

**Imminent Infrastructures:
The promise of Kanal Istanbul
and the experiences of people in Durusu**

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Abstract

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Summary

Based on fieldwork between August and December 2019 in Istanbul, media analysis, and historical research, this thesis explores the tension between the materiality and immateriality of infrastructures. Its case is Kanal Istanbul and its impact on Durusu village. As Kanal Istanbul has been in the works for more than ten years and is still not actualized, it has engendered a speculative moment that presents a rich ground to observe how imagination and speculation come into play when thinking of this infrastructural tension. How is the emerging future that is contingent on Kanal Istanbul negotiated by the people living in Durusu, the government, and the groups resisting the construction of the canal? I will argue that even in the material absence of Kanal Istanbul, it has significant impact as a speculative imaginary. It evokes a wide range of competing affects that are embedded in the inextricably interlinked *in/visibilities* of multiple infrastructures and speak to the politics of future building.

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Things rarely go as planned in life and increasingly so at that. These past three years have taught me so much about how to grow with change, to let go but also to persist.

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List of Abbreviations

AKP: Justice and Development Party

ISKI: Istanbul Water and Sewage Administration

CHP: Republican People's Party

TOKI: Mass Housing Development Administration

ISI: Istanbul Water Administration

TEMA: Turkish Foundation for Combating Erosion

IBB : Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

GAP: Southeast Anatolia Development Project

IYI-SEN: Construction Workers' Union

WWF: World Wildlife Fund

TMMOB: The Chamber of Environmental Engineers

Introduction

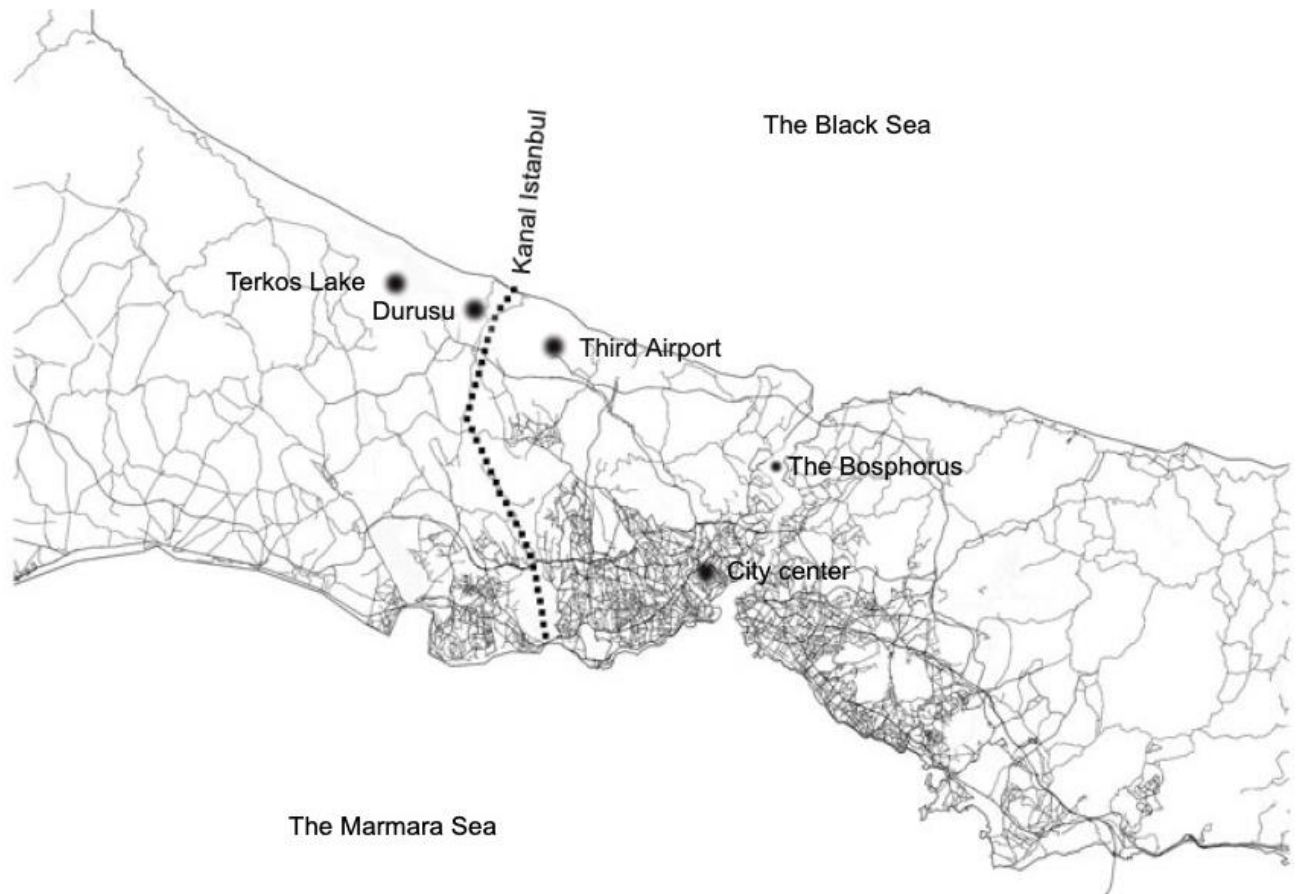
It was more than ten years ago at this point that I first heard about the Crazy Project: Kanal Istanbul. I was taking a break at the cafeteria from studying, scrolling through Turkish news on my phone. After reading a news article explaining the project, I distinctly remember looking around me in disbelief and waiting for other people to react, only I was in Montreal and no one else had this astonishing news on their radar. So I frantically messaged my parents and friends trying to understand what this was about and whether it could actually happen. I remember the visceral sense of urgency I felt. I wanted to take action, do something. In the years that followed, Kanal Istanbul disappeared from public attention for months and years at a time, periodically resurfacing in the media and dinner conversations.

Kanal Istanbul is a multi-billion-dollar project presented by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, under the leadership of President Tayyip Erdogan, and as part of Vision 2023 alongside other major mega-projects such as the Third Bridge, Third Airport and the Northern Marmara Highway – all located in Northern Istanbul. It includes the construction of a canal that would cross from Black Sea to the Marmara Sea, turning the European side of Istanbul into an island and running forty-five kilometers from Durusu to Kucukcekmece. It was projected to be 275 meters wide and to have six bridges going across it. Around 600 thousand new housing units are planned to be developed around it. Redirecting the busy tanker traffic from the Bosphorus is presented as the primary reason for the project's necessity. The scale of finance needed, geo-political implications, and the expected ecological impact makes this project highly complicated and contested.¹ The Environmental Impact Assessment report listed the expected cost of the project as 16.65 billion dollars back in 2017, which is more recently estimated to be closer to 50 billion dollars (Durdag). There have been various reports and books² published in

¹ There are two main informative websites that function as an archive for the resources related to Kanal Istanbul. One of them by the AKP government listed as “kanalistanbul.gov.tr” and the other by the municipal government in partnership with the coalition organizing against the project called Istanbul Kent Konseyi, with the web address kanal.istanbul. Both provide a timeline of the progression of the project since 2011 and resources on why the Kanal is necessary or destructive.

² Some examples include Ya Kanal Ya Istanbul, Kanal İstanbul Çok Disiplinli Bilimsel Değerlendirme, Environmental Impact Assessment Report.

the past ten years looking at the possible implications from various perspectives including social, environmental, economic, legal, political, geographical, and geological.



Al, Meltem. Kanal Istanbul's Route [map] Scale not given. In: "Walking in the Periphery: Activist Art and Urban Resistance to Neoliberalism in Istanbul." *Review of Middle East Studies* 52(2): 311.

Figure 1: Map of Istanbul with the proposed route of the canal

As we are speaking of a relatively long timeframe, it might be helpful to have a brief timeline of important moments concerning the development of the project, going from its initial announcement in 2011 until mid-2021, at which point I stopped including new information into

my writing. Kanal Istanbul was first announced to the public in April 2011 in a large press conference held at the Istanbul Congress Center, ahead of the elections which took place later in June 2011. In February 2014 the project's budget and details (including the route, depth, width of the canal, which would all be changed many times later on) were shared with the public. TEMA (Turkish Foundation for Combating Erosion, an NGO working on reforestation and the protection of natural habitats) followed this with a report on the impact of the mega projects in Northern Istanbul, including Kanal Istanbul. In 2017, IBB released a promotional video on what the canal would look like once built. In 2018, the government held public consultations and announced changes to the route and the budget for the canal. In June 2019, The Municipality of Istanbul elections were won by the main opposition party, CHP, and Ekrem Imamoglu became the new mayor of Istanbul. In October 2019, the Environmental Impact Assessment Report was released and then approved on December 23rd, and the public were given ten days to contest it. In January 2020, the Environmental Impact Assessment Report got its final approval, but this decision was later taken to court by both HDP (another opposition party) and TEMA. Later that year, there was also a protest organized in Kucukcekmece, the southern end of where the canal would pass, to form a human chain with hundreds of people (Ekoloji Birliđi).

There has been significant public organizing³ against Kanal Istanbul around its expected ecological impact and demanding the redistribution of resources given the economic crisis that Turkey is in. As opposed to the 25-thousand-dollar per-person annual income that Erdogan had promised to reach by 2023 during a speech back in 2011, the average income in 2021 was at 37 thousand 400 liras, which equals two thousand and eighty Canadian dollars (Gelir ve Yaşam Kosulları Araştırması 2021). The lack of infrastructural preparedness for environmental disasters such as flooding, and earthquakes is another issue often brought up by the opposition to the project.⁴ More recently, the floods in the Black Sea Region, which resulted in the death of eighty-one people, and the forest fires in the southern coast in the summer of 2021, bring up questions of responsibility about our collective futures. All the more so given that the president

³ As well as municipal since the election of Ekrem Imamoglu as the mayor of Istanbul.

⁴ This worry is viscerally felt in the collective consciousness through the headlines stating that since 1999, 330 of the 407 emergency gathering spaces have been developed into shopping malls and condos (Bianet 2019).

conveniently argued that these disasters were the responsibility of the municipalities and not the national government. It is also worth noting that during the time of writing this thesis, the pressing economic needs of the country (and therefore what Kanal Istanbul budget spending gets compared to) have changed several times, including COVID-19, an earthquake, fires, and floods.

As someone who considers Istanbul their home, I share these worries and am motivated by them. In 2018 when I was deciding on the focus of my thesis for my Masters, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (at the time led by an AKP leader) had announced that the construction of Kanal Istanbul would be starting soon. The public consultations had begun and there were speculations that the bidding had started. Since I had been following the story on Kanal Istanbul for a while and was committed to engaging with it in some way, I decided to pick it as my topic of research. I decided to do my fieldwork in Durusu – a small town in Northern Istanbul along the route of the canal, and therefore one of the communities that would be most immediately impacted by the project – assuming that by the time I was doing my fieldwork, conducting interviews and doing participant observation, the construction would have started.

However, by mid 2019 when I arrived in Durusu to start my research, the fate of Kanal Istanbul had become uncertain. There hadn't been a word from the government regarding the project in months, the construction hadn't started, and when I prompted a conversation about Kanal Istanbul in Durusu, more often than not I was asked:

Is that still happening?

All my questions were now in reference not to the material and present process of Kanal Istanbul being *built*, but rather in reference to the hypothetical possibility of it. My research topic had, due to this stalled project, become speculative. I had conversations with several people including my supervisor at this point about whether I should change my topic but ultimately decided to continue looking at Kanal Istanbul, and Durusu. My initial questions were: how will the construction of Kanal Istanbul impact everyday life in Durusu? What are the ways in which people will support or resist the development of Kanal Istanbul? What will be the ways in which people navigate change in their environment instigated by the construction of Kanal Istanbul? In

the face of this absent development and the uncertainty around the fate of the project, these questions needed to be revised.

“How do we study something that does not yet exist?” This question, also evoked by Rebecca Bryant regarding her work on *future*, is foundational in the theoretical framework of this thesis. How does this material nonexistence interact with the present *imaginary*? How do the “promise of infrastructure,” anticipation of change, and imagination of the future relate to each other?

This temporal shift due to the stalling of the project opened distinctions and relationalities that perhaps would not be visible otherwise. In the absence of any physical progress in the construction of the canal, my focus shifted to a deeper understanding of the context, histories, and relationships between the material and the imaginary. The imagination of Kanal Istanbul, as a theoretical agent distinct from its material becoming, and the implications of this distinction as it relates to the literature on infrastructure in general and the temporality of infrastructures more specifically, will be an overarching theme throughout this dissertation. The literature on temporality, with an attention to “future orientations,” (Bryant, 2020) imagination and infrastructures will be the bodies of literature that I mainly engage with.

Infrastructures have received scholarly attention in Anthropology both as an object of study and an analytical lens. Looking at the anthropology of infrastructure literature in 2022 is joining a conversation in high demand. Not only has infrastructure become a buzzword (Hetherington 2019b, 5) it will likely continue to expand and grow with the attention brought on by Covid-19 to essential services and infrastructures (Buier 2022). Some of these works explore the relationship between temporality and material affect in how promises of development operate.

In paying attention to temporality of infrastructures, Hetherington (2016)’s work on surveying in Paraguay and Appel’s (2018) work on rapid development in Equatorial Guinea both speak on the way that the linearity of developmental time comes into play. Hetherington approaches the issue from the perspective of “promises”, saying that each infrastructure carries

with it a certain promise that its creation was set to fulfill. However, he stresses that we must look past the initial promise to analyze the effects of said infrastructure, which might lead us to a completely new set of promises. Otherwise, Hetherington argues, we will “remain at the service of developmental time.” (Hetherington 2016, 14) Appel underlines that “developmental time has come to be associated [with] paved roads and skyscrapers, running water and electricity”, (Appel 2018, 58) which symbolize a desire for material equality in the form of infrastructural progress. She sees infrastructures as the landmarks of postcolonial imperialism, which present an avenue for anthropologists that she calls “archaeologies of the present” (Appel 2018, 59).

With a focus on the political and affective economies of concrete, Archambault (2018), Elinoff (2017) and Harvey (2010) draw attention to the relationship between social and the material. Archambault theorizes aspiration as a historically specific encounter between particular subjectivities and materiality. Elinoff investigates the political power of concrete based on his research in Thailand and argues that “the intersection of the socio-political and the material allows concrete to make power present while also opening possibilities for its disruption” (p 588) Harvey argues that “concrete is a form of matter with overt potential for both social and material transformation.”(p 42).

In his landmark review article on infrastructures from 2013, Brian Larkin describes infrastructures as “both *things* and the *relations* between things”. In explaining the relations between the two, he gives the examples of how we “see computers not cables, light not electricity, taps and water but not pipes and sewers” (Larkin 2013, 329). If we were to apply this exercise to Kanal Istanbul, what would we see?

Star (1999) argues that infrastructures are invisible, in the background, and only become visible upon breakdown – when they *fail* to function as intended by design. Di Nunzio (2018) points to the modernist representation of infrastructures as invisible and functional as the reason for the former lack of interest in the discipline. Other scholars point out infrastructures are far from being invisible (Edwards 2003, 188; Anand 2017, 225), in fact they are often expressions of state presence and power (Hetherington and Campbell 2014, 192). At this point I find Brian Larkin’s analysis useful, where he says that invisibility is “only one end at the extreme edge of a

range of visibilities that move from unseen to grand spectacles and everything in between... The point is not to assert one or another status as an inherent condition of infrastructures but to examine how (in)visibility is mobilized and why” (2013, 336). What does *visibility* and *invisibility* look like in relation to “something,” a process that doesn’t materially exist? Invisible to whom? When? Where? In fact, the *(in)visibility* can be shifting over time as well. So it would be worthwhile to reflect on Star and Ruhleder’s distinction that “an artifact becomes infrastructure for someone, within a set of relationships, and for a particular activity” (Star and Ruhleder, qtd. in Carse and Kneas 2019, 13).

This also brings us to the so-called material turn in anthropology, heavily influenced by Graham Harman, Jane Bennett and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, which centers objects and materiality instead of the classical approach of focusing on symbols and representation. They critique the modernist and post-modernist approaches that center representations and human subjectivity and hold it as the reason for loss of reality and sense of alienation. Within the so-called material turn, Bennett (2012) touches on the tension between the object and the process⁵ and offers that maybe we don’t need to choose between objects and their relations and argues that both objects and relations should be the focus of theoretical attention.

In the absence of Kanal Istanbul, I was faced with the invisible histories of the third airport and the ISKI water systems, two major city infrastructures in Istanbul. Expanding Larkin’s example: when we run the tap water and follow the pipes all the way to Terkos ISKI facilities, we see the people who are employed there, people who live by the lake where the water is drawn, people whose lives are defined by conditions imposed on to them so that a particular infrastructurality can exist as it does.

This particular temporal position – the moment or period when an infrastructure is not yet built – still has an “aura of theoretical novelty,” despite being empirically common (Carse and Kneas 2019, 9). In this thesis I will explore how the world-making capacity of infrastructures

⁵ The quarrel between Heraclitus who saw the fixity of objects as an illusion and objects as processes as opposed to Parmenides who argued that objects need to be outside time and space to degree to be comprehensible, is foundational in our theories of knowledge today.

expands beyond their function by interrogating the historical and material embeddedness of Kanal Istanbul. Based on my ethnographic encounters, historical research, and media analysis, I will argue that even in its material absence, Kanal Istanbul has impact as a speculative imaginary and evokes a wide range of competing affects that are both embedded in the inextricably linked *(in)visibilities* of multiple infrastructures and speak to the politics of future building. With this thesis I hope to contribute to the growing conversation on “unbuilt and unfinished” infrastructures. (Carse and Kneas 2019, Jewels 2017, Gupta 2018)

Chapter 1 focuses on the government’s narrative around Kanal Istanbul and the future imagination it draws from. I will provide an overview of how infrastructures have been studied as they relate to development and modernization and argue that in Turkey, large infrastructure projects have been instrumental in the government creating a particular imagination of the future. Based on analysis of media interviews with Erdogan, I will demonstrate that resistance against Kanal Istanbul is portrayed as a resistance against the development of the country and the resulting in claims of authority about who gets to decide what that future looks like.

Chapter 2 focuses on the experiences of people living in Durusu and the infrastructural history in the area that continues to shape people’s day to day experiences. I will argue that as an imaginary, Kanal Istanbul is already reconfiguring the relationship between center and periphery. Attention to materiality and historical affect help us understand the relationalities between past, present, and future.

Chapter 3 situates the temporality of Kanal Istanbul in relation to the broader literature on the temporality of infrastructures. I will argue that focusing on future orientation, contingent on infrastructures, complexifies the narratives around these projects. Future orientation, a teleologic approach to understanding action as it relates to the future, allows us to pay attention to the multiplicity of stories that live behind the narratives of support and resistance. I will argue that the imaginary holds space for negotiations of the future, where anticipation, speculation, and disbelief can orient the actions, in the spaces between material and immaterial, visible and invisible, past, present and future.

Buier (2022) warns of the tendency in anthropology when thinking of infrastructures to stress the uncertainty, multiplicity and instability with the risk of “overshadowing the analytical and political consequences of the systemic and stable character of infrastructural development” (Buier, 2022, 6) With a diversified methodology that brings in historical, material and rhetorical approaches (which was perhaps more of a result of practical circumstances and ease of access to certain type of knowledge), I argue that by recognizing the in-betweenness of “Kanal Istanbul” and holding it as both a historically and materially implicated object and as a process, we are able to better observe the how political realities are experienced, negotiated and contested.

Methodology

What does it mean to do research at “home”? Where does home end and the field begin? What is “the field”? Historically, anthropology has relied on the construction of an “other” and the vast majority of anthropological theory has been developed based on research done by western anthropologists studying the “other” in the global south (Munthali 2001). Today, boundaries of “home” and “the field” are understood to be more fluid than ever before and that was certainly true for my experience.

‘Fieldwork’ has historically been understood as a space distinct from home, a place of discovery, clear of distracting influences (Gupta 1997). James Clifford says that this assumes “specific practices of displacement and focused, disciplined attention” and that it has become increasingly more difficult to circumscribe. What is considered a distracting influence? And how do we cope with the inevitability of these “distractions” while doing research?

This challenge is addressed in the *Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography* by Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe (2020), where they call for a recognition of the ways in which ethnographic practices are being shaped by the researchers’ own lives and argue that a recombination of “home” and “field” is necessary. While expectations and capacities of fieldwork for an MA thesis are different from more long-term research projects addressed in this text, it is still very important to consider their arguments because the assumptions challenged, and questions asked are highly important.

How do researchers construct field sites and visits when they face personal, financial, and political constraints?

How do we ensure travel to field sites, and what do we do when travel is impossible?

How do these pressures redefine “home” and “field”?

What are the modes of doing research in short temporal spurts or remotely, when long-term fieldwork is no longer possible?

How do we learn?

How do we develop and maintain relations? How do we contend with the gaps in our findings?
(Gunel et al. 2020)

How did I construct my field site?

While technically my *field site* was set to be Durusu, a small town in northern Istanbul, I would say that my *field site* is the imagination of Kanal Istanbul, with particular attention to the experiences of Durusu residents. I had initially chosen Durusu because looking at the predicted route of the canal, it was the village closest to it. As my theoretical focus shifted towards imagination based on other readings, I could have broadened my scope, but I did not want to let go of or marginalize the ethnography that I completed in Durusu.

I had planned to do fieldwork from August to November 2019, and my initial plan was to spend a month in Durusu while commuting the other three months from the city center. I was determined to have at least several weeks of uninterrupted time in Durusu. When I first arrived in August I realized that there were no hostels or hotels in Durusu, except for one expensive hotel commonly hosting large conventions in the broader area. Nobody in Durusu offered to host me (nor did I expect this since we had just met), so I commuted from my house in the *center* of the city. Looking back, I wonder if I should have done any work to establish relations prior to arriving there, what I could have done to prepare.

The constantly shifting political landscape around Kanal Istanbul mentioned in the introduction was paralleled by my shifting capacity to do *fieldwork* – read, write, and pay attention – in the months of August to December 2019, as throughout this time, my grandmother, who I lived with, who raised me, and made me the person that I am today, became ill and passed away. It has been with a heavy heart and entangled emotions that I have thought through and written through these months of fieldwork and many more months of research.

In the weeks and months that I couldn't go to "my field" in Durusu, "the field" became a space that I could go into, even while being at home, and enter a new reality – a mental space removed from my day to day reality. Especially when the research topic is personal, anxieties,

fears, expectations, and disappointments around the fieldwork can also translate into significant methodological challenges. Letting go of my expectations about how this research process would go – first in anticipation, then in present, and finally in memory – was one of my biggest challenges in trying to engage with the topic.

Between the months of August and January 2019, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews. Six of them were with residents in Durusu and one was with an activist who did work in the area. Four of the interviews were done in August, and the remaining three were done in October and January. The people I spoke with, I mostly met through references, snowballing, or just picking up a conversation on the street or at a café. Besides these interviews, my engagement with the people in Durusu consisted of occasional chats in public spaces. These exchanges were fewer in number than I had hoped for. Perhaps because of the nature of the topic, or the political climate in Turkey, or because they did not have a particular reason to trust me, four out of the seven interviewees did not want to be audio recorded, so I had to take handwritten notes during the interviews. Not coming from a background in anthropology, this was also the first time I was interviewing anyone. These conditions during the interviews have impacted the quality and the depth of our conversations and therefore the quality of some of my research material.

Joanne Passaro (2020) warns against the tendency in anthropology to create a coherent “necessary other” bound by “areas” and “sites.” Historically, anthropological research in Turkey has been strongly divided along the lines of rural versus urban, with the rural being the main focus of observation (Holston 2009). Would we be looking at the experiences and lives in Durusu and surrounding villages if the canal was not happening? I am conscious of my own urban gaze and cautious not to falsely assume a homogenized rural experience. Instead, I have made an effort to pay attention to the ways in which this particular town is linked to multiple geographies and histories in varying ways.

My initial goal with this thesis was to observe, learn about, and document the experience of some of the people who would be intimately impacted by the construction of Kanal Istanbul. I reflected on why I chose Durusu over the course of both my fieldwork and writing process, and realized that I had perhaps defaulted to the idea that my field site needed to be a bounded space.

Formulating a clear research question was a challenge because of the scale of the project and the constantly changing circumstances. Maybe I romanticized what was unknown to me, the lives of people who live in the “peripheries” of the city, and wanted to document the possible destruction with the hopes of understanding some aspect of what was to be lost. I am not sure if it matters why I picked which topic, which site, but it does help excavate the assumptions, expectations, and imaginations with which I have started this thesis and have inevitably engaged with my fieldwork material and readings.

The fact that Durusu is a small town certainly had an impact on my presence there. I was immediately recognized as someone who was not from there and was assumed to be a day visitor from Istanbul. When I explained that I was doing research, I was often asked where I was studying, and disclosing that I was at a Canadian University prompted curiosity expressed in questions such as: “How did you end up in Canada? How are you making a living? Did you move there alone? Why would a university in Canada be interested in Kanal Istanbul?” I felt like this was a distancing factor, but perhaps it wasn’t, I don’t know. I was also almost always asked where my family is from. One side of my family happens to be from the Balkans, like the majority of the people in Durusu, which prompted the reaction “*oh you are one of us.*” This allowed me to establish a commonality, when my questions and presence, especially during the beginning of my visits when the conversation around Kanal Istanbul hadn’t picked up yet, seemed to be somewhat random. In contrast, when I went back in December, it seemed to matter less who I was and why I was there because many other people including journalists had started to come by to Durusu to talk to people about Kanal Istanbul.

At the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020, when Kanal Istanbul was being discussed in every political debate and being written about in every news outlet, a lot more attention was starting to be paid to the towns in Northern Istanbul like Durusu, Yeniköy and Karaburun. Quotes from people in these towns are often used to back up a stance either for or against Kanal Istanbul. I am cautious not to do that and to let the ambiguities and uncertainties in our conversations sit.

During my fieldwork months when I couldn't go to Durusu but had the capacity to work, I started looking for alternative ways of engaging with what was happening. This included going to the library to find new sources, reading up on the history of Durusu, listening to conference recordings and political debates on TV, and reaching out to environmental organizers in Istanbul. Two interviews (in addition to the seven mentioned above) made with environmental organizers were not useable and therefore not referenced in the thesis. They were also not recorded, and my handwritten notes were not sufficient enough though these interviews were insightful in providing guidance.

I had started off with the broad research question: How is the construction of Kanal Istanbul impacting life in Durusu? I repeated this so many times to friends, family, and family friends, with a slightly different articulation each time. Now looking back, each time I answered questions about my thesis topic was a performance of me trying to figure out the answer to that question.

Only when I flew back to Montreal in January did I actually sit down to listen through and try to make sense of my notes and recordings. As my ethnographic data was limited, I relied on other primary data sources online, such as interviews, speeches, and news articles. One of the reasons I ended up giving the space that I did to the government narrative on Kanal Istanbul was because the majority of publicly accessible online accounts of and narratives about the projects were those of government officials, in particular of President Erdogan, and later Ekrem Imamoglu. I also adopted a more historical focus to contextualize Kanal Istanbul but also Durusu⁶ in the broader infrastructural history of Istanbul. This allowed me to think about the politics beyond the current government and how the center and periphery are reproduced over a longer time scale.

⁶ Durusu was formerly named Terkos.

Chapter One: Territories of the Imagination

Kanal Istanbul, in its current form, was first introduced to the public in April 2011, to an auditorium full of thousands of cheering people in the Istanbul Congress Center, with a speech at a televised event by the then Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan. He started his speech with an excerpt from the poem “Deniz Turkusu” by Yahya Kemal, a very famous Turkish poet:

*Çıktığın yolda bugün yelken açık, yapayalnız,
Gözlerin arkaya çevrilmeyerek, pervasız
Yürü! Hür maviliğin bittiği son hadde kadar!
İnsan alemde hayal ettiği müddetçe yaşar.*

*Your sails are up, on the journey that you have begun, all alone,
Your eyes don't wander back, unashamed
March! Until the end of the liberated blue
One lives in this world only if he dreams/imagines.*

He repeated the last sentence looking straight into the audience and continued to refer to figures like Alp Aslan, Fatih Sultan Mehmet, Mimar Sinan, and their conquests, their dreams of creating the Ottoman Empire, building the Blue Mosque, and so on. Then he said:

And so, we also dreamt for our country, for our people. A dream where everyone is free, everyone can express who they are... where there is no unemployment, no poverty... of solidarity and brotherhood. That is the dream we have pursued. Our plans for Istanbul are a result of not only our love and devotion for Istanbul, but also of our dreams for it.

After forty-five minutes of talking about different residential, fast train, and construction projects they – the government – have dreamt of and completed over the years, he finally said:

It's time for bigger dreams my friends... Turkey is ready and the goal is 2023. Our GDP will be 3 trillion by 2023. Income per person will be 25 thousand dollars per year. We will build another 15 thousand kilometers of double roads, build 500 thousand new residences... The project I am about to announce is a multi-dimensional project. It is a project of energy, transportation, farming, education, employment, urbanism, also a family, residency, culture, and tourism project. Most importantly this is an environmental project. It is a project of protecting Istanbul, Istanbul's nature, surroundings, sea, water resources, greenery and wild (plant) life.

(Ohm, 2011,3:20)⁷

More than ten years later, Erdogan's aspirational words rest unfulfilled. The "promise" of infrastructure in this case lies in stark contrast to the economic crisis that Turkey has been in for several years, struggle in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increasingly alarming deterioration of the marine ecosystem in the Marmara Sea. While Kanal Istanbul has not materialized, it continues to live in the imaginary, in perhaps what Crapanzano describes as an "optative space time," a domain of hope and desire. In this chapter, I will first provide a brief overview of the history of modernization in Turkey and its relationship to infrastructure. The second section will look at the ways in which infrastructures have been implicated in government control and the third section will delve into the imagination of the Kanal which looks at how discourse itself can be a place of negotiation, bringing up questions of how much power stories can hold.

Modernity and Infrastructure

Turkey was founded as a nation-state following WWI in 1920. Historically, the state has achieved its power and legitimacy through establishing modernization as an urgent collective interest and promising to fulfill this ideal (Adaman and Akbulut 2021). For the pursuit of *modernity* and economic development in Turkey, urbanization has been a defining factor since the 1950s. This aligns with the dominant global narrative of development at the time, which understood the creation of capital through infrastructural projects as essential for economic

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development (Carse 2014, 9). Especially since the 1980s, starting with the liberalization of the economy and the emergence of neoliberalism under the leadership of Turgut Ozal, there has been significant government investment in various development projects and rapid urbanization (The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs 2010).

As of 2017, 74.4% of the population in Turkey lived in urban spaces as opposed to approximately 32% in 1960. With the recent constitutional change that made all villages into neighborhoods, the official rural population has gone down further to 9% (Resmi Gazete 28489, 6 December 2012 Kanun 6360). Durusu and the neighboring towns were among those impacted by this shift in legal status. Since the AKP came to power in 2002, the party adopted an even more active role in development projects – in particular, the formalization of social housing development which was led by TOKI (Mass Housing Development Administration) – while incentivizing private investment in luxury housing and infrastructures (Candan and Kolluoglu 2008), making “re-production of space” the most important capital accumulation model in Turkey (Cavusoglu and Strutz 2014).

Istanbul has always been at the center of the national development goals. Its population makes up one fifth of the country’s population “produces 27 percent of the national GDP, 38 percent of total industrial output, 50 percent of services, and 40 percent of tax revenues (OECD 2008).”(Akça et al.2014, 353) The vision of Istanbul as a global city has been a shared vision across the board for Turkey’s various political parties. The Istanbul Metropolitan Planning office’s (IMP) master plan on Istanbul was a way through which AKP had legitimized and planned for the structural changes for the city, including a shift from agriculture and industry to finance, real estate and insurance. It would replace poorer inner-city populations with high educated service workers. The Istanbul Master Plan was finalized in 2009, with the goal of mending the “the conflicts between natural and artificial environment systems and develop relationships that may provide sustainability of relationship between socio-economic activities and natural resources. In addition to this, it is aimed to decentralize, restructure the labor in terms of country and region, create sustainability of natural structure and life; produce regional planning strategies in transportation and logistics functions.” (Levend and Erdem, 2011,1) With

this plan the Northern Istanbul Forests, where the third airport currently sits and part of where Kanal Istanbul would cross, were designated as protected areas.

The move towards rapid urbanization brought with it increased investment in infrastructure. In Turkey, like elsewhere, infrastructure has long been strongly linked with modernity as infrastructure is identified as a means through which governments and people can participate in a *common*⁸ ideal, that is, “to be modern” (Larkin 2013). It is therefore not surprising to see that promotional material used in the advertisement of Kanal Istanbul draw on the rhetoric of modernity to give the project appeal. The flashy videos and digitally manufactured imagery – a discourse described by Tureli and Al (2019) as “urbanism of illusionary images” – present an imagination of the future of Istanbul, centering the project as the future of the city. This idea is echoed by the slogan “Istanbul’s tomorrow,” which is the slogan for the municipality of Arnavutkoy – the municipality that has had the most gain in population and land over the course of its existence, particularly under the rule of AKP, and which governs Durusu. It is also one of the main voting bases for the AKP. One such video by the Minister of Environment and Urban Planning has the following script in reference to the new waterside luxury condos and pedestrian walking areas that will be built around the canal:

*The sight of the yachts in the marina comes together with the beauty of the canal to
become exceptional portraits
The green spaces formed along the canal allows for elevated quality of life.*

*A modern city is being born
Becoming a boutique city of 167 million squares, generously welcomed by nature
Where traditional elements meet modernity and technology, a new life flourishes.*

⁸ Who is left out on this consensus? Whose participation qualifies it as common? Adaman and Akbulut (2021) underline that according to the Gramscian understanding of hegemony, the state is the bearer and deliverer of society’s collective interest.

*Conformable living spaces that finds its strength in nature, creates exceptionally
designed spaces.*

*The greenery and the 21st century modernism is harmonized for the project of the century,
Kanal Istanbul...*

*A modern city is being born where people won't have issues with traffic
(Haberturk, 6 June. 2021, 0:45)*

The script situates “modernity” away from traffic – despite cars being a symbolic epitome of modernity – and within “nature,” produced by labour (Stefanelli 2021, Escobar 1999). There is implicit recognition of the value of green spaces and mobility free of traffic for a higher quality of life in Istanbul, as well as attempting to create it in a seemingly new landscape, while simultaneously continuing to wipe out what little greenery is left in the urban city centers. Tureli and Al (2019) assert that Kanal Istanbul is an attempt to imagine the future by re-drawing the past, by assuming the past as an empty territory. Production of green spaces as a means of redrawing the past has historical precedence in the Ottoman Empire and early republic with the creation of gardens. In fact, the protests against the attempted demolition of Gezi Park, one of the few green spaces in this area, was met with violent crackdown that triggered the Gezi protests, the largest social organizing in Turkey’s recent history (Hahn 28 May.2018).

Who gets to access and benefit from this new “modern” city speaks to the unequal cityscapes that this megaproject⁹ will be producing. In one of my interviews, Gokturk – a satellite city and a gated community in Northern Istanbul, whose growth was primarily due to

⁹ There has also been increased investment, primarily through private-public partnerships in transportation infrastructures in the form of megaprojects. Megaprojects, often seen as vehicles for change in the global south, are loosely defined as “large-scale complex ventures that typically cost \$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational and affect millions of people” (Aalders et al. 2021, 4), and are commonly led by the state and dependent on international funding. Infrastructural projects in Northern Istanbul are part of a move in Turkey to increase investment in *transportation infrastructure*: up to 200 billion dollars into until 2023, in comparison to only 30 billion in healthcare. Carse (2014) warns that in the case of the Panama Canal, the disproportionate focus on the transportation industry has led to disproportionate centralization of power, wealth, and population in transit zones.

being positioned as “in nature”¹⁰ – was brought up as a place that used to be a swamp before the rich came, bought out the people who used to live in old houses, and developed the area. Akbulut and Candan (2018) underline that green spaces, lakes, sea fronts, and the promise of “a life in nature” are leveraged as selling points for many housing developments and gated communities like Beykoz Konakları and Vadi Istanbul. Similarly, the promotional materials for Kanal Istanbul, exemplified above, focus on the waterside yachts, walking areas, and green spaces as valuable aspects of these developments.

This brings to mind Erdogan saying in his speech:

Most importantly this is an environmental project. It is a project of protecting Istanbul, Istanbul's nature

From the political ecology perspective this is understood as the domestication of *nature* rather than a separation or dichotomization of it. However, in this case, it is not just the idea of “nature” that is being sold but a particular iteration of it, namely the aesthetic of the Bosphorus. In fact, another gated community built a few years ago on the southern route of Kanal Istanbul was named Sinpaş Bosphorus City¹¹ Kanal Istanbul’s relationship to the Bosphorus is, however, more complicated. As mentioned, it is argued that Kanal Istanbul is necessary for the safety of Istanbul and the Bosphorus because it would alleviate the congestion in vessel traffic and prevent tanker accidents.

The Bosphorus allows for the transit of more than 40 thousand ships every year which is more than the Panama and Suez Canal combined (UNIKAD 2015, Karahan 2019). It has a history of a thousand years and has been a symbol of cultural and economic capital for Istanbul. It is a “natural” strait and the only waterway connection between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. It is also claimed that the new cities built around the canal and the new highways

¹⁰ There is no one bounded and finite definition of nature, as the constructedness of the understanding of nature is now widely accepted, and its meaning has shifted over the course of history. The modernist conception of nature, one that is isolated, pure and separate from human context, where nature is situated in opposition to the social and the cultural is challenged in anthropological literature (Escobar 1999). At the same time, this essentialist and modernist idea of nature is still utilized to leverage interest, in examples like the promotional video for Kanal Istanbul.

¹¹ A thematic housing project that replicates a miniature version of the Bosphorus Strait in Halkali

will decrease traffic in the city and create new, modern living spaces. The condition of *contemporaneous modernity* is articulated through the production of nature and increased control over access to these spaces. In talk about infrastructures in the Turkish context, “modern” has become a linguistic vessel for the projection of political aspirations.

Social theories of modernization in the early- and mid-1900s understood development as a linear path that mapped a special global hierarchy of progress into a historical sequence whose temporal implications are described as “developmental time”¹². Within this hierarchy, the newly formed “modern” state of Turkey was designated a developing country. While the narrative around the hierarchy of development has widely lost credibility, it is still significant because notions of modernity and what it means to be modern are still intertwined with national narratives of progress (Ferguson 1992). In anthropology, the concept of multiple modernities was put forth as a way to critique this linearity; imagination, mainly used as a rhetorical device in anthropology, and the idea of the “social imaginary” have been used to explore this multiplicity. I will not be delving deeper into modernity and modernization as that is not the focus of this research, but I nonetheless wish to locate Kanal Istanbul promotional materials within this global theoretical framework.

In Turkey, the state narrative on progress fueled by infrastructural development can be characterized as a catch-up game. (Tanıl Bora Kıraathane'de: "Politika, Düşünce ve Kalite, 2020) Infrastructures have historically been defined as future-facing projects of national improvement, not only in Turkey but also globally (Knox 2017, 373). Embedded in modern understanding of the future, they are used as a measure of progress whenever and wherever they are valued as potential vehicles for change and improvement (Harvey 2018). The number of villages with access to electricity or the number of roads built by an active government are often articulated as representations of this progress (Gupta 2018). This is visible in Erdogan’s rhetoric when, in the excerpt from his speech quoted above in page eighteen, where he lists the number of roads and bridges that have been constructed under his rule as a representation of the development of the country. Infrastructures refer not only to artifacts but rather to the building of relationships

¹² Modernization and development were presented as linear paths of motion designated by post-world war Europe mapped a special global hierarchy of development (Ferguson 1999) .

(Carse 2014), valued as potential for change, and how that change is negotiated determines the kinds of tensions that arise in these processes of building relationships. Attention to infrastructures allows us to examine how their materiality is implicated in the organization and exercise of state power.

Power moves through infrastructure

Infrastructures (megaprojects in particular) have been instrumental in reinforcing hegemony and control (Tureli and Al 2019; Doureaujeanni 2009). Whether it garners support or dissent, the following studies explore the ways in which infrastructures are implicated in state control. Von Schnitzler (2008) through her analysis of prepaid water meters in post-apartheid South Africa shows the ways in which the water meters work to produce a certain citizenship ethics – “ultimately meter is about control” as put by one of her interviewees. Here, the practice of budgeting being promoted by the state favors those who have a stable income and disadvantages those who rely on informal and intermittent income, creating boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, rendering visible the political content vested in infrastructure.

Anne Spice, based on her work at the Unist’ot’en Camp argues that critical infrastructures to the Canadian government – such as the oil and gas pipelines– are technologies of settler colonialism that disrupt indigenous life and “infrastructures”. In Turkey also, political power is built through the production of space (Logie et Morvan 2017). Dam and HPP projects across the country, particularly in Southeast Anatolia or Kurdistan, have been instrumental in exerting government presence and control civil life even before the rule of AKP. Such projects have been studied as both a technopolitical and regional frontier (Stahl 2019) and as a means of security and border control with neighboring countries like Iraq and Syria (Kucukkaya 2019) .

One example of this is GAP, the South East Anatolia Development Project, which is described in the national education system as an effort to elevate the “underdeveloped” areas of the country. A report documenting the economic, social and cultural impact of various dams and HPP projects on predominantly Kurdish communities highlights that people in those communities were not consulted regarding the project and that there is a lack of regard for the

protection of cultural heritage and memory. These are also complicated by the way that the Turkish State has historically targeted Kurdish culture, life and heritage. Some of the areas that would be or have been submerged include graves of disappeared people and grounds for spiritual practices. In fact, Goner and Rebello (2016), based on their research in Dersim, a historically Kurdish and Alevi city, suggest that displacement of people can sometimes be the goal, rather than it being the way to capital.

Thinking of Istanbul more specifically, particularly in the past twenty years and under the vision of Istanbul 2023, gentrification has become a key component of producing a new Istanbul, and it abstracts the city from its past, claiming it as an empty space to be imagined. Tureli and Al (2019) identify Kanal Istanbul as active in a similar effort in rewriting the city's past and dictating its future. For this aim, TOKI has become a prominent actor in the redistribution of "non-commodified spaces" (Çavuşoğlu and Julia Strutz) such as forests, grazing lands, and shanty neighborhoods. Cavdar (2016) argues that TOKI, the mass housing administration that oversees the relocation of people displaced by gentrification projects (like Sulukule and Bezirganbahce),¹³ functions as a system to create dependency to the state, what she calls a "loyalty generator." She argues that by providing loans and housing to lower middle-class families and by removing them from their existing support networks, resulting in a loss of community and security, these housing policies make "household economies" dependent on the continued existence of AKP.

Similarly, Adaman and Akbulut (2019) argue that people who are most directly impacted by the cost of large-scale construction, energy, and transportation projects continue to garner support for AKP because of the prosperity that developmentalism promises. For example, in Soma, formerly an agricultural town that produced predominantly tobacco and olives, people were pushed into picking up jobs in the energy sector, in particular coal mining, to be able to survive. This even became a requirement for youth to become acceptable members of society and gain approval to be able to marry. Adaman et al (2018) identify the lack of alternatives to the dominant narrative of nationalism and point out that a desire to reinstate the glory of the Ottoman

¹³ Two neighborhoods in Istanbul that went through heavy gentrification that resulted in thousands of people being resettled to the outskirts of the city.

Empire, through various means including energy independence, is a reason for sustained public support.

While these pay attention to the multiplicity of ways that infrastructures are implicated, I would like to recognize Laura Bear (2020)'s call to engage with the term in a critical genealogical manner which also brings the focus into the totalizing aspects of the term. Through her *longue duree* analysis on the colonial history and privatization of Indian Railways, she challenges "the creation of a universal global thing called infrastructure" (page 46) as a neutral term which erases its historicity and materiality and argues that defining a nation's all circulatory networks as infrastructure enables the marketization of public works and their transformation into a global asset class. Speculation – "the play between visibility and invisibility" (p 48) in the process of financialization of public works is used to anticipate, stimulate and control the future. While her work is in reference to financial and legal structures, can we not also speak of a totalizing effect of the symbolic narrative around infrastructures? De Boeck (2011) points out that despite being the "victims" of the new city that will be developed in Kinshasa, the fisherman who will be displaced still supported the project, because of its "appeal to the imagination" of a new and modern city. He argues that beyond whether the new city, "Cite du Fleuve," will be built or not, what matters and gathers this support is the interplay between real and unreal, the appeal of imagination enacted by infrastructures.

A striking example of the symbolic power that infrastructures can hold is explored by Sneath (2009), whose work on the power of electricity explains that in Mongolia *light* was read as a metonym for the grand narrative of modernization. Here, the spectacle of light works as an imaginative effect that creates a perception of the world and the future. On the other hand, he looks at *dal*, a form of divination that people practice, to imagine futures in private. For Sneath, *dal* and modernism are two different but comparable styles of *imaginative effects* that offer imaginative possibilities. Imagination for Sneath is not a realm to be dominated but a vista to be multiplied.

These works demonstrate the various ways in which "infrastructures" are implicated in and reveal the politics of participation, whether through the production of consent, particular

subjectivities, or simple domination. The examples above all speak to a way in which the promises of infrastructure, whether for prosperity, modernity or something else, works as a mechanism of control. If cities are “imagined environments” (James Donald 1992) as nations are imagined communities (Anderson 1983), how are competing imaginations of these environments negotiated?

Environmental resistance and the political history of infrastructures in Turkey

The neoliberal restructuring that took place starting in the 1980s in Turkey has had a huge impact on energy infrastructures. In 1980, 91% of mining was publicly owned, yet by 2002, 82% of all mining had been privatized. Privatization and foreign direct investment were further incentivized by the adoption of a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) into the constitution in 1999 under the recommendation of the IMF. The years of instability during the coalition governments, including the economic crisis in 1994 and 2001, have been critical in the rise of the Justice and Development Party and Erdogan who came to power in 2002. Starting in 2001, the transformation into a neoliberal economy escalated with continued privatization of state-owned critical infrastructures (Turhan et al. 2020). During the past 20 years, the AKP has built a loyal business class through the transfer of capital from its opponents to its supporters by controlling and politicizing state institutions, uneven access to media and private resources (Esen and Gumuscu, 2018)

Cavusoglu and Stutz (2015) argue that AKP’s special politics have been the reason why they have been able to maintain a neoliberal hegemony in Turkey where reproduction of space has been the main avenue for economic accumulation. They argue that this was possible through three main avenues. First, exploitation of non-commodified spaces: “privatizing the large state-owned stock of former industrial and public buildings. Forests, rivers, and informally urbanized land and creating a set of laws to expropriate property from the current owners of valuable inner-city neighborhoods.” (p.338) Second, the monopolization of the construction sector that feeds the reproduction of space. And lastly, corporatism that uses an overarching Islamist agenda that transcended class and uses nationalism to garner widespread support while also establishing itself as a moral leader.

Yuksekkaya and Ergenc (2022) identify two parallel processes that weaken the local institutions and localized development in Turkey: “the shifting of decision-making powers from municipalities to central state organs, especially with regard to the real estate industry; and the shifting of decision-making powers from the elected members of the city councils to the mayors themselves.” The law 6360 (6 December 2012) that changed the legal status of a significant number of villages¹⁴, stripping them of their special status and governance rights, aligns with the aforementioned strategies. The overreaching of central authority is used against environmental movements as well. A major example is the struggle against the construction of the first foreign investment mine in Aliaga near Izmir where the authority of Aliaga and Foca municipalities were stripped away by the Minister of Public Works¹⁵ because of their support for the resistance (Turhan et al. 2020). This mobilization was also significant given the political climate of fear and repression following the coup d’état on September 12th 1980 which crushed social movements in general, and leftist organizing more specifically. Adem (2005) underlines that these movements allowed organization and political individuals to collaborate with labor unions, professional chambers and local authorities who had no previous environmental activism history.

While there were complaints and disagreements around infrastructure projects earlier on too, like the tensions that arose around the creation of ISKI which will be explored in chapter two, there has been a significant increase in environmental movements in Turkey starting with 1990s and onwards. “Conservation of green spaces, anti-mining, anti-reconstruction, anti-deforestation and anti-hydroelectric power plants have been some of the prominent focal points of these movements.” (Tasdemir, p112) The organizing against the mine in Aliaga as well as the gold mine in Bergama (an area known for its agricultural production and archeological sites) in early 1990’s carries importance as many networks that formed during the struggle set presence for other environmental struggles in Turkey. The resistance against the Akkuyu nuclear power plant and the dam in Artvin, Cerrattepe also present major examples of organizing. Turhan et al.

¹⁴ Those governed by cities that were made to be a metropolitan municipality.

¹⁵ What used to be the Ministry of Public Works has now become Ministry of Infrastructure reminding of Laura Bear’s critique of financialization on public works.

(2020) identify that there is a “strong continuity in the environmental movement through actors and in their repertoires of actions – despite significantly altered relations with the state and the legal system. Many of the current activists remember and long for the 1990s events and their tactics shows a resemblance. For example, in several instances, activists tried to re-create the emblematic human chain action against the coal-fired power plants. “(p181) Creating the emblematic human chain was indeed a strategy used in organizing against Kanal Istanbul in January 2019 in Kucukcekmece.

Who gets to imagine?

The transformation of Northern Istanbul has been widely observed and publicly contested. The third bridge and the third airport can be named as examples of mega projects, with international financing and enormous budgets. For example, the third bridge, whose construction started in 2013 and finished in 2016, was realized through a private-public partnership where a consortium of companies was responsible for the financing and the construction, and in return is managing the tolls for profit (which is insured by the government) until August 2024, at which point the bridge is expected to be made public (Gokcen, 6 February. 2021,n.p) These projects are often developed with a guarantee by the government for a minimum amount of revenue for the companies involved and therefore create potential liabilities.

The development of the third airport was protested all throughout its construction by various groups and organizations including environmental groups like Northern Forests Defense, workers’ unions, and local villagers. The construction was also marked by news of workers’ deaths and terrible working conditions. This led to organized strikes by thousands of construction workers via their union, IYI-SEN (Gokkus 2018). After the presidency’s communications office (CIMER) confirmed that fifty-two workers had died on the site of the construction in five years, strikes escalated but were met by police violence and arrest (Yesil Gazete 2016).

At one of the villages by the airport, one of the villagers exclaimed, pointing at a linden tree:

They cannot in any way repay me for this.

Another remarked:

I am not against the airport, but they cannot serve the people by cheating someone of their rights.

He was referring to the fact that with the new law on nationalization the government would only compensate the villagers for 10% of their land, saying that the rest are categorized as forest land, even though it has been used for farming and grazing for more than eighty years (Kazaz 2014).

When we look at the narratives around Kanal Istanbul specifically, but also other infrastructure projects in Northern Istanbul, the sense of progress associated with them is contested and marks a divide of inclusion and exclusion between who gets a say on the shared future of the city. The current government's response to resistance to these projects, whether resistance to the projects themselves or to working conditions, has been one of repression and police brutality. Those who disagree with these investments are seen as enemies of the state (Doureaujeanni 2009). When we look at the language being used and the way that challenges are being responded to, it is clear that any resistance against these projects is understood as resistance against a particular future, one where Turkey is a global power regaining its glory following its Ottoman roots.

An example that makes the troubling narrative of conquest more explicit in light of the aforementioned outcries is the construction company's decision to line up 1453¹⁶ trucks at the construction site of the third airport on the 564th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul, in 2017. The convoy of trucks also officially competed that day in Guinness world record to be "the longest truck convoy." The CEO of the company remarks on the celebration:

Just like the spirit of conquest that marks the end and a beginning of an era, we as a nation have shown what we can do when we come together. Once the Istanbul airport is complete, I am sure it will mark the end and the beginning of a new era in aviation.
(Diken 2017)

¹⁶ May 29th in 1453 is when Fatih Sultan Mehmet conquered Istanbul.

The language of conquest as a mechanism of polarization and coercion becomes more visible through the following excerpt from another promotional video by the government:

Türkiye bir yandan gelişimin önündeki çürümüş zihniyetle mücadele ederken, diğer taraftan da halkın faydasına olan yeni ve mega projelerle gücüne güç katmaya devam ediyor. Geçmişin köhne zihniyeti 2053 ve 2073ü şimdiden tasarlayan projelerle Balkanlar'da, doğu Akdeniz'de, Kıbrıs'ta, Kafkaslarda, Afrika'da, Orta Doğu'da ve tüm Türki coğrafyalarda Türkiye'nin yeni yüzyılın parlayan yıldızı olmasına engel olamayacaktır.

While Turkey is struggling with the rotten mentality against development, on the other hand, it continues to strengthen its power with new and mega projects that benefit the people. The old-fashioned mentality of the past will not be able to prevent Turkey from being the shining star of the new century in the Balkans, the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus, the Caucasus, Africa, the Middle East and all Turkic geographies with projects that have already designed 2053 and 2073. (HaberGlobal, 2021, 27:1); translation mine)

The language used for the promotional video is a very explicit example of linear developmentalism, of going from the undeveloped past to the developed future. This future is very much intertwined with the “imaginaries” of the past, particularly with that of the Ottoman Empire. The idea of the Kanal İstanbul project, in some variation, has been around since the Ottoman Empire. Efforts to connect the Black Sea to the Marmara Sea can be traced back to 1591 to the reign of Sultan Murad III and have been a recurring topic of inquiry. The plan that has the most resemblance to the current project was produced in 1850 during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid. However, all historical efforts were eventually abandoned due to war, economic instability, and debt (Alkan 2014). Today, it is presented as part of Vision 2023 (which refers to the development goals set by Tayyip Erdoğan to be accomplished by 2023, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Turkey). It is still very much embedded in the Neo-Ottoman narrative of conquest. This vision was later amended with 2053 and 2071, respectively referring to the 600th anniversary of the conquest of Istanbul by Fatih Sultan Mehmet and the 1000th anniversary of the Battle of Manzikert – the battle between the Seljuqs and the Byzantines,

where the defeat of the Byzantines is historically referred to as the point of decline for the Empire and marked the presence and control of Muslims in Anatolia (Bunting, 2017).

This is alongside a broader practice of remembering through anniversaries, designations like the third bridge in Istanbul being named Yavuz Sultan Selim, another bridge in Canakkale named Gazi Osman Pasha (a Marshall from the end of the 1800s), or the 1453 trucks. These practices of commemoration and memorialization “extend through time, suggesting a certain permanence, a continuing significance” (Crapanzano 2004, 159), and carry the past glory into the present to invoke a sense of national pride and construct a shared vision of a prosperous future.

Sinan Logie and Yoann Morvan, authors of the book *Istanbul 2023*, describe the nature – maybe style, as Sneath would say – of the government’s imagination (this desire to resurrect old projects and the emphasis on accomplishments of the Ottoman era in relation to the Istanbul 2023 vision) as “Ottoman retro-futurism.” While retro-futurism traditionally refers to arts, design, and architecture, at its core it refers to an imagination of the future as if envisioned in the past (Fetters 2020). This also erases the present – and people in the present– as active agents of imagination, in concert with the material erasure caused by the anticipated destruction of graves, livelihoods, homes, and neighborhoods. On the role of imagination, Starobinski argues that “it enables us to project our ‘fables’ in a direction that does not have to reckon with the ‘evident universe.’ ... In turn it facilitates our ‘practical domination over the real’ or our breaking ties with it” (Crapanzano 2004, 19). While his work primarily pulls from literature and fiction writing, what would it mean to think of “political imagination” as a form of fable-telling?

Charles Taylor theorizes *social imaginaries* as the common understandings, expectations, and the notions that underlie these expectations, and that make common practices possible. This understanding is carried through images, stories, and legends (Taylor 2004). In a similar but more open-ended way, Benedict Anderson understands all nations larger than tribes as imagined through practices such as maps and printed press. He defines nations as “*imagined* political communities” and qualifies them as imagined because members don’t ever get to know most of the fellow members of these communities. In both of these views, the imaginary is anchored in and produced by specific practices.

Sneath et al. (2009) observe these approaches as limited by the fact that imagination is expected to serve an argument. Gupta (2018) articulates the distinction between “aspirations, anticipations, and imaginations of the future: what people think their society should be like, what they want it to be like, and what kind of statement they wish to make about that vision of the future (Gupta 2018, 63). For Appadurai, imagination is a “collective practice” that is crucial in the creation of locality.

Going back to Erdogan’s poem in his speech, in particular to the line below, I reflect on how my dilemma in translating this line opened up a path for another possible exploration of imagination.

*İnsan alemde hayal ettiği müddetçe yaşar.
One lives in this world only if he dreams/imagines.*

Hayal, as it is put in Turkish, is a tricky word to think about, especially when translating into English. Linguistically, it sits somewhere between “dreaming” and “imagining.” When speaking of our aspirations we could say in English that that thing is our *dream*, whereas in Turkish dream (*ruya*) strictly refers to sleep imaginings. *Hayal*, on the other hand, is a wakeful process. It is a word borrowed from Arabic that has its philosophical roots in the teachings of Ibn al-Arabi, who was a Muslim philosopher in the 10th Century. He situates *hayal* as an ontological state that is transcendental, in *berzah*: “At times it appears to be between the spiritual and material — the sensuous — world; at others between being and nothingness, as somehow equivalent to existence” (Crapanzano 2004, Oncu 2019). This in-between “space” is productive in thinking about how material and immaterial realities are implicated in each other.

Kanal Istanbul as presented by the government is cast in developmental time, often associated with infrastructures because of its relationship to modernity. Thinking of infrastructures as having a beginning that starts with planning and an ending that is marked with inauguration favors the script of singular modernity and linear temporality (the same script utilized by the government to hold authority over the imaginations of the future). The boundaries of participation are rigid and explicit, as seen in the promotional video by the government which

was quoted earlier in this section. The imagination of the future is opened as another space to conquer and control.

In this chapter I provided a brief history of development in Turkey as it is linked to ideas of modernization and infrastructure to give context to the roots and evolution of the political imaginaries today and situate the experience of Turkey within the broader literature. Then, I demonstrated how the future facing potentiality of infrastructures are instrumental for government control. Finally, I argued that alongside imagination as a practice of producing locality, bypassing the present, and effecting alternative futures, imaginations of infrastructures is also a realm where the politics of the future are negotiated, and government control is enacted. By drawing from post-modernist and interpretive scholars such as Crapanzano, Sneath and Charles Taylor and focusing on government narrative around Kanal Istanbul through media analysis, my goal is to first provide context for the more ethnographic accounts. Secondly, initiate the discussion on the relationship between imagination and reality. I am not aiming to define imagination or imaginary but simply think about how the experiences around Kanal Istanbul can contribute to that discussion, which will be continued in chapter three.

Chapter Two: Living with “Infrastructures” in Durusu

Graham and McFarlane (2015) point out that infrastructures enable and disable certain types of action in the city. What about outside the city? Durusu is home to the first water facilities that brought water into the city center from the Terkos Lake since the late 1800s. It is located a little more than a kilometer away from the Third Airport in Istanbul and is expected to be transformed by the construction of Kanal Istanbul in the coming years. While Kanal Istanbul does not yet exist in its material form, it has been living in the imaginary for the past ten years. As an imaginary construct, it still has material impact. It is currently a speculative object and this particular moment opens an analytical space to explore how we can talk about how the imaginary relates to materiality. While Kanal Istanbul is undoubtedly an infrastructural project, understanding it as such in theoretical terms lets us interrogate the relationalities that surround it.

Anand calls infrastructures “material articulations of imagination, ideology and social life”. De Boeck refers to them as “built forms around which public thickens”. Larkin describes them as “built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space” (2013, 328). Hetherington claims that “holding something as infrastructure is to suspend that thing’s present as the future’s *necessary* past” (2016, 5). Yet what if they were defined by what they have disrupted? What happens when we ask whose imagination infrastructures are articulating? Which public? Flow of whose foods, what people? Necessary by what definition? For whose future?

Looking at the history of Durusu and the stories of people who live there, it is clear that the “becoming” of Kanal Istanbul is inextricably tied to other infrastructures and the historical ruptures associated with them. When I say the becoming of Kanal Istanbul, I am not just referring to the material construction of it, but the idea of it as well. Gupta distinguishes between the phase of “becoming” and “being” for infrastructures and says that once they move on to the phase of being, they disappear from social scrutiny. He associates this with completion, and hence disappearance to normal functioning, and argues that “theorizing infrastructures as perpetually in motion” allows us to excavate the *labour* and maintenance that went into them while also drawing attention to their materiality (Gupta, 2018, 73). While an infrastructure may

be technically incomplete, it may be functionally complete and therefore theoretically in the state of being. However, understanding the Third Airport as “always in process” allows us to better see the ways in which it is both materially and rhetorically entangled in the becoming of Kanal Istanbul. The active relationality of Kanal Istanbul and the Third Airport gives us a unique opportunity to investigate how infrastructures at different stages may be contingent on each other. How has the deterioration of the concrete of the runways – material agency? – (due to rain and the swampy earth underneath) impacted the considerations of construction for Kanal Istanbul? How do the networks built to organize against the airport relate to the organizing against Kanal Istanbul?

I will argue that Durusu sits in a unique position that exposes the complicated history and the continuing conflicts of interest in the area, beyond the often-simplified relationship to the canal as something that people are either for or against. Its position as a post-industrial rural town allows us to further interrogate the ways in which radical environmental change, such as the construction of large infrastructure projects, alter human and non-human life.

Materiality

After ten years of government rhetoric, while Kanal Istanbul as a project is still in limbo, attention to materiality allows us to see what this process has meant for the case of Durusu. Though I have lived in Istanbul since I was born, I had never been to the part of Istanbul that was to be my “field site,” Durusu, or even the surrounding area, until the summer of 2019. At that point there hadn’t been a mention of Kanal Istanbul in the news for several months, and with the worsening economic state of the country, it seemed, to me and to the general public, that the project might have been silently abandoned. While not knowing whether or not it would actually be built, or if it was still relevant, I decided to keep Kanal Istanbul as the focus of my research. Looking back, De Boeck’s (2011) analysis that sometimes words seem more real than physical reality is increasingly relevant. What has the word of Kanal Istanbul enacted?

Landing at the airport adjacent to Durusu in 2019 was the first time I had been there since it had been built while I was in Canada. As we were flying in, I looked out the airplane window and tried to soak in every detail I could see through the heavy rain. We were flying over the

periphery of Istanbul, approaching from the northwest, over the Black Sea to continue inland and descend. In a rush to savor the bird's eye view of my field site that I knew I would not get again, I pinned down some landmarks and tried to imagine what it would all look like if there was a canal cutting across it.

My experience of Durusu started on a summer day, feeling sticky from humidity at 80% and googling how to get to Durusu. Knowing that the drive from the airport to my house in the “center” of the city took not more than forty minutes, I was surprised to find out that it would take me three hours to get to Durusu via public transit. Looking to avoid the long bus ride in the heat and feeling secretly proud, thinking that I had cheated the system, I decided to take the airport shuttle that leaves from Taksim (the city center) and goes directly to the airport. The excitement did not last very long when I realized that it would take me one hour and forty-five minutes to get to Durusu from the airport by bus, a distance that takes less than fifteen minutes by car.

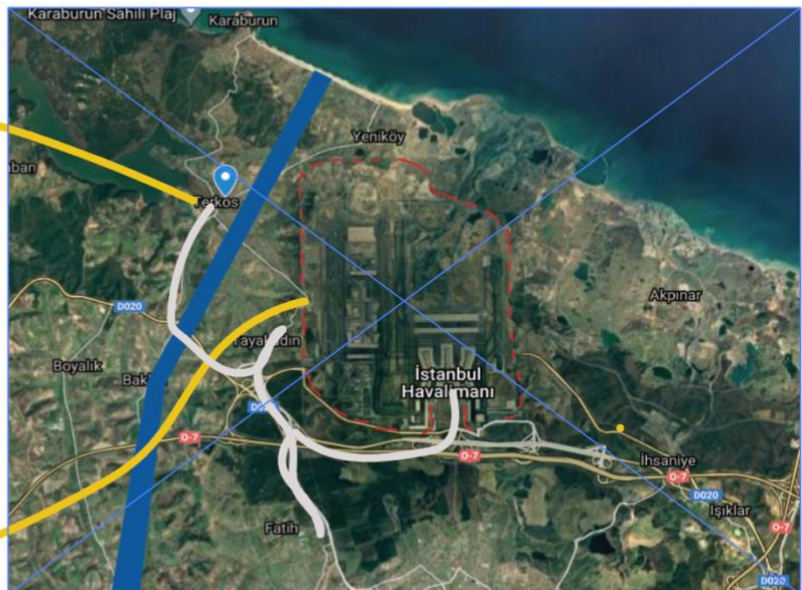


Figure 2: Mapping of travel between the Third Airport and Durusu

The red lines mark the border of the airport, the blue pin marks Durusu village, and the grey line demonstrates the public transit from the airport to Durusu.

Once I arrived in Durusu through the main road that forks into two, I got out of the taxi that I took from the airport. At the entrance was the office of the Muhtar: the ‘chief’ of the village, who in reality is more like a liaison between the regional municipality and the villagers. The municipal building, police station, and the local high school were all lined up next to each other on one side of the road like a welcoming committee. On the other side were houses and some wooden boats lying around. There weren’t many people, even in the middle of summer.

I didn’t know where to start, where to go, or what do, and felt somewhat out of place as well, so I started to walk around aimlessly in the soothing but foreign silence. To my ears, accustomed to being overstimulated by sounds of machinery, cars, honking, and abundance of people, the quiet was awakening. I could hear a rooster from what felt like hundreds of meters away. The bells of sheep and goats were chiming as if in conversation. The birds tweeted in the background as the crunching of the pebbles underneath my feet echoed my presence. If there was a car coming, I heard the tires on the road from far away, on the other side of the neighborhood. In the absence of overwhelming traffic, every sound has a presence that spoke of a distance, an actor, a motion.

The road to my right was lined with houses two to four stories high, each with a small garden in front of it and shepherded by a chicken or a dog. Zeynep – owner of a café on the main street, who moved to Durusu seven years ago because living conditions became too difficult in Istanbul, and she fell in love with the tranquil life here – would later tell me that the tomatoes in her garden now grow already rotten. Zeynep was the first person I met in Durusu, and whenever I didn’t know what to do or just wanted to sit and have some food I would go to her café. The houses are all painted in earthy colors, some blue, beige, or green. They sit at the base of a small hill that overlooks the whole village. Walking up the streets perpendicular to the base requires some breathwork as they are, at a minimum, sixty-degrees steep. Once you get to the top, the view is extraordinary. Sixty-six meters above sea level, the trees lace over the town, with only

the minarets of the mosques penetrating through. The entirety of the lake lies beneath. It felt necessary in that moment to stop, take a deep breath, and listen.



Figure 3: View overlooking Durusu village and Terkos Lake

Once I was back on the main street, I sat down at Zeynep's café. I had decided to walk into it primarily because it made me feel more comfortable to enter a shop tended by a woman.

I asked her about the commute to Durusu and if there was a better way to get here from the airport, and Zeynep simply responded:

Yeah, you need a car to get around.

The physical disconnect between the airport and the neighboring villages is echoed in conversations I had in Durusu. Zeynep said:

We suffer through the construction dust, the noise day and night, our workers building the buildings, some of them losing their life, but when it came to offering benefits, we got none.

Not even prioritization of our people to be employed at the airport.

The Third Airport now sits between Akpınar, Tayakadin, and Yeniköy in 76 million square meters of land that used to be predominantly agricultural, grazing land and forests. The feeling of betrayal expressed by Zeynep seemed to be shared by many in Durusu and influenced their judgment of the canal. Since they were not taken into consideration during the construction of the Third Airport, they *expected* that it would be the same with Kanal Istanbul. Just as Star (2002) suggests that things become infrastructural for different people at different times, Harvey (2018) gives the example that a road is infrastructural to the driver but not for those who do the maintenance of the road. So the Third Airport, with its goal of becoming the world primary transit spot for air travel and serving primarily upper middle class Turkish and international travelers, may not be infrastructural for people living in Durusu, and this is because they experience it in other ways as described by Zeynep.

Durusu is a completely residential town and has no commercial places that I could stay at. So for the duration my time in Istanbul, I commuted back and forth to Durusu. I did a lot of walking around and, while walking, I would often see water buffalos. The first time I saw them was during my first drive to Durusu. Maybe twenty minutes from my destination, on the side of the highway, a couple of them were walking along, right on the other side of the metal bumper that keeps cars from flying off the road and simultaneously, perhaps, keeps the buffalos from walking onto the road and getting hit – a materialization of the border drawn between human and “nature.” They seemed lost to me and I worried about them, but I kept seeing more and more water buffalos at places where it seemed to me like they were lost. In time, I learned that in fact they were exactly where they were supposed to be. The infringement of the concrete onto the buffalos’ living spaces became clear. On several occasions, as I was going further away from the city but had not yet arrived in Durusu, I ran into buffalos on the side of the highway and also on the village roads. The village roads, as opposed to the highways, have no barriers around them so animals and people can freely cut across.

I followed one herd from a distance. Their path cuts across different towns and roads. They all walk in a single line. For a while, there is no human in sight, just the buffalos walking, and walking, and walking. After maybe ten minutes I see the shepherd at the very back. The buffalo leads the way. They come through one of the ponds around four in the afternoon, right before the sunset during the fall. The pond exists in a little triangle patch of land on the road between Yeniköy and Durusu, and the border of the airport that is now fenced off. They arrive from the south, come by the pond, and dip in the water for some time. They continue up a hill on a narrow dirt path, and it is hard to tell if the hill is organic landscape or a huge pile of excavation from the construction site. Once up the hill, they disappear.

I learned, through asking someone who was fishing in that pond, that the buffalos end their journey in Yeniköy. Zehra – one of the leading opponents of the canal who has been living in the area for more than fifty years and has a shop in Durusu – had mentioned that water buffalo herding did not exist in Durusu, but it did in Yeniköy, where she is originally from. The young men fishing by the pond were among the few people who had come there to picnic or do other leisurely activities. On one side of the pond were the buffalos bathing, and on the other side were people hanging out and fishing.

I started making sure to pass by that spot around the same time when I could, purely because the sight of the buffalos on their journey was mesmerizing. They passed by that pond at around 4pm every day. Most of the time, there were also people hanging around, having a good time. They came from the neighboring towns and knew the buffalos' path, maybe because they knew someone who was in the water buffalo business, or maybe because they had paid attention to who they were coexisting with in that space.



Figure 4: Buffaloes walking along the fenced off border

Though I have eaten ‘kaymak’ (fresh cream made from the milk of water buffalos), a specialty of Turkish cuisine, many many times, I had never seen a water buffalo in the city before. This is true for many people who live in Istanbul. “Water buffalos of Istanbul” became more well-known during the construction of the Third Airport, where water buffalos used to roam freely and where now an enormous amount of cement lies. Similarly, the landscape and localities such as Durusu, Terkos, Yeniköy, and Tayakadin became familiar in people’s “mental maps” through these mega infrastructure projects (Kentel 2019). The area of the airport used to be home to tens of small lakes, of which only a few are now left. One of those ponds is located along the village road that connects Durusu and Yeniköy. This road also functions as a border for the site of the airport, and would no longer exist if the canal were built.¹⁷ It is a place where relationships and co-existence with non-human life is explicit and part of everyday life. This is partially a by-product of their occupation and partially a simple fact of spaces where there is

¹⁷ See figure 1.

more non-human life than human life. The pond is a snapshot of that dynamic, one that has already been shrunk and that could fully disappear.

The fenced-up walls, the cut and dead-ended roads, rerouted buffalos, and cemented lakes are not because of Kanal Istanbul but of the construction of the Third Airport. The intimate and visceral nature of the experiences over the past years is felt in Zeynep's potent words:

Bombs were detonating all night, how can one sleep in peace?

They burned my lungs.

She is referring to detonators used for the construction of the airport. Her words "They burned my lungs" are in reference to The Northern Forest of Istanbul, which is often called the lungs of Istanbul. Zeynep is not only referring to the literal sense that the quality of air has significantly declined but also that she personally feels the pain of this destruction. Again, as we were talking at the back of her café, sipping our tea and eating our borek, a low hum from the distance quickly escalated to a roar, an alarming sound for someone who has never heard it fill the air. An airplane either arriving at or departing from the new Istanbul airport every seventy-four seconds is now a part of Durusu's everyday reality.

For many Istanbul residents the discussions around Kanal Istanbul are rhetorical in nature, the way the discussions around the Third Airport were. The experience in Durusu is intimate and everyday. The airport as an infrastructural object is functioning as intended, yet it is experienced as a failure and a rupture compared to the opportunities it was expected to create for Durusu. What histories and experiences have been evoked, remembered, triggered, and drawn from when people engage with this project?

Terkos as a site of extraction

The rate of urbanization on the peripheries of Istanbul has increased dramatically in the past ten years, in line with a broader global trend, which is characterised by the overwhelming numbers of people living in the impoverished peripheries of "the urban centers that benefit from

their services and their poverty” (Holston 2009, 245). Holston identifies the movement rising from these groups asking for their rights as a global category of conflict observable in various places, particularly across the global south. The state here is expected to ensure the wellbeing of its citizens through the means of infrastructure. However, unlike the other parts of urban peripheries in Istanbul (where the majority of the demographic is made up of people who moved to Istanbul from other parts of the country in the past twenty years), Northern villages have a particular history that makes their experience distinct. These villages are predominantly occupied by *mubadil* families who live in houses they inherited from their families, where their ancestors are buried in the neighborhood cemetery. The boundaries of the urban center have expanded over the years and are now threatening to absorb these villages.

Thinking about Kanal Istanbul as an integral part of the state narrative where the “Istanbul of tomorrow” is to emerge partly from what is now Durusu, Kanal Istanbul can be understood as a part of a larger effort to create a new “center” for the city. This, however, becomes complicated by the fact that the route of the canal, which falls on the periphery of the city, has historically been and still is a site of extraction for the benefit of the “center.” In these shifting relationalities, form is important.

The area around Lake Terkos has been defined by its relationship to the city center in many ways. This uneven relationship between a particular “center” and a particular “periphery” – namely the area around Lake Terkos and the historical center of Istanbul, Pera – dates back to late 1800s, when the lake was designated as a water source for the city center. In 1882, Compagnie des Eaux de Constantinople (Dersaadet Su Isleri) was given concession to build a waterworks to bring water from Terkos to Pera (Kentel 2019). It is noteworthy that this presents one of the first examples of build-operate-transfer (public-private partnership) model, which is now particularly popular among the infrastructural projects in the Northern Istanbul region. For this, the part of the lake that was semi-connected to the Black Sea was closed off to prevent mixing of salt water and fresh water. In the following years, all the way up to 1912, there are accounts of complaints and petitions against the company because of flooding due to the closing of the lake as well as increasing restrictions on fishing and access to different resources. In particular, there is an account of a complaint made by residents of Terkos (now Terkos and

Durusu neighborhoods) in regards to their access to Karamandere, one of the rivers feeding the lake, which was essential to meeting their “*necessities of life*” (Kentel 2019). Their complaints and petitions ring a familiar tune, as one of the major tactics of resistance against the canal employed by residents from all across the city, in Durusu and elsewhere, has been the petitions calling for the cancelation of the Approval of the Environmental Assessment Report.

Once it had become clear that these conflicts would not be solved by the company, Terkos waterworks were nationalized and transferred from Compagnie des Eaux de Constantinople to ISI (Istanbul Water Administration) in 1932. Through increased urbanization and the expanding city reach, ISKI was formed to have greater authority and absorb the responsibilities of ISI in 1981. In 1984, ISKI was placed under the Jurisdiction of Istanbul City Municipality, while granting its control over an even greater geographic area as the reach of the water resources expand beyond the limits of the city (ISKI).

Kanal Istanbul will be, and already has begun, reconfiguring the relationship between the center and periphery, and this reconfiguration needs to be understood in relation to other historical ruptures in the area. Through its position as a significant water source for the city and the industrialization that this brought, Terkos/Durusu historically became a “center” for the surrounding villages, complete with a cinema, shops, and a social life independent from what was offered in Istanbul. This is why the dispossession of Durusu, as well as the economic and social rupture of the past decades, is significant. De Boeck in his work on Kinshasa observes that La Cité du Fleuve, a “modern” residential project – which would displace farmers and fisherman – would destroy the small-scale informal networks and coping mechanisms that allows for Kinosis to survive (Boeck 2011). At risk of disappearing in Durusu is precisely these ties, as well as the differentiated ecosystem of production and sociality that defined the area. While rural communities overall are less dependent on state infrastructures than urban dwellers (Gupta 2018), particularly communities that have access to land like Durusu and surrounding towns, one of the most important networks disrupted are food networks, as most people living in the villages in Northern Istanbul predominantly consume what they produce.

“They won’t let us live here like *this*”

“Bizi burada, boyle yasatmazlar”

Who are *we*?

Where is *here*?

What is *this*?

Zehra, as she explains it here, is not just referring to her family, or even just Durusu, but to the neighboring villages too: villages of Northern Istanbul, where residents live a predominantly rural life, as opposed to the neighborhoods down the route of the canal, like Arnavutkoy or Kucukcekmece, which have already been urbanized and whose population predominantly works in the service industry (Bartu, 2020). *Who*, *where* and *how* is inextricably interlinked when we talk about lived experiences (Munn 1992) and, in the case of Durusu, they exist in a temporality that is somewhere in between Navora-Yashin’s (2003) depiction of “frozen time” (talking about the life in Northern Cyprus under the rule of the NRNC “phantom state”), and what Hetherington (2016) calls “developmental time,” which operates on a unilinear narrative of development. In this time and space, there is a simultaneous experience of change and continuity or fixedness.

After the Durusu Municipality closed, there was a lot of outward migration. There is a ban on construction and no social life. It’s a town of retired people. Nothing changes, it has been the same ever since I have known it.

This was Murat, a man in his late thirties or early forties, who used to work for the local government of Durusu but is now running the local market.

Durusu Municipality, which was an administrative and cultural center of the area, is now registered as two separate neighborhoods Terkos and Durusu – formerly known as Camii and Zafer neighborhoods. It was categorized as a Belde, which means “town,” a large village with a municipality. As of 2009, with the constitutional change that made all villages into neighborhoods, stripping them of their special status, Durusu was split into the two

neighborhoods and came under the jurisdiction of Arnavutkoy Municipality. Durusu losing its status as a town was referenced in several conversations as a turning point for the social and economic life of the neighborhood. Yet there was also the feeling that things never change, as articulated by Cengiz Bey:

Durusu has been the same for 30 years, because we are located on the water basin and so there isn't permission to build.

Cengiz Bey, who was born and raised in Durusu, directly links the feelings of continuity to the construction ban which came into place because Terkos Lake was designated one of the main drinking water resources for Istanbul. The restriction stands in even greater contrast when viewed alongside the magnitude of the infrastructural projects being developed in the area, namely the airport, the Northern Istanbul Highway, and potentially Kanal Istanbul. He continued:

It's the same with the airport and it'll be the same with the canal. Because there is no permission to build, only restoration. Even if the canal is built nothing will change for us because we are too close to the Lake. They built the third airport but nothing changed for us.

There is a sense of neglect based on lack of resources that he brings up when talking about the absence of change. He says:

During winter months [as opposed to the summer months where there is an ambulance because of increased population due to tourism] we don't even have an ambulance, I can't count the times I have had to rush someone to the hospital with my car (Cengiz Bey)

During my visits in July, before the Environmental Impact Assessment Report was released, the fact that Durusu is too close to the lake was brought up as a reason as to why people thought Kanal Istanbul wouldn't be built. Something as precious as the fresh water of Terkos

Lake, which provides drinking water to the city – in fact “Terkos suyu”¹⁸ (Kentel 2019) has been a synonym for drinking water – couldn’t possibly be jeopardized.¹⁹ The presence of the lake and the regulations that protect it (something that people in Durusu cannot change, which continues to have impact in a similar manner throughout years) have been defining factors for life in Durusu, associated with the sense of “frozen time,” something beyond the familiar experience of “time slowing down” when one goes from an urban setting to a rural setting (Davydenko 2016).

Despite this seeming contradiction, there have also been several markers of change in Durusu over the years. Zehra, who owns a small business in Durusu, talked passionately about the past:

There used to be factories, if your dad worked there, once he retired you took his place, like at ISKI. When I was younger there was a yogurt factory. That got torn down to be a municipal building. Now they took our municipality too. My political views aside, it’s not just Durusu, all villagers around here are victims. When I first moved here there used to be two outdoor one indoors movie theater. They started closing in the ‘80s. There used to be more of a social life and production. The natural living spaces have already started to shift, I used to never see squirrels and porcupines because they used to have their own living spaces, but now I see them in the garden because they are getting moved, even pigs.

The airplane sounds, the changing climate... For example, there used to have kara memerlimiz.²⁰ People used to hunt. That was tourism and it helped people here. Fishing... no longer exists. My father used to have a fish restaurant. They used to catch fish my size. No longer, nature is off balance. Can you believe that we didn’t see a single stork this year. It’s not only us, but animals are also victims too. My sister saw with her own eyes, five or six wild pigs on the road. What can they do, they are running out of living spaces. Forests are disappearing.

¹⁸ Terkos suyu means water from Terkos.

¹⁹ This is a point of contention addressed in both the websites made by the AKP government and the municipality and the city council will scientific resources on the issue. One saying that it will not impact the drinking water, and the other saying it will, respectively.

²⁰ Haven’t been able to find the English name for this species of fish.

Zehra wasn't the only one to refer to the 'good old days' when there used to be a more active social life, resources, and production in Durusu. In fact, there is a public Facebook group named "Nostalci terkos" where members of the community can share old photos and reminisce about the old times. One of the people who expressed this feeling of loss is Murat who runs one of the markets. Like most people in Durusu and in fact the greater area, he comes from a *mubadil* family, which refers to the families from the Balkans who have been moved to Turkey after the population exchange from Greece and Bulgaria. I had first met him when I was picking up some vegetables from the vegetable stand that he had set up in front of the market a couple of days before. We had had a small chat, like he does with all of his customers. When I asked him if he would have time to talk outside work, since I didn't want to bother him while there were customers around, he said that it would not be a problem to just talk at the store.

So the next time I went to the market, I was prepared with my notebook and pen. I had thought that maybe we would stand aside to talk, but as we talked the customers kept coming and he kept tending to them, and each customer made a small remark or two about whatever he was talking about at the time. Akin also referred to the open-air cinemas and the social life, talked about how people from neighboring towns used to come here, and how, since losing the municipal status

along with the social life, the sense of community and shared values are also being lost.

He said that since the municipal center is in a different place, they don't get much resourcing or attention, which also affects practices of organization because they do not have control. He also pointed to the lost sense of community as to why there isn't much organizing against the canal even though most people are against it in Durusu. While reminiscing about old times, but somewhat out of nowhere, he pulled out a pamphlet of the Durusu Municipality from more than ten years ago. In it he is pictured alongside fellow members. His relationship to the old days of Durusu was clearly personal, as he was an active member of the team who created all the things that he perceived to be lost now. The pamphlet memorializes the past – perhaps in similar ways to the past Ottoman project remembered by the government – and carries it into the

present. Despite this being a personal matter for him, the sense of declining social life is clearly shared in the collective experience.

Whether it is expressed as a negative change or the absence of change, the marker of difference seems to be a misalignment between the current reality and the desired reality, whether it is in reference to the social life, the ability to develop the area, or the status of governance. Here, I am limited in my analysis of what a desired change might look like because both my questions and the conversations in general more often focused on past and present experiences. While there were a couple of people who were more explicit about their position against the construction of Kanal Istanbul, which I will go further into in chapter three, something that is notable is the remark often made to express that what they want in fact does not matter, because “*the government will do whatever they want anyways.*” I cannot say whether this sense can be generalized to broader imaginations of the future.

In a moment of anticipation, while the rhetoric around Kanal Istanbul continues to hold various imaginations, Durusu reveals the way in which Kanal Istanbul is entangled with other historical and current infrastructural projects. Kanal Istanbul, along with other mega infrastructure projects in northern Istanbul – some of which now make the headlines for the amount of tax money they require, since they are operated by private corporations – can be understood as “coercive state legitimization by grounding their political practices in global developmental discourse,” resulting in displacement and loss of livelihood. These are well documented effects of mega-infrastructure projects around the world (Abbink 2012). In the midst of opaque government practices and highly speculative futures, focusing on material and historical affect grounds our understanding of the relationality of past, present, and future, as it is alternately arrested and accelerated by infrastructure.

Chapter 3: Imminent Futures, Disputed Realities and Competing Infrastructures

After ten years of anticipation, Kanal Istanbul sits in both theoretical and empirical precarity. In addition to the AKP government's strong push for Kanal Istanbul and the daily experiences of people living in Durusu explored in previous chapters, there has been and continues to be very strong resistance against Kanal Istanbul by the public at large. This chapter will look at three different aspects of this speculative moment of becoming. First, I will explore how Kanal Istanbul as a speculative imaginary has been an object of civic inquiry. Second, I will focus on the voices of resistance that have become increasingly more pronounced. And third, I will contemplate what these competing narratives say about the temporality of infrastructures.

In the face of mega infrastructural projects, often steered by governments and private companies, the process of becoming opens space for public intervention, whether through the tenuousness of the bureaucratic process (Aalders et al. 2021) or through suspension as a tactic (Spice 2018). While Kanal Istanbul was never officially put on hold, there has been more than ten years of its anticipation and precarity – not knowing whether it will happen, how it would happen, and so forth. But when the *anticipation* has been elongated for so long, does the anticipation become suspended? Gupta (2018) understands suspension as a distinct temporality – not a way into completion but its own “ontic condition.” Looking at a half-build development project called Colombo Port City Development, which was put on hold by the government of Sri Lanka, Gupta (2018) describes the rubble that sits around as *ruins* of the future. Suspension lives between the promise and the actuality, as a temporality distinct from anticipation. In a similar manner that the concrete pillars rest in suspension, can future orientations also be suspended? Jewel (2017), referring to the liminal space that Nicaragua Canal is in, having been approved but not constructed for decades, thinks of infrastructures as ghosts: materially absent, yet present and impactful nonetheless. Carse and Kneas (2019) offer the heuristics *Zombies* and *Suspended presents* as ways of thinking about unbuilt or unfinished infrastructures. Infrastructures as *Zombies* draws attention to how they “linger between the dissipation and reemergence of the social, political, and economic networks that give them life,” whereas *Suspended Presents* are concerned with “social experiences and affective states that associated with infrastructural delay”

(p.18).It refers to a social process that centers anticipation and foregrounds social experiences that produce alternative renderings of the project.

Building on Gupta's understanding, Spice (2018) theorizes the existence of oil and gas pipeline construction as a suspension of Indigenous life, in direct opposition to the suspension of the constructions which would enable the continuation of Indigenous life. Reflecting at the number of times I have been asked if Kanal Istanbul will in fact happen – the absence of news and knowledge created a suspension of future orientations – as someone who holds no authority about the future of the project, there was very much a sense that our collective capacity of knowing the future of this huge project is a guessing game, making each citizen a speculator.

Bryant (2019) introduces “future orientations” as a way of looking at the relationship between future and action: anticipation, expectation, speculation, potentiality, hope, and destiny, through which the future might orient the present. I want to recall an exercise from her introduction to “The Anthropology of the Future,” not to re-enact her compelling illustration of these orientations, but rather to make space for it to exist as part of my writing process. Following her instructions to look up from the page, I listen to the raindrops against the window. It sounds more inconsistent than what I think of when I think of the sound of rain. I hear the occasional car pass by faintly in the background. I hear the wind gush from the back of the house where I had left a window open and wonder if any water came in. I notice a car door slam, since I am expecting somebody, I retain my attention for a few minutes in the case of a doorbell ring. Each engagement evoked a different urgency, depth, and quality.

Bryant gives the example of Ayhan and his family, who lived in Cyprus in the 1960s and escaped into their neighbors' home from the fear (in expectation and anticipation) of being attacked by the Greek Cypriots, and describes their decision to leave their home as “future-oriented actions: ones that projected the present into the future and attempted to shape the future in the present” (Bryant and Knight 2019, 22). She distinguishes between expectation and anticipation through their weight in present versus the past, where expectation pulls from the knowledge of the past whereas anticipation brings future into the present via imagination.

Another example is through the work of Sami Hermez in Lebanon when his interlocutor asks him whether he thinks there will be a war:

Anticipating, then, becomes a collective way of stepping into the future, of trying to transform one's own future or the future of the collective before it occurs. Collective anticipation is one that tries to forestall or alter the coming event that is itself expected to transform the life of the present. Anticipation, in this sense, works to relieve the anxiety of uncertainty and to "normalize" the present through a speculative imagination of the future. (Bryant and Knight, 2019, 42)

In the absence of historical anchors for expectations, and when calculation for the future is not possible, speculation offers a way of participating in what they call "hypothetical futures."

Future orientations and alternative realities

How does disbelief come in as a future orientation? How are future orientations articulated in the context of resistance organizing? How can we explain this sense of precarity and speculation and, to a degree *disbelief*, that is still present, despite the fact that during a public speech in April 2021, President Erdogan made a statement saying:

Kanal Istanbul will be built. No matter what anyone says. (Diken 2021)

On June 26th 2021, during the ground-breaking ceremony for one of the bridges that would cross the currently non-existent canal, while media headlined the event as the ground-breaking of Kanal Istanbul, Mayor of Istanbul Ekrem Imamoglu went on air to clarify, saying:

Now I will explain to you the illusion.

He explained that the ground-breaking²¹ was not for Kanal Istanbul but simply for a bridge that in fact had no relation to the Kanal Istanbul Project (Sputnik Türkiye 2021). What does it mean for two prominent political leaders to dispute the boundaries of where the starting point of a project like Kanal Istanbul falls? The construction of this bridge would be the first publicly visible materialization of Kanal Istanbul. Therefore, holding power over the narrative of whether Kanal Istanbul has been founded (“temel atmak”) or not, is the space of its “reality,” the space between the word and the meaning of the word (Crapanzano 2004) is negotiated. It is the space between holding Kanal Istanbul in the future versus bringing it into the present, where the imaginary and the material are negotiated. The continuously competing narratives on a political platform have become competing claims to truth, where the sense of suspension lives, not because of an explicit arrest, but because of pervasive precarity. This opacity can partially be explained through Laura Bear’s analysis of speculation through the understating of infrastructure as a global asset class – the financialization of public works – where “state institutions legitimate financial market action and accumulation,” and where the processes are “so hidden and difficult to trace, as they are protected by private legal regimes, are off the books of national treasuries and involve pension, sovereign wealth and equity funds. It is this play between visibility and invisibility that generates intensifying speculation” (2020, 65). Spice (2018) refers to a more explicitly financial understanding of speculation, where citizen-speculators are incited to partake. While in the case of Kanal Istanbul, real estate speculation in particular has led to immense capital redistribution, I understand speculation to be not exclusively financial but also, if not more predominantly, *conceptual*, as a moment in which people are trying to *know*.

Before becoming an explicit battleground between the ruling party and the Municipality of Istanbul, governed by a mayor from the opposition party, Kanal Istanbul was already lingering in the public consciousness as an object of inquiry. While many environmental organizations were already alarmed by the catastrophic environmental outcomes documented in their respective reports outlining the detrimental ecological destruction the canal would cause (WWF, TEMA, TMMOB, North Forests Defense), the lack of reliable information about the plan and the uncertainty about the fate of the project resulted in this imaginary route becoming an exploratory

²¹ Ceremony that marks the beginning of a construction project, a public ritual.

space in civic inquiry. One of the people leading this move was Serkan Taycan, an artist and researcher who started the walking group “Between two Seas.”²²

I spoke with Serkan Taycan at his apartment in Istanbul. He, like myself, had commuted to the outskirts of the city for the numerous walks that he had started organizing in 2012, soon after the announcement of the canal. Eight years after his first walk, he is not as involved in the Kanal walks anymore. In fact, he said it has become a thing with its own momentum. When I asked about how this idea of walking the route of the canal came about, he responded:

In 2009-2010 when I was working on photography projects one of them was focusing on the transformation in the peripheries of the city and this started with me realizing the relationship between the changes in the center and the changes in the periphery. I realized that many of the things being discussed in the city like mass housing and public spaces were primarily sourced, both in terms of natural resource and human labour, from the peripheries of the city. The transformation that was slower in the city was faster and more visible in the periphery. With this curiosity I started organizing walks. At first I was looking at the processes of construction. I started noticing the ecological transformation. Where are these construction materials coming from, what are they being turned into, I started following and tracing them.

I have to underline that the Gezi experience highlighted the act of participation. So your embodied presence, being there, in person. I wondered how we can reproduce and multiply the embodied participation in this situation and thought that the walking route might be a good method for this.

I wondered how the canal will impact things and started walking alone and created a map from it.

²² Between Two Seas is a participatory artwork that seeks to raise consciousness of the dramatic transformation of Istanbul’s periphery. The artist’s invitation to walk along the area set aside for the canal has been taken up by many individuals and collectives from Istanbul, elsewhere in Turkey, and beyond (*Walking in the Periphery: Activist Art and Urban Resistance to Neoliberalism in Istanbul*).

His remarks hint at the ways in which social organizing around different environmental projects are linked. For example, the resistance movement against Kanal Istanbul by the Northern Forests Defence is a continuation of their work in relation to the Third Bridge and the Third Airport. What started as Serkan's individual project then became a group project, organized through the Facebook page of "Between Two Seas," and then an artistic project that was exhibited as part of the 13th Istanbul Biennial.

We did nearly 30 walks.

This is an articulation of a right to the city or it helps people to find their way of asking for their right to the city. (Serkan)

Today, several other groups have taken up walking the route of the canal. People have been coming from different countries and walking the route. It has been featured in lifestyle magazines like *Istanbul Life* and geography magazines like *Atlas*. Hiking Istanbul, a group that creates hike-able routes in and around the city, is in the process of publishing their routes as a book. Northern Forests Defense (an organization that formed in response to the environmental destruction in the Northwest of Istanbul) started walking the route as early as 2017. The "Ya Kanal Ya Istanbul"²³ platform, a committee of different groups, have been organizing walks along this route as protests, several of which were escorted by the rural police (Ocak 2018).

It is not just more organized groups but also individuals, as well as daily contemplations and speculations, which co-construct the narrative around Kanal Istanbul. Saban, whom I met at Zeynep's shop and who was born and raised in Durusu, said that he knows the plans for the future of the village and that the village will not stay the same, that the lifestyle of the city will be brought here. While he was working at the municipality, he was showing engineers around Durusu and they said that the lake is tilted towards the village, which means that if the canal is built, the lake will be leaking underground water towards the canal. They stressed that this could

²³ Ya Kanal Ya Istanbul is a coordination committee made up of individuals, neighborhood groups, unions, animal rights activists, and political parties who reject the imposition of the project of Kanal Istanbul onto the people of Istanbul, and who have come together to stop the project from happening. Their resistance strategies have included postering around the city, organizing protest and reading of press releases at key locations, follow up on the continuing lawsuit that demands the cancelation of the approval for the environmental impact assessment report for Kanal Istanbul.

not happen because the lake supplies almost all of the freshwater for Istanbul. He said he doesn't believe that the construction will actually happen for the canal, at least not on the route that is decided on at the moment, but that if the lake did not exist, they would definitely be building it. He believed that the lake and its location is the main obstacle in front of the canal.

On another occasion, Akin got into a discussion with one of the people who came into the store to buy something, about whether the government would actually make a fair payment for the expropriated land if the canal were to be built. While Akin insisted that people would end up getting cheated out of their land, the other person whose name I never found out was convinced that it would be okay because they would be compensated for it.

In a *suspended present*, trying to *know*, engage with, and make sense of this anticipated shift, our collective knowledge is, more than anything, a *patchwork*²⁴ of personal accounts: whether it is in the form of assertions like Saban's, in the form of a discussion such as the one between Akin and his customer, walks along the imaginary route created by Serkan Taycan, or a research project like mine.

Voices of Resistance

After my visits in the summer and early fall, I had to take some time away and was only able to go back to Durusu again in the winter. At this point Kanal Istanbul had become a major news headline because on December 23rd, the Environmental Impact Assessment Report for Kanal Istanbul – which is 1595 pages long in addition to 12208 pages of appendices – was approved by the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning and became available to the public. It was announced that the public would have until January 2nd to file a complaint and based on the feedback from the public, they might ask for further additions to the report (Yeşil Ekonomi 2019).

²⁴ My inclination to describe this way of trying to know is inspired by the Patchwork Ethnography Manifesto by Gokce Gunel, Saiba Varma and Chika Watanabe.

Several environmental organizations like TEMA (who has been documenting and reporting against the canal since its announcement), Greenpeace and TMMOB quickly made available sample complaint letters that people could simply insert their information into and sign. Since the letters were only accepted in person, and the period of submission was only ten days, for the entirety of that week there were people waiting in line for hours, rain or shine, to submit their letters outside of the different ministry buildings. The approval of the report seemed to indicate that the canal, whose fate was uncertain – or was perceived to be uncertain by the public – had suddenly become much more certain.

From the beginning of my fieldwork in August and even prior to that, both in the city and in the rural suburbs like Durusu, whenever I was engaged in conversation relating to the canal, people would ask me “Oh is that really happening?” It had almost turned into an urban myth that we could casually remark on but not consider very seriously. Given the eight years since the announcement of the project, the opacity of its progress and the growing economic crisis in Turkey, this was an unsurprising reaction. This is also why the approval of the report marked a significant shift regarding the conversation around the canal.

During that week, my friends and family included, thousands of people were circulating these letters, offering to drop them off for each other, waiting in line for hours in the rain. Zehra herself had organized a delivery of letters in Durusu. This movement had also gathered momentum with the leadership of Ekrem Imamoglu, the new mayor of Istanbul representing the opposition party, who had been very vocal in his stance against the canal. On metros and ferries, barcovisions highlighted the negative impact that the canal would have on the city. By January 2nd, more than a hundred thousand letters had been submitted.

Despite the petitions and the resistance by the Municipality, on January 17th, 2020, the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning announced that they had given the final approval for the Environmental Impact Assessment report for Kanal Istanbul (Deutsche Welle 2020). The assessment was based on various categories of analysis, including social, environmental, economic, legal, political, geographical, and geological. In the section on the social impact, the EAR designates three degrees of categorization for assessment for the different neighborhoods

along the canal based on their proximity. Both Durusu and Terkos neighborhoods are situated within the second degree of distance to the canal. The report highlights that,

considering the planned new residential and urban development, the areas that are still rural will go through significant changes. These changes will likely result in the rapid transformation of the rural population through either direct displacement or incoming migration... there is also an aim to create a modern living space along the canal. While the expected increase in population is about 1 million, if there is further licencing for construction along the reserve this could mean even higher numbers. (Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, App 37, 522[186])

The report continues: *“It is also noteworthy that aforementioned groups, who are predominantly middle aged or older, mostly do not hold other skills and would be unemployed if these livelihoods were to disappear.”* Agriculture, animal farming (water buffalo herding in particular) and fishing make up a significant portion of the livelihood in the area. These occupations not only provide a source of income but also a source of sustenance. Durusu differs somewhat from the other villages because of its position as the former municipal center and its industrial history. The ISKI pump in Durusu was the largest employer in the area and is referenced as one of the reasons why some of the *mubadil* families settled here. The railway that would bring coal from the Yenikoy port to the ISKI facilities was another source of employment. With the railway no longer functional, the ISKI relocated, the municipality relocated to Arnavutkoy and with agricultural restrictions to protect Terkos lake, livelihood options in Durusu have become a lot more limited. This is another reason as to why youth often leave Durusu, leaving mostly retired and elder residents behind (Baysal 2021).

These generalized and anonymous statements echo the sentiments I came across within Durusu. They demonstrate that the verdict to approve the report and move forward with the project is in

full recognition of, and in spite of, the impact it will have on this particular group of people and land. During my conversation with Zehra, she remarked that:

They aren't going to let us have a canal view. We know what happened in Kucukcekmece, if the same thing happens to us what will I do.

Sulukule example is there, they moved people to TOKI housing and they couldn't do it. Their social fabric was destroyed, their friendships, family, relationships... It is not easy to rebuild these things.

The other projects mentioned by Zehra like Sulukule are some of the best-known gentrification projects in Istanbul. Her anticipation of what will happen to her if the canal is built is informed by experiences of others in different neighborhoods. The imaginary of the canal has created a shared stake among different people along a virtual line. Zehra was one of the people who had been to Kucukcekmece (on the southern end of the canals route), to a meeting where people from different communities were invited to discuss and organize against the canal.

During our interview she continued:

I will do whatever I can, until the last drop. Even if I am alone, I will resist. I have one life, I swear I will sacrifice it for this country and people. If they said, you will die and the living conditions will be better and the canal wouldn't be built, I would give my life.

The intensity of the *affect* (Knox 2017) associated with the idea of Kanal Istanbul and the invocation of the “death” of Istanbul is echoed by the slogan of the biggest resistance organizing “Ya Kanal Ya Istanbul” (either Kanal or Istanbul), and made explicit by the mayor of Istanbul Ekrem Imamoglu when he said:

I have nightmares at night when I think about Kanal Istanbul (qtd. in McKernan 2021)

We owe it to our children and grandchildren to fight against Kanal Istanbul (One of the protestors with Ya Kanal Ya Istanbul)

However, this is not a unanimous experience. There are also people who experience Kanal Istanbul as an aspired future, more in line with the narrative promoted by the government, as noted by the *muhtar* of Sazlibosna:

This will be one of the most luxurious places in Turkey. Kanal Istanbul is a project that will contribute to the future of Turkey. When we look beyond the century, it is possible to see that it is a very positive project. We are excited and proud for our children and grandchildren. It is a project that concerns not only Sazlibosna but also Turkey. This channel will be the heart of Istanbul. (İstanbulular Kanal İstanbul için ne diyor?2021)

– Sazlibosna muhtari Oktay Teke

It is noteworthy that both perspectives express their thoughts on Kanal Istanbul through a reference to their grandchildren and the future generations. There is a shared sense that this project will alter our reality not only in the near future but in the distant future as well, for generations to come.

In the midst of this extremely oppositional *affect*, I am reminded of my conversation with Ahmet Amca at his fodder shop. I was introduced to him by Huseyin when he had come by to the shop. It is a modest half-basement half-ground level store full of bags of fodder. He and his wife were sitting close to the window next to each other having some food. The shop wall was decorated with personal memorabilia. Ahmet Amca was born and raised in Durusu and is part of one of the families that came here from the Balkans in the late 1800s. When I asked Ahmet Amca if he received any official communication from the government or the municipality regarding the canal, his answer was a clear no. He expressed that he could do nothing but wait and see, and that “*it wasn’t in [his] culture anyways.*” I found this comment intriguing, but our conversation was relatively short and I couldn’t ask further questions. While this sentiment didn’t come up in any of my other conversations, it reminded me of something that Serkan had said:

Most of these villages are immigrant villages, with a history no longer than one hundred years, so their ties to the land might be looser.

While this is beyond the scope of this thesis, the migration history and its relationship to environmental and infrastructural projects would be worth looking into further. What I do want to point out is the historical lived experiences, the ways in which they are intertwined with the infrastructural history of Durusu. The Republic of Turkey as we know it is not yet one hundred years old and the family histories, the migration histories, and the infrastructural histories, which I will discuss further in the following section, expand beyond the time scales of the nation-state and are implicated in the futures they are attempting to enact through infrastructure. Paying attention to the broader histories of the landscapes informs the different ways in which people are responding to this speculative moment.

What started as a desire to understand the impact of Kanal Istanbul in Durusu, in the absence of the canal's materiality, became an exploration of the ways in which different infrastructures are inextricably linked and simultaneously competing across space and time. I welcomed this shift in focus, especially given the tendency in literature to focus on one particular infrastructure (Graham and McFarlane 2014). Attention to the temporality of infrastructures helps make visible competing visions of the future, and the political and historical entanglements of those competing visions, while also accounting for shifting timelines.

As discussed in previous chapters, infrastructures are understood to be an essential aspect of being a modern and developed nation-state, particularly in relation to the development narrative in the global south (Gupta 2018). At the same time, infrastructures in many cases exist across *historical time*, preceding and succeeding not only governments but also nation-states (Edwards 2003). The Indian railways (Bear 2020), and the water pumps in Istanbul (what is now the waterways of ISKI explored in the earlier chapter), can be seen as examples of this.

Edwards gives the example of the Roman aqueducts, the main way that water was carried to Constantinople before the construction of the water pumps, to illustrate the fragility and *ephemerality* of infrastructures across geophysical or long-term historical time, saying that

they no longer carry water (Edwards 2003, 195). The Roman aqueducts are today thought of as *ruins* – as the “afterlife of infrastructures” (Gupta 2018, 69). As water left the waterways, the waterways dried up like a soul leaving its body. Does that mean an infrastructure’s life is contingent on its function, which is often designated by the state? In which case, once it has “died,” is it no longer relevant to theorize it as infrastructure, because its relationality is now understood as the social life of ruins? How do the material remains of infrastructure fit into its conceptualization as ephemeral? How does the tension between materiality and temporality relate to narratives of resistance whose claims are based on an ecological destruction that will outlive any future governments, and the “infrastructurality” that those narratives of resistance enact around the permanently dug-up canal? What does it say about the possibility of the Terkos Lake waterway losing its function if the construction of the canal damages its water basin? Conceptualizing infrastructure with contingency to its function – often dictated by the state – privileges the state narrative, experience, and perception over others. This is not to say that they are a priori political, independent of the relations that form around them, but rather to draw attention to the way that their materiality and political lives have the capacity to endure across time (Anand 2017).

Cavalcanti (2014), in her work in Rio de Janeiro on the transformation of favelas to public facilities (which led to the relocation of people in the favelas to social housing), explains how the experience of process conditions how infrastructure is known and lived. While the planners see it as a necessary investment, the people living in favelas see it as exclusionary practice. Similarly, what is critical infrastructure for the state of Canada is the destruction of the critical infrastructure of the Wetsuwet’en nation (Spice 2018). Are these simply differing experiences, or ontological claims about infrastructures? While there is a lot of emphasis on literature on the changing, shifting, moving nature of infrastructures, reflecting back onto the sense of death invoked by the anticipation of Kanal Istanbul, and paying attention to the infrastructural landscape in and around Durusu, brings forth the material permanence of different infrastructures at different stages of their life. This expanded understanding is necessary to account for the level of fear and intensity brought up in response to the canal and the *remains* that will continue to be at a scale only legible in geophysical time. We need to sit with the simultaneity of the experience of “life” and “death” invoked by the promise of Kanal Istanbul,

the simultaneity of ephemerality and irreversible solidity of infrastructures, further intensified by their scale, is something that we need to sit with.

For the government, Kanal Istanbul is the necessary past of “Istanbul’s tomorrow,” an imagination that centers the lives of some while marginalizing others. What is being contested is not only Kanal Istanbul as a project but the future it will enact and uphold. Paying attention to the narratives in Durusu, a historically peripheral town, makes visible the ways in which present discussion on future imagining is also inextricably linked to the past.

Conclusion

I started off expecting to look at how the construction of Kanal Istanbul would impact life in Durusu. However, during my time in Istanbul, Kanal Istanbul continued to live in the imaginary. As an imaginary that lives between the present and the future, I explored how Kanal Istanbul can contribute to our understanding of how infrastructural imminence is implicated in the negotiation of the future. Drawing from the literature on imagination, infrastructure, and temporality, I have attempted to make sense of the potential emergence of the Kanal Istanbul Project and situate it within the broader history of development and infrastructure in Turkey.

In chapter one, I aimed to provide context for the government's narrative around Kanal Istanbul and the future imagination it draws from. Looking at the promotional materials and speeches by Erdogan, I argued that resistance against Kanal Istanbul is portrayed as a resistance against the development of the country, a development that claims authority on who gets to decide what that future looks like, and thus opens up our collective imagination as a space for both negotiation, control, and resistance. Recalling Sneath's analysis on divination, we can argue that Erdogan's dream of the Ottoman past, that of the caliphate, implies an authority over not only the political word but that of the spiritual as well. Thinking of imagination as *barzah*, a term that resists definition and sits between being and nothingness while possessing the power of both, the resistance can then be understood as challenging not only a material project or a political agenda, but the divine authority as well.

In chapter two, I focused on the experiences of people living in Durusu and the infrastructural history in the area that continues to shape people's day-to-day experiences. I argued that as an imaginary, Kanal Istanbul is already reconfiguring the relationship between center and periphery. Paying attention to the differences in perceptions of change and continuity, including Durusu residents' reflections on possibility of the project, demonstrates the nuanced multiplicity in people's relationships to change. While almost everyone expressed a desire for the project to not happen, the experiences being drawn and the ways in which it is articulated were all different.

In chapter three, I argued that focusing on future orientation, contingent on infrastructures, complexifies the narrative around these projects. Future orientation, a teleologic approach to understanding action as it relates to the future, allows us to pay attention to the multiplicity of stories that live behind the narrative of support or resistance. I argued that the imaginary holds space for negotiations of the future, where anticipation, speculation and disbelief can orient the actors in the spaces between material and immaterial, visible and invisible, past, present, and future. Imminence, as a temporal moment, makes visible the contradictions of a highly polarized political climate, and resisting the urge to resolve these contradictions opens up the space for a more nuanced dialogue and understanding.

Some thoughts on further questions

The sheer complexity and connectedness of the scale of Kanal Istanbul makes it a very interesting and challenging object and process to frame. There are endless ways in which my research and dissertation feels unfinished, for that exact reason. I will name some of the ways that I think the topics and questions that I have discussed can be further explored.

One that I have contemplated along the way is how the relationship between the residents of Durusu and ISKI, the largest employer in the town (also the body that governs and regulates the contraction and farming rules in the area), has changed over the years. One person had remarked that historically, jobs at the ISKI facilities were inherited from older family members, so for example if someone is retiring his niece would take his place. This speaks to how intimately tied and interdependent life in Durusu was with ISKI. At the same time, the old ISKI facilities, which were turned into a museum more than six or seven years ago, still remains closed and inaccessible to the residents. The muhtar, during our conversation mentioned that he has no idea why they won't open it and asked me to let him know if I end up being able to get access to their archives. Looking further into this relationship, both through archival research and through oral history, would have a lot to contribute to what it might mean to be "living with" infrastructures.

Agricultural and animal farming are livelihoods that have been greatly impacted by the developments in Northern Istanbul, particularly in Yeniköy and other towns surrounding Durusu. These are also towns with distinct family and communal histories, extensively researched and written on by Cihan Uzuncarsili Baysal. She remarks: “Ağaçlı and Yeniköy, were the two towns that experienced the destruction of the third airport most extensively and intensely. The lives of grandchildren of people who have endured great pain in being separated from their homelands and resettled and re grounded on the fertile soils of Northern Istanbul, have been flattened, not by war this time, but by top-down ecocide” (Baysal 2021,15). She identifies, as I have also mentioned, the legal changes that turned all villages into neighborhoods, the ban on construction and the regulations around the Terkos Lake and the construction of the third airport as major points of rupture related to the decline in social life in Durusu and neighboring villages. How are these points of rupture related to the decline in social life and sense of community in these villages, mentioned in some of my interviews as well as Baysal’s research? Recalling the pamphlet that Akin pulled out of his table to show me of the time when Durusu had its own municipality and he used to work there, what are some other practices of remembrance? Do these practices connect to a desire or capacity for collective imagination and action? How?

Last words

Reflecting on the promises of prosperity made by President Erdogan more than ten years ago, looking at the economic collapse that Turkey is going through, one can’t help but wonder about the role that promises play. What qualifies something as a promise? In such a politicized and polarized context, how can we collectively, on a daily basis, think about accountability and responsibility as it relates to our collective future(s)? Kanal Istanbul has also brought together people from different geographies and socio-economic backgrounds to work together around a common goal. What might be some lessons learned from these experiences? Can the imminence of rupture create space for reassessment of collective values? How do we encounter the possibility of change at such a large scale, both individually and collectively? Recalling Tureli and Al’s (2019) assessment that Kanal Istanbul is an attempt to redraw the past as an empty territory, along with Baysal’s (2021) analysis that the Northern Istanbul project (and that very physical bulldozing of their homes and sacred places), serves to create a *tabula rasa*, erasing the

memories of the space. When both past and the future is being negotiated in the present day, we have to fight for our voices, and our rights to imagine and enact our collective futures.

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