

"THERE IS NOTHING  
QUITE LIKE TOPHANE"  
**A CASE STUDY OF  
GENTRIFICATION IN  
ISTANBUL**

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Cover photo: Boy on a street in Tophane. Credit: Onur Ekmekeđi

\* The interpretations and conclusions made in this report belong solely to the author and do not reflect IPC's official position.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Lovering and Türkmen have rightfully labeled the Turkish approach to urban renewal “bulldozer neoliberalism.”<sup>1</sup> A brief glance at Turkish newspapers is sufficient to see what is meant by this. Stories of whole neighborhoods being torn down, green spaces being eradicated, and long-term residents being forcefully evicted can be heard from all over the country.

Given this context it is no surprise that in the summer of 2013 Turkey lived through what can rightfully be called the most encompassing urban protest movement in the country’s history. The so-called Gezi movement mobilized against construction in Istanbul’s Gezi Park, one of the last green spaces located in the Taksim area of Beyoğlu. Though other issues, such as a new law on the restriction of alcohol consumption, mixed with the original cause, the protests were mainly the result of the Turkish government’s aggressive neoliberal urban policies, including a rapid eradication of public spaces.

Though best known internationally, Gezi is not the only influential urban resistance movement in Turkey or in Istanbul for that matter. Particularly, state-led urban renewal projects have sparked collective opposition, be it through neighborhood associations, year-long court cases, or simply individual residents who have refused to leave their homes. Many of these resistances, like the Gezi protests, emerged in the core of the city. While urban transformation in Istanbul mostly started from the periphery and encompassed projects such as the building of gated communities in shanty towns, over the last decade it has arrived in the central

(and typically historical) districts of Istanbul such as Fatih, Şişli, and Beyoğlu.<sup>2</sup>

This report focuses on one of these inner city areas called Tophane. Tophane is located in the Beyoğlu district and was Istanbul’s oldest industrial zone during the Ottoman Era. Having once been a middle-class, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic quarter mostly consisting of indigenous non-Muslim traders, it is currently home to a low- to middle-income population mostly originating from Eastern Anatolia and known for its relatively conservative lifestyle. While compared to many other neighborhoods across Istanbul and Turkey in general there is no major all-encompassing construction project targeting Tophane’s residential spaces, the neighborhood is undergoing a gentrification process that immediately meets the eye once one wanders around its narrow streets. Cafes serving expensive lattes and espresso to an increasingly international clientele are placed directly next to old-established barbershops. Simultaneously, apartments are one by one sold and restored, some of them are rented out to newcomers, and others are turned into apart hotels.

The opening of the Istanbul Modern Museum on Tophane’s shore in 2004, Tophane’s usage as an exhibition space for the Istanbul Biennale from 2005 onwards, and the opening of an art and exhibition space in Tophane’s old tobacco storage unit (Depo) have been major turning points triggering this development. Moreover, the neighborhood’s gentrification will most likely be furthered by the Galata Port project, a project foreseeing the construction of a port reaching from Tophane to neighboring Karaköy and including amenities such

<sup>1</sup> John Lovering and Hade Türkmen, “Bulldozer neo-liberalism in Istanbul: The state-led construction of property markets, and the displacement of the urban poor,” *International Planning Studies* 16, no. 1 (2011): 73-96.

<sup>2</sup> Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins, “Changing Urban Cultural Governance in Istanbul: The Beyoğlu Plan,” KPY Working Paper 1, Culture Policy and Management Research Centre, 2011.



as shopping and restaurants. Galata Port is planning to turn Tophane into a hub for cruise ship tourism. Accordingly, rents in the area are rising rapidly, and housing prices have doubled and even tripled over the last years.

Particularly in the last five to six years, Tophane has also been the site for the emergence of social conflict between so-called newcomers and long-term residents. In September 2010, the opening of a new gallery in Tophane was interrupted by the violent outlash of long-established residents who reportedly were bothered by the gallery's guests consuming alcohol outside and making noise.<sup>3</sup> This incident was followed by numerous other clashes continuing during the time of my fieldwork. Nevertheless, given that Tophane is not targeted by a comprehensive and state-led urban renewal project as, for example, other neighborhoods in Beyoğlu such as Kasımpaşa and Tarlabası are, there is to date no collective resistance to the gentrification process in the quarter, i.e., protests, as it happens in many other neighborhoods across Istanbul. On the contrary, Tophane is typically understood to be a stronghold of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), despite the municipality's and the central government's outspoken efforts to transform the neighborhood.

During the Mercator-IPC Fellowship, I conducted an explorative field study in Tophane complemented by an analysis of secondary material such as newspaper reports and commentaries, academic and non-academic reports, as well as visual material, with the following set of sub-questions in mind:

- What is the relation of long-term residents with the local and national government? How can we explain the apparent relative loyalty to the

AKP, on the one hand, and dissatisfaction with the gentrification process, on the other? How do politicians, if they do, address the gentrification of Tophane and its residents in general?

- How does the gentrification process in the neighborhood affect social networks among residents?
- What novel forms of social exclusion can we witness? What forms of conflict emerge aside from those publicized in the media? And how do residents frame these conflicts?
- How is the gentrification process perceived and framed by residents?
- What does Tophane mean to its residents?

It is needless to say that short-term fieldwork cannot provide comprehensive or definite answers to these questions, nor can I make a definite statement on the relation between residents and politics. Instead I hope to point out some issues and provide a framework that might inspire further studies and thinking. After providing a very short discussion on the significance of studying cities and the role of urban transformation, I will first give a brief summary of the context of Turkey's and Beyoğlu's urban transformation, which will then proceed to the case of Tophane. In conclusion, I will provide some suggestions for further research and make some comments on a possible future for the Tophane neighborhood.

<sup>3</sup> Behice Pehlivan, *Rethinking Gentrification: The Analysis of Artistic Space and Violence in Istanbul* (PhD dissertation, Central European University, 2011).

## 2. WHY DO CITIES MATTER? LOCATING TURKEY'S URBAN TRANSFORMATION WITHIN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

A crucial insight from my research has been that, as residents of this country, we tend to perceive Turkish “bulldozer neoliberalism” and the socio-economic polarization that emerges out of it as an exceptional development that is closely intertwined with the AKP’s identity as a conservative Islamic party and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s autocratic leadership style. While many of the developments we today witness in Turkish cities, such as forceful evictions, violent clashes between resisting groups and riot police, the eradication of green spaces or the political discourse around urban transformation, need to be discussed and evaluated within Turkey’s wider social and political context and the traits of the ruling party, it is also necessary to rightfully locate Turkey’s urban transformation process and its consequences in a wider global context.

If Turkey is living through an era of “bulldozer neoliberalism” that primarily manifests itself in urban areas, it is firstly important to establish why cities are such an important research site. Human geographer and social theorist David Harvey,<sup>4</sup> who bases his thesis on the ideas of French Marxist Henri Lefebvre, has in this context famously argued that the reoccurring and systemic economic crises caused by over accumulation has led to an “urbanization of capital.” Over accumulation, simply put, happens when “too much capital is produced in aggregate relative to the opportunities to employ that capital.”<sup>5</sup> This includes a surplus of labor power and hence a threat of rising unemployment.

4 David Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

5 David Harvey, “The urban process under capitalism,” in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 32.

An answer to this is to turn from “production per se into production of the urban built environment as a means to absorb surplus capital and hence avert—if only temporarily—crisis.”<sup>6</sup> In this sense capital seeks a “spatial fix.”<sup>7</sup> Though there is limited empirical evidence for this thesis, given that it is extremely hard to prove, scholars have been able to show that investments in the built environment increase during the onset of economic crises, such as in the years leading up to the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>8</sup> These macro-economic processes are important to consider if we want to understand why urban transformation, not only in Turkey but virtually everywhere in the world, is creating civil unrest and why the urban has become the site for a new series of democratic struggles:

Almost all urban political struggles [...] have something to do with the fact that the process of urbanization (investment in the secondary circuit of capital accumulation) has a little regard for the “real needs of people” and has almost everything to do with the “needs of capital” to avoid crisis or to seek new venues of capital accumulation.<sup>9</sup>

Given that capital is urbanizing in periodic cycles, it is also not surprising that there has been a trend in research to lay more focus on the role of

6 Brett Christophers, “Revisiting the urbanization of capital,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 6 (2011): 1347-1364.

7 David Harvey, “The Spatial Fix—Hegel, Von Thunen and Marx,” *Antipode* 13, no. 2 (1981): 1-12.

8 Brett Christophers, “Revisiting the urbanization of capital,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 6 (2011): 1347-1364.

9 Mehmet Baris Kuymulu, “Claiming the Right to the City: Towards the Production of Space from Below” (PhD dissertation, CUNY, 2014), 35.

the local, i.e., regions, cities, and sub-city units. Particularly, studies of gentrification have gained tremendous popularity since the 1970s. Though not all urban transformation is immediately connected to gentrification—we can, for example, think of infrastructural projects—many processes of urban transformation, in fact, are gentrification processes. The late Neil Smith, accordingly, has argued that gentrification is the “global urban strategy” of our time.<sup>10</sup> But what is gentrification exactly?

Gentrification is originally a term coined by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 and understood as a process in which urban working-class neighborhoods are transformed in favor of middle- and upper-class use.<sup>11</sup> This process is accompanied by new forms of land use and infrastructure. Gentrification research was pioneered in the United States in the late 1970s, particularly in the predominantly black inner-city neighborhoods of New York City and Chicago. Despite decades of research, now including not only Europe but also third-world cities such as Mumbai,<sup>12</sup> Istanbul,<sup>13</sup> or Johannesburg,<sup>14</sup> gentrification remains a “chaotic concept”<sup>15</sup> with no agreement in the academic community on its definition, causes, actors, and consequences. Without dwelling too much on this debate, I apply a relatively comprehensive definition of gentrification as a

spatial class transformation in which economically less powerful groups give way to more powerful ones. It is crucial to note that gentrification entails a transformation of symbolic and social power relations in a given space, i.e., it changes the way people in a neighborhood relate to each other, how an area is perceived and described by outsiders, or who is able to use the gentrifying space effectively and who is not. This also means that not all effects are as obvious as rent increase or physical displacement but that some forms of exclusion and conflict can only be discerned by research on the level of the neighborhood.

How this happens depends on the specific context. Gentrification can occur more gradually with the movement of higher status groups into relatively marginalized neighborhoods, which can be due to multiple reasons such as affordability, closeness to the center, attractive and restorable housing stock, etc. This type of gentrification first occurred in Istanbul during the 1980s in two neighborhoods along the Bosphorus, Kuzguncuk and Ortaköy. In the 1990s, a similar process could be observed in a very central area in Beyoğlu, in the Cihangir neighborhood. The gentrification that has taken place in Turkey and in Istanbul in particular since the 2000s following the country’s financial crisis in 2001, however, has followed a different, more state-initiated pattern.<sup>16</sup> It can rightly be described as “an entirely new era with rapid transformations taking place on an unprecedented scale.”<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, most of the current gentrification processes in the country take place via large-scale urban transformation projects realized in public-private partnership.

<sup>10</sup> Neil Smith, *The new urban frontier: Gentrification and the revanchist city* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Sharon Zukin, “Gentrification: culture and capital in the urban core,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 13 (1987): 129-147.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Harris, “From London to Mumbai and back again: gentrification and public policy in comparative perspective,” *Urban Studies* 45, no. 12 (2008): 2407-2428.

<sup>13</sup> Tuna Kuyucu and Özlem Ünsal, “Urban Transformation as State-led Property Transfer: An Analysis of Two Cases of Urban Renewal in Istanbul,” *Urban Studies* 47, no. 7 (2010): 1479-1499.

<sup>14</sup> Gustav Visser, “Gentrification and South African Cities: Towards a Research Agenda,” *Cities* 19, no. 6 (2002): 419-423.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Beauregard, “The Chaos and Complexity of Gentrification,” in *The Gentrification of the City*, ed. Neil Smith and Peter Williams, 35-55 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Nilgün Ergün, “Gentrification in Istanbul,” *Cities* 21, no. 5 (2004): 391-405.

<sup>17</sup> Tolga Islam, “Current urban discourse, urban transformation and gentrification in Istanbul,” *Architectural Design* 80, no. 1 (2010): 58-63.

### 3. TURKEY'S URBAN POLICY REGIME

Turkey lived through a devastating crisis of over accumulation in 2000-2001 after which the Turkish lira lost about 40 percent of its worth. The period after 2001 then became an opportunity for the newly founded Justice and Development Party (AKP) to come to power and “reset and re-establish”<sup>18</sup> Turkey economically, socially, and politically. In line with what has been said above, construction and urban renewal have become major pillars of this new system.

Accordingly, “urban transformation” has been a catchphrase within the AKP’s political discourse since the party’s coming to power in the early 2000s. After the Marmara region had been hit by a devastating earthquake in 1999 that left tens of thousands dead and injured, there was a widely established consensus that Turkey in general but Istanbul in particular needed a serious reconstruction of its built environment to meet the threat of future earthquakes. However, slowly but steadily the notion of “urban transformation” has come to be utilized not only as a protective remedy against earthquakes but also “as a solution to almost all of the city’s ills”<sup>19</sup> such as crime, poverty, and terrorism, with natural disasters only being one of many reasons. In this sense we can argue that urban transformation has not only been a way to avert economic crisis but has also been utilized effectively as a political and economic tool. Accordingly, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has identified construction as the sector that keeps Turkey’s economic growth

engine running.<sup>20</sup> Following China, Turkey has the second largest construction contractors in terms of revenues gained from projects outside Turkey.<sup>21</sup>

The AKP has also adjusted the legal framework or put into practice existing laws to encourage, or even render possible, rapid urban transformation. Examples of this are the so-called “disaster risk law” of 2012 (Law No. 6306) and the so-called “Beyoğlu Law” that pertains to historical conservation areas (Law No. 5366) passed in 2005. The party also utilizes existing law in favor of urban transformation: the so-called “urgent expropriation law” (Law 2942)—a law that allows the state to expropriate land and all immovables in the course of seven days in case of exceptional circumstances such as war, for example—dates back to 1983. However, it has only been brought into use a few times in the past and is now put into practice very extensively: while applied only four times throughout the 1990s, it was applied 105 times in the 2000s. In 2013 alone there were approximately 250 expropriations.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the harsh and unsustainable manner in which urban transformation is proceeding in Turkey<sup>23</sup> and despite the existence of protest

18 Emrah Altınok, “To have or not to have, that is the Question: The Unseen Dimensions of Housing Question in Turkey The Case of TOKİ - İstanbul in Post-2000 Period,” *The Housing Question*, Nomad Seminar, University of San Diego, 2015.

19 Islam, “Current urban discourse, urban transformation and gentrification in Istanbul,” 60.

20 “Erdoğan’dan inşaat sektörü açıklaması,” *Hürriyet*, December 15, 2014, accessed July 7, 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/erdogandan-insaat-sektoru-aciklamasi-27761406>.

21 “Turkish contractors rank second in the world for 8<sup>th</sup> year in a row,” *Daily Sabah*, August 24, 2015, accessed August 10, 2016, <http://www.dailysabah.com/money/2015/08/24/turkish-contractors-rank-second-in-the-world-for-8th-year-in-a-row>.

22 “Uygulamada Acele Kamulaştırma,” *Hukukki Haber*, September 25, 2014, accessed July 14, 2016, <http://www.hukukihaber.net/makale/uygulamada-acele-kamulastirma-h47260.html>.

23 E.g., In 2015, approximately 418 workers died on construction sites, see “57 çocuk işçi yaşamadan öldü,” *Milliyet*, April 5, 2014, accessed July 21, 2016, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/57-cocuk-isci-yasamadan-oldu-gundem-2221302/>.

movements—such as the Gezi protests in summer 2013—and organized civil society that opposes this process, there is also relatively wide support, or at least passive consent, for urban transformation projects even among those parts of the population that are affected by displacement or that are outspoken AKP opponents. To understand how this consent is generated, it is important to discuss who the actors of urban transformation are in Turkey and how they interact with society. Though it is very difficult to untangle all of the networks at play, I attempt to discuss some of the crucial structures.

### 3.1. The Players of Urban Transformation in Turkey

Briefly, one can maintain that there are three main actors with which we have to engage: firstly, the public sector, i.e., the national and local governments and the institutions connected to them. An institution that deserves special attention is the public housing administration (*Toplu Konut İdaresi*, for short TOKİ). TOKİ had been established in 1984 with the goal to provide social housing for low-income populations; however, it was relatively inactive until its revitalization in 2003 under the AKP government and placed under the Prime Ministry as a separate ministry. Part of this revitalization was the passage of a law that increased opportunities for TOKİ to step into partnerships with the private sector. Within the last ten years TOKİ has largely digressed from its original founding reason and is actively engaged in co-financing the construction of luxury housing (typically in areas of informal settlement) and in partnership with the private sector and realty cooperations.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, as of today only six to seven percent of housing built

or co-financed by TOKİ targets middle- and low-income residents.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, the private sector, with its major construction companies, must be mentioned. Here, it is important to note that there are companies close to the political leadership that have privileged access to construction projects.

Thirdly, there are civil society organizations and locals from whom, among other things, resistance to these projects emerges. An example of this is the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), which has challenged several urban transformation projects in court—some of them successfully—and also organizes public meetings to disseminate information about these projects to the wider public. TMMOB, for example, has played a major role in postponing the start of the so-called Galata Port project on Tophane's shores by arguing, among other things, that it contradicts public interest. So have residents themselves challenged other urban transformation projects. An exemplary case of this was the Sulukule Platform in one of Istanbul's historical Romani neighborhoods. Together with urban activists, academics, and artists, residents opposed their displacement from Sulukule by organizing public meetings, workshops, and protests that have even sparked international solidarity.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, the year-long urban struggle finally ended with the demolition of the historical quarter and the displacement of its Romani population.

Moreover, it is important to note that though we tend to think about residents in terms of being victims of urban transformation, there is also a large portion of residents that benefit economically from

<sup>24</sup> Efe Can Gürcan and Efe Peker, "Turkey's Gezi Park demonstrations of 2013: A Marxian analysis of the political moment," *Socialism and Democracy* 28, no. 1 (2014): 70-89.

<sup>25</sup> "TOKİ dar gelirli vatandaşları unuttu," *Hürriyet*, February 21, 2016, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/toki-dar-gelirli-vatandasi-unuttu-40057989>.

<sup>26</sup> Ülke Evrim Uysal, "An urban social movement challenging urban regeneration: The case of Sulukule, Istanbul," *Cities* 29, no. 1 (2012): 12-22.

this process. This is also possible due to Turkey's, and particularly Istanbul's, property structure: it is estimated that owner occupation in Turkey in general and in Istanbul in particular is between 65-70 percent,<sup>27</sup> which is relatively high compared to many countries in Western Europe. In Germany, for example, this rate is slightly above 50 percent.<sup>28</sup> This entails that in case of urban transformation—which can mean complete demolition and rebuilding, restoration, or simply gentrification of the neighborhood without physical interventions—house owners can expect a considerable economic gain in case they sell or rent out their apartments. Furthermore, it has been shown that dwellers of informal settlements whose houses are targeted by urban transformation projects are typically included in the urban property regime. TOKİ plays a crucial role here: it grants formal housing to urban squatters in TOKİ settlements in exchange for low interest long-term credits. Long-term mortgage debt and individual property rights have, accordingly, been an effective “governmental technology”<sup>29</sup> to bind locals to the governing party and contain resistance.<sup>30</sup>

There are other issues that need to be considered to understand why urban transformation projects in Turkey receive relatively wide support. Firstly,

given the often cited “politics of performance”<sup>31</sup> after the economic crisis Turkey went through in 2001 and the ability of the AKP to bolster steep economic growth, among other things, by turning to the construction sector while riding on a low equity wave in the period from 2002 to 2007,<sup>32</sup> the party has very successfully established itself as the party that “gets things done” in the eyes of the electorate. In this sense, as has been noted above, the failure of the previous government and the economic and political hardship the Turkish people went through before and during the crisis has turned into an opportunity for the AKP to establish itself.

Another issue is misinformation or a lack of information. Thorough data collection and access to such data in Turkey is almost non-existent. This is also true for the property structure. Though house ownership is estimated to be around 65-70 percent, it is not really clear how much of the housing is informal, how much is legally owned, and so forth. The same goes for the countless urban transformation projects, which are very difficult to access for ordinary citizens. There has been, for example, a constant back and forth regarding the master plan for the Beyoğlu district. Though there is a link to the “master plan” on the municipality's website,<sup>33</sup> as of today it appears to be broken. Lack of access to data does not mean the data does not exist, since it might be made available on a case-by-case basis. I, hence, argue that in the case of Turkey a lack of information or misinformation is also a form of politics.<sup>34</sup> This is, of course, directly connected to

27 “Population and Housing Census 2011,” *Turkish Statistical Institute News Release*, Turkish Statistical Institute (2013), accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=15843>.

28 “Housing Statistics,” Eurostat, accessed August 3, 2016, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Housing\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Housing_statistics).

29 Nicholas Glastonbury and Defne Kadioğlu Polat, ““Cleaning out the Ghettos” Urban Governance and the Remaking of Kurdistan,” *Jadaliyya*, March 18, 2016, accessed July 2, 2016, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/24097/>.

30 Tahire Erman, *Miş gibi site* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2016); Mert Arslanalp, “Haklar ve İstisnalar: Kentsel Yurttaşlığı Derinleştirmek,” *Ayrıntı Dergi* 15 (2016).

31 Sibel Bozdoğan, “Urban Development as Politics of Performance: Istanbul's Transformation under the AKP,” Duke University, *Rethinking Global Cities* series, 2014.

32 Ziya Öniş, “The triumph of conservative globalism: The political economy of the AKP era,” *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 2 (2012): 135-152.

33 Beyoğlu Municipality Website, [www.beyoglu Belediyesi.gov.tr](http://www.beyoglu Belediyesi.gov.tr), accessed July 1, 2016.

34 Murray Edelman, *The politics of misinformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

the fact that the urban transformation process in Turkey in general remains highly non-transparent and lacks citizen participation on all levels. Several civil initiatives have attempted to counter this non-transparency by providing information on urban transformation projects on privately initiated websites.<sup>35</sup> These initiatives, however, can naturally not make up for the void left by the central and local administrations in this respect.

### 3.2. Beyoğlu

Istanbul is today typically described as a polycentric city; however, historically speaking the Beyoğlu district, located on the European side, has always been understood as the city's cosmopolitan heart. During the Ottoman Era, Beyoğlu—then referred to as Pera—was home to a diverse middle- and upper-class population of mostly European non-Muslim descent. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of the Turkish Republic, and the following attempts to ethnically homogenize Turkey, Istanbul, and consequently Beyoğlu, lost its cosmopolitan population over several decades. After a pogrom against the Greek minority in Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara in September 1955, most of the remaining non-Muslims in Beyoğlu left abruptly. The buildings and apartments they left behind were sometimes bought and sometimes squatted in by low-income rural immigrants, leaving the area with an ambiguous ownership structure that partially lasts today. The population exchange preceded economic decline. The more expensive entertainment and shopping industry moved to other areas along the Bosphorus such as Etiler or Nişantaşı, and the middle and upper classes gradually pulled away from Beyoğlu, though the area remained the diplomatic center of the city.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, <http://www.mulksuzlestirme.org>, a website that provides graphics on the ways capital is accumulated through dispossession.

Since the 1990s, and increasingly since the 2000s, Beyoğlu's renewal and reinstitution as the cosmopolitan heart of Istanbul ranks high on the municipalities' and on the national government's priority list.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, the district has been at the forefront of the government's efforts to foster economic growth and attract global investment. The primary strategy to achieve this has been urban transformation projects. The projects planned and realized in Beyoğlu are worth particular attention given that the district, due to its unique physical and social structure, was declared an official conservation site in 1993. In 2004, a Beyoğlu Conservation Plan (*Beyoğlu Koruma Amaçlı İmar Planı*) was finally drafted by the Beyoğlu Municipality. The plan was approved by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in 2010; however, local neighborhood associations challenged the plan in court arguing that it fails to protect Beyoğlu's physical makeup and threatens its social fabric. While the associations won the court case in 2013 leading to the cancellation of the plan, the highest administrative court reversed the judgment in 2015 arguing that the data presented in the first court case was insufficient.<sup>37</sup>

While local contestations continue,<sup>38</sup> partly leading to a back and forth exchange regarding construction projects in Beyoğlu, it is undeniable that the area has already undergone a major transition in the meantime. What has made this transition possible was a new legal framework that was introduced by the AKP in 2005. Law 5366 (Law for the Protection of Dilapidated Historical and Cultural Real Estate Through Protection by Renewal) is

<sup>36</sup> Mine Eder and Özlem Öz, "Neoliberalization of Istanbul's Nightlife: Beer or Champagne?" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 2 (2015): 284-304.

<sup>37</sup> Nilay Vardar, "Danıştay Beyoğlu İçin Verilen Örnek Kararı Bilimsel Bulmadı," *Bianet*, accessed July 31, 2016, <http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/166448-danistay-beyoglu-icin-verilen-ornek-kararibilimsel-bulmadi>.

<sup>38</sup> Kuyucu and Ünsal, "Urban Transformation as State-led Property Transfer.

typically referred to as the “Beyoğlu Law” and has enabled most of the urban renewal projects that we today witness in the area. It has substituted for Law 2863, which prohibited the acquisition of cultural and natural property through possession and only allowed for renewal in conservation areas after the preparation and approval of an urban development plan. Law 5366 instead enables municipalities to declare urban renewal areas and “rebuilt and restore the regions in accordance with the development of the region.”

Accordingly, it has allowed for extensive interventions in Beyoğlu including the complete reconstruction of historical neighborhoods and the privatization of public spaces, as well as demolitions and relocations.<sup>39</sup> Under the municipal headline “the big transition” (büyük dönüşüm), there are currently four major urban renewal projects encompassing or partially encompassing the neighborhoods of Tarlabası, Sötlüce, Kasımpaşa, and Okmeydanı in Beyoğlu. Additionally, there is a private-led urban transformation project targeting the neighborhood of Piyalepaşa. Other so-called “mega-projects,” as well as smaller interventions, are being planned or realized throughout Beyoğlu such as Galata Port on the shores of the Tophane neighborhood or the pedestrianization of several main streets.

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<sup>39</sup> Astrid Debold-Kritter, Gerard Perrier, and Michael Petzet, “Turkey: Threats to the World Heritage in the Changing Metropolitan Areas of Istanbul/Allianoi and Hasankeyf doomend,” in *Heritage at Risk*, ed. Historic England, 2015, 175-180.



## 4. CASE STUDY: TOPHANE

### 4.1. Why does Tophane matter?

Tophane is located along the Bosphorus shore southeast of the famous Taksim neighborhood in Beyoğlu. Being Turkey's oldest industrial zone during the Ottoman period, it is today mostly inhabited by low- to middle-income workers and small business owners originating from the Southeast Anatolian cities of Bitlis, Erzurum, and Siirt, with the latter constituting the vast majority. Before the 1950s, Tophane was, as was all of Beyoğlu, a multi-religious space populated by Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Muslims. Though after the pogrom of 1955 the area lost its religious diversity, its current composition is still relatively diverse in terms of ethnicity: Arabs, Turks, Kurds, and Romani people live in the neighborhood. As mentioned in the introduction, there is no wholesome transformation project targeting Tophane's residential part, so what can a study of Tophane tell us about the nature of urban transformation in Turkey?

Firstly, given Tophane's location and the renewal Beyoğlu as a whole is undergoing, the neighborhood is unsurprisingly experiencing a gentrification process. Accordingly, one can witness long-term residents, newcomers, and tourists living in the same building and frequenting the same streets while the commercial landscape is undergoing a considerable change. In that sense Tophane is a prime example of a more gradual urban transformation process that proceeds in central Istanbul while most of the surrounding areas are under heavy construction.

Secondly, Tophane, which is known for its conservative constituency and strong local presence of Islamic sects, in recent years has advanced as a symbol of the socio-economic polarization within Turkish society as a whole. In fall 2010, locals

attacked visitors at a gallery opening in Tophane. The reason put forward for the attack was alcohol consumption in front of the gallery. This widely publicized and analyzed clash was followed by numerous other violent encounters, which also took place during the time of my fieldwork. Many have argued that this local anger is a direct result of gentrification, with locals feeling threatened by rising rents and fearing a loss of their lifestyles. Others have maintained that many locals benefit or try to benefit from the gentrification process by trying to control the economy of Tophane and its surrounding area. This is also why Tophane matters: given the unprecedented level of social and economic polarization in Turkish society, the violent encounters in Tophane may well be seen as a local manifestation of this country-wide tension.

There have been many comments and analyses on the transformation of Tophane,<sup>40</sup> most of which have either looked at more issues and pointed out Tophane's history as a formerly more cosmopolitan and now more conservative area or looked at the relation between art and gentrification. With this report I hope to add to this ongoing debate by not only considering Tophane's specificities (which are surely important to consider) but looking at the neighborhood as a microcosm of wider changes Turkey's urban landscapes are undergoing.

40 Pekka Tuominen, "The clash of values across symbolic boundaries: claims of urban space in contemporary Istanbul," *Contemporary Islam* 7, no. 1 (2013): 33-51; Zeynep Enlil, Yigit Evren, and Iclal Dincer, "Cultural Triangle and Beyond: A Spatial Analysis of Cultural Industries in Istanbul," *Planning Practice and Research* 26, no. 2 (2011): 167-183; Behice Pehlivan, *Rethinking Gentrification: The Analysis of Artistic Space and Violence in Istanbul* (PhD dissertation, Central European University, 2011); E. Castagna, C. Castaneda, and E. Malara, "Dialogues on Tophane: A Case of Cultural Gentrification, Istanbul Technical University," *Composite Cities*, November 12-14, 2014; Niek Zeeman, "What makes up Tophane?: Mental mapping in the light of the Galata Port Project" (Master Thesis, Uppsala University, 2014).

## 4.2. Research Design

This case study is based on qualitative research methods and interviews, field observations, and an analysis of secondary material such as news reports, commentaries, academic and non-academic writing on Tophane, and visual material. Interviewees include long-term residents of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds, among them local entrepreneurs, welfare recipients and retirees, residents who moved relatively recently to the neighborhood or lived there for a relatively short period of time, individuals appointed to or elected to different positions in the local administrative apparatus, and urban researchers who may be defined as “experts” on the urban transformation of Istanbul and Beyoğlu in particular. All interviews were conducted between November 2015 and June 2016. I partly worked through snowball sampling and partly approached some of the interviewees independently from one another. Interviewees were between the ages of 25 to 75, and the interviews typically ranged from informal, brief conversations to two-hour semi-structured interviews. Twenty-four of the interviews were more formal and scheduled, and seven people out of the 24 were interviewed in groups (one male group of three and one female group of four). This was not an intentional methodological choice, but in Turkey, and one might say in fieldwork that involves ordinary citizens in general, group conversations are always likely to emerge. These scheduled interviews were complemented by more informal conversations with mostly long-term residents or former Tophane residents who recently moved elsewhere. It is hard to pin down an exact number of people I spoke with given that I exchanged short conversations with numerous residents during the time I spent in Tophane. Some of the rather informal encounters, as well as the scheduled interviews, were scattered over several days or even weeks since over time I got to know some of the residents better and could

revisit them as new questions were developing. Furthermore, the study includes fieldwork in the form of field observations. The main observatory data and many of the informal conversations stem from the so-called “people’s parliament” (*Halk Meclisi*) meetings conducted in the local neighborhood house (*Tophane Semt Konağı*) in which I participated about every other Tuesday for about six months. It is needless to say that all names of my informants have been changed to protect their identity, except the names of the “experts” I interviewed.

## 4.3. Methodological and Ethical Challenges

It is necessary to point out that I encountered many challenges in my fieldwork, some of which were of an ethical nature. However, I do not evaluate these challenges as a limitation to my research but as a part of my findings; that is why I want to discuss them here briefly.

I frequently caught myself comparing my fieldwork in Tophane to the fieldwork I had previously conducted in Berlin in a low-income, immigrant-heavy, and gentrifying neighborhood. In Berlin my field access had been relatively easy. Though there was a clear class difference (and thus power asymmetry) between me and my interviewees, given my own background as the daughter of Turkish immigrants in Germany, I did not feel as if I was an outsider. This was certainly different in Tophane. Accordingly, I felt less at ease approaching residents, and in some cases I also felt that residents were less willing to open up to me. Another issue was that within the last few years Tophane has advanced to a “hot” research and journalistic topic. The answers to my questions almost seemed as if they were the same responses across different interviews. I could clearly tell that I had not been the first researcher to ask these questions. Though in Berlin there had also been journalists and a few academics that had examined the neighborhood

before me, I was probably one of the first who was “German-Turkish,” spoke both languages, and thus could build relatively more intimate relations with the immigrants from Turkey in the quarter. I tried to deal with these challenges by changing my methodology after a few months. Rather than conducting more interviews, which were getting repetitive, I decided to focus on participatory observation. As mentioned before, most of this observatory data stems from the weekly peoples’ parliament meetings in which residents would come to voice their demands in the presence of a local *muhtar* (elected neighborhood head) and a local parliament member. These observations made it possible for me to keep tracing the developments in the quarter while engaging in more informal encounters with residents and local authorities rather than using scheduled interviews as my main source of data collection.

However, these two factors, being a clear “outsider” and not being the first to visit Tophane, not only led to methodological but also to ethical concerns. Firstly, I did not want to take too much of peoples’ time. This is, in my view, one of the biggest problems in ethnographic or field-based research. Researchers typically want to talk to as many people as possible in a relatively short amount of time, but they often forget that their interviewees’ time is precious too and that participating in an interview is laborious. In the scholarly discussion around this problem, it is often proposed that interviewees are paid for their services to academia. I was not sure whether my interview partners would appreciate me offering them money. I tried to overcome this problem (though in my opinion it can never be truly overcome) through two strategies. Firstly, I was offering time “back” by not expecting residents to talk about what I wanted them to talk about all the time but to listen to whatever they wanted to tell me, even if it was irrelevant to my research. In this way, I hope I could at least ensure some

kind of reciprocity. Secondly, I simply tried to be considerate by, for example, frequently bringing cake or cookies to the weekly peoples’ parliament meetings or by helping out by taking pictures, bringing tea, or passing on information. The fact that I was a clear “political outsider” also proved challenging from time to time. The people involved in local politics and the *muhtar* possessed different ideological and political views than my own. Since voicing my own criticisms or opposing views would have certainly impeded my access to them, I would be moderately affirmative of their statements without giving away my own political standing.

#### 4.4. A Brief Note on the Meaning of Mahalle

One of the questions I had in mind when starting my research was what Tophane means to its residents and what gentrification entails for them. To understand this, however, it is first necessary to engage with the role of neighborhoods, or *mahalle* in the Turkish context. Only within this context, in my view, is it possible to grasp the rising tension in Turkey on the urban neighborhood level and the sense of loss that might result from gentrification. The term *mahalle* is variably equated with quarter, neighborhood, or district. During the Ottoman Empire it was the smallest administrative unit. In today’s urban settings it is still that way; however, as I will further discuss in the case of Tophane, not every area that is perceived as one mahalle by locals is necessarily an official mahalle in the sense of being an administrative unit. In this sense *mahalle* does not only necessarily connote a formal entity but has a complex social meaning. Historically speaking *mahalleler* (plural of mahalle) were organized after religious identities, e.g., Jewish mahalleler in Istanbul. Though Turkey has lost its multi-religious and multi-ethnic composition to a large extent, identitarian segmentation—rather than segmentation based on class—is still visible in urban areas. It is, for example, typical for people

originating from the same village or town to live in the same mahalle in Istanbul, which also makes the mahalle one of the most important units of identification in Istanbulites' everyday life. This is even more true for lower-income populations for whom the mahalle often constitutes a set of relatively rich social networks, including relatives.

Again, historically speaking the particularity of the mahalle in the Ottoman Empire was that it had a relatively autonomous structure with the Ottoman leadership not interfering with the everyday life of its subjects. The religious leaders (*imam*) or elected heads (*muhtar*) of a mahalle also collected taxes. Since the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 and the evolution of the modern nation state, this has, of course, changed significantly. However, it is important to keep this historical legacy in mind, because we can witness many of its remnants in Tophane today.

#### 4.5. Part I: Getting to Know Tophane

##### *Where is Tophane? Tracing a "Blind Spot" of the City*

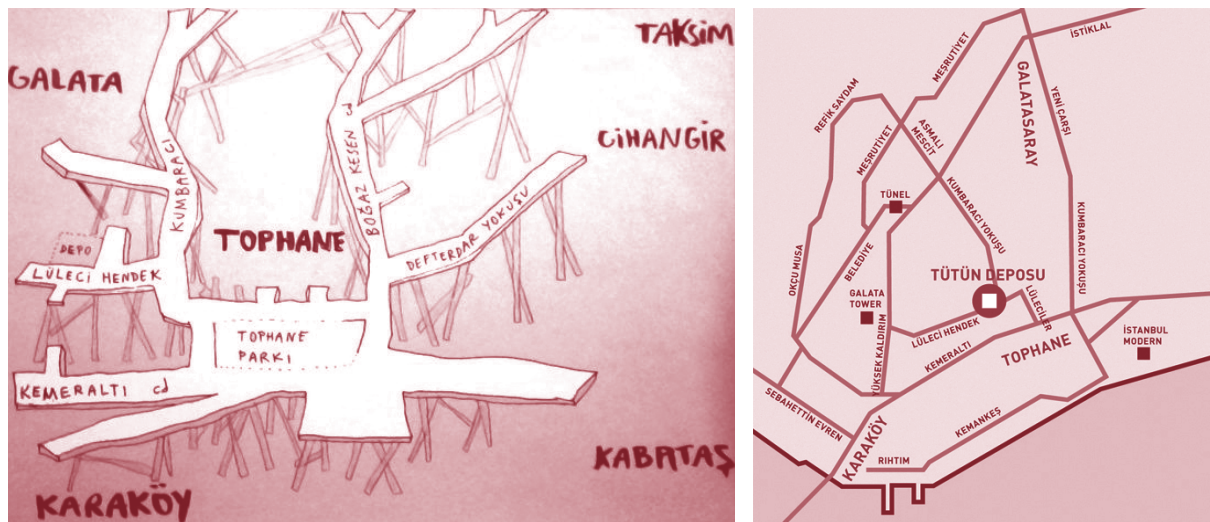
Curiously, while Tophane is often cited in the media and by politicians and is frequently the subject of heated discussions on who owns Beyoğlu, there is no agreed upon definition on where Tophane is. In line with what has been said above, though Tophane is by its residents and probably most people in Turkey conceptualized as a mahalle, it is actually not an administrative unit but lies at the intersection of several official mahalleler (such as Hacımimi mahallesi, Tomtom mahallesi, or Kemankeş mahallesi). Urban anthropologist Ayşe Çavdar thus rightly referred to Tophane as one of the "blind spots" of Istanbul, despite its extremely central location.<sup>41</sup> While most outsiders, for example, identify Tophane as

a relatively small area below Kemeraltı Boulevard and directly along the Bosphorus shore—which was until recently (in fact, right up until the Galata Port construction starting in December 2015) occupied by several shisha bars and is the site of two historic mosques—Tophane's residential areas have only recently gained more attention. It seems that many Tophane residents (in Turkish also *Tophaneli*), in contrast to the public perception, designate quite a large area to be part of their neighborhood. In a small study Zeeman found that about half of her male sample in Tophane identified places and streets such as the Virgin Mary Assyrian Church or Serdar-i-Ekrem Boulevard, one of the iconic gentrified streets in Beyoğlu, to be part of Tophane.<sup>42</sup> In most official accounts or tourist guides, these places are, however, identified to be in other neighborhoods in Beyoğlu. During the time I spent in Tophane, I started to develop my own mental map of the neighborhood. If someone were to ask me where Tophane is, I would say it is the area that stretches from the Bosphorus shore where Kemankeş mahallesi and the Istanbul Modern Museum are located until approximately the middle parts of Kumbaracı Yokuşu, Lüleci Hendek Caddesi, and Boğazkesen Caddesi. In my conception Boğazkesen Caddesi is also the avenue that divides Tophane from the Cihangir neighborhood. The two sketches on the following page somewhat reflect this mental map.

In the context of gentrification, these contradicting spatial imaginaries have important implications. For example, cafes or restaurants that lie in an area that some would refer to as Tophane and others would refer to as part of one of the adjacent—and already more gentrified—neighborhoods, namely Galata, Cihangir, or Karaköy, are frequently adver-

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Ayşe Çavdar in discussion with the author, Istanbul, June 27, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Niek Zeeman, "What makes up Tophane?: Mental mapping in the light of the Galata Port Project" (Masters Thesis, Uppsala University, 2014).



*Tophane “maps”: The sketch on the left is from the website of the art and exhibition space “Depo” in Tophane (depoistanbul.net). The sketch on the right is a location plan for the same art and exhibition space taken from a Sabancı University website (myweb.sabanciuniv.edu).*

tised as being part of one of the latter.<sup>43</sup> In a sense it seems that as gentrification proceeds and the streetscape is changing, it also changes the way we imagine and draw borders between neighborhoods. Since Karaköy, for example, is a largely gentrified space, those parts of Tophane that are one by one becoming gentrified as well may to some extent start to blend into Karaköy.

What became clear in my interviews and observations is that this “intrusion” of already more gentrified areas into Tophane (or better, into the imaginary of Tophane by many of its residents), is a contentious matter in which Tophane is usually constructed as the “last bastion.” When I asked one of my interviewees, a *Tophaneli* male in his 30s who is also a real estate agent, why so many conflicts seem to occur between people who live in Tophane and people in the adjacent Cihangir

area, he answered with a crooked smile, “You know, Cihangir used to be ours too. We would walk from İstiklal Caddesi to the seaside knowing and saying hello to everyone.” Having been witness to Beyoğlu’s transformation in the last decades from downtrodden to cool and edgy, Tophane locals from a certain age upwards clearly remember the times when more of their friends and relatives were living in the neighboring areas.

During my fieldwork another violent incident took place in which a group of men attacked and dragged beer-drinking people out of a record store under the premise that they would not be allowed to drink in “their” mahalle during the holy month of Ramadan. Many people and media outlets maintained that the incident happened not in Tophane but in Cihangir and, accordingly, condemned the attacks with the hashtag “Cihangir is ours” (#Cihangirbizim) on social media. However, when I talked to one of the muhtars, the conversation we had once again

<sup>43</sup> E.g., the famous Karabatak Karaköy Cafe, which in my own mental mapping is actually part of Tophane but identifies itself as being in Karaköy.

revealed the blurry boundaries between Tophane and its adjacent areas:

Muhtar Nadide: “This is Tophane, you cannot do this here (drink publicly during Ramadan).”

Author: “But wasn’t that in Cihangir?”

Muhtar Nadide: “No, no it happened in Firuzağa.”

Author: “Yes, but Firuzağa partly belongs to Cihangir, doesn’t it?”

Muhtar Nadide: “No, no, that was in Tophane.”

In a sense we might thus say that while gentrifying spaces have intruded into the Tophane area, one by one starting to more and more resemble other neighborhoods in Beyoğlu, Tophane locals are pushing back, expanding the boundaries of their mahalle when they feel it is necessary. Unfor-

tunately, this has so far also included the use of physical force.

#### *Tophane’s “Urban” Past and “Rural” Present?*

“The houses are shabby, but it is Beyoğlu after all,” says Ayşe while stitching together fabrics during a course on soft furnishing in the local neighborhood house. “When my daughter-in-law would say, “I am marrying into a family in Beyoğlu,” people would say “aaaa” (as a sign of being positively impressed).” Beyoğlu is special in the eyes of not only Tophane locals but also most of the Turkish population. Despite the fact that after the 1950s the district experienced an extreme decline in its economic and social life, with its side streets even coming to be known as dangerous after dark, Beyoğlu has always remained a space of multiple and competing desires. If you would ask any Istanbulite where the heart of the city is, the answer would probably be Beyoğlu. Now, this heart is undergoing a tremendous and so far unseen transformation and, as



*Tophane graffiti tags as territorial markers: The photo on the left is a graffiti tag of Tophane close to Galata Tower. The photo on the right is a graffiti tag in one of Tophane’s side streets. Credit: Defne Kadioğlu Polat (left) and Onur Ekmekci (right)*

can be expected, not to everyone's delight. Much of the district is under heavy construction, and the rest is undergoing rapid gentrification, with new hotels, restaurants, and cafes opening almost daily and accompanied by luxury restorations. As the impoverished neighborhoods of Beyoğlu are one by one undergoing large-scale demolition and reconstruction, Tophane is often set apart from Beyoğlu as a whole as a place that remains overly conservative and unable to adapt to the vibrancy and diversity of contemporary urban life. Particularly in the media, this is often lamented with reference to Tophane's cosmopolitan and mostly non-Muslim past as opposed to its contemporary "rural" and Muslim makeup. After the attack on gallery visitors in Tophane in 2010, even former AKP Minister of Culture Ertuğrul Günay urged residents to not impose their "provincial lifestyles" on others.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, the locals I had the chance to encounter perceived themselves and their lifestyles as anything but provincial. Take Faruk Bey, for example. Faruk Bey is a retired man in his 70s who used to be a relatively high-ranking civil servant. He is not bothered by Tophane's contentious public image: "This does not concern me. I am a rooted *Tophaneli*," he says during a sunny but chilly afternoon on which we are sitting outside one of the coffee houses, circled by a few of his friends. Faruk Bey distinguishes Tophane residents into three groups: those residents, such as himself, who have been in the neighborhood for several generations and whom he refers to as "rooted," those who came a few decades ago, and the newcomers who moved to Tophane over the last years. In fact, the time when someone arrived in Tophane is not only a matter of rootedness but also holds political significance. As noted before most of Beyoğlu's minority popu-

lations left the district after the pogrom against the Greek population in September 1955. Hence, those residents who came afterwards typically squatted the vacant apartments unlawfully (while the government turned a blind eye) or acquired their apartment for extremely low prices from their original owners who were forced to flee. Every time a conflict emerges between long-term residents and newcomers or visiting outsiders, people are quite quick to refer to the ambiguous circumstances under which Tophane's current residents seem to have arrived, thus questioning their right to the neighborhood:

The main reason for this atrocity in Istanbul<sup>45</sup> is Istanbul's changing demographic since the 1950s. The main reason for this change are the so-called 6-7 September incidents and the lynching and looting incidents after which Greeks and Armenians, who made up Istanbul's urban population, were forced to migrate to Greece. The second reason is the rural/provincial population migrating to Istanbul from different regions of Anatolia (Black Sea, East, and Southeastern Anatolia). As a result of these migrations Istanbul has lost its urban population, and of course art galleries, theaters, and cinemas have lost their audience. Even if it sounds nice to name Istanbul the 2010 European Capital of Culture, it is more suited to call it a mega village.<sup>46</sup>

Which portion of Tophane residents came after 1955, however, is unclear. In fact, historian Ayşe Hür has argued that many *Tophaneli* arrived towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of

<sup>44</sup> "Günay: Kimse kasaba yaşamını dayatamaz," *Radikal*, September 23, 2010, accessed July 8, 2016, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/gunay-kimse-kasaba-yasamini-dayatamaz-1020397/>.

<sup>45</sup> The September 2010 gallery attacks that took place in Tophane.

<sup>46</sup> Reader comment: "Üç yıldır niye saldırmadık," *Radikal*, September 24, 2010, accessed July 8, 2016, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/uc-yildir-niye-saldirmadik-1020502/yorumlar-2>.

Sultan Abdülhamit II's Islamization policies.<sup>47</sup> The people who then migrated to Tophane were mostly Southeastern Kurds and Arabs. This group of early migrants is eager to emphasize its long history in Tophane, probably also wanting to differentiate themselves from the people who arrived after the 1955 pogrom. Faruk Bey is one of the “rooted *Tophaneli*,” whose grandfather came from Siirt, traveling over the Black Sea and arriving at the Tophane port and staying in the neighborhood. Faruk Bey's son, a surgeon, is the fourth generation in the neighborhood. Faruk Bey clearly remembers the times when Jews, Greeks, Armenians, and Muslims such as himself were living together in the quarter. Given that this is a much longer time than most Istanbulites can claim to remember, it is interesting that Tophane is still seen as a neighborhood that resists the urban lifestyle, that stubbornly holds on to its provinciality, and that its residents are not suited to live in. I have personally come to see that while there is a clear need to address the atrocities of the past, the way the debate is conducted today is rather unfruitful. The fact is that not only have rural migrants and squatters benefitted from the displacement of the non-Muslim population in Beyoğlu but so also have many of the present newcomers. Without the rent gap<sup>48</sup> that evolved in Tophane due to Beyoğlu's decline after the 1950s, today's gentrification, with its hipster cafes, galleries, and hotels, would not be possible. It thus seems crucial to discuss Tophane's gentrification keeping in mind that neither long-

term residents nor so-called newcomers are solely victims or perpetrators.

#### 4.6. Part 2: (Changing) Everyday Life in Tophane

It can easily be observed that Tophane residents constitute a relatively tight-knit community. People recognize each other on the streets. They know who is who and seem to appreciate this closeness. During the peoples' parliament meetings there was usually a friendly atmosphere between the muhtar, the local parliament member, and the people who would come to voice their problems, which were usually about social benefits. Nicknames such as “taxi driver Mehmet” or “simit seller Mustafa” were commonly used, signaling familiarity among residents as well as the local government. This familiarity is accompanied by a relatively high degree of informality in the neighborhood. The local parliament member, Mustafa Bey, for example, frequently uses his personal ties to help residents, such as getting them ahead in line in the public hospitals or finding them a job in one of the new restaurants or hotels. “We even help them with marriage,” he said to me half in jest. These family-like ties result in a fairly paternalistic relationship—residents, rather than participating in local government by voicing their demands and concerns, typically only get in touch with the local administration to ask, and sometimes beg, for social benefits.

Help among residents also seems fairly common. One resident described that seven or eight years ago they helped out a woman in the neighborhood who lost her husband to a traffic accident. She was unable to pay the rent so they gathered money among themselves and bought the apartment for her. At that time apartments in Tophane were still relatively affordable. I frequently came across residents who would say, “there is nothing quite like Tophane,” in terms of neighborhood solidarity. Another resident told me that for him Tophane means, “let's go to our place,” i.e., inviting your friends home for lunch or dinner, sharing your

47 Ayşe Hür, “Tophane Kabadayısı, Beyoğlu Beyefendisi,” *Taraf*, September, 26, 2010, accessed July 14, 2016, <http://www.arsiv.taraf.com.tr/yazilar/ayse-hur/tophane-kabadayisi-beyoglu-beyefendisi/13114/+&c-d=1&hl=de&ct=clnk&gl=tr>.

48 The rent gap theory was developed by human geographer Neil Smith in 1979 and refers to the disparity between the current rental income for a certain property and the potential rental income (if, for example, old housing stock is renovated, etc.). The higher this disparity, the more attractive a neighborhood becomes for investors and thus is prone to gentrify.



food. Many residents are not only neighbors but also related to one another, which also explains the widespread perception among locals that their first and foremost identity is to be a *Tophaneli*.

In some cases these relatively close relationships also help to deal with the rent pressure resulting from gentrification. For example, a barber whom I had the chance to have several short conversations with while sitting in his tiny barbershop told me, "This is the third shop we have had in Tophane. The former location was on the main street; now we are in a less visible location. If I did not have my old customers, we would have had to close a long time ago."

In fact, I encountered customers in this barbershop who were not even living in Tophane any longer but were still coming to the neighborhood to get a haircut. Scholars have shown that these forms of social networks can help communities to cope with gentrification quite effectively. However, they have also maintained that low-income populations are more dependent on spatial proximity and thus more vulnerable to the changes resulting from gentrification.<sup>49</sup> For example, the coffeehouses that once constituted the heart of Tophane's social life for men have become less common, leading to more men hanging out on street corners.

Along these lines I want to further discuss Tophane's social fabric and how it might be impacted by the gentrification process.

#### *Enforcing Street Justice: Tophane as Defensible Space*

Frequently, Tophane residents refer to the neighborhood culture (*mahalle kültürü*) of Tophane as being a more or less unchangeable constant that needs to be respected by newcomers and outsiders.

<sup>49</sup> John Betancur, "Gentrification and community fabric in Chicago," *Urban Studies* 48, no. 2 (2011): 383-406.

This is often underlined with the words "this is Tophane," or as Ömer, a Tophaneli cafe owner says, "I have learned a lot from the newcomers; I have changed my shell. But this is a place with its own traditions and customs. You have to accept that this is a conservative place." Precisely what traditions and customs are in practice remains ambiguous, but the fact is that some Tophaneli seem willing to violently enforce what they perceive to be the rules of their mahalle.

Mehmet, a local journalist in his mid-40s, for example, tells me that he is not in favor of calling the police in case tourists make too much noise or people are drinking in front of apartment buildings: "We don't call the police for every little thing. We take care of our own business. This is part of our mahalle rules." In a sense, Mehmet's conception of Tophane's relative autonomy as a space with its own rules of conduct that are enforced and cultivated by its residents is rooted in the historic position of mahalleler during the Ottoman Empire, where the Ottoman leadership would largely refrain from interfering in the daily matters of its subjects. Tophane is a special case in this respect since the neighborhood has a long history of self-enforced street justice: Tophane was famous for its *kabadayı*,<sup>50</sup> respected locals who would enforce rules in their neighborhood while frequently being involved in illegal business such as gambling and brothels. This was a more or less established and respected system that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and lasted up until the military coup in 1980. There is still much nostalgia around the informal institution of *kabadayılık* in Tophane, which may to some extent also explain the ongoing attempts to enforce street justice.

Curiously, it is exactly the historical presence of *kabadayılık* (bullying), of which many Tophane residents seem to be proud, that also reveals the nature of everyday life in the neighborhood. In a

<sup>50</sup> Literally meaning "thug."



Ali with one of his oldest customers and two men in front of one of the local male coffeehouses.  
Credit: Onur Ekmekçi

piece on Tophane, historian Ayşe Hür describes *kabadayılık* as follows:

As it is known during the Ottoman Era *kabadayılık*, in the famous journalists Refii Cevat Ulunay's words, "was a form of urban chivalry" (...) they would protect the weak and powerless and were responsible for protecting the neighborhood's honor. (...) they would like alcohol and the entertainment that comes with it, but they would never lose their posture. They would gamble, but they would not cheat. They were womanizers, but they would never even look at the girls from the neighborhood. They would carry daggers on their hips, but they would not fight if not necessary.<sup>51</sup>

Hür, however, also adds that towards the end of the Ottoman Empire much changed in regard to the institution of *kabadayılık*, resulting in more of a mafiosi-

like behavior among the former "urban chevaliers." Nevertheless, in Tophane a rather romantic notion of the *kabadayı* era prevails. For example, residents seem to appreciate the idea that even if alcohol is consumed in the neighborhood, it should be done with constraint as the former *kabadayı*s allegedly did. So does Mehmet say, that in contrast to public perception, "Tophane is not a place that is unfamiliar to alcohol and drugs. We have our own local drunkards, but in the past it all used to be in a certain moderation and balance." Gökhan, a 30-year-old merchant who is also involved in local politics, tells me that after the informal policing system of *kabadayılık* was put to an end by the state in the 1980s, Tophane had major problems with drug dealing and usage: "The generations before us cleaned out Tophane through hard work, and now we have the same problems again, drugs, alcohol, gambling without control. Only this time the elites do it. We have to protect our youth."

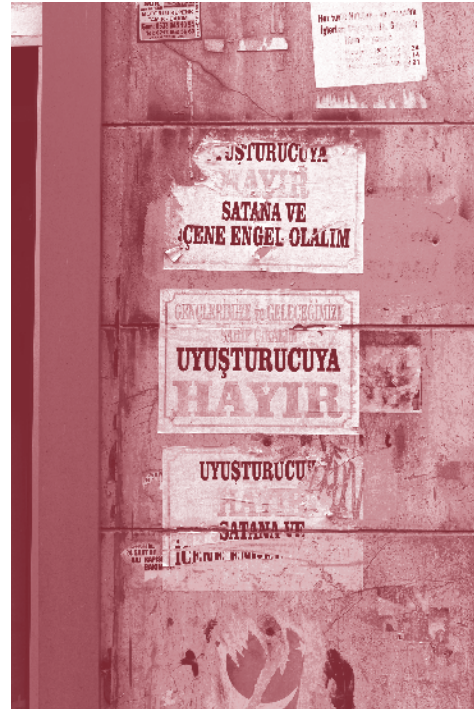
In fact, it seemed crucial to most long-term residents I talked to that if alcohol is consumed

51 Hür, "Tophane Kabadayı, Beyoğlu Beyefendisi."

in the neighborhood, it should not be done on the streets, and if at home then with curtains closed, so the young would not take it as a bad example. Accordingly, Ömer, a cafe owner, urged the local art and event space Depo, which opened in the former tobacco storage unit and is neighbor to his cafe, to close the front of its building with panels in case a reception for an exhibition is taking place so locals cannot see when guests are consuming alcohol. Moreover, there is a sign on the fences of Karabaş Mosque, a small mosque located in Tophane's residential space, saying that alcohol consumption is prohibited in the mosque area. Mehmet says that since the municipality did not want to take care of the matter, residents hung up the sign. Similarly one can see signs saying, "No to drugs. Inhibit dealers and users," posted all over the neighborhood. Residents are called upon to impede drug dealing and

usage in their neighborhood at their own initiative rather than calling the police.

Since many Tophaneli experienced firsthand the void that was left when their informal control mechanism (namely, the *kabadayılık*) was banned, some residents now seem to suggest that they have to take matters into their own hands to once again protect their neighborhood rather than relying on the state. Mehmet openly and even proudly tells me that he from time to time would get involved in beating up people who do not respect the local *mahalle* culture, such as men whom he identified as being gay. He believes that this is his right as one of the "owners" of Tophane. In a sense, the boundaries between public and private space get blurred in the *mahalle*.



*Residents' attempt to regulate alcohol and drug consumption in the neighborhood per signposts.  
Credit: Defne Kadoğlu Polat (left) and Onur Ekmekçi (right)*

I want to relate this perception of Tophane as a fairly autonomous unit with its own ways and customs that is neither fully public nor private to the well-known urban theory notion of “defensible space.” In the 1970s, architect and city planner Oscar Newman<sup>52</sup> put forward the theory of “defensible space” arguing that neighborhood safety in cities can be enhanced if city planners adhere to certain design principles, such as building low-rise rather than high-rise housing and creating a physical environment that enables residents to own and control their living environment. The notion of “defensible space” is important in the context of gentrification. While gentrifying neighborhoods are often characterized by dropping crime rates and enhanced feelings of security among old and new residents,<sup>53</sup> long-term residents at the same time often perceive of the gentrification process as a loss of control over a once familiar environment.

That means that while a given neighborhood, such as Tophane, in its pre-gentrification state may be conceptualized as dangerous by outsiders, residents often have a different perception. I noticed this sentiment frequently in Tophane, particularly when interviewees complained about new people moving in or the numerous apart hotels opening in the area. “The new places are like closed books. They don’t get into contact with the neighborhood,” says Mehmet. Crucial to note here is also that some of the new places only have English advertising, given that they are often owned by foreigners, which—apart from economic restraints—clearly excludes the vast majority of Tophaneli from becoming customers. Of the “rooted Tophaneli” Faruk Bey similarly mourns that while many apartments are sold, owners do not watch who is moving in. His friend Abdullah Bey says that he barely recognizes people on the street

52 Oscar Newman, *Crime Prevention Through Urban Design Defensible Space* (New York: The Mcmillan Company, 1927).

53 Lance Freeman, *There goes the hood: Views of gentrification from the ground up* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

anymore. This desire of long-term residents to have an intimate relationship with their neighbors and to control and police what they are doing stands in stark contrast to what many middle- to upper-class Istanbulites and tourists expect of living in or visiting a neighborhood in the midst of a metropolis. Antje, a half-Dutch, half-Turkish 28-year-old woman who had been living in Tophane for a year in 2015 before moving back to Cihangir, describes this conflict as follows: “My house owners would come at my door without prior notice. They would also call frequently. They would be nice and ask if I needed anything but maybe they were also checking on me. I always tried to put a distance in between.”

People like Antje are the new face of Tophane: young urbanites who do not crave for family-like relations with their neighbors or appreciate social control but urban anonymity. On the other side, the “rooted Tophaneli,” Faruk Bey tells me that Tophane is the last place in Beyoğlu which feels like a “mahalle” to him: “I don’t think I can adjust to anywhere else in Beyoğlu anymore. I couldn’t live in Cihangir, for example.” In turn, this means that for many Tophaneli gentrification will put an end to everyday life as they knew it, a life that they felt they had a certain amount of control over. As a well-known architect and urban activist, Korhan Gümüş, whom I interviewed and had countless conversations with during the duration of this study, stated, “Most Tophane locals are probably undergoing the biggest transition of their lives.”

### *Women in Tophane*

“There are two things you can’t do in Tophane,” says Hilal, sitting next to Ayşe in sewing class. “You can’t drink in public, and you can’t make a pass at women.” Gentrification, as the literature agrees, has an important gender dimension. Cahill’s research on young women of color on the Lower East Side in New York

and their experience of gentrification,<sup>54</sup> for example, has shown that gentrification has different implications for women because it compromises their agency in different ways. In general it can be stated that particularly low-income women's social ties are more fragile and more dependent on proximity. The jobs they often do, such as cleaning in private households or remaining as domestic workers at home, promise less reciprocity. They are thus typically more vulnerable to the gentrification process. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, gentrification has a strong impact on perceptions of security and insecurity, which are particularly consequential for woman.

Some Tophaneli women argue they feel more at ease when walking in the neighborhood given that so many new places have opened that seem lively and have female customers sitting outside rather than only male coffeehouses. Ömer, the cafe owner, confirms this. The place where he opened his cafe in April 2012 at the intersection between Kumbaracı Yokuşu and Lüleci Hendek Caddesi used to be a male coffeehouse as well. He remembers that "Women could not even walk across this corner. They would take the backstreets. Now they walk by confidently." Nuri, a local corner store owner in his 30s, similarly finds that "There is already a change in Tophane that everyone tolerates. For example, women couldn't go sit in the Tayfun Cafe here around the corner (a shisha bar that belongs to the local football club). Now they come and smoke shisha and no one says anything against it."

Zehra, who works at a local pharmacy, agrees with this evaluation of Tophane's changing mindset: "In the past, particularly women were afraid here after dark. Now, they are more confident walking around. Because people's perception has changed. With the change in the neighborhood, people's way of thinking changes, too."

<sup>54</sup> Caitlin Cahill, "Negotiating grit and glamour: young women of color and the gentrification of the lower east side," *City & Society* 19, no. 2 (2007): 202-231.

Her colleague Esra, however, adds that for the women of Tophane, it was never really dangerous and that for her not much has changed: "To women who are from here, nothing would happen anyway. Everyone knows me, there is no way anything would happen to me. It is different for the newcomers. That is how it is in this neighborhood, they have each other's back."

A similar disagreement on the state of Tophane's security for women emerged in a conversation among women in the neighborhood house between Meryem and Ferda:

Meryem: "I walk in front of the new cafes comfortably. We didn't want to walk by the coffeehouses in the past; I still don't like it."

Ferda: "No one makes a pass though."

Meryem: "Yes, but there would be (disapproving) looks."

Ferda: "Well, I was never bothered."

As can be seen the effects of gentrification on women are often ambiguous and not the same for everyone. While Esra and Ferda confirm the notion of Tophane as "defensible space" in which they felt safe since they are known by everyone, Meryem and Zehra do not share this conception. They feel more comfortable walking around as the neighborhood is changing.

In general it can be said that while you see women walking around in Tophane without much hesitation and without encountering many problems, Tophane's streets clearly remain male-dominated. The people sitting in front of the coffeehouses and the barbershops and talking on the streets are all men. Women are typically only seen outside together with their children going from one place to another or playing with them in the park. Sitting around and chatting among women in Tophane usually happens in the back streets in front of their buildings or in the local neighborhood house that opened in 2006.



*Women sitting and chatting in front of private buildings in Tophane's non-busy back streets.  
Credit: Onur Ekmekçi*

According to some residents, female presence on Tophane's streets has even decreased over the last years. The loss of the so-called mahalle culture and the fact that more and more people are either moving out due to rising rents or because they are able to sell their apartments for lucrative prices seems to negatively impact women's social life. So does Meryem, a woman in her 50s who positively pointed out the comfort she feels when walking in front of the new cafes, tell me, "In the past everyone would be on the street, especially during Ramadan. We would take our rugs and sit in front of the doors.

That's done. On the one hand, many people left the neighborhood; on the other, everyone is preoccupied with their own troubles."

As Meryem underlines it is important to note that the changes in Tophane's social life are not all exclusively connected to the gentrification process as such but to Istanbul's rising socio-economic inequality in general. This polarization typically hits women from relatively low-income neighborhoods particularly hard since they are held responsible for the well-being of the family and are now, at the

same time, required to support the family income. Often they have to take care of the household and children while working in physically tiring jobs such as cleaning. It was also mostly women who would come to the peoples' parliament meetings on Tuesdays in the local neighborhood house to ask for social benefits, sometimes with very young children and babies though their husbands and grown sons were typically unemployed and could have also taken on this chore. These multiple responsibilities do not leave much time for the women of Tophane to chat in front of the apartments. Mehmet, the local journalist, adds that as people have started to withdraw to the privacy of their households due to economic hardship and that women do have not many places left to go, he insists, "maybe [they go to] the Qur'an classes. People have stopped visiting each others houses." While social life for the men of Tophane continues on street corners and in coffeehouses, women seem to be increasingly spending time within the four walls of their homes. Even if the neighborhood becomes more secure according to some, it remains to be seen how much long-term and lower-income female residents will be able to benefit from this positive side effect.

It is quite typical that as urbanization progresses, more informal ways of relating to one's neighbors, such as sitting on door steps or visiting one another spontaneously, are substituted by more formalized and spatially confined ways, particularly for women. In her ethnographic study of an informal settlement (*gecekondu*) in Ankara that has been given over to TOKİ, Tahire Erman describes how the former female *gecekondu* dwellers' habit of sitting in front of their houses is frowned upon in the new TOKİ complex.<sup>55</sup> Instead it is expected that they use park benches or pavilions built for this purpose. In Tophane the local neighborhood house seems to play a crucial role. Opened in 2006 by the municipality, and as I came to understand with some financial

support of a businessman known for his exceptional ties to the government, the local neighborhood house in Tophane is one of many in the Beyoğlu district. It offers many services that seem crucial to the local population. Many families do not have washing machines at home, so there is a laundry in the basement. It also offers opportunities to shower and eat for seasonal workers who come to Istanbul from Anatolian cities and who often rent out small one-room apartments in the area for low prices but do not have kitchens or showers. One muhtar in Tophane told me that due to this the crime rate, particularly robbery, has gone down in Beyoğlu. There is also a day nursery that allows mothers of young children in Tophane and the surrounding areas to work. At the same time, neighborhood houses are meeting places for women. They here find the opportunity to socialize in the numerous classes, such as sewing or ornament making. In fact, many of the services offered seem highly efficient in coping with the problems urban populations in Turkey and elsewhere are facing.

However, there is another side to the story: the neighborhood house also serves as an institution that contributes to adapting the local population to Beyoğlu's changing economy. So does the mayor of the Beyoğlu municipality, Ahmet Misbah Demircan, say about the purpose of the neighborhood houses:

Men are going to coffeehouses and mosques, but women don't have coffeehouses. This is their coffeehouse. But this coffeehouse contributes to women's development. If a mother has not educated herself, if she did not come to a place like this and enhanced herself, if she cannot give her child the right vision, that child drops out of school, hardly finishes high school. For this not to happen, we educate our children and our mothers in the local neighborhood house.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Tahire Erman, *Miş gibi site* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2016).

<sup>56</sup> "Başkan Demircan: 'Semt Konakları Kadınların Kahvesi Oldu,'" *Hürriyet*, June 5, 2015, accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/baskan-demircan-semt-konaklari-kadinlarin-kahvesi-oldu-37123811>.

Demircan also finds a direct link between the services offered in the neighborhood houses to Beyoğlu's touristic gentrification, which he sees as an opportunity rather than as a threat. In an interview with a newspaper, he argued that the hotels that have opened in Beyoğlu will provide four to five thousand job opportunities and that the neighborhood houses offer professional classes such as computer skills or hairdressing that might help Tophane residents to get one of these jobs: "We try to give this education in the neighborhood houses. The education we give in the neighborhood houses are for free. In Kadıköy or Beşiktaş,<sup>57</sup> the rich pay for such classes."<sup>58</sup>

In this sense the neighborhood house is designed not only for helping women socialize outside the family but also to improve their motherhood and job market skills. It is clear that the Beyoğlu municipality attempts to reach consent for the gentrification process among residents by suggesting to include them in the process and feed them the message that they can benefit from what is happening.

Gentrification and rising economic competition also has its effects on the mahalle and the way residents behave towards each other. It seems that the much praised neighborhood solidarity of Tophane described above is starting to suffer. I came across a few cases in which residents told on their neighbors in order to cut off their social benefits. And again, this seems to hit women particularly hard. For example, a young woman with five children whose husband left the home without a formal divorce and who was receiving some sort of welfare was reported to the responsible government agency by her neighbor, who claimed that her husband was still coming home on and off and that she was thus

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57 Two districts in Istanbul led by the opposition party, the CHP.

58 "Başkan Demircan: 'Semt Konakları Kadınların Kahvesi Oldu.'"

in no need of help. I came across a similar issue in a conversation with one of the local muhtar:

Muhtar Nadide: "I just gave Hafize 200 lira the other day; some people just don't appreciate what they get, but I wouldn't give it to her if I didn't think she needs it. Yesterday then someone stopped me on the street. She asked, "Why do you help Hafize? She is doing fine." I got so angry. I said, "How is she fine? Her husband is in on dialysis three times a week." She said, "They sold their apartment." Yes, they did because here the apartments are worth money now, and now they got three small apartments her father-in-law bought in the Gazi neighborhood<sup>59</sup> for that money. Does this mean they're doing fine?"

This kind of competitive thinking and petty tattling emerges because of socio-economic inequality and polarization, which naturally is having an effect on the solidarity residents are willing to show each other. And this polarization is clearly worsening in the context of gentrification as can be seen from the above interview excerpt in which it is seen that who sells or rents out their apartment or building at which price is an issue of conversation and possible envy in the neighborhood. It is thus important to note that gentrification is not only about new cafes, rising rents, and hipsters but that it entails a restructuring not only between so-called "gentrifiers" and long-term residents but also among long-term residents, possibly leading to new forms of exclusion and conflict.

#### 4.7. Part 3: Politics and Economics in Tophane

*"They give us the language and we use it."*

Faruk Bey has ambiguous feelings about today's Tophane. While he fears what will develop in the upcoming years with the gentrification process

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59 Low-income neighborhood in Istanbul mostly inhabited by Kurds.



proceeding, he also is not happy with how things have been in recent years. "I am a nationalist," he says. "We used to celebrate the Republic Day here with flags everywhere. Now you won't see any flags. Instead there is an empty conception of religion." Faruk Bey is a religious man himself, who during our interview frequently makes references not only to Islam but also to Atatürk. When I ask him about the Gezi protests and how he perceived them, he and his friends smiled, lowering their voices as if they do not want the other men in the coffeehouse we are sitting at to hear us: "We are the last generation you can ask this about. From now on no one will talk about this with you." What Faruk Bey and his friends imply is that Tophane has undergone a certain radicalization in terms of its political identity.

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the questions I had in mind when starting my fieldwork, and maybe even the one that intrigued me the most, was what kind of relation locals have with the AKP on the local and national level. Tophane's image as a stronghold of the ruling Justice and Development Party fortified itself during the anti-government Gezi Park protests in 2013. Though there is no univocal account of what exactly happened, it seems that protestors ran away from the police down from İstiklal Caddesi through Tophane chanting anti-AKP and anti-Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (who then was still prime minister) slogans on the night of May 31. Locals threw glass bottles at them and held "watch" every night after as long as the protests went on in order to, as Gökhan puts it, "defend the neighborhood." While even before Gezi the area was known for its conservatism, after these events Tophane was increasingly perceived as a neighborhood that overwhelmingly and radically supports the ruling party.

"Their error was that they were chanting slogans. Against whom are you chanting? I am not the AKP," says Ömer, the cafe-owner. Ömer thinks it is nonsense that people think of Tophane as the AKP's stronghold and that there is not any truth to this.

Echoing Ömer's statements, almost everyone I spoke to underlined that Tophane is not a political place but that the only affiliation that counts for them is to be a "Tophaneli." What I also witnessed was that residents were quite outspoken against the municipal government and the Beyoğlu mayor, Ahmet Misbah Demircan, while they withheld from mentioning President Erdoğan. This is not surprising, firstly because of the current political context in Turkey in which criticizing Mr. Erdoğan typically comes at a high price and secondly because of Tophane locals' specific relation with the President. Erdoğan hails from Kasımpaşa, another neighborhood in Beyoğlu that has strong ties with Tophane. Many residents have relatives there, and it is said that Erdoğan used to play football in Tophane's local club, Tayfunspor. Some of the older inhabitants remember his childhood vividly. Given this well-known personal relationship, after the incident and during the Gezi protest Tophane locals were marked as "Tayyip's soldiers" (*Tayyip'in askerleri*), a sort of AKP militia. And some Tophaneli seemed willingly to accept this label. One newspaper quoted a resident as follows:

We believe in God. We would not harm a fly. But as we believe in God we believe in this struggle (the AKP's struggle). We are trying to hold ourselves back, hold our young back. If Tayyip says, "run the streets," we will take down Taksim. We obey them. Tayyip is our leader. We'll do what he says.<sup>60</sup>

This statement from July 2013 confirmed the public perception of Tophane. However, in my personal encounters, views on the AKP were much more nuanced. Ömer, for example, argues that this extreme declaration of loyalty towards President Erdoğan is partly due to the fact that Tophane's conservative residents feel pressured

<sup>60</sup> Volkan Koç, "Geceleri olay çıkmasın diye nöbetteyiz; Tayyip çıkın derse Taksim'i dağıtırız!" T24, July 8, 2013, accessed July 31, 2016, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/tophanenin-abileri-anlatti-tayyip-cikkin-desin-taksimi-dagitiriz,233843>.

to use this kind of language to defend themselves and their neighborhood. “The opposition labels us a certain way, and the AKP gives us the language to defend ourselves and we use it,” he says. What Ömer seems to indicate is that the rising political tension in Turkey drives different groups in society into extreme corners, though everyday life might be much more eclectic. In that sense, what people declare publicly, in newspapers, or on social media is not necessarily what they would say in private. For example, Gökhan is, as mentioned before, involved in local politics and is publicly a fervent defender of Erdoğan’s agenda to change Turkey’s political system from parliamentary to presidential. In our conversation, however, he seemed more differentiated. In fact, he was the only one who openly criticized Erdoğan’s reaction during the Gezi protests:

I would stand at this corner to defend the neighborhood. They would come full of anger and break windows. I think they were right the first five days, but then the terrorist organization<sup>61</sup> became involved. I don’t agree with what the government did; kids died there. That is why I support Özal.<sup>62</sup> I mean, I don’t really know that era, but they would say that in such a case Özal would have come to the park with a helicopter and said, “What are you doing here? Okay, the park stays.” He would not have come out and said, “We will also destroy the AKM.”<sup>63</sup> He wouldn’t have provoked. After Gezi, Tophane’s people felt estranged from Erdoğan. But you cannot make me responsible for what the President does. You supported Kenan Evren, and do I hold you responsible for what he did? I voted for them so political stability prevails. AKP

61 I.e., the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

62 Former and deceased prime minister and president of Turkey

63 Abbreviation for Atatürk Cultural Center (*Atatürk Kultur Merkezi*), another building in Taksim, built in 1969, for which the AKP has voiced destruction plans

doesn’t have an ideology or a struggle. It’s only Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. 49.5 percent of the votes, but everyone curses, everyone in my surrounding. There are many people who think like me. I was very angry (at the government) during Gezi. I was in the AKP’s local organizations for eight years, in the Beyoğlu Youth Organization.

He adds, “many of us may vote for the AKP, but that does not make us the AKP.” Much that had been said to me during these interviews may have also resulted from a certain social desirability effect. I have already mentioned this problematic in the part on methodological and ethical challenges. There might have been residents who did not want to come off as aggressive AKP supporters. A few people I spoke to would openly condemn the AKP in front of me and even say that they will not vote for them but state the complete opposite on their Facebook or Twitter accounts. But even with this being the case, it becomes clear that many people in Turkey still, no matter which party they support or do not support, are willing to adapt a “softer” attitude in private encounters.

Even Mehmet, the local journalist who in his local news reports appears to be a fervent and unconditional AKP supporter and is an official member of the party, seems to indicate that the AKP does not necessarily act in his interest:

Mehmet: “In Turkey we have a tradition of putting people into categories. The neighborhood reacts to this categorization by radicalization. This is a habit of the old Turkey.”

Author: “What do you think about the AKP’s role in Tophane’s recent transformation?”

Mehmet: “Everyone is Tayyipçi (for the president), but Tayyip agrees with what is happening here, the profit-making (by the municipality and private investors).”

Author: "How does that make you feel as his supporter?"

Mehmet: "Ashamed."

Author: "Do you think people in Tophane can profit from the change too?"

Mehmet: "No, they would hardly take us as servants."

Many Tophane residents, if they are property owners, do profit from gentrification by selling their apartments for relatively high prices or renting out. On the other hand, however, many residents work in relatively low-paying jobs, such as cleaning, in the surrounding hotels and new establishments such as the local art and event space Depo. It is probably this fact that Mehmet is hinting at. Gökhan, on his part, thinks that particularly the municipality has failed in reaching out to Tophane residents:

Gökhan: "Misbah (the Beyoğlu mayor Ahmet Misbah Demircan) comes to weddings and funerals. The local administration has failed in Tophane. They think of our votes as guaranteed. They think of us as their children, but they are wrong."

Author: "But do you voice this discontent somehow?"

Gökhan: "We issued written statements to all institutions. We criticize over social media. I tweeted at the Ministry of Culture (which gives out the alcohol licenses), but they didn't reply."

Author: "So is that your way of resisting?"

Gökhan: "We don't resist, but we reproach."

These kind of conversations show that not only oppositional groups feel misrepresented by the

current political power reconfiguration in Turkey but that there is also a lack of representation for supporters of the ruling party. Korhan Gümüş in this context argues that many AKP voters in fact remain "unrepresented" because under the current system and political climate they are unable to express more nuanced views and defend their material interests more effectively. That, however, does not mean that they remain passive, as I attempt to discuss in the following section.

#### *Political Agency and Violence in Tophane*

Though many of my interviewees underlined that Tophane has no particular political identity, political signs can be seen throughout the neighborhood. President Erdoğan's and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's pictures, as well as the famous "Rabia" sign of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which Erdoğan has successfully utilized for his own political campaign and since 2013 has advanced as a symbol of political Islam in Turkey, can be seen on shop windows and private buildings. Coffee mugs and pencils with the logo of the ruling party are a common sight in barbershops and corner stores.

Nehir, a twenty-something postgraduate student who had lived in Tophane for several years before moving to another neighborhood, says that many people in the neighborhood are quick to respond to the political discourse of the governing party:

As Erdoğan's discourse became more trenchant, the discourse of the neighborhood became more trenchant as well. Especially after 2010, when the debate on changing Turkey's political system from parliamentary to presidential emerged and the gallery attack happened in Tophane, the neighborhood really became a microcosm of what was starting to happen in Turkey as a whole. The political change in the country was reflected in Tophane's daily life.



*“Rabia” sign on a Tophane residential building.  
Credit: Onur Ekmekçi*

In fact, Nehir experienced firsthand the consequences of some residents acting upon the AKP’s political messages. In November 2013, Erdoğan, then prime minister, made a public speech in which he spoke out against male and female students sharing a flat, though there is no law that would prohibit this.<sup>64</sup> The day after this statement the police knocked on Nehir’s door in Tophane questioning her landlord about her, though she had a female flatmate and there was no legal warrant. Fortunately, her landlord and neighbors backed her up, so the incident remained without consequence.

<sup>64</sup> “Tophane’de ev baskını,” *Milliyet*, November 8, 2013, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/tophane-de-ev-baskini/gundem/detay/1789209/default.htm>.

While what happened to Nehir is related to religious conservatism and political identity, according to urban anthropologist Ayşe Çavdar, who lived in Tophane between 2008 and 2010, it is also intrinsically connected to the gentrification process. She maintains that the reason that many locals in Tophane appear as radical AKP supporters is not only that they feel pressured into taking this position to claim their identity but also that there is an economic purpose that holds particular significance in the context of gentrification and rising property values: “They are giving a message to the AKP and Erdoğan. They are saying, “We are the ones who are your soldiers” (*sizin askeriniz biziz*), so don’t forget about us.”<sup>65</sup>

This sort of message, the adoption of a highly conservative discourse, and the accompanying pressure and violence against secular groups has turned into a strategy for residents to receive their own share in the gentrification process by asserting control:

Tophane always had a smell to it. It always appeared as a neglected space, a space that has been left to its own. The basements smell from moisture. When I asked the people after the 2010 gallery attacks what happened, they would say, “it is going to be like Cihangir here, we have suffered from this neighborhood’s shortcomings, and now they will enjoy its pleasures.” The issue is to take control of the profit. They use a language of conservatism and violence because they try to attract attention in this way. This is a struggle for agency.<sup>66</sup>

This struggle for agency, however, has so far not resonated with the AKP. For example, after an attack on beer-drinking individuals at a record store in June 2016, a high-ranking AKP official completely dismissed this behavior by labeling it as “ISIS (Islamic

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Ayşe Çavdar in discussion with the author, Istanbul, June 27, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

State) mindset"—thereby marking some Tophane residents as potential Islamist radicals. Similarly, local authorities seem to be ambivalent about these attempts. When I asked two muhtars, both outspoken AKP supporters, and Mustafa Bey, a local AKP politician who represents Tophane in the Beyoğlu parliament, about the incident in the record store, they seemed to disagree on the perpetrators' intentions:

Muhtar Nadide: "I was at a dinner with the Istanbul mayor last night (the day after the record store incident), and I told him that I am behind the people of Tophane and that we don't want to become like Galata or Cihangir."

Mustafa Bey: "This is an organized thing. They were 25 people."

Muhtar Nadide: "But maybe there was some kind of harassment.<sup>67</sup> This is Tophane; this is not Cihangir. This is a rooted neighborhood."

Mustafa Bey: "Why do you believe everything that is said? This harassment lie has been told before. The President already condemned it, what else is there to say?"

Author: "If it's organized, who does this then?"

Mustafa Bey: "Don't get into that, just leave it."

The muhtar of the area in which the incident took place also seemed reluctant to univocally take the perpetrators' side:

Muhtar Hamit: "Both sides are wrong. Just as you cannot read a Qur'an in a tavern, you cannot drink in a mosque. I also drink from time to time, but I have also been fasting since I was nine. I don't do the daily prayers. They (the people drinking in and in front of the record store) are wrong too, but I wouldn't want to have Firuzzağa to become known like this. We are known as bigots now."

67 The perpetrators had claimed that the people in the record store harassed a woman who passed by wearing a headscarf.

The ambiguous stance of local politicians and AKP-supporting muhtars towards these violent attempts to take control of Tophane and its neighborhood reflect the contradictions that emerge out of identity-focused politics. Though the ruling party and Tophane residents appear to share similar values, according to Cavdar, the AKP's goal is ultimately not to preserve the mahalle culture of Tophane, and thereby to shield its residents from displacement, but to capitalize on Istanbul's economic potential:

... gentrification projects are part of the AKP's vision. The municipalities and other institutions are implementing this vision and most significantly (...) this is to the benefit of more secular groups in society. (...) AKP does not protect anyone's 'life style.'<sup>68</sup>

My case study of Tophane clearly confirms Çavdar's view: it is the mayor of the Beyoğlu Municipality who fervently advertises Tophane's gentrification and calls upon residents to take part in the process by educating themselves in the neighborhood houses. It was President Erdoğan who played a major role in the opening of the Istanbul Modern Museum on Tophane's shores and supported the Biennale. Moreover, the Galata Port project, which will certainly further contribute to Tophane's gentrification (including alcohol-consuming tourists), is part of the AKP's economic incentive program. This also explains why the violent attacks on secular (and gentrifying) groups in Tophane and its surrounding area, though done in the name of "conservative values," do not and most likely will not resonate with the government or the municipality. It is no coincidence that the former AKP election bureau in the midst of the neighborhood is now a fancy furniture atelier, directly neighboring one of the old coffee-houses.

68 Ayşe Çavdar, "Tophane'de ne oldu," *Bir+Bir* 7 (2010).

## 5. IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION: GENTRIFICATION AND ITS DISCOMFORTS

This report has been a modest attempt to describe the effects gentrification has had on Tophane's long-term population. I have shown that gentrification entails not only rent increases and displacement but has complex social and political consequences.

In the first part of my case study I have mainly concentrated on the social dimension. While most accounts of Tophane deal with conflicts between newcomers and long-established inhabitants as a form of cultural clash, I have shed light on the changing everyday life of long-term residents and have found that gentrification has important consequences such as changing and contradictory perceptions of security, feelings of losing control over a once familiar environment, and an overall erosion of the social fabric, which is particularly detrimental for women. In the second part, the focus was on the relation residents have with politics and particularly with the ruling party. What I have observed is that the degree of political polarization in Turkey, i.e., the conflict between religious-conservative and secular groups, has overshadowed a proper debate on gentrification. The discussion on social and economic inequalities urban transformation and gentrification are causing are repeatedly falling victim to ancient identitarian fault lines. As a broader and more general concern, a question that we should thus keep asking ourselves in research as well as in praxis is how we can look beyond these fault lines. One thing seems clear: the more political polarization increases, the less we will be able to discern the increasing social inequalities permeating Istanbul's neighborhoods.

Last but not least, it is important to point out the current developments in Turkey and how they will affect Beyoğlu's and Tophane's gentrification in the future. A local muhtar told me about a meeting on urban transformation that the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality had arranged. When I asked her what

the meeting was about and whether they also talked about the problems urban transformation is causing, she happily answered, "No, no problems—about the way it will make things better, its benefits." This reply is in many ways symptomatic of the dominant Turkish attitude towards urban transformation. While there are certainly many arguments to be made for sustainable urban change—in any case it is needed—a huge problem in Turkey is that, at least in politics, the detrimental effects this might have are glossed over. Given that economic gains are extremely high and construction has become the growth engine of the Turkish economy, the negative repercussions of processes such as gentrification have largely remained a concern reserved for oppositional civil society groups and academics.

At least in Beyoğlu, however, problems caused by unsustainable urban transformation have already reached a stage in which they can hardly be further ignored by decision makers. While this report engages with the changes Tophane has been undergoing amidst gentrification, it is important to note that while the government and municipality have been eager to boost Beyoğlu's economic growth by substantially intervening in its physical and social makeup, it seems that currently the district is entering a new phase of decline. Tourism is dwindling, hotels are almost empty, and the numerous construction sites, as well as the destruction and commercialization of historical buildings, have made the district—once again—unattractive in the eyes of many middle- and upper-class Istanbulites. While just a few years ago Beyoğlu mayor Demircan promised to create four to five thousand new jobs in the hotel industry from which Tophane residents could benefit, hotels currently have a vacancy rate of 80 percent. A question for further research will need to ask what the effects of this decline will be on Tophane's local population.

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