSKİ Branch, Terkos Pumping Station and workers. From the Late Roman Period on, one of the main water distribution pipelines providing water for Istanbul passed through the region. The aqueducts and waterways of the ancient 242-kilometre route extending from Vize (Thracia) to Istanbul no longer stand. Only 40 remain in semi-derelict condition. Operating first with steam then with electricity, the Terkos Pumping Station was in service until the late 1970s, when Istanbul’s water requirement surpassed the facility’s capacity. One of the huge steam pumps of the plant is identical with the pumps of the Titanic, the largest passenger liner of its time that sank in 1912 during her maiden voyage after striking an iceberg.⁷⁷ With its underground water lines, historical buildings and archive, the facility is a significant monument of industrial

⁷¹ Hasan Kurt, Karaburun village.

⁷² Ersin Gürlek, Baklalı village.

⁷³ Balaban village head.

⁷⁴ Ali Yemişken from Tayakadın village.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Bozlağan and Yılmaz, *op. cit.* p. 40.

⁷⁷ Tayakadın blogspot, 28 July 2013, <http://tayakadinli.blogspot.com/2013/06/tayakadin-koyu-tarihi.html> (28 July 2013).

heritage. A project was developed in 2006 to transform it into a Museum of Maritime Civilizations; however, the project remains incomplete.



Figure 8: Ottoman canons at Karaburun.

In Durusu, there is a Romani settlement with low-rise residential buildings among greenery, founded by migrants from Saloniki (Greece) and Bulgaria. Families from Saloniki that came during the population exchange did not like the first area they were shown, and preferred Durusu because of employment possibilities at the pumping station. The priority of migrants had to be work and food, thus, this region was their second and final stop. Nuri Bey is 97 years old. He began work at the pumping station when he was 17. He worked there for 33 years and then retired:

“When the population exchange took place, they gave our fathers a place around Celaliye. But they didn’t stay there for long. There they told them that there is a factory in Terkos. So they decided to come here. There weren’t many workers then. They needed workers for the factory. So, we came here as 66 shareholders. There were 66 households in the village. Everyone found employment at the factory. And with the money they earned, they bought places here.”

Historic Turning Points

A turning point, in this context, means a development or an internal or external intervention that radically transforms the local people’s lives and living spaces in the positive or negative sense. Thus, the Lighthouse and Ship Rescue Company in Karaburun and the İSKİ facilities in Durusu constitute turning points. Migration from the Balkans is the earliest turning point, while we could consider the entry of mega-projects into the region as the most recent. Interviews revealed both the unique turning points of each settlement and the common ones shared by all.

Unique Turning Points of Each Settlement

Coal Mines: Ağaçlı and Yeniköy

Coal mines opening along the Ağaçlı and Yeniköy coasts in the 1950’s became the nightmare of both settlements. The pillaging of land increasingly continued in the 1970s. Excavation even continued after the 1980 (military coup), with work done at

night. Local inhabitants recalled: “Millions of tonnes of excavation were filled into the sea. Coal mines dumped their excavation into the sea.”

The forest land, a main source of income for local people, was destroyed:

“Every village had its own forest. We protected our forests ourselves. No one could enter the forest and cut down a single tree, because it was the livelihood of our forebears for many years. They sold their charcoal and wood in Istanbul, that’s how they made a living [at] forestry and livestock breeding. Then the coal mines entered our lands. They destroyed the whole forest.”⁷⁸

Because of the coal mines, the historical public bath in Ağaçlı and the hospital built during the First World War are buried in the ground.⁷⁹ The destruction of historical monuments was mentioned during coffee house chats in Ağaçlı as well:

“During the war effort, whenever that was, as part of that, a military hospital was built and a light railway, providing coal to the electrical power plant in Silahtarağa and as part of that, a public bath. The public bath was the last structure left standing and it was destroyed around 15 years ago. The coal mines destroyed them. They find a way to cover it up.”

Law no. 4785 on the Nationalization of Forests (1945): Tayakadın and Yeniköy

Although they made their living through livestock breeding, migrants that settled in Tayakadın did not have their own land for many years. As their animals entered the meadows of wealthy individuals in the area, there were complaints; investigations were carried out and court cases were filed against them. Finally, in 1932, 104 people from the village came together to purchase 9.150 donums of land for 20.000 liras from Captain Rifat, Chemist Mustafa and District Governor Celal, to be paid in instalments over 20 years. For the next 20 years, all the money they made had to go toward paying their debts:

“My mother used to say, for 20 years, we never bought new shoes. For 20 years in my youth, we never bought new clothes, because we were paying instalments for 20 years. Those who had the means had four shares, those who had less had three, two, one, or half shares. They fenced their land off and lived on it. There is a single title deed, including the forest.”⁸⁰

“A single title deed, including the forest” became a problem for them when, in 1945, Law no. 4785 on the Nationalization of Forests was passed. When, along with the forest, the areas they inhabited were designated as part of the forest and nationalized; 80% of Tayakadın became the property of the treasury. Although they won the court case they filed after 14 years, they were only able to recover their residential properties, since 60% of their land was forest land. Later, when part of this land, usurped under the pretext of protecting the forest, was put on sale under clause 2B (the sale of degraded forest land), they applied to buy their own land back. However, now they were confronted with the “Reserve Area for Development” designation, declared within the scope of Law no. 6306 on Disasters. (The Reserve Area would later become the route of Erdoğan’s insane Canal Project and overlap with the New City.) Sales were stopped.⁸¹

Today, on forest land confiscated by the state on the pretext of public good, stands the Third Airport: “When the state nationalizes forests, it does so in order to protect its forest

⁷⁸ Ağaçlı village coffee house.

⁷⁹ Bilgin and Yarış, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁸⁰ Halit Demir, Tayakadın village.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

status. Now, for commercial ends, the forest has been destroyed!”⁸² Law no. 4785 also struck Yeniköy. 1,175 hectares, 5,000 m² of forest land, registered under the Yeniköy legal entity, was nationalized in 1947. However, villagers were granted use of these lands within certain restrictions, but only until the announcement of the Third Airport project.⁸³

Protected Strips of Terkos Lake and Sazlıdere Dam

As explained in detail under “Bans on Development” below, in Balaban, Durusu, Dursunköy, and Baklalı villages, authorities forbade adding even a single nail to one’s property. Those villages in the Terkos Lake and Sazlıdere Dam water basin protection strips and impact zones were affected twofold: The issue was not only the strictness of the development bans, but also the strict regulations imposed on agriculture and livestock breeding in the area, as Ersin Gürlek from Baklalı complains about the restrictions stemming from the Sazlıdere Dam:

“I used to breed livestock before. Cattle farming. We had animals brought in from Europe, from Germany. We formed an association and we expanded. Then we aimed to turn it into a dairy farm. There is a restriction imposed by İSKİ, because it is a water basin. There were certain demands, certain regulations we had to comply with. However, to meet them, you would have to sell the farm and you would still fall short. So, we had to downsize.”

Sazlıdere Dam also impacted Dursunköy:

“But when the dam was built, it killed off everything. You plant seeds and they interfere. They even banned the use of fertilizer at one point. They wanted us to use scientifically prepared fertilizer, so it didn’t pollute the water. The dam construction took a lot of land, it took all our meadows. We lost a lot of land, all the way to the south, Şamlar. That was the first turning point, of course, Sazlıdere Dam.”⁸⁴

Similar problems were voiced in Balaban, which is located in the Terkos Lake basin.

Neoliberal Agriculture and Livestock Breeding Policies

Türkiye’s general policies regarding agriculture and livestock breeding constituted a common turning point for the settlements visited. From the 1980s on, but especially in the last 15–20 years, parallel to neoliberal economic policies. Support for agriculture and livestock breeding decreased, costs and loan debts increased:

“There used to be farming and livestock breeding. A lot of goats, too. Now tell me, how much does a sack of animal feed cost, go on, tell me. You can’t use a tractor in the field, the fuel too expensive. It doesn’t add up. We have ended up on the receiving end.”⁸⁵

“It’s only us left, three friends. In the past, there were 9 herds only of sheep, and 7 herds of goats. My father and his two brothers, they had 800-1000 goats. But now it’s all been finished.”⁸⁶

“There were many water buffalos, too. And water buffalo cream, of course, everything. There used to be a lot of livestock. As the guy says, “I’m looking after the livestock and looking after the livestock, but then realize that I have been working for the fodder and forage seller!” Animal feed is too expensive and livestock breeding is not supported now.”⁸⁷

⁸² Cavit Demir, Tayakadın village.

⁸³ *Tayakadınliblogspot.com*, 14 December 2019, pp. 21–26.

⁸⁴ Mehmet, Dursunköy village

⁸⁵ Yeniköy village coffee house.

⁸⁶ Balaban village coffee house.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Once agriculture and livestock breeding were no longer a source of income but debt due to increasing costs and loans remaining unpaid, and with added, various requirements such as paying for the marriages of their children, repairing their homes, villagers began to sell their lands, lot by lot. This was before the project for the Third Airport in the area. Thus, most of the land that is being sold over and over again today, at skyrocketing prices, does not belong to the villagers. It is not the villager who profits from speculation:

“The agricultural policy of our country is terrible. You take out a loan, ask for credit from the agricultural credit cooperative. And they don’t buy your produce off you either, so you sell your sunflower for next to nothing. And then you have to sell off your land, whether you like it or not. [That is the] easiest way to get money, the most comfortable way. And we, the people of Thrace, we love money, we love to live our life. For the kids’ wedding, to buy a house, to buy a car, sell 3 donums here, 5 donums there, it’s gone. The lands of Baklalı amount to 17, 800 donums, as far as I remember. There are three families left, who haven’t sold their lands.

If all three of us got together, it wouldn’t make 3,000 donums anymore. Some of it was sold, some of it was shared out. You can’t make a living through farming. Livestock breeding is finished, too. Only five families still work in livestock breeding, whereas in the past, it was the majority of the village.⁸⁸

“People in the past, they cut open the bushes to make room for us, and now we are selling it away. They made the effort, all the married children lived in the same house. They used the same toilet and bathroom, four families in one house. That’s how they kept the money. As for us, whenever we feel a little pressed for money, we sell a corner off a field, to live comfortably. The whole village has been sold off, I would say two thirds of it is gone. The houses are there, the fields are gone.”⁸⁹

Another factor that leads to the sale of land is the division of the land through inheritance. Shareholders who have already migrated away from the settlement want to sell when agricultural incomes drop. As stated in Baklalı, many of those who have sold their land are people who have moved to Istanbul: “They say, I don’t live in the village, I don’t benefit from it either. I might as well sell it off and buy something, for my child, for myself. They are the kind of people who sell their shares.”

Unlike the general trend in rural Türkiye, daughters are given equal share of the inheritance in the region and “daughters who marry outside the village want to sell their shares after a while.” The urgent expropriations of TOKİ in Ağalı saw a similar difference in approach:

“Since the property was already divided, those who lived outside the village wanted to sell, they were eager. That’s how the first court cases began. They (officials) went to people who had moved to the city and bought their land. Those who were in debt jumped at that offer of 175 TL (17.5 Euros per donum), for instance.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Aynur Ően (F), Baklalı village.

⁸⁹ Mehmet, Dursunköy village

⁹⁰ Nezih Beceral, Upper Ağalı village.



Figure 9: Baklalı village.

The younger population abandoned agriculture and livestock breeding since it offered no future, found work at centers such as Hadımköy and Arnavutköy, and left their villages. If development and zoning bans is one reason why we mostly come across middle-aged and older people in the villages today, the other reason is that agriculture and livestock breeding no longer bring a profit:

“In the past, 80–90% of youngsters who completed primary school would either become farmers or livestock breeders. That’s finished now. There are no young people here anymore, they all escape to Istanbul.”⁹¹

“Livestock breeding is not like it used to be. The children eventually get married and move to Istanbul. Development is not allowed in the village, so people cannot build to expand their homes, or build a second house in their garden. So, many leave after they get married. And families cannot say, when it comes to livestock breeding, ‘I want my children to continue the same work’.”⁹²

“No one breeds livestock in the village. It’s tough work. It’s costly, laborious, dirty work. You don’t get rewarded for your efforts. And that’s why I think everyone will quit gradually. In the last 20 years, 20 barns have closed down here. Those who marry also do not breed livestock.”⁹³

Bans on Development

Development has been banned in all the villages; not a single nail can be added. The circumstances of those located along the protection strip of the Terkos Lake and Sazlıdere Dam are even more difficult. Married young people do not have the chance to live in the village because of the development ban. And when the younger population leaves, the settlements are left to middle-aged and older generations:

“For instance, your child is getting married, there is room next to your house, or in your courtyard, but you cannot build. They didn’t allow us to even build a chicken coop.”⁹⁴

“The reason young people won’t stay is, there is no work, and there is no development permit. And there is no place to live in the village. The state, the municipality, they won’t allow it. So, they are forced to leave.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Yeniköy village coffee house.

⁹² Ağaçalı village head.

⁹³ Estate agent, Dursunköy village.

⁹⁴ Mehmet Bey, Dursunköy village.

“There is no development permit here after all. It’s closed to development plans. It’s a drinking water basin, that’s the reason. So, there is unemployment and a lot of migration. There are no young people, unfortunately, they have all left. There is only a little land, no work, so they are forced to migrate. That is why almost hundred per cent of the people you see here are retired.”⁹⁶

According to the Dursunköy Village Head, there are eight factories in the vicinity of the village, in the lines of class jar manufacturing, heat isolation, soap and kitchen ware, however, these factories are 30 years old. They were all built before the Sazlıdere Dam. The prohibition to build new facilities or annexes due to the presence of the dam, has an impact on employment. Restricted employment combined with the ban on building their own homes results in the younger population abandoning the area.

Law no. 6360 on Metropolitan Municipalities (2012)

When villages were transformed into neighborhoods, thus changed from rural to urban places, in accordance with Law no. 6360, the legal entity status of villages was removed. They were no longer part of the rural administration but belonged to the big city municipality. Village Heads lost their powers to rent, sell, collect taxes and represent in court on behalf of the village. Village budgets were transferred to the district municipality; and all services stopped: “The village head’s office had its own budget, but they abolished that. We are taxed, but we receive no services. All they do is collect the garbage, and sweep the streets with machines.”⁹⁷

Most importantly, the commons were enclosed because when the village’s legal entity status was removed, its registered immovable assets and common properties such as fields and meadows were seized. There was no place left to graze the animals:

“Now, father state encourages livestock breeding. The bank gives us loans to buy animals. But where do I keep the animals? I have room but I cannot keep animals there anymore. Our new status is neighborhood.”⁹⁸

An important detail in the complaints uttered by the locals was the sale of these common properties for the benefit of certain people in an area where land prices have hit record highs:

“With the airport and Canal Istanbul, the existing meadows will be finished, too. Once the land was transferred to the treasury, no meadows were left. I guess that was the goal, anyway: To seize our meadows. I estimate that there was around 200 donum[s of] empty land in our meadow. It belonged to the village legal entity. It was common land, now it belongs to individuals. Those who have the power seize the land.”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Estate agent, Dursunköy village.

⁹⁶ Balaban village coffee house

⁹⁷ Baklalı village coffee house.

⁹⁸ Balaban village coffee house.

⁹⁹ Dursunköy village coffee house.



Figure 10: The Third Airport area before and after the project in 2008 and 2017. Source: Google Earth.

The Common Denominator of Ecocide: The Third Airport Project

In settlements where it destroyed the forest, water, fields and meadows, the Third Airport also made everyday life unbearable with construction activities including careless truck traffic, excavation, debris, stone quarries, sand mining and land reclamation:

“The extent of the environmental massacre is so devastating that the quality of our life has decreased. I mean, who are you? Get the hell out of our lives. This village is 180 years old; people have lived here for 180 years!”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Ağacli village coffee house.

Although the project has had a different impact in different settlements, the common aspect is that the forests and lakes in the region have been destroyed, resulting in a devastating effect on agriculture and livestock breeding, and especially water buffalo breeding. Agriculture and livestock breeding were already facing difficulties as stated above, and the Third Airport project constituted, so to say, the golden shot. Thus, opposition to the Canal is shaped by experiences and aggrievement caused by the airport. “Once bitten twice shy” summarizes the overall outlook.

The coal mines that for many years caused trouble to Ağaçlı and Yeniköy were closed, but the pillaging now continued with the Third Airport. Stone quarries opened for the project destroyed green areas, sand was mined from the coasts, destroying sand dunes:

“There aren’t mines anymore, there are stone quarries. And they also dump excavation waste into the sea, filling up the coast. The pit left behind by the mines is rehabilitated, but if one truck goes to the pit, then five trucks dump into the sea! They also mine sand from the sea. The mines are closed, but it is actually worse than when they were open, because the mines did not operate across the entire shoreline, there was always a beach area that the villagers or visitors from Istanbul could use, now that is gone, too. When the dust that rises from the sea fill covers the dune, the sand is buried beneath, a layer forms on top, and grass begins to grow. The golden glow of the dune disappears. And of course, this activity has increased because of the airport construction, to provide materials for the site. Our village has become a construction site.”¹⁰¹

Urgent expropriations for the Third Airport worsened the course of events. Yeniköy’s agricultural land and meadows were seized, while expropriation in Ağaçlı comprised not only agricultural land and meadows, but the village itself, too:

“Yeniköy was expropriated, too, but not the village itself, however, for Upper Ağaçlı, this is the case. There is no option for work if livestock breeding ends. And now the homes are going, too. Demolition orders have been served. 70% of the village will be gone.”¹⁰²

The water buffalos of Istanbul are threatened:

“Livestock breeding is carried out most widely in the upper village and it is about to end completely. In terms of water buffalo population, Istanbul is in the top three across Türkiye, because of Ağaçlı. It’s surprising. You would think it would be all Anatolia. For a long time, Istanbul was first. And Ağaçlı is the village with the highest water buffalo population in Istanbul.”¹⁰³

Livestock breeding was the main source of income in Yeniköy, which had 20 meadows.¹⁰⁴ However, with swift expropriation, livestock breeding was suffocated by the hand of the state. Although the judicial process is continuing, meadows have been walled off:

“Every household had at least 10–15 animals. There wasn’t anyone who didn’t breed animals. Livestock breeding and gardens, too, the two of them went together. Finished! We sold off the seaside, the coal mines bought that part of the land. And now, this part has been sold off to the airport project.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ağaçlı village head.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Gürbüz, (2014: 48).

¹⁰⁵ Family from Yeniköy village.



Figure 11: Water buffalos and vast meadows: What is left from the Third Airport is now threatened by the Canal.

Landfill for the airport has damaged the coastline and the habitat of fish has been annihilated. Let alone having a conversation, it has become an ordeal to sleep at night with the noise of passenger jets flying overhead. We saw how our interviews were interrupted by the same noise. Jet emissions also impacted garden agriculture, and the produce is “sulking.”

Halit Demir of Tayakadın stated that from 1970 to 2004, there were 630 coal mines in the region that stretched from Sariyer to Yeniköy along the Black Sea coast. As the coal mines were closed down, the pits filled up with rain and underground waters, forming many ponds and lakes that were suitable as grazing places for water buffalos. However, when they were filled up with excavation waste from the Third Airport project, the water buffalo industry could no longer find the marshland necessary for grazing. Istanbul is among the first three cities in Türkiye in the water buffalo industry and holds an important place in Europe, however, as in Ağaçlı, the industry faces collapse in Tayakadın, too:

“Now, the owner of this building used to breed livestock, water buffalos. The owners of the building next door, they were two siblings. They bred water buffalos, too. One of them sold their share. The other has 100 water buffalos, they have a farm. Theirs is the largest farm. But they, too, say that they are planning to sell, because they can’t make any profit. Water buffalos go to the forest, or swims in small lakes. But they have dried all the lakes. It used to be all marshland and lakes here. They have filled them all up.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Tayakadın village head.



Figure 12: 70 lakes have been filled with excavations from the Third Airport project.

One of the landfilled lakes is Kulakçayırı, a site that has an important place in the region's collective memory:

"For those who bred water buffalos, there was Kulakçayırı. We went hunting there in the winter. It was a large lake, it took an hour and 15 minutes to go around it. We went hunting. And in the summer we went fishing. When we went fishing in the summer, the water buffalos would go in the water, and graze around the lake. There were so many of them. I'd guess that there were at least 500–600 water buffalos there every day. Well, that's finished now, too."¹⁰⁷

Almost every settlement remembered Kulakçayırı with fond nostalgia:

"People came to fish, to have picnics; it was a wide area. The entire district of Eyüp could use it as a recreational space. The place where the airport is now. It was such a beautiful place. Kulakçayırı was a natural paradise. The reason they failed to build the road above it was the large headwaters beneath the ground."¹⁰⁸

How many people who use the mega airport today know that beneath the runways lie the mortal remains of Kulakçayırı with tens of small lakes?¹⁰⁹ Or that they are flying over the forests of Yeniköy and Tayakadın, turned into forests of cement now? From the ecocide rises the mega-project that not only wipes out ecosystems of thousands of years but also the collective memory of the region while building its own memory, literally and figuratively on the tabula rasa it has created. The good old memories of childhood and youth, the joys and pleasures of being one with nature, all those picnics, fishing and tent days, recreation... have all been buried under "the biggest airport of the world and six continents."

The project has also destroyed the meadows that stretched from Ağaçalı to Tayakadın:

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Ağaçalı village coffee house.

¹⁰⁹ "Lakes flowed to Black Sea for third Istanbul airport construction," *Hürriyet Daily News* (5 June 2014) <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/lakes-flowed-to-black-sea-for-third-istanbul-airport-construction-67437>; Rose Bridger, "Campaigners resist destruction of Istanbul forests and wetlands for airport megaproject," *The Ecologist* (25 July 2015), <https://theecologist.org/2015/jul/25/campaigners-resist-destruction-istanbul-forests-and-wetlands-airport-megaproject>.

“I had water buffalos, too. You let them graze in spring, in the month of April, and you can go and gather them in autumn, in the month of November. Ağaçlı, once upon a time! I went to Ağaçlı many times to buy animals. We had a large meadow, plenty of water, a large meadow. A whole summer would pass. You go and you can’t recognize your animals. Now the meadows and lakes are gone, livestock breeding is finished, the region has been forced to collapse in the economic sense. 30–40 years ago, there were 3.600 cattle here. And 15 herds of sheep, with at least 150 sheep in each herd. In Europe, the largest water buffalo population after Italy was here. 5–6 thousand water buffalos, gone because of the airport. And they weren’t sold, they slaughtered them!”¹¹⁰

Some of them decided to slaughter their animals, while others, whose land was now worth more, sold the land and moved away from Istanbul to Thrace, with their animals. Those who have not sold their land yet are the lucky ones.

Baklalı and Dursunköy are experiencing a similar process:

“The airport had an impact on agriculture and livestock breeding, it finished them. The airport did it. Village life changed, but not for the good. In the past, people made a reasonable living through dairy farming and livestock breeding, they did fine. Now, all of that is gone. A few people have jobs at the project area, but they earn the minimum wage at the airport, and that’s not enough.”¹¹¹



Figure 13: Aircraft strafing the rooftops of Yeniköy.

At the coffee houses, concern over displacement due to the Canal construction was also voiced: “And now they have come up with this Canal Istanbul. Citizens like us who for many years have dedicated their lives to this place, bought a few donums of land, they will just pay us a pittance and kick us out.”¹¹²

The Third Airport, with its noise, emissions, landfill through excavation disposal and destruction of green spaces, became a significant turning point for Karaburun and determined their view of the Canal, too:

“I plead with you, don’t tell us anymore about it. It is so harmful to us. It is harmful to me, that is the truth. It is harmful to the village. Noise every minute and a half. You can’t hear it now because of the lodos wind. The noise and everything! And now the Canal is coming. What good is the Canal for me? It will cause harm. Where will they dump all the excavation? In the sea, that’s where, and that will kill the

¹¹⁰ Halit Demir, Tayakadın village.

¹¹¹ Dursunköy village coffee house.

¹¹² Baklalı village coffee house.

fishing industry [from] the dust and what not from the trucks. When they were building the airport, the green of the forest all turned yellow. All the green areas are now gone.”¹¹³

Expectations of employment at the Third Airport came to naught, while the hopes of the shopkeepers also fell through when Karaburn was left on the other side of the project site. The winners were the shopkeepers of Tayakadın, Baklalı and Dursunköy, as they are located on the Third Airport route: “Taxi drivers are always here, drinking tea, drinking coffee, eating. You would never see yellow taxis here in the past. Maybe once a month or so, but now, they queue up early in the morning.”¹¹⁴

On the other hand, in contrast to Tayakadın shopkeepers, there are many complaints about the traffic chaos in the settlement transformed into a free car park by taxi drivers and shuttle vehicles of companies that work for the airport, about the occupation of the front of homes and barns, about noise and visual pollution and the obstruction of fire engines and ambulances.



Figure 14: Detail from the shop window of an estate agent in Tayakadın.

The Financialization of Rural Space

The most significant impact of mega-projects, first the Third Airport and then the Canal, was the transformation of living spaces and settlements into commodities bought and sold in the market, into mere tools of speculation. Since 2011, when the mega-projects were first announced, the region has been a favorite choice for investors and speculators. A landscape dominated by estate agent offices, their shop-windows covered with images of the Third Bridge, Third Airport and the Canal, speaks for itself. Settlements have begun to change hands as if they were shares on the stock market and not the living spaces that are decades, or even centuries old: The whole process has been referred to as “Tahtakale,” the informal stock exchange area of Istanbul.

For buyers, a title deed proves enough, they do not even check for development permits for land lots, since they sell on when prices increase. Some parcels of land have changed hands 11 times. Statistical research reveals the astronomical increase in land

¹¹³ Karaburun village coffee house.

¹¹⁴ Dursunköy village head.

prices from 2010 to 2018: 700% in Durusu, 3,025% in Balaban, 2,900% in Tayakadın and 2,233% in Dursunköy.¹¹⁵

ARAZİLER İÇİN YILLARA GÖRE DEĞER DEĞİŞİMLERİ				
Bölgeler	Kaynak: TSKB			
	2010 Yılı değerleri (TL/m ²)	2013 Yılı değerleri (TL/m ²)	2018 Yılı değerleri (TL/m ²)	Değişim (%)
Terkos	50 -60	250-300	400-500	733
Durusu	40-50	180-200	350-400	700
Boyalık	20-25	140-150	300-350	1300
Cilingir	20-25	120-130	400-450	1700
Balaban	6-8	55-65	200-250	3025
Tayakadın	15-20	130-140	450-600	2900
Dursunköy	10-15	120-160	300-350	2233
Sazlıbosna	10-15	120-160	400-500	3233

Figure 15: The increase in land values from 2010–18 in the region. The possible locations of the Third Airport and the Canal were announced starting from 2011. Source: G. Alagöz.

People shared their accounts of how land that was once exchanged for a packet of cigarettes, an animal or a black and white television set—as if they were speaking of a completely different universe—is now sold for astronomical figures. The land was so worthless that when a cadastral survey passed through, the villagers weren't bothered:

"In the past, land here was not worth a dime. That's what our elders told us. Sales were done through barter: "Swap me that animal for that piece of land." Many places changed hands like that. Some have deeds, some don't. In many cadastral surveys, they were included in meadow land. People weren't bothered. When the cadastral survey was made, people didn't pay attention. Land didn't cost much. They registered some land with the state. But if it were known, if there were deeds, it all actually belongs to us."¹¹⁶

"A 54-donum piece of land. A citizen from the Black Sea region, works in Germany, comes here, likes what he sees. I'd like to buy a field, too, he thinks. He buys a 54-donum piece of land for the price of a packet of Maltepe cigarettes. That was thirty years ago. 5-6 years ago, he wanted to sell it. We sold it for him for five or six million lira."¹¹⁷

"[It's] cheap land, very affordable. Free almost. There was an estate agent, a friend from the city of Ordu, he used to say, "I used to sell land here, and I would give black-and-white television sets in return for the land."¹¹⁸

"Three days ago we sold this plot of land to a businessman from Siirt [a city in the southeast]. A plot of 12,5 donum, at the exit of the village. It used to belong to a man from Adıyaman [a city in the southeast]. He bought it 9 years ago, for 300 thousand lira. We sold it for 4 million 700 thousand. He couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the money! That's what has happened after the airport construction. How much would that man's land cost if the airport had not been built? He bought it for 300 thousand. It would have increased to a million perhaps. You see the difference. Now, people are waiting for development permits; that has stalled the sales."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Gülistan Alagöz, "Çılgın prim! Fiyatlar şimdiden 4 kat arttı" ["Insane premium! Prices already up fourfold"], *Hürriyet* G. (15 January 2018), <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/cilgin-proje-cilgin-prim-40711036>.

¹¹⁶ Baklalı village coffee house.

¹¹⁷ Real estate agent Aynur Şen (F), Baklalı village.

¹¹⁸ Tayakadın village head.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

They also mentioned investors from the Gulf countries: “The Arabs bought villas in Durusu. The Arabs bought a lot of land here. My two sisters-in-law sold their land to Arabs. I bought three donums of land in Dursunköy, and the Arabs bought that.”¹²⁰ As mentioned above, local residents who for various needs and faced with financial difficulties sold their lands at an earlier date are the losers of this period: “They buy land as investment, with the influence of mega-projects, but most of the land had already been sold before the mega-projects were announced. So now it is changing hands, from one investor to the next.”¹²¹ 90% of Baklalı and 400 of the 450 land lots of Dursunköy were sold “to outside,” or in other words, to people residing outside the region or the country.

Land where once it was forbidden to build even a chicken coop is now open to the 5-star development plans of the Canal-New City project. Sales had stopped during the period when the visits were carried out. Some were holding back from selling with the hope of a permission for development to be announced, while others simply failed to sell because there were no buyers due to the economic crisis. At the time of the announcement of the zoning plans of the New City, the stagnancy in markets continues due to the current state of the economy. According to some estate agents, expectations of expropriation are also a cause.

Lands of the Forebears/Love of Nature

In interviews, the settlements were described as “the lands of the forebears and grandfathers,” “family hearth” or “our inheritance from the forebears.” Residents, when speaking of the graves of the forebears, emphasized that they had taken root here over many generations. Their cemeteries function as indicators that render them the true owners of their settlements:

“This Canal will have a negative effect on us. In the worst possible manner, it is a matter of life and death. I have lived here for centuries. When I visit the cemetery, I have countless relatives there. My father is there, my grandfather, my father’s grandfather, it goes back.”¹²²

“I am now 70 years old; I am here. My grandfather is here, my father is here. They lie here, there in the mosque cemetery, there is my lineage.”¹²³

“Our grandfathers, our fathers, they are there at the cemetery you saw coming here. Listen, we inherited our village from our grandfathers and fathers.”¹²⁴

The Cemeteries Directorate of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality has stated that the Baklalı, Yeniköy and Roman (probably the cemetery of the Romani neighborhood in Durusu) cemeteries are those that will be removed along the Canal route¹²⁵; however, since the relevant development plans have been changed a few times since, the fate of the cemeteries is not clear, and local people continue to be genuinely concerned.

¹²⁰ Şen, *op. cit.*

¹²¹ An estate agent from Baklalı

¹²² Ersin Gürlek, Baklalı village.

¹²³ Mehmet, who is one of the biggest land owners in Dursunköy village.

¹²⁴ Yusuf Sağlam, the oldest person in Balaban village.

¹²⁵ Meltem Akyol, “10 Soruda Kanal İstanbul” [“Canal İstanbul in 10 questions”], *Evrensel* (25 December 2019), <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/393976/kanal-istanbul-nedir-gerekceleri-ve-itirazlar-neler-10-soruda-kanal-istanbul>).

Another point that they voiced was how they perceived their own life – calm, peaceful, attached to nature. Their settlements with wide public spaces and low-rise homes were viewed as superior to the city. Those who migrated from various parts of Anatolia are also part of this group. Places like Göktürk and Hadımköy where the younger population has settled, and Istanbul itself, were named as bad examples:

“Even if they paid me for it, I couldn’t live in Göktürk. It doesn’t suit me. We are used to living here. When I go into Istanbul, I miss this place before the evening is out. I immediately want to get back.”¹²⁶

“There is no other place where you can feel so peaceful. For instance, I have never gone to Istanbul and stayed over for two nights. If I were to stay two nights, I would fall ill on the third.”¹²⁷

“We cannot reach an agreement with TOKİ. That is impossible. Even if they were to offer a flat, then they would say, you have to live here. I won’t be allowed to go out into my garden. They will dig it up and destroy it. We are outside in the fresh air all day in the summer. It’s green. We have so many fruit trees. My heart goes out most to them.”¹²⁸

“If buildings were constructed here, and they settled our mothers and fathers in them, they would pass away before a year is through. Look around you, how beautiful it is. Can you live in a place like this in Göktürk today. You need a lot of money for that. But here, it’s free. The air is important, too. This is what we are used to.”¹²⁹

“When you come here, you pass by the lake. You pass by the forest. You look to one side, there is the Black Sea, and the lake is there in the middle. Naturally, it is green, you have nature, you have the lake. What else would you want!”¹³⁰

Since the interviews were mostly held with middle-aged or older individuals, it is possible that the younger people have different views, or prefer the dynamic urban life. However, we also met young people who didn’t like urban life, or who had migrated to urban centers but had returned immediately once they retired, to “bring joy to their family home.”



Figure 16: A view from Karaburun, the entrance point of the Canal from the Black Sea. Source: Selçuk Koçum.

¹²⁶ Tayakadın village head.

¹²⁷ Baklalı coffee house.

¹²⁸ İlknur (F), Dursunköy village.

¹²⁹ Ağaçlı village coffee house.

¹³⁰ Karaburun village coffee house

Discussion

Research shows that the commonalities of these settlements are more than their differences. Since they came here through various waves of migration from the Balkans, they share a common past and culture and similar histories. They share the suffering of paths of migration. We see that both the *gajal* and those who came from the Balkans and later from Anatolia with waves of migration to these settlements, who make their living through agriculture and livestock breeding and benefit from the commons of the region. They are connected with, and dependent upon each other to continue their lives and survive.

They inhabit meadows extending from Ağaçlı to Tayakadın, beaches that line the coast from Yeniköy to Karaburun. They have formed living reflections of migration histories that coincide with spaces of labor, as in Durusu and Karaburun. Northern Forest settlements form a permanent geographical location, and they form an ecosystem, just like the Northern Forests themselves. And just like the Northern Forests, they are under threat.

This research has shown that the Third Airport is not the only factor in the destruction of agriculture and livestock breeding in the area. The dissolution of both of these livelihoods began long before, and the reasons are revealed. On the other hand, the development plans for the Canal area; that is, for its New City, have been enacted. Thus, the region where even a nail cannot be pounded, has now been opened to construction of all kinds.

We can expect the mortal blow to nature, agriculture and the unique history and culture of the region as Dubai-like urban forms rise from the tabula rasa created by demolitions and destruction. All this is in addition to the many airport construction workers whose deaths have been (officially) concealed.¹³¹ As expressed by the EIA report of the Third Airport: “Artificial paradises, floating cities and smart cities, like those in Dubai, await the mega urbanites who complain about the lack of green fields among skyscrapers. In parallel to this, the transportation systems and airports of mega cities are changing. And our country will, of course, receive its share of these differentiations.”¹³²

In the midst of these developments, Türkiye was one of the 194 countries that negotiated the New Urban Agenda, replacing the Habitat II Agenda, the global policy that is renewed every 20 years, which was previously concluded at Istanbul in 1996. In 2016, all states envisaged “cities and human settlements that...Fulfil their social

¹³¹ “Ölümüne mesai... 3. havalimanı inşaatında çoğu iş cinayeti sümen altı ediliyor” [“Working overtime... Most work-related deaths are being swept under the rug in the construction of the 3rd airport”], *Cumhuriyet* (12 February 2018), <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/olumune-mesai-3-havalimani-insaatinda-cogu-is-cinayeti-sumen-alti-ediliyor-927488>; “3. Havalimanı inşaatında 400 işçinin ölümü gizlendi” iddiası: Sus payı 400 bin lira” [“3. Claim: “The deaths of 400 workers at the airport construction site were concealed”: Hush money is 400 thousand liras”], *T24* (12 February 2018), <https://t24.com.tr/haber/3-havalimani-insaatinda-400-iscinin-olumu-gizlendi-iddiasi-sus-payi-400-bin-lira.557648>; “İstanbul Havalimanı'nda kaç işçi öldü? Resmi yanıt geldi,” [“How many workers died at Istanbul Airport? Official response arrived”]. *Cumhuriyet* (December 2018), <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/istanbul-havalimaninda-kac-isci-oldu-resmi-yanit-geldi-1158495>

¹³² NFD, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

function, including the social and ecological function of land.”¹³³ Türkiye pledged more specifically that:

“We commit ourselves to preserving and promoting the ecological and social function of land, including coastal areas that support cities and human settlements, and to fostering ecosystem-based solutions to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, so that the ecosystem’s regenerative capacity is not exceeded. We also commit ourselves to promoting sustainable land use, combining urban extensions with adequate densities and compactness to prevent and contain urban sprawl, as well as preventing unnecessary land-use change and the loss of productive land and fragile and important ecosystems.”¹³⁴

Another outcome of this research contradicts that principle. In contrast to general opinion, it is not the local people, but a small minority, who benefit from skyrocketing land prices and speculation. Since the local people were the ones who sold first, an expectation of rentier profit claimed to be the grounds for the absence of objection to mega-projects. However, this assumption is not valid for the majority of the population. Interviews point to estate agents and shopkeepers along the route as the winners in the area from the Third Airport project. On the other hand, there are also estate agents who oppose the Canal, and it is no surprise that they are from the local population.

In settlements visited for this oral history, the majority of people are against the Canal. As the research has shown, the main reasons are:

- Loyalty and attachment to the lands of their forebears,
- Love of nature,
- The fact that they are not trained in any field other than agriculture and livestock breeding and
- Lessons they have learned from the damage caused by the Third Airport.

Why their objections have not transformed into organized opposition is beyond the scope of this study. On the other hand, the dissolution of rural areas, the middle-aged and older generations remaining alone in the settlements as the younger generation has left and finally, the loss of any vision for the future, as disclosed in the interviews, give certain clues. It should also be noted that it is difficult for these small, introverted settlements that for decades had little access to the center to confront the state. Moreover, it is quite easy for horizontal and/or vertical, external and/or internal pressure and/or bribery from the ruling power and/or capital to operate here to further marginalize the local inhabitants.

The resistance against the mega-projects in the region has been engendered and organized by exogenous actors, such as professional chambers that sue the EIA reports and the projects and by ecological and urban movements that mobilize Istanbulites, such as the NFD and “Either the Canal or Istanbul” initiative. Istanbul Big City Municipality governed by the main opposition party since 2019 has also been an active actor in this respect. As expected, the central government has crushed down on the resistance via bans, restrictions, coercion and custodies, and also by using all kinds of criminalization discourse, stigmatizing the activists and movements as foreign agents,

¹³³ New Urban Agenda, A/RES/71/256, 25 January 2017, para. 13, <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 69.

terrorist groups or those against the country's progress. Collective visits, especially from ecological organizations, have been prevented through the use of security forces and gendarmerie forces have been sent to the homes of local activists. The intensity of interference and pressure on the settlements has increased since the announcement in late 2019 of the Canal and New City plans. Nevertheless, a significant number of petitions of objection have been filed against the Canal-New City plans from the area.



Figure 17: The “We will not let you devour the Northern Forests” protest against the Third Airport (2013, December 22), organized by the Northern Forests Defense, Istanbul Urban Defense and Gezi Forums of the June 2013 uprising. Source: NFD Media.

On the basis of their statements during interviews, although they appear not to be raising their voices, we can speak of genuine opposition as uttered by Tayakadın's village head:

“On behalf of myself, let me put it clearly, I do not want Tayakadın to develop. I don't want them to build. I want it to remain a village. When it is opened to development, hotels will be built, they will open bars and discos... In other words, it will be just like central Istanbul. It will be like Göktürk... Every single person living in Tayakadın shares my thoughts. They neither want the Canal, nor any development.”

The people of Tayakadın did not disappoint their village head. Out of 1,950 registered voters, 1,700 people objected to the New City zoning plans.

According to the plans, the whole region will be opened to all manners of tourism and commercial activity, luxury residences and recreation areas, fairs and conference centers, logistical areas and many other projects will be built. Comments such as “They are prepared to sacrifice us” and “This village will be removed; this village is gone already” had been frequently voiced during the interviews in Yeniköy. Having surveyed the region, the comment “They are prepared to sacrifice us” appears to be valid for all the settlements. Top-down mega-projects have descended like an avalanche onto fertile lives that were woven through cumbersome journeys, suffering and losses, many efforts and ordeals, scarcity and deprivation of the forebears, to be presented to the grandchildren.

This study departs from such a concern: It recognizes as its debt of conscience to know and tell the story of people dispersed like so many the ‘grains of sand’ by mega-projects.

These people of Istanbul—so close, and yet so far—have not been allocated as much space in the long reports as the flora and fauna, or they are reduced to mere numbers. To use the phrase of Uncle Nuri, a 97-year-old resident of Durusu, this is a greeting of solidarity to those “who felt the love of these lands.”

Research Methodology

From 16 September to 17 December 2019, 17 visits were made on 11 days to 8 settlements of the Northern Forests along the Black Sea shore and around Terkos Lake, to the villages of Ağaçlı(3), Yeniköy (3), Karaburun (1), Balaban (1), Durusu (2), Tayakadın (2), Baklalı (3) and Dursunköy (2). The reason these settlements were selected was the fact that they were directly impacted by the Third Airport and were also within the impact zone of Canal Istanbul. When the same outcome and similar views began to be expressed, a saturation point was deemed to have been reached and the research was concluded.

In-depth interviews and coffee house chats formed the basis of the methodology. In-depth interviews were held at homes, at work places such as the village head's office or real estate offices and at coffee houses. A total of 22 private interviews were held, and 9 collective chats took place at village coffee houses. During the 8-10 people chats at coffee houses, names of those who did not readily present their names were not asked. These are referred to as "X village coffee house" in the footnotes.

Since most of the young population has left their villages, in coffee house chats, middle-aged men formed the majority. Despite an attempt to observe gender balance, only 6 women could be reached for in-depth interviews (Baklalı:1, Balaban:1, Durusu:1, Dursunköy:1, Yeniköy:2). Reasons for this include the absence of women in coffee houses, and the possibility of entry only into those homes which accept a request for a visit. In fact, there were women in houses that were visited that did not turn up for the interview, or did not want to speak.

The recording device was not switched on before taking consent. There were no objections to audio recordings. In order to directly communicate the thoughts and emotions of the people of the region, paraphrasing was refrained from, their spoken delivery was conveyed untouched.

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