The Immoral Economy of Housing in Turkey

AYŞE BUGRA

Academic interest in informal economies, as areas where people seek to meet their needs outside the formal, legally bounded processes of exchange and redistribution, has largely stemmed from development studies. It was in relation to the problems of developing economies that certain international organizations such as the ILO or the World Bank incorporated the topic in their research agendas in the 1970s (Hart, 1973; Gerry, 1987; Smith, 1989). It was also recognized, however, that informal economic activity had a non-negligible role in centrally planned economies and within the urban immigrant communities in some developed western countries (Grossman, 1977; Ferman et al., 1987; Smith, 1989). In the contemporary international setting, especially after the demise of former redistributive mechanisms both in developed western countries and in the communist bloc, the informal sector has gradually ceased to be regarded as a marginal phenomenon and has begun to be seen as an integral component of resource allocation in all types of societies, including the industrial and post-industrial ones, where they substitute or complement formal mechanisms of state intervention and market exchange (Gershuny, 1979; Ferman et al., 1987; Mingione, 1991). These developments present an important challenge to standard approaches to economic analysis and policy formulation which are built upon the paradigm of market exchange and are centered around the dichotomy between the state and the market. The problem with these standard approaches in this regard is not only the difficulty, or impossibility, of incorporating the analysis of reciprocity networks which play an important role in shaping the informal sector. An equally important problem is presented by the fact that the networks of reciprocity in question do not function independently of the wider political economy in which they are set, but they reflect and influence the ways in which the market mechanism and state redistributive processes operate (Gaughan and Ferman, 1987; Henry, 1987; Miller, 1987; Lomnitz, 1988; Mingione, 1991). The work of Sik (1994) makes a particularly significant contribution in this area by highlighting the legacy of the ‘second economy’, i.e. the activities outside the direct control of the state in former centrally planned economies, as a crucial factor shaping the character of the newly emerging market economy through the process of post-communist transformation. The study of informal economic activity calls, therefore, for an analytical framework in which the complex interaction between the organizing principles of reciprocity, redistribution and exchange is taken into account.

This paper attempts to contribute to the development of such a framework by introducing a moral dimension to the debate. The discussion is centered on two ideas: (1) both reciprocity and redistribution incorporate a moral principle which can be defined as ‘the unequal treatment of the unequal’ as opposed to the moral neutrality of market exchange which takes place between formally equal trading partners; and (2) in certain contexts where redistributive processes are not institutionalized in a rule-based, depersonalized manner
but involve relations that take place within informal networks of reciprocity, the element of moral relativity that forms their basis might lead to situations where they lose their legitimacy and generate highly negative social consequences. These ideas are presented through an examination of the political, social and economic coordinates of informal housing in Turkey which highlights the nature and implications of the relationship between the form of state intervention and the character of informal activity. The particular case of irregular settlements in Turkey also points to the ways in which the realm of market exchange might be shaped by the dynamics of informal-sector development.

**Theoretical backdrop**

The title of this article refers to E.P. Thompson’s essay ‘The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century’. In this essay, Thompson discusses the eighteenth century food riots in England in the context of the conflict between the traditional morality of popular consumption and the a-moral stand of the new political economy where the satisfaction of human needs is left to the impersonal forces of the market. According to Thompson, food riots were triggered by poverty and hunger, but they were not acts of sheer deprivation by hopeless people. They were, rather, based on a popular consensus about legitimate and illegitimate practices in the social organization of supply and demand of basic food staples. As Thompson (1991: 188) puts it, ‘This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties in the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor. An outrage to these moral assumptions, quite as much as actual deprivation, was the occasion for direct action’.

It was, in other words, traditional views about the obligations of the society in the satisfaction of what are considered to be legitimate needs of the masses that formed the moral basis of popular expectations and the non-market ways of realizing these expectations. It was on this basis that traditional paternalist politicians took a position against the political views represented by the ‘classicists’ who adhered to the tenets of the new political economy, and, according to Thompson, it was this particular stand of the ‘traditionalists’ that explains the relative leniency of the state authority vis-à-vis the acts of plunder by the rioting poor.

While Thompson contrasts the morality of the eighteenth century food riots with the a-morality of the market, both Coats (1972) and Fox-Genovese (1973) evaluate the historical case that he presents as one which involves a clash between traditional paternalism and liberal moral philosophy. Thus, they point to the difference between two distinct moral positions compared with each other in terms of their implications for individual freedom. To reformulate the debate using the marxian terminology suggested by Dumont (1977: 5), the realm of market exchange, as opposed to non-market ways of satisfying needs, is dominated by ‘relations between men and things’ and not by ‘relations between men’. While relations between people reflect the prevailing structures of social hierarchy, relations mediated by things are equal relations where objects of equal value are exchanged for each other outside the inequalities of power implicit in social relations. This formulation does not, of course, imply a denial of the reality of power in modern market societies. What it attempts to highlight is the difference of purchasing power based inequalities between formally equal participants in market relations from the social standing and/or hierarchy that governs economic relations in non-market contexts.¹ It

¹ As such, the formulation has a clear parallel with the idea expressed by Marx in the following passage: ‘The contrast between the power, based on the personal relations of dominion and servitude, that is conferred by landed property, and the impersonal power that is given by money, is expressed by the two French proverbs ‘Nulle terre sans seigneur’, and ‘L’argent n’a pas de maître’” (Marx, 1887: 145).
draws attention, consequently, to the contrast between two different moral principles: ‘unequal treatment of the unequal’ versus ‘equal treatment of all’. The first principle characterizes most reciprocity relations and redistributive systems which have as one of their most important functions the preservation of social cohesion by assuring a socially adequate livelihood to all members of the community.

The way the organizing principles of reciprocity and redistribution operate is systematically discussed by Polanyi (1944: 43–55; 1957) in an attempt to expose the exceptional character of the self-regulating market system that relies exclusively on the strictly economic principle of exchange in the allocation of resources. Polanyi defines reciprocity as the give-and-take between individuals that stand in a particular social relationship vis-à-vis each other. Unlike exchange, it is a personal relation which is conducted through the institutional pattern of symmetry whereby the individuals or groups within the society are ‘paired’ in their obligations to or expectations of each other. Hence, again unlike exchange, it is a continuing relation given by the social position of the parties involved. Redistribution, on the other hand, refers to the ‘pooling’ of resources in a common center to be distributed to the individuals that belong to the collectivity. It operates with the aid of the supporting institutional pattern of centricity that regulates the collection and redistribution of the resources involved. The process of redistribution forms part of the prevailing political regime and, unlike market exchange, is not entirely economic in its function and character.

In Polanyi’s approach, the principles of reciprocity and redistribution, which are both distinguished from exchange, also appear to be clearly distinct from each other. As Mingione (1991: 29–32) argues, this clear-cut distinction creates problems in the macro-social analysis of modern industrial societies because it leads to the neglect of the role of factors of reciprocity in orienting the redistributive process. In fact, the significance of the role that reciprocity networks can play in redistributive practices, especially in societies where state intervention is pervasive, is highlighted by several anthropologists (Lomnitz, 1988; Smith, 1989). In this regard, the work of Sahlins, which reveals the difficulty of drawing clear boundaries between the principles of reciprocity and redistribution, appears to be quite useful.

Sahlins (1972: 188–9) distinguishes between the two principles in question by arguing that redistribution is a within relation while reciprocity is a between one. The former pertains to arrangements designed with the social unity of the collectivity as their reference point, while the latter involves a certain social duality since it implies different parties with distinct socio-economic positions and interests. Redistribution appears, however, as the end result of an evolutionary process where reciprocity relations of a particular type are formally organized in the institutional pattern of centricity. Hence, the ‘evolutionist’ question that Sahlins (1972: 209) asks: ‘When does one give way to the other, reciprocity to redistribution?’ According to Sahlins, the question cannot be answered at a purely theoretical level but requires the analysis of different arrangements in which the system of reciprocities is socially organized.

Sahlins discusses reciprocity as a continuum of forms in a spectrum which has ‘generalized reciprocity’ as the ‘solidarity extreme’ at the one end and ‘negative reciprocity’ as the ‘unsociable extreme’ at the other. Generalized reciprocity, characterized by the principle of generosity, applies to ‘pure gift’ as well as to ‘kinship dues’, ‘chiefly dues’ and ‘noblesse oblige’ kinds of behavior. As for negative reciprocity, it refers to appropriations and transactions directed at ‘net utilitarian advantage’ and constitutes an attempt to maximize ‘the unearned increment’ or ‘to get something for nothing with impunity’. The spectrum of reciprocities, as Sahlins presents them, also implies a moral ranking. While Sahlins writes that the acts of negative reciprocity might well be condoned when directed towards outsiders to the community, it remains clear that self-seeking behavior of the type associated with negative reciprocity has a negative connotation in contrast to the positive connotation of generous behavior that characterizes generalized reciprocity.
In Sahlins’s approach, it is generalized reciprocity which gives way to redistribution as the duties and obligations of leadership acquire a formalized and institutionalized character. It would not be difficult to see that the ‘evolutionary’ process that he depicts can be applied to different social arrangements in different types of modern societies. Housing constitutes an ideal area for this type of exercise because the need for shelter is universally recognized as a basic need whose satisfaction cannot be entirely left to the impersonal forces of the market mechanism. The sector has, in other words, a ‘moral economy’ whose underlying principles are different from those that form the basis of market exchange. In developed market economies, including the most liberally-oriented ones such as the United States, the state has played a crucial role through formal institutional mechanisms designed to assure the satisfaction of the need for shelter (Wolman, 1975; Headey, 1978; Huttman, 1985; Pickvance, 1986; Van Vliet, 1990; Lefebvre et al., 1991). These different mechanisms can be seen as institutionalized manifestations of generalized reciprocity where certain individuals, who cannot satisfy their socially accepted needs within the framework of the market mechanism, are entitled to the generosity of the community.

Entitlement to the generosity of the community might, however, take on different forms where the evolution from reciprocity to redistribution appears much less complete and redistributive practices assume the informal and personal character of reciprocity relations. In developing countries in general, as in the particular case of Turkey, formal redistributive measures are replaced by informal reciprocity networks mobilized in the development of irregular settlements — which had come to be accepted as the common way of providing shelter for the urban poor before international organizations acknowledged and endorsed them as such within the framework of Turner’s (1966) very influential approach to the subject (Ward, 1982; Durrand-Lasserve, 1986; Shidlo, 1990; Fiori and Ramirez, 1992; Harms, 1992).

Quite naturally, in contexts where irregular settlements play an important role as a spontaneous solution to the problem of low-income housing, the characteristics of the moral economy of the housing sector differ from those that it manifests in societies where the state contributes to the solution of the same problem through formal, institutionalized mechanisms. The role of the state remains, however, of crucial significance in shaping the informal housing sector. The discussion of the Turkish case presented in this paper highlights this by showing that the development of irregular settlements has taken place on a moral basis which reflects the socially recognized legitimacy of the need for shelter, and that these settlements have been regularized by successive steps taken by the state. However, the historical evolution of the informal housing sector in Turkey also presents a case in which this particular form of need satisfaction, where the distinction between reciprocity and redistribution remains ambiguous, is very unlikely to last for any extended period of time without giving way to forms of behavior motivated by the ‘maximization of the unearned increment’. In other words, what could be initially regarded as generosity would be likely to give way to negative reciprocity. The subversion of the legitimate need for shelter in the ‘immoral’ economy of housing in Turkey constitutes a typical example of such a development which has led to both the commercialization of irregular settlements and the increasing significance of negative reciprocity networks within the middle-class housing market.

**Irregular housing in Turkey**

Like many similar forms found in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the Turkish *gecekondu* (‘landed overnight’ in literal translation) constitute a form of illegal, or at least irregular, type of low-income housing. Like the irregular settlements found elsewhere, it has a moral legitimacy as a form of need satisfaction complementing the deficiencies of formal
mechanisms of exchange and redistribution. Hence, the absence of a formal policy approach to the problem of low-income housing appears as a crucial factor explaining the spectacular expansion of gecekondu settlements. The expansion in question has, however, led to an erosion of its own moral basis through two developments: the increasing commercialization of gecekondu and the changing configuration of economic interests in the urban land market. The dynamics of these developments clearly reflect the nature of state redistributive policies, shaped within the context of urban land tenure patterns, and the character of political processes in the country.

According to the early studies conducted for the Ministry of Reconstruction and Settlement (1965a; 1965b; 1965c), in the first half of the 1960s 59% of the population in Ankara, 45% in Istanbul and 33% in Izmir lived in irregular settlements. In the 1980s, these percentages were, respectively, 55%, 70% and 50%. In 1991 the total number of gecekondu in Turkey was estimated to be 1,585,455, nearly half of them being located in the three most populated cities of the country, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir (Gökçe et al., 1993: 3, 35). Such a spectacular development could only take place with the consent of political authorities, which was not challenged by public opinion. Starting from the 1940s, the mushrooming of irregular settlements has repeatedly been on the political agenda, but it has rarely been discussed as a problem of the violation of property rights, as it would have been in the legal and institutional framework of a developed market economy. It has been addressed, rather, as a social problem and invariably approached with proposals for low-income housing projects. Since these projects have rarely materialized in an effective way, the demolition of existing gecekondu, whenever it was attempted, was regarded as an act of cruelty against helpless individuals and represented as such by the media with the aid of heartbreaking pictures of human misery. In other words, as in the historical example discussed by Thompson, moral economy principles, derived from a particular understanding of socially defined human needs, have prevailed over the principles of property and contract underlying the market economy.

In fact, formal redistributive measures in the area of housing have always remained inadequate to deal with the problem of low-income housing since the foundation of the Republic in 1923. Although in the early years of the republican era housing policy was very much on the agenda, what dominated the latter was the residential needs of state bureaucrats related to the transfer of state capital from Istanbul to the small, central,

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2 In this regard, a particularly interesting case is presented by one of the early instances when the political support given to gecekondu development was put on the agenda by the bureaucrats of a particular ministry which had seen the land under its jurisdiction invaded by squatters. As a response to the media coverage of this incident, the Governor of Istanbul clearly told the journalists that the misery of squatters should not be manipulated for political purposes, but these unfortunate individuals should at least be able to survive without having to worry about the eventual demolition of the miserable shacks that they have built for themselves (Cumhuriyet, 27 January 1950).

3 See, for example, Cumhuriyet, 23 April 1950; 16 January 1958; 31 July 1962; and 20 November 1965. In November 1965, in a much publicized conference held by the Ministry of Reconstruction and Settlement, the Prime Minister Demirel clearly stated that the demolition of gecekondu without providing alternative shelter for squatters was totally out of the question. The prime minister’s speech was immediately followed by an uncontrollable wave of land invasions in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, involving cases of the most rapid gecekondu construction, some of which were completed in less than 24 hours! In these cases, even where private plots of land were also invaded, demolition activity remained very limited and was accompanied by provisions to find alternative housing to squatters (See Cumhuriyet, 23 and 24 November 1965). Some of the political cartoons accompanying the coverage of these incidents clearly reflect the moral framework of the latter as perceived by the public. In one of them, for example, the Minister of Reconstruction and Settlement is portrayed as a fat, rich man with a warm coat and a big umbrella in front of a miserable family of squatters shivering under a roof much smaller than the minister’s umbrella (Cumhuriyet, 7 December 1965).

The first gecekondu law, explicitly so-called, was enacted in 1966 shortly after these incidents, and largely routinized the regularization of gecekondu. More will be said later on the significance of this particular law.
Anatolian town of Ankara. Hence, the recommendations of the German urban planner Herman Jansen, who was invited to prepare the master plan of the new capital city and who suggested the nationalization of a large area of cheaper land for the development of social housing projects, were not taken into account (Atay, 1958: 374–90; Göksu, 1994). In the 1940s, when the government explicitly recognized the shortage of housing as a national problem, there were several attempts to provide houses for the workers of State Economic Enterprises and initiatives were taken to extend the housing projects beyond Ankara, to towns in central and eastern regions of the country. Yet, as criticized by several eminent architects of the era, the role of the state in the residential sector has remained limited to the construction of houses for its employees.

Apart from these attempts to provide housing for state employees, redistributive policy in the area of low-income housing has relied on the provision of subsidized credit for residential construction by the Turkish Real Estate and Credit Bank and the Social Insurance Fund. These organizations both provided credit and became directly involved in the realization of mass housing projects. Their activities were, however, subject to recurrent criticism because they seemed to be contributing more to the development of middle-class and even luxurious residential construction than to the realization of social housing projects. The Ataköy and Levent complexes in Istanbul are among the best known examples of luxurious residential complexes realized by the Bank in the 1950s through credit opportunities destined for low-income housing projects. It has been repeatedly stressed that many of the apartment blocs built for workers covered by the Social Insurance Fund were also eventually acquired by higher income groups.

Yet both organizations have enabled the development of housing cooperatives which still present the main channel of access to home ownership for most Turkish families of limited means. The role of cooperatives has become important, especially after the 1960s when stricter measures were taken to clarify the conditions of access to subsidized credit in order to prevent the subsidization of residential construction catering to the needs of high-income groups. The growth of residential construction by cooperatives really started to accelerate, however, after the foundation of the Mass Housing and Investment Administration (MHIA) in 1984, which, through considerable budgetary and extra-budgetary public resources controlled by the Mass Housing Fund, soon became the largest housing finance agency in the country (Öncü, 1988; Pulat, 1992). It is estimated that of the total number of housing cooperatives founded between 1941 and 1991 (approximately 28,307), 79% originate from the post-1980 period (Berkman, 1995: 148).

We also see that the share of dwelling units in cooperative housing in terms of the total number of dwelling units, which was 5.2% in 1970 and 8.7% in 1980, had reached 25.2% in 1990 (State Institute of Statistics, 1991: 242).

State subsidies provided to cooperatives as the most effective instrument of formal housing policy should, however, be evaluated cautiously by taking into account three factors. First, not all cooperatives have access to subsidized credit (Berkman, 1995; Osmay, 1995). Second, membership in a cooperative which, as previously mentioned, appears to be a very important means of access to regular home ownership, is only open

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4 National competitions were held, for example, for the construction of housing complexes for workers of public enterprises in the towns of Ereğli and Burdur (Sayar, 1946). Around the same time, the government launched a project involving the construction of 5000 houses for civil servants in different towns of Eastern Anatolia (see the report on this project published in Arkitekt 1944: 278–83).

5 See, for example, Mortaş (1943) and Sayar (1946).

6 Aggregate statistics on the specific magnitude of public funds used for these projects are not available. Yet Pulat (1992: 202–53) presents a full survey of the evolution of housing policy in the republican period (1923–90) and the relative effectiveness of the instruments used. Policy discussions which reveal the limitations of previously implemented measures are also included in the survey. See also Tekeli (1995) and Keleş (1990).
to individuals that have steady employment in the formal sector, which obviously excludes a significant number of urban squatters (Osmay, 1995; Türel, 1995a). The fact that most inhabitants of irregular settlements do not even know about the existence of subsidized credit opportunities is a good indication of the limited success of state redistributive policies in reaching the urban poor (Şenyapılı, 1995). Third, as will be discussed later, the 1984 Housing Law, which enabled private investors to have access to subsidized credit for the construction of dwelling units of up to 150 square meters, benefited big construction firms catering to middle-class demand much more than the urban poor.

With the legal changes made after 1989, the government has tried to reorient the activities of the MHIA towards the housing needs of the underprivileged, with special emphasis placed on the gecekondu. By then, however, the development of the informal housing sector had been shaped in ways which seriously limit the chances of a formal policy reorientation. If the role of the state has not been very important in providing low-income housing to the urban poor in the formal sector, it has been of crucial significance in shaping the development of the irregular housing sector. Land invasions and gecekondu construction processes have been realized through the mobilization of reciprocity relations where the state has been an important actor by virtue, mainly, of two factors: the nature of urban land tenure patterns and the characteristics of electoral politics in the country.

In this regard, the significance of publicly owned land in the cities and their vicinity has been instrumental in the relative ease with which land invasions have eventually led to established entitlements. Neither privatized nor used for social projects, these vacant public plots were soon treated as commons and rapidly ‘enclosed’ by irregular settlers and small entrepreneurs exploiting the rising demand for low-income housing. It would not be unfounded to suggest that if land tenure patterns had been different and private property in urban land had been more significant than it was, the development of irregular settlements could hardly have reached the dimensions that it has. In fact, a very significant percentage of gecekondu buildings are built on enclosed public land. This percentage is 75.84% in Istanbul, 87.92% in Ankara and 80.79% in Izmir (calculated on the basis of the statistics given by Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1991: 111). Therefore, it seems significant that among the five big cities where the informal settlements are especially important, Izmir is the only one where the city center is not affected by squatter development, which remains limited to the peripheral regions farthest away from the coastline. This is sometimes explained by the fact that within Izmir private property in urban land is much more significant than in other big cities where public land covers a larger area of urban geography (Keleş, 1972: 188).

Also important with regard to urban land patterns are the hazy boundaries between urban plots and surrounding agricultural land that is eventually integrated into the cities. The peripheral land remained under the jurisdiction of the villages around the cities and hence different rules applied to its development. These rural plots were eventually subdivided and have become the objects of shared title deeds which do not entail the legal right to construct but which form a basis for claims that cannot be easily disregarded by government authorities (Şenyapılı, 1978: 68–9; Yörük, 1987). It is reported that in 1980 in Istanbul there were about 2 million subdivisions of peripheral land with over 100,000 unauthorized buildings on them (Pulat, 1992: 54).

These irregular patterns of access to urban land have thus become an important aspect of social policy or a manifestation of generalized reciprocity, institutionalized, albeit informally, as a redistributive practice which has clearly served the purposes of avoiding
social unrest and legitimizing the existing social order. This particular way of ‘institutionalizing generosity’ was, however, strongly marked by the ‘between’ character of reciprocity relations since the ambiguities surrounding urban land tenure patterns have given Turkish state authorities an unusual opportunity to opt for clientelistic politics by exchanging entitlements to public property by votes.

The way these channels have been mobilized in the Turkish context clearly reflects the character of the political processes in the country. In Turkey, in spite of the three military interventions that overthrew the elected governments in 1960, 1971 and 1980 without much popular reaction, elections are taken very seriously and instances of electoral fraud are very rare. Yet, in a society where the organized articulation and representation of sectional interests is systematically discouraged by the central authority, political support of organized groups determined by the common interests of their members has always been an insignificant factor for electoral success. Political parties have relied, instead, on networks of patron-client relations used in the co-optation of the electorate.

In this process, a series of amnesty laws were passed to regularize the status of gecekondu. Hence, the gecekondu, once built and occupied, sooner or later attain legal status and are regularized by government action. It is, in fact, documented that most gecekondu owners hold some kind of property title to land: 45.3% have a regular property title, 25.8% hold shared title deeds, and 8.6% have acquired a government certificate that will eventually entitle them to formal legal ownership of their house. This leaves about 20.3% of irregular houses with no titles (Gökçe et al., 1993: 161). This percentage of irregular houses with no entitlements is estimated to be 15.8% in Istanbul, 20.3% in Ankara and 27.6% in Izmir (Devlet Planlama Teşkilati, 1991: 110). The provision of urban infrastructure and municipal services in irregular settlements have often preceded and at times accompanied the legal procedures of regularization.

Like their legal status, the physical characteristics of these popular dwellings, too, have undergone successive changes whereby they were transformed from slum-like constructions to, in many cases, concrete apartment blocks which are often indistinguishable from equally unpleasant looking middle-class dwellings (Tekeli, 1979; Bektöre, 1986). One of the most prominent researchers on the subject, Şenyapılı (1978) has in fact defined the gecekondu in terms of its flexibility both as a social and as an architectural form. Some researchers have indeed found a positive correlation between the length of time spent in the city by the squatters and the improved physical quality and the size of housing units (Türel, 1995b). Even in the 1960s, when the surveys conducted for the Ministry of Reconstruction and Settlement (1966: 14–19) emphasized slum-like physical characteristics as the defining feature of gecekondu, a study conducted by C. Hart (1969) on one of the oldest irregular settlements of Istanbul found that in terms of the availability of basic household facilities, the gecekondu in this particular area were no different, and perhaps better equipped, than the average dwelling unit in the city of Istanbul as a whole. Residents of any of the big cities of Turkey cannot, in fact, help noticing the growth and structural improvement of squatter settlements which start out as one or two room shacks in small gardens built with mixed construction materials and develop into several-storied cement blocks.

This type of development creates certain definitional ambiguities given the difficulty

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8 See, for example, Ayşe Öncü’s (1994) comparison of Egypt and Turkey with regard to the possibility of urban squatter development as a factor controlling radical popular movements. According to Öncü, one of the factors behind the significance of the latter in Egypt is the absence of socio-political mechanisms that have enabled the development and regularization of the gecekondu in Turkey.

9 The first amnesty law legalizing irregular residences was enacted in 1949. This was followed by others enacted in 1953, 1963, 1966, 1976, 1983, 1984 and 1990. For a comprehensive discussion of these amnesty laws, see Tekeli (1993).
of distinguishing certain gecekondu from middle-class residences on the one hand, and the striking differences that exist between irregular houses of different vintages on the other. This is clearly revealed in a recent study on a large district of irregular settlements in Istanbul, which has over time developed into a fair sized town. As the study indicates, the settlers who live in houses transformed in this manner clearly distinguish themselves from those who live in slums which have not yet been modified and regularized and to which they limit the use of the term gecekondu (Erder, 1996: 185–91).

As a result of these parallel processes of regularization and physical upgrading of gecekondu, the latter have ceased to be the site of a precarious existence of marginal segments of the population, but have become an undeniable aspect of the urban land market with an important commercial potential which could be entrepreneurially exploited. Commercialization is clearly demonstrated, for example, by the fact that most of the actual gecekondu owners have not enclosed the land themselves but purchased it either from the person who initially appropriated it (56.22% in Istanbul, 51.58% in Ankara and 47.58% in Izmir) or from a relative or a real estate agent (19.20% in Istanbul, 9.48% in Ankara and 15.45% in Izmir) (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1991: 111). Another factor which indicates the commercialization of gecekondu is the rather significant percentage of tenants among those who live in this type of dwelling. Recent surveys estimate this percentage to be 24.3% for Turkey as a whole (Gökcete al., 1993: 160) and 32.67%, 28.50% and 27.70% for Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir respectively (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1991: 108). In a similar vein, the studies that document the way gecekondu are constructed point to the significance of the trends toward commercialization by raising doubts about the self-help character of this form of housing. The surveys of the State Planning Organization indicate, for example, that the percentage of gecekondu owners who have built their own houses is much less important than the percentage of those using commercial channels of construction (Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1991: 112).

As several researchers have documented (Yönder, 1987; Erder, 1996), this commercial potential has, in fact, been effectively realized by local strongmen who have taken control of the ‘markets’ for buying the land, and the construction and renting of gecekondu with the objective of maximizing ‘the unearned increment’ which Sahlins presents as the main aim of the transactions that take the form of negative reciprocity. This movement from the ‘solidarity extreme’ toward the ‘unsociable extreme’ on Sahlins’s continuum of reciprocities has not, however, remained limited to gecekondu, but has also affected the middle-class housing sector, parts of which have consequently begun to acquire an ‘informal’ character. Changing urban residential patterns whereby middle-class residences have begun to move away from the center to the periphery of the big cities constitute an important aspect of this development. These trends reflect, at least in part, the feelings of insecurity and discomfort associated with life in the crowded cities where urban infrastructure and municipal services are increasingly less adequate, a situation to which the mushrooming of irregular settlements has made a considerable contribution. Also instrumental in the emergence of these new preferences relating to middle-class housing are the new patterns of transportation associated with new expressways and increasing private car ownership. These changes in the nature of middle-class demand for housing have been accompanied by parallel changes on the supply side, whereby large construction firms have begun to move into the area of residential construction previously left to small contractors. This upsurge of interest by large firms in the sector does not only constitute a response to demand factors, but is also related to the increasing state involvement in housing after the foundation of the MHI Administration in 1984, which has created significant opportunities for access to subsidized credit (Öncü, 1988; Keleş, 1990). These developments have led to a situation in which the peripheral urban land, hitherto available to the squatters, has become interesting for developers catering to middle- and upper middle-class demand for housing (Şenyapılı, 1995).
In fact, both the commercialization of gecekondu and the emergence of competing claims on peripheral land appear to be the outcome of squatter regularization processes whereby the privileges accorded to the underprivileged by social consent have been subverted and used to sustain diverse forms of illicit income generation. Among the amnesty laws that have led to this development, there are two which constitute significant benchmarks. The first law, which unlike the previous ones was the first to be explicitly called a gecekondu law, actually formalized the moral legitimacy of the ‘unequal treatment of the unequal’ by recognizing that different groups of citizens, the squatters living in irregular settlements, and the residents in the formal housing sector, were bound by different rules with regard to the acquisition of building permits and the use of municipal services. About two decades later, in 1984, the double standards prevailing in the area of housing were de facto ended by an amnesty law which extended the amnesty beyond existing buildings and allowed for their reconstruction and conversion to multiple-story apartment blocs. Around the same time, with the very entrepreneurially-oriented Motherland Party government holding the majority in parliament and controlling most of the municipalities, some of the powers of the central government in the area of urban construction and land development activities were passed to the municipalities. Especially in Istanbul, where urban real estate rents are higher than elsewhere, this transfer of authority from the central to the municipal government has led to feverish construction activity through municipal ‘land development and reconstruction’ plans which were designed to cover irregular settlements, but which were immediately extended to hitherto non-inhabited peripheral land, some of which included forests and water reservoirs. Thus, not only have the municipalities acquired access to enormous sources of revenue through the marketing of such peripheral land to big construction firms, but the scope for rent seeking activity has reached unprecedented dimensions.

In a formal sense, municipal control over land development and construction processes is based on the legally defined powers and responsibilities of municipal governments. The ‘lawfulness’, if not the legality, of the arrangements between developers and municipal authorities enabled by these legal provisions are, however, highly contested, mainly for two reasons. First, the legal provisions in question have been significantly subverted from their initial objective of squatter regularization and are being used to enable the development of large residential complexes involving hundreds and sometimes thousands of housing units. Second, these developments often involve serious damage to forest land, water reservoirs and special areas of the urban landscape such as the Bosphorus coastline, which should all be under the protection of law. Hence, in several instances, the initiatives of civil society associations have led the Constitutional Court and the Council of State to annul some of the legal amendments enabling the municipal governments to distribute building permits to large construction projects.

10 Some of these residential complexes were on totally empty land without any prior squatter development and they were constructed by major enterprise groups (holding companies) of the country. For example, Koç Holding built the Zekeriyaköy Complex of 6000 residential units in the ‘green belt’ at the Northern part of Istanbul and Alarko Holding built 284 detached houses around one of the most important water reservoirs of the city in Büyükçekmece. In these two areas, housing cooperatives, too, were very active in realizing projects catering to middle-class residential needs (Ekinci, 1994: 117, 121–2, 117–8).
11 It is estimated that during the five year period between 1987 and early 1993, Sarıyer municipality in northern Istanbul alone gave construction permits covering 380,000 square meters of forest and agricultural land (Cumhuriyet, 14 March 1993).
12 For example, the provisions of two amendments of the construction law, one enabling residential construction around the Bosphorus coastline and the other giving the municipalities the power of issuing permits for individual plots independently of wider municipal area plans, were declared unlawful by two Constitutional Court decisions in 1986 and 1992. The 1992 decision of the Constitutional Court was supported by a subsequent Council of State decision that cancelled the permits given to a big holding company for the construction of a complex consisting of 1000 residential units (Ekinci, 1994: 60–1, 106–8).
It is the objective of controlling the rapidly accelerating expansion of gecekondu that forms the rationale behind the extended powers of municipal governments. The expansion of irregular settlements is also used to rationalize the use of these powers in highly controversial ways of urban rent sharing. Bedreddin Dalan, who, as the mayor of Istanbul between 1984 and 1988 played a crucial role in marketing the peripheral and coastal land, often justified himself against the ardent opposition of associations of city planners and architects by claiming that only developers catering to the middle- and upper middle-class housing sector could check land invasions by squatters. These two groups of interests competing over urban land might appear to be situated in different legal and economic contexts, within the formal market economy on the one hand, and in the moral economy of the informal housing sector on the other. What the current situation manifests, however, is two different types of negative reciprocity: those relying on an exchange of property titles for votes in the case of increasingly commercialized squatter development, and those involving illicit pecuniary deals between municipal authorities and large constructors of middle- and upper middle-class residential projects. Although the second case is characterized by the absence of the situational morality of the principle of the unequal treatment of the unequal, the difference between the two is increasingly marginalized through the commercialization of irregular settlements in a process where moral relativity gives way to straightforward immorality.

Conclusion

The moral issues surrounding the problem of irregular settlements that are discussed in this paper can be summarized in two points: The historical evolution of the societal context of Turkish gecekondu highlights, first, that the informal housing sector can hardly be studied without reference to state redistributive practices. It is because of the shortcomings of the latter that the informal sector acquires a basis for social legitimacy defined by the entitlement of the unprivileged members of the society to public generosity. The nature of the policy process also shapes the particular form of institutionalization of this generosity, which, in the Turkish case, does not resemble the formal redistributive practices that are found in developed western countries but continues to manifest the informal and personalized character of reciprocity relations. While both types of redistributive activity manifest a similar type of moral relativity, in Turkey the incompleteness of the evolutionary process whereby reciprocity relations lead to formal redistribution paves the way to the emergence of certain forms of behavior of the kind that Sahlins describes as negative reciprocity. While the pursuit of material gain is an objective of the activities carried out through relations of negative reciprocity, the latter do not take place within the legally bounded context of market exchange. Hence, profits generated through the commercialization of gecekondu remain contingent upon the successful manipulation of political decisions.

The second point highlighted in the discussion pertains to the implications of the evolution of the informal sector through networks of reciprocity relations between squatters and political authorities for the formal housing sector. In this regard, the Turkish case does not only show that non-formalized relations of generalized reciprocity might turn into negative reciprocity networks, but also demonstrates that the latter are likely to extend to the realm of the market, to subvert the impersonality and formal equality of the exchange relationship, and to lead to the emergence of a particular ‘immoral economy’ framework.

These developments, through which the ‘unsociable extreme’ of the reciprocity continuum becomes a dominant characteristic of economic and social relations within the housing sector, have policy implications of crucial significance. In close parallel to Sik’s

(1994) account of the ways in which the legacy of the Hungarian second economy shapes and distorts the newly emerging market economy, one can observe that the formal economy of housing and its regulation by the state are strongly conditioned by behavioral regularities and institutional practices formed within the societal context of informal housing in Turkey. The latter appears, therefore, as an important factor which would determine the likely outcome of recent attempts to formalize the redistributive practices in the area of housing.

These attempts have become important, first, with the enactment of the Housing Law in 1984 which mobilized significant amounts of public resources through the Mass Housing Fund. As previously mentioned, until the end of the 1980s, a significant portion of these funds were used to provide subsidized credit to middle-income housing projects. Yet, with the legal amendments of 1989, the government has attempted to channel public resources in order to control and to contain further development of irregular settlements. This policy reorientation reflected two parallel and interrelated developments. First, the newly emerging conflicts of interest between squatters and large construction firms over hitherto uncontested peripheral land available for the development of irregular settlements have been instrumental in affecting policy decisions. Partly as a consequence of this first development, but also engendered by the widely observed commercialization of the gecekondu, there was a transformation of initially lenient, or at least unhostile, public opinion toward the expansion of irregular settlements. The change of atmosphere in question is clearly observed in the media where the traditionally sympathetic coverage of the problems of ‘poor’ squatters has given way to the (sometimes well-founded) presentation of the same people as quite well-off individuals who enjoy middle-class standards of living at the expense of regular citizens who pay their taxes and live in regular buildings. 14

As can be easily seen, both these developments are of a nature to render politically difficult the mobilization of public funds for the benefit of a social group that has lost the sympathy and support that it once enjoyed in society. The current policy reorientation takes place, in other words, in a context where the moral legitimacy of ‘the unequal treatment of the unequal’ has been eroded within the informal context of reciprocity relations between irregular settlers and public authorities. Since formal redistributive measures would also be based on a similar moral basis of situational character, the extent to which they would enjoy public approval remains highly uncertain, especially in the current context of interest conflicts surrounding the supply of urban land.

Perhaps more significant than this problem are, however, the behavioral regularities that have developed through long-lasting relations of negative reciprocity. These historically given patterns of behavior are of a nature to block most policy measures directed at depersonalization and formalization of the role of the state in the area of housing. Irregular construction activity now involves not only the interests of low-income squatters, but also those of other social groups that are economically and politically very well positioned to defend them. 15 While the latter are very unlikely to forego the immense

14 See, for example, the dossier ‘Gecekondu 50 yaşında’ (Milliyet, 3 January 1996), which clearly documents this changing attitude. See, also, ‘Istanbul’da gecekondu kuşatmasının 50. yıl’ (Forum, 15 December 1995). For articles attempting to document that squatters enjoy fairly comfortable standards of life, see, among many others, ‘Beyaz Eyya Cenneti Gecekondu’ (Hurriyet, 13 November 1995) and ‘Gecekondularda Konforlu Yaşam’ (Bizim Gazete, 12 November 1995).

15 A study carried out by Istanbul Technical University for the Ministry of Environment in 1995 showed that the quantity of organic waste daily dumped in the largest dam supplying Istanbul was around 20 tons. The study suggested that there was no way of dealing with this problem without preventing residential construction around the area which included both squatter settlements and middle-income housing projects (Yeni Yüzyıl, 23 June 1995). Such preventive measures are, however, rarely taken either around the particular area covered by the study or elsewhere, as clearly indicated by the recent media coverage of a particularly outrageous case where a businessman, known for his closeness to the Islamist Welfare Party in power, has received permission for the realization of a large residential complex of 5000 dwelling units around one of the water reservoirs of Istanbul (Radikal, 1 May 1997).
opportunities of real-estate rent that the current situation generates, the former, too, would be unlikely to give up their chances of participating in rent seeking activity through the horizontal and vertical growth of the gecekondu which have long since ceased to be a simple means of satisfying the need for shelter and have become important items of speculation (Senyapılı, 1995). Given the attitudes of politicians for whom electoral competition largely rests upon the control of this access to urban land speculation, it appears quite difficult to break the expectations of speculative gain of a considerable segment of the electorate. As things stand, therefore, it seems highly doubtful that a formal, impersonal process of redistribution aimed at the protection of communal interest can smoothly emerge out of the historical pattern of state redistributive practices in the country.

Ayşe Bugra (bugray@boun.edu.tr), Department of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Boğaziçi University, Bebek 80815, Istanbul, Turkey.

References


16 Some well-intentioned experts have suggested, for example, tripartite deals between the state, private entrepreneurs and squatters to build apartment blocs on the illegally appropriated land and to give flats to gecekondu owners in exchange for their houses (Tezcan, 1995). While such measures seem to be beneficial for all the parties involved, they have proven to be extremely difficult to implement, mainly because the squatters have found the deal unattractive in comparison to the urban rents that the land they could appropriate would entail.

17 This difficulty is clearly demonstrated by the atmosphere of the electoral campaign before the municipal elections of March 1994. In spite of the ongoing discussions concerning the most appropriate mechanisms of a formal policy approach to the housing problem, the candidates adopted an electoral discourse which was totally in line with past practices of exchanging votes for property titles. Then Prime Minister Tansu Çiller was especially eloquent in her references to her maternal sentiments for poor squatters who would never see their houses demolished if they elected the candidates of her party (see, for example, Milliyet, 15 March, 1994). As a response to her speeches, one independent candidate for the municipality of Istanbul started constructing a gecekondu on one of the many plots of land owned by Çiller, stating that her real estate property was the safest to invade given her explicitly declared position toward land invasions! (Meydan, 3 March 1994).


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