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THERE ARE ORCHARDS AROUND DİYARBAKIR

Retracing Kurdish forced
urbanisation in the 1980s-90s

HAKİKAT ADALET HAFIZA MERKEZİ
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There are Orchards around Diyarbakır:
Retracing Kurdish Forced Urbanisation in the 1980-90s
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HAKİKAT ADALET HAFIZA ÇALIŞMALARI DERNEĞİ YAYINLARI
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Contents

Introduction | **1**

1. Positioning Bağlar: Emergence and development | **7**

2. Endurance, resistance, and coping | **35**

3. Diversity in the neighbourhood | **47**

4. A place of shelter, a space of transit | **55**

5. Neglect, stigmatisation, and induced decay | **63**

Conclusion | **71**

Sources | **74**

Acknowledgments | **76**





Introduction

This booklet retraces the history of forced urbanisation in Bağlar, a densely populated district in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakır which has exponentially expanded as a result of violent displacement and mass migration in the 1980s and 90s.

Researching Bağlar

“There are orchards around Diyarbakır”, the opening line of a popular folk song goes, but nowadays the groves (*bağlar*) have all but disappeared. During the years at the apex of the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK), between the 1980s and 1990s, the population of Diyarbakır – the unofficial capital of Kurds in Turkey – almost tripled. Internally displaced people from rural areas, where thousands of villages were being evacuated and destroyed, settled into the city, moving into the historic city and the then-emerging shanty towns. Bağlar, nowadays a central and consolidated part of the city, is largely composed of neighbourhoods that emerged during this period. Nothing but its name suggests that before this rapid population influx the area was mostly occupied by orchards.

Shaped out of the brutal displacement of hundreds thousands of people from their land, Bağlar is a breeding ground for insurgent practices challenging the state’s legitimacy. In days of protest and mourning, clashes often erupt between security forces and demonstrators, who erect barricades and hide in the narrow alleys. The district, with more than 400,000 inhabitants¹, is considered to be a stronghold of the Kurdish movement. Yet, Bağlar’s historical specificity and socio-political relevance are often overlooked – both in academia, the public discourse, and official historiography. Just as many other similar neighbourhoods in the country’s Kurdish-majority regions, Bağlar is either disregarded or mostly explained through conventional lenses of rural-to-urban migration, gecekondu-isation (informal settlement), or “*çarpık kentleşme*” (crooked urbanisation). By reducing the area to an example of urban blight and failed planning, such approaches flatten Bağlar’s complexity and erase its role as a space of endurance and political mobilisation. Furthermore, they feed into the urban regeneration narrative underpinning state-sponsored projects for redevelopment “from scratch”, which in recent years have targeted Bağlar.

There are sporadic narrations on Bağlar which, though more sympathetic and attentive, do not go far beyond

1. According to official statistics, the population of Bağlar district is 406,471. However, the population of the “Old Bağlar” area, which consists of 11 neighbourhoods (Fatih, Alipınar, Kaynartepe, Körhat, Muradiye, Yeniköy, 5 Nisan, Şeyh Şamil, Yunus Emre, Mevlana Halit, and Selahattin Eyyubi) that received heavy migration in the 1980s and 1990s, is 225,889 (TÜİK, Turkish Statistical Institute).

descriptive accounts. They mention its role as a space of shelter for the forcibly displaced, point out the traces of rapid settlement with scarce resources and incremental densification in its built environment, or explain how the district materially disrupts the government-sanctioned urbanity and identity with its pockets of rural, Kurdish culture. But there is a conspicuous lack of knowledge on how Bağlar actually came into being.

Research aims and methods

The development process of Bağlar is significant for several reasons. The settlement and urbanisation process in Bağlar – grounded in forced uprooting, compressed into a short period, and occurring under harsh state repression – has unique characteristics that cannot be fully explained through the conventional lens of informal urbanisation in Turkey. Retracing Bağlar’s development reveals how processes such as gecekondu-isation, land commodification, and densification, common to other cities in Turkey, intertwine with forms of ethnic struggle and colonial territoriality specific to the Kurdish region. This research, therefore, seeks to shed light on a form of city-making distinct to a particular geography and history that is currently under-documented.²

It is essential to acknowledge and document the collective experience of urbanisation, settlement, and resistance in places like Bağlar, including the wide-ranging social and political implications. This is especially relevant in light of the looming threat of demolition and urban renewal driven by the central government, which gained renewed momentum, at least discursively, following the recent earthquakes. By presenting an alternative understanding of Bağlar that moves beyond its portrayal as a site of disorder and scarcity, this research seeks to contribute to developing different approaches to urban upgrading that do not involve redevelopment “from scratch” – an approach favoured by both government and local authorities despite their political differences.

To reconstruct Bağlar’s urban development and focus on the unique context of Kurdish urbanisation in 1980s and 1990s Turkey, this research was conducted on two

2. Discussions on the spatial dimensions of the Kurdish issue in Turkey and the effects of urbanisation on the Kurdish movement have gained momentum in the last two decades. For an in-depth analysis, see Zeynep Gambetti and Joost Jongerden, *The Kurdish Issue in Turkey: A Spatial Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

complementary fronts. First, we carried out desk and archival research online and in various institutions, including Ankara's State Archive, the Orient Institute in Istanbul, the Chamber of Architects of Istanbul, and the Metropolitan Municipality of Diyarbakır. Through publications, news articles, reports, and aerial photographs, we assembled a history of Bağlar's development. Second, we collected oral histories from current and former Bağlar residents who lived in the area during the 1980s and 1990s, documenting their personal experiences of settlement and transformation.

Booklet structure

The booklet is divided into five sections. The first section draws on newspaper articles and official reports to trace Bağlar's historical development. The remaining four sections explore key themes from our desk research and fieldwork, incorporating oral testimonies, observations, and secondary sources.

The first part provides a comprehensive review of Bağlar's development from its initial formation in the 1960s to the present day. This section includes a timeline of significant local events, contextualised within their regional and international dimensions, as well as a map highlighting sites significant to Bağlar's collective memory.

The second part examines Bağlar's evolution as a space of everyday survival and political mobilisation, where endurance amid neglect and poor infrastructure intersected with resistance to state repression. Displaced residents relied on solidarity networks, forming a politicised community symbolic of the Kurdish movement, while also navigating processes of urban development, land speculation, and spatial transformation.

The third section explores the heterogeneous built and social fabric of Bağlar, where the stratified urban texture reflects its haphazard development, and the diverse population embodies the variety of migrant groups and social classes that have shaped it over the past five decades. Contrary to mainstream representations framing

it as a “ghetto,” “slum,” or exclusively “Kurdish” area, it is important to recognize Bağlar’s internal diversity and dynamic character.

In the fourth part we discuss how Bağlar has always been a space of transit, where low-income populations tend to settle until their conditions allow them to relocate elsewhere in the city – leaving room for newcomers in a more precarious position. Therefore, while Bağlar’s population keeps changing, its role as a place of shelter for Diyarbakır’s most disadvantaged populations persists to this day.

The fifth section focuses on the ways Bağlar has historically been neglected and stigmatised, and how these discursive processes are closely tied to policies of underinvestment and induced decay. This view, in turn, feeds into grand visions of redevelopment that imply the erasure of Bağlar’s socio-spatial structure and the displacement of much of its population - exemplified by the urban transformation projects currently targeting the area.

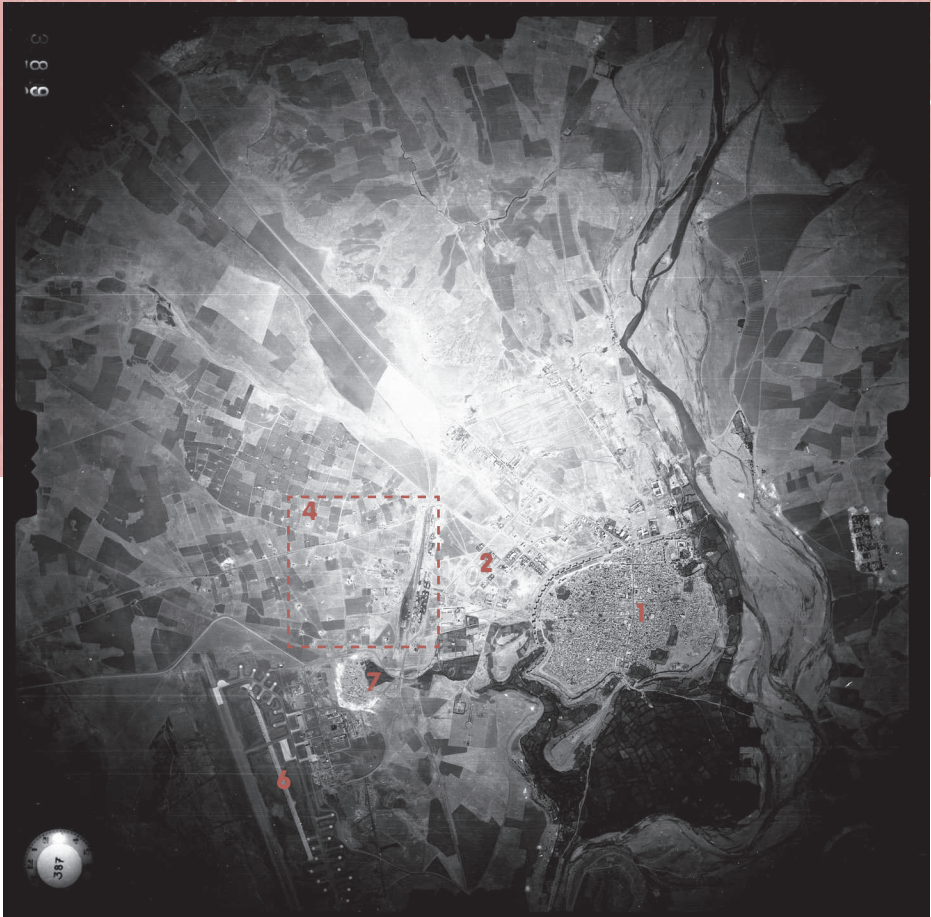
Overall, the findings presented in this booklet address a historiographical gap related to Bağlar and Diyarbakır, merging published sources with personal accounts of residents. While not exhaustive, this research aims to spark further work in documenting Bağlar’s collective memory and piecing together its overlooked history. This is a first step towards recognizing the role of Bağlar in the development of the city and the Kurdish political movement. The ultimate message underscores that Bağlar is not peripheral to Diyarbakır but central to its story: Bağlar does not lie “around” Diyarbakır, but in its very core. Acknowledging its significance calls for a deeper appreciation of its complex culture and advocates for improvements in living conditions that respect its rich social and material heritage, rather than erasing it.





1 Positioning Bağlar: Emergence and development

The mass forced urbanisation of the Kurdish population consolidated Diyarbakır's position as the political centre of the Kurdish movement, while Bağlar became a key support base for emerging Kurdish parties.



Aerial photograph of Diyarbakır in 1952. Outside the ancient walled city (1), the developing district of Yenişehir (2) is taking shape. Beyond the railway tracks and station (3) lies the sparsely populated area of Bağlar, with scattered rural mansions among vineyards. The crossroads of Dört Yol is already identifiable as a junction of countryside pathways (5). To the south are the Military Airport (6) and the old non-Muslim village of Alıpınar (7). (Courtesy of DBB Planning and Urbanism Office)

Early period of urbanisation (1940-1980)

Bağlar is mentioned for the first time in the context of the housing crisis in the Diyarbakır newspaper in 1940. Against the heat, one of the biggest problems of the city, Bağlar's vineyards, with their "clean and pure air, greenery, openness and wide horizons,"³ are pictured as a beautiful countryside for Diyarbakır. The mansions, built in a special architectural style different from the houses in the city and surrounded by green grape vines, are said to be reminiscent of Istanbul's Erenköy and Caddebostan. The article suggested that if the issues with electricity, water, and roads were resolved, the city would gain a new neighbourhood, and the housing shortage could be partially alleviated.

3. "Bağlar",
Diyarbakır,
31.07.1940.

4. "The housing
crisis in our city has
reached a critical
stage", *Diyarbakır*,
24.09.1947.

5. "Can Bağlar
District be turned
into a neighbourhood
as some of our
citizens wish?",
Diyarbakır,
19.12.1947.

6. "Municipality
opens bus
services to Bağlar
neighbourhood",
Diyarbakır,
30.07.1952.

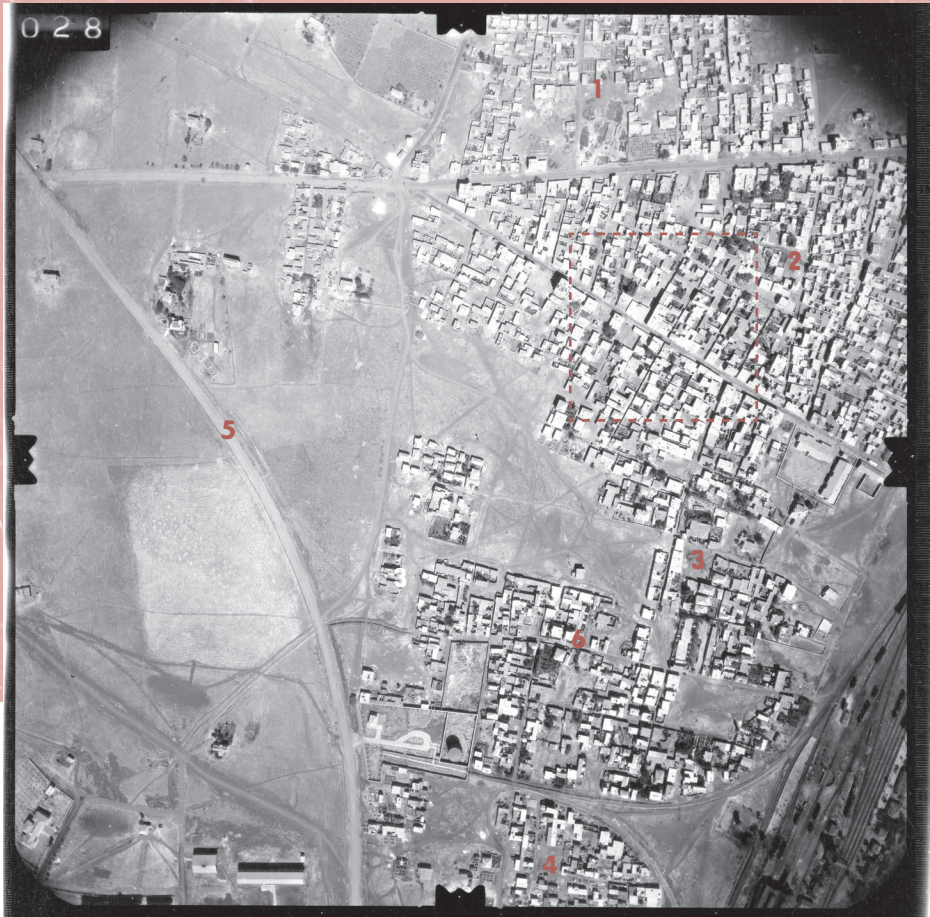
7. "Bağlar people
asking for a school",
Diyarbakır Sesi,
29.09.1960; "The
state of Bağlar", *Yeni
Yurt*, 15.02.1969.

8. "The rains
have started and
the citizens living
in the Bağlar
neighbourhood are
complaining about
the mud again",
Diyarbakır Sesi,
01.11.1961.

As the housing crisis grew, about fifty civil servant houses were built outside the city walls in the Yenisehir district. Although this development addressed some of the housing needs, the alternative address for the insufficient housing was Bağlar. There were three hundred mansions, large and small, owned by private individuals in Bağlar.⁴ However, it was noted that these houses, used only in the summer months, remained empty during the winter.

It was suggested that if the road between the station and the city were extended toward Bağlar, a primary school built, vehicles provided to improve access, and a police station established, the demand for the mansions – suitable for two families – would increase. The local population, approximately 2,500 at the time, stated they would help address the area's deficiencies through collective labour if necessary.⁵ A few years later, bus services began operating between the city and the vineyards, but the demand for a proper road remained unmet.⁶

In the 1960s, residents repeated their request for a school and highlighted ongoing infrastructure issues.⁷ By this time, Bağlar's population was estimated to be nearly 10,000.⁸ The problem of mud, frequently mentioned during this period, persisted for years. The area between Bağlar and the station became a dumping ground where waste accumulated during rainfall, and in summer, the area dried up, forming a swamp filled with mosquitoes due to the stagnant water and unpleasant odours, but the swamp remained untreated.



Aerial photograph of Bağlar in 1966. The neighbourhoods of Kaynartepe (1), Muradiye (2), Fatih (3), and Körhat (4) have by now been largely urbanised. The area features a mix of low-rise buildings, greenery, and empty lots. Karacadağ Bulvarı (5), later one of the city's main thoroughfares, is visible. A cluster of houses is seen along the street known as "Migrants' Road" (6), where Bulgarian Turks were settled by the government. (Courtesy of DBB Planning and Urbanism Office)

9. In Diyarbakır, 33 per cent of the population lives in slums, *Sesin*, 28.12.1974.

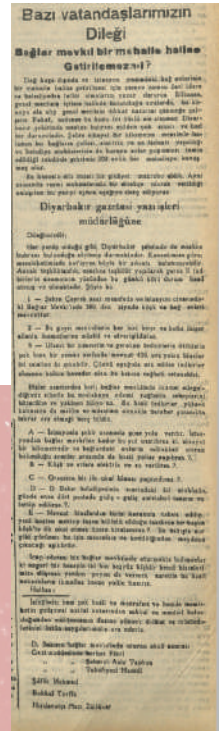
10. "There is no doctor at the Health Centre in Bağlar with a population of 60 thousand", *Yeni Zaman*, 08.05.1974.

11. Five articles published in *Yeni Zaman* newspaper between 1974 and 1976 contain information on Bağlar's population. In these news items, the population is stated to be sixty thousand, fifty thousand, thirty-five thousand respectively, and in two news items it is said to have exceeded sixty thousand.

12. "Bağlar Sunay Caddesi Residents declare that they will start resistance against the municipality if their roads are not built", *Yeni Zaman*, 15.10.1974.

In 1974, a report by Deputy Governor Mekin Sarioğlu stated that Diyarbakır had 12,000 slums, with 33% of the population living in them.⁹ By this time, Bağlar was referred to as "the only constituency that changes the fate of the municipal elections."¹⁰ Despite this, it was noted that Bağlar's residents were largely left to fend for themselves. While there is no clear data on Bağlar's population in the 1970s, it is estimated to have been slightly above 60,000.¹¹ Bağlar's only primary school (Faik Ali Primary School), its only secondary school (Atatürk Secondary School), and its only health centre were located on Sunay Street. Residents petitioned the municipality to asphalt the section of the street leading to the main intersection to allow minibuses and buses to pass more easily. They threatened to block the road to traffic if the street wasn't paved.¹²

According to local newspapers, the "slumification" of the city began around 1977–78 and was later accelerated by



"Bağlar", *Diyarbakır*, 31.07.1940.

"Can't Bağlar District be turned into a neighbourhood as some of our citizens wish?", *Diyarbakır*, 19.12.1947.



Aerial photograph of Bağlar in 1976. As the older neighborhoods become increasingly saturated, sparse self-built settlements begin to emerge on the outskirts. The military airport to the southwest (1) and the military base to the northeast (2) constrain the city's expansion. To the northwest, Diyarbakır's new prison (3), under construction at the time, stands amidst largely agricultural fields and scattered settlements. Further north, Urfa Yolu is visible. (Courtesy of DBB Planning and Urbanism Office)

the migration of people from Kurdish villages evacuated for security reasons.¹³ Reflecting the prevailing views of the time, squatting was associated with unemployment, alienation, social problems, and criminal activity. The initial negative transformations in the city's urban fabric during the 1970s were described using the metaphor of "deterioration."¹⁴

13. "Distorted Urbanisation", *Güneydoğu Mesaj*, 01-10.09.1995.

14. "Half of the city without a permit", *Diyarbakır Gün*, 21.01.2004.

15. The importance of Diyarbakır for the Kurdish movement has its roots in the revolts of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods and was consolidated in the 1960s with the establishment of the Revolutionary Eastern Culture Hearths (DDKO) following the Eastern Rallies. However, DDKO was closed down following the 12 March Memorandum.

Diyarbakır's prominence within the Kurdish movement, rooted in revolts during the Late Ottoman and Early Republican periods, was reinforced in the 1960s with the establishment of the Revolutionary Eastern Culture Hearths (DDKO) following the Eastern Rallies. DDKO was later shut down after the 12 March Memorandum (Military Coup). Following the thesis that "Kurdistan is a colony," in this period Kurdish organisations began organising separately from the Turkish left. In 1977, Mehdi Zana, the Kurdistan Socialist Party of Turkey's (*Partiya Sosyalist a Kurdistan a Tirkîyeyê* - PSKT) candidate, running as independent, was elected mayor of Diyarbakır, marking a milestone for the visibility and political representation of Kurdish identity.¹⁵ A year later, in 1978, PKK was founded in Lice, Diyarbakır, advocating Marxist-Leninist principles and an anti-colonial struggle in Kurdish territories.

Conflict, mass displacement and rapid urbanisation (1980-1999)

On 12 September 1980, a military coup took place, leading to widespread human rights violations. Diyarbakır Military Prison No. 5, the foundation of which was laid in 1972 on Bağlar's outskirts and heralded in the news with the headline "Diyarbakır is getting a modern prison",¹⁶ became a symbol of the coup's brutality. Mehdi Zana, who was arrested after the coup, was also imprisoned for 14 years. The prison, which is engraved in the memory of Kurdish society with the torture and ill-treatment of prisoners during this period, contributed to the Kurdish political movement gaining momentum and Diyarbakır being recognised as its capital city.

Martial law, which had been in effect prior to the coup, was expanded to cover all cities and later replaced by a

16. "Diyarbakır is getting a modern prison", *Sesin*, 08.10.1974.



Aerial photograph of Bağlar in 1986. By the mid-1980s, agricultural land between the older parts of Bağlar, Urfa Yolu, Karacadağ Bulvarı, and the stream had nearly disappeared, giving way to scattered clusters of housing and prospective developments. Important arteries such as Emek Caddesi (1) and Medine Bulvarı (2) began to take shape. Amid the largely informal developments, planned housing blocks like the Civil Servants' Lodgments (*Memur Lojmanları*) (3) and Iskanevleri (4) stand out. The new police headquarters (5) is also visible. (Courtesy of DBB Planning and Urbanism Office)

17. "Now the trouble of going back", *Milliyet*, 28.07.1995.

18. TBMM, "Report of the Parliamentary Investigation Commission (10/25) established to investigate the problems of our citizens who migrated due to evacuated settlements in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia and to determine the necessary measures to be taken", (1998): 11.

19. IDMC, Internal Displacement Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2006 (Geneva, 2007), 4, 95.

State of Emergency (*Olağanüstü Hâl* – OHAL). On 19 July 1987, following the lifting of martial law, the first OHAL was declared in Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Siirt, eventually expanding to encompass the entire Kurdish region. From this point on, the state began evacuating Kurdish villages, citing clashes between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces as the reason.

Estimates on displacement during the forced evacuations of Kurdish provinces in the 1990s vary widely, but all point to a massive scale. Official data from the Regional Governorate of the State of Emergency in 1994 reported the evacuation of 988 villages and 1,676 hamlets, affecting 50,000 families and 311,000 people.¹⁷ The Parliamentary Investigation Commission recorded even higher figures, with 905 villages, 2,923 hamlets, and 3,428 settlements evacuated.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated that between 954,000 and 1.2 million people were forcibly displaced.¹⁹ Despite differing numbers, it is clear that millions were affected by these displacements.

Forced migration due to village evacuations was most intense between 1992 and 1994, with many people who were forced to migrate but reluctant to leave their lands moving to Diyarbakır. However, since the interval between population censuses, conducted every five years

Bilgin: 'Diyarbakır' da 20 bin aç var'

DIYARBAKIR'in Bağlar Belediye Başkanı **Ahmet Yağmur**, yiyecek dağıtımındaki izdiham nedeniyle izdihamı **Kemal Polat**'ı suçlayarak "Yardımları tespit edilen adreslere verilmiş diye yalvardım, ama kabul etmedi. İzdihamı seyredip güldüyordu, hoşuna gidiyordu" dedi. **Polat** gıda yardımını dün kendi ilçesi Eğil'de sürdürürken, paketler bu kez korucu ve asker denetiminde dağıtıldı.

BU KEZ OLMADI

600 bin nüfuslu Bağlar'da 400 bin kişinin yardıma muhtaç durumda olduğunu kaydeden **Yağmur**, çamur deryası içindeki yiyecek dağıtımında yaşanan izdihama **Polat**'ın neden olduğunu ileri sürdü. **Yağmur** "Hiç kimse yardım etmiyor. Bizim gibi vatandaşlarımızın o nüfusla oynamaya hak-

kı yok" diye konuştu. 320 poşetlik gıda yardımıyla geldiği ilçede bakanlar gibi karşılanan **Polat**, yaptırıldığı caminin inşaatını geçerek vatandaşlarla görüşti. Belediye binası önünde yardım dağıtılırken, bir bölük asker ve korucu onlem aldı. Erzak poşet-

leri, güvenlik güçlerinin kuvvetlerinin gözetiminde izdiham yaşanmadan kaymakamlığa belirlenmiş kişilere dağıtıldı.

Diyarbakır Büyükşehir Belediye Başkanı **Ahmet Bilgin** her gün yüzlerce aç insanın kapısını çaldığını belirtti-

rek il ve ilçelerde belediyelere kayıtlı 20 binin üzerinde aç insan olduğunu söyledi. **Diyarbakır**'ın bölgede en çok aç alan il olduğunu kaydeden **Bilgin** pansuman tedbirlerle bir yere varılamayacağını, sorunların günden güne büyüdüğünü vurguladı.

Şeyhmus ÇAKAN, Namık DURUKAN, Mehmet TÜRK - DIYARBAKIR

"Bilgin: 'There are 20 thousand hungry in Diyarbakır'", *Milliyet*, 18.01.1997.



Aerial photograph of Bağlar in 1992. Intense construction activity is evident in the newly developing neighborhoods, including 5 Nisan (1), Şeyh Şamil (2), and Mevlana Halit (3). Large apartment blocks built by contractors appear alongside earlier self-built houses. Informal urbanization has also extended into the former villages of Yeniköy (4) and Peyas (5), as well as in Huzurevleri (6) and Seyrantepe (7). The densification and vertical expansion of buildings in Bağlar's older core, especially along its main roads, is also notable. (Courtesy of DBB Planning and Urbanism Office)

20. DIE, 1990 General Population Census: Administrative Division (Summary Tables) (Ankara: State Institute of Statistics, 1991), 27.

21. DIE, 2000 General Population Census: Social and Economic Characteristics of the Population: Diyarbakır (Ankara: State Institute of Statistics, 2000), 62.

22. TMMOB, Türkiye Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği Yayınları, 1998, 26.

23. Human Rights Watch, Displaced And Disregarded: Turkey's Failing Village Return Programme, Vol. 14, No. 7 (2002): 23.

24. "In Diyarbakır, 200 gecekondular were demolished in 14 months", Yeni Yurt, 09.07.1993.

until 1990, was changed to ten years after 1990, clear population data for the period of forced migration is unavailable. According to the State Institute of Statistics, Diyarbakır's central district population was 381,144²⁰ in 1990 and 545,983²¹ in 2000. In contrast, a report by TMMOB estimated the central district population at 822,837²² in 1996, based on calculations of both natural and extraordinary population growth, a 116% increase from 1990. The difference between these calculations can be attributed to outward migration, as Diyarbakır not only received migrants but also saw people leave for cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Mersin, and Adana.

Diyarbakır, particularly Bağlar, saw a significant influx of migrants from both within the province and from other Kurdish areas. One source notes that Bağlar's population grew from 75,000 to 300,000 in the 1990s.²³ In 1993, following the establishment of the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, the first-tier municipalities of Yenışehir, Sur, and Bağlar were created. At that time, Diyarbakır's population had surged from 200,000 to over 800,000, and despite strict controls, squatting continued unabated. Teams demolished 200 shanties in Bağlar's 5 Nisan Neighborhood,²⁴ yet reports indicated that half of the city's population lived in slums.

Shortly afterwards, an eight-storey building on Sento Street in Fatih neighbourhood of Bağlar collapsed. Since

"Distorted Urbanisation",
Güneydoğu Mesaj,
01-10.09.1995.

ÇARPIK KENTLEŞME ...

●Diyarbakır'da gecekondulaşma 1977-78 yıllarından sonra başlamış özellikle bölgemiz de yaşanan siyasal olayların, dolaylı gövnenin gerekçesiyle boğaniyan veya boğaniyan köyden göçeden insanlar, sonuğunu Diyarbakır'da altıncı, geçekondulaşma ve çarpık kentleşme olarak karşımıza ve aşınmaz sorunlar haline gelmiştir.

1. Bölge Herkesin bildiği gibi, Diyarbakır'da gecekondulaşma 1977-78 yıllarından sonra başlamış özellikle bölgemiz de yaşanan siyasal olayların, dolaylı gövnenin gerekçesiyle boğaniyan veya boğaniyan köyden göçeden insanlar, sonuğunu Diyarbakır'da altıncı, geçekondulaşma ve çarpık kentleşme olarak karşımıza ve aşınmaz sorunlar haline gelmiştir.

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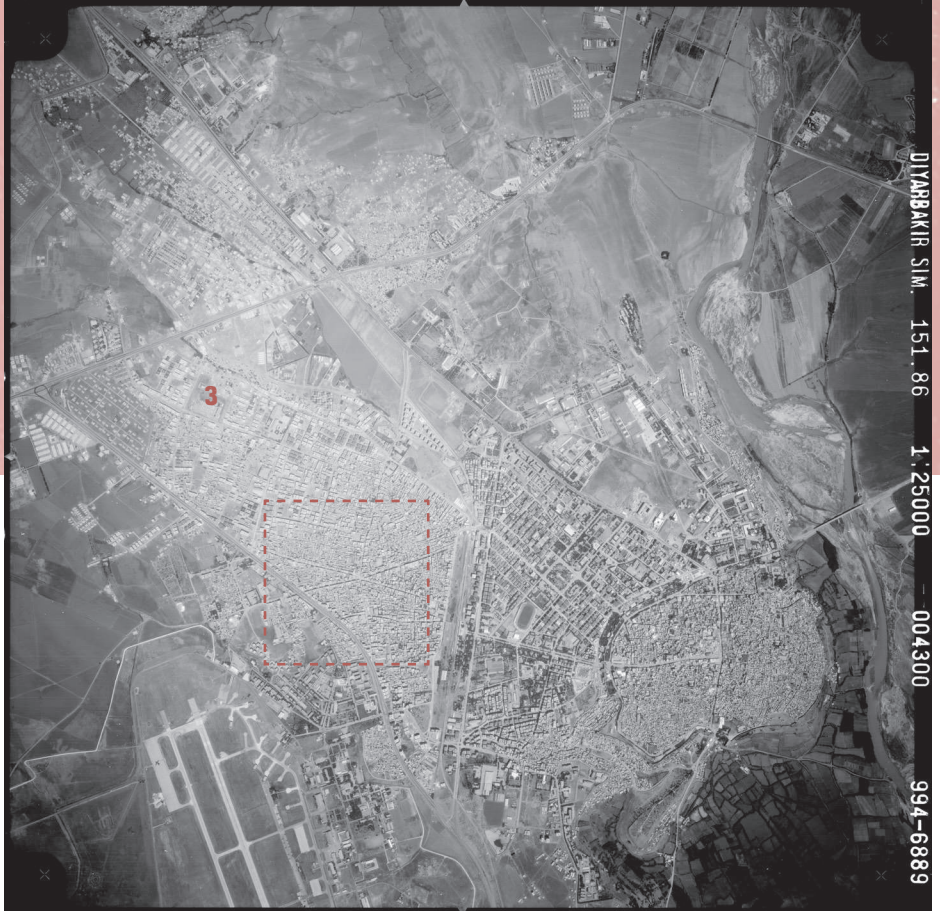
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Diyarbakır'dan çarpık kentleşmeye örnek



Aerial photograph of Bağlar in 1994. Compared to the previous image, this photograph illustrates the rapid urbanization and densification that Bağlar experienced in the 1990s. The densification and vertical expansion of buildings in Bağlar's older core, particularly along main roads as Karacadağ Bulvarı (1) and the streets flowing into Dörtöy (2), is also visible. The prison (3), originally situated in an open area, is now entirely encircled by houses. (Courtesy of DBB Planning and Urbanism Office)

the flats had not yet been rented out, there were no casualties. Many builders bypass regulations, erecting multi-storey flats on licenses for fewer floors, and selling these units without proper authorization. During a period of intense construction in the district, the 5 April 1994 austerity²⁵ economic measures halted housing projects, causing contractors to abandon the city and leaving numerous developments unfinished.

Local administrations were unprepared for this sudden migration. The influx of people also strained health and infrastructure services, leading to an increase in diseases. In 1994, Bağlar's densely packed slum neighbourhoods only received water every three to four days.²⁶ During this period, the district's political identity was shaped by forced migration, with numerous protests, ranging from hunger strikes and shutdowns to street clashes and press statements. Unlike other central districts, protests in Bağlar were more widespread and intense, with violent confrontations between protesters and law enforcement. As the mass forced urbanisation of the Kurdish population cemented Diyarbakır's position as the political hub of the Kurdish movement, Bağlar became a key support base for the growing pro-Kurdish parties.

25. The 5 April 1994 decisions destabilised Turkey's construction sector by cutting public spending and increasing financing costs. Demand for residential and commercial projects dropped, small firms struggled, and many projects faced delays or cancellations.

26. "We are groaning for water!", *Milliyet*, 02.10.1994.

"The Capital of Poverty", *Milliyet*, 21.01.1997.





Satellite view of Bağlar in 2002.

The area bounded by the railway, Urfa Yolu, Karacadağ Bulvarı, and the stream is now fully saturated. Koşuyolu Park (1), established in the late 1990s, marks Bağlar's eastern boundary. (Source: Google Earth)

Political opening, Kurdish administrations, and urban development (1999-2014)

In the local elections of 1999, the People's Democracy Party (HADEP), which was founded after the closure of the two previous parties, finished ahead in 38 municipalities, including one metropolitan municipality. In Diyarbakır, Feridun Çelik was elected mayor with 62.5% of the vote. Through municipalism and local governments, the Kurds were able to solve their problems and put them on the agenda more widely. The state of emergency that began on 12 September was lifted shortly after the AKP came to power in 2002. In the 2004 local elections, Osman Baydemir was elected Mayor of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, following Çelik. In the same election, Yurdusev Özsökmenler and Cabbar Leygara were elected as co-mayors in Bağlar. In 2008, Bağlar, Sur, Yenişehir and Kayapınar were declared districts. In the elections held in the same year, the Democratic Society Party (DTP) won all the central districts and the metropolitan mayorship.

During the so-called “opening” process, important steps were taken to preserve Kurdish identity and culture in Kurdish-administered areas. Streets and neighbourhoods were renamed with Kurdish names, Kurdish language courses were introduced, and cultural events became more widespread. The municipality also focused on rediscovering and restoring Diyarbakır's heritage, particularly in the walled city, where local administrations signed a contested protocol with TOKİ for urban transformation in the impoverished neighbourhoods of Alipaşa and Lalebey. The urban developments of this period further entrenched the spatial division of classes within Kurdish society.

27. DEM Party and its predecessors received 68.10% (DTP), 58.56% (BDP), 70.33% (HDP), and 71.83% (DEM Party) of the votes in the local elections in 2009, 2014, 2019, and 2024, respectively.

In parallel, Kurdish-controlled municipalities emphasised their support for low-income neighbourhoods, where they had a strong base.²⁷ After 1999, Bağlar saw notable improvements in infrastructure and better access to basic services such as transportation, street cleaning, and waste management. In a district marked by high unemployment, poverty, and the forced displacement of many residents who had lost their livelihoods in the villages, local

administrations promoted solidarity initiatives. For instance, the Günışığı Solidarity Store was opened in 2007 to meet residents' clothing needs.

Despite these improvements and small-scale initiatives, Kurdish-led municipalities fell short of delivering a radical upgrading of Bağlar and other gecekondu areas. Instead, the Metropolitan Zoning Plans approved during Osman Baydemir's tenure outlined a blueprint for the city's dramatic expansion. In the following years, gated high-rise blocks and wide boulevards emerged in districts like Kayapınar and New Bağlar, attracting the newly emerging middle class, including many relocating from Bağlar's older neighborhoods. Meanwhile, in 2012, Baydemir famously toured one of Kaynartepe's main streets in Bağlar with real-estate tycoon Ali Ağaoğlu, just months after the Urban Transformation Law 6306 was enacted. Even for the Kurdish political movement, Bağlar was increasingly viewed as irrecoverable, a district that needed to be rebuilt from scratch.

“Opening with Halay
in Diyarbakır”,
Milliyet, 16.12.2005.



Diyarbakır'da halaylı açılış

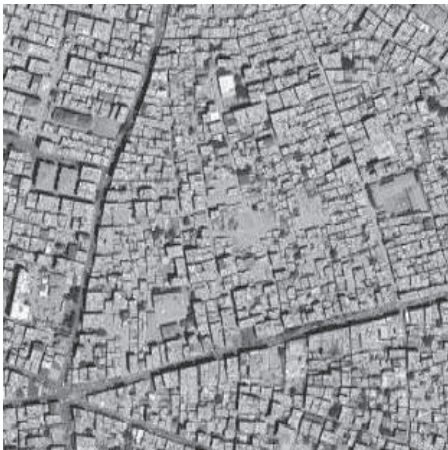
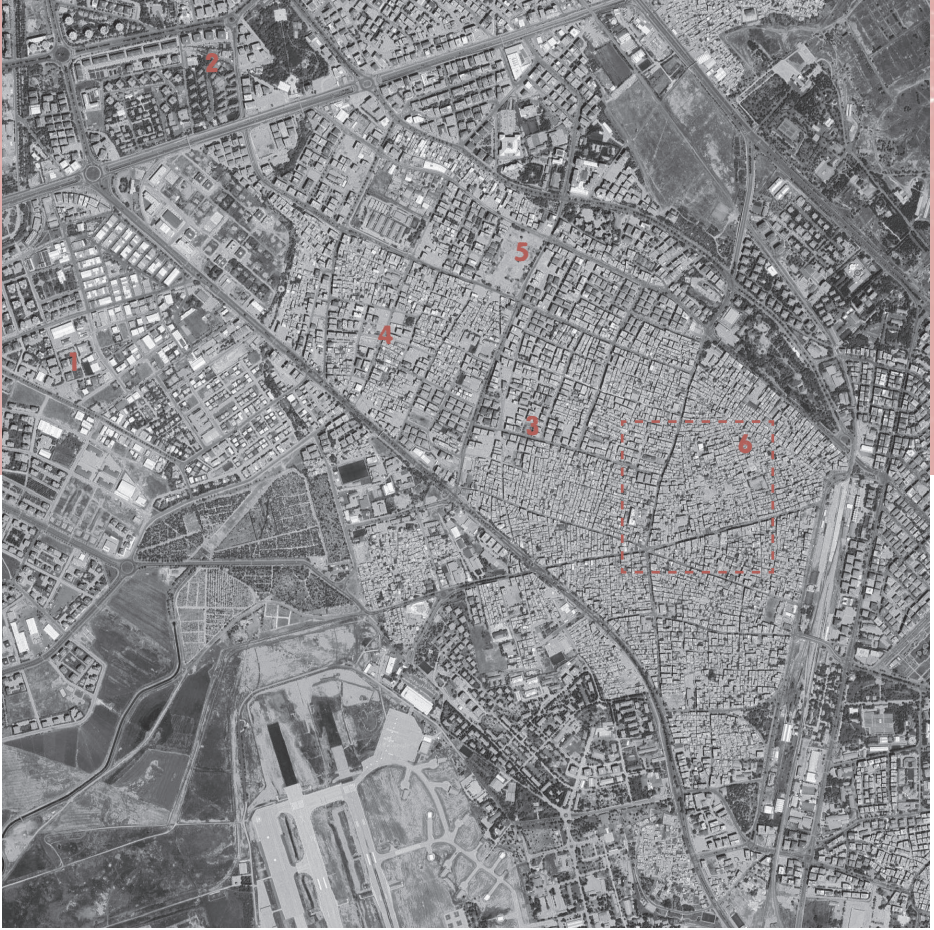
Diyarbakır'ın Bağlar Belediyesi'nce yaptırılan “Kadın Yaşam Parkı” ile park içinde yer alan yapılan anıtın açılış töreni dün yapıldı. Açılışa katılan Diyarbakır Büyükşehir Belediye Başkanı Osman Baydemir, kadın - erkek arasındaki ayrımcılığın ortadan kalkmasıyla toplumsal barışın sağlanabileceğini söyledi. Baydemir ve Bağlar Belediye Başkanı Yurdusev Özsoğmenler, açılışın ardından kadınlarla birlikte parkta halay çekti. ■ **DIYARBAKIR AA**

Conflict recrudescence and urban regeneration (2014-2024)

After the Arab Spring in 2011, regional upheavals – especially the wars in neighbouring Iraq and Syria – had a profound impact on the Kurdish movement and Diyarbakır. During Summer 2014, ISIS carried out the Yazidi Genocide, killing 5,000 and displacing tens of thousands. Many found refuge in Diyarbakır's Fidanlık Camp. In September-October 2014, ISIS attacked Kobani Canton in Rojava, defended by YPG/YPJ forces. Turkey's refusal to open a humanitarian corridor, as called for by HDP politicians, sparked protests violently suppressed, with 46 casualties reported by the Human Rights Association. Bağlar witnessed intense protests and clashes during this time.

During the 2015 elections campaign, a HDP rally in Diyarbakır's train station square was bombed, killing 5 and injuring over 400. Two days later, on 7 June 2015, the HDP won 13% of the vote, preventing the AKP from securing a parliamentary majority. Failed coalition talks led to a rerun on 1 November, amidst attacks like the Suruç Massacre and the 10 October Ankara bombing, all claimed by ISIS. After regaining a majority, Erdoğan declared the peace process, launched on Newroz Day 2013, "in the freezer."

Later in 2015, "self-administration" was declared by people's assemblies in some parts of the Kurdish provinces. The ensuing escalation saw the Turkish military besiege urban areas where militants had barricaded themselves, imposing 381 curfews across 11 Kurdish provinces, including 214 in Diyarbakır alone. From December 2015 to March 2016, a siege on several neighbourhoods in Diyarbakır's historic walled city of Sur destroyed much of the area and displaced nearly 20,000 people. Many of those displaced from Sur, itself a refuge for villagers forcibly evicted in the 1980s and 1990s, relocated to Bağlar. The district also saw heightened tension, with reports of residents temporarily leaving, fearing that violence might spill over. Additionally, Bağlar provided shelter to refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war and ISIS attacks in Iraq.



Satellite view of Bağlar in 2023.

To the west, developments in “New Bağlar” are evident (1), while to the north, Kayapınar (2) has also been extensively urbanised. The impacts of the 2023 earthquakes, which prompted numerous demolitions, are visible, in particular in areas of 5 Nisan (3), Şeyh Şamil (4), and Mevlana Halit (5). In Kaynartepe (6), gaps in the dense urban fabric reflect both earthquake-related demolitions and those connected to ongoing urban transformation projects. (Source: Google Earth)

Following the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, the situation worsened. Kurdish political representatives faced mass arrests, the Turkish Army launched cross-border operations against Kurdish forces in Iraq and Syria, and state-appointed trustees (kayyım) replaced elected officials in Kurdish regions, including Diyarbakır and Bağlar.

Against this backdrop, in 2021, the Turkish government announced plans for “urban transformation” in Bağlar. The project was set to begin near Dört Yol in Kaynaratepe, the heart of Bağlar and a frequent epicentre during times of unrest. As is common in Turkey, “urban transformation” stands for a tabula rasa redevelopment, erasing the neighbourhood’s existing structure. The project faced opposition by civil society, including legal challenges, and remains currently stalled, but has never been called off. Meanwhile, parts of the district remain in a state of worsening decay, further exacerbated by the 2023 earthquakes, which caused extensive damage in Bağlar. Those who can afford to leave continue to move to the city’s expanding outskirts, while Bağlar increasingly shelters the poorest and most marginalized groups. Although both authorities and residents agree on the need to improve living conditions in Bağlar, a clear and sustainable plan has yet to emerge.

Advertisement board announcing urban regeneration, Bağlar, 2020.



Timeline of important events affecting the development of Bağlar

1940

Bağlar is featured in the newspaper “Diyarbakır”.

1947

Housing Crisis - Fifty civil servant houses are built outside the city walls in response to the housing crisis.

1952

Diyarbakır Municipality starts bus services to Bağlar.

1969

Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları founded - The “Revolutionary Hearths of Eastern Culture” was founded by Kurdish intellectuals and activists to advocate for the recognition of Kurdish identity, culture and rights. It was dissolved after the 1971 military coup.

1971

12 March Memorandum - A military ‘soft coup’ overthrew the government, intensified repression of leftist movements, restricted freedoms and exacerbated political polarisation, shaping Turkey’s unstable political landscape in the 1970s.

In 1965-1967, 1/1000 scale plans for inside and outside the city walls are prepared and put into effect - With this plan, plans for the Yenişehir District are revised, while the Bağlar District and the current military area are proposed as development areas.

1972

Construction of Diyarbakır Prison begins in Bağlar.

1974

Diyarbakır gecekondu report - In a report drafted by Deputy Governor Mekin Sarıoğlu, it is stated that there are 12,000 gecekondu in Diyarbakır, housing 33% of the population.

1977

Mehdi Zana is elected mayor of Diyarbakır - Mehdi Zana is voted mayor of Diyarbakır, becoming the first Kurdish nationalist leader to openly advocate for Kurdish identity and rights. He faced intense scrutiny and pressure during his tenure, culminating in his arrest following the 1980 military coup.

1978

Foundation of the PKK.

Martial law is imposed - martial law is declared in 13 Kurdish provinces and extended to nineteen provinces the following year.

1980

Diyarbakır Military Prison No. 5 opens - Diyarbakır Military Prison No. 5, built in Bağlar, is inaugurated.

12 September Military Coup - The military, led by

	Kenan Evren, overthrew the government, declared martial law, suppressed freedoms, arrested thousands, targeted Kurdish movements and enacted a repressive constitution that would shape politics for decades.		
	Iraqi invasion of Iran / start of the Iran-Iraq war.		
1982		
	Constitution of 1982 - The new constitution, drafted under military rule, is approved in a referendum with 92% of the vote.		1988 The Convention on the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment is signed. Enfal Campaign and Halabja Massacre in Southern Kurdistan / Iraq - On 16 March 1988, planes carrying poisonous chemical gas bombarded the town of Halabja. More than 5,000 people were killed and nearly 10,000 civilians were injured.
1983		
	State of Emergency law is adopted.		
	Turgut Özal (ANAP) is elected Prime Minister.	1990 The People's Labour Party (HEP) is founded - HEP, the first representative of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, is established.
1984		First Gulf War begins.
	Law No. 2981, "Gecekondu Amnesty".	1991 Vedat Aydın murder - Kurdish politician and human rights defender Vedat Aydın is detained and later found dead; JITEM is held responsible for the murder.
	PKK's first armed action.		Leyla Zana's swearing-in ceremony.
1985		
	The temporary village guard system is introduced.		
1987		
	Establishment of the "State of Emergency Region", State of Emergency Regional Governorate - Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Hakkâri, Mardin, Siirt, Tunceli and Van are included as neighbouring provinces, followed by Adıyaman, Bitlis and Muş. In 1990, Batman and Şırnak became provinces, bringing the number of provinces to 13.	1992 Newroz massacre in Cizre - 57 to 120 people are killed in Cizre during Newroz celebrations.
	The Gendarmerie Intelligence and Anti-Terrorism Command (JITEM) is established.		Increase in village evacuations in Kurdish provinces - According to the statements of the Ministry of Interior, a total of 982 villages and 1,674 hamlets were evacuated in the Eastern and Southeastern regions in 1995.

1993

Operations in Diyarbakır and Bingöl - The Turkish Air Force conducts an air operation in the region between Diyarbakır and Bingöl. As a result of the operation, 150 PKK members are killed.

Unilateral ceasefire declared by the PKK.

Proclamation of the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality.

Demolition of gecekondu structures in Bağlar - While reports indicate that half of Diyarbakır's population lives in gecekondu, 200 shanties are demolished in the 5 Nisan neighbourhood.

1994

Bağlar Municipality is declared a "lower tier" municipality.

"Central Village Project" announced - Following village evacuations, the "Central Village Project" is announced by the Tansu Çiller government in November 1994.

1995

Koşuyolu Park is established.

"Return to Village Project" is announced.

1996

Revolt in Diyarbakır Prison - 8 prisoners are killed in an uprising in Diyarbakır Prison.

1997

Operation Hammer - Turkish Armed Forces cross into Northern Iraq and intervene in the civil war between Massoud

Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan with the aim of destroying PKK units. Approximately 1200 PKK militants are killed.

1998

Parliamentary Report on Evacuated Villages - On 14 January 1998, the 'Report of the Parliamentary Investigation Commission Established to Investigate the Problems of Our Citizens Migrating Due to Evacuated Settlements in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia and to Determine the Measures to be Taken' is submitted to the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

1999

Öcalan arrested in Kenya - PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan is apprehended in Kenya's capital Nairobi on 15 February 1999 by Turkish authorities with the assistance of international intelligence agencies.

"Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project" announced - In 1999, the Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project (RVRP) was launched as a continuation of the Central Village project. Returns to the evacuated villages did not take place effectively, mainly due to lack of the necessary conditions, mistrust of the Turkish government and pressure on migrants to report that they had left their villages due to terrorism.

HADEP's first metropolitan presidency (Feridun Çelik in Diyarbakır).

2002	<p>AKP comes to power.</p> <p>The state of emergency is lifted.</p>	<p>sentenced for calling PKK militants guerrillas.</p> <p>Tekel Resistance.</p> <p>Kurdish Opening.</p>
2004	<p>Osman Baydemir of the BDP is elected mayor of Diyarbakır.</p> <p>Kardelen Women's House is established in Bağlar.</p>	2010
2005	<p>Turkey begins the EU accession process.</p>	<p>Constitutional Amendment Referendum.</p>
2006	<p>Diyarbakır Metropolitan 1/25.000 Master Plan is approved and enters into force.</p>	<p>2011</p> <p>Syrian revolution and war begin.</p> <p>Van Earthquake - A 7.1 magnitude earthquake hits on 23 October, causing major damage, especially in Van and Erciş. More than 600 people lose their lives.</p> <p>Roboski Massacre - 34 people are killed when Turkish warplanes bomb a group of Kurdish villagers engaged in smuggling near the Iraqi border.</p>
2007	<p>Bağlar Women's Cooperative is established.</p> <p>Bağlar Günışığı Assistance and Solidarity Store is established.</p> <p>e-Memorandum.</p>	2012
2008	<p>Bağlar, Sur, Yenişehir and Kayapınar declared districts - Bağlar, Sur, Yenişehir and Kayapınar were declared districts in line with the decision to establish districts within municipalities by Law No. 5747.</p> <p>Ergenekon Trial.</p>	<p>Law 6306 on the Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk is passed.</p> <p>Mayor Osman Baydemir takes real estate tycoon Ali Ağaoğlu for a walk in Bağlar.</p>
2009	<p>TRT6 starts broadcasting.</p> <p>Demirtaş and Ahmet Türk are investigated for speaking Kurdish in a group meeting.</p> <p>Osman Baydemir is</p>	<p>2013</p> <p>2013 Diyarbakır Newroz - Öcalan's 2013 declaration is read during the Diyarbakır Newroz.</p> <p>Gezi Resistance - The protest organised by Taksim Solidarity against the removal of some trees in Taksim Gezi Park as part of the Taksim Pedestrianisation Project started with a group of 40-50 people setting up tents and staying overnight in the park. On 31 May, after the intensified interventions of the law enforcement forces, the protests in Istanbul gain</p>

momentum and spread, with support for the protests from many provinces.

Jiyan Semt Pazarı (Diyarbakır Bağlar Women's Market) - Diyarbakır's first women's neighbourhood market is opened by Bağlar Municipality.

2014

Fidanlık Camp established in Diyarbakır - Yazidis who migrated from Sinjar during the ISIS-led genocide settle in the Fidanlık Camp in Diyarbakır Yenişehir.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan elected as President - In the first election in which the president is elected by direct popular vote, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is elected as president with 52% of the votes among three candidates (Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu and Selahattin Demirtaş).

Kobani Events - Protests erupt in Turkey's Kurdish provinces following Erdoğan's words "Kobani has fallen, it will fall" during the YPG/YPJ's battle for ISIS-besieged Kobani in Syria; 46 people are killed in clashes.

2015

Demirtaş: "We will not make you president!"

A bomb attack is organised against the pre-election HDP rally in Diyarbakır.

7 June general elections - HDP wins 80 MPs with 13% of the vote. AKP loses absolute majority in the parliament for the first time.

Diyarbakır Walls and Hevsel Gardens are included in the UNESCO "World Cultural Heritage" list.

Suruç Explosion - A suicide bomber in Suruç district attacks a group of activists from the Federation of Socialist Youth Associations (SGDF) who were preparing to deliver aid to Kobani. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack, killing 33 and injuring more than 100 people.

Trench Operations / Self-governance process - Following the declaration of autonomy in Kurdish regions, the government intervenes in Kurdish provinces, especially Diyarbakır, Cizre, Nusaybin, Idil, Yüksekova and Şırnak, causing massive urban destruction and heavy casualties.

Erdoğan: "The solution process has been put in the freezer".

Tahir Elçi assassination - Human rights defender and President of the Diyarbakır Bar Association Tahir Elçi dies on 28 November 2015 as a result of an armed attack during a press conference in Diyarbakır.

103 people are killed and more than 500 injured in the Ankara bombing.

2016

Coup Attempt - Following the failed military uprising against President Erdoğan's government, there are widespread arrests and purges across the country.

Operation Euphrates Shield - The Turkish army and Syrian rebel groups loyal to Turkey fight against ISIL forces as well as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Turkey's invasion of northern Syria creates a buffer strip along the Turkish border and prevents the Kurdish-controlled cantons

in Rojava from merging.

Gültan Kışanak arrested - Diyarbakır Metropolitan Mayor Gültan Kışanak is arrested 'on charges of being a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)'. On 26 October, thousands of demonstrators gather in front of Diyarbakır City Hall demanding the release of the mayors.

Trustee appointed to DBB - Trustees are appointed to replace Gültan Kışanak and Fırat Anlı, who were detained on 25 October.

Arrests against HDP leadership - Several HDP politicians, including HDP Co-Chairs Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş, are arrested.

2017

Constitutional Referendum - In a referendum held under a state of emergency, Turkey switches to a presidential executive system with 51.4% of the vote, according to government figures.

2018

Operation Olive Branch - The Turkish Armed Forces invades the Kurdish-majority Afrin region in northwestern Syria in cooperation with the Syrian National Army (SNA) against the People's Protection Units (YPG) of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Presidential System.

2019

2019 Local Elections - Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı (HDP) is elected mayor of Diyarbakır with 62.9% of the votes.

Trustees appointed to HDP

municipalities - Trustees are appointed to Diyarbakır, Van and Mardin; Diyarbakır Mayor Mızraklı (HDP) is dismissed and arrested.

Operation Peace Spring - A cross-border military operation is launched by the Turkish Armed Forces and the Syrian National Army against the Syrian Democratic Forces, which declared autonomy in northern Syria.

2020

Kaynaratepe neighbourhood is declared a "Risky Area" by the Presidency.

2021

Kaynaratepe is declared an "Urban Transformation Area" - After being declared a 'Risky Area', Kaynaratepe neighbourhood is earmarked for urban transformation by the Ministry of Urban Planning.

2023

Kahramanmaraş Earthquake - On 6 February 2023, earthquakes occur with epicentres in Pazarcık and Elbistan districts of Kahramanmaraş. Nearly 55,000 people are killed and more than 100,000 injured in the earthquakes that affect Turkey, Syria and Kurdistan.

2024

Dogan Hatun and Ayse Serra Bucak (DEM Party) are elected co-mayors of Diyarbakır.

Bağlar is featured in the newspaper "Diyarbakır"

In 1965-1967, 1/1000 scale plans for inside and outside the city walls are prepared and put into effect

Construction of Diyarbakır Prison begins in Bağlar

Iranian Revolution
Foundation of the PKK

1950

1960

1970

Diyarbakır Municipality starts bus services to Bağlar

12 March Memorandum

Martial law is imposed

Housing crisis

Revolutionary Eastern Culture Hearths foundation

Report on gecekondu in Diyarbakır

Mehdi Zana is elected mayor of Diyarbakır

Diyarbakır Metropolitan 1/25.000 Master Plan is approved

Osman Baydemir is elected mayor of Diyarbakır

"Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project" announced

Bağlar Women's Cooperative is established

Bağlar Günüşiği Assistance and Solidarity Store is established

Turkey begins EU accession process

AKP comes to power

2000

Bağlar, Sur, Yenişehir and Kayapınar declared districts

Kardelen Women's House is established in Bağlar

HADEP's first metropolitan presidency

TRT6 starts broadcasting

e-Memorandum

The state of emergency is lifted

Kurdish Opening

Ergenekon Trial

Öcalan arrested in Kenya

Syrian revolution and war begin

Constitutional Amendment Referendum

Van Earthquake

7 June general elections

Diyarbakır Walls and Hevsel Gardens are included in the UNESCO "World Cultural Heritage" list

Roboski Massacre

Gezi Resistance

Kobani Events

Tahir Elçi assassination

Ankara Explosion

Law 6306 on "Urban Transformation" is passed

O. Baydemir takes real estate tycoon Ali Ağaoğlu for a walk in Bağlar

2013 Diyarbakır Newroz

Diyarbakır Bağlar Women's Market is established

Fidanlık Camp established in Diyarbakır

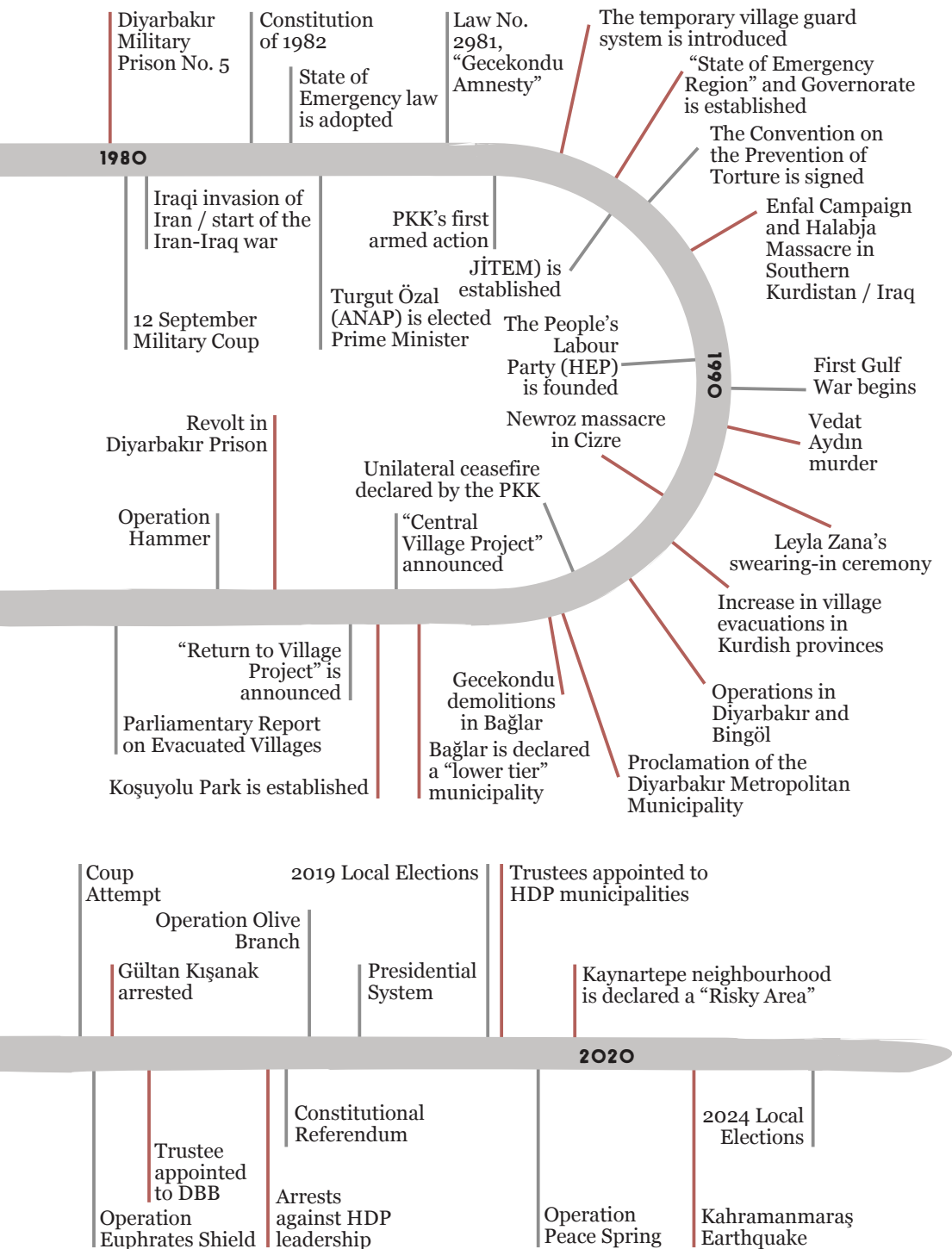
Erdoğan elected as President

Suruç Explosion

Trench Operations / Self-governance process

Bomb attack against pre-election HDP rally in Diyarbakır

2010



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2 Endurance, resistance, and coping

Bağlar emerged as a place where everyday survival strategies and resistance to state violence intersected with the mundane processes of urbanisation and land speculation.

Electricity was faulty until 2009-2014. Sometimes there was no electricity for weeks. We used to burn tyres to protest against DEDAŞ. There was a lot of trouble especially in Fatih. Looking out of the window of the house, Kaynaratepe was visible. The light was always on in those sides, but it was dim here.

(Baran, 25 years old, Fatih)

When I was in high school, there was no electricity. It would come on for an hour and then it would be gone for 5 days or 10 days. I used to study in front of a candle, it was

terrible. Even once my brother was studying, the candle ran out, the table was on fire... Or there would be no electricity for maybe three months. Finally, people got together and went to the electricity company. I remember there was electricity everywhere around our neighbourhood; in the police school, in the officers' lodgings... Only our neighbourhood was in the dark. Water was also provided late, very late. It would work one day and five days it would not. Then when the water came, there was no electricity...

(Hasret, 42 years old, Şeyh Şamil)



"The electricity in Bağlar neighbourhood is switched off for 4 hours in the evenings", Güneydoğu, 07.08.1962; "Bağlar Kaynaratepe Neighbourhood Turned into Kербela due to Thirst", Yeni Zaman, 29.06.1974.

The historical fabric of Bağlar – shaped by state violence, resistance, and poverty – has not only been a stage for struggles over shelter and livelihood but has also evolved alongside broader dynamics of urban change. These processes have made Bağlar a site where social resistance and the challenges of urbanization intersect. Thus, beyond its historical burdens, it is crucial to examine how Bağlar has been shaped by Diyarbakır’s overall urbanization process and how it compares to other regions of the city.”

Even before the surge of forced migration from the 1980s onwards, residents of Bağlar faced significant hardships, with inadequate infrastructure and social services. The mass influx of displaced people further outpaced the provision of basic services. Roads were unpaved and muddy, there was no running water, and electricity was unreliable. It was only towards the late 1990s, when HADEP gained municipal power, that conditions began to improve – though infrastructure issues persist, with residents still protesting frequent blackouts which continued until recently.

Many of the new arrivals moved to Bağlar after losing their property, houses, land and livestock, as they had no other options for affordable shelter. In these harsh conditions, residents of Bağlar have largely relied on their own solidarity networks to survive, with little or no assistance from external support organisations or the state. Dispossessed and displaced by the armed forces’ burning of their homes, fields and livestock, people settled



When HADEP came, there was no theft. During the Özal period, it was forbidden to help those who came from Halabja. Under Turgut Atalay [1989-1994] nothing was done according to the zoning. We built our own houses 2 metres to the right, 2-3 metres in front of the houses to make roads and streets. Ahmet Bilgin [1994-1999] period was good. Everyone built buildings away from the street. Koşuyolu was also built in that period. Tree planting works were carried out.

(Galip, 69 years old, Fatih)

After the 1999 elections, Diyarbakır started to be renewed, we were very happy, but they didn’t want us to develop and raise our voices.

(Ferhat, 44 years old, Fatih)

There were houses with a pump. Water was always a problem. It was always cut off. Electricity was always cut off - it was not something we would be surprised when it was cut off.

(Metin, 39 years old, Kaynaratepe)

“ We were tenants, we bought a field and built a house because it was cheap. My father was working at the public roads. He looked after ten people with one salary. He built our house with his one salary. We had a master builder do the construction. Back then, you could buy a car with one salary. It was 2 storeys, 2 rooms and 1 living room. There was no plan. First you built a one-storey house, then when you had money you built another floor. That's what we did. I got married in 1980. We built a floor. Our plot was 105 m². 65 of it was a house and 40 was a vineyard. A document was given during the Kenan Evren period. At that time, single-storey houses were getting

merged to build apartment blocks. We didn't want it, we didn't need it. Now my aunt lives in our old house. Those who came from Kobani have left. Now, the Gypsies from Syria have remained.

(Galip, 69 years old, Fatih)

It was a two-storey house. There was no courtyard. Then another floor was added, then another one. There were four floors in total. To have more space for ourselves. Then we built a coal shed on top. Our relative made one floor and we made the other floor. We rented it out when we left.

(Hasret, 42 years old, Şeyh Şamil)



“Intensive migration and rapid population growth have turned Diyarbakır into two cities”, *Yeni Yurt*, 09.06.1993; “People of Bağlar neighbourhood have been longing for a single drop of water for months”, *Yeni Yurt*, 14.08.1993.

in Bağlar and began to live in an environment devoid of basic living conditions. People living in shanty or apartment dwellings generally tried to make a living by working in the construction sector and in daily labour at low wages.

The conflict in the Kurdish provinces and the subsequent population increase in Diyarbakır coincided with major shifts in Turkey's macroeconomic policies. Economic liberalisation and the 1984 Gecekondu Amnesty law spurred a construction boom, making urban land a primary source of profit. In this context, forced urbanisation in Bağlar has converged with the real estate surge and the expansion of the construction sector. Multi-story buildings were hastily constructed alongside self-built gecekondu by residents of the district, and this fast-paced urbanisation brought some upward mobility for more established dwellers.

Because of this background, the population of Bağlar is highly politicised, making the district a symbolic



“Diyarbakır will be saved from distorted urbanisation”, *Öz Diyarbakır*, 01.05.1984; “So far, 12 thousand applications have been made to benefit from the zoning amnesty...”, *Öz Diyarbakır*, 27.08.1984.



That was a pastry shop. It was a patriot's shop. In the 90s they killed him right opposite. It was an unsolved murder. Many people died in the homeland. The police were scared back then. Shopkeepers were constantly downing shutters. We used to join in.

(Galip, 69 years old, Fatih)

There were a lot [of incidents]... we heard about them. At that time, Newroz was banned, but people used to hold them on the rooftops and in the neighbourhood. I remember seeing them, but there were raids and attacks. I saw people being beaten. I mean, we were seeing it. Because it was forbidden.

(Hasret, 42 years old, Şeyh Şamil)

There were Newroz [celebrations] on every street and in every square. Tyres were burnt.

The place where Newroz was celebrated was a muddy area. The police would always attack. They would immediately detain those with muddy feet just because they left the celebration.

(Metin, 39 years old, Kaynartepe)

The thing I miss the most is that we had a Newroz area in Körhat Park. First it was dirt. That area was always full until '94-'95. Then the police would chase us. We are still going [nowadays], but it is not as enjoyable as the streets.

(Ferhat, 44 years old, Fatih)

Cenaze töreninde de olay

DIYARBAKIR DHA

Polisin evine saldırı

Dünyadaki ilk 3 gün önceki
PKK'nın önceki 3 günü arasında
başlatılan saldırıları için Türkiye Anayasası,
Milletler Birliği ve Abidullah Dini
tarafından yasaklandı. Versiyon
Milletler Birliği yasaklandı.

Çocuklar milletler
birliği tarafından yasaklandı.
18 Nisan, Polis Mafyasası
tarafından yasaklandı.
Yasak. Polis polisinin
tarafından yasaklandı.
Yasak. Polis polisinin
tarafından yasaklandı.
Yasak. Polis polisinin
tarafından yasaklandı.

Dan Dede Çarşamba günü
tarafından yasaklandı.
Yasak. Polis polisinin
tarafından yasaklandı.
Yasak. Polis polisinin
tarafından yasaklandı.

Uppdragsbetet David Mattias Matti Sernedine på papperstaket inte känner den kändare Dala Uppdragsbetet By Fästarens gäst i riket. Uppdragsbetet Matti Sernedine på papperstaket inte känner den kändare Dala Uppdragsbetet By Fästarens gäst i riket. Uppdragsbetet Matti Sernedine på papperstaket inte känner den kändare Dala Uppdragsbetet By Fästarens gäst i riket.

Öyleyse burada görevlik yapıları ve süreçleri parantez altına alalım.



“Incident at the funeral”, *Milliyet*, 31.03.2006; “March at condolence”, *Diyarbakır Gün*, 07.12.2003.

KAYAPINAR

In the 90s, before being moved to the outskirts of the city, this large unbuilt area was the site of the main Newroz celebrations in the city.



Urfa yolu

2

ŞEYH ŞAMİL

MEVLANA HALİT

Turgut Özal blv.

Elazığ cd.

Emek cd.

3

5 NİSAN

Medine blv.

1

Sunay cd.

KAYNARTEPE

Nükhet Coşkun cd.

Cirne cd.

5

4

Gürsel cd.

MURADİYE

Fatih cd.

6

Göçmenler cd.

FATİH

8

5

Karacadağ blv.

YENİKÖY

KÖRHAT

ALİPİNAR

7

5

The military airport, from which warplanes take off and land daily, sits in the South-West of Bağlar and has constrained the city's urban expansion.

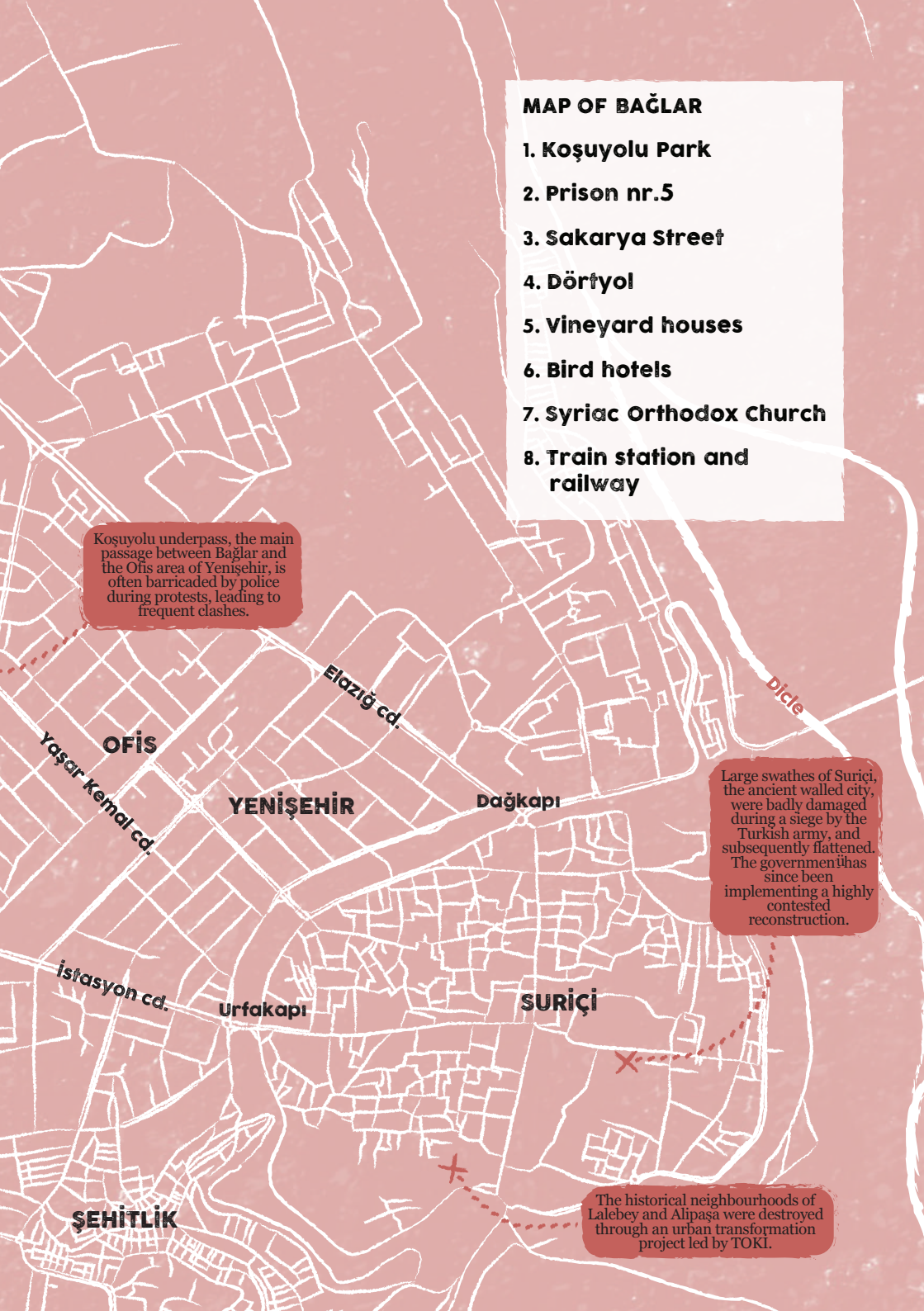
MAP OF BAĞLAR

1. Koşuyolu Park
2. Prison nr.5
3. Sakarya Street
4. Dört Yol
5. Vineyard houses
6. Bird hotels
7. Syriac Orthodox Church
8. Train station and railway

Koşuyolu underpass, the main passage between Bağlar and the Ofis area of Yenışehir, is often barricaded by police during protests, leading to frequent clashes.

Large swathes of Suriçi, the ancient walled city, were badly damaged during a siege by the Turkish army, and subsequently flattened. The government has since been implementing a highly contested reconstruction.

The historical neighbourhoods of Lalebey and Alipaşa were destroyed through an urban transformation project led by TOKİ.





1. Koşuyolu Park

Built in 1995 on the former horse-racing ground, the park is one of Diyarbakır's largest. Bağlar residents used to hang around here also when it was only a vast open expanse. After turning into a park, it became the green lung of Bağlar, where people spent their time amid cafes and trees. The park and Kosuyolu avenue are also important political spaces, where demonstrations are often organised.



2. Prison nr.5

The notorious prison was completed in 1980, just a few months before the 12 September coup. In the period that came to be known as "Diyarbakır's hell", hundreds of inmates were tortured and dozens died. The prison was dismissed a few years ago, and currently, the government is planning to turn it into a "cultural centre".



3. Sakarya Street

Cutting through 5 Nisan neighbourhood, this pedestrian street is the commercial backbone of Bağlar. While it came to the fore as a bustling trade route in the 1980s with people coming from the villages to shop, today it continues to be a frequent destination for both residents of Bağlar and outsiders. This street is an important centre reflecting the dynamic and lively structure of Bağlar.



4. Dörtöy

This busy junction, where, despite its name, six roads are converging, is the heart of Bağlar. The roundabout existed even prior to the urbanization of Bağlar, as a junction of rural paths. Daily labourers are waiting to be hired, amid constant traffic, and mobile sellers. All around are tea houses, eateries, and shops. Dörtöy is also an important space for gatherings and protests.

5. Vineyard houses

Only a few remaining old country houses, built in black basalt, still recall the time when Bağlar was covered with vineyards. One of them has been converted into the Municipality library for children, but is disused. Another one is tucked away behind a petrol station on Karacadag caddesi.



6. Bird hotels

This peculiar kind of residences, also known as “pidgeon hotels”, are multistory structures where birds are housed in rooms. They are concentrated around Fatih caddesi, which is known as “Kuşçu yolu”. All kinds of birds, from pigeons to parrots, are kept here by owners - “lawyers, architects, judges!” - who live elsewhere in the city.



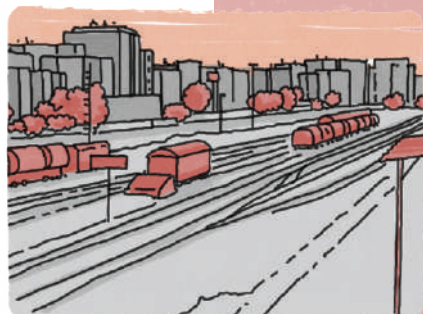
7. syriac orthodox church

This ancient church, in bad need of restoration, lies in ruin in the middle of the old Christian village of Alipinar, which still retains a low-rise texture. It is widely known as an Armenian church, but it was actually built by a Syriac community. Closeby, you can also find an old rural mansion built in traditional style.



8. Train station and railway

The station was opened in 1935, and in the following years the railway was extended eastwards. In the 1950s and 60s, many people moved from rural areas to the city by train. Today, the railway marks the boundary between Ofis/Yenisehir and Bağlar, which on official property deeds is still described as “the station vineyards”.







3 Diversity in the neighbourhood

Bağlar's complex development trajectory has created a layered and composite socio-spatial structure. Even though it is often portrayed as a poverty-stricken "slum," Bağlar in fact exhibits a diverse character and is home to a wide variety of residents.

“ The traditional houses of Sur are the prototype of the houses with inner courtyards built by families [in Bağlar] with their own means. All houses with courtyards have a well for water.

(Devran, 39 years old, Kaynarstepe /Mevlana Halit)

When we moved to Mevlana Halit [around 1998], most of the area around Urfa Yolu and Kayapınar was empty. There were scattered constructions and military housing [near Selahattin Eyyubi Bulvarı on Urfa Yolu] and there was already the village of Peyas and the Huzurevler settlement built next to the factories.

(Devran, 39 years old, Kaynarstepe / Mevlana Halit)



Diyarbakır'da Halkın Yüzde 33'ü Gecekondularda Yaşıyor

Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi'nin 200 bin nüfuslu ilçesi olan Diyarbakır'da halkın yüzde 33'ünün gecekondu olarak yaşadığı bildirildi. Yabancılar tarafından yapılan evlerdeki gecekondu sakinlerinin sayısı 112 bin 172 olarak tespit edildi. Bu rakamın yüzde 33'ü gecekondu sakinleri olarak sayılıyor. Diyarbakır Valisi Mustafa Sökmen, gecekondu sakinlerinin yüzde 33'ünün gecekondu olarak yaşadığını belirtti. Sökmen, gecekondu sakinlerinin yüzde 33'ünün gecekondu olarak yaşadığını belirtti. Sökmen, gecekondu sakinlerinin yüzde 33'ünün gecekondu olarak yaşadığını belirtti.

İlçiyeye ait nüfus arası buluşması halinde bulunan 16 ilin nüfus hareketleri ve belediye başkanları tarafından yapılan toplantıda, Diyarbakır'da gecekondu sakinlerinin sayısı 112 bin 172 olarak tespit edildi. Bu rakamın yüzde 33'ü gecekondu sakinleri olarak sayılıyor. Diyarbakır Valisi Mustafa Sökmen, gecekondu sakinlerinin yüzde 33'ünün gecekondu olarak yaşadığını belirtti. Sökmen, gecekondu sakinlerinin yüzde 33'ünün gecekondu olarak yaşadığını belirtti.



Sark'ın Parisi Diyarbakır, her yönüyle düzensiz bir şehir

Son aylarda yaşanan aşırı göçle birlikte nüfusu 1,5 milyonu aşan kentte sağlık, eğitim, ulaşım, ticaret ve sosyal yaşantı biçimi çekilmez bir duruma geldi

“In Diyarbakır, 33 per cent of the population lives in slums”, *Sesin*, 28.12.1974; “Diyarbakır, the Paris of the East, is an irregular city in every aspect”, *Yeni Yurt*, 07.10.1993.

Bağlar's urban fabric bears the traces of migrations, forced relocations and municipal policies in different periods. From past to present, Bağlar has shaped Diyarbakır's identity through its historical ties and spatial relations. The neighbourhoods closer to the city centre, such as Kaynartepe, Muradiye, and Fatih, form the oldest part of Bağlar, with a maze of narrow alleys and a layered urban structure that has developed over more than fifty years. According to a representative of the Chamber of Architects, 90% of "Old Bağlar" consists of unlicensed buildings. These originated as *gecekond* in the 1960s, when Yenişehir was almost fully urbanised, and people began settling in the vineyards behind the railway station. Even though it appears to be an area completely disconnected from Diyarbakır's old core, Bağlar has historical and spatial relations with Sur. While the vineyards and orchard houses of the inhabitants of Suriçi form the base of Bağlar's shantytown texture, the location of the railway station, which determines the development of Bağlar, points to its connection with Urfakapı.²⁸

28. Mehmet Atlı,
Hepsi Diyarbakır
(İstanbul: İletişim
Yayınları, 2014), 27.

As Diyarbakır's population grew in the 1990s, low-quality high-rise buildings proliferated rapidly to accommodate displaced residents. According to an architect, former



"Was our D.Bakır going to come to this!...",
Yeni Yurt, 08.02.1993;
"Municipality officially turns a blind eye to illegal construction",
Yeni Yurt, 13.07.1993.



Around 1990, 1995...
Development started very quickly.
I remember all that noise.

(Hasret, 42 years old, Şeyh Şamil)

People were coming. You could see it in the way they dressed, it was evident. They were bringing their own culture: Derik looked different, Çınar looked different. Life did not change when you moved from the village. They used to live the way they came from the village. Then the young people changed, but the middle-aged people did not...

(Metin, 39 years old, Kaynaratepe)

head of the Zoning Department of the DBB, in the 1990s, illegal and non-engineered construction became widespread in Bağlar. The incomers' urgent need to find a roof over their heads led to an increase in low-quality buildings and squatter settlements. Licenced construction remains very limited, while buildings in compliance with zoning plans are almost never produced.²⁹ An architect who worked on projects mainly in Bağlar and Yenışehir in the 2000s states that people in Bağlar designed houses to meet their basic needs, focusing on the building plan and with no additional design made for the façade.³⁰

In the informal gecekondu areas in Bağlar's historic core, existing buildings were expanded vertically and some of the old houses were demolished to make way for multi-storey apartment blocks built by small contractors. In areas such as 5 Nisan, Mevlana Halit and Şeyh Şamil, uniform apartment blocks were erected on previously undeveloped land. Due to height restrictions imposed by their proximity to the airport, former villages such as Alıpınar and Yeniköy still retain a largely low-rise character. In addition, some areas of Bağlar have been urbanised in a planned manner for a more middle class population, including state-built civil servant housing and co-operative housing projects.

According to an official who worked in Kayapınar Municipality between 1999-2004, despite efforts to direct construction to Bağlar, the interest of contractors outside Kayapınar remained limited.³¹ According to an official

29. Veda Seven Biçen, "1960'lerden Günümüze Çok Katlı Konut/Konutlaşma Süreci Diyarbakır Kenti" (PhD Thesis, Karadeniz Technical University, 2020), 179.

30. Biçen, 188.

31. Biçen, 175.



When I first arrived, everyone called me “Oh, Zaza girl.” When I finished school, I learnt Turkish. I also learnt Kurdish from my surroundings. Since I didn’t learn Turkish until the 5th grade, I couldn’t communicate with the teachers. I was talking to my classmates who spoke Zazaki. Later we became friends. After we learnt Turkish, we started to get included.

(Hasret, 42 years old, Şeyh Şamil)

Not knowing the language was difficult. When I started school, I did not speak Turkish, poverty and the conflict environment were also challenging. There was a very serious conflict setting.

(Metin, 39 years old, Kaynaratepe)

At that time, everyone who didn’t want to leave Kurdistan would come to Bağlar.

(Devran, 39 years old, Kaynaratepe /Mevlana Halit)

working in Bağlar Municipality during the same period, it was very difficult to obtain a licence in the district and the density of gecekondu was a major problem. Despite some concessions in old Bağlar, the municipality did not allow unlicensed construction in new areas and demolished more than fifty buildings, facing threats from the land mafia and serious resistance. While the private sector and co-operatives were at the forefront of construction, the lack of established construction companies attracted attention; he emphasised that there was a period when ordinary ironsmiths became contractors.³² However, both the problems of unlicensed construction and the density of slums in Bağlar and the dominance of inexperienced contractors in construction have laid the groundwork for the complex urban texture of the district. As a result, Bağlar’s urban landscape is anything but uniform, reflecting the different phases of its haphazard urban development.

The social composition of Bağlar is also more complex than it is usually portrayed. The area harbours a significant diversity in terms of both ethnic origins and political leanings. At the height of the conflict, people migrating from Kurdish provinces settled in Bağlar, creating a microcosm of diverse local cultures. Newcomers often settled based on their existing social connections, leading to the formation of regional clusters, such as the concentration of Zazas around Emek Caddesi

32. Biçen, 179.



During the Baydemir period, our neighbourhood got very clean. When I was at university they would come and ask - what do you need? Then they would come - immediately, directly - and do it. They were saying “We are ready to serve.” That period was very good.

(Hasret, 42 years old, Şeyh Şamil)

It was better then, there were no drugs [2007-2008]. The economy was better. After 2014, drug use increased with the increase in unemployment. In 15 years, nothing new has been built in Bağlar. If there is anything that can keep Bağlar afloat, it is Sakarya Street, Bağlar Hospital and the Post Office.

(Baran, 25 years old, Fatih)

or Mardinites around Girne Caddesi. Also noteworthy is the presence of the Koredere tribe, who came from the Lice district after refusing to side with the government in the 1990s. With people coming from all over Bakur – the northern part of Kurdistan within the Turkish borders – Bağlar has been a ground for the emergence of a common national and political consciousness.

With this social diversity, Bağlar has not only been a residential area, but also an important stage for Diyarbakır’s political and cultural dynamism. This socio-spatial diversity has also played a decisive role in the urbanisation policies of local governments. The work carried out during Osman Baydemir’s tenure between 2004 and 2014 shows that an attempt was made to address this complex structure with a more inclusive approach. The increase in green areas and environmentally sensitive municipalism practices are also noteworthy aspects of this period. However, financial constraints and tensions with the central government posed obstacles to some projects.

In 2011, with the conflict in Syria and Iraq, Bağlar began to host Arabic and Kurdish-speaking refugees from neighbouring countries. Some of these newcomers share political ties with the Kurdish movement, including refugees from Kobani and Sinjar. The instability in the region has also caused Dom people to migrate across the border. According to various accounts in the interviews we conducted, most of these recent migrants settled in the older parts of Bağlar where the building stock was more deteriorated.

“‘Meticulous’ operation”,
Milliyet, 10.07.2001.

“

People came from Sur and Syria. The locals did not come, they migrated. To Kayapınar, Bağcılar.

(Galip, 69 years old, Fatih)

Hizbullah was active. I remember my friend's elder brother was killed in front of me because he had quit them.

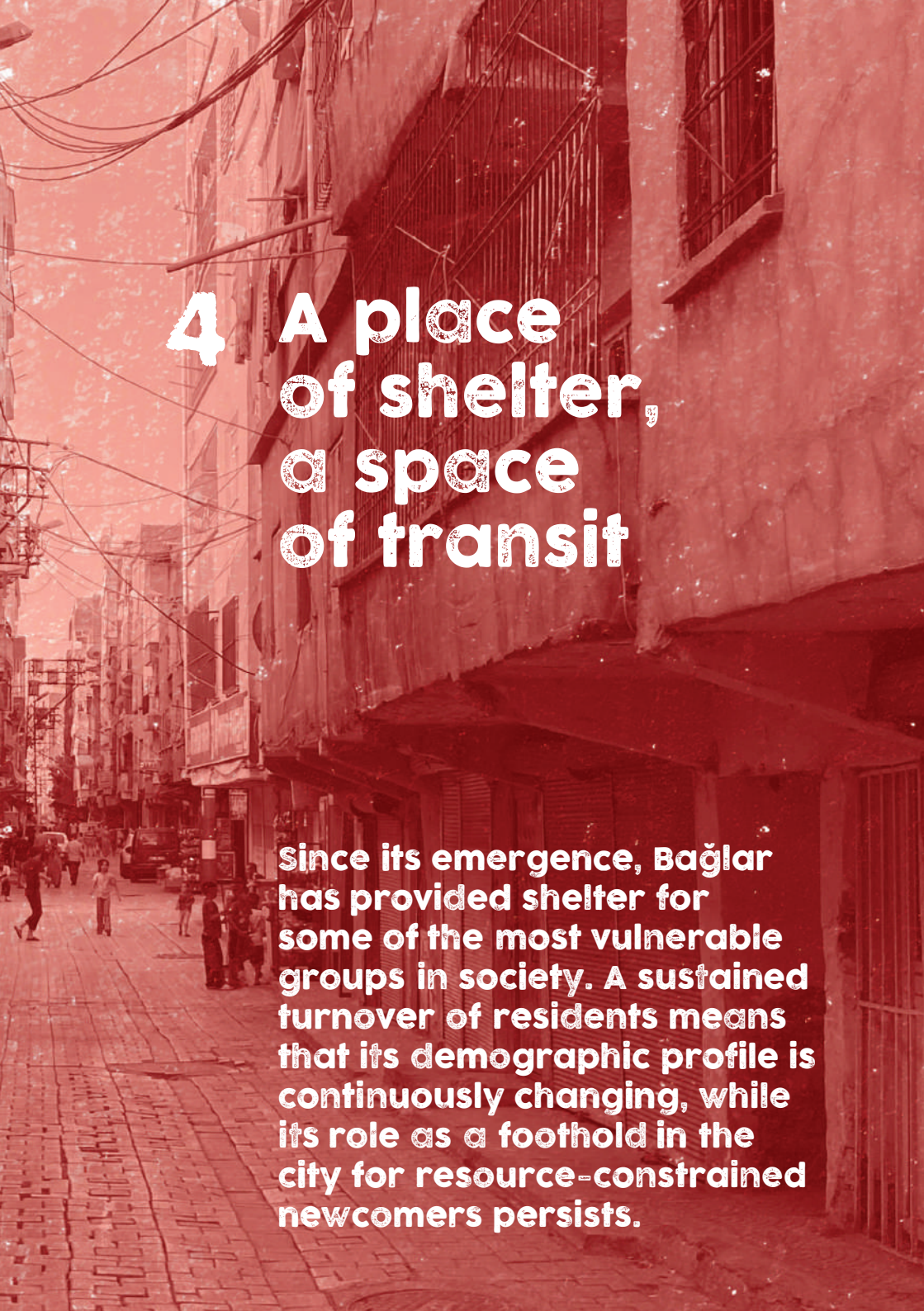
(Metin, 39 years old,
Kaynaratepe)



Although seen as a stronghold of the Kurdish movement, Bağlar also harbours a variety of political and social influences. In the 1990s there was a significant Islamist presence in certain areas of Şeyh Şamil, Kaynaratepe and Fatih; Hezbollah supporters organised around specific mosques and established cells in Bağlar.

For more than fifty years, Bağlar has been experiencing different phases of development and typologies of urbanisation, and has been home to various social groups. As some interviewees observed, it can be argued that the wider urban changes in Diyarbakır in recent years have left Bağlar in a relatively worse state compared to other neighbourhoods. However, beyond its current residents, it must be recognised that a significant portion of Diyarbakır's population has passed through Bağlar over the years, shaping its dynamic character.





4 A place of shelter, a space of transit

Since its emergence, Bağlar has provided shelter for some of the most vulnerable groups in society. A sustained turnover of residents means that its demographic profile is continuously changing, while its role as a foothold in the city for resource-constrained newcomers persists.

“Peshmerga caused millions in damage”, *Yeni Yurt*, 12.02.1993;
 “40 people in one dwelling”,
Yeni Yurt, 26.04.1993.

“ When I was a child, I remember the Peshmerga were in Diyarbakır. They were walking around with their clothes and stuff. My parents were making preparations in the basement because they said [Saddam] might attack. They were storing food, there were blankets. If there was a chemical attack, we were told to cover our faces with wet blankets or something like that. This situation lasted for several months.

(Hasret, 42 years old,
 Şeyh Şamil)

Well, there was a belief – chemicals will be thrown out from the air. Nylon was stored in the basement. A woman was pouring water on us. People bought so much duct tape to seal the windows that it was called Saddam tape.

(Metin, 39 years old,
 Kaynarpete)

Plastic was used against chemicals. We used to put water in the plastic.

(Ferhat, 44 years old, Fatih)





We needed support. The conditions of those who came after us were probably better than ours. We were not in a position to help others, so we were the ones who needed support. We were the foreigners. The others came from Diyarbakır (Lice, Hazro), they had connections, they came in an organised way.

(Hasret, 42 years old, Şeyh Şamil)

It was cheap here, we had no money. We came in lorries. Some went to Ofis, some to Şehitlik. Those who had no money would come here.

(Ömer, 44 years old, Muradiye)

However, many who move to Bağlar do not stay permanently but relocate when their situation improves – even if it may take a few decades. While it is difficult to quantify, many of those who settled in Bağlar during the 1980s and 1990s eventually moved to other parts of the city, particularly to the rapidly expanding districts in new Bağlar and Kayapınar, from the 1990s onwards. This ongoing outflow of residents makes room for newcomers who are often in more precarious circumstances. This characteristic of Bağlar can be related to the concept of “rotating poverty,” which explains that while disadvantaged groups in a locality transition to better conditions over time, the new groups replacing them face similar challenges.³⁴ A similar cycle is taking place in Bağlar; as former residents migrate, newcomers try to establish an affordable life in the neighbourhood. Historically, Bağlar has thus served as a space of arrival, affordable living, and temporary settlement for disadvantaged groups. Despite changes in its population profile in recent decades, Bağlar maintains to this day its role as a dwelling space for the city’s most marginalised populations.

More recently, Bağlar has become home to refugees from Syria and Iraq, as well as residents forcibly displaced within Diyarbakır following the armed clashes in Sur in 2015. These conflicts not only damaged Sur’s historical and cultural fabric but also displaced many of its inhabitants. In the aftermath, the state confiscated

34. Oğuz Işık and M. Melih Pınarcıoğlu, *Nöbetleşe Yoksulluk Sultanbeyli Örneği* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001).



Postmen, teachers, lawyers lived in our street. Bağlar was everyone's residential area in Diyarbakır. In time, those with better class status left. Now those who have nothing are here...

(Metin, 39 years old, Kaynarstepe)

In 1994, I was 9 years old. I was studying at the Regional Primary Boarding School (YİBO) in Lice. We used to walk from Lice to Kulp. When we arrived in Kulp, the house was no longer there, everything was on fire. There was war, JİTEM was in the region. That night we stayed with my aunts, then we went back

to school. From there we took the bus to Diyarbakır. The bus dropped us off right at Dağkapı. We sat on a bench for hours, not knowing what to do. Then, by chance, a familiar villager passed by. He told us to wait half an hour and that he was going to the PTT to make a phone call. Then he turned back and took us to Bağlar. We went on foot. I remember we passed in front of Ofis, at that time the underground shopping centre was being built... We crossed the railway and entered the 231st street. I will never forget that!

(Devran, 39 years old, Kaynarstepe /Mevlana Halit)

property and implemented urban transformation projects, leaving the local population with no options and worsening their poverty. Many who lost their homes and livelihoods were forced to migrate to Bağlar, drawn by its affordable housing, informal job opportunities, and central location. As a result, Bağlar has become a refuge for both Syrian and Iraqi refugees and those displaced from Sur.

This turnover implies that many in Diyarbakır, even among the middle classes now living in newer suburbs, have passed through Bağlar at some point. Often, former residents maintain ties to the area through property ownership, workplaces, or social connections. In this sense, the role of Bağlar in the urban development of Diyarbakır extends beyond the boundaries of the area. Bağlar sits not only geographically at the heart of the expanding metropolis, it constitutes one of the primary spaces where newcomers transition into urban life as inhabitants of Diyarbakır.





5 Neglect, stigmatisation, and induced decay

Despite being a central and densely populated district of Diyarbakir, Bağlar has consistently faced neglect, invisibility, and stigmatisation. This framing paves the way for large-scale urban transformation projects that would erase Bağlar's rich socio-spatial structure and displace a significant portion of its population.

Accounts of Bağlar predominantly focus on negative evaluations. These studies often either underemphasize the role of state violence in the city's development or address it from a security-oriented perspective.³⁵ The district's formation, shaped by forced migration from Kurdish villages to the city, is frequently labeled as "distorted urbanization" or "false urbanization."³⁶ Diyarbakır, described in the local press as a "transit city"³⁷ and "village city,"³⁸ is portrayed as experiencing "unhealthy urbanization"³⁹ and growing in a "hormone-driven"⁴⁰ manner. As the city most affected by forced migration, it is often characterized as a "mega village"⁴¹ and a "terminal city."⁴² The phrase "separate cities in the same city"⁴³ is used to highlight segregation within the urban population.

We can also argue that local administrations, among the key actors in the city, adopt a similar approach. Cabbar Leygara, who served as the Mayor of Bağlar between 1999 and 2004, attributes a special meaning to urbanity and states that the city was unprepared for the migration of the 1990s. He explains that, due to inadequate infrastructure services and the loss of values brought by migration, this place that resembled a city turned into a huge village.⁴⁴ People who lost their values but retained their habits from the village form the profile of Bağlar, building barns around the tandır on the upper floors of the large apartment buildings they inhabit.

In commentaries that overlook the fact that Bağlar's residents were displaced under conditions of coercion and oppression, and the resulting challenges, migration itself is portrayed as the problem. To support this perspective, experts are often cited. For instance, psychiatrist Remzi

35. Tahire Erman, "Urbanisation and urbanism", *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey* (Routledge, 2013), 298.

36. Dündar Dağlı and Ayşe Çağlayan, "Determination of urban sprawl and transformation process: The case of Diyarbakır", *International Journal of Geography and Geography Education* (IGGE), Vol. 43, (2021): 218.

37. "Thousands of families living in the outskirts and gecekondu are in a difficult situation", *Yeni Zaman*, 27.02.1976.

38. "Was our D. Bakır going to become like this too!...", *Yeni Yurt*, 08.02.1993.

39. "Now there is the problem of going back", *Milliyet*, 28.07.1995.

40. Mazhar Bağlı and Abdulkadir Binici, *Kentleşme Tarihi ve Diyarbakır Kenttsel Gelişimi* (Ankara: Bilimadamı Yayınları, 2005), 167.

41. Bağlı and Binici, 10.

42. İnan Keser, *Göç ve Zor: Diyarbakır Örneğinde Göç ve Zorunlu Göç* (Ankara: Ütopya Publishing House, 2011).

43. Ahmet Özer, "Göç ve Kentleşme Kısacasında Bir Kent: Diyarbakır",



We wouldn't do it, but our neighbours did. They kept cows and chickens in the courtyard in front of our house. There was a shortage of firewood. People were baking bread on the roof. Most houses had a tandır on the roof.

(Hasret, 42 years old, Şeyh Şamil)



“There is no doctor at the Health Centre in Bağlar with a population of 60 thousand”, *Zaman*, 08.05.1974; “Who’s telling the truth?”, *Güneydoğu Ekspres*, 13.09.2004.



Oto argues that “people far from education” are likely to turn to crime during their adaptation to urban life.⁴⁵

*Tüm Yönleriyle
Diyarbakır 2nd
Symposium (Ankara:
Efil, 2011), 271-288.*

44. Duygu Canan Öztürk, “Socio-Spatial Practices of the Pro-Kurdish Municipalities: The Case of Diyarbakır” (Master’s Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2013), 302.

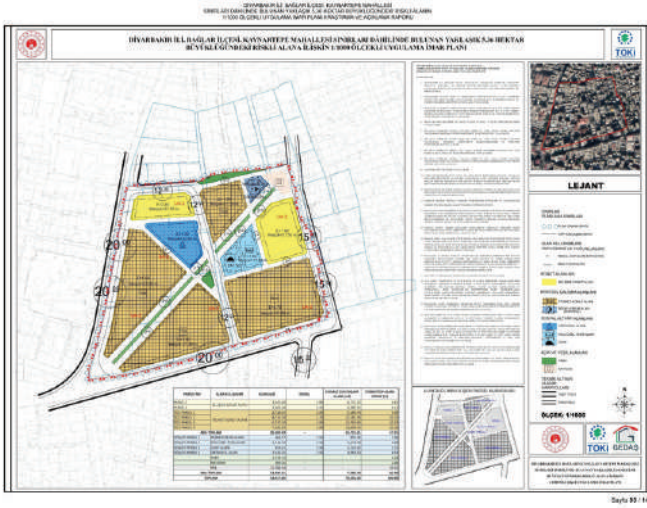
45. “The artificial population explosion in the region has left the administrators helpless”, *Yeni Yurt*, 02.10.1993.

46. Amed Tigris and Yıldız Çakar, *Amed: Coğrafya, Tarih, Kültür* (Diyarbakır: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Publications, 2013).

Remarkably, although Bağlar is widely considered a “vote basket” for Kurdish political parties, it has largely been overlooked by pro-Kurdish administrations as well. In the early 2010s, at the height of the Kurdish municipal movement when local authorities aspired to position Diyarbakır as a cultural capital of the Middle East, the metropolitan municipality released a full-colour publication on the city’s history.⁴⁶ This volume dedicated extensive coverage to Suruçi, the ancient walled citadel, and Yenisehir, the republican-era expansion. Then, it bypassed Bağlar entirely and moved directly to Kayapınar, the “new Diyarbakır” with its gated residential complexes, broad boulevards, monumental roundabouts, and shopping centres. This omission illustrates Bağlar’s persistent invisibility: its history remains undocumented, leading to a conspicuous lack of material about the area.

On the other hand, despite the positive developments in the city, Bağlar was neglected in this period as well. When not ignored, Bağlar and its population have generally been portrayed in a negative light, as a threat to the state or as a “cancer” in the city’s body. By now, Bağlar has acquired

Kaynaratepe Mahallesi Riskli Alan İmar Planı.



the status of a “problem” for the Kurdish movement and the local authorities it administers. This discursive framing lays the groundwork for initiatives aimed at the district’s complete overhaul.

The vision of remaking Bağlar from scratch dates back to at least 2012, when then-mayor Osman Baydemir famously toured one of Kaynaratepe’s main streets alongside real-estate tycoon Ali Ağaoğlu, just months after the Urban Transformation Law 6306 was enacted.⁴⁷ In 2020, Bağlar Municipality was included within the scope of urban transformation by Presidential Decree in 2020, on the grounds of a “terrorist threat.” The following year, the government formally designated Kaynaratepe neighbourhood an “Urban Transformation Area.” According to development plans, the project would begin

47. For a detailed discussion on the relations between neoliberal urban policies and Kurdish administrations in Diyarbakır, see Muna Güvenç, *The City Is Ours: Spaces of Political Mobilisation and Imaginaries of Nationhood in Turkey* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2024).



If there was an on-site transformation, we would stay. This is the best place in Diyarbakır.

(Ferhat, 44 years old, Fatih)

near Dörtöyl, the heart of Bağlar and a frequent epicentre during times of unrest. Urban transformation risks triggering significant displacement in the area. The recent forced displacement process in Sur in particular raises the prospect of a similar threat to the people of Bağlar in the future.

Reconstructing Bağlar from the ground up, however, is not a simple undertaking. The complex property ownership patterns necessitate prolonged negotiations with stakeholders. Additionally, due to its proximity to the airport, building heights in Bağlar are capped at eight stories, limiting opportunities for lucrative land speculation. Urban transformation in Bağlar would therefore require substantial government investment while offering limited profit margins. Moreover, given Bağlar's current population density, rebuilding to meet modern housing standards would likely require relocating approximately 40% of its residents, as estimated by sources within DBB. The project foresees the demolition of buildings that currently house 6,750 people, forcing an estimated 5,000 residents to leave their homes, while new buildings planned will only accommodate 1,750 people, excluding the majority of the existing population.⁴⁸ According to Çekdar Taşkıran, Co-Chair of the Diyarbakır Branch of the Chamber of City Planners, the plan report predicts a decline in the area's population over time, with 5,000 residents expected to migrate. This poses a serious threat to both the social fabric and the right to housing.

48. "A migration plan under the name of urban transformation in Kaynaratepe", *Politika Haber*, 01.05.2021.



After the earthquake, none of the buildings are sound. People stay because they have no other choice.

(Metin, 39 years old, Kaynaratepe)

The ground was solid, nothing happened. I thought this place would be levelled. I said, "Bağlar is over". Only 3-4 carpets [in the shop] fell down.

(Galip, 69 years old, Fatih)

It was not affected. The earthquake happened at 04.17, I came to Bağlar at 05.30. I was expecting it to be flattened. Probably because the materials of the old buildings are of better quality and the foundations are deeper, they were not affected much.

(Baran, 25 years old, Fatih)

The project faced opposition by civil society, including legal challenges, and remains stalled. Its effects, however, continue to impact the area. Bağlar, particularly Kaynaratepe, is now subject to a strategy of induced decay, aimed at legitimizing urban transformation. Illegal activities are largely tolerated, and vacated buildings are left standing and unmaintained. This decline was exacerbated by the 2023 earthquakes, which damaged thousands of structures in Bağlar. Making the district increasingly unlivable has become a strategic manoeuvre in urban planning to open the way for redevelopment.

The earthquake caused serious damages in Bağlar, especially in the areas with old and unstable building stock, making the district's vulnerabilities more evident. Once again, it has become apparent that the layered urban fabric, consisting of narrow streets and haphazardly built buildings, poses a great risk in terms of earthquake resilience. According to an assessment made in 2012 by Necati Pirinçcioğlu, former president of the Diyarbakır Branch of the Chamber of Architects and former co-president of Kayapınar Municipality, the dense and unplanned construction in the district constitutes a great danger due to the difficulties of access and the impossibility of intervention in the event of a

Mahkeme kentsel dönüşüm 'dur' dedi

Diyarbakır 3'üncü İdare Mahkemesi, Kaynaratepe Mahallesi'nde belediyenin hayata geçirmek istediği kentsel dönüşüm projesini "kanuna aykırı" bularak iptal etti.

Güncel

Görüş: 31.01.2023 06:30

Güncelleme: 31.01.2023 06:30



Fotoğraf: MA

"Court says
"stop" to urban
transformation",
BirGün,
31.01.2023.

disaster. Renovation of these buildings through on-site transformation is a critical need in terms of both life safety and strengthening the social infrastructure.⁴⁹ Yet, the damage in Bağlar was much lower than expected. The transformation process, however, needs to be planned with a participatory approach, taking into account concerns such as fear of displacement and protection of the social fabric.

The prospect of urban transformation in Bağlar signals profound changes both physically and socially. The issues stemming from years of neglect, intense migration, and unplanned urbanization in the region have become even more visible in recent times, particularly in the wake of earthquakes and other disasters. Despite this, the state's strategic interventions through transformation projects and the capital-driven approaches to redevelopment raise serious concerns about preserving the social fabric and ensuring a fair solution. Neighborhoods with old and densely built housing stock, such as Kaynartepe, have become primary targets of these projects. However, the area's complex property structures and high population density make the transformation process challenging both legally and socially.

The transformation process in Bağlar will not only affect physical structures but also impact the social relationships, economic resources, and lifestyles of its residents. Therefore, it should not be viewed merely as an engineering initiative aimed at reducing disaster risks. The projection that 40% of the residents may be forced to relocate makes the implications of displacement even more critical.

In this context, it is important that the future of Bağlar is shaped by the demands of local administrations, central government and residents. When on-site transformation is planned with a participatory approach, taking into account the social fabric and economic constraints of the region, both a disaster-resistant construction and the needs of the residents can be met. In this process, projects that will deepen the historical neglect and existing problems of the region should be avoided; Bağlar should be treated as a living part of the city, not as a construction site.

49. Öztürk, "Socio-Spatial Practices of the Pro-Kurdish Municipalities: The Case of Diyarbakır", 303.





conclusion

Researching the history and present implications of forced urbanisation in Bağlar is critical not only for understanding the past, but also for contributing to the formulation of more just and inclusive urban policies in the future.

This research on Bağlar has been undertaken not only to document the area's past or to preserve its collective memory, but also to contribute a different perspective to possible scenarios which might shape the future of the district. Bağlar has historically had a central role in the social, cultural and spatial dynamics of Diyarbakır, as well as being the heartbeat of the communities living on the margins of the city. Therefore, research on the history and present of the area is critical not only for understanding the past, but also for contributing to the formulation of more just and inclusive policies in the future.

This study explores the intersection and mutual transformation of forced migration and urbanisation dynamics through the concept of “forced urbanisation.” In the context of Kurdish forced migration, which arose as Kurds were forced to abandon their settlements due to conflicts, village evacuations, and other state policies, rural-to-urban population movements accelerated. This led to the rapid and unplanned expansion of urban areas. Displaced populations often concentrated in specific parts of the city, where existing infrastructure and services were insufficient to accommodate the sudden population surge. This, in turn, exacerbated poverty, deepened social inequalities, and intensified spatial segregation. Forced urbanisation not only reshaped the physical structure of the city but also brought about significant social, economic, and cultural transformations. As such, it needs to be understood as a spatial, political, and socio-economic phenomenon encompassing the broader impacts of displacement-driven urbanisation.

While intersecting with broader urbanisation dynamics in Turkey – such as gecekondu-isation, land commodification, and profit-driven redevelopment – forced urbanisation in the Kurdish provinces exhibits distinct characteristics tied to the historical and geographical context in which it emerged. Its impact on Diyarbakır's urban fabric is particularly pronounced due to its scale, unmatched by other urban centres in the country. Within this context, the concept of forced urbanisation also highlights how the Kurdish issue is reproduced at the urban level. Forced migration created a ground where Kurdish identity was reshaped in urban

areas and networks of solidarity and resistance were formed. At the same time, this process intersected with state efforts to control urban areas and suppress the Kurdish issue. In this context, forced urbanisation emerges as both a survival strategy for displaced communities and an arena of social conflict. The concept offers a lens through which to view urban space not only as a site of habitation but also as a material instrument and tangible outcome of power relations, coercive policies, and acts of resistance. Bağlar, shaped by the dynamics of forced migration and displacement, stands as a prime example of forced urbanisation.

This study combines personal accounts from residents with a variety of published sources to underscore Bağlar's central role in the context of Diyarbakır and the Kurdish political movement. While the scale of this research is limited, it seeks to draw attention to the shortcomings of existing accounts and offer an alternative perspective. Bağlar harbours remarkable diversity in its spatial and social structure, reflecting the multi-layered composition of Diyarbakır through its historical connections and contemporary dynamics. More in-depth and inclusive studies on Bağlar could enhance our understanding of the district and inform policies aimed at improving the living conditions of its residents. It is our hope that this study will inspire greater interest in the history and socio-cultural fabric of Bağlar, paving the way for further, more comprehensive research.

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