

Turkey's Military Urbanism and Neocolonial Architecture in Kurdish Cities

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Executive summary

This commentary focuses on how the Turkish state facilitates military urbanism as revanchist and racialized mechanisms of collective punishment to suppress grassroots mobilization, oppositional politics, and resistance in Kurdish cities. Based on an ethnographic case study in Sur, Diyarbakır, it shows how neocolonial urban policies are employed to annihilate, displace, and dispossess localities while replacing them with standardized, bordered, and financialized architectures of state security and control. Mass scale destructions, militarized policies, and coercive restructuring in Kurdish cities reveal the state's emergent spatial strategy to recolonize the region at the urban level. The state dominates, frames, and reconfigures Kurdish urbanities so as to eliminate alternatives, opposition, and challenges to its

existing and deepening hegemony.

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Introduction: Urban warfare and urbicide in Kurdish cities

This contribution looks at Turkish state politics from the security standpoint of military urbanism and neocolonial architecture.² The topic is introduced with brief reviews of the urban warfare and its historical background. Then, relevant events in Sur, Diyarbakır, a central neighborhood in the region's main city, are detailed. Drawing from ethnographic research undertaken between 2016 and 2019, the focus is placed on local people's experiences and the forced movements of populations and redevelopment of the inner-city.³

In the June 7, 2015 parliamentary elections, the ruling AKP lost its parliamentary majority and thus power to form an independent government. One of the main reasons for this was the position of the *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democratic Party, HDP), which was able to gain the vote of the Kurdish movement along with that of various democratic supporters and social movements in Turkey. Shortly after what was effectively the electoral defeat of June 7, the new AKP government—now in a coalition with the right-wing nationalist *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* (Nationalist Movement Party, MHP)—announced the end of the peace process dealing with the century-long Kurdish issue and conflict in Turkey, which had been based on negotiations with the *Partîya Karkerên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Worker's Party, PKK). From August 2015, the *Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi* (Democratic Regions Party, DBP)⁴ municipalities began declaring “democratic autonomy.” The government responded to this political uprising in Kurdish cities with military operations, round-the-clock curfews, states of emergency, and the initiation of

² Some parts of this commentary were published as ‘Displacing Resistance in Kurdish Regions: The Symbiosis of Neoliberal Transformation and Authoritarian State in Sur’ in İ. Borsuk, P. Dinç, S. Kavak, & P. Sayan (Eds.), *Authoritarian Neoliberalism and Resistance in Turkey. Construction, Consolidation, and Contestation* (pp. 81-104), Palgrave Macmillan.

³ The cited interviews were conducted in 2017 (in Turkish); the study included 20 open-ended, in-depth interviews in supported by informal conversations with state officials, subcontracting implementers, local residents, and civil society activists.

⁴ The DBP was founded in 2001, as reconstruction of the *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party, BDP); linked to the HDP, it is mainly active in the Kurdish region in Turkey and proponent of the system of “democratic confederalism.” See Gunes, C., & Güler, Ç. (2018). Kurdish movement's democratic autonomy proposals in Turkey. In *Democratic Representation in Plurinational States* (pp. 159-175). Palgrave Macmillan.



urban attacks, which intensified into warfare between December 2015 and March 2016.⁵

For more than three months, Turkish state forces laid siege to Kurdish cities. Many urban areas became total military enclaves with advanced techniques of urban warfare—using drones (UAVs), helicopters, tanks, carpet artillery bombing, remote-controlled machine guns, armored SUV's, and bulldozers)—against the PKK-affiliated low-tech urban militia of the *Yekîneyên Parastina Sivîl* (Civil Protection Units, YPS), which had built barricades and trenches in the neighborhoods.⁶ During the conflict, an estimated 355,000–500,000⁷ people were forcibly displaced by the disproportionate state violence,⁸ which amounted to urbicide (i.e., a systematic destruction of the built environment).⁹ According to the figures provided by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, a total of around 1.6 million people were affected by the round-the-clock curfews and military lockdowns in 22 urban centers.¹⁰

During this process, state authorities used revanchist statements while demonizing entire cities, towns, and districts through the discourse of 'cleansing' to sustain the systematic destruction. In January 2016, during the operations, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that

Cizre, Sur, Silopi, all of these sites will be cleaned. As a second step after this cleansing, the urban transformation process will begin.¹¹

⁵ Ercan, H. (2019). Is hope more precious than victory? The failed peace process and urban warfare in the Kurdish Region of Turkey. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 118(1), 111-127; Bakan, R. (2020). Socio-spatial dynamics of contentious politics: A case of urban warfare in the Kurdish region of Turkey. *Kurdish Studies*, 8(2), 245-270.

⁶ Darici, H. (2016). Of Kurdish youth and ditches. *Theory & Event*, 19(1).

⁷ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/TR/OHCHR_South-East_TurkeyReport_10_March_2017.pdf

⁸ Darici, H., & Hakyemez, S. (2019). Neither civilian, nor combatant: Weaponised spaces and spatialised bodies in Cizre. In *Turkey's Necropolitical Laboratory: Democracy, Violence and Resistance* (pp. 71-94). Edinburgh University Press.

⁹ Coward, M. (2008). *Urbicide: The politics of urban destruction*. Routledge.

¹⁰ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/22957/html>

¹¹ <https://www.haberler.com/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-buralar-temizlendikten-8110718-haber/>

Prime Minister of time Ahmet Davutoğlu then stated

We are applying a new security plan... These cities were developed in the 1990s in an uncontrolled and unplanned way... Even if these incidents had not occurred, these are places where an urban transformation had to be carried out... In Sur, Silopi, Nusaybin, and similar places, decent houses will be built.¹²

Following the armed clashes, the state began to expropriate urban land and forcibly applied urban restructuring in the settlements. The infrastructural violence¹³ did not stop there but rather intensified during the restructuring process. Something like 40,000 buildings were destroyed in seven urban centers (Cizre: 3,000, Idil: 700, Nusaybin: 11,000, Silopi: 7,618, Şırnak: 7,000, Sur: 3,569, Yüksekova: 5,000).¹⁴ Aerial pictures show entire districts erased by the state bulldozing.¹⁵ In the context of conflict situations, this was one of the largest systematic urban destruction programs of the post-Cold War era. In order to understand this mass-scale urbicide, we should consider its historical background and dynamics.

Historical Background and Political Mobilization in Kurdish cities

The PKK was founded in 1978, after the decades-long history of colonial policies¹⁶ and forced assimilation of Kurds in Turkey.¹⁷ While the 1980 military junta closed the option of political opposition through legal means, large numbers of prisoners went on to join the ranks of the PKK, which launched a Maoist-styled guerilla war in 1984 aiming to decolonize northern Kurdistan (southeastern

¹² <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/suru-toledo-gibi-yapacagiz-1069462/>

¹³ Rodgers, D. (2012). Haussmannization in the tropics: Abject urbanism and infrastructural violence in Nicaragua. *Ethnography*, 13(4), 413-438.

¹⁴ Estimated numbers collected from various civil society reports and media reviews.

¹⁵ https://www.tmmob.org.tr/sites/default/files/tmmob_yikilan_kentler_raporu.pdf

¹⁶ Duruiz, D. (2020). Tracing the conceptual genealogy of Kurdistan as international colony. *Middle East Report*, 295.

¹⁷ Zeydanlıoğlu, W. (2008). The white Turkish man's burden: Orientalism, Kemalism and the Kurds in Turkey. *Neo-colonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe*, 4(2), 155-174.



Turkey).¹⁸ The late 1980s and 90s saw an increasing insurgency and the development of widespread asymmetrical warfare between the PKK and the Turkish state.¹⁹ According to government figures, 378,000 persons had been forcibly displaced from 3,165 villages by the state forces by the end of 1999, while other reports estimated the final number at between 2.5 and 4 million.²⁰ In addition to the forced displacements that denuded the countryside and effected a mass urban migration, the state subordinated the region's demographic and geographical features to the divisions and disciplines of hydroelectric dams, security zones, and military fortifications. Largely executed in areas marked by the Kurdish resistance, these measures—this program—also played a major role in the region's rapid urbanization.

The late 1990s saw a critical shift in this resistance involving ideological transformations within the Kurdish movement and a new grassroots politics in Kurdish cities.²¹ In the 1999 local elections, *Halkın Demokratik Partisi* (People's Democratic Party, HADEP) took over the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality with 62.48% of the total vote, a stunning victory accompanied by a similarly high vote share in several other cities and towns. This was the first time that the Kurdish political movement had gained significant numbers of local municipalities. Despite the high level of state pressure applied to its party members and executives along with investigations and party closure cases, the movement managed to hold on to and expand the number of municipalities it ran in the region over the following two decades.

This paradigm shift within the Kurdish movement also facilitated the transformation of Kurdish cities into sites of grassroots mobilization

¹⁸ Jongerden, J. (2016). Colonialism, self-determination and independence: The new PKK paradigm. In M. Gunter (Ed.), *Kurdish Issues: Essays in honor of Robert W. Olson* (pp. 106-21). Mazda Publishers.

¹⁹ Işık, A. (2022). Turkish Paramilitaries during the Conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK. *The Commentaries*, 2(1), 1-11.

²⁰ Ayata, B., & Yüксеker, D. (2005). A belated awakening: National and international responses to the internal displacement of Kurds in Turkey. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 32, 5-42.

²¹ Yarkin, G. (2015). The ideological transformation of the PKK regarding the political economy of the Kurdish region in Turkey. *Kurdish Studies*, 3(1), 26-46.

accompanied by political and cultural activism.²² Neighborhood assemblies were organized as part of this participatory governance, with gender-equality provisions and a (male-female) co-chair system established across local institutions.²³ Municipalities played a significant role in a (re)appropriation of urban space as a locus of political, social, and cultural mobilization.²⁴ For instance, events and festivals were organized to highlight the multiethnic heritage of places, streets were named after political and cultural activists, and the Kurdish language started to be widely used in civil life and public institutions. During these years, Diyarbakır gradually became the symbolic²⁵ and cultural²⁶ capital of a contentious Kurdish politics through residents' everyday practices and the movement's activities.²⁷

However, it should be noted that the Kurdish movement's and municipalities' politics of identity were not accompanied with comprehensive social programs or strategies aimed at transcending the colonial background and capitalist urbanization. While Diyarbakır became increasingly embedded in cycles of globalization,²⁸ the movement created its own political and economic elites that were actively engaged in the accumulation of wealth through commercial activities and the financialization of urban land and facilities. In this context, the grassroots populism within the movement served to block bottom-up mobilizations against growing class distinctions, urban hyper inequalities, over-accumulation, and

²² Sustam, E. (2021). The Kurdish political and artistic making by the transborder perception in the interstitial spaces. *UXUC-User Experience and Urban Creativity*, 3(2), 24-37.

²³ Gunes, C., & Güner, Ç. (2018). Kurdish movement's democratic autonomy proposals in Turkey. In E. Nimni & E. Altoprak (Eds.), *Democratic Representation in Plurinational States* (pp. 159-175). Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁴ Gambetti, Z. (2005). The conflictual (trans) formation of the public sphere in urban space: the case of Diyarbakır. *New perspectives on Turkey*, 32, 43-71. Gambetti, Z. (2009). Decolonizing Diyarbakır: Culture, identity and the struggle to appropriate urban space. *Comparing Cities: The Middle East and South Asia*, 97-129.

²⁵ Aydın, D. (2013). Mobilising the Kurds in Turkey: Newroz as a myth. In *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New perspectives on violence, representation and reconciliation* (pp. 84-104). Routledge.

²⁶ Güven, O. Ö. (2021). 'Our city is our identity!' A field study on Kurdish local government experiences in Diyarbakır. *GeoJournal*, 86(2), 1029-1041.

²⁷ Öztürk, D. C. (2013). *Socio-Spatial Practices of the Pro-Kurdish Municipalities: The case of Diyarbakır* (unpublished master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara).

²⁸ Kaya, F. (2020). The Spatial Dimension of Globalization in Diyarbakır City. *Eurasian Academy of Sciences Social Sciences Journal*, (32), 93-115.



the centralization of politico-economic power. The spatial effects of these configurations were revealed in the BDP/DBP/HDP municipalities' gentrification and displacement approaches to the lower-income inner-city neighborhoods of Sur via tourism-based economic growth and rentier capitalism.²⁹

Military urbanism and coercive restructuring in Sur, Diyarbakır

In order to deal with Kurdish urban mobilization and resistance after the peace process ended in 2015, state policies regarding Sur, a historical, inner-city neighborhood of Diyarbakır, radically changed from the context of contested urban renewal³⁰ to coercive military urbanism.³¹ A year later, upon the announcement of the end of military operations on March 21, 2016, the state declared the entire area of Sur an urban transformation site, based on Law No. 2942 addressing the “urgent expropriation of risky areas for national defense”. After this point, the urban restructuring of Sur has become a matter of militarized state control.³² Policies of isolation and desolation are fostered through no-entry, shoot-to-kill zones and security buffer zones in the midst of the urban landscape. One of the young, displaced residents delineated the military enclaves of Sur as follows:

I couldn't go to my old neighborhood for a year. Sometimes, it comes to my mind to go there, it is my old neighborhood, and I can definitely find a way to get in, but what will you say when the police catch you and then a punishment comes?

²⁹ Jongerden, J. (2021). Civilizing space: Addressing disorder in rural and urban landscapes. In *The Routledge Handbook on Contemporary Turkey* (pp. 373-384). Routledge.

³⁰ Eyyüpoğlu, D. (2018). *Understanding the driving forces in heritage conservation activities in Suriçi*. (unpublished master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara); Bakan, R. (2018). *Rethinking Urban Transformation and Contested Spaces: The Case of Diyarbakır*. (unpublished master's thesis, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul); Taş, D. (2019). *Urban transformation as political and ideological intervention in space: A case study in Diyarbakır*. (unpublished master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, Ankara).

³¹ Graham, S. (2011). *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*. Verso Books.

³² Genç, F. (2021). Governing the contested city: Geographies of displacement in Diyarbakır, Turkey. *Antipode*, 53(6), 1682-1703. Genç, F. (2016). Suriçi in destruction-regeneration dialectic. Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 15 April. <https://tr.boell.org/en/2016/04/15/surici-destruction-regeneration-regeneration-dialectic> (last accessed 27 February 2022).

They say it's a forbidden zone. If you are caught there, they can say that you're a terrorist and they'll shoot you.

Security check-points were built at each of the district's arched gateways through the historical city walls so that every citizen entering or leaving can be controlled through ID checks, interrogations, and video recordings. Various types of weaponized and armored vehicles patrol nearly every street.³³ Concrete security walls, barricades, and fences encamp the district, segregating it from the rest of the city. Several military bases were built in a crossroad of high population-density neighborhoods, and dozens of houses were emptied and demolished to prepare the construction sites. Their proximity to the settlement areas means that residents' everyday activities and spaces are constantly under coercion, surveillance, and control.

The narrow, crooked streets had created an obstacle for security forces and weaponized vehicles. Consequently, broadening them as a Hausmannian military strategy³⁴ has become one of the main motivations of the urban restructuring to facilitate and intensify neocolonial urban control³⁵ in the region. The master plans prepared by the state-backed housing agency *Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı* (TOKİ) explicitly states the following:

The adjacent street culture in the region, which is generally narrow, 2–3 metres long, will be replaced by broad streets of minimum 6–7 metres. The narrow streets will be replaced by wide streets, especially in the places where the security operations were carried out.³⁶

³³ During the years 2008–21, 40 people, 21 of them children, lost their lives as a result of lethal police patrolling and the policies of impunity in the region. See <https://www.birgun.net/haber/ihd-13-yilda-zirhli-arac-carpmalarinda-20-si-cocuk-42-kisi-yasamini-yitirdi-357991>

³⁴ Herscher, A. (2007). Urbicide, urbanism, and urban destruction in Kosovo. *Theory & Event*, 10(2).

³⁵ For global resurrections of neocolonial architectures see Coslett, D. E. (Ed.). (2019). *Neocolonialism and built heritage: Echoes of empire in Africa, Asia, and Europe*. Routledge; Kipfer, S. (2016). Neocolonial urbanism? La renovation urbaine in Paris. *Antipode*, 48(3), 603–625; Hertz, B. J. (2000). Neo-Colonial Architecture and the Neo-Architecture of Colonialism. In *Cross Currents: Trans-Cultural Architecture, Education, and Urbanism- Proceedings of the ACSA 2000 International Conference* (pp. 315–320).

³⁶ http://www.yapi.com.tr/haberler/doguda-kentsel-donusum-silopiden-baslavacak_142807.html



During my field research, I interviewed a high-ranking TOKI engineer who had come to the city to check whether the subcontracting companies were implementing the urban restructuring projects according to the master plans. In the interview, he emphasized that “this is a process that must continue without being related with economy or something else, the state is not allowing those narrow streets in Sur anymore.” The engineer’s words confirm that the urban restructuring in Sur primarily seeks to increase militarized state control in the neighborhoods.

The sense of a suffocating spatial surrounding in Sur not only derives from the military policies but also the standardizing and homogenizing architecture of newly built streets and houses.³⁷ The residents of Sur and civil society activists commonly compared the design style of the new houses with “open-air prisons” and “tombs.” The new architecture is planned to keep everyday social interaction to as little as possible through encircling walls around two-story houses, painted grey and white. The area remained like a ghost town, without any residents even though the constructions were already finished. Meanwhile, all the shops in the main boulevards and bazaars of Sur are also required to change their exteriors in accordance with the new buildings. An administrative official said that the new architectural style of the district was designed to follow exactly that of the city centers of western Turkey. Through this security-based and assimilative urban restructuring, the state forcibly occupied and appropriated the central core of the city as a deliberate political and military strategy. Therefore, state-led urban restructuring in Sur constitutes a manifold socio-spatial program used as a tool to recolonize Kurdish urbanities and to coerce and control their populations.

Coercive displacement and dispossession

In the aftermath of the fighting in Sur, on March 21, 2016, the government had passed decree No. 8659, for the requisitioning of

³⁷ These newly built houses have striking architectural similarities with those in other cases of colonial urban restructuring. See Weizman, E. (2012). *Hollow land: Israel's architecture of occupation*. Verso books.

6,292 out of 7,714 parcels of land and expropriation from their previous owners. As a result, 82% of the entire area of Sur passed into state ownership. The urban restructuring in Sur stands as a clear case of an enforced land grab dispossessing and displacing lower-income residents.³⁸ After the state had decided on the requisition, there were strong objections from the city, and over 300 civil society institutions came together and established the Sur Conservation Platform. An urban activist in the platform explains how the transformation process was implemented:

First, they tried to do it by consent from the residents through TOKİ agreements while threatening the residents with their political identities. When this didn't work, the instruments of force stepped in. They're forcing residents to sell their houses for really low prices, like \$5,000–10,000, but they're planning to sell the new houses for maybe \$300,000,³⁹ such as the ones located in streets over-looking the historical city walls, which is the most efficient area for them to gain economic profit and urban rent.

After the forced expropriations in Sur, the government made it compulsory for Sur residents to choose between either accepting the compensation money or taking a loan from TOKİ to buy an apartment in a mass housing complex planned for an empty area on the periphery of the city. A resident who had to leave his home criticized the process as follows:

Now, today, the turnkey construction cost of a 2+1 flat is 15,000. They are selling it to us for \$50,000. Well, this is already named “social housing,” if it is called “social,” then they shouldn't get any profit from me. Ok, let them take \$3,000 as profit, the flat costs \$15,000, then give it to us for 18,000. No! 50,000! [...] We couldn't get that [money] together, either.

³⁸ Küçükırca, A. (2018). *Thinking Surici Through Home Place*. Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research (DISA) Publications.

³⁹ All values converted at the 2017 exchange rate of 1\$ = 3.20TL.



The state's expropriation of land has resulted in a dramatic decline in the socio-economic conditions of the Sur residents, who had been dependent on the low cost of living in the inner-city and the communal economy of the neighborhoods. The dispossession and displacement of the urban restructuring cut them off from these facilities, deepening their conditions of poverty. During my interviews, ex-Sur residents commonly compared their present to previous neighborhoods and explained how their living conditions had worsened after being forcibly moved to the other parts of the city:

We were moved to another district. We were pushed to a new life, a relentless life. It was nice there [in Sur], \$5–6 a day was enough for us, now it's \$20–25 a day here. We were earning enough for the winter in 20 days. Now, we're working 12 months, throughout the whole year; it means nothing. So, I mean, it's a hard life, a savage life for us who don't steal, don't just go after profit, don't lose themselves.

The state is changing the demographic structure in neighborhoods with destruction, forced displacement, and dispossession solidified through recreational service facilities and gentrification. The completed houses and shops in Sur began to be sold by state-affiliated real estate companies at prices ranging from \$180,000 to \$620,000, advertised as luxurious and historical.⁴⁰

Repression of the internally displaced urban poor and civil society

As a result of the decades-long colonial policies and then warfare in the region, the residents' lives in Sur have become increasingly precarious.⁴¹ Previously, a quarter of the people in the district were unemployed, and 56% of the residents had an annual income of

⁴⁰ <https://tr.sputniknews.com/20210129/surda-30-ila-100-bin-liraya-alinan-evlerin-yerine-yapilan-villalar-satista-fiyatlar-2-milyona-kadar-1043688603.html>

⁴¹ Çaylı, E. (2021). The aesthetics of extractivism: Violence, ecology, and sensibility in Turkey's Kurdistan. *Antipode*, 53(5), 1377–1399. Çaylı, E., & Doğrul, H. (2021). Emergency as normalcy in mid-2010s Amed/Diyarbakır. *Architectures of Emergency in Turkey: Heritage, Displacement and Catastrophe*, 69.

under \$1400, well below the poverty level.⁴² According to a survey conducted with 445 households in the district by the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality in 2017, half of the residents had come to the district as a result of forced migration during the 1990s. According to the same survey, over 60% of households had a monthly income of below \$110, and 15% did not have anyone working in the family. Those who were in paid jobs were typically uninsured, temporary, and unregistered. All these conditions explain residents' strong resistance to leaving their homes in the neighborhood.

Sur residents were strongly against the destruction of their homes and community. The social architecture of Sur had provided residents with a base to build strong neighborhood communities and solidarity, which were enhanced by residents' previous experiences of forced displacements. Now, the sense of belonging to a neighborhood plays a vital role in their continued resistance. Displaced Sur residents mainly demand the right to return to their previous neighborhood and rebuild their homes, while those still there are vehement about their desire to stay and repair their houses. They resist leaving their houses even after the coercive power steps in and they are threatened and criminalized by the security forces. A young resident in Sur said this during his eviction and the destruction of his house:

The state is persecuting people here for its own benefit. It doesn't want people living here together, anymore. We were living together, now the state's dispersing all these people to different places... You see, my house was just here, now it's destroyed, there's nothing but ruins. But look, I'm still here, refusing to go anywhere. It wasn't easy to destroy this neighborhood just like that. When people refused to leave their houses they came this time with war, killing, and so on. They force people to leave their houses, saying if you don't

⁴² Aslan, A. S. (2013). Diyarbakır suriçi kentsel dönüşüm projelerinin değerlendirilmesi. Neo-liberalizm sonrası mekânsal müdahale biçimleri ve yansımaları. *KBAM 4. Kentsel ve Bölgesel Araştırmalar Sempozyumu, Bildiri Kitabı*,309–322.



leave, we'll kill you... It's been five months now since the state cut the electricity and water in this neighborhood... Now, if we get together as five people on the street, they label us "terrorist" and put us in jail, taking us into custody. Why? Because we don't want to leave our own houses.

Residents continue to resist the legislative, regulative, and coercive apparatuses of the state.⁴³ For example, some applied to the Turkish Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights against the urgent expropriation decision of the government. However, many residents lack the resources or direct access to legal means to object to state implementations, marking a significant power imbalance. Civil society institutions try to support residents wanting to object to human rights violations, but they are also subject to oppression and criminalization by the state. Hundreds of organizations have been closed down, and thousands of activists have been targeted and jailed. Any type of event, meeting, or demonstration is forbidden; police violence and raids are continuous. Across the Kurdish region in 2019, according to *İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Human Rights Association Turkey, İHD), 2,987 people were taken into custody, 511 people were arrested, and 2081 houses and workplaces were raided by the state security forces.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The central neighborhood of Sur in Diyarbakır is only one case of the mass scale destruction, militarized policies, and coercive restructurings in Kurdish cities.⁴⁵ Overall, these reveal the state's emergent spatial strategy to recolonize the region at an urban level. Ankara is enforcing these policies as racialized, socio-spatial tools of regional urban suppression, coercion, and control. It has been using revanchist urban restructuring and military architecture to suppress

⁴³ Saadi, S. (2021). Waiting for justice amidst the remnants: urban development, displacement and resistance in Diyarbakır. *Social Anthropology*, 29(3), 847-861.

⁴⁴ <https://www.ihd.org.tr/dogu-ve-guneydogu-anadolu-bolgesi-2019-yili-insan-haklari-ihlalleri-raporu/>

⁴⁵ Most of the research on this subject is restricted to case studies in Diyarbakır, like the present one; further research in other cities of the region is needed.

political mobilization and grassroots resistance in Kurdish cities. Mass-scale destruction and land expropriations have been implemented hand-in-hand with the coercive dispossession and displacement of the residents. Those who resist are targeted by the state violence, security policies, and criminalization.

This neocolonial polity sustains itself not only through extensively perpetuating and permeating the state of warfare, security, and militarism in the Kurdish region, but also by gradually extending it to the entire country and its adjacent geographies. The longstanding policy of the state of exception in the Kurdish region has been expanding across the whole of Turkey, transforming governance into a permanent state of exception under the autocratic regime.⁴⁶ We are reminded once again of Foucault's metaphor of a boomerang effect, which emphasizes that the militarized and violent governance in colonial peripheries is sooner or later extended to the colonial centers, too.⁴⁷ An escape from this ongoing catastrophe will require efforts working towards a deconstruction of the colonial and militarized configurations of the state.

⁴⁶ Jongerden, J. (2019). Conquering the state and subordinating society under AKP rule: A Kurdish perspective on the development of a new autocracy in Turkey. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 21(3), 260-273; Ercan, H. (2021). Authoritarianism from above and below: Exclusive nationalism and the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. *The Commentaries*, 1(1), 75-83.

⁴⁷ Graham, S. (2012). Foucault's boomerang: the new military urbanism. *Development Dialogue*, 58(April), 37-48.

