"Poorness is Ghettoness"

Urban Renewal and Hip-hop Acculturation in Sulukule, Istanbul

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Standing on a street in Karagümrük one day in March 2014, a teenage boy named Efe explained the origins of his local hip-hop scene to me. "We started rapping after the neighborhood was destroyed," he said, speaking with the concision and authority of someone well beyond his thirteen years. Although I had been visiting Karagümrük for more than a year at this point, to both research musical change and teach English as a volunteer, I had yet to hear the local fervor for rap explained so succinctly. Efe had articulated what others had only ever implied to me through either words or actions: the urban renewal project that had destroyed their neighborhood had also kick-started their interest in hip-hop.

The "we" Efe spoke of refers to the roughly two-dozen teenagers and young adults who comprise his local music scene. They are a diverse and active network of enthusiasts, one for which differences of gender, ethnicity, family background, and age have been overcome by a shared excitement for hip-hop culture and an intense sense of local pride. The neighborhood that unites them, however, is not often identified, as one might assume given my introduction above, as Karagümrük, the working-class district on Istanbul's historic peninsula in which Efe and I stood that day. It is, instead, Sulukule, the neighborhood that in Efe's terms had been destroyed. In this chapter I explore how young former residents and their peers have acculturated hip-hop music, dance, style, and discourse in

the aftermath of Sulukule's destruction. This change, I argue, has amounted to both a reconceptualization of Sulukule as a hip-hop ghetto and an empowering local identity based upon this new spatial dynamic. In this context the term "ghetto" refers to two concepts that are separate but in constant dialogue with one another. It is first an identifying concept that can unite – yet further stigmatize – an urban minority, and second, a primary tool by which members of a hip-hop community can delineate their local scene from others. In many ways, the growing popularity of hip-hop in Sulukule amounts to the interweaving of these two concepts and their subsequent manifestation on social and cultural planes. Drawing from two and a half years of fieldwork on-site in Karagümrük, the physical space in which the spirit of Sulukule lives on, I contend that hip-hop acculturation in Sulukule indicates an aestheticized turn to the local that is in dialogue with the design tenets of post-Fordist cities, specifically Krims' idea of integrated aestheticized space. By adopting this modern tendency of place branding, Sulukule youth participate in prevailing modes of accumulation even as they may assume a rebellious identity.

Analyses of Sulukule's new urban voice have so far been limited to analyzing music videos by local rap group Tahribad-ı İsyan (van Dobben Schoon 2014: 655–56; Yıldırım 2015: 257–65). My focus here is on the construction of place as it occurs outside of contained artistic works like "Wonderland." I shift my attention from music video analysis towards the aesthetics of everyday life in Sulukule as displayed through speech, within personal style, and in spaces. Using Krims' principle of integrated aestheticized space, I argue that the cultural changes occurring in Sulukule can be better understood and contextualized with recourse to the aesthetics of place-making in capitalist cities. As this tenet of urban design stipulates, negotiations of self and place in Sulukule have amounted to the creation of a locality that is bound to a fixed geography, aesthetically consolidated, and intended to add value to the neighborhood.

Prior to its destruction in 2009, Sulukule was an established Romani neighborhood in the central Istanbul district of Fatih. For

much of the 20th Century, the area was renowned as an entertainment quarter, famous for its Romani musicians and dancers, many of who had lived in the area for generations. *Eğlence evleri* (entertainment houses) were its primary sources of income, and regularly brought outside visitors and money to an otherwise stigmatized neighborhood located just inside of the city's Byzantine-era walls. In the early 1990s, though, the local Municipality shut down the *eğlence evleri* on the grounds that they were not just sites of traditional Romani culture but hotbeds of drugs and prostitution. But the decision to close the area's principal source of livelihood only further impoverished Sulukule and encouraged its illicit economies. Deprived of a major source of income, faced with a growing drug and crime problem, and informally cordoned off from the surrounding neighborhood (Karaman and Islam 2011: 4–5), many local residents struggled with urban poverty and joblessness throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

With its central location, worsening socio-economic condition, and deteriorating physical state, Sulukule was a prime candidate for urban renewal. As many would know, this term refers to the redevelopment of inner-city buildings and neighborhoods, and in Istanbul it is not without its controversy. The Turkish term is *kentsel dönüşüm*, which refers to the destruction of older houses and buildings in order to build new ones. The impetus for real estate developers is to earn more money from potential returns than those being currently accrued – what Neil Smith referred to in the late 70s as "rent-gap logic" (Smith 1979: 545). But owing to a number of 21st century reforms that legalize the expropriation of private property by local administrative bodies, urban renewal projects in Istanbul bear the potential to impinge on the rights of local residents even as they can promise substantial financial returns to their private and public backers. The 2005 reform that the Sulukule project was based on, for instance, Law No. 5366, transfers administrative rights for protected historical districts from the Conservation Council to local municipalities. The law authorizes the latter to redevelop these historical districts if they are deemed "derelict" and "obsolescent"

(Angell et al. 2014: 651). Karaman and Islam conclude that because this reform does not "specify consent and participation of the residents as pre-conditions for the [Sulukule] renewal project," residents had no choice but to "accept the terms and conditions imposed by the local Municipality or else face expropriation and eviction" (2010: 3). Without asking Sulukule residents for the permission or input, in other words, the Fatih Municipality demolished and rebuilt a long-standing neighborhood.

The renewal project proposed that homeowners would move into new units on-site, once completed, and pay the difference in value between their old and new houses. But this was financially unrealistic for many in Sulukule, where many residents struggle with poverty and joblessness. Refusing the low expropriation prices offered by the Municipality, many ended up selling their deeds to real estate speculators and moved into the adjacent neighborhood of Karagümrük. Tenants, meanwhile, were offered prohibitively expensive units in government housing 35 kilometers away from Sulukule in Taşoluk. This proposal proved untenable as well, because it involved a complete change in lifestyle, finances, and proximity to key services in the city center. Faced with a lack of alternative solutions, many former Sulukule residents simply resettled in nearby Karagümrük. Despite attracting substantial public opposition (Karaman 2014: 11–13; Somersan and Kırca-Schroeder 2008: 103), the project went ahead on the basis of its solid legal foundation. In partnership with the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and the Housing Development Administration of Turkey *(TOKİ)*, the district Municipality of Fatih accordingly oversaw the renewal project through to its ultimate completion in 2014. Though much of Sulukule was physically destroyed in the process, many locals still refer to the area around the redevelopment project as Sulukule, and I follow suit in this chapter.

My account begins with a harsh reality behind hip-hop's influence on area youth: Sulukule's redevelopment was especially painful for its younger residents. Özlem Soysal, a child psychologist who works with former residents in Karagümrük, argues that the

lengthy and contentious nature of Sulukule's renewal caused most children to develop post-traumatic stress in its wake (Ö. Soysal, personal communication July 24, 2013). "The demolition added to [the children's] lives a kind of physical violence from the state," she says, "because they know that the state breaks their houses down." The physical force of destruction triggered an emotional distress that aggravated pre-existing struggles with broken families, poor job prospects, crime, and drugs, resulting in a visceral and unprocessed pain. Many local youth resent and distrust government institutions as a result. "They don't want to go to school," adds Soysal, "because they see it as a state institution, and they don't trust the school" (ibid). By destroying Sulukule, then, the government did not just deprive local youth of the institutional support found in their centuries-old community, but encouraged a suspicion of formal institutions on the outside. To explain the popularity of hip-hop in Sulukule, it is necessary to point out how the renewal project both weakened local networks of support and engendered an antipathy towards government bodies. Hip-hop's emphasis on social solidarity and neighborhood loyalty appeals to Sulukule youth for this very reason. Given the disjuncture between the area in which they now live, Karagümrük, and the neighborhood that was destroyed, Sulukule, I argue that the regeneration of Sulukule as a hip-hop ghetto is an (un)conscious effort to overcome the damage of state-inflicted urban renewal.

Because Efe and most of his peers are young rappers who are still developing artistically, it is difficult to identify and analyze a "Sulukule sound"[1]. So instead of referring to a purely musical change, I use the term *hip-hop acculturation* to indicate the everyday expressive acts that collectively refashion Sulukule as a self-styled hip-hop "ghetto." My emphasis, accordingly, is not on artistic quality or the minutiae of genre-related characteristics, but how urban spaces and personal identities are produced and expressed through musical aesthetics and performance. I argue that an influential

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1 | An earlier paper of mine (Yıldırım, 2015) did analyze one particular rap song from Sulukule, "Ghetto Machines" by Tahribad-ı İsyan.

music video by the local rap group Tahribad-ı İsyan has promoted Sulukule as a politically active hip-hop ghetto, and that local youth embody this spatial dynamic in various, interrelated spatial venues and scales including everyday conversation, body art, dance, fashion and language, social media, and in physical space. I understand the influence of hip-hop as extending far past musical poetics accordingly, as is suggested by the rap lyric quoted at the beginning of this paper, "poorness is ghettoness"[2]. The lyric was written by another thirteen year old rapper named Seymen. It reveals that even poorness itself, an abstract but constant source force in the lives of many Sulukule children, is now conceptualized with recourse to hip-hop's spatial dynamics.

A Thoroughgoing Design of Life in the City

Of the theorists who have worked on the spatial dynamics of urban music cultures, Krims is often the most convincing. Recognizing "the intimate role that aesthetics and the arts play in urban production and character" (Krims 2012: 144) in capitalist cities, he created a framework to analyze and compare urban spaces on a global scale. Most relevant is his concept of "integrated aestheticized space," which denotes a recent strategy of capital accumulation by which inner-city neighborhoods are encouraged to integrate "different kinds of design to create a highly controlled, aestheticized, and isolated urban environment" (Krims 2007: xxxii). He claims that by remodeling streets, buildings, and public spaces in order to give them a unique and unified aesthetic, it is possible for city planners to transform stagnant urban neighborhoods into sites of tourism, cultural regeneration, and urban renewal. In short, the concept is used to spur economic and social growth on the basis of the aestheticized construction of place. The use of conspicuous design to create economic value places integrated aestheticized space within the

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2 | The original lyric in Turkish is "Fakirlik ghettoluktur."

tradition of design-intensity (Lash and Urry 1994: 15), which itself refers to a mode of production in which the careful packaging of symbols and information contribute more to an object's value than its physical materials. Krims' work is valuable in suggesting that design-intensive production affects the creation, marketing, and consumption of urban places just as does the manufacturing of consumer and industrial goods.

But the aesthetic packaging of place has not remained the sole charge of city planners and private developers hoping to create surplus value out of underperforming real estate. To the contrary, it has impacted urban culture, residents, and production to a much wider extent. The role of aesthetics in the reinvigoration of urban spaces is such that an ethos of design intensity has taken root around the world, one that requires "a fundamental and thoroughgoing design and aestheticizing of life in the city" (Krims 2007: xxxiv). Capital accumulation in the city, then, does not just refer to, or affect the material necessities of production, but also encompasses a "facilitating shell of economic, social, and political arrangements [and] cultural and artistic sensibilities" (Fisher 2011: 20). Musical practice, such as the appropriation of hip-hop in Sulukule, can be figured as part of this "facilitating shell" in order to explain the aesthetic lives of Istanbul teenagers.

The potential problem in using structural frameworks to analyze social phenomena is assuming that global models – in this case, of capital accumulation and urban design – simply impose themselves on actors without being subjected to local negotiations. This is the chief argument of assemblage theorists, many of whom claim that political economic approaches to urban phenomena can overlook the dynamism, heterogeneity, and subversive capabilities of local subjects (McFarlane 2011: 209; McGuirk & Dowling 2009: 176). Assemblage theorists specifically in regard to Istanbul have made similar claims. Angell, Hammond, and van Dobben Schoon have proposed an assemblage-inspired framework that focuses on the contingency of urban life in Istanbul, rather than how it might conform to more essentializing models. Such an approach

allows us to see how "universals like neoliberalism, risk, Islam or ethnicity are always produced from and within specific contexts" (Angell, Hammond, & van Dobben Schoon 2014: 647). In turn, they oppose the simple unfolding of dualisms such as global/local and modern/traditional because they often imply an "active" globalization or modernity imposing itself on a "passive" locality or tradition. Perpetuating these binaries risks marginalizing the capacity of individuals to subvert, circumvent, or deconstruct analytic models. Still we should also bear in mind that production in cities can actually nurture and depend on uniquely local expressions in order to create relative value so long as they can compete in a design-intensive market. It is conceivable then that local agency – in the form of highly aestheticized and information-dependent identities, artistic production, or everyday actions – can find avenues of expression in the capitalist city.

As I elaborate later on, rappers in Sulukule might actually be signaling their participation in an established model of production and mainstream society when they construct their urban localities along the lines of integrated aestheticized space. This chapter contributes by detailing one highly aestheticized response to the top-down transformation of Istanbul that, even as it personally and politically empowers youth marginalized by urban renewal, exists within the same "particular configuration of capitalism in which place acquires something of a branding value" (Krims 2007: 37). Recognizing the role of place in the modern city does not commit Sulukule rappers to a structural framework that limits their personal and collective freedoms, but leads us to question how localities are constructed and received as aesthetic realms in contemporary Istanbul. To acknowledge this is to "historicize the prominence of place in our contemporary musical life," and thus avoid "the risk of mystifying, rather than illuminating, a phenomenon that presents itself as thoroughly contingent" (Krims 2007: 37).

Perhaps more so than any other popular music, hip-hop requires that artists base their identities on an intimate connection to their local urban environment, a practice that Murray Forman traces to

the culture's origins in New York City ghettoes. He describes rap pioneers like Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash as "alternative cartographers" who claimed city blocks and neighborhoods for their live performance practice in keeping with the spatial traditions of urban gang culture (Forman 2000: 67–71). The heritage of inner-city 'gang turf' led them to stage the inherently competitive natures of rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti within "geographic boundaries that demarcate … territory among various crews, cliques, posses, extending and altering the spatial alliances that had previously cohered under other organizational structures" (ibid: 68).

Specific urban areas were granted value as they developed into hip-hop niches, informed by the unique flavor of resident artists. Defined by artists and their specific sounds, these urban areas were subject to personal and collective negotiations that eventually amounted to their reputations as idiosyncratically local hip-hop scenes. Residents and outsiders alike understood these urban spaces as concentrated sites of social and creative importance and followed their progress as discerning producers and consumers of culture. Forman consequently asserts, "even in its infancy hip-hop cartography was to some extent shaped by a refined capitalist logic and the existence of distinct market regions" (67). Fierce competition between the hip-hop ghettoes of post-industrial New York was a natural consequence, and prompted similar place-based rivalries to form on regional and national scales as hip-hop grew in popularity throughout the 1980s, culminating in the infamous "East Coast-West Coast" feud in the 90s.

Out of genre and cultural conventions, in other words, hip-hop scenes across the United States formed around distinct urban localities the creative output of which was recognizably of its place. From New York City to L.A., hip-hop ghettoes formed as well-defined sites of cultural production that utilized the capitalist marketing of place, even as rappers often rallied against establishment culture and economics. It is vital to note that the embrace of capitalist place-making did not have to be intentional, or even realized by those involved, for it to occur. And recognizing this now does not invalidate

the real grievances of politically-minded rap, but suggests that hip-hop's spatial dynamics – which include the creation, valuation, and promulgation of area-specific "ghettoes" – are not entirely divorced from those of the capitalist city. As hip-hop has grown in global popularity in the 21st Century, the genre's foregrounding of place has remained so essential to hip-hop identities that representing the ghetto or "the hood"[3] is now a required practice among hardcore rap acts (ibid: 72–73). Aspiring rappers, then, must carefully incorporate the contingencies of their neighborhood into a conventional and genre-specific spatial dynamic.

Following this convention, rappers in Istanbul tend to accentuate urban localities in their music just as readily. But Istanbul rappers also tend to espouse a "resistant" lyrical tone, which raises context-specific complications that are worth reviewing. For one, Solomon (2005) notes that rappers in Istanbul must confront the irony of expressing their localized and rebellious identity through a globalized music genre.

The video for "İstanbul" by the Turkish MC Nefret exemplifies this paradox, because it relies on the visual conventions of hip-hop to critique the dehumanizing effects of globalization. But Solomon claims it would be too simple to interpret the video as an act of subversion alone, because Nefret is not just appropriating a global form to critique the globalization of his native city. Since hip-hop itself "globalizes" Istanbul, Nefret is complicit in the very transformations he condemns. Solomon accordingly argues that Nefret embodies and embraces "the tensions between 'the two Istanbuls' – the city of the globalized cosmopolitan and the city of the rural migrant and the working urban poor (62). As Nefret laments the pollution and violence that have wrecked the migrant's dream of a modern and

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3 | Or the term popularly used in the United States post-1987, 'the 'hood' (Forman 2000: 68). Forman says that 'the hood' replaced 'the ghetto' in American hip-hop discourses with the rise of West Coast rap in 1987–88. The term indicated a more localized and specific place than the ghetto, but are in principal coterminous.

prosperous Istanbul, he also invokes two imaginations of the city that have emerged from the city's globalization and thus "share a common contemporary urban culture based on synthesizing local tradition with modern culture" (ibid: 62). Nefret may criticize the alienating social effects of Istanbul's expansion and opening up to transnational economic flows, but the medium and form of his critique is just as global. His rap identity is not entirely resistant, but another indication of Istanbul's globalization.

Discussing a separate video by Istanbul rappers, "Wonderland" by the Sulukule group Tahribad-ı İsyan, van Dobben Schoon reinforces Solomon's claim that Istanbul rap should not be reduced to simple narratives of localized resistance. With recourse to assemblage theory, she argues that the depiction of an active and rebellious Romani political identity in "Wonderland" was not "merely another instance of resistance against a neoliberal regime" (van Dobben Schoon 2014: 664) and its authoritarian urban renewal policies. Such a straightforward interpretation, she argues, would overlook the fact that Sulukule's political identity is a matter tightly contested by local residents, urban activist groups, and international NGOs, all of whom understand and promote the neighborhood with different and often competing agendas. There is a constant negotiation of what and whom Sulukule stands for as a result, one whose symbiotic communication between residents and outsiders challenges a vision of the neighborhood as separate from or completely subject to "global" forces. And because "Wonderland" mobilized anti-renewal sentiments from Sulukule to the 2013 Istanbul Biennial, where it debuted to enraptured audiences, van Dobben Schoon maintains that Sulukule residents cannot be regarded as the passive recipients of extralocal structures. Rather, they are active urban subjects capable of informing "the direction of urban politics in Istanbul" (ibid: 665). Even though their neighborhood has been destroyed by neoliberal urban renewal, van Dobben Schoon claims that Sulukule residents have not been marginalized to the point of silence.

Focusing on the political message of "Wonderland," van Dobben Schoon understandably does not address the video's hip-hop aesthetic,

noting only that "the rappers seem to embrace the ghetto as a source of 'street cred'" (ibid: 664). But beyond the facts that its director Halil Altındere is a renowned Turkish artist and the video premiered at the 2013 Istanbul Biennial, there is plenty of reason to engage with "Wonderland" as an aesthetic work. Most notably, the eight-minute video is replete with symbolic images that place rappers Tahribad-ı İsyan in their home neighborhood of Sulukule. Informed by hip-hop conventions, Altındere caricatures and refines the neighborhood's post-renewal urban desolation in order to, ironically enough, situate the clip within a tradition of ghetto realism in rap videos (Ramsey 2004: 168–69). From the low-angle camera shots, to the backdrops of graffiti-filled walls, and even to confrontations with local police, "Wonderland" integrates images of post-renewal Sulukule into an aestheticized dystopia in which Tahribad-ı İsyan must rely on their music if they are to stop the demolitions and save the neighborhood. In this sense the video is a parable, suggesting that urban desolation and oppressive authorities can be overcome if culturally-relevant art form such as hip-hop is used to air local grievances.

"Now I Want to Be a Rapper"

With the success of "Wonderland," Tahribad-ı İsyan (Figure 1) circulated a new model of success within Sulukule, one built on musical talent, aggressive politics, and the aesthetic consolidation of its local spaces. On the back of "Wonderland," Tahribad-ı İsyan were featured in the domestic and international press, signed a record deal, and performed in front of thousands at opposition political rallies, all of which made an impression on aspiring rappers back home. Sulukule residents have long made money playing music, but only with the fantastic reception of "Wonderland" did youth understand that their local struggles could be symbolically consolidated into a hip-hop ghetto and their neighborhood packaged into a potent, modern, and marketable form of artistic expression. But most importantly, "Wonderland" showed them that the limitations

that typically stood in the way of stability and success in Sulukule –
namely poverty and oppressive external authorities – could be lever-
aged to make the neighborhood seem like an authentic hip-hop
ghetto.

*Figure 1: The members of Tahribad-ı İsyan (from left to right: V-Z,
Zen-G, Slang) in Sulukule in 2015*

Stephanie Paine, with permission

The influence of Tahribad-ı İsyan on young rappers in Sulukule,
though, is not just due to "Wonderland". Ever since the neigh-
borhood's renewal, the trio has assumed the role of big brothers
for many of the young boys and girls whose houses were demol-
ished. These relationships were nurtured in the *Sulukule Çocuk
Sanat Atölyesi* (Sulukule Children's Art Atelier), a youth center in
Karagümrük that was opened in 2010 by a group of activists called
The Sulukule Platform. Their purpose was to combat the psycho-
logical damage incurred by the redevelopment, and they chose an
arts-based educational program to supplement the musical training
many children received at home. Soon after the Atelier was estab-

lished, Tahribad-ı İsyan expanded the center's curriculum – which had initially focused on Romani music – to include freestyle rap workshops. In these lessons, group members V-Z, Zen-G, and Slang taught young children about rap, instructing them on rhyming and good rhythm, but also how hip-hop was founded on social solidarity and neighborhood loyalty.

It was also because of these lessons that I first met Tahribad-ı İsyan. Eager to know the group and see their neighborhood, I made contact with the coordinator of the Atelier, who arranged for me to teach English to the group. I had never been to that part of Istanbul before and had little idea what to expect. In our first lesson, our ESL books prompted a discussion of sports, and I asked Zen-G if he ever played tennis. I realize now what a naive question this was, and it was a credit to my new students' good nature that they responded with laughter. Without missing a beat Zen-G replied with impressive English: "no man, tennis is not ghetto." Everybody in the room laughed. I doubt any of them have ever played tennis, because the sport, as in most cities worldwide, is neither popular with, nor accessible to Istanbul's poorer residents. Still, I was struck by how succinctly Zen-G formulated this by appealing to the ghetto in spoken discourse. Rejecting tennis so plainly was justified and funny because it was such an unviable option, both by his standards and the ghetto's.

Since the latter had been transmitted to them by way of global hip-hop, it was a revealing instance of transnational acculturation at work. By justifying his actions with appeal to a foreign concept, Zen-G proved that global ideas are only locally meaningful when they clarify, construct, or interact with experience on the ground. Ghetto acculturation is thus a process of negotiation in which Zen-G embraces "the ghetto" concept, adapts it to his own uses, and then self-identifies with it, which generates new connotations of what "the ghetto" stands for in turn. As van Dobben Schoon (2014) suggested, Sulukule's new ghetto identity is not only at the mercy of external pressures, but redefines extralocal concepts as they are absorbed and retransmitted.

If Tahribad-ı İsyan appeals to the ghetto so readily, we should ask what it stands for and why. The Sulukule ghetto, like others around the world, is a "cultural combustion engine that melts divisions amongst the confined group and fuels its collective pride even as it entrenches the stigma that hovers over it" (Wacquant 2004: 7). Ghetto discourse in Sulukule does more than conjugate place in line with hip-hop's spatial dynamics, then: it unites marginalized individuals under a common environment and identity. "It's said that a ghetto is a neighborhood where minorities and poor people live, so our Sulukule is no different than a ghetto" two older Atelier attendants told me (F. Doğan and E. Yılmaz, personal communication, September 22, 2015).

The pluralization of "minority" in this quote is important, because the Sulukule hip-hop scene is not homogenous in ethnic, gender, or social terms. Over the course of my visits to the Atelier I interacted with male and female attendees who self-identified as Romani, Kurdish, Turkish, and Armenian; Sulukule residents and outsiders; those whose homes were destroyed in the renewal process, and those whose weren't. Non-Romani individuals and those whose houses were not destroyed in the renewal project still embrace and represent Sulukule out of what I call ghetto appeal: the neighborhood's capacity to embrace and unite subjugated identities against oppression. The social solidarity that results from Sulukule's ghettoization finds creative expression in rap and dance, which in turn alters the hopes and imagination of participants. A young Atelier attendant, Ömer, once rapped a telling line in this respect: "I used to want to be a footballer, now I want to be a rapper." If it is essential for aspiring rappers to represent the ghetto in their art and everyday lives, then Ömer's line reveals how hip-hop has come to anchor the material aspirations of Sulukule youth just as it has their musical lives.

Figure 2: Gizem, a 19 year-old dancer and instructor at the Sulukule Children's Art Atelier

Stephanie Paine, with permission

This reconfiguration of personal hope is what we might call the promise of hip-hop, and efforts to attain it involve an aestheticizing of the self in line with hip-hop standards of fashion sense, kinesics, and the body. Portraits of atelier attendants shot by the photographer Stephanie Paine, whose work I gratefully use here, reveal hip-hop's influence on Sulukule youth. Her portrait of Gizem, a 19 year-old dancer shown in Figure 2, depicts a remarkable fluency in hip-hop visual expression: the skin-tight faded jeans; the protruding tongues of retro Adidas sneakers; urban sportswear; the horizontal victory hand sign; and as seen in close-up on the left, a tattoo she recently had done that portrays the name of her hip-hop dance troupe – "*hu-hu*" – at the base of a trail of enlarging diamonds. Above the largest diamond is the English word "blue." She explained that she has recently been "obsessed with the color blue," but I might've guessed from the color of her dyed hair. Gizem's tattoo manifests

an embedded relationship among her body, identity as a dancer, aesthetic sense, and the richness – symbolic or literal – that they promise collectively. Her conspicuous adherence to street style demonstrates how hip-hop acculturation visually refigures the body, the central actor in the construction of place.

Alongside these changes in personal aesthetics, the growing popularity of hip-hop has altered subjects' interactions with digital communication. Social media provides the strongest case in point, because they allow visual and written communication to take place with unprecedented volume, frequency, and user-generated manipulation of content. In Sulukule as elsewhere, platforms like Facebook and Instagram have become principal sites of identity construction for youth because they offer channels for self-narration and encourage a transnational outlook among users. All of these dynamics are at play in Figure 3: a photo uploaded by Gizem onto her Facebook account in the summer of 2015.

Beaming upside-down at the camera, Gizem is performing a break dance move called "the scorpion" in the *TOKİ*-constructed basketball courts in Sulukule. The setting, accordingly, amounts to one instance of "mapping" Sulukule as a hip-hop ghetto. In this photograph Gizem is once more wearing sneakers (Puma's) and an urban themed t-shirt (representing the Bronx this time, not Austin). But here, the kinesics, captions, and backdrop impart more than her outfit. The buildings in the background situate Gizem in close proximity to the *TOKİ* renewal project, but they are almost an afterthought. The focus, instead, is on the exceptional movement of Gizem's body; her legs are captured at an angle that is nearly-inhuman and explains why the move is known as "the scorpion." As she swivels her leg and looks at the camera upside down, Gizem appears unrestricted in terms of both where she can go and how she can move. And like any impressive physical feat, "the scorpion" seems to empower Gizem, whose smile in the photograph radiates warmth and positivity. For a knowing audience, one aware of the *TOKİ* project's debilitating influence on Sulukule youth, the photograph is a testament to the empowering qualities of hip-hop dance.

Kato's assertion that breakdancing "rehumanizes an otherwise alienating urban environment" (Kato 2007: 191) rings particularly true.

Figure 3: A photo uploaded onto Gizem's Facebook account in July 2015

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The manner in which Gizem has captioned the photograph is revealing as well, particularly because her all English "hashtags"[4] – including *#hiphopbabyyyyyyyyyyy*; *#bgirlll*[5]; *#ghetto*; *#stronger* – indicate that this Facebook post is meant to circulate on international (i.e. non-local) circuits. In consequence, we might consider this picture as a narrative device aimed at situating Gizem the *#bgirlll* in Sulukule the *#ghetto*. Her personal style, consistent with that in Figure 3, interacts with liberating breakdance choreography to express unrestricted personal movement in the #ghetto to an online audience that Gizem hopes is cosmopolitan enough to

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4 | From Wikipedia: "A hashtag is a type of label or metadata tag used on social network and microblogging services which makes it easier for users to find messages with a specific theme or content."

5 | "#bgirlll" (sic) refers to "bgirl," which is a term for female break-dancers.

know English. Because they offer Gizem representative control of her neighborhood and body, social media posts like this are primary sites of self-contextualization in place and should be considered as important platforms for daily aesthetic expression.

These interactions between Gizem, her urban environment, and hip-hop aesthetics do not amount to a preconfigured expressive structure that determines or marginalizes her agency. The contingencies of place and individuality are, to the contrary, at the heart of each photograph. Van Dobben Schoon (2014) is correct then to state that new identities can emerge as hip-hop localizes in Sulukule. Still, this insight should not distract us from how Gizem's Facebook post applies the conventions and genre-specific spatial dynamics of hip-hop to the locality of Sulukule. She situates herself in Sulukule through visual signifiers, connects herself and her neighborhood in hip-hop culture through her dancing and attire, and establishes Sulukule as a ghetto with her hashtags at the side. The photograph and captions on display consequently amount to a rich, controlled, and incorporated aesthetic expression that formulates Sulukule as a ghetto and Gizem as a b-girl within it. It shows that ghetto acculturation is a process charged with the design-intensive (i.e. heavily aestheticized) construction of personal identity and place. Representing Sulukule as a hip-hop ghetto is achieved using a mode of urban production that delineates neighborhoods and integrates them aesthetically. If Zen-G justified his low-income neighborhood by appealing to the ghetto, Gizem shows how this locality is creatively enacted through personal style, dance moves, and carefully-constructed social media posts. But Zen-G and Gizem are by no means the only ones appealing to ghetto standards and a hip-hop aesthetic in Sulukule[6]. I have focused on them here only for reasons of space. Collectively, thousands of similar outfits, Facebook posts, flashed gang signs, impromptu breakdance sessions, and conversa-

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6 | Many more instances of hip-hop's influence on personal style, dance, and the Atelier can be seen in Stephanie Paine's photography series "Sulukule Art Atelier."

tions about the ghetto constitute the construction of Sulukule as a unique locus of hip-hop. Recalling Forman's claim that "representing the ghetto … is now a required practice among hardcore rap acts (2001, p. 72–73), these everyday acts of expression are how Sulukule youth ghettoize their neighborhood so that it stands, in dialogue with others, as an authentic hip-hop locality.

There is in fact a separate integrated aestheticized space on display in the background of Gizem's Facebook post – the *TOKİ* redevelopment project – one which can be seen more fully in Figure 4. The architectural scheme of this project is worth discussing for two reasons. First, its use of a consolidated aesthetic attests to Krims' (2007) theory of design-intensive urban renewal. Second, its use of a symbolic aesthetic has been controversial since the redevelopment plan was first announced. Noting that the project's housing units bore certain touches of neo-Ottoman architecture, some critics took offense to the (debatable) implications. A number of scholars (Somersan and Kırca-Schroeder: 98; Osterlund 2014: 188–89) contend that its aesthetic tacitly endorses the hegemonic interests of the AK Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [Justice and Development Party]), who are in power at both the municipal and national levels and often communicate in neo-Ottoman terms, to invoke "the superior achievements of a Turkish state that accepted Islam as its official religion" (Özyürek 2006: 156). This line of reasoning assumes that the exterior wooden panels and *cumba*-s (bay windows) of the *TOKİ* condominiums reflect the imposition of dominant values on the minority residents who used to live in Sulukule. Somersan and Kırca-Schroeder, for instance, argue that the project's neo-Ottoman style is "in the direction of reviving a mythical 'Ottoman past' and an Islamic ethos" (2008: 96), and that it was decided upon so that Sulukule would "acquire new, impeccable morals based on Islam and the tourism sector" (ibid: 103).

With this assessment, Somersan and Kırca-Schroeder situate Sulukule within a wider critique of the AK Party's urban policy that also surfaced during the Gezi Park protests of 2013. Similar to

that which unfolded in Sulukule, public opposition to Gezi Park's redevelopment was partially founded on the AK Party's plans to build a neo-Ottoman structure in its place – there, mimicking the Ottoman-era barracks that had occupied the site until 1940. But in tracking how consolidated design is being used in attempts to reinvigorate city spaces in Istanbul, Somersan and Kırca-Schroeder also hint at a separate dynamic of the *TOKİ* project, one that has yet to be discussed. In coordinating the Sulukule redevelopment project to a unified aesthetic scheme, the *TOKİ* project is a prime instance of integrated aestheticized space at work in Istanbul. The redevelopment's neo-Ottoman flourishes need to be understood in these critical terms as well as those of a rekindled imperial hegemony. This is not just because they disclose the presence of consolidated urban planning in Istanbul, but because the design-intensive aesthetics of the *TOKİ* project are being met-head on by a more populist design scheme next door in Karagümrük: the Sulukule hip-hop ghetto.

Figure 4: The integrated neo-Ottoman design scheme of TOKİ's renewal project in Sulukule

Stephanie Paine, with permission

If Solomon (2005) writes that resistant rap in Istanbul reflects the city's common culture of globalization – one shared by the rich and the poor – then in Sulukule this mutual participation of cosmopolitan life takes the shape of an incorporated and heavily-symbolic design sense that intends to add place value to urban localities. The hip-hop scene is naturally nowhere near as integrated an aesthetic space as the capital-intensive, neoliberal redevelopment project, but in the areas where Sulukule youth do have control over their environment they have begun to concoct an urban aesthetic that is just as unified and expressive, and thus similarly included within the principles of capitalist place-making.

Having explored how Sulukule has been reimagined as a hip-hop ghetto in discourse and on bodies and social media, I look in the last section of this chapter at how this phenomenon unfolded in the Sulukule Children's Art Atelier, the public local space most susceptible to youthful influence. After five years in operation in three locations in Karagümrük, the Atelier closed in September 2015. A month before, the founder of the Atelier, Funda Oral, had told me why this had to happen: alongside diminishing financial and social support, the facility's educational impetus had waned over the years; freestyle rap workshops and hip-hop dance lessons had effectively taken over the program (F. Oral, personal communication, August, 2, 2015). Oral told me that the children "only want to do hip-hop," and that the Atelier hadn't been founded for those purposes alone. No one had supported Sulukule rap more than Funda, but operating a community practice studio had become unsustainable, both for her and her team of volunteers. As I thought guiltily about my own infrequent English lessons, I looked around the Atelier and realized that Funda was right: the kids did only want to "do hip-hop;" hip-hop imagery was everywhere. With free reign over its interior decoration, the young rappers and dancers had redesigned the Atelier to reflect their collective vision of Sulukule.

The rising popularity of hip-hop was especially pronounced on the Atelier walls. Figure 5 offers just one example. The bottom of the image shows a banner from the Atelier's early years; in

youthful fonts and colors it announces the *Sulukule Çocuk Sanat Atölyesi* (Sulukule Children's Art Atelier) and advertises the classes it formerly held: percussion, dance, music notation, drama, guitar, violin, a reading and writing club, and English. The banner was professionally printed, and features the insignia of the European Capital of Culture and Istanbul Technical University, former bene-factors of the Atelier.

Figure 5: Collage of banners of the Sulukule's Children's Art Atelier, edited together

Stephanie Paine, with permission

Above it is another, newer banner, this one spray-painted on a bed sheet in graffiti-style characters. Most noticeable is that the word *çocuk* (child) has been left out of the newer banner – adolescents taking exception to themselves maybe – but also evident is a stark

contrast in lettering. It is true that the juvenile offset font of the lower banner expresses the Atelier's presence through visual style as well as words, but the top banner more heavily relies on the packaging of symbolic content to express local culture. Whereas the older banner uses words to communicate the Atelier's original educational program, the newer banner relies on aesthetics to express the Atelier's hip-hop orientation in later years. By institutionalizing a personal aesthetic popular among attendants, then, the upper banner constructs an identity for the Atelier founded on hip-hop style, not just the concept of "young people learning in a youth center." The discrepancy between these two banners is a telling example of how design-intensive production – the tendency in advanced capitalism for products to derive value not from physical materials but from their packaging of symbols and information – can cause shifts in popular urban cultures just as it does in the production of goods and services. The shift to design-intensity indicates "a fundamental and thoroughgoing design and aestheticizing of life in the city" (Krims 2007: xxxiv). Similar to how the *TOKİ* project relied on a neo-Ottoman design scheme to instigate urban regeneration in Sulukule, local youth base their new urban identity on the expressive power of aesthetics. Even as the Sulukule's emergent and rebellious political identity challenges the *TOKİ* project, it constructs a distinctive ghetto founded on hip-hop iconography and design, and thus depends on the same tenets of integrated aestheticized space.

CONCLUSION

While aggressive capitalism can and too often does oppress vulnerable inner-city populations, its dynamics of urban place-making can also trigger new cultural expressions and consolidate existing local values around the aestheticizing of localities. This phenomenon is evident in the acculturation of hip-hop by Sulukule youth, particularly in their interactions with the imagined and place-based concept of "the ghetto." When Forman writes on hip-hop's "refined

capitalist logic," or Krims on the "design-intensive" construction of urban place, neither means to suggest that these spatial dynamics limit or restrict the free articulation of local values. Hip-hop market niches and integrated aestheticized spaces in fact rely on expressions that are local in origin and significance in order to create and market value. All to say, although the Sulukule hip-hop community is full of personal idiosyncrasies and subversive political intentions, its rebellion is not so profound as to reject the capitalist principals of urban place. While urban renewal has destroyed much of their neighborhood, it has not marginalized Sulukule youth out of prevailing models of place construction or artistic communication. To the contrary, it has encouraged an aestheticized turn to the local that celebrates the neighborhood even as it highlights its social dislocation and frayed urban fabric. Instead of indicating a wholehearted rejection of capital accumulation in Istanbul, then, the rebellious urban identity of young Sulukule rappers and dancers may well signal their cautious entrance into the formal circuits of urban production.

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