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To cite this article: Cenk Özbay (2024) Transforming buildings, reorienting lives: the desire for gentrification in Istanbul, *Urban Geography*, 45:3, 411-432, DOI: [10.1080/02723638.2023.2190265](https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2023.2190265)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2023.2190265>



Published online: 17 Mar 2023.



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Transforming buildings, reorienting lives: the desire for gentrification in Istanbul

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ABSTRACT

How do the marginalized middle-lower-class residents of a neighborhood yearn for and participate in gentrification? In Istanbul, the low-quality building stock and risk of earthquakes intensifies the need for urban transformation, making it seem inevitable and desirable. This article focuses on the experience of gentrification in the Hasanpaşa neighborhood of Istanbul, using an intersectional lens to discuss how the locals, who cultivate a reorienting agency, give consent and aspire for urban change. A form of aspirational normativity emerges among the locals, driving the positive affect around the ideal and materiality of renewal – exemplified by the transformation of an abandoned power plant into a cultural complex. The case of Hasanpaşa shows that we need to take into account the different starting points, multiple contextual features, and intersecting social positions in order to have a more complete understanding of the landscapes of urban change.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 July 2022
Accepted 7 March 2023

KEYWORDS

Gentrification; urban transformation; neighborhood; class; affect; Istanbul

Introduction

This article focuses on gentrification in a marginalized working-class Istanbul neighborhood, Hasanpaşa, and asks why the inhabitants are enthusiastic, optimistic, and complicit in the socio-spatial change in their milieus. The locals deem urban transformation as an opportunity to reconfigure their social identities and their aspirations for upward social mobility. There are structural factors that facilitate urban transformation, including its slower pace compared to other areas of Istanbul, the relatively high ratio of homeownership, and the large-scale projects implemented by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) in the area. My aim here is to complicate the booming urban studies literature on Istanbul and contribute to the contextual studies about cities and gentrification around the world by analyzing the experiment and experience of urban transformation in this neighborhood.

“Urban transformation in Istanbul” as an overarching legal, political, and popular notion is not a uniform process with similar outcomes everywhere: it generates divergent routes, standstills, erasures, and results. It is a complex socio-spatial process in which citizens, the state, the housing market, municipalities, and capitalist contractors are entangled with the earthquake risk, the growing population, the lack of available land,

and ecological limits. Also, the residents of gentrifying neighborhoods have heterogeneous identities, and their responses to the neoliberal urban processes differ depending on local histories, forms of belonging, the involvement of state institutions, and mechanisms of capital redistribution (i.e. through dispossession, property ownership, and lease arrangements, Maloutas & Fujito, 2012; Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Soytemel, 2015). The case of Hasanpaşa indicates that we must account for the different starting points and multiple contextual features in order to have a fuller understanding of urban change and how the locals shape their perceptions of it.

This article incorporates an intersectional lens (Collins & Bilge, 2016) to discuss how the locals, who define and cultivate a reorienting agency to give consent to, desire, and actively seek urban change. The intersectional framework highlights the identities and subjective constructions of the residents' social location and expectations for the future against multiple oppressive structures and processes. I examine the socio-spatial circumstances that make a certain form of gentrification desirable in the eyes of residents with different social positions. Asking how intersectional differences affect perceptions of (and responses to) urban transformation can help us refine and expand property relations and class structures to include nuances arising from gender differences, age variance, and divergencies in racial-ethnic, sexual, and bodily identifications. How are these translated, and then, to inform and enable people to feel, think, and act in specific ways about gentrification? Below, I also look more closely at the aspirations that drive the positive affect around the signs of class mobility and the ideal and the materiality of renewal – symbolized by the postindustrial transmogrification of an abandoned power station into a cultural complex.

Certain social, historical, and material conditions combine to produce this communal feeling in Hasanpaşa: The neighborhood is not a homogenous space in a fixed temporality. It is intertwined with different histories (i.e. large parts of the land were not developed; a small portion was occupied by squatter settlements that were later legalized). People have their own ways of interpreting and relating to the identity of the place (i.e. the nostalgic narratives versus the stories of stigmatization). There are structural factors that would affect the routes and outcomes of gentrification (i.e. the relatively high level of owner-occupation and construction limits). Ultimately, the case of Hasanpaşa demonstrates a rare combination of multiple contingencies that enable the locals to aspire to participate in and control the pace of urban transformation in their neighborhood.

The article is structured as follows. The next section aims to offer an intersectional contribution to the ways we decipher gentrification. After discussing the methodology and the multiscale context, the following sections outline the factors that make gentrification desirable in Hasanpaşa and the dynamics behind the optimistic politics of affect. The article ends with a conclusion.

Adding an intersectional lens to gentrification

Broadly speaking, gentrification is the remaking of a dilapidated area for the proliferation of capital through property speculation, reinvestment, and the re-commodification of space as a new urban strategy and vision (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005; Smith, 2002). The highly contested notion of a ubiquitous model of gentrification that sweeps through

everywhere at once tends to blend and homogenize economic motives and outcomes (i.e. the disinvestment-reinvestment cycle or the “rent gap”), cultural symptoms and transformations (i.e. the mushrooming number of chic cafés and bars), and socio-political predecessors and ramifications (i.e. displacement and eviction) (Bernt, 2016; Chen & Shin, 2019; Lees et al., 2016; Maloutas, 2018; Shaw, 2005).

Urban research around the world has demonstrated that urban policies, the involvement of the government, and socio-spatial processes work contingently and produce divergent outcomes (Datta & Shaban, 2017; Edensor & Jayne, 2012; Roy, 2016; Roy & Ong, 2011). Accordingly, we must be attentive to the multi-layered contextual realities, the interplay of power, and the agency of social groups to substantiate the narratives of planetary gentrification. Still, several constitutive logics and normative principles travel and operate in multitudinous settings in the Global South (Maloutas, 2018). The urban studies literature underlines the need to use the gentrification framework cautiously, to refine it to explicate specific circumstances, and perhaps to add other terms to arrive at a less uniform and more nuanced theory that is open to situated accounts of urban change and the local politics of neoliberal urbanization (Calderon et al., 2020; Ghertner, 2015; Maloutas, 2011; Smart & Smart, 2017). Despite the compelling strength of this discussion in favor of diversification, Calderon et al. maintain that “the central pillar of gentrification scholarship is intellectually sound and still (depressingly) useful,” (2020, p. 19).

Gentrification is an economic and political process with structural capacities, actors, and actions that have the power to determine the contours of many people’s lives, the social character of the neighborhoods, and the inner workings of cities. Those who stand to benefit from urban renewal – politicians, municipalities, developers, realtors, and property owners – plan and work jointly to produce gentrification-friendly environments, policies, and practices (Shaw, 2005) at the expense of unwilling tenants, the urban poor, and other disadvantaged groups. In this sense, gentrification designates the forced removal of working-class and/or stigmatized people from their homes and prompts changes in the social organization of the place, including the loss of affordable areas within the city center. Research corroborates these theses, focusing mainly on the aspects of displacement, expropriation, disenfranchisement, and resistance (Lees et al., 2016; Moskowitz, 2018).

Here, I frame gentrification to underscore both the unconventional particularities of the neighborhood I have ethnographically studied and the multiplicity of urban processes at work in different parts of Istanbul, as in most other capitalist-neoliberal places (Bernt, 2016). What happens in the Hasanpaşa neighborhood as a “terrain of habitation, livelihood, self-organization, and politics” (Roy, 2011, p. 224) and the negotiations its residents engage in in order to live and thrive without being forced to leave, are not easily transferable to other parts of Istanbul or any other city. At the same time, however, pervasive orientations of capital reallocation and underlying trajectories of profit-maximizing urbanism do emerge here to some extent.

This article contributes to gentrification studies by highlighting the agency and potential for empowerment of locals through their aspirations for upward social mobility and ambitions for symbolic capital. Understanding the impact of neoliberal urban policies depends on a variety of tasks, including recognizing, unpacking, and analyzing the self-accounts of the locals, and analysis of the creation and inhabitation of different

locations generated by the simultaneous intersections of identities with the newcomer/old-timer status, community dynamics, the municipality, and the state. A situated analysis of gentrification therefore requires and benefits from an intersectional approach.

Intersectional theory originated from the need to situate Black women's simultaneous vulnerabilities to racism and patriarchy (Crenshaw, 1989). It addresses the interpenetrating and overlapping operations of axes of power and social structures that reproduce exclusion and inequality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Davis, 2008; Hancock, 2016; McCall, 2005). People have intersectional identities which give them unique vantage points, experiences, affective maps for interpreting what is happening around them, and certain strategies for coping. Until recently, an intersectional framework has not been incorporated into urban studies research (for exceptions, see Greif, 2015; Sicotte, 2014; Soytemel, 2015). An intersectional lens that highlights residents' internal differences as well as their expectations of gentrification enables us to set out how consent, desire, complicity, and future-oriented affective intensities are intimately shaped. Intersectional thinking also helps us to have a nuanced understanding of gentrification, without labeling all locals as equally suffering, incapable victims, and representing every action as discontent and resistance.

Questions and methods

One of the central questions that this article seeks to answer is what makes it possible for marginalized, disempowered, and lower-middle class residents to yearn for and willingly participate in gentrification, rather than disavow and resist it. How does this collective "structure of feeling" (Williams, 1961) and affective mood (an amalgam of aspiration, optimism, hope, and tenaciousness) grow among the locals?

From 2015 to 2021, I lived in a reconstructed (or "transformed") apartment building in Acıbadem, which is adjacent to Hasanpaşa. Most of my neighbors socialized and shopped in Hasanpaşa, and they felt like a part of that community. Their way of making sense of the socio-spatial mutation around us led me to focus more on Hasanpaşa, where the change was more visible and compelling than in Acıbadem, which has long been a middle-class area.

This article draws on ethnographic participant observation and in-depth recorded interviews with the mukhtar (the elected local authority), real-estate agents ($n=2$), shop owners ($n=6$), long-time residents ($n=10$), and the newcomers ($n=10$) that took place between 2017 and 2020.¹ The interviews included questions about residential history, memories and "biographies" in the neighborhood, new developments, experiences of and opinions of gentrification, the role of class and gender-sexual identities, and predictions for the future. Participant observation included regularly walking in the streets, taking photographs of the buildings and public spaces (561 photos), attending informal gatherings, visiting the cultural and community centers, and engaging in conversations with different groups of people when/where possible.

Most of the neighborhood residents and shopkeepers had similar ideas about urban transformation, which were generally affirmative and consenting, yet simultaneously cautious and sharp. They established this optimistic-yet-watchful attitude based on their personal and collective experiences of their neighborhood and the sense of comparison with adjacent places undergoing different forms of urban transformation, such as

Yeldegirmeni (cultural and economic renewal without radical physical change) and Fikirtepe (demolished for a “slash-and-build” gentrification, Shin, 2016). This overall affective state and intersectional micro-narratives of the neighborhood life constitute a norm (or an “aspirational norm” as explained below) and provide a reference point that shaped my questions and the ethnographic research.

What happens when the residents of a marginalized and tumbledown neighborhood long for and invest in gentrification as a self-organized and self-directed scheme? This question is especially relevant when gentrification does not appear as a top-down “project” in the form of state interference, big financial actors, or the municipality, as is generally the case in Istanbul (Arican, 2020; Bartu Candan & Kolluoglu, 2008; Kuyucu & Unsal, 2010), where locals have little bargaining power and their only chance is to stop the development by a court decision (Kuyucu, 2022). What are the chances of residents finding a way between the absolute flattening (and loss) of their neighborhood and a state of inaction in which nothing happens, and they gain nothing? How does it work for these aspiring actors to participate enterprisingly in and enjoy the communal affective investment generated by the gentrification experience (and experiment)? These questions require an understanding of the locals not as helpless and immobile victims but as active social agents, who perceive the economic capacity of their neighborhood in a comparative sense, negotiate with contractors, deal with politicians, gather knowledge and experience, formulate positive affect, and engage in gentrification.

The context

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government came to power in 2002 and intensified Turkey’s neoliberal adjustment policies to the global economic and financial system, while introducing democratic reforms and inclusive cultural openings (Öniş & Senses, 2009; Özbay et al., 2016). However, President Erdogan’s administration has become increasingly authoritarian and anti-democratic. Turkey has experienced destabilizing and regime-threatening “crisis tendencies” (Connell, 1995), mainly due to the transgression of the law and the simulated imperial fantasies of the politicians (Özselcuk & Kucuk, 2019), which are far removed from the practical life-worlds and livelihoods of citizens.

Istanbul in the twenty-first century is the heart of Turkey’s volatile economy (Kuyucu, 2022; Sentürk, 2014), the political hotbed of revolt and dissension (Erensü & Karaman, 2017), and an impasse in transcontinental migration routes (Biehl, 2020). The city is burdened with increasing population, densification, urban sprawl, transit problems, and ecological destruction (Bartu Candan & Özbay, 2014; Perouse, 2016). The low-quality building stock and the impending earthquake risk not only intensify the need for a massive wave of “urban transformation,” but also make it seem belated (Bartu Candan & Kolluoglu, 2008; Türkün, 2014). This setting reifies the significance of urban transformation, making it both inevitable and desirable for inhabitants as well as for the government, politicians, and capitalist forces (Arican, 2020; Kuyucu & Unsal, 2010). In this “placeless, breathless, and dispossessing” (Bartu Candan & Özbay, 2014) context, Istanbul is an ideal location to study the juxtaposition of the idiosyncratic cases of urban renewal in time and space. In this setting, multiple institutional and social actors interact

in this setting through different and contradictory interests, priorities, and agendas. Certain aspirations, fears, and opportunities emerge and are publicly discussed in this constellation of changing socio-spatial conditions.

These (geo-)political, economic, and social turbulences have afflicted Istanbul. Over the past two decades, the city has witnessed various kinds of state intervention (or the “predatory state-led gentrification,” Lopez-Morales, 2015), urban transformation initiatives, mega-projects, capital-led developments that displace entire neighborhoods, disconnected attempts at regeneration, and infrastructure investments, while profit-driven land speculation and neoliberal management of urban rentier have reached a peak.

Although masked behind the actual risk of earthquakes and growing population, urban transformation has been governed through the prioritization of profit maximization, capital valorization, and “the search for endless accumulation” (Harvey, 2010, p. 205). The construction sector – and the high-return, speculation-based enterprises, such as glossy residential and commercial urban real estate – have been presented as the engine of economic growth (Bora, 2016). Billboards in public spaces and advertisements on television and digital media display high-end real estate projects targeted at local and transnational high-income groups. This archipelago of urban renewal and reconstruction spearheads and represents the power relations that exist in the context of the increasingly dominant public-private partnerships and the financialized circuits of capital accumulation. Capital (in the form of multi-scalar operations of the state-sponsored capitalist contractors), state capacities, territorial power, and cultural politics of what cities should look like intermingle in contemporary Istanbul to produce a docile population that readily agrees (or, is forced to accept) what is proposed and urban geographies as empty spaces to be rebuilt from scratch (Aksoy, 2012; Arican, 2020; Bartu Candan & Özbay, 2014; Kuyucu & Unsal, 2010; Mills, 2010; Öz & Eder, 2012; Soytemel, 2017).

Located on the southwestern tip of the Asian side of Istanbul with a population of half a million, Kadıköy is a renowned, well-off district, where highly educated middle and upper-middle classes enjoy their secular, modern lifestyles alongside their anti-government, oppositional political identities (Asar, 2020). A spatial nucleus for youth, culture/arts, consumption, and entertainment has emerged in the last decade with a tide of commercial gentrification (Özdemir & Selcuk, 2017). Kadıköy is geographically small and densely built. Hundreds of old apartment buildings have been reconstructed in the name of earthquake-strengthening, and there is almost no vacant land left for new development.² The simultaneous popularity of the district and the scarcity of available land make Kadıköy a hotspot for urban transformation, as it is becoming increasingly more expensive to rent or buy a unit in most of its 21 neighborhoods.

Gentrification has diverse impacts on neighborhoods depending on their location, population, class composition, cultural identity and reputation, vulnerability, or resilience against the surges of urban change. In Istanbul, several historic neighborhoods have been gentrified and marketed with nostalgic branding as the “traditional” and “authentic” corners of the city (Günay & Dökmeci, 2012; Mills, 2010; Soytemel, 2015; Uysal, 2012). In contrast to these places, which have been thoroughly analyzed by scholars and covered by the press as part of the “new Istanbul” (Aksoy, 2012), Hasanpaşa has experienced a less dramatic, smoother, and more compromising type of gentrification. It was not even listed among the “neighborhoods of urban transformation in Istanbul” in 2010 (Yalcintan et al., 2014, p. 60).

Hasanpaşa is a long-neglected, underinvested neighborhood that has been stigmatized within the prosperous Kadıköy district. Residents of the district have seen the area as inferior, ignorant, pious, poor, and cheap. Constructed as an “outsider within” the neighborhood represents a set of values and notions that do not necessarily belong to the idealized image of the Kadıköy culture and lifestyle (Figure 1).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Hasanpaşa was known as Gazhane – the gas power plant. Amid orchards and lawns, the neighborhood emerged around the plant as an inexpensive and convenient residential area for the workers and was connected to the historic center of Kadıköy by a tram line. The small neighborhood, now home to around 15,000 people, has three geographical parts (See Figure 2). The first is the south–north strip that runs along the western bank of the Kurbağalidere Creek. This area is mainly designated for commercial activities and public services, including Gazhane, schools, a bus garage, and municipal offices.

The second part is the area called Taşocağı (The Quarry), which is located on the top of the hill in the north-western direction. There are small cemeteries of the Greek-Orthodox, Jewish, and Armenian communities. Informally built squatter houses (*gecekondu*) used to occupied part of the site until a decade ago. These squatter houses received title deeds and became legal in the late 1980s. As of 2022, there are several single-story squatter houses in their original form, waiting to be demolished and rebuilt as apartment blocks. Apart from these, there are new three- and five-story buildings on almost every plot. The third part of the neighborhood is located southwest of the strip. This area contains small apartment buildings, shops, and wooden houses and is better integrated architecturally and socially with the center of Kadıköy.

Three different actors conduct the urban transformation in Hasanpaşa. IMM undertakes three projects: The first is to clean, stabilize, and ameliorate the malodorous and polluted Kurbağalidere riverbank. At the northern end of the commercial strip along the riverbank, the second major project is the construction of a multi-story underground car park (for 1,500 cars) and the modern infrastructure for the weekly farmers’ market – a concrete, covered field designated for the periodic Tuesday Bazaar (Öz & Eder, 2012). (See Figure 3)



Figure 1. A map of Hasanpaşa, the riverside, Gazhane power plant, and the field for the farmers’ market.

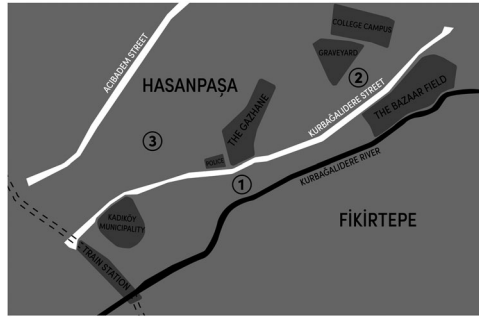


Figure 2. A drawing of Hasanpaşa, made by Nazif Can Akcali, 2021.



Figure 3. The northern part of Hasanpaşa, as seen from a high-rise building in Fikirtepe. (Photo by the author).

The third major IMM project is the restoration of the abandoned power plant, Gazhane, as a multi-purpose museum and cultural center. Opened in 1892 and closed in 1993, Gazhane occupies a large chunk of land (33,000 square meters) in the neighborhood territory. The restoration project started in 2015 and, after long delays, it was opened in the summer of 2021. Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu visited the site in 2019, shortly after his election, to check the progress and show the public that the restoration was a priority for his administration. This visit renewed residents' optimism about the bright future of Gazhane, the neighborhood, and their homes.

Kadıköy Municipality is another actor in urban transformation. After rebuilding the neighborhood's police station to be earthquake-resistant in 2007, the municipality bought two dilapidated wooden villas and restored them as a youth cultural and arts center and an institution dedicated to the art of caricature (cartoon) drawing.

The final component of urban transformation in Hasanpaşa is the construction of new apartment blocks to replace the smaller, older buildings, or single-family houses, which were not safe structures for an impending earthquake. Individual contractors constitute the third actor of urban change; they discuss the terms of the conversion and sign contracts with the owners, navigate the municipal bureaucracy and the Urban



Figure 4. A new apartment block. (Photo by the author).

Transformation Law (number 6306), demolish the existing structure, and then build new, taller, “luxurious and comfortable” apartment buildings. These buildings come with elevators, state-of-the-art heating–cooling technologies, and French (Juliet) balconies that absorb more daylight into the apartments. The developer has 2–4 extra units in each building after distributing the new condos to the previous owners. They sell the extra units to cover their expenses and make a profit. As these newer apartments are more expensive than the existing low-quality housing stock, wealthier groups with greater purchasing power and economic-cultural capital move in. (See [Figure 4](#))

What makes gentrification desirable?

In the recent urban studies literature on Istanbul, urban renewal and gentrification are commonly examined in a critical framework and represented as a negative factor in the lives of local people (the disadvantaged, the urban poor, ethnic-racial minorities) (Günay & Dökmeci, 2012; Kuyucu & Unsal, 2010; Mills, 2010; Soytemel, 2017; Türkün, 2014; Uysal, 2012; Yalcintan et al., 2014). The formation of positive feelings and consent for neoliberal urban restructuring (i.e. shopping malls, gated communities, and other privatized and monitored spaces) has not been extensively studied (for exceptions, see Bartu Candan & Kolluoglu, 2008; Genis, 2007). The Hasanpaşa residents, old and new alike, do not feel disturbed or threatened by the socio-spatial changes in their neighborhood. In this sense, their collective optimistic and insistent affect provides a contradictory example to the studies that concentrate on those who are displaced, threatened with displacement, and feel out of place after urban transformation. In this section, I discuss the reasons behind this difference.

The discontent

The first factor contributing to the desire for gentrification is the residents’ unhappiness about the current state of the place. While most of the older male interviewees mention

the “good, old” authentic Hasanpaşa identity with nostalgic sentiments, the younger men and women I talked to despise the public image of the neighborhood. They point to underinvestment in urban infrastructure and services and complain that the poor physical conditions have damaged their well-being and quality of life. They construct the neighborhood’s past as something to be forgotten and hidden. Zübeyde (45), for example, says, “I don’t think it’s a nice history or memory, this neighborhood can only be seen as a curse.”

The residents’ idea of the neighborhood is one of poverty and neglect in comparison to other nearby places. There are many public buildings and large plots of land that have been abandoned for decades, a situation that seems unimaginable in other areas of Kadıköy. The wealthy areas are well maintained by the municipality, residents say, unlike their own. Musa (51) mentions that this neglect happened in Hasanpaşa because they were “no one’s children, the wretched [*gariban*].” The result is an unpolished landscape characterized by low air quality because of Gazhane and unfinished construction projects in the adjacent Fikirtepe, mosquitos and bad smells from the river, mud and dirt from unpaved roads – a stark exception in the otherwise prosperous and well-manicured Kadıköy. Apart from the nostalgic elderly, the residents are unhappy with the alienating treatment that their neighborhood has received from the authorities.

Locals argue that the working-class, unattractive, dull features contribute to this scene of spatial abjection. “You can’t find anything beautiful or aesthetic here, as if it’s not in Kadıköy,” says Nükhet (20). They add that when people ask them where they live in Kadıköy, they say Acıbadem, because “when I say Hasanpaşa, then people say ‘oh, I see.’” Feelings of displeasure and irritation, experiences and memories of dissatisfaction, the comparative inferiority felt in relation to other close-by vicinities, and the anger triggered by all this are central to the local subjectivity in Hasanpaşa. Security, human relations, and interpersonal connections are referred to as the good aspects, while frustration and grievance mark the relationship of the locals to the space as they question the reasons behind its perceived lower status. This affective state of being downtrodden and mistreated makes the desire for gentrification more explicit and the collective optimism for the place more intriguing, because instead of leaving the place and starting over in another area, most people choose, or are simply forced, to stay and wait for the start of the urban renewal that they believe will save their neighborhood.

The absence of big construction capital

The second component of the collective desire for gentrification is the absence of major financial investors, entrepreneurs, or construction conglomerates that could dominate the transformation process. This situation can be seen in the case of neighboring Fikirtepe, where the state, through a special law, increased the building permits and limits enormously in order to make construction there more profitable. The most basic explanation for the lack of interest of big capitalists in the area is the construction limits applied by the local planning system of the municipality. The existing height limit for the new buildings is 15 meters (or the basement plus 4 floors), which prevents contractors from generating large profit margins from the reconstruction of buildings in Hasanpaşa. Only small-scale developers with limited financial, operational, and labor resources

would engage here. This absence and the municipal regulations play a role in confirming and sustaining the current positive affect by alleviating uncertainty. Nobody I talked to feels threatened by the unpredictable fluctuations of the local real estate market, which is rare in the gentrifying parts of Istanbul.

The mukhtar told me more than once, and reiterated to the local press, that the neighborhood community wanted “urban transformation without displacement” (*yerinde kentsel dönüşüm*) for their earthquake-prone buildings. With this concept, they mean that they oppose a state-led legal and economic operation to demolish all the existing buildings, rezone the territory, and build skyscrapers for the upper classes – as Fikirtepe has experienced. Fikirtepe appears to be a failed mass-scale project with bankrupt developers, incomplete high-rises, unfinished infrastructure, conflicting property rights, and displaced locals (Soytemel, 2017; see also Arican, 2020 for the politics of time in urban transformation). What is happening in Fikirtepe has frightened the Hasanpaşa residents. Fortunately for them, such a superimposition has never happened in Hasanpaşa, and parts of the neighborhood are being gentrified without displacement or the construction of residential towers that would disrupt the social and economic life of the neighborhood. The inhabitants are content with the current character of the reconstructed apartment blocks, which are human-scale and sit alongside vivid streets full of small, low-key shops.

The high rate of owner-occupation

The third factor that makes the gentrification process controllable and desirable is the high rate of owner-occupation. The mukhtar, realtors, and residents explain that the displacement of tenants who cannot afford the higher rents after gentrification is a very rare phenomenon in Hasanpaşa because most inhabitants own their flats. The reason for this is the low price of housing in the neighborhood in previous decades. The mukhtar says: “The prices were low, and it was easy to buy an apartment even before 5 years ago [before urban transformation started]. Renters didn’t come here much because there were better options for the same amount of money [to rent]. But it was a good place to buy a home.” There are still tenant families, single women and men, or groups of students who share apartments on a temporary basis who may move to another location if their building is being demolished. The mukhtar says that nobody knows what the ratio of homeowners to renters is, but adds that “it should be at least 80%” because Hasanpaşa has been a cheap and unpopular place for decades. Even the poorer groups have been able to buy apartments and live in their own places next to the center of Kadıköy. The Kadıköy Municipality refused to share the official numbers with me when I asked them, but the municipal officer I spoke to said that he suspected that Hasanpaşa had a smaller number of tenants than the rest of Kadıköy. Although the inhabitants of Fikirtepe also used to own homes with official title deeds, they were unable to resist the large-scale urban transformation project because their ownership status was invalidated by a special law. Hasanpaşa has not experienced this kind of intervention. In most cases, the owners move back into their homes after the reconstruction is completed (which normally takes less than 2 years) and start living alongside the newcomers in their fresh, smart apartment blocks. The absence of dispossession and displacement of the locals reduces the sense of risk and fear of gentrification and eases the emergence of the optimistic affective intensity.

Local economic life

Another reason that can explain the positive disposition towards gentrification is the social significance of economic life in the neighborhood (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). As of October 2019, there were 455 active businesses in Hasanpaşa. These numbers and the intensity of transactions show that Hasanpaşa is a highly commercial place where trade, services, food-beverage consumption, and car repair shops are commonplace. Despite residential gentrification, commerce has not been affected and most shops have maintained their identity, business capacity, and clientele. Urban transformation has not triggered a wave of commercial-and-leisure-economy-driven gentrification (Sequera & Nofre, 2020) here. Some of the residents, especially the elderly, express their contentment with the continuation of the local economy that gives the neighborhood its “character” and “flavor.” Metin (66) says they used to know every single shopowner in Hasanpaşa. Recently, it has become impossible for them to keep track of who is who and where they come from. However, they add: “We know the stores, we trust them. I still know many people [the shopkeepers], especially the old gang [*eski tayfa*] [...] These are our people here.” On the other hand, the younger people (especially young women) claim that the attributes of these shops, especially the more “masculine” businesses where all employees and most (if not all) customers are men, like the coffee-houses, auto body shop units, the “traditional” stores, and the small, cheap fast-food counters (*büfe*), are the source of Hasanpaşa’s bad (i.e. inelegant and dirty) reputation as they constitute a masculine public space. It is said that this unappealing commercial character and the masculine aura of the place reinforces its low-status public image and is unwelcoming to the middle-class (especially women and the youth).

Cosmopolitan secularism against state interference

When I ask Metin about the tolerance and inclusivity that the “traditional Istanbul neighborhood” (Mills, 2010) is supposed to have, both the mukhtar and they agree that Hasanpaşa has always had “people from all religions and regions, including the Roma.” Metin approves and adds: “There is no fundamentalism [*sofuluk*] here. Everybody respects each other.” The issue of religion and the threat of Islamic fundamentalism to a secular lifestyle is also at stake as a part of the state’s nationwide project to form a more religious society with a conservative built environment, by erecting new mosques on any available urban land and opening new religious public schools (Batuman, 2018). This perceived “danger” of a religious-fundamentalist siege brings the state into the discussion. Hence, the final factor in the local support for urban transformation is the peculiar attitude of the state, not regarding gentrification, but in the form of religion. Instead of informing the citizens about urban transformation and mediating between them and the developers, what the state does in Hasanpaşa is adopt a politico-religious mission that the residents fear will disturb them, unsettle the aura of secular tolerance that is prevalent in the neighborhood, and make them further stigmatized within the eminently secular Kadıköy district. Gentrification and upward class mobility can provide an answer to this and protect them from the Islamizing force of the state.

Hasanpaşa has six private (secular) schools and three public schools – two of which provide religious education. The Ministry of Education converted a nearby elementary

school into a Muslim “*imamhatip*” (preacher) school and constructed a three-building campus for a Muslim (preacher) high school on a large empty lot in the northeast corner of the neighborhood (see Figure 3). The locals feel violated and angry at the top-down social engineering of the state through the imposition of religious curricula and institutions. In this sense, the construction of a new mosque in addition to the existing three has increased the tensions they feel with the state. Elmas (51) says: “We don’t need more religious places here. We don’t have any [secular] public schools to send our children to for free. The only option is the religious ones, and nobody wants that. We demand green spaces and parks. What they have given us instead is a new mosque, two hundred meters away from another one.” Emre (39) believes that this is a premeditated state strategy to designate the neighborhood as the Islamic center of Kadıköy: “Maybe because this place isn’t rich and well-established, they see it as an appropriate Trojan horse to conquer Kadıköy, where political Islam always fails.”

The concentration of the state-led Islamic propaganda and counter-secular activities in Hasanpaşa highlight the dissatisfaction and sense of marginalization of the local population, whose voices are consistently unheard or disavowed by the authorities. On the other hand, the residents humorously whisper that it is a good thing that the state has not blazed a trail and undertook urban regeneration either by passing a specific law for the neighborhood (as in Fikirtepe) or by initiating the destruction (as in Tarlabasi). Instead, the state takes a relatively impartial stance, which makes the locals feel lucky and relieved. They reckon that they have some bargaining power with the individual contractors and even with the municipality, but that it would be more difficult to negotiate if the state were to force development on the area, as it has done in other parts of Istanbul.

The developments in Hasanpaşa suggest that urban redevelopment projects do not always cause unease, panic, and coercion if certain structural and relational conditions coexist, and if the residents strategize around these contingencies.

An affective politics of optimism: local aspirations guiding gentrification

In this section, I aim to unfold the hope and optimism that is collectively felt and articulated after years of feeling excluded and indignant. The indifference of the state encourages the locals and gives them the autonomy to speak confidently about living with a high-spirited uncertainty about the future; they say they have learned to “wait and see” what things are coming, what situations are developing.

Collectively cultivated optimism

The locals’ shifted perspective to make sense of Hasanpaşa reveals a yearning for a kind of “aspirational normativity” (Berlant, 2011, p. 167) that invokes desires, promises, hope, and optimism in a certain direction. This normativity emerges as an ongoing process of discursive constructions where normative rhetoric and discourses of the time ahead are produced to serve the materialization (i.e. urban transformation) and reproduction of the gentrified future of the neighborhood as a decent middle-class environment. Most of my interlocutors do not imagine Hasanpaşa as a beautiful place to be preserved as nostalgically frozen in time. Instead, what unites them here and constitutes the current local subjectivity is the expectation of socio-spatial change and the anticipated positive

outcomes of gentrification, including the tangible ones that arrive with the completion of piecemeal constructions. In this way, the urban poor and the aspiring middle-lower classes, who have experienced negligence and discrimination, find an opportunity for upward social mobility and the acquisition of cultural and symbolic capital.

Other than moving out, which is usually impossible due to financial or familial reasons, the best possible strategy to cope with the socio-spatial stigma of Hasanpaşa is to improve the built environment (i.e. beautification and revitalization) and to convert the geographical advantage (i.e. the physical proximity to the transport infrastructure, shopping malls, and the center of Kadıköy) into symbolic, economic, and cultural fields. In this context, gentrification does not disrupt the prolonged neighborhood identity or create a traumatic void (Moskowitz, 2018; Pain, 2019). On the contrary, it helps to promote a new and promising identity based on the prospective developments in the material and affective domains. The concern is, on the one hand, how discursive statements have been articulated to justify the deployment of urban transformation and, on the other, how these discourses can be reinterpreted, reshaped and reappropriated by working-class residents in the process of resolving possible social contradictions and incipient class conflicts.

Ong (2016, p. 77) explains that “affect refers to the human capacity [...] to shift from one experiential state to another. Affect is not subjective feelings, but an abstract intensity in the passage from one experiential state of a body to another.” Residents experience such an abstract intensity in the form of hope, determination, and commitment as they expect positive changes in the value and character of their neighborhood. The locals are in a transitional and experiential state because they do not, and indeed cannot, know exactly what will happen after the completion of gentrification and the restoration of Gazhane. Instead, they collectively play make-believe around the notion of a unified “community of shared future.” This capacity to be hopeful exists and circulates among people through unpredictability and uncertainty. The flow of optimism deconstructs and restructures the sense of identity and belonging to the neighborhood – a connection that the inhabitants had learned to forget or conceal in the past. Through the construction of the affective intensity and dispositions, Hasanpaşa is transformed from a place that generates unhappiness, shame, and dissatisfaction for the locals into a living space of positive reconfiguration. The neighborhood emerges as an affective geography, configured by the emotional investment of the locals. The transitory, uncertain, and experiential state stimulates enthusiasm and determination. Residents think of a sea change and envision a future full of opportunities that will improve the physical environment, cultural atmosphere, and class composition.

This positive affect constitutes an aspirational normativity that prevents the residents from verbalizing emergent problems (i.e. issues with the contractors, with the municipality, or the new neighbors) and criticizing new forms of inequality. The discourse about the neighborhood being “lucky, smart, or cautious,” as a whole shuts down possible channels through which the locals might express hesitation, dissatisfaction, and dissent, and disheartens them from cultivating resistant subjectivities. When I asked Seval (40) why they thought that the previous version of their apartment and the neighborhood was better than the “transformed” current situation, they did not want to answer and said: “Never mind, whenever I say these things, my neighbors accuse me of being a troublemaker and silence me.” Later, when I visited their home, they told me that they were

indeed unhappy with the redesign of the apartment, but that their neighbors were focused on the increased value of their property and not on the form and function of the space. Sevval said that because she was a young woman and a single mother, neither her neighbors nor the contractor paid attention to what she had to say. The risk of existing or future spatial injustices and class conflicts, such as poverty, reduced income, increased cost of living, the loss of affordable housing in the city center, and precarious employment, are silenced and rendered hidden in the normatively optimistic discourse of urban transformation.

Reassembling class

While Kadıköy is inhabited by professionals and better-off families, Hasanpaşa stands out from the rest of the district with its working-class character, perceived insularity and poverty. The residents of Hasanpaşa are “haunted by the need for justification, legitimation, recognition” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 239) and are drawn to profit from the transformation of their cheap (but for them, it is a success to own these apartments) properties into valuable, upmarket estates. As a community, they covet a new identity as legitimate urban citizens with a decent home in a respected neighborhood, and this goal is so close, so achievable. As their flats are “transformed” to become “decent” and middle class, so are they.

Class plays a central role in the constitution of collective identity and the creation of socio-spatial positionings, as it intersects with gender and age, which are also critical to the interpretation and experience of space. Existing ethnic, gender, sexual and age divides in neighborhood life are further complicated by the addition of new class matrices. These intersectional differences create slight divergences in the appreciation of the collective optimism and high expectations that circulate among the locals.

As the new buildings are completed and the new residents move into the more expensive condos, class differences between the newcomers and the old-timers have become more pronounced in contrast to the past, when residents came from similar class backgrounds and inter-class encounters were less common. Class distinctions are embedded in everyday life, tacitly felt, and clandestinely observed as the population becomes more diverse and heterogeneous. So far, these class contrasts have not led to conflict, hostility, or social distance. Nevertheless, neighbors increasingly talk about class and use it as a legitimate topic of conversation through which everyday difference is articulated. In a sense, the neighborhood’s reimagined past heterogeneity, which some residents narrate as an affirmative aspect of its past beauty, is being revamped through the blending of class differences and dissimilarities in lifestyle and consumption. A newcomer professional, Emre (38) gives an example of the production of difference through intimate observation and whispering:

I order drinking water in glass [not plastic] water jugs. One day, I heard voices and looked through the peephole to see that my neighbors [women] were silently discussing how much money we spend on the water. Since we don’t have a child, it’s just me and my wife, they concluded that although we were rich, it would still not affect us because we were just two people, against their more crowded families. I was surprised to be called rich because of our water preferences. And how attentive my neighbors were. Where we came from [the upper-middle class Suadiye], nobody would even notice this.

Emre and his wife can be classified as gentrifiers because they live in a new, duplex four-bedroom duplex apartment with a terrace. This unit costs at least four times as much as a regular, old flat in the area. Therefore, the value of their property, as well as their education, car, job, and clothes, create a class distinction in everyday situations with their neighbors.

While they were talking about their building's licensing (*iskan*) problems with the developer, Emre told one of his neighbors Mrs. Nalan (48) that maybe they should have called a fortuneteller to perform the ritual of "lead pouring" to repel evil eye and "clean up" the building from "negative energy":

I told her that because I assumed that she was into that kind of stuff. You know, being a housewife and a real *neighborhood woman* as she is. She looked at me in surprise and said that it was a shame that such a cultured man like me was interested in this kind of superstition. To be honest, I was mesmerized by how sharply she articulated our difference, and she kindly expressed that she wasn't happy with me talking to her in that way. I felt ashamed, although I didn't have any bad intentions such as humiliating her.

In this encounter, Nalan shows that she is well-aware of the existing but tacit hierarchies between the newcomers and the old-timers as well as their unspoken gender discrepancy, and how they might be perceived by the gentrifiers. But she can discursively reverse the unequal relationship and take the moral high ground to condemn the newcomers. This does not lead to a permanent hostility though. When I talked to Nalan later, she said that it was normal to redraw the boundaries because these groups come across each other for the first time and did not know each other well. She emphasized that she and her old-time neighbors were happy to see the social classes mixing and living together "under the same roof." She adds:

My 17-year-old daughter didn't like me drying clothes on the balcony, and she kept complaining about it, but I didn't care. Then they [Emre and his wife] did the same. After [they warned Nalan], we decided in the apartment building that clothes should only be dried in the back, out of sight from the street [...] It is good for them [their children] to live with and talk to these educated people. Their manners will improve. For example, the neighbors leave old books and DVDs in the apartment lobby and my children take them. It is enriching.

Like Nalan, residents draw further distinctions between the old habits and the new (or, modern) predilections. After mentioning which neighbors celebrate the traditional religious days and which ones do not, Bahar (35) also explains that neighbors observe which specific supermarkets each family visits. If a family (or a single person) chooses the middle-class supermarkets instead of the cheap ones, they are categorized as "different," or even "in good standing" [*durumu iyi*], or simply rich: "Supermarket bags reveal who you are in their eyes." Tunc (22) told me, half-jokingly, that motorbike food deliveries, which have been quite common in Istanbul since before the Covid-19 pandemic, are also carefully discerned:

People say, oh look, the rich are eating sushi again, or good, expensive kebabs, while the normal people's options are limited to McDonald's or cheap pizza. My mother runs to the window, trying to guess who has ordered what, when she hears the sound of a motorbike.

Nilüfer (50) agrees that social change happens slowly through class interactions. They trust that the class identity and habitus of the newcomers will gradually help to elevate the prestige of the place and the respectability of the residents (or, more importantly, their children's). "The new apartments are nice, luxurious. Our guests are surprised by the change. The new people are also decent, respectable people. This will be a better neighborhood."³ Aspirational normativity and optimistic affect are structured in Hasanpaşa through such intersectional precepts, and this process is consolidated by the re-emergence of Gazhane, the abandoned power plant, which they believe will make the neighborhood a more visible and "knowable" place in Kadıköy and in Istanbul.

Gazhane as a Beacon of gentrification

Badiou underscores the power of visibility in the symbolic field that helps to exhibit the "infrastructural politics as an event." In contrast to the toxic rubble, the restoration of Gazhane as a socio-cultural and symbolic infrastructure, or an infrastructural event, achieves inordinate visibility and dominates the symbolic field, as "something that initiates a transformation in the rules of visibility themselves" (Badiou, 2012, p. 69). Gazhane generates a regime of visibility that is imagined by the locals, who use it to "appear as existent" and to control the meaning of their neighborhood. Despite the differences in how they experience gentrification and imagine the past and the future, most of them share optimistic expectations for the reopening of Gazhane. As the neighborhood gentrifies and becomes more heterogeneous with inhabitants from different class backgrounds, the locals' aspirations for prosperity, acceptance, and respect are underpinned by their optimism about the reopening of Gazhane – no longer a symbol of squalor and alienation from the rest of the city, but a future center of attraction through its class-based, symbolic, cultural, and gendered meanings.⁴ It is ascending as a place that will connect them to the rest of the district in space and time.

Gordillo asserts that "giving particular forms to space has profound political implications because these forms (walls, roads, towers) affect mobility, visibility and the spatial reach of technologies of rule," (2014, p. 79). Restoring and rearranging the space for communal use after years of neglect has come to mean reorienting bodies and lives towards optimism that will be organized around the rubble: "But the point of analyzing [the] destruction is not simply to outline the spatiality of geographic forms of devastation, but also to explore the positive reconfigurations that follow" (Gordillo, 2014, p. 83). Most of the people that I talked to share this enthusiasm and emphasize the restoration and rebirth of Gazhane as a cultural center, although they do not know much about the renovation plans. It is an ambiguous curiosity and uncertain hope in contrast to the predominating materiality of the industrial complex.

Born and raised in Hasanpaşa, Tunc (22) knows the symbolic boundaries well enough to speculate about the ongoing socio-spatial change and the possible futures (including a seemingly global desire for a Starbucks, see Koning, 2015). They believe in an entrepreneurial fashion that these will improve the immediate circumstances and gradually make the neighborhood equal to the other gentrified and "cool places" (Skelton & Valentine, 2005) in Istanbul:

[Now] more marginal people are moving here. I mean the elites [...] The only thing we lack is a Starbucks. Maybe it will come after Gazhane [...] It can change everything because more

educated, cultured people can come here. There are beautiful old buildings down there. But they are occupied by some low class, ugly shops. If renovated, they have the potential to be cool. I mean like [cool] cafés and restaurants.

The unadulterated belief in and commitment to the potential benefits of the opening of Gazhane was the most frequently repeated positive affect put into discourse through an intersectional viewpoint. For example, Nükhet (20) recounts, “My friends always tease me about this place, like, what do you do in Hasanpaşa? They think it is an unattractive place, a slum. Urban transformation will change the neighborhood, it will save us all. Gazhane can finally make this place tempting for young people.” Sharing similar feelings, Semra (27) highlighted the cultural and gendered aspects of gentrification:

The streets of Hasanpaşa are masculine. Girls do not want to hang out here, they prefer elsewhere. There is an independent theater, but nobody knows about it. The opening of Gazhane can revive cultural life. After the mayor’s visit, I’m more hopeful that they [the authorities] won’t give up on this place.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the discussions on the nuanced facets of gentrification in diverse contexts. A transformative perspective on gentrification must recognize the dialectic between the market-driven processes (i.e. real-estate speculation, construction boom, rent-gap, expropriation and displacement) that characterize current analyses of urban transformation, and the emergent aspirational normativity that makes gentrification acceptable and desirable for the disadvantaged residents. In the absence of direct and predatory state intervention, an optimistic view of urban transformation emerges, highlighting the consent and participation of local populations, especially those who benefit from this socio-spatial process, in the mechanisms of neoliberal (capital-driven) urban restructuring, potentially leading to a more democratic and equitable urban transformation.

In this sense, Semra’s hope above is not isolated. Simone contends that “the poor do have a lot going against them in terms of their ability to extend themselves into their surrounds. They also tend to internalize the harsh judgments others who are less poor make about them,” (2014, p. 5). The residents of Hasanpaşa do not simply accept or internalize the harsh judgments about themselves and their neighborhood. Rather, they strive to find ways to unthink and resist such judgments through intersectional precepts.

They actively invest in the idea and practice of gentrification for the purpose of upward social mobility. How the residents understand urban politics, formulate subjectivities, and share a collective affirmative expectation constitute an optimistic, aspirational normativity to carve out a meaningful life between the socio-spatial stigma and the opportunities triggered by urban transformation. Here, gentrification pervades everyday life, engendering a climate of optimism and hope, and weaving a new social fabric around the notion not of the neighborhood’s history but of its future (signifying a respectable middle-class with a clean slate). Gentrification spotlights the malaise of the historical neighborhood, yet it does not curtail the socio-spatial identity. Instead, in this case, it seems to provide a novel social and cultural infrastructure for coexistence and local belonging. Observing the contradictory processes of urban transformation in

Istanbul, which are neither uniform nor monolithic despite simplifying public narratives, the residents develop strategies of waiting and watching, searching for cracks, inconsistencies and opportunities that might emerge.

The daily encounters and micro-narratives of Hasanpaşa residents show that self-motivated gentrification (provided certain conditions are met) can open the door to a wider discussion about the right to the city, participatory planning, and the prioritization of human needs within debates on neoliberal urban restructuring – including its destructiveness and incessant drive for profit maximization. The case of Hasanpaşa demonstrates that a more democratic, just, satisfying, and sustainable form of urbanism can be possible not only in abstract urban utopias, or in advanced welfare states with great redistributive capacities, but also in the devalorized parts of a city that has been at the center of a destructive and dispossessing neoliberal restructuring in an unfinished transition to a post-industrial urban economy. Yet, the structural factors, including the protection of property rights, the mitigation of the risk of expropriation and displacement, and the restrained interference from the state and major financiers, must be met with sustainable social and economic relations and an affective state of communal zeal. For the latter condition, symbolic investments in addition to the material ones (such as the open-ended meanings of the restoration of Gazhane) seem crucial.

It is not possible to know how gentrification will unfold after the opening of Gazhane as a cultural complex and a common point of attraction. As Shaw notes, “embedded local communities, while they cannot be manufactured or guaranteed, are a likely and direct result of long-term secure housing” (2005, p. 186), which Hasanpaşa appears to have assured so far with the cautious gentrification practices and aspirational normativity they have collectively generated. New questions regarding the future of the neighborhood might include how further re-commodification of urban space will come about and how the socio-spatial identities of current residents, along with their class and gender maneuvers, will find their place in the new phase of Hasanpaşa. In this sense, Hasanpaşa has so far been an exceptional case in the experiment of urban transformation in Istanbul; whether it will remain as it is or will turn into yet another gentrified neighborhood that has lost its class composition and transmogrified into a bourgeois playground, requires time and further research to unravel.

Notes

1. I conducted additional interviews with a worker at the Kadıköy Municipality, who specializes in planning and zoning, a developer who built two apartments in the neighborhood, and a city employee at the reopened Gazhane Museum in December 2021. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. All names are anonymized.
2. 3,675 of the total 3,972 earthquake-prone apartment blocks in Kadıköy were demolished and most of them were reconstructed afterward as of mid-2021 (Baser, 2021). Many old-but-sound structures are rebuilt for more luxurious, smart, and expensive units.
3. See Özbay’s (1999) discussion on Turkish women’s reading of the spatiality of a modern lifestyle via the structure and modeling of the flat.
4. Some locals organized around the idea to transform Gazhane from its ruins into a public space that would serve the neighborhood in 1995. They call themselves the “Gazhane Environmental Volunteers.” Their Twitter account is @GazhaneH. My respondents are not part of this grassroots organization, but they have supported the groups’ demands about the place.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ebru Soytemel, Kerem Öktem, Ayfer Bartu Candan, Ayse Saktanber, Kristen Biehl, Asli İkizoglu, and Yagmur Nuhurat for their generous and constructive suggestions. Most of all, I am very grateful to the residents of Hasanpaşa, who were so willing to share their everyday experiences of socio-spatial change.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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