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Violence against Istanbul and strategies for resistance

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This paper examines urban megaprojects and slow violence in Turkey through the case of Kanal Istanbul, situating it within broader authoritarian and neoliberal urban development policies in Istanbul. Drawing on thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with experts and activists, it explores how the proposed 'alternative waterway', effectively splitting the city, has been critiqued as an act of urbicide. The paper offers two main contributions: first, it traces urban resistance in Istanbul over the past 15 years, highlighting how past unrest connects with the present moment; second, it analyses urban megaprojects through the lens of slow and infrastructural violence, culminating in the concept of urbicide as a form of resistance. The paper argues that Kanal Istanbul is not an isolated rupture but part of a broader continuum of urban struggle shaped by past violences and emerging solidarities. It concludes by framing urbicide as both a diagnostic and strategic lens for understanding how Istanbul's urban policies—neoliberal and more-than-neoliberal—have produced sustained cycles of violence and resistance. Thus, I approach the

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narrative of urbicide as both a diagnostic and strategic lens to trace the evolution of urban resistance in Istanbul.

Introduction

Starting in the 1980s, Turkey's adoption of more neoliberal economic policies and its aspiration for greater integration into the global economy played a pivotal role in fostering what is referred to as the 'urban growth machine' (Molotch 1976). This machine aimed to commercialise and commodify urban spaces and significantly expand the construction sector. As pointed out by Karaman (2012), as the manufacturing sector gradually moved to the outskirts of major Turkish cities, including Istanbul, the real estate and construction sector emerged as a key driver of the country's economic growth and urban development. This was primarily achieved through increasingly extensive urban renewal, regeneration and redevelopment projects, which had rising social and environmental consequences. These projects and the activities of these sectors usually culminated into gentrification and state-led displacement, forced evictions and a widening class distinction (Akcali and Korkut 2015), while these projects were presented as the 'shining stars' of Turkey.

The contributions of this paper are twofold: (i) tracing the moments of urban resistance in Istanbul in the last 15 years and exploring the connection and progression of urban unrest through the latest urban megaproject in an authoritarian environment (ii) analysing the (possible) effects of this urban megaproject, which is the last of many state-driven urban projects in the historical trajectory of AKP (the ruling party in Turkey since 2002) through the scholarship of slow and infrastructural violence. In this paper, I describe these authoritarian and neoliberal urban development policies that are primarily driven by the needs of the capital and the possibly perilous effects of urban megaprojects through the case study of Kanal Istanbul Project. Urbicide started to be commonly used during the 1992 widespread destruction of the built environment in Bosnia as part of the ongoing war (Coward 2008); however, in this paper, I employ 'narratives of urbicide' as it is used by the scientific and activist community that are against this project and represent the mounting resistance. They simply employ these narratives to draw attention to potential (but not yet materialized) consequences of an urban megaproject to emphasize the irretrievable damages to the urban life of Istanbul and the environment as a whole, and to emphasize a moment of urban resistance. This narrative serves as a peak moment for a historical progression of urban resistance and AKP's long-term trajectory of state-driven urban decisions and projects.

As a result of a 'more-than-neoliberal' regime (see below for a detailed discussion), the construction industry became the cornerstone of Turkey's political economy. To support this sector, the AKP was compelled to undertake larger and more costly infrastructure projects funded by the public. Turkey's governance system is now stuck in a cycle: the diminishing surplus from these projects necessitates them to be even more extensive and ambitious, which in turn triggers resistance from urban residents who must either be convinced

or coerced into accepting them (Bayırbağ, Schindler, and Penpecioglu 2023). Alongside the opposition generated by the AKP's adoption of 'crazy projects,' there was significant resistance to its efforts to impose Islamicization on society (see Kaya 2015; Bayırbağ, Schindler, and Penpecioglu 2023). This growing urban opposition ultimately resulted in the AKP's defeat in the 2019 local elections, which was seen as a win and a direct result of the urban consciousness created by the Gezi Park Protests, highlighting the vulnerability of its dominant project and created hope for the May 2023 general elections. This election was seen as a referendum not only for the Islamization of the society but also for the state-led urbanization policies. However, in May 2023, Turkish citizens chose to give their vote of confidence (even if with a small margin only) in the AKP's commitment to delivering a state-led urban transformation. Having said that, Istanbulites themselves opted to re-elect Ekrem İmamoğlu (current mayor of Istanbul) by a landslide win during the local elections of March, 2024. This is seen as an obvious rejection of this state-driven urbanism and implementation of urban megaprojects, and as embracing the continuation of Gezi Spirit by the citizens of Istanbul.

There is a strand of research that investigates how the actions of the past can inform current social movements. Tilly (1986, 176) defines this as 'repertoires of collective action' which is an 'accumulated experience that alters continuously as a result of previous action'. These kinds of repertoires and strategies of authorities have influence on each other to decide what forms of action would be feasible or desirable (Ozduzen 2019). Tarrow (1993, 284–286) coined the terms 'protest cycles' and 'heightened conflicts' to highlight the progression of stages in urban unrests and protests. These denote moments of societal upheaval characterized by the creation of new, altered, or reiterated signs, symbols and layers of significance, which subsequently interact in dialogue with the upcoming mobilization. McAdam and Sewell (2001) emphasise the importance of temporality in social movements and use the term 'transformative events' to refer to protest surges. In this regard, following the footsteps of Halvorsen (2015, 404) and Ozduzen (2019), the activism and tactics of resistance I analyse in this study are informed by the previous social unrests (particularly Gezi Park Protests) and signpost a continuous series of everyday practices that facilitate the transformation toward post-capitalist futures. In so doing, I ask how can a (dys)utopian megaproject such as Kanal Istanbul create such resistance and debate to the point of suggesting the annihilation of Istanbul without even being built and what kind of (slow) violence does this imply on present and future wellbeing and livelihood of Istanbul and Istanbulites?

The slow and structural violence created by this project is of course not the first nor the only one, but it is the latest one in a string of urban decisions since the early 2000s. The violence created and experienced by other urban projects, the strategies that are used and that failed to create effective opposition to those projects, the tactics used and communities formed during and after the Gezi Park Protests, all inform each other to reach this moment of resistance against Kanal Istanbul and many other projects and decisions that may follow Kanal Istanbul. That is why in this paper, I analyse the narrative of urbicide as a strategy and to show the progression of urban resistance in Istanbul against ever-expanding urban projects. This connection was made even more obvious in my fieldwork when the possibility of Kanal Istanbul resistance leading to 'another Gezi' became a topic of

discussion without any prompting from me. This further shows that the strategies from the opposition and the central government continuously inform each other.

To be able to make sense of these events through the case of Kanal Istanbul, I first explain my methods and methodology. Following that, I briefly discuss the literature on urban megaprojects and move on to the concepts of slow and infrastructural violence as part of the theoretical framework for this paper. I, then, move on to explain urban megaprojects in the context of Istanbul, Turkey and continue with the background of the specific urban megaproject of Kanal Istanbul. Finally I surmise and discuss my findings in the discussion part and conclude the paper with some remarks on neoliberal and 'more-than-neoliberal' urban policies that lead to urban megaprojects, the violence caused by this and how narratives of urbicide have culminated in this moment of urban resistance.

Methodology and methods

Critical realism (Bhaskar 1989; Næss 2015) is the approach used for this research, because it emphasizes the importance of historical contexts in observing the economic and legal change in the processes of urbanisation in Istanbul. Hence, I have delved into the underlying mechanisms influencing the specific cases under examination in this study, including the significance of historical, spatial and legal contexts, and have noted the economic shifts. The broader, temporally bound framework encompasses economic, social and political dynamics across various geographical levels and extensive historical periods. Understanding the development of state-led urbanisation of Istanbul and the resistance since Gezi necessitate a comprehensive perspective that includes economic dynamics, historical background and diverse spatial dimensions. In addition, a policy trajectory approach is employed to analyse the change in urban policies and legislation, and dynamics of urban politics. Vidovich (2013) surmises that a policy trajectory approach to policy analysis depends upon analysing matters of interest, conflict and power. In this regard, this approach considers the shift in power over a contested space as an important facet of the policy making process. I believe these two approaches work well in explaining and exploring the slow and structural violence Istanbul has been facing that has culminated in a spectacular project such as Kanal Istanbul.

I conducted 15 interviews with urban actors that are working on and resisting Kanal Istanbul project. These actors include members of the Chamber of Architects, Chamber of Urban Planners, the organization 'Either Istanbul or The Canal', Istanbul Urban Defence and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Some of the respondents who are included in the listed organisations hold academic positions in the departments of urban planning, architecture, civil engineering, marine engineering and public administration in various universities. Others hold civil service positions and they are activists, urban planners, architects and lawyers specializing in urban laws and regulations. In that regard, all respondents belong to the expert category. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to interview inhabitants and farmers who are currently living on and around the project route, to which I will return later. I have also attended meetings and press conferences (over the course of 2020 and 2021) held by the NGOs and organizations listed

above. The qualitative data is complemented by a document analysis of Istanbul Environmental Impact Report, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality research reports on Kanal Istanbul, research and press reports prepared by Chamber of Urban Planners, reports prepared by The Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA) and the Istanbul Master Plan. All these documents include official policy decisions and explanations pertaining to the Kanal Istanbul project.

Scholar-activism has become a central orientation for many critical urban scholars, particularly those committed to engaging with urban injustice through both theory and practice (Epstein 2020; DeMeulenaere and Cann 2013). Key terrains of intervention include housing struggles, dispossession, displacement, large-scale urban developments and gentrification. This research, situated within the contested field of urban megaprojects, similarly adopts a scholar-activist stance. Such an approach exemplifies the interpretive reflexivity captured in Giddens's (1986) concept of double hermeneutics. Drawing on Dimitri Ginev (2018), double hermeneutics refers to the recursive interpretive relationship between researcher and researched, where both are embedded in shared, historically situated lifeworlds and mutually implicated in processes of meaning-making. This ontological entanglement resonates with the epistemic commitments of scholar-activism, where knowledge production is understood as a politically situated practice rather than a detached academic exercise.

The concept of slow violence, as theorized by Rob Nixon (2011), is ontologically disruptive in its refusal of immediacy and spectacle. It foregrounds forms of harm that are incremental, attritional and frequently invisible within dominant epistemologies of violence. From a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, and particularly through Ginev's lens, this calls for an interpretive mode attuned to how violence is disclosed through lived experience and socio-historical embeddedness. Epistemologically, slow violence resists capture by empiricist frameworks, instead demanding critical interpretation of how harm is narrated, contested and embodied.

In this sense, Ginev's notion of double hermeneutics becomes indispensable. Understanding slow violence in the context of Kanal Istanbul requires a hermeneutic circularity in which the researcher is not an external analyst but an engaged participant in contested processes of urban transformation. The interpretive act here is not secondary to the 'real' but constitutive of how violence is known, represented and politicized. To engage with slow violence, then, is to engage a hermeneutic practice that is, in Ginev's terms, inherently interpretive, situated, and fundamentally political. Following from this, while undertaking this research, I have been part of the organisations and the resistance against the project. That is why my experience and expertise is also part of the collected data. Even though the fieldwork followed a semi-structured research plan and research questions, I first started resisting this project and then came up with the research aim and questions to analyse this struggle and resistance against massive urban projects and decisions. The research never attempted to seek the answer to the question whether Kanal Istanbul should be built. The starting point has always been why it should not be built.

In terms of analysing the data I collected, there is not a single, rigid method for presenting qualitative data. The interview data was analysed first by

transcription and then theme coding. To find patterns, themes and concepts, all of the obtained data was broken down into smaller components. For the analysis, the data was separated into different topics and themes. In this paper, given its prominence in the fieldwork findings, I structured the thematic analysis around the framework of violence. These themes include: violence against the environment, violence against the livelihood of Istanbulites and resistance against violence. In addition, I used the term 'Istanbulite' to refer to the target group under threat. 'Istanbulite' is used to identify individuals who currently reside and work in Istanbul. However, it is important to note that this group includes not only those who oppose the project but also individuals who may potentially benefit financially from AKP's state-driven urban policies. I included them to emphasise the magnitude of the threat highlighted by the experts and scientific community (including myself) who resist the project. If the projections of the expert community materialise, individuals will be affected irrespective of their political affiliations or financial status, as the project is depicted as a war on the environment. Lastly, this 'dramatic' stance sets the stage for my utilisation of 'narratives of urbicide.' As mentioned in the Introduction, there is currently no urbicide occurring due to the Kanal Istanbul Project. However, I opted to employ the term as part of my analysis to underscore the 'repertoires of collective action' that have shaped the resistance against Kanal Istanbul, particularly stemming from previous social unrests (especially Gezi). The strategies that are evolving since the Gezi Park Protests era have prompted the expert and scientific community (of which I am a part) to incorporate the term 'urbicide' into their resistance efforts. Hence, 'narratives of urbicide' constitute a crucial aspect of my research analysis.

Urban megaprojects

Castells (2004, 86) wrote that in a time where globalisation is intensifying day by day 'the fate of metropolitan economies depends on their ability to subordinate urban functions and forms to the dynamics of certain places to ensure their competitive articulation in the global space of flows'. In this regard, urban megaprojects and large scale infrastructure projects become indispensable to maintain the economic competitiveness of cities (Dewey and Davis 2013). Many cities, including those in the Global North (for an example see Hsieh and Noonan 2017) but mostly the ones in the South, have experienced conflict and resistance against large scale projects that promote urban growth and development (Dewey and Davis 2013).

Urban mega projects are large scale projects that require enormous amounts of budgets and funds both from the public and the private sector and have significant effects on the citizens of the city (Flyvbjerg 2014). These projects are usually categorized as capital and profit led urban decisions that mostly encourage economic development and growth of the city. They often have some ideological and political underlying reasons as well (see Koch and Valiyev 2016). Urban mega projects are essentially constructed with the aim of increasing land speculation and creating dramatic rise in land prices (Shatkin 2016). Sklair (2005) argues that urban megaprojects act as a tool and strategy for spatial transformation of

the urban as they reflect perfectly the homogenising effects of the transnational capital and the goals of the global real estate market. Bogaert (2018) argues that the analysis of megaprojects reveals a crucial paradox: although these projects often advance a strongly neoliberal agenda, they are simultaneously state-led. This apparent contradiction challenges the assumption that neoliberalism entails a retreat of the state. Instead, it illustrates how market freedom can coexist with—and even rely on—intense state intervention. As Bogaert (2018) further emphasizes, globalization and the expansion of global capital are not natural or autonomous processes, but are actively shaped and facilitated by the state.

Even if it appears that less than democratic nationalistic environments do not correspond or fit into the neoliberal governmental settings because of the promotion of neoliberal subjectivity that is realized in 'entrepreneurial individual' in the neoliberal rationalities, it has been argued time and time again that 'nationalism and neo-liberalism should not be considered as conflicting ideologies' (Akcali and Korkut 2015, 80; Kurki 2011). As Burte and Kamath (2023) discuss, this 'more-than-neoliberal' and hybrid urban governance sits at the intersection of neoliberal governance and state-capitalism. Turkey's urbanism exposes a fundamental contradiction within neoliberalism: while it promotes the ideal of free markets, its implementation often relies on strong state intervention and market regulation, revealing that these markets are neither free nor neutral in practice. This underscores the significant involvement of the state in influencing and facilitating urban land-rent markets in various ways, resulting in a fusion of governance models that prioritize deal-making involving prominent figures from both the government and private sectors (Gibson, Legacy, and Rogers 2023; Burte and Kamath 2023).

Slow and infrastructural violence

As described in the accounts of the respondents at a later point, Kanal Istanbul is perceived as a war on the environment and the gradual degradation of Istanbul's natural surroundings, often referred to as 'slow violence'. This concept of slow violence is a way of highlighting the passage of time, akin to what geographers have previously done with terms like 'Anthropocene' or the 'Doomsday Clock' to underscore the very real dangers posed by climate change and environmental threats (Davies 2019). Nixon explains it as (2011, 2):

By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.....We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive...

This take on slow violence prompts us to think about how harm is defined and what it includes. It showcases how violence that is not immediately visible or explosive (like in a war zone) can, over time, become so much more important and harmful than its original cause (Davies 2019). That is why Nixon's (2011) work can encourage geographers to look beyond the obvious and immediate

inspections of spatial inequality and restructuring of urban space and include the gradual, multi-layered and uneven destructions within the field. Slow violence encourages us to integrate the progressive demises, destructions and layered deposits of unequal social brutalities within the geographical here-and-now as a spatial idea. It also encourages us to look back in time in order to uncover the violent inequality patterns that permeate modern life and may very well ruin the future by freeing our geographic imaginations from the confines of the present (Davies 2022). Academics have rightly argued that ‘geography must be at the centre of any debate of violence’ in light of this expanding discourse’s intriguing and varied topics (Tyner and Inwood 2014, 1). Yet, geographers have only just begun to investigate the idea of slow violence (Davies 2022, 411).

The literature on infrastructural violence shows how urban infrastructures enunciate specific configurations of power that subject the vulnerable to marginalisation, abjection and disconnection (see Nixon 2011; Rodgers and O’Neill 2012; Lesutis 2022). These configurations of power can be physical, symbolic or structural (Lesutis 2022a). Infrastructural violence involves the subtle masking of the tangible, destructive consequences of ambitious projects by their grandiose portrayals. We should acknowledge and analyse infrastructures as tangible, calamitous manifestations of capitalist state-driven displays of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ (Lesutis 2022a). Academic conceptualizations of ‘infrastructural violence’ (Rodgers and O’Neill 2012, 403), which understand infrastructural violence to be both active and passive and acknowledge first and foremost that ‘the workings of infrastructure can be substantially deleterious’, can add nuance to the concept of slow violence in relation to cities. Rodgers and O’Neill (2012, 404) surmise that, as infrastructures rework relationships between people and non-human persons in daily life, these relationalities are frequently ‘to the detriment of marginalised actors,’ but receive little visibility or attention due to the fact that their negative effects accrue gradually over time, as opposed to being triggered by spectacular events (Dunlap 2021). Hence, infrastructures can exemplify both structural and slow violence. They reveal how systems for water, waste, transportation, and energy operate within political and economic frameworks. These frameworks often exclude low-income communities from fair access while neglecting to consider non-human entities. Addressing these exclusions presents a formidable challenge.

Structural and slow violence is especially hard to detect not only because it is not instantly visible but also because it can be ingrained in the actual methods and tools employed to achieve societal benefits, such as strategies, regulations and legal frameworks, that are rightfully at the disposal of the democratic government (Burte and Kamath 2023). Roy (2011) talks about a phenomenon they termed state informality. According to Roy, there is a transition between two distinct aspects of governmental authority, as exemplified by both spectacular and slow forms of violence. This happens when the state differentially generates and manages spatial value, and through ‘flexible planning’, wherein various mechanisms employed often exist outside the realm of formal law but are largely justified by the principles and practices of legal planning. As analysed below, this type of slow violence occurs when there is a fluctuation caused by the state between what is deemed legal and illegal, thereby creating new circumstances in which laws can be selectively applied or disregarded (Burte and Kamath 2023).

It is here that the actually spectacular and grandiose project of Kanal Istanbul emerges as an example of slow violence. Kanal Istanbul is just the latest example of many state-led urban mega/regeneration/transformation/development projects since the early 2000s. In Istanbul, the implementation of neoliberal policies initially manifested in fragmented urban endeavours and initiatives focused on urban regeneration and transformation, which later evolved into large-scale urban megaprojects through changing urban laws and regulations and 'flexible planning' (Gunay 2015). This new model was very different from the old model of Turkish urbanisation, which relied on overlooking squatting, but instead, this new model promoted complete and utter commodification of the urban space (Batuman 2015). These changes in policy and laws did not garner much attention by the public and slowly but surely prepared the basis for implementing bigger and more controversial projects over time. It is through slow and structural violence that we can understand the historical trajectory of the AKP's state driven urbanisation which has relied on a rich portfolio of interventions in laws, regulations and policy made Kanal Istanbul possible in the first place.

Urban megaprojects in Turkey

Right from the start, AKP (Turkey's ruling party since 2002) did not want to be labelled as a religious political party and used the term 'conservative democracy' as part of their manifesto. Especially during their first term (2002–2007), AKP emphasised the importance of secularism, social justice, democracy, pluralism, cosmopolitanism, free market economy and the conservation of moral values (Korkut and Yanik 2009; Akcali and Korkut 2015). However, as time went on and AKP strengthened its grasp on power, the discourse on abortion, education reforms, women's rights and gender inequality triggered more and more dissent in the secular part of the population (e.g. Gezi Park Protests). Eventually, it became clear that AKP's previous more liberal and democratic narrative was only used as pragmatic style in consolidating its rule (Akcali and Korkut 2015).

It is usually agreed that there has been a change and a shift toward more authoritarianism in AKP politics starting around the year of 2011 (Onis 2016). Bozkurt-Güngen (2018, 15) terms this phenomenon 'embedded authoritarianism', which curtails popular democratic empowerment and subsequently transitioned from a rule-based/technocratic strategy to a more discretionary approach in the 2010s. However, some scholars argue that the AKP politics have always been somewhat authoritarian for the following reasons (Ozden, Akça, and Bekmen 2017): firstly, the party did not truly get rid of the authoritarian neoliberalism established by the post 1980 coup d'état and secondly, it has kept the majoritarian and monolithic way of governing that it inherited from previous conservative and right-wing parties. This results in an intolerance for any kind of criticism and opposition within the party.

During the tenure of the AKP government, there has been a growing adoption of neoliberal economic policies, leading to the strengthening of capital accumulation (Tanyılmaz 2015). Through changing urban and

municipal law, giving subsidies and tax exemptions to private construction companies, increasing financialisation of the housing market and finally starting to implement massive urban regeneration, renewal, redevelopment and infrastructure projects, Turkey started to have a growing (but also very unequal) economy (Yardımcı 2020; Ergenc and Yuksekkaya 2022). Urban regeneration became a legal term in Turkey in 2004 and the expansive power of the Mass Housing Development Agency (TOKİ) had only accelerated the implementation of neo-liberal urban politics in a very centralised way (Batuman 2013). Several significant legislations have facilitated this process. For instance, Law No. 5162 of 2004 empowered TOKİ to formulate master plans in informal settlements. The enactment of the ‘Mass Housing Law’ in the same year expanded TOKİ’s authority beyond mass housing to encompass urban renewal and regeneration in metropolitan regions (Yilmaz 2010). Another pivotal law, passed in 2005, titled ‘The Law for Preservation and Usage of Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Monuments,’ allowed TOKİ to execute urban regeneration projects in historic neighbourhoods while resettling residents in housing developments on the outskirts (Yilmaz 2010). Additionally, an omnibus bill passed in 2008 introduced amendments to numerous laws and regulations, broadening TOKİ’s scope by modifying 27 statutes (Turkun and Yapici 2009). For example, one modification was made to Law No. 775 on Slum Clearance. The 2008 reforms enabled TOKİ to take direct control of *gecekondu* areas, bypassing municipal authorities and facilitating large-scale redevelopment without local participation. Another example is the amendment to Law No. 5018 on Public Finance Management and Control, which allowed TOKİ to acquire and sell public land—including schools and public buildings in prime urban areas—without requiring municipal approval or public auction procedures (*ibid.*). Overall, the omnibus bill enabled central authorities—particularly TOKİ—to override municipal planning decisions, thereby centralizing control over urban land and development. These reforms endowed TOKİ with extensive jurisdiction over informal settlements and public spaces, transforming it into a governmental entity with the authority to sell public schools located in the city centre (Can 2022). At present, this authority is divided between the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change, established through the consolidation of various ministries in 2012. Concerning housing and urban development in Turkey, these two institutions stand out as the most influential central government bodies (Can 2022).

Overall, the current administration adopted a policy focused on unfair wealth distribution and prioritised housing and construction over manufacturing as the driving force behind its national development strategy (Balaban 2012; Bayırbağ, Schindler, and Penpecioglu 2023). This state-led urbanization not only established the physical and structural foundation for the AKP’s political initiative but also influenced the operational approach of neoliberalism as a diverse system of governance. Collective efforts and conflicts over land, housing and infrastructure play a substantial role in constraining, modifying and even advancing neoliberal reforms within Istanbul while being not purely neoliberal. Consequently, Istanbul (and Turkish cities) exhibits an adaptation of ‘more-than-neoliberalism’ (Gibson, Legacy, and Rogers 2023).

An overview of Kanal Istanbul

Kanal Istanbul, a large-scale infrastructure project that proposes an artificial alternative waterway to the natural Bosphorus strait, was first announced to the public in early 2011. It was considered a headline-grabbing project that would probably never turn into reality (Hurriyet 2011). The idea of connecting the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea through an artificial canal has been around since the sixteenth century and was brought up by a few newspaper articles in Turkey in the 1990s, but it was only in the last couple of years that the current government declared only they have the power to realise this ‘grandiose utopia’ that is unmatched in its ambition (Can 2022). As assessed in the 2017 Environmental Impact Report (EIR) of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, the canal was set to be 45 kilometres long (Can 2022).

After the announcement and inclusion of the project (see Figure 1) in a more realistic manner in the latest EIR (2019), there has been a barrage of criticism from different parts of civil society. The most important of these come from the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the Union of Turkey Chambers of Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK), and fourteen bars from fourteen different cities. The TMMOB has urged urban citizens to file their own objections against the EIR and Ministry’s decision to accept Kanal Istanbul as environmentally safe, which led to long queues in front of the



Figure 1: The planned route of Kanal Istanbul. (Source: 2017 Environmental Impact Report).

Ministry of Urbanism and Environment (Can 2022). One important component in this overwhelming criticism from the scientific community, NGOs and the Municipality is that Kanal Istanbul would be the end of Istanbul and present an act of 'urbicide'. This use and narrative of urbicide is deeply embedded within the context of the history of urban resistance in Turkey especially starting with the Gezi Park Protests.

In this context, the Gezi Park Protests in Istanbul (and Turkey) marked a pivotal moment. In late May 2013, a coalition of scholars, activists and urban experts organised a modest protest reminiscent of the Occupy movement within Gezi Park, Istanbul. Their objective was to halt the demolition of one of the city's few remaining green spaces, slated to be replaced by a shopping complex disguised as the reconstruction of historic military barracks (Topçu Kışlası) that had been razed years earlier (Can 2024). The protests initially sparked over what seemed like a minor urban decision but quickly escalated into a significant movement asserting the right to the city, ultimately becoming Turkey's largest instance of civil unrest. The Gezi Park Protest is distinguished as the most substantial and renowned urban resistance in Turkish history. Additionally, in its aftermath, numerous grassroots-level encounters and neighbourhood forums emerged, fostering networks of solidarity among Istanbulites. These impromptu forums and alliances, coupled with the severe treatment of protesters during and after the protests, have attracted considerable scholarly interest (Pelivan 2020; Kuymulu 2013; Ozkaynak et al. 2015; Ozen 2020; Bilgiç 2016). The resistance against Kanal Istanbul can be seen as a continuation and another moment of resistance after Gezi, not least because it is organised with the experiences and knowledge under the umbrella of the 'Gezi spirit'.

Even though the Kanal project was not announced in an official and serious way up until 2019, the issue of who owns the land on and around the project route has been a topic of discussion. Then Minister of Environment and Urbanism of Turkey, Murat Kurum, stated in 2019 that the issue of creating land monopolies was a concern of theirs and they would not allow it, and that the owners were kept confidential (Tele1 2019). However, shortly after this announcement the Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu stated that there has been a significant amount of investment and real estate sales on and around the project area from the Gulf countries, and that around 30 million square meters of land belonged to three major companies (Sozcu 2019). The Kanal Istanbul project route is considered as a very lucrative investment for the transnational and national construction firms because most of this land is not exactly suitable for settlement and listed in the master and environmental plan of Istanbul as water basins, forests, pastoral and agricultural areas. In line with this, the profit and rent capture created by allowing this land to be developed are extremely high, but the project is likely to cause irretrievable damages to the environment of Istanbul (Baba 2020).

In mid-2021, the Ministry of Transportation announced that they were officially 'laying the foundation of the canal' (NTV 2021). However, this was a misleading announcement because by 'laying the foundation', the Ministry meant the start of the construction of a bridge (Sazlidere Bridge) that will potentially be on the Kanal Istanbul route should the canal be constructed. However, independently of the Kanal, the bridge has been part of the master

plans for years now, and it is/was part of the construction project of North Marmara Highway (Evrensel 2021). Most recently, the Kanal project was used again as part of the election campaign when Erdoğan announced right before the second round of general elections in Turkey (May, 2023) that there would be luxurious residential development on both sides of the project route, and that they (the AKP government) would take the necessary steps to start the project right after the election (Birgün 2023). Erdoğan got elected again as the President of Turkey and his party, AKP, secured the most MPs in the parliament. Following this election, the planning permissions and building licences have been granted to Turkish Airlines and Emlak Konut, a real estate investment company that is part of the Ministry of Urbanism and TOKI, to start the construction for said residential area (Güvemli 2023).

At the time of writing (April, 2025), Turkish democracy—what remains of it—continues to face severe erosion under the pressures of the current administration. On 23 March 2025, Istanbul's mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu was arrested on corruption charges shortly after declaring his intention to run in the next general elections (BBCTurkce 2025). Following this politically contentious and widely regarded unlawful arrest, İmamoğlu took to Twitter on 17 April to expose a further escalation by the government. He revealed that, during his detainment, the administration had unlawfully initiated the construction of 24,000 housing units near the Sazlıdere Dam, a critical water source for Istanbul's European side, in connection with the controversial and ecologically destructive 'Kanal Istanbul' project (Euronews 2025). As İmamoğlu stated: 'They took advantage of my absence and started the construction of 24 thousand houses around the Sazlıdere Dam, one of the most important water resources of the European Side [of Istanbul], for the sake of the profiteering and plunder project called 'Kanal Istanbul.' This act has drawn widespread criticism, with reports from İmamoğlu, opposition leader Özgür Özel, and multiple media outlets indicating that advertisements for these illegally constructed homes are already being broadcast on Arabic-language television channels, targeting foreign investors (BBCTurkce 2025). The move exemplifies the administration's increasing reliance on extractive urban development, authoritarian suppression of political opposition and strategic dispossession in pursuit of capital accumulation.

Temporalities of violence, territories of protest

Violence against the environment

As stated in the Istanbul Environment Plan (2006, 478), the natural and agricultural importance of the ecological corridor of Kanal Istanbul needs to be preserved to be able to sustain the continuity of wildlife and urban air circulation. However, this preservation is rendered impossible by allowing development on this land. Furthermore, the ecosystem sustained by the three seas (Black Sea, Marmara Sea and Mediterranean Sea) is a product of thousands of years of evolution (Michael and Ozsoy 2002). The Turkish Strait System (TSS) that consists of the exchange of water of the three seas is a unique system in the world with its two-layer flow (Ozsoy and Saydam 2014). The project does not

seem to consider the uniqueness of this system (at least in none of the documents that were released by the state so far) and this can cause irredeemable damages to Marmara Sea (Ozsoy and Saydam 2014). One of the respondents goes on to explain:

The project will cause the water of three seas to be mixed in a way that would cause hydrogen sulphite and increase the saltiness level, so in other words, the seas will smell like rotten eggs (Interview).

As of now, 25% of Istanbul's municipal borders are agricultural land and 86% of this land is located on the project area (Baba 2020; Gurbuz 2014). These areas contain cultivation of high value crops and rearing livestock and are an important part of the Istanbul market. This would lead not only to a major loss of agricultural products for all of Istanbul but also to the displacement of farmers and inhabitants who live and work in these areas. One of the respondents pointed out that:

It is so outrageous to me that these policy makers do not learn any lessons from the global pandemic we are going through. It became so painfully clear how important close by agricultural land is for big cities and they propose the destruction of all of the agricultural land of Istanbul with this project (Interview)

Finally, the flora and fauna habitat of Istanbul is home to 2500 different species of flowering plants and ferns (Tolunay 2014). The area surrounding Lake Terkos which is a part of the project is among the richest biodiversity of flora in Turkey (Kalem 2014). However, if the project is completed with all of its extra development of residences, recreational areas and so on, this biodiversity will be at risk of extinction. In addition, by effectively severing the mainland connection and turning the Istanbul Peninsula into an island, migration routes for wildlife will cease to exist and will effectively lead to the destruction of any wildlife (Baba 2020). One respondent points out: 'They propose that these birds will choose another route for their migration, but nature does not work that way (Interview).'

The Northern Forests Defence, an NGO that defends the environmental integrity of the northern forests of the Marmara Region, made significant decisions and progress through the utilisation of forums held in parks. This tactic of holding public forums started during the Gezi period. Despite the dedicated efforts of the Northern Forests Defence, the construction of the Third Bridge and Third Airport proceeded, resulting in the destruction of Istanbul's last remaining green area, known as The Northern Forests. According to their report that was published in 2021 (p.15), they reiterated the same possible damage outlined above, should the canal be constructed. However, it is of course not very effective to raise awareness and draw attention to such a catastrophic project by giving statistics on sea water, plants and birds. That is one of the reasons narratives of urbicide was utilized as a strategy to reveal the slow violence that could be created on the environment.

Davies (2019, 2) surmises that 'slow violence presents us with a political geography of deferred environmental threats, where violence is outsourced'.

This is why the consequences of the impacts of slow violence do not attract as much attention as they should compared to the more immediate and dramatic threats, and even though Kanal Istanbul is a spectacular infrastructure project, the environmental threats it presents are not immediately visible. In a way, it is the spectacularism of the project (and the promise of development that comes with an infrastructural project) that hides the irretrievable damages to the environment. The elusive and gradual effects of climate change, acidification of oceans, or in this case an urban megaproject that would take several years to construct with countless changes to urban and environmental legislation, do not create the same sense of urgency for the general public. For the most part, the environmental violence has not been really acknowledged as violence at all and slow violence as a concept can change that (Nixon 2011, 2). I will explain below that even though the project has not started yet, there have been steps taken to further damage the environment that are not immediately visible.

Violence against the livelihood of Istanbulites

According to the Urban Master Plan prepared by the Istanbul Water and Sewerage Administration (İSKİ), Istanbul will be unable to provide enough water for its existing inhabitants (İBB 2006) in the coming years. With the construction of the project there will be not only a significant increase in Istanbul's population, but also the project proposes to close down the existing water basins (i.e. Sazlıdere Water Basin). Ultimately, the risk of significant water shortages is imminent, should the Kanal Istanbul project be constructed (Baba 2020). However, it is important to emphasise that there will possibly be water shortages in Istanbul in the future if there are no steps taken to prevent the water shortages (no steps have been taken so far). The canal increases the risk of significantly worsening this oncoming problem:

One of the dams and water basins [Sazlıdere] that the project is proposing to destroy can provide the whole of Istanbul with water for 24 days straight by itself. I have never seen an urban project that is constructed at the expense of its own survival resources. First for everything. (Interview).

And the interviewee goes on to explain further:

It is said the project will last around 7 and 4 years of this will include excavation work. This excavation work also includes exploding parts of the area with dynamites, of course. Just imagine living in that area while all this is going on. These people will be exposed to noise, molecules and asbestos every day. Every day. (Interview).

This highlights the slow violence due to effects of the toxic geography that is being created by this urban megaproject. Another respondent talks about the possible development pressure for the city of Istanbul and how the livelihood of all Istanbulites can be affected severely:

The development pressure after the construction of the project will be overwhelming...In the end, Istanbul will be unliveable. There is no way around it...In addition, there are important wind corridors in Istanbul that go from North

to South and that should not be interrupted by any kind of development or built environment. This project disrupts those corridors completely and that would result in the heating of the whole entire city area. (Interview)

The accounts of the respondents are portraying a very bleak picture through technical terms. Nixon (2011, 10) points out that ‘to confront slow violence requires [...] that we plot and give figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time’. The community chose the use the term *urbicide* to give shape to these threats. According to my own personal experience as a scholar activist and contributor to the meetings and forums held to inform the public, talking about ‘heat islands’ or ‘development pressure’ does not create a sense of urgency about a project that could be built in the near or far future. However, the narrative of possible *urbicide* was able to draw much more attention for the people of Istanbul and make them think about their and their children’s future in the city.

This difficulty in explaining the slow and structural violence in the context of the Kanal project was not only related to the construction of the actual canal, but also to the loss of land and dispossessions that have been occurring due to change in urban laws and policies. This has been made possible especially with one recent definition added to the law no: 6306, which is the law that deals with land (urban or rural) under the threat of natural disasters (especially earthquakes). This definition was called ‘reserved built environment’, land that would be used as new built environment and that is located in a potential natural disaster area (read: earthquake fault line and surrounding area). Such land is classified by the Treasury at the request of TOKI. Areas under direct threat by natural disasters and land that belongs to the national and local state are prioritized, but private property or land can be included in this designation of reserved areas as well. More importantly, this means that any kind of land (i.e. agricultural, forest, husbandry and urban land) can be designated as a reserved area if the Treasury agrees to do so. This change ultimately opened up any land in Turkey for development and created enormous amounts of rent gaps, especially in Istanbul. Having said that, much of the land in the project route is already designated as reserved built environment area and this move effectively excluded the Municipality in terms of its development and planning. This top-down legal decision is also a perfect example of the dynamics of urban growth machine in Turkey that is facilitated by the state through authoritarian practices and the operation of a hybrid ‘more-than-neoliberal’ form of governance. One respondent explained this:

The planning authority of reserved areas are given to the Ministry [Ministry of Environment and Urbanism] and taken away from the Municipality. This is such an anti-democratic approach?!? It is unheard of. (Interview).

Finally, the evictions and displacement have already started in some neighbourhoods located on the Project route. Inhabitants of the Şahintepe neighbourhood are already served notices to relocate somewhere else due to the Kanal Istanbul Project and they have recently legally challenged this decision made by the Ministry (Sozcu 2022). Inhabitants of Şahintepe are the

first to experience the structural violence that making Kanal Istanbul a reality implies. This clearly shows the very real damage the Project is already causing. A respondent explains the damage this project has already done and will do to the possible future of Istanbul:

Oh, dear, there is no future for Istanbul. Istanbul has already surpassed all of its environmental and social thresholds. In truth, Istanbul has been sacrificed to the economic growth policies of Turkey It pains me to say this, but that is the truth. (Interview)

Even if the narrative of urbicide is mobilized for maximum effect and a chance to stop this project before even fully starting, it became clear to me during interviews that all the expert respondents were very emotional about the real possibility of this 'urbicide' becoming reality and the very real damage it has already caused.

Resistance against violence

Although the project itself has not started fully yet, there is growing and important opposition against it. In this section I will investigate the ways in which resistance to this project is informed by strategies developed over the last 15 years and especially since the Gezi Park Protests. I argue that the use of the urbicide narrative is the most prominent strategy used by the experts and activists to resist the project and that is one of the reasons why there has been such growing criticism even before the start of the project. In addition, both activists and experts are familiar with the consequences of this project and who it really benefits. On the other hand, the central administration has been familiar with the legal resistance and protest tactics of the opposition. To resist this project and to suppress that resistance, many of the strategies have been used by both sides.

The project has long been kept under wraps from everyone who would be affected by it, including the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. This lack of transparency was used as a tactic by the central administration to delay any opposition to the project and continues to be used to cover the slow and structural violence on the environment and the facilitation of dispossession through capital accumulation by a change of legislation (i.e. law 6306, major investments by Gulf country companies) and closed-door tenders. In the end, this state tactic has been relatively successful and made it harder to resist the project. One of the respondents from the Municipality contends that:

After there was an administration change in the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality [mid-2019], the planning work of the Kanal Istanbul Project apparently continued under the authority of the Ministry [the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Turkey] without the knowledge of the Municipality. I think it was December [2019] that the Ministry announced the new environmental impact plan for the project and we [the Municipality] knew nothing about it. They [the Ministry] opted to continue this work from Ankara and without our knowledge or consent. We had no choice but to start the legal process to oppose this. (Interview)

All of the informants and people in the meetings I attended over the course of 2021 that were held by NGOs and urban justice organisations emphasised the importance of the inclusion of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in resisting the Kanal Istanbul Project. In these meetings, the general public who were there to be informed by the experts and the scientific community, were at times suspicious of and overwhelmed by the immense negative effects and ‘urbicide’ described, and asked the question ‘Is there really no positive to it? Are you not even able to name one thing?’ and in the face of this question the experts were usually silent and admitted that in their professional opinion there is no obvious positive effect of the project that could justify the ‘urbicide’ (in their words) it would potentially create. They also stated that those experts hired by the central government in the making of the project and the writing process of the EIR were invited to several public meetings as well; however, they declined the invitation. This further reinforced the narrative of urbicide and ultimately put the outspoken scholar activists’ and experts’ statements in direct conflict with the governmental officials that are in favour of the project.

The project is presented to the Municipality as a *fait accompli* without any consultation or discussion. This further shows the ‘deal-making’ features of the ‘more-than-neoliberal’ governance currently at play. However, the fact that the Mayor of Istanbul (Ekrem İmamoğlu) took a firm stance against the project and positioned his organisation and politics as being unequivocally against this ‘project of urbicide’ (in his own words Cumhuriyet 2021) gave every organization and the scientific community more legitimacy and created a safe and an accredited platform for people to raise awareness and make their case against the Project. The mayoral election of İmamoğlu in 2019 is seen by many urban justice organizations, including all of my informants, as a direct result of the strategies used and developed during the Gezi Park Protests. One of my informants stated:

‘.. I see the effects of Gezi continuing even now. Even the fact that the opposition won in the 2019 local elections is a sign of that... Even in small neighbourhoods, people started organising protests and small occupations to protect their parks and fight for people’s right to stay put. This consciousness was not as prevalent before.’ (Interview)

This narrative of urbicide then became a strategy employed by opponents of the Kanal project, many of whom also form a significant part of the broader opposition to the AKP. The fact that this project would ‘murder’ Istanbul was repeated not only by my informants but also in various meetings I attended. Many respondents saw the Municipality’s involvement as a further democratization of urban politics in Istanbul and a beacon of hope in a sea of authoritarian practices. One respondent explains this as follows:

So the way I see it, the involvement of the Municipality in the resistance against Kanal Istanbul is not only unavoidable in protecting the rights of urban citizens, but also indispensable to its democratic existence. Can you imagine that right now most of Istanbul is under the planning authority of the Ministry!!! This does not correspond to any kind of urban planning approach anywhere. (Interview)

A very important part of the resistance includes the legal challenge against the project. Legal resistance is still seen as the most important and most effective strategy by most of the respondents and the urban justice organisations I interviewed. However, it is also the most time consuming and expensive one. Legal resistance also becomes very challenging under the current political landscape as the current governmental administration can and does modify laws and regulations to fit their own agenda (i.e. law 6306) and can prolong lawsuits by using the bureaucratic system, which also works to depoliticise the very real and political consequences of many urban projects and decisions. When asked what could be the best outcome from the legal resistance, a respondent stated that:

What we need is a stay of execution order. That is what we need for any kind of lawsuit against a controversial urban project or decision. However, it has not been granted so far even with countless expert reports that state the urgency of the situation. (Interview)

The central government has repeatedly used bureaucratic mechanisms to its advantage to depoliticize and delay urban decision-making. In many cases, it has secured cancellations or stay-of-execution orders only after projects in Istanbul were already completed or nearing completion (e.g. the Sulukule Project, Tarlabası Project, Ağaoğlu 1453 Maslak Project, etc.). This tactic not only works to get the projects done, but it also creates structural and slow violence by moving the projects and their long-term consequences out of sight by making it look like the opposition for these projects is being considered by the legal system. This is also why the narrative of urbicide was utilized to create a sense of urgency for Kanal Istanbul and prevent it from falling out of public view by disappearing into an endless string of legal cases that do not make much sense to the general public. The successive AKP governments starting from 2002 deliberately created an increasingly inconsistent and disorderly institutional and legal framework. This framework not only granted local and national authorities the freedom to pursue urban initiatives, but also created opportunities for resourceful individuals to strategically position themselves in relation to the generation of urban income—a form of revenue derived from economic gains and financial flows produced through urban development processes, such as land speculation, real estate investments, infrastructure projects, and the commodification of urban space (see Şengül 2013). In addition, and in this particular case, it made it possible for the state to bypass any institution when needed.

To reiterate the lack of transparency, hybrid form of urban governance and increasing pressure and violence on the public resisting to this project, in late 2020, the central government opted to undermine the Municipality and confiscated municipal busses that were assigned to urban resistance movements planning to visit the project area, raise awareness, have a peaceful hike/protest and hold an art show with paintings from several artists who were against the project. They stopped the activists from ever going to the area on the grounds of the pandemic, quickly prepared a decree that banned protests and any kind of interviewing, painting or singing activity in the area. The activists, instead,



Figure 2: The impromptu protest in the centre of Istanbul. (Source: Author's personal archive).

decided to hold an impromptu protest in the city centre (see Figure 2). There have been other protests that were stopped in a similar fashion.

In addition, the police force was ordered to dispose of the posters that were allowed and encouraged by the Municipality against the project and could be found all over Istanbul (see Figure 3) (Sozcu 2020). This oppressive approach is also why I could not interview any inhabitants living on the project route.



Figure 3: Taken down posters Source: <https://www.birgun.net/haber/ibb-nin-kanal-istanbul-afisleri-kaldirildi-sosyal-medya-kampanya-baslatti-yakanalyaistanbul-312677>.

The latest development in this lack of transparency came in one of the trials in one of the ongoing lawsuits (filed by TMMOB and some citizens affected by the project). On the 24th of March 2022, the court decided to send experts to the project area without the acknowledgment and knowledge of the plaintiffs. TMMOB made a press announcement saying that (March, 2022 in front of the court):

The will of the public has been destroyed in the preparation stages of this project and now the same is attempted to be done in the court. The court is basically arranging a touristic fieldwork with the experts without the knowledge of plaintiff citizens and TMMOB.

At the time of writing, the central government is still adamant on realising this project. This seems more of a reality now, not least because the opposition lost the 2023 National Elections and the AKP government with Erdoğan will be governing the country for the next 5 years. However, even though Kanal Istanbul was used again as political leverage by the AKP during the local election campaign in March 2024, the governing party faced a significant loss of major cities, including Istanbul. The re-elected İmamoğlu repeated his intention use every tactic to prevent this project from being realised. He recently reaffirmed this commitment even from prison.

Conclusion

This paper employs the uricide narrative as a strategy used by activists and experts as part of their repertoire of collective action and explores the slow and infrastructural violence caused by Kanal Istanbul as part of the latest urban megaproject in a 20-year-long period of state-driven urbanism policies. The Gezi Park Protest was an important moment of rupture in the history of the Turkish Republic and the networks, connections and ideas from that moment are utilised and distilled into other products of collective action. The Gezi Protest was established as a response to the radical urban restructuring initiatives and the privatisation of urban space (Kuymulu 2013; Karakayalı and Yaka 2014). Kanal Istanbul project and the growing resistance against it is the latest addition to that repertoire and shows itself as a platform for new emerging tactics not only for the opposition but also for central government.

The national state undeniably wields significant influence in implementing plans and laws that result in violent outcomes, as well as in employing 'legitimate' force. This becomes especially important in this project through the 'flexible planning' and cherry-picking which regulations to implement and which laws or regulations to bypass (i.e. law no 6306 and mobilising police force against the Municipality). This evidently results in slow and structural violence and serves as a tool in the central state's arsenal to implement their agenda with least resistance.

As discussed in the findings, the accounts of the respondents highlight a complete dystopian future of Istanbul, should the project be completed. It is not possible to know, at this point, if Istanbul would actually be 'destroyed' due

to the damages the canal would create, but, it is important to understand why the accounts are so clear cut and can sometimes even be read as hyperbolic. This increasing resistance has been growing with different tactics and strategies from the urban justice movements, experts and activists with relation to the policies, projects and tactics of the central government. This resistance is not only about Kanal Istanbul but it is part of a repertoire coming together since the early to mid 2010s. The narrative of urbicide here is used to achieve a high level of urgency and draw as much attention as possible while fighting the slow, structural and infrastructural violence created by the government. As mentioned above, even though legal resistance is regarded the most important tactic, it is especially hard for the opposition to clearly explain to the public the out of sight consequences of changing urban laws and regulations or the endless lawsuits filed against the project and why, and explain the direct damage Kanal Istanbul would create on the environment through technical terms.

In addition, Kanal Istanbul showcases various ranges and degrees of violence (currently happening and potential) that immensely shape the urban space and its future. This regime, along with Turkey's current national governance, which had evolved beyond pure neoliberalism, eventually lost its momentum. The AKP's ability to use its strategic position as a mediator in urban transformation declined as the short-term gains gave way to long-term drawbacks. Turkey's national governance structure remains heavily invested in reshaping its cities, but it has become increasingly fragile due to the inconsistencies in its conservative-neoliberal populism (Bayırbağ, Schindler, and Penpecioglu 2023). Especially since the 2010s, the profit-led and market-first approach has made the costs of structural and slow violence—both on the urban poor and on the environment—increasingly visible (see Batuman 2013; Erman 2016). This paper demonstrates that dynamics of solidarity and resistance are connected and that protest is an ever-growing process of tactics and strategies. Moments of rupture and crisis emerge as the peak moments during a concentrated urban dissent and are usually violently and rapidly surpassed; however, this paper shows that their legacy and the connections and networks they flare up are much more long lasting and inform many other types of resistance.

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