Gentrification as a Blanket Concept: A Tale of Resisting and Contesting Neoliberal Urbanization Programmes

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This study focuses on the spaces of neoliberalism in Istanbul and more specifically Sulukule neighborhood constitutes its empirical focus. The hegemonic ascendancy of neoliberalism encounters contestations and social unrest, political mobilizations across the world. Through the case of Sulukule (Istanbul, Turkey), our aim is to illustrate how gentrification as a neoliberal instrument utilized by a conservative/Islamist local government intervene the urban space not only for economic purposes but also culturally. This study analyzes this process, which went through in Sulukule, a former low-income neighborhood, mainly inhabited by a Gypsy community, sustaining livelihoods through an historically created entertainment culture, which was not welcomed by the conservative political cadres. This study turns the attention to the dynamics generated at the interstices of economy, politics and society, and delivers a tale of resistance and contestation to the uneasy marriage between conservative Islamism and neoliberalism.

Key Words: urban gentrification, neoliberal urbanization, neoliberalism, Sulukule

1. What is it about in Sulukule?

Don't silence your *darbuka* (Goblet drum), don't leave Sulukule"[*] became a common slogan among the ex-inhabitants of Sulukule. This slogan gained popularity in the Turkish national and local media in the past few years and unlike many other stories of neoliberal urbanization, the case of Sulukule received considerable public support and civil society engagement. For the ex-habitants of Sulukule, being the losers of neoliberal urbanization was not only about losing their shelters, but also meant losing their local culture, which was often associated with *darbuka*, a kind of goblet drum. This specific instrument was a popular representation of Sulukule culture for centuries and the silence of *darbuka* in Sulukule triggered unprecedented social discomfort, political reaction among civil society groups, planners and received extensive press coverage consequently. Sulukule was definitely not the first victim of neoliberal urbanization in Istanbul, but what is it about in Sulukule, so that it is worthwhile to flash back and use this case study to reflect on the concept of neoliberal urbanization and its relevance in Istanbul?

"In Sulukule, where Fatih Municipality had expropriated the lands belonging to Gypsies for 500-800 TRY, a land belonging to the Treasury is put out to tender for a price five times higher by auction." (Dağlar, 2010) is read on one of the major newspapers in Turkey, Hürriyet, in September 2010, just after three months of the demolishment. Currently, new construction (Photograph 1) on the plain land with some remaining from the old neighborhood is underway.

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[*] In Turkish: *Darbukani Susturma, Sulukule'yi Birakma.* For more information, please see http://www.arkitera.com/h37915-darbukayi-susturma-sulukuleyi-birakma-.html

Photograph 1: New construction in the old neighborhood, Sulukule
Photograph: Can Berkol, 25.11.2010

Intense discussions broke out about Sulukule Project, as TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey) announced its intent on Sulukule as the construction of luxury housing and as the former residents of Sulukule – mostly Gypsies- were left with no alternative than moving to Kayabaşı, Taşoluk to other TOKİ-built mass houses far away from the city center.

Lawsuits filed by former Sulukule residents about the unfair expropriation and demolishment of their houses still continue. Even European Court of Human Rights accepted application of former Sulukule residents about that their property rights are violated, and the neighborhood of a very specific culture has been destroyed. This paper analyzes the concept of gentrification as a tool for neoliberal urbanization through the case of Sulukule, Istanbul. The case of Sulukule not only presents an instance in which neoliberal policies of the local municipal -in tandem with the national- administration extend capitalist relations into new places, but also indicate that neoliberal policies, through gentrification, exert significant pressure on livelihoods.

Gentrification should be accepted as the physical appearing of the reproduction of capitalism, or in order words, economic re-structuring on macro levels. The capital accumulation regimes change; urban lands constitute a significant part of and urban gentrification projects have become one of the tools of this new accumulation process. Just as in the case of Sulukule

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Renewal Project, it is no more profitable that low income groups to reside on those lands, as the land within the city center increase in value. Thus sanitation is perceived to be necessary for such land; the poor will be sent to the outskirts of the city where the land values are comparably low and a new and middle-high income group will embrace the sanitized lands, which they have right to, as they can afford to pay for it. Such gentrification projects target mainly the new users rather than the current habitants thus clearly serve the new capital accumulation regime.

This paper proposes to approach urban space as neoliberalized forms of capital accumulation and being arenas for neoliberal strategies of regulation/intervention. Here a very crucial question emerges; the meanings in the urban space are redefined and struggled as well, but for whose interests are urban space and local economies produced and re-produced? In Sulukule, we observe how neoliberal urbanism attacked a local culture vivid in Istanbul under the guidance of a Islamist political party, namely Justice and Development Party (AKP) which has shown that neoliberal reforms in Istanbul coincided with a conservative tendency that sought for homogeneity within the city centre by displacing lower income inhabitants. In accordance, the urban coalition formed around AKP guidance has also been sympathetic to actors who aim at neoliberalizing the urban space. This coincidence and dangerous overlap has been generating *multi*faceted and *multi*plex problems centered on the implementation of neoliberal reforms in Istanbul. Although the hegemony of neoliberal urbanization is apparent, the urban gentrification process in and ongoing exclusion of former Sulukule inhabitants are being contested. Academics, civil society representatives, volunteers organized around community groups have recently prepared an alternative urban regeneration project for Sulukule and officially presented it to Fatih Municipality. Yet, no attempt has been made to incorporate the alternative project into the existing one. As the project is progressing rapidly, the former residents of Sulukule resisted leaving their neighborhood for a long time. Yet when the destruction began, the families who could enter into negotiation with the Municipality moved to Taşoluk – a suburban neighborhood which is 27 km. away from Sulukule and 33 km from the city center (Eminönü)-; while others moved to neighborhoods next to Sulukule. Some of the families having moved to Taşoluk could not get accustomed to the living conditions of their new place or could not economically afford to live there and soon moved back to neighborhoods close to Sulukule (Sulukule Workshop, 2009).

2. Neoliberalization of Urban Space in Istanbul

In this study, we understand the concept of neoliberalism as macroeconomic re-structuring that mobilizes "a range of policies intended to extend market discipline, competition, and commodification throughout all sectors of society" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Brenner, 2004; Peck et al, 2009). The adoption of neoliberal policies and their increasing resonance in the crises environment of the Keynesianism had various repercussion, ranging from the local to the global scales. Our aim is to focus on the transformative impacts of neoliberalism on urban areas. Cities have emerged as the privileged sites of the valorization of neoliberal policies, implementations and strategies. As Bartu and Kolluoglu (2008) portrayed in the case of Istanbul, socio-economic and political processes of neoliberalism have created "spaces of decay," "distressed areas," and privileged spaces. These dominant patterns have been analyzed in the emerging literature on neoliberal urbanism. Our analysis extends this line of thinking by studying a particular aspect of neoliberalization, which is its overlap and co-constitution with conservative policies and engendering hegemony over certain areas and livelihoods of the city. We contend that this is a crucial aspect of neoliberalization, in the sense that it is located within the interstices of economy, culture and politics and this aspect offers us an enriched perspective in deciphering the impacts of neoliberalization when the institutors are conservative-Islamic sentiments.

The empirical focus of this study, the case of Sulukule with a vibrant local culture historically, reveals how gentrification is exposed as a form of neoliberal intervention in the urban space. It should be noted that not every form of gentrification is neoliberal, but it is possible to infer from the literature on gentrification that gentrification is not an isolated process of neighborhood change, involving in rehabilitation of inner city residential areas, but an integrated part of wider processes of urban spatial, political, economic restructuring (Smith and Williams, 1986; Smith, 1996), and this is a terrain which is seen as excessively fertile from the perspective of neoliberal urban policy makers, city governments, developers and real estate agents. In this study, two dimensions of gentrification are prioritized: its political nature and its contextuality. What it meant by the political dimension is that, gentrification is embedded in a broader neoliberal discourse and seen as a tool for the political maneuvers of neoliberal interests. The latter dimension refers to an emphasis on the importance of contextuality and scale issues, Lees (2000) underlines the changing nature of gentrification and calls for a need to focus on the "geographies of gentrification" considering emergent different forms due to locally specific and temporal conditions. As a result of the incorporation of neoliberal economic policy into the strategies and priorities of urban governments, gentrification became to be evaluated as an appreciated neighborhood change.

This also coincided with a time when the local governments acquired more responsibility. As a result of deeply suffering from less financial resources, municipalities, city governments and local governments became more inclined to pursue entrepreneurial governance models, in other words they were forced to be more active players in the game (2006: 133). The ascendance of the neoliberal ideas definitely increased the reliance of the local government actors, city administrators and municipalities on taxes. Gentrification as the neighborhood manifestation of neoliberalism, connected to neoliberal urbanization, as one of the forms of inner city real estate investment, as a result replacing the Keynesian logic with an entrepreneurial one.

The literature on gentrification active role of local governments, state agencies and urban public policy in gentrification processes in different cities around the world (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Lees 2000; Slater, 2004; Smith, 2002; Hammel and Wyly, 1999 among others). Situated in the context of New Urban Politics, initiating certain policy schemes, policymakers do actively adopt gentrification as an integral part of their revitalization strategies. What is subtle in the case of Sulukule is that, gentrification as part and parcel of neoliberal strategy manifest itself with myriad local forms, variegated institutional constellations and versatile social processes. As the case of Sulukule illustrates, gentrification, as it is argued in this study, is not only a mechanism for dislocation, but as Peck et al indicate, a transformed spatial strategy (as opposed to its earlier conceptualizations) that is utilized by urban growth coalitions and neoliberal minded local/national administrations. Gentrification in Sulukule as a neoliberal instrument and its spatial interventions bring various tensions on social fabric along with the detrimental impacts on cultural characteristics. Therefore, gentrification not only implies a socio economic transformation that is executed by neoliberals, but also entails cultural side effects. The case of Sulukule, social forms of resistance and political contestations centered on this local story informs us about the area that intersects between economy and culture, with a variety of political implications. In order to study this area analytically and decipher the penetration of neoliberal practices as well as its contestations in Sulukule, providing a background on the urban landscape within which Sulukule is located is necessary. This need refers to Istanbul's encounter with neoliberalism and globalization, which are two interdependent and correlated processes equipped with significant transformative power not only on nation states, but also on municipal and metropolitan governments.

The neo-liberal policies paved the way for foreign direct investments (FDI), and Istanbul stood out with its attractiveness for FDIs. Rapidly, Istanbul became Turkey's globalizing centre for finance and has become a favored location for multinational corporations attempting to make headway into the Turkish market (Perçin, 2007:6). Istanbul increasingly aimed to promote itself as an attractive city that not only hosts world-class facilities, such as offices, skyscrapers, hotels, cafés, restaurants, and shopping and convention centers;

but also as a mosaic mixing many cultures into a "dominant" one. All these changes have had direct impacts on regeneration policies, especially for Istanbul. Since then, the basic aim of the regeneration activities has been to make the city look attractive and to get rid of anything that could deform this beautiful picture. As in the Sulukule case, municipalities undertook major projects to transform the infrastructure and appearance of Istanbul to make it more attractive for foreign investors.

Istanbul's 'new development strategy' in the neoliberal era most often framed around the concept of global city with a specific focus on the questions of "How to sell Istanbul?" posed by Keyder (1993) (see Keyder, 1992; 1993; Keyder and Öncü, 1993; and for a critical perspective see Ercan, 1996; Oktem, 2005, 2006). Istanbul's encounter with the concept of global city dates back to the famous January 24, 1980 decisions, which constitute the initial adoption of neoliberal policies under the Turgut Özal government. Soon after these decisions, it was not a coincidence that the 1980 Master Plan of Istanbul (29 July 1980) included section, which identified Istanbul as a "world city".

Perhaps, a critical milestone in Istanbul's neoliberal trajectory relates to the increasing devolution of power in the hands of Bedreddin Dalan, Mayor of the Metropolitan Municipality in the 1984-1989 period. According to Oktay Ekinci, the head of the Chamber of Architects in that period argued that Istanbul's encounter with neoliberalization and its impacts on the urban space manifested itself on an undemocratic platform (Ekinci, 1995).† According to Ekinci, the immediate consequence of this change was the relaxation of the planning mechanism. These relaxations established a suitable environment to implement neoliberal practices through special laws to promote the market mechanism. The ascendancy of market mechanism and its penetration in establishing master plans meant that the historical, social, natural and ecological considerations were immensely downgraded, as opposed to privileging of revenue generation. Urban space has been approached and restructured (1) to engender more marketable areas and (2) generating urban rents turned into a major mechanism for capital accumulation so did urban development into a significant growth sector (Kurtulus 2007, Keyder 2007, Swynedegouw et al, 2002).

Thereby, neoliberal urbanization in Istanbul embarked on a radical rupture from the earlier forms of governance which mostly rested on populist practices via utilizing from state owned urban land. As Ünsal and Kuyucu (2010: 52) underline, Istanbul in fact could be characterized as a laggard, because increasing dominance of neoliberal urbanization commenced fairly recently. The increasing visibility of urban transformation projects contained

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† It was undemocratic because power was extensively concentrated on the mayor and the executive committee and the role of the elected members in the metropolitan councils were reduced (Ekinci, 1995).

efforts to upgrade particular localities (physically) and secondly further entrenchments of the neoliberal governance regime.

While the recent re-generation projects in Istanbul are basically aiming to gentrify the society - the users of the physical environment to be sanitized. By emphasizing the "generation" in the concept of re-*generation, it is intended to* express that the process of gentrification/re-generation handled in this study, is not a natural process, but rather a forced and top-down process, which is imposed usually to disadvantaged groups of the urban society (ethnic minorities, socially excluded groups, poor and uneducated people, etc.). For instance, as Ünsal and Kuyucu indicate, "gecekondu zones and inner city slums become particularly attractive for redevelopment for two reasons: legal ambiguities in their property regimes and as their perceived status as centers of crime and decay" (54). Not surprisingly, these areas were under serious pressure by the conservative AKP. Sulukule, as a region inflicted with a variety of informal practices, has been on the spot more than others.

After the 1960s neighborhoods, which were not conserved by adequate policies began to deteriorate rapidly (Ünlü *et al.*, 2003). The emergence of twilight areas had the idea of urban regeneration its train. However, regeneration practices usually overlooked the socio-economic characteristics of twilight zones and have focused only on the physical dilapidation. Yet, living in an area which does not get its share of the infrastructure, or the social and welfare services, that the city is offering, traps both the neighborhood and its residents into marginality.

Recently, the re-generation projects targeting Gypsy neighborhoods in Turkey such as "Sulukule Regeneration Project" are subject to dispute; and these projects are criticized mainly because of their violating nature, both human and citizen rights, and some questions such as whether these projects really aim to re-generate the physical environment or the Gypsy culture which has been neglected by the mainstream society are being raised.

Since 2006, when the project was just an "idea", until now, when almost most of the buildings in Sulukule have been demolished, the project has been subject of many argumentations in terms of conservation, participation, urban identity, sustainability, and social capital.

3. The case of Sulukule

Map 1: Sulukule and Taşoluk in Istanbul

There is an implicit consensus that the gentrification/re-generation process is operating differently in the neoliberal times by integrating multiple new actors, with new power asymmetries, hierarchies and cleavages. Since the neoliberal movements have been affecting Turkish urban politics, the basic aim of the re-generation activities has been to make the city look attractive and to get rid of anything that could deform this "beautiful picture". Consequently, re-generation practices usually overlooked the socio-economic characteristics of twilight zones and tried to banish the users of these areas. So, the neighborhoods where the most vulnerable groups such as Gypsies live have been defined as being in decay both physically and socially. Having defined these areas as in need for "rehabilitation", authorities addressed themselves to re-generate these "areas" as soon as possible.

This is where the global capital is reaching the neighborhood by bypassing or cooperating with the state, in the most recent form of gentrification. Nevertheless, the commodification of the neighborhood is not a one way street, the more it is influenced by global forces and tried to be dominated by the market logic, and it is becoming a crucial scale for contestations as well. Hackworth also maintains that gentrification is a neighborhood level of neoliberalism, and creates opportunities for real estate capitalism. As he mentions, "recent economic restructuring appears to have altered the real estate industry in such a way as to encourage the presence of large corporate gentrifiers more than small-scale owner-occupiers" (Hackworth, 2006: 139). In this regard, gentrification process privileges certain actors over others, creates insiders and outsiders, and also become a crucial rent distributing mechanism.

It is important to recognize the features of the gentrification process, which now manifests themselves in the urban spaces that are to a great extent shaped through neoliberalism. The involvement of corporate developers especially in terms of initiating the process, the involvement of local governments, the silence of opposition parties, and increasing pressures on un-gentrified neighborhoods, even though they are not in the central locations are the means of neoliberalism to commodity urban space.

Looking at the specific case of Sulukule, firstly one has to gain some insights about the neighborhood. Sulukule is situated in the historic peninsula within the boundaries of the World Heritage Site as defined by UNESCO in 1985, and is surrounded by the Byzantine city walls, within the Fatih municipality of Istanbul. The Gypsies settled in Sulukule in 1054, when Istanbul was the Byzantine capital. Its population increased after the Ottoman conquest in the 15th century when Mehmet the Conqueror placed other Gypsy groups engaged with basketry, metalwork, and horse-raising here to revive the local economy (Yılgür, 2007).

In the 17th century Ottoman Empire, Gypsies of Sulukule were known as musicians, dancers, fortune tellers, acrobats, and illusionists. The community used to run entertainment houses, which were the backbone of the area's economy. After the foundation of the republic, the Gypsies of Sulukule continued to run informal "listen and drink" establishments until 1991; one could rent the entire house, a hall, or a room, and have belly dancers and musicians performing while being served food and alcohol. These establishments have also helped the revival of other businesses, such as tobacco and spirits shops as well as neighborhood taxis that constantly shuttle entertainment house clients from distant neighborhoods.

Previously marked as an urban conservation area, Sulukule residents were not allowed to make any changes neither in the buildings nor in the urban layout of the neighborhood. Because of the neglect and the absence of rehabilitation proposals in this area, the deterioration of the built environment speeded up (Avgenikou *et al.*, 2007:13). Recently, Fatih Municipality has prepared a development plan for Sulukule. Backed up with the Urban Regeneration Law number 5366, Sulukule is now marked as an urban regeneration area, where development is orchestrated in a top-down manner and based on a new set of conditions and rules (Avgenikou *et al.*, 2007:7). The plan proposes the demolition of the existing buildings, and to erase the neighborhood urban fabric to replace it with a new and "better" one. Under the current version of the plan, Sulukule is faced with the risk of losing both its cultural heritage and its urban fabric.

There are two basic oppositions mounted against Sulukule project. The first point is that some locations are being chosen as 'appropriate' areas for Gypsies to be settled based on a lack of knowledge, as there is no specific

research about Gypsy housing conditions in Turkey. In the case of Sulukule regeneration project, Taşoluk has been chosen as appropriate for Sulukule residents by the authorities (Map 1). Moving Gypsies to another place, where they cannot establish physical and social organizations for their business is just pushing them into a deeper poverty trap. It is clear, that in neighborhoods where people belong to the same ethnic backgrounds, there are invisible networks which prevent the inhabitants from starving and getting lost within the complexities of the mainstream society. So, replacing the community which has become a united whole will mean the loss of a cultural asset, and it can never be recovered or recreated again.

The second point preoccupying the minds about the real intent of Sulukule project is that it does not seriously consider the Gypsy ways of living at all. The proposals offer something very different from what should have been proposed for a Gypsy community. For example, Gypsies in general use outdoor spaces intensely (Erdilek, 2007), and streets mean a lot to them than merely being a space for circulation. Not giving them the opportunity to use the streets as they are used to the authorities are just pushing them into their "new" houses and in that way try to turn Gypsies into something that they are obviously not born as. A very good example for the outcomes of this insensitivity is given by Fonseca (2002:186). In her book "Burry Me Standing", she tells that she, herself, saw a horse in one of the upper floors of an apartment in Bulgaria. So, if a Roma is earning his life from a horse cart, then one cannot expect him to feed his horse in the garden of an apartment. These are just basic facts which should not be ignored in a plan proposed for a Gypsy community.

In brief, even just by looking at these points one can acknowledge that local authorities blinded by the breeze of neoliberalism do interfere in the natural process of the integration of Gypsies, Sulukule residents, into the mainstream via these projects. The proposals, as they are, are clearly not in the interests of local inhabitants. By not taking into consideration the needs of them, the projects fail to see the already established patterns of life in these areas. Residents, who do not possess any skills that would be marketable in another part of the city, are only detached from their social and "business" networks "by force". Forcing them to be like the bigger rest is just an act of extreme brutality (Photograph 2, 3).

Photograph 2, 3: Construction of new and quotidian houses in Sulukule
Photograph: Can Berkol, 25.11.2010

Hence, the answer to the question, whether re-generation is another concept to denote the neoliberal strategies to commodify space, seems to be "yes". Gentrification nowadays refers to facilitating the highest and best land uses to supplant present uses, or forcing proper allocation of capital to land, which is prescribed by the market mentality (Clark, 2005). This is not a friction free process, indeed, and by looking at the scalar nature of the gentrification process under neoliberal times, it is possible to infer the polarized power relations, asymmetries and entangled power hierarchies that are vital for the hegemony of the neoliberal urban vision, and reproduction and restructuring of the capitalist tendencies.

According to Slater, the literature on gentrification treated the concept as a consequence for a long time. Even chose to avoid considering the negative consequences associated with the concept such as displacement as a research focus, and this situation coincided with the pervasive influence of neoliberal policies with considered gentrification as a new "social mix" in urban areas. Just as in the Sulukule regeneration project, the project was proposing estate owners to move to Taşoluk, which is about 35 km away from Sulukule and the city centre. So, actually, the project did not consider the right of the local community to continue living in the same place where they have been living for over 1000 years. The relocation proposals overlook the importance of social networks for low-income groups. As in many other Gypsy neighborhoods, in Sulukule it is the case that many people in the community depend on their neighbors for day-to-day needs, whether Gypsy or *gadje*[‡] (UNDP, 2002:95, 97, 98). The eviction of the local community has to be avoided, because the relocation will break these social and economic ties. Sulukule inhabitants need this safety network to deal with the vulnerability and discrimination they are exposed to. Besides, in Sulukule, replacing the community which has become a united whole will mean the loss of a cultural asset, and it can never be recovered or recreated again.

[‡] Roma word standing for non-Gypsy.

Linking the issue to a relatively more recent phenomenon, neoliberal urbanization is a theoretical opening that some scholars adhere to. In the current era of neoliberal urban policy, there is a different understanding of social mix that is as Blomley points out, "programs of renewal often seek to encourage home ownership, given its supposed effects on economic self-reliance, entrepreneurship. Gentrification on this account is to be encouraged, because it will mean the replacement of anti-community (non-property owning, transitory, problematized) by an active, responsible and improving population of homeowners" (Blomley, 2004: 89). Again, as in the Sulukule it has been the case, while the project proposes every claimant to possess a decent flat in Taşoluk. However, it is also evident, that no study has been undertaken to understand the social, demographic, cultural, or economic dynamics of Sulukule. Thus, the project cannot be expected to be realistic. As this is the case, the question becomes what is really the aim of this regeneration and whose interests are really favored. The proposal, as it is, is clearly not in the interests of local inhabitants. For example, people in Sulukule are living in poor and overcrowded housing conditions. Several families share one house, and usually without basic amenities. As household structures are so complex, insights need to be gained into how to accommodate these structures into new urban typologies (Avgenikou *et al.*, 2007).

5. Conclusion

Today, the concept of gentrification/re-generation is very much employed and referred to the diffusion of neoliberal urban policies in the context of neighborhoods. The case of Sulukule has been a representative case in the Turkish context, especially when the urban and metropolitan transformation of Istanbul is taken into account. The way neighborhoods transform and serve the interests of the market and the capital is similar to the historical functioning of capitalism. Thus, the globalization of gentrification arguments made in the literature should not surprise us given that it is a neoliberal strategy to extract value whenever and wherever possible, in the form of gentrification aiming to revalorize usually decayed spaces or slum areas.

Moreover, as a neighborhood manifestation of neoliberalism, gentrification no longer resides within the boundaries of the local scale. It should be noted that the way neoliberalism penetrated and found existence by devising strategies in the neighborhood scale depends on the dynamics of the state rescaling process since the demise of the Keynesian times. The hollowing out of the nation state and transferring of capacities and responsibilities to sub-national scales brought tension, as well as new opportunities for local governments. They had to make better use the spatial opportunities by cooperating with the capitalists, real estate developers, planners and designers to make their neighborhood, city or urban context as attractive as possible so that they would be able to increase their tax base, and avoid the loss of

transfers in the neoliberal era due to the weakening capacity and shrinking capacity to maneuvers of the national states.

Also in Sulukule, the re-generation project aims to turn this old Gypsy neighborhood into an attractive and sanitized area (Ünlü, 2005). Using the powers of the Law number 5366§, the municipality decided to evacuate run-down buildings and turn them into an upper-middle class neighborhood. A great many number of academics, professionals, and representatives of NGOs and community groups view these decisions as a blatant injustice. None of the residents have been called to participate in the decision-making process, and most of them are left out of negotiations, especially if they are tenants. In Sulukule, authorities did not hesitate to push away Gypsies, who are "*persona non grata*" anyway. What is aimed in this paper is to reveal that the purpose of such urban projects is to pave the way for bigger [neoliberal] businesses (Ciravoğlu and İslam, 2006).

In general, what we gather from the literature on gentrification is that now seen as a quick solution, or in Slater's terms as a savior for cities, its content has been depoliticized, and proposed as a key strategy to approach complex urban problems. They are complex because they are creating both winners and losers, and the irony is that nobody is really keeping track of what is happening to communities who are dislocated because of disruptions through investment in their area. While *gentrifiers* are shown as the primary actor of this process, the "gentrified" (both the community and the physical space) constitute the other half.

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§ Urban Regeneration Law number 5366, the aim of which is "to settle the principles of transformation of regeneration areas, which are deteriorated or inadequate in terms of social and technical infrastructure and need to be developed, revitalized, improved or cleared taking scientific, technical, artistic, or hygienic standards into account"

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