

«GECEKONDU» FAMILLES IN ANKARA AND SOME PROBLEMS REGARDING THE CITY

INTRODUCTION :

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«Gecekondu» ise the name given to the dwellings constructed in a very short time on land that do not generally belong to the constructor. However this definition should justifiably include those which are legally built but share the same properties with the illegally built dwellings. Assuming this, a more realistic approach to the scientific, social and legal standing of the «Gecekondu»s can be obtained. «Gecekondu» ise one of the terms created, during the Second World War, by the population. (The word means «appeared overnight»). Other terms originating from the population in the same period, are words like «haciğa», for collective taxis «dolmuş» etc. From that time on families living in «gecekondu» have been known as «gecekondu» family.

These «gecekondu» families mainly originate from the country, villages and plains. This phenomenon is by no means peculiar to Turkey alone. It is a general and serious problem common to all underdeveloped countries. The basic reason underlying this is the constant population migration to bigger towns. Similar episodes, though not exactly similar have been recorded in history, and are witnessed even today in countries which are being rapidly industrialized. (1)

BASIC FACTS ABOUT «GECEKONDU» FAMILIES :

The typical «gecekondu» family is a transition between a village family and a city as regards to its customs and social standing. It has fewer members than a village family, the distribution of work

(1) This research is based on facts collected for another work by the author, «Gecekondu Familles in Ankara» (1966), published by the Ministry of Health and public Assistance, Academy of Social Services.

among the members being more generalized and distinctly defined. The family retains most of its village ways, while at the same time adapting to certain convenient city ways. Thus the «gecekondu» family is unique in the same sense that it possesses both town and rural family characteristics. However, it is by no means identical with a typical small town family, though they do share some basic properties. In this respect, the «gecekondu» family displays the alterable ways of both town and village families, while at the same time exhibiting properties of both types.

CHARACTERISTICS :

The settling of families in the «gecekondu» districts is subject to certain ethnical and regional conditions. This plays an important role in the continuation of the community spirit as a whole. Consequently these families have difficulty in giving up village habits and adapting to city ways.

DIET :

Most of the families are faced with the necessity of obtaining their winter supplies of food directly from their villages. This leads to the continuation of the old dietary habits. (2)

HEALTH - CLEANLINESS :

In this respect a «gecekondu» district closely resembles a village. Generally, tidiness is neglected. Similarly house management also suffers, a respect in which these people need assistance :

ATTITUDE TOWARDS NEW IDEAS AND CLOTHING :

The «gecekondu» women can be classified under two headings : Those who work at home, and those who go out to work. The latter category generally do laundry, baby-sit, cook and do housework, in the broad sense, for city families. These women are the sources of new ideas for the «gecekondu» families. Being in close touch with the better-off community, their outlook and habits change, often causing new problems to arise. They bring with them clothing and other things from the richer families they work for, out of fashion

(2) As soon as a «gecekondu» family lay their hands on some cash, they purchase basic food materials, such as flour onions, etc. This is in direct accordance with village customs and economic security.

as these things may be. (3) Blouses, nylon hardware, high-heeled shoes are introduced into the «gecekondu»s in this fashion.

Decause they sell their acquired second-hand clothes to their «gecekondu» neighbors, in a way resemble dealers in used clothing. Some of these women and their daughters like to imitate the city women, among, «gecekondu» women those wearing village-made dresses and stockings are also encountered. Head-scarves, «hirka» (some sort of a blazer), long skirts are a common sight. The dominant colour is red. Generally, in accordance with village tradition, bright, eye catching colours are preferred.

As was mentioned previously, the women who work outside their homes generally react well to new ideas. Generally they are the best home managers. Also the wife-husband relations can be said to take a better turn in these better-run homes. It would be errnig to state that this weakens the patriarchal dominance within the family.

As for the domestic woman, their days are completely full with doing housework as the families as a rule comprise many members. As a result, their relations with the outside world are limited and rare. The women persevere in their village ways, which are reflected in the wat they cood, eat, arrange the kitchen, ect. Their garments reflect the way the women of old Ankara women used to dress. Those who wear «şalvar»s (baggy pants) constitute the majority. Pyjamas are a rare sight in the «gecekondu»s. Pyjama weares among men are many, but very few women actually venture to wear pyjamas, these being degenerate forms of the «şalvar» rather than proper pyjamas. Recently the nightgown is also finding its way into the «gecekondu»s, which shows a gradual change in tradition.

The «gecekondu» men are inclined to wear custom-tailored suits, which is a marked characteristic of small town men. Sports jackets and trousers which are sometimes seen are almost invariably bought second-hand. In a way men's clothing is observed to be more in the working-outfit class. As a rule, the men are more easily adapted to the city way of dressing than the women.

(3) I is generally the younger members under education who introduce the latest creations into the «gecekondu» dwellings.

THE OCCUPATIONAL PATTERNS :

Labor distribution among the family is the main dissimilarity between «gecekondu» and village families; the «gecekondu» family exhibit more dynamic and complicated characteristics because of labor specialization and expansion, as well as new social standing and relevant responsibilities.

The Turkish village family has lost some of its ancestral characteristics. When compared with the typical city family, a great majority still house such close relations as mothers-in-law, father-in-law, grandparents, grandchildren, etc. under the same roof. A remarkable fact about the «gecekondu» family is a departure from this. The main preoccupation in the village is agriculture and livestock, whereas this shifts to various industrial branches in the city, resulting in an increase in the number of families working in these branches. Government employees, grocers and other small time dealers are also included in this number. (4)

Under these conditions, the «gecekondu» families are observed to be forced to expand their inter-community relations. One reason is the wider environment, such as various organizations and trade unions.

LODGING CHARACTERISTICS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON LIFE STANDARDS :

The metamorphosis and disintegration observed amongst city society manifest themselves in various ways in the «gecekondu» society. The severest problem encountered is the necessity of adjusting themselves to the higher social level of townfolk, which is not at all easy to accomplish, mainly because they are as yet trying to overcome conflicts within themselves (and this naturally causes disturbance and misdemeanour).

The income level of the «gecekondu» family is higher than the village family, but is nowhere on the city family's income level. This and the fact that the «gecekondu» family has not yet completed its development, increases the responsibilities on the family.

No matter how look at it, the «gecekondu» family today lives in a crowded and insufficient lodgings. They are mostly built wit-

(4) However, street hawkers are excluded, as this profession may be better classified as «parasitism».

These people incidentally amount to hundreds.

hout health standards, they are nests of disease and poverty. For example, sewerage mainly consists of a hole in the ground used jointly. Many «gecekondu» districts still lack electricity, sewerage, roads. In general, the income of a family is just sufficient to meet the most basic needs of food, clothing and health.

HOUSE OWNERSHIP :

A village family own their lodging. A city family either own or rent their lodging. Most of the «gecekondu»s are owned by their dwellers, and so can be considered as «homes» and in this sense are closer to village houses.

THE NUMBER OF FAMILY MEMBERS AND ITS EFFECTS ON INTER - FAMILY RELATIONS :

«The «gecekondu» family contains roughly the same number of people as a village family, though by and by this number tends to get smaller. Future family planning will definitely show its effects on this aspect.

The more members to a family, the more restrained and frequent are the relations among these members. However these relations are encounter various social problems.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE FAMILY LEADER :

It is quite clear that as the «gecekondu» family abandons its village ways, the position of the family leader grows weaker. Less work burdens the «gecekondu» women, and as the duties of the men change the relations between man and women and the other members are smoother. However no equality between the members can be tolerated. Children are relatively free from discipline. Outside relations are sparse and weak, though at the same time contain a sense of mutual help.

MARRIAGE :

The «gecekondu» family resembles the village family in the sense that marrying early is in favour. The city family in the sense that marrying later is in favour. The city family departs from this by showing a tendency to marry at older ages. In addition, a tendency is obvious in the «gecekondu» families to demand from bri-

des and bridegrooms cultural and educational background, rather than the old village custom of matching couples with similar social, economic and cultural level.

CHANGE OF OUTLOOK :

As a resumé of what we have said so far, we can say that the «gecekondu» family is more weakly bound by customs and traditions than the village family and is more liberal in certain respects. However this does not mean that it has become a city family. It resembles a city family in the way it dresses and the things it eats. This resemblance has been acquired through adaptation to city life, and encountered social problems. The woman's position has improved considerably. A father can not prevent his wife or daughter from working outside, whereas he might very well forbid them even to leave the house in the village. Naturally, economic obligations play an important role in the tolerant attitude of the men. In short, the «gecekondu» family has been able to work itself free to a certain extent from the old conservative traditions.

CONFLICTING OUTLOOKS :

When a «gecekondu» family is being analyzed, it is sometimes necessary to attribute to them village, small town and city characteristics. People comprising these families have not completely severed their connections with their villages. Their kins still live in villages and small towns. Those who live in cities can not be considered a par of the cities, because they have not yet been able to adapt fully to the active city life. On one hand, they are attached emotionally to their villages, on the other hand, they seek to make the best out of what a city offers.

The «gecekondu» family, while trying to raise chicken, vegetables, trees and crops on the plot in the backyard hopes to realize its dreams of becoming workers in a city factory. They strive to live many different lives at the same time. On the one hand, the son of the family attends Kouran courses and learns to read and write Arabic, and on the other hand he is expected to hold a modern and respectable career. Thus it is obvious that the «gecekondu» families are a society fighting conflicts.

Most of the «Gecekondu» families are remnants of the village society. Undoubtedly the city has had its effects on the families,

and as a consequence of these effects these families can not possess the full characteristics of either society.

CONTINUATION OF TRADITION :

The general tendency in the «gecekondu» family is to stick to the village customs for a long time to come. For example as in the village, economic insecurity prevails and the «gecekondu» families try to purchase all their annual food supply at once, at the first opportunity. Also the food supply for the winter is collected and prepared in the summer.

EFFECTS OF THE CITY :

The «gecekondu» family wish to make good use of city facilities and conveniences such as running tap-water, electricity, carpets, beds, tables, radios, kitchenwares, butane gas-burners, etc. These needs are facilitated by the more civilized city ways.

DIFFERENT ORIGINS AND THEIR EFFECTS :

«Gecekondu» families originate from different places. However these differences hardly have any effect on the culture of the nation. In other words these families can ignore these differences when necessary. Most of the dwellings are illegal. Municipal services are lacking. There are many economic and cultural similarities. These are all points that unite the families in a common cause. Probably this is the strongest characteristic that may eventually lead to a class unification.

REORGANISATION OF CONSUMPTION HABITS, AND HOME ECONOMY :

In the village dwelling is assured for everyone. This security is the first to suffer in the city. As a result the first urge in the family is to economize as much as possible, which manifests itself in minimizing clothing, food and entertainment expenses. No article is dispensed with before it is utterly unusable; no surplus is wasted and no prodigality is allowed. All the available resources are immediately put to use, children and all. After the initial difficulties are overcome, the first thing to do is to rent a «gecekondu» jointly. As soon as economic conditions are permissible ownership of a «gecekondu» is sought. If further possible, a small apartment in a mo-

dest ditrict may be purchased. Most of the flats in these modest districts of Ankara belong to former «gecekondu» owners.

FORMATION OF SOCIAL SPIRIT :

As was mentioned before, the «gecekondu» families are well aware of the presence of a better-off class than themselves, although they are above the village class. The majority of the «gecekondu» community sincerely believe that the better-off class never attained their status by lawful ways, which explains the negative attitude of the former towards the latter. The concept of considering the city folk as a higher and better class is not yet fully accepted, although some incidents indicate that this is not so far away.

The events of September 6th and 7th, (1955), later occurances at Kadifekale in İzmir and Gülveren in Ankara, the seizure of a bit of land in the district of Telsizler upon the news that it would be given away free and the pillage of some privately-owned estate caused by a misinterpretation of a declaration of the Prime Minister, concerning. The events in the «gecekondu» communities has had and will have something to do with progressive movements and tendencies. One of the foremost problems of Turkey is this problem of the «gecekondu»s who are not yet well-established, and will take a long time to settle down. In this respect, it is best to consider the «gecekondu» districts as transition locations and improve things accordingly.

CONCLUSION :

The «gecekondu» is a dwelling constructed in a very short time on land that does not, in general, belong to the constructor. The definition may include those which are legally built, but share the same characteristics with the illegally built dwellings. The basic cause is the population migration to the cities. The «gecekondu» family, in comparison with the village family, has fewer members, has its labour distribution specialized, still insists on village ways, and can generally be regarded as a transition between village and city communities. It also exhibits more dynamic and complicated properties regarding the inter-family relations and new social responsibilities. It has a higher income level than the village family. the lodgings are restricted, insufficient and in general do not comply with health regulations. The «gecekondu» family is less rightly bound by customs and traditions. The members of the family have

not completely severed their conections with their villages. They try to make the best use of the city facilities. The illegal status of the dwellings, absence of municipal services, similarities, in economic and cultural levels are factors which help the «gecekondu» families to unite for a comman cause. Economic insecurity and fear of losing possession of their dwellings are the common anxicties.

The «gecekondu» communities are biginning to realize the existance of a higher and better class, whose status, at present, they are convinced was not achieved legally. The social structure of the «gecekondu» family is constantly changing. In this respect it is best to regard the «gecekondu» districts as transition locations and make improvements accordingly.