

STREAM 2. The ambivalence of disaster and neglect: Türkiye's wildfires.

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July 2 2025.

Wildfires are burning up forests across the Aegean, Mediterranean, and Anatolian regions of Turkey. In the west, flames have reached the hilltops of Seferihisar in İzmir, where more than 50,000 people have been evacuated. I'm preparing to travel to Urla this weekend for a family wedding just north of the fires' epicentre, and I'm checking [NASA's FIRMS](#) site daily to see which areas are affected. My partner and I exchange uneasy laughs on the phone whilst doing so, sarcastically remarking that our behaviour can be likened [to that of American tourists in Maui](#), a few years before. But I comfort myself by carrying the moral burden of this act with the gift of perspective, for there is a precise reason why we have chosen to be here by a sea that doesn't taste salty enough, and not in our homeland on the Gulf of Iskenderun. Further eastwards on the Mediterranean coast, beyond the periphery of mainstream Turkey's jaded gaze, wildfires rage around my paternal family's city of Antioch with unprecedented force. Locals on social media claim that an area the size of seven hundred football fields has already burned in the past week alone. Unsurprisingly, no coordinated state response is on site. Instead, a plethora of videos and images emerge of [locals looking on in disbelief](#) as their land, homes, and livelihoods are turned to ashes.

It was just last week that Antiochians were sharing videos, infographics, images, anything to draw attention to the compounded humanitarian crisis unfolding since the February 2023 earthquakes; the lack of running water, the poisoning of the soil, the mass uprooting of olive trees, the seizure of properties. The list continues.

And now, these wildfires become yet another uneasy addition to the timeline of disastrous milestones that litter the city [\[1\]](#). This is beyond a disaster. I refuse to use that word so objectively, to let it be fatalistically attributed as the fate of a beautiful land. This is *neglect*. A systemic, pathological practice of ordering, in which native communities in the south(-east) are cursed to oscillate between empty declarations of solidarity, and a resolute omission from nationwide emergency response.

One could project whatever rationalisation the book could offer to negate the severity of such neglect: "all of Turkey is in shambles", "everywhere is burning". these are somewhat valid. The whole country is, after all, rife with ruptures and flames, earthquakes and wildfires. Yet the soil is still fresh on the mass graves in Antakya, the vines have not yet taken over. Further into the city, the reservation area, as Turkey's first, continues to threaten survivors with permanent dispossession from their lands. Cracks remain visible across the surfaces of walls, doors, and obituaries, whilst dust from contaminated debris continues to fill the air. Antakya hasn't stopped being in disaster since 2023, and there seems to be no end in sight...

I call my cousin, to tell her that the flights seem to be operating fine to Izmir. Right now, it seems I have to also engage in this embedded ambivalence that has become the norm - for my cousin's sake. I check Flight Radar to see the condition of Antioch's airport, only to find out [that it has been closed for over a month](#) now due to indiscernible reasons. Ok... "I can fly

out as planned on Friday, so hopefully we will make it without issues”, I say. on the phone to my cousin. Sheepishly I continue, “why did you choose Izmir and not Iskenderun, Samandag or Arsuz sis? The airport is closed but we could’ve driven from Ankara and found a way to avoid the fires anyway”, I say.

She responds, “sure, we’d avoid the fires, but since the earthquakes, there are not enough houses in the town to host our guests”.



Image taken on Jul 1st in Antakya and widely circulated across social media. I cannot be sure who the original photographer is, but I saw this image on HatayTube.