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Negotiating the Night: Creative Class in a Post-Secular *Mahalle*, The Case of Balat *Gece Müzakereleri: Post-Seküler Mahallede Yaratıcı Sınıflar, Balat Örneği*

Abstract

The ongoing urban transformation projects in Istanbul have resulted in gentrification. The fast-paced transformation impacts everyday life whilst changing neighbourhoods. Balat, as one of the oldest *mahalles* in Istanbul, has been transforming under the influence of culture-led gentrification and has gradually become a popular spot for the creative class. Substantial literature on Istanbul informs us that in some areas night-life and the consumption of alcohol create a tension amongst the locals and the newcomers. Balat's religious majority aligns well with the government's conservative, post-secular values. This can appear in the forms of de-secularising businesses, choosing not to serve alcohol and avoiding night-time activity altogether. In other words, the form of consumption that is tolerated in Balat cannot be thought outside of Islam. The methods employed in the study of these night negotiations and the impact of post-secularism in Balat consisted of observation conducted over 3 months as part of a micro-ethnography work undertaken during a PhD fieldwork. This paper will expand thinking about the parallel lives between the creative class and the locals in Balat where the night is being actively negotiated and the sense of belonging and community is being reconfigured by gentrification and post-secularism.

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Öz

İstanbul'da devam eden kentsel dönüşüm projeleri, soylulaştırma ile sonuçlanmıştır. Bu hızlı tempolu dönüşüm, mahalleleri değiştirirken günlük hayatı da etkiliyor. İstanbul'un en eski mahallelerinden biri olan Balat, kültür odaklı soylulaştırmanın etkisiyle dönüşmekte ve yaratıcı sınıfın giderek popüler bir mekan haline gelmektedir. İstanbul ile ilgili önemli literatür bize, bazı bölgelerde gece hayatı ve alkol tüketiminin yerel halk ve yeni gelenler arasında bir gerilim yarattığını bildirmektedir. Balat'ın dindar çoğunluğu, hükümetin muhafazakar, post-seküler değerleri ile uyumludur. Bu, işletmeleri sekülerlikten arındırma, alkol servisi yapmamayı seçme ve gece faaliyetlerinden tamamen kaçınma şeklinde ortaya çıkabilir. Başka bir deyişle, Balat'ta tolere edilen tüketim şekli İslam dışında düşünülemez. Bu gece müzakerelerinin çalışmasında kullanılan yöntemler ve post-seküler değerlerin Balat'ta etkisi, doktora saha çalışması sırasında gerçekleştirilen bir mikro-etnografi çalışmasının bir parçası olarak 3 ay boyunca yapılan gözlemlen oluşmaktadır. Bu makale, gecenin aktif olarak müzakere edildiği ve aidiyet ve topluluk duygusunun soylulaştırma ve sekülerlik sonrası tarafından yeniden yapılandırıldığı Balat'taki yaratıcı sınıf ve yerliler arasındaki paralel yaşamlar hakkında düşünmeyi genişletecektir.

Keywords

Gentrification, post-secularism, creative class, night-time

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Soylulaştırma, post-sekülerlik, yaratıcı sınıf, gece vakti

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Introduction

This paper is about the ongoing culture-led gentrification of Istanbul's traditional neighbourhood Balat. It focuses on the ways in which gentrification overlaps with post-secularism and how, together, they transform, influence and shape consumer practices at night. A starting point is that the increasing number of urban transformation projects in Istanbul have had a diverse impact on the city, resulting in gentrification, change in daily life, and introduction of new lifestyles to old areas (Bozdogan and Akcan, 2012; Dolcerocca, 2015). Istanbul's transformation has intensified since the early 2000s with the election of the current government and its increasing interest in the construction sector (Can, 2013; Erdi, 2018; Ergun, 2004; Mutman and Turgut, 2018; Oz and Eder, 2018; Yetiskul and Demirel, 2018).

In this paper I will discuss the ongoing urban transformation of Istanbul in relation to culture-led gentrification in Balat and will explore its impact on night-time activities. The argument is that night-time activities have been regulated and sometimes limited.

What this suggests is that consumption is allowed only within post-secular values. This departs from the traditional Western accounts of the night, which tend to be alcohol-led. More importantly, with the gentrification in the West there is a tendency towards outdoors, while here, I argue that there is a developing sharpening of the public and private. To what extent does this reflect post-secularism, in this case Islam, is discussed.

Drawing upon fieldwork that was conducted in Balat, the paper describes the forms of nocturnal tensions that have emerged and the ways in which they are dealt. The discussion is based on observation conducted over 3 months as part of a micro-ethnography. The primary method was a case study which consisted of observational, sensory and visual analysis (Eberle and Maeder, 2016; Low, 2015; Pink, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2015; Rose, 2016). Over the 3 months spent in Balat, fieldwork notes were taken, and sensory, visual and observational data were collected during mornings, afternoons and evenings over 5 days per week. The purpose of the observation was to understand everyday life, see the actors in real-life and examine local environments (Bryman, 2016; Yin 2012).

Sensory data, informed by the work of Degen (2008; 2010), May (2013), Yelmi (2017), Low (2015) and Rhys-Taylor (2013), was collected using the five senses to describe vision, smell and sound of the neighbourhood. In Turkey, neighbourhoods are crucial spaces where micro changes can be grasped in context. According to Mills 'the traditional urban neighborhood' (also known as mahalle) is a 'space of belonging and collectivity' (2007, p. 336). Therefore, the research sought to examine the impact of gentrification on a mahalle and to see whether this space of belonging and collectivity was being challenged. The ongoing gentrification in Balat has started to raise questions about the idea of belonging since the locals now are sharing the neighbourhood with gentrifiers. In the light of the recent changes in the urban fabric of Istanbul, this paper presents an understanding of the extent in which life in Balat, a traditional mahalle of Istanbul, has transformed, and the ways in which the night-time

is experienced at the intersection of post-secularism and gentrification. In the case of Balat, culture-led gentrification has made the neighbourhood popular amongst the creative class, but the neighbourhood managed to preserve its traditional and conservative fabric and created a new form of consumerism that cannot be thought outside of Islam.

Background

Istanbul's geographical location has shaped the city's character and by connecting 'both North and South', Istanbul has the uniqueness of being in-between both literally and figuratively (Yetiskul and Demirel, 2018, p. 3338). This in-betweenness, most of the time, manifests in the blurriness of the city itself. It can be argued that it is not always easy to define Istanbul - whether it is part of the Global South or Global North. It has characteristics of both, from unplanned urban sprawl to ambitious urban transformation projects. The more Turkey becomes integrated into the global world the more the recent governments have been introducing neoliberal policies, albeit with their own conservative approach. As a result, the current government in Turkey have embraced neoliberal policies, applied them to laws regarding urban transformation whilst gradually shifting towards a more post-secular structure (Adaman et al., 2017; Akkar Ercan, 2011; Akkan et al., 2017; Denec, 2014; Eraydin and Tasan-Kok, 2014; Keyder, 2010). By implementing six urban laws between 2002 and 2012, the government made urban transformation a key policy outcome and put Istanbul at the heart of it by attempts to further embed the city within globalised networks, increase tourism and expand the construction sector (Karaman, 2013).

With the help of these urban laws, urban transformation in Istanbul has gained speed and the majority of urban transformation projects in the city have started to result in gentrification. Even though, gentrification has its various outcomes in Istanbul depending on the neighbourhood, there are also some parallels with Smith's much-cited definition where he sees gentrification as a form of recycling a neighbourhood in order to start 'a new cycle of use' (1979, p. 545).

Balat is one such area where we see gentrification, post-secularism, and urban transformation intersecting. It is one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Istanbul, historically the area used to be the home to Jewish communities dating back to the Byzantium times (Akin, 2015; Ergun, 2004; Turkun, 2015). Balat had become a multi-ethnic and multi-religious area where Greek Orthodox community was also located in around the same period (Dincer, 2011). During the mid-1900s more and more Muslim communities started to move to Balat and increased the Muslim population in the area (Turkun, 2015).

As we now know, Balat is no longer a home to a diverse community as it was 100 years ago. There are many socio-political and economic reasons for the loss of Balat's diversity. It is argued that the foundation of the Republic and its nation-state ideology can be regarded as a driving force (Bezmez, 2008; Dincer, 2011). The important events that forced the non-Muslim

communities to leave Balat and mostly Turkey were the Wealth Tax in 1942, the foundation of Israel in 1948, the events of 6-7 September in 1955, the case of Cyprus and the forced migration of Greeks back to Greece (Dincer, 2011, p. 58; Gunay and Dokmeci, 2012, p. 217; Ergun, 2004, p. 403; Turkun, 2015, p. 156). With each event not only Balat's diverse population declined, but its social pattern was also transformed.

The 1950s and the 1960s can be considered as materialisation of this transformation where Balat started to become an area where migrants from Anatolia started to relocate with the hopes of finding 'cheap premises near the industrial zones' (Dincer, 2011, p. 58). As Turkun highlights, this first wave of migrants were mostly from the Black Sea region (2015, p. 160). In the 1960s and the 1970s, the area became increasingly 'working-class' where 'families [were] employed by local companies and factories' (Soytemel, 2015, p. 68).

During the 1980s Balat was 'cleansed' with the removal of industrial plants from the Golden Horn; however, that cleansing caused loss of jobs and created more poverty and declined the area further (Bezmez, 2008; Mutman and Turgut, 2018; Turkun, 2015). The mid-1980s also witnessed some demolitions in and around Balat in order to support the cleansing of the Golden Horn (Akin, 2015; Akkar Ercan, 2010).

The existence of a very poor and religious population' and 'the presence of unpleasant smells caused by industrial pollution' was what Balat used to be famous for during the 1990s (Islam, 2005, p. 131). This era has made Balat a focal point for another wave of migration, this time from the East and Southeast of Turkey as a result of forced migration (Turkun, 2015). One of the first renovation projects in Balat was also proposed around the mid-1990s after the Habitat II Conference in 1996 (Akin, 2015; Atik, 2015).

The 2000s for Balat was full of new rehabilitation projects funded by the EU and the Fatih Municipality and it was considered as 'the first example for the rehabilitation of historic neighborhoods in Istanbul' (Gunay and Dokmeci, 2012, p. 217). The neighbourhood's transformation gained speed after 2005 with law no. 5366, which concerns the Protection of Deteriorated Historic and Cultural Heritage through Renewal and Re-use. It is also known as the Urban Renewal Law (Dincer, 2011; Gunay and Dokmeci, 2012). The purpose of Urban Renewal Law is to protect by renewing historical and cultural areas (Sahin, 2015) and Balat was selected as one of transformation areas in 2006 (Gunay and Dokmeci, 2012). This ambitious urban renewal project was initiated by the government and had the potential to change Balat radically by causing displacement due to increasing property prices. However, the project was halted and cancelled as a result of solidarity and resistance amongst locals (Akin, 2015; Sahin, 2015; Turkun, 2015). Had the proposed project actually materialised, the majority of the building stock in Balat would have been demolished due to 'long neglect' combined with 'earthquake risk' and the demolition would have taken place 'irrespective of their historical character' (Dincer, 2011, p. 57-58). Due to the cancellation of the project, the gentrification of Balat has not been driven by mass re-construction, as elsewhere in the city,

but instead follows more of a culture-led gentrification where the existing building stock has been renovated piecemeal.

Today, Fatih district where Balat is located, is known to be religiously and socially conservative (Bezmez, 2008; Islam, 2005). Although the area is famously identified by ‘narrow streets and what appears to be a near complete lack of planning’ (O’Neill and Guler, 2009, p. 160), due to its diverse background, it has a rich and historical architectural character, and its multi-cultural history has made the area attractive in the eyes of the creative class. According to Mills this is a common practice in Istanbul’s old neighbourhoods ‘where Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and other minorities lived are today being gentrified under the guise of a cultural movement to recover minority history’ (2005, p. 445). Balat’s transformation is in a similar vein and can be analysed through the culture-led gentrification model whereby this poor and historical neighbourhood has been ‘rediscovered’ by members of the creative class (Bridge, 2006; Florida, 2014; Ley, 2003; Llyod, 2010; Zukin, 1987). This represents a common feature of gentrifying areas where both established and poorer residents live alongside the newly arriving middle and upper middle class.

Gentrification & Night-time

The inner-city location, affordable rent, and the idea of living and/or working in 100-year-old buildings have encouraged the creative class to relocate to Balat. With the increasing visibility of creative class members in Balat, new venues have started to open up in order to accommodate the newcomers. Balat’s gentrification draws on a nostalgic and neo-bohemian narrative which manifests in new bistros, eateries and shops. The theme of nostalgia, the historical architecture and the overall perceived authenticity of Balat has further resulted in the area’s popularity. As Mills points out, the increasing interest of the creative class towards historical inner-city areas of Istanbul can also be described as ‘nostalgic gentrification’ (2008, p. 387). Soytemel agrees with Mills’ account on nostalgia (2008) and explains to what extent nostalgia can influence the popularity of certain areas of the city: ‘Nostalgia for the traditional mahalle life has made historical neighbourhoods of Istanbul popular sites for those who want to live in traditional places in contemporary times, where everyday actions of the collective and the individual actions of belonging define who is an insider or outsider’ (2015, p. 67-68). What has been seen in Balat further recalls the work of Lloyd on neo-bohemia and a ‘grit as glamour’ aesthetic (2010).

It is important to reiterate here that even though gentrification in Istanbul is not entirely the same as gentrification in the Global North, Turkey cannot be thought outside of the global order. Certain aspects of global urban policies have been applied to Turkey as well and Istanbul,

as one of the infected cities of the neo-liberal economy, faces the capitalist forces heavily through new urban transformation projects such as creation of waterfronts, public spaces,

shopping malls, inner city developments, and public transportation projects becoming the new symbols of the city (Mutman and Turgut, 2018, p. 165).

The increasing popularity of inner-city neighbourhoods in Istanbul is, in a similar vein to Bridge's account on gentrification 'as a reclassification (away from the working-class city and the traditional desirability of the middle-class suburbs) in which inner-urban living became once again invested with ideas of status, style, and cosmopolitanism' (Atkinson, 2003; Bridge and Dowling, 2001; Jager, 1986; Ley, 1996; 2003 cited in Bridge, 2006, p. 1966-1967). As mentioned earlier, although Istanbul has its own practices, patterns and nuances of gentrification such as post-secularism that this paper will discuss further, there is a back-to-the-city movement when it comes to areas like Balat.

However, the ongoing gentrification in Balat is not effectively pushing the locals out, it is a slower transition in so far that enables or imposes a form of living together. In Istanbul, there was a level of neglect on the building stock and as a result these areas were cheaper. Due to the neglect and affordability, inner city neighbourhoods had a reputation of being 'run-down' and sometimes even 'dangerous', the occupants were commonly lower income groups. The case of Balat can be understood as a combination of 'formerly prestigious historic' neighbourhood that has been attracting 'creative class' (Mutman and Turgut, 2018, p. 168). This argument overlaps with Thorns account on 'increasing attention on the centre of the city as a place to live' and the ways in which it is shaping new forms of gentrification (2002, p. 56). According to Lloyd, preferring the inner city has become 'an authentic urban experience' that would entail 'sharing the streets with working-class' by accepting that 'personal interaction remains superficial' (2010, p. 80).

There is a notable departure here from Lloyd and other work on gentrification, however, in that the area is still conservative. There are similarities with traditional culture-led gentrification where creative class moves and transforms the area. Uzun's account for example is highly useful to understand the case of Balat; he describes gentrifiers as 'pioneers' or the 'risk-oblivious group' and they prefer to relocate because of 'their cultural values, lifestyle and the historical value of the area' (2003, p. 365-366). According to Uzun this 'new middle class' prefers that their 'residential choice reflected a different lifestyle, which included a preference for historic inner-city neighbourhoods' and more interestingly they want their choice of neighbourhood to express them mostly through historical buildings with architectural value (2003, p. 363). This pattern was observed in Balat through how quickly neglected historical houses were bought and refurbished by the creative class one after the other. Jackson and Butler's study on Brixton has some similarities with the case of Balat and specifically the ways in which areas are heterogenized during their transition period. Jackson and Butler point out that '[...] the white gentrifiers, who bought their houses, the black population of Brixton lived in a parallel universe and were largely ignored' (2015, p. 2357). Ergun's account is in a similar

vein and is useful to understand the importance of habitus and belonging (being surrounded by similar people) when it comes to gentrification (2004).

The sense of belonging and habitus might be easier to restore during the daytime when people are busy at work or doing their daily chores. It is the night-time this overlap or parallel living and working together can get more complex and challenging for the people in Balat. As mentioned earlier, amongst the similarities with the nightlife in the West, Turkey has its own context and approach towards night-time. Literature on nightlife in the West focuses on the ways in which the nocturnal city is being 'marketed' and 'branded' with bars, restaurants and clubs (Eldridge, 2019, p. 424). In other words, there is an overall acceptance that night-time activities 'in the non-Muslim world' commonly revolve around alcohol (Roberts and Eldridge, 2009, p. 81; Nofre et al., 2018; Eldridge, 2019).

However, what night-time activities might consist of varies according to the culture. As Roberts and Eldridge point out, night-time is more than just alcohol consumption, 'It could stand for pavement cafés, for an increase in cultural and entertainment uses, for a relaxed approach to liquor licensing, for city centre living and for good urban design in the public realm combined with night-time events' (2009, p. 39). Amid expands this account by giving examples from Iran and the Middle East, where night-time is not associated with alcohol and many other everyday activities such as 'shopping or visiting relatives' can take place at night (2018, p. 88).

Just like in many other cities, Istanbul has its nuances when it comes to night and the city's in-betweenness resurfaces. The said in-betweenness makes Istanbul home to various faces of night-time activities. There are some areas in Istanbul that echo the night studies in the West where the night-time is associated with bars and alcohol such as Asmalimescit, Galata and Moda (Eder and Oz, 2015). However, as seen in Balat, there are also some other areas with a conservative social fabric where the Islamic practices are more embedded, and the night-time is associated with other activities from going to a café or ice-cream parlour to visiting relatives. This is clearly what is happening in Balat. Regardless of the ongoing culture-led gentrification in the area, night-time activities do not necessarily revolve around alcohol consumption.

Balat & Post-secularism

Before drawing this out further and exploring how the creative-class and night-time leisure opportunities have developed in Balat, it is necessary to explore the further context of post-secularism. The idea of belonging and freely practising one's habitus might not always be straightforward, and in the case of culture-led gentrification, the newcomers (mostly members of creative class) are often earning more than the locals. It is not just the economic difference, but the extent of the cultural and social differences between the locals and the gentrifiers that can create tension. For Zukin, 'In the areas where hipsters and gentrifiers live there's a new cosmopolitanism in the air: tolerant, hip, casual' (2009, p. 7-8). Although Balat has become

associated with culture-led gentrification and has gradually been turning into a neo-bohemian hub, unlike some Western examples, its transformation is very much shaped by a post-secular pattern and not entirely by this hipster and casual context.

Post-secularism for Turkey means transforming into a system of re-Islamification by leaving a strictly secular system behind (Komecoglu, 2016; Rosati, 2016). As Komecoglu (2016) and Rosati argue, this shift can be explained as ‘the making of a postsecular society’ and the ‘transformation of the notion and practice of secularism’ (2016, p. 62). Even though Turkey is declared as a secular state in the constitution, increasingly after the 1980s there was a bold shift towards post-secularism with the help of Islamic political actors. Post-secularism is one of the core tools of the current government in Turkey. The shift from a strictly secular state was defined as ‘Islamic revivalism’ by Potuoglu-Cook and regarded as ‘the challenge of being incorporated into a world market while also upholding a distinct Muslim identity’ (2006, p. 647). Since post-secularism is one of the core elements and urban transformation is one of the main goals of the current government, it is not difficult to find the impacts and traces of post-secularism in Istanbul’s experience of gentrification and urban transformation. Lovering and Turkmen explain the process clearly in their account:

The current redevelopment of Istanbul reveals a highly form of neo-liberalism, in which global discourses and policy models are combined with local traditions and institutions to rationalize a radical-conservative project to rebuild the city and its socio-cultural characteristics (2011, p. 73).

In other words, the shift from secularism to post-secularism is more embedded than just redefining the relationship between the state and religion (Gokarisel and Secor, 2015). This shift is materialising through everyday life, including night-time activities as well as urban fabric and public spaces. With the encouragement of the conservative Islamist government, the public realm has become increasingly de-secularised whilst systematically implementing neo-liberal and globalist economic policies. By supporting ‘neo-conservative and populist policies’ (Dolcerocca, 2015, p. 1154) and by appointing Istanbul as ‘the focal point of a neo-liberal strategy’ (Enlil, 2011, p. 14), the government succeeded in transforming the city through the urban transformation which have had a considerable impact on various aspects of Istanbul from landmarks to public spaces, from regulating the night-time activity to controlling access to alcohol.

The rise of post-secularism in the shape of re-Islamification cannot be denied in Turkey. However, the shift towards a post-secular society is sharper and stronger in some areas than others. If a neighbourhood has already a religious and conservative structure like Balat, consuming alcohol, public displays of affection, and the visibility of women and LGBTQ people has not been as common. As touched upon earlier, everyday life has been impacted by post-secularism, but when it came to night-time, post-secularism has manifested as regulating,

controlling and limiting alcohol consumption or any activities or spaces that can enable alcohol consumption.

This is what makes the case of Balat more complex. The gentrification it is undergoing is not entirely in the way it is understood in Western literature. It does not completely fit into the traditional culture-led gentrification model that commonly consists of transforming working-class areas and rebranding the area with a hip nightlife (Eldridge, 2019). Gokarisel and Secor's account is highly instrumental in understanding the impacts of post-secularism on everyday life:

With the emergence of more spaces that cater mostly to the devout Sunni lifestyle, such as cafes, restaurants, entertainment spaces, and hotels that don't serve alcohol (but may draw a mixed crowd with good prices and prime locations), urban space in Istanbul is under constant renegotiation (2015, p. 26).

This has inevitably reshaped businesses and the ways in which the businesses can be run. One of the most significant influences was the implementation of Law no. 6487 in 2013 in order to regulate the sale, promotion and advertisement of alcohol products and its reflection on everyday life was in the shape of banning the purchase of alcohol from shops between 10pm-6am. This new law created a new approach towards accessing and consuming alcohol during the night. This type of regulation can be read as a serious challenge in a mega city like Istanbul, which has historically been home to kiosks, shops, coffeeshops and restaurants with their own timetables that can serve customers 24-hours. Depending on the social structure of the area, night-time in Istanbul can be complex and more comparable to Amid's account of Mashhad where 'everyday activities might seem as equally normal taking place at night' (2018, p. 86).

By regulating the hours of alcohol access in Istanbul, activities associated with the night-time are being disrupted. Unlike the examples of gentrification in the West such as La Barceloneta (Nofre et al., 2018) and Peckham (Jackson and Benson, 2014), even in relatively more secular areas with popular night-time spots such as Asmalimescit in Beyoglu, there were some radical interventions to the ways in which the streets were being organised and used by the public. One example is the order of removal of outdoor seating in a popular bar street in Asmalimescit in 2011. Ertuna-Howison and Howison explain this top-down intervention as a sign of a more radical transformation:

the virtual closing of this popular (and highly valued) district to its traditional constituency, signified by the removal of sidewalk tables from small local businesses, is in fact a herald of the numerous 'urban renewal' projects that have destroyed neighborhoods, demolished historical landmarks and cut down forests as the city is aggressively redesigned to make way for the highest bidder (2012, p. 3).

As explained earlier, the overall urban transformation and the rising post-secularism have various impacts on urban fabric and the ways in which the city, especially night, is experienced. In other words, the transformation of Istanbul is not only about transforming building stock and reconfiguring public spaces, but also about regulating night-life. In the case of Balat, alcohol consumption is an uncommon social activity due to the limited number of bars in the area and only a few shop selling alcohol. However in a neighbourhood as conservative as Balat, the ways in which activities can be conducted or accepted reflects the Islamist tendencies of the current government. This indicates a significant difference with the Western model of gentrification and night-time, which is understood in terms of a vaguer sense of ‘increased consumerism’. Here consumption and consumerism are important, but are much more regulated and supports the post-secular approach of the current government.

Discussion

As touched upon earlier, the type of night-time activities and to what extent alcohol consumption is accepted or tolerated are regarded as important indicators in Turkey to comprehend the social and political tendency of a neighbourhood, as well as its secular to post-secular transition. As Gokarisa and Secor explain, although Islam does not permit alcohol consumption, ‘the sale, marketing, and consumption of alcohol have been relatively free in Turkey’; however, there have been an increase in ‘alcohol free’ spaces that ‘explicitly target a devout Muslim clientele’ and these new spaces are marketed as ‘Islamic’ (2015, p. 26).

Although each neighbourhood’s experience with night-time activities is different in Istanbul, Balat’s case aligns with the government’s post-secular agenda. The neighbourhood is gentrifying but the locals are still mostly conservative and religious. That is to say, the activities and the forms of consumption that can materialise in Balat are limited to the conservative religious majority. The form of experiencing Balat is to an extent what the locals would tolerate. As discussed throughout, selling and consuming alcohol seems like an issue that can create tension between the locals and the gentrifiers. There have been examples of this tension and how quickly it can turn into something more serious. The case of Tophane, an old religious neighbourhood located in the waterfront of Istanbul, was a prime example of cultural gentrification and the ways in which the tension can unfold into something more serious. For example,

in 2010 a mob of 40 local men from Tophane attacked a coordinated series of exhibition openings organized by several of the art galleries that have started to mushroom in the district in the last decade. The attack left 15 people wounded, and the motive was associated with the disturbance caused by gallery visitors having alcoholic beverages on the street, which is in conflict with the prevailing values of the neighborhood’ (Oz and Eder, 2018, p. 1031).

Having chosen Balat, the gentrifiers therefore would avoid instigating situations that can create any form of tension and they would act accordingly. Acting accordingly would often materialise as de-secularising businesses, that would mean choosing not to serve or sell alcohol in the majority of shops, restaurants, and bistros in Balat.

Closing businesses before 10pm in order to avoid the tension of selling alcohol or making sure the neighbourhood is alcohol-free has become another common practice in Istanbul, especially in more post-secular neighbourhoods like Balat. This has undeniably impacted the ways in which tourists experience the city and in the case of Balat, the overall experience mostly has to consist of leaving the neighbourhood once the businesses close down. The non-existence of night-time activity after 10.00 pm almost functions as an unwritten curfew. In other words, the creative class in Balat have de-secularised their business to be able to fit in and this has led to a specific form of consumerism, allowing a specific type of consumer. It is a form of consumer-led gentrification that cannot be thought outside of Islam.

Final Comments

Gentrification in Turkey is not exactly the same as gentrification in the West, especially in terms of how it is understood in literature exploring the links between night-time and urban change. Gentrification in Turkey is linked to commercialisation, but it is also more interiorising and mostly implements the government's ideology of neoliberal conservative Islam. By interiorising, I mean a slightly different sense of the public and private. While in some cities, night-time activities spill out onto the street, and it used to be so in some parts of Istanbul, here we are seeing nightlife retreating more into indoor spaces. That being said, the level of impact from the government's ideology varies according to the area. Ultimately, the people of that neighbourhood determine the activities that can take place, but not without being shaped by the government's ideological role.

In the case of Balat, the religious and conservative nature of the neighbourhood is more a reflection of the communities that live there and how those moving in negotiate what is already there. As it is still predominantly a conservative, religious neighbourhood, Balat can be understood as a non-secular and now post-secular place, hence the government does not need to intervene to implement post-secular practices. Therefore, for the newcomers there needs to be a form of negotiation to see what is tolerated in the neighbourhood. As discussed earlier, life in Balat can be easy as long as the members of the creative class act accordingly such as de-secularising their businesses, rearranging their consumption practices and limit or change their night-time activities.

Similar to the example of Brixton that was mentioned earlier, Balat also can be described as a patchwork with many invisible boundaries between gentrifiers and locals (Jackson and Butler, 2015). Since the relationship between gentrifiers and locals is mostly founded on negotiation, daily life is not very convivial in Balat (Gilroy, 2004). This overlaps with Tonk-

iss' argument on sharing spaces. Drawing upon Jacobs, she points out that neighbourhood is sometimes just a shared space with other members and that is a common aspect of urban life (Jacobs, 1964, p. 126 cited in Tonkiss, 2005, p. 21). In that sense, Balat is not a homogeneous neighbourhood when it comes to habitus; different groups with various class, gender, race, ethnicity, and religious backgrounds are living parallel lives alongside each other. It is important to underline that not every heterogeneous neighbourhood provides or is expected to provide a sense of community or belonging. Balat might not be offering a romanticised sense of belonging, but has been accepting the ongoing culture-led gentrification and the creative class it brought. As a result, the sense of diversity has rebranded Balat as a 'rediscovered' nostalgic neighbourhood and made the neighbourhood more popular amongst the creative class.

As opposed to many other gentrifying neighbourhoods in Istanbul, in Balat activities that are tolerated are taken for granted. This unspoken code informs the newcomers that the locals' and the government's post secular approach ultimately determines and shapes the lifestyle, consumer behaviour and night-time activities.

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