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Entertainment & leisure consumption in Istanbul

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CHAPTER

5

**“SO DO WE SPLIT OR KEEP ON
GOING?”**

**MAKING SENSE OF ISTANBUL’S
LEISURE CONSUMPTION &
ENTERTAINMENT**

“SO DO WE SPLIT OR KEEP ON GOING?”

V. 1. SO, WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

One Saturday night, as I sat to wrap up this concluding chapter, I was suddenly distracted by a series of blasts coming from outside. I was studying at my apartment on *Yeni Çarşı Caddesi* or literally, New Market [or Bazaar] Avenue, that hardly qualifies as an ‘avenue’, but which is instead a thin, one-way street climbing from the conservative *Tophâne* neighborhood in the south to the northern *Galatasaray Meydanı*-Square on the axial *İstiklâl Avenue*. One of the only five streets where vehicular traffic is allowed to intersect with *İstiklâl Avenue*, *Yeni Çarşı* is usually swarmed by nightgoers climbing up the slope to reach the entertainment heartland of Istanbul.

But the noises that distracted me did not belong to those pedestrians who may have had a bit too much to drink, or taxis and other vehicles honking impatiently and angrily –since *Yeni Çarşı* is constantly congested at nights. And no, the noise was not emanating from the neighboring *Eski 45’lik*, the former seedy rock bar with a cult following which was recently ‘upgraded’ by the same management, into a bouncer-gated music club for richer folks, repetitively playing 1960s, 1970s and 1980s Turkish pop nostalgia. The source of the noise was not the neighboring *Zoe Teras* either, the roof-top restaurant with an excellent view of the historical peninsula and parts of Bosphorus, which later re-styles itself into a night club with ‘Eurotrash’ dance music blasting until the first light of the morning.

The noise rather belonged to a large group of protesters who were fleeing from *Galatasaray* square and the stones and bottles they were hurling towards *Çevik Kuvvet*, the aptly labeled ‘Agile Force’ special riot police unit. As I carefully looked down, I saw the police firing rubber bullets and tear gas canisters on the large group dispersed all around *Yeni Çarşı*. The protesters temporarily managed to set up a barricade made up of large municipal garbage cans, fortified with pieces of steel, wood and pieces of concrete. They then ripped off the promotional banner displaying Beyoğlu district’s mayor (from the ruling *AK Parti*) Ahmet Misbah Demircan’s smiling face and set the whole barricade on fire using the banner as their torch.



Police first contained themselves by only keeping firmly on their ground, firing rubber bullets and tear gas canisters and using their shields to protect themselves from the hurled stones and bottles... But when the TOMA (*Toplumsal Olaylara Müdahale Aracı*, [Armored] Intervention Vehicle to Social Events) showed up, slowly creeping down from Galatasaray square, the 'balance of power' clearly shifted to the advantage of the police. TOMA quickly put the fire down by spraying pressure water and then easily demolished the barricade. *Çevik Kuvvet* police officers initially hiding behind the TOMA suddenly started to run after the protesters who tried to find their way out of the thin avenue. Most protesters ran towards *Tophâne* one of the only two available directions and I wondered if that was indeed a 'smart' choice or not. I remembered that during *Gezi Park* protests months ago conservative pro-*AK Parti* residents of *Tophâne* had severely beaten up anti-government protesters, easily identifying them by their gas masks or helmets. Ten minutes later, police slowly started to climb back up towards the square, putting their truncheons away.

I resumed working on my chapter, but about an hour later, I was distracted again by the sudden onset of blasting noises down below. This time over, I saw two entirely different groups of people, both made up of what apparently looked like civilians, clashing with one another. One group was indeed made up of mainly *Tophâne* youngsters and older guys with wooden sticks in their hands. I even identified one of the older men as a small shopkeeper a devout Muslim whom I knew from years ago. They were ferociously attacking the other group by loudly yelling "*Allah! Allah!*" the highly motivational 'attack hymn' dating back to the Ottoman army and also currently in use by the Turkish Armed Forces, TSK.

They were clashing with youngsters who had covered up their faces with red pieces of cloth. Those masked in red were 'armed' by wooden and metal sticks as well as pieces of stones and bottles. I was under the impression that the more numerous *Tophâne* guys would be the clear winners, but I was surprised to see that the masked youngsters finally managed to push them all away, deep down towards the southern neighborhood and severely beaten up some among them who could not escape as quickly. Moments later, I then saw the red-masked youngsters, climbing back up, with victorious gestures, yelling slogans sympathizing with the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (*Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi*, DHKP-C) the clandestine radical left wing organization whose history dates back to late 1970s. Some of those radical leftists smashed the



advertising billboards as they climbed up towards *İstiklâl* and yelled highly 'sacrilegious' slogans such as: "Fuck *Tekbir!*"¹. This was indeed a highly 'controversial' slogan even for a Marxist-Leninist group aiming to gain popularity among the urban poor.

In order to understand and contextualize what had happened, I turned on my internet connection and I learned from facebook that all those clashes were part of the protests against *AK Parti* government's recent legislative move to seriously limit internet access by the citizens. One particular post drew my attention. It was written by a Turkish-Jewish student of mine who recently graduated. He is a very talented House music DJ who had earlier invited me to a Beyoğlu club where he was doing a DJ Set that same night. Regarding what had transpired, he wrote in his facebook page that, although he "took part in the *Gezi Park* protests in June 2013", he thinks that "[...] now in 2014, organizing a protest march on Saturday is 'idiotic' or 'counterproductive' to say the least". He argued that "Beyoğlu's entertainment establishments depend predominantly on the sales during Friday and Saturday nights, the two peak nights of the entire week". He then added below sentences:

"[Prime Minister] Tayyip [Erdoğan] is already against 'us', we fellas who drink and dance and party... [a]nd thus 'his' police is very eager to usurp the occasion in order to scare away simple folks who are just on the lookout for some fun and relaxation around the avenue [...] Listen up, man! I am not for street fighting anymore... We already made our point and that should suffice. We should now look for smarter ways to fight against 'this dictatorship' rather than 'stab' the entertainment life of *Beyoğlu*. Come on people, thousands of hard-working, decent and honest folks make their living out of this avenue... Do you think it makes sense to clash with the police now? Let's not do this anymore, and certainly not on Saturday nights... Some of my friends posted stupid things like: 'Arrrgh, I missed the smell of that tear gas... Gosh, my muscles atrophied 'cuz I haven't been clashing with the Pigs for months (...) Yeah, I'm now howling, 'Cheers to you, Tayyip!' [Şerefine Tayyip!], sitting atop a barricade! Whooo-hoo! Well fellas, if you are doing this clash thing as some sort of pre-clubbing fun, a kinda 'warm up' before you head later past midnight to your favorite joints, let me tell you that they would either be shut down entirely or be totally deserted by then... You shoot yourself in the foot, and hurt others while doing it... 'They' are being smart: 'They' chase 'us' away, what

¹ *Takbir* is the Arab-language term for the full phrase; "*Allāhu Akbar*". It is usually translated as "God is [the] greatest," or "God is great."



‘they’ see as ‘rowdy alcoholics’... Dudes, we also need to be smart, real smart!... Fun is our source, our fountain... *Gezi* was all about fun... It was fun and also disproportionately witty [*orantısız zekâ*,² a reference to the purportedly disproportional use of force by the police during the protests] ... Let’s keep the fun and wit going, people... Protecting ‘our’ fun, though, is no laughing matter, it is serious business. Let me tell y’all that much...”³

What he wrote certainly seemed to make a lot of sense and I was convinced even more when I decided to take a quick stroll outside. *İstiklâl* did not look anything like its usual Saturday-night self. The avenue where normally “you almost literally ‘swim’ amidst the sea of night-goers and are struck by the diversity and multiplicity of the scenes and personalities” as I had described in Chapter I, looked more like a ‘war zone’, with scattered debris, hastily sprayed graffiti, smashed shop windows all around. Ripped posters and placards were swimming amidst the dregs of the tons of water that were sprayed by the TOMA of the riot police. Internet connection on my cell phone informed me that numerous *Beyoğlu* visitors, sadly including a six month old baby, were hospitalized because of the excessive tear gas used by the police. I was happy to learn later that the baby was doing fine, but *İstiklâl* Avenue, usually colored by street musicians and happy party-goers was almost fully deserted, looking like an unusually ‘wet’ ghost town.

What I have witnessed over the course of a few hours totally altered the image I had painted at the beginning of this book, on Chapter I. *İstiklâl Caddesi* the axial pedestrian thoroughfare in *Beyoğlu* district, the current and historical entertainment heartland of not only Istanbul, but also entire Turkey -if not the geographical region of the country looked ‘reconquered’ by the riot police and night-goers were nowhere in sight. It was lacking all the street musicians, dancers and puppeteers performing on this glittering avenue, connecting the central *Taksim* square to *Tünel* circle, each of which are transportation hubs and social meeting points on their own.

So this whole sad scene made me wonder: “Where do we go from here?” It brought to mind the common, almost reflexive comment one would utter around this time. Towards the later hours of the night or even in early morning, when groups of friends, now very tired after hours of banqueting, dining, chatting, dancing and listening to music ask one another: “So, do we split, or keep on going?” Mostly, at least some members split, taking taxis or walking away to call it a night... Some make one final stop at *Bambi*, the

² Orantısız zekâ as a notion was coined and gained widespread usage during and after *Gezi Park* protests. For example, one of the hastily assembled hagiographic *Gezi* books bears the name, *Gezi’den Orantısız Zekâ* (Disproportional Wit by Gezi, Serkan Akkuş (ed) Sınırsız Kitap, İstanbul, 2013.

³ H.B. allowed me to quote his facebook posting but kindly asked me to refrain from giving a direct reference to his profile page. I made a loose translation of his original, Turkish-language posting in March 2014.



legendary fast-food place on *Taksim* square. Some others proceed to after-hours clubs and establishments dotting the side streets. Those too tired or lazy for the after-hours places still find it difficult to split completely and walk to nearby friends' houses for a few more glasses and laughs. They burn the midnight oil by 'domesticating' their hitherto commercially catered entertainment. I believe at the beginning of 2014 when I am writing the closing sentences of this book, this is the type of the question one needs to ask: "So, do we split, or keep on going?"

This dilemmatic question actually works in a number of levels and layers that could all be connected to the main arguments of this book. The question could be read from a whole array of tones, ranging from the literal to the metaphorical. Is Istanbul's entertainment (already feeling threatened by the creeping and lurking 'threats' of excessive corporatization, commercialization, touristification and family-oriented hygienization) now facing the heavy-handed regulation by an increasingly conservative and authoritarian government and municipality? Are international and national commentators right? Especially when they claim Istanbul's modern lifestyles, and thus at least most visible forms of leisure consumption and entertainment are being threatened by the Islamic conservatism of Erdoğan? Does the ruling party have a secret agenda that is being quickly translated into actual, selective and punitive regulation over leisure consumption and entertainment, especially those viewed as sinful, rowdy and out of the middle-class family mainstream?

Is Turkey becoming more like Iran? Once securing enough electoral support, will Erdoğan turn Istanbul and Turkey into a stronghold of Islamic heritage tourism and a brand-city (*Marka Şehir*), a global city based firmly on neoliberal industries and services, minus the drinking and partying components? Is there some truth to the notion that, instead, Dubaization is the new, dominant trend? Will *Beyoğlu* and Istanbul be further gentrified and touristified, whereby only the educated, rich elites and international tourists will afford to be admitted into and consume at overly priced establishments that are at once ghettoized and spatially clustered at some earmarked neighborhoods?

And, at the more metaphorical level, should I keep on continuing to analyze this further? Or should I say the final word, or at least place the theoretical 'comma' which is explanatory enough and analytically sound? I decided with all the above complexities, I should 'split' and give the



picture as of 2014. In order to answer all the above questions and provide a sufficient analysis, I need to note that although all of them are certainly legitimate, they could not possibly be answered only by looking at the here and now. All above developments and trends are actually frozen circumstances in time that can only be made sense of once the melody of time will be sung at them. In this sense, the two seemingly contrasting vignettes at the beginning and at the end of this book, that of the shining and diverse İstiklâl, and that of the beaten up, tired and soaking wet ghost town smelling of tear gas are part and parcel of the same *longue durée* historical sociology of Istanbul's leisure consumption and entertainment. Certainly, they are not meaningless or insignificant, but as Braudel would remind us, should be seen as *poussière de l'histoire*, the 'dust of time' that should eventually settle and form a symptomatic sediment of sorts that could be read in more meaningful, comprehensible and lively ways. If seen from this vantage point, as I tried to develop in this book, they could whistle, or sing to us so that we can do the analytical dance as we split.

V. 2. GOING AROUND THE SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL LIMITATIONS

From a distance, all the above scenes and complexities certainly appear striking. Indeed, Istanbul has definitely deserved that all the stage lights would turn towards her. Both as the 'Cool Metropolis' (*Newsweek*, 2000) or the embattled city claimed by Erdoğan and *Gezi Park* protesters alike, Istanbul made the headlines and initiated numerous academic evaluations. However, if one were to look more closely and identify individual sub-processes within this whole transformation, the colorful variety of persons and institutions; the entanglement of consumers and producers of leisure and entertainment; global cityness as discursive practice as well as legislative and managerial practice are nothing new and similar cases could be seen elsewhere in the globe. Neither are the renovation and upgrading of the run-down inner city sections into magnets of investment and attraction; and speedily commercializing and corporatizing of such hitherto marginalized urban spaces (Habraken, 2004; Schmidt, 2004) are nothing new.

I had also noted in the Chapter I, that comparable- changes and routines were also observed in numerous other cities including New York, London, Vancouver, Amsterdam, Berlin, Melbourne, Hong Kong (Mee Kam Ng, 2002; Fainstein, 2008; Novy, 2012) among many others. In most such



metropolitan settings, or global cities to be more exact, dilapidated and central parts of town are fast becoming –again– centers of attraction, as nodal points or strips housing; retail trade, dining, entertainment, leisure consumption and a whole array of diverse assortments of establishments. Prior, during and after such trends of renewal of centrally located towns, buildings, streets and city furniture were being renovated and upgraded, the mainstream current within them increasingly securitized, privatized and corporatized.

Viewed from this global comparative lens, Istanbul's leisure consumption and entertainment could be conceptualized as local reflections of global trends. However, conceived as such, this narrative does not do justice to the historical specificity and experiential heritage of Istanbul as a metropolis of leisure consumption and entertainment. What I have thus proposed, instead, was to conduct a *longue durée* reading of Istanbul which would allow one to clearly note the context of its numerous breaks and continuities. In such a depiction, global processes and locally concrete forms are highly entangled and depend on another.

V. 3. REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this context, my key research questions were as follows: **(a)** How could we to comprehend and contextualize the demands by various types of consumers? How were such demands fulfilled by various types of producers who supplied such entertainment and leisure consumption-oriented services? In short, I try to look at the dynamics of supply and demand in entertainment and leisure. **(b)** How did the state and other actors regulate and mediate between leisure consumption and entertainment supply and demand? How did regulation and mediation mechanisms provide the broad contours within which such activities were operating? How were the mechanisms such as; support and promotion, provision of employment opportunities, assignment of different levels of respect and prestige, taxation, deciding on legal and/or informal frames of employment and entrepreneurship, limitation, banning and penalizing deployed variously by governmental and non-governmental forces? **(c)** How were 'ethnic' difference and diversity functionalized, and then later on, commodified? How was this functionalization taking place in terms of consuming the 'Other' as an object of interest? How various ethno-religious groups were socially, economically and culturally channeled to distinct leisure consumption and entertainment-oriented vocations and market niches?



V. 4. EMBEDDEDNESS, TEMPORALITY & SPATIALITY TO THE RESCUE

In order to answer above questions, I argued that leisure consumption and entertainment are shaped by the interaction among the consumers and producers. I learned from Kloosterman and Rath (2001; Rath, 2007) that this interaction is always embedded in wider structures, and always mediated. That's why I also focus on regulators and mediators and why I address the wider social, cultural, political and economic structures that shape leisure and entertainment. In this sense leisure consumption and entertainment could be fruitfully deployed to contextualize the political and socio-cultural processes that make entertainment a site for the proliferation of leisure and entertainment and the articulation of ethnic and class relations and of nation-state building. In this sense, leisure and entertainment are a reflection of a particular set of social relations within which the state and other actors intervene. What is to be added is that especially in the Reform Ottoman and Republican periods, leisure and entertainment assumed an "instrumental role in structuring people's overall experience of modernity" (Miles, 1998:19). They provided a launching pad of particularized identity and an individually customized way of experiencing a macro-historical process of monetarization (or commodification) that are otherwise de-personifying.

I have espoused a historical approach, learned from Braudel's *longue durée* and mobilized the analytical dynamism and interpretative power of numerous other approaches that one could loosely classify under 'history movements'. By 'new history movements' I place those approaches as diverse as history from below, history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) and women's history. Those movements could be seen, as I also noted in Chapter I, as the ensemble of numerous followers of Le Goff's battle cry to establish a 'new history' (*nouvelle histoire*) who want to go beyond the orthodoxies of a Rankean account of history 'as it is' or as a constellation of supposedly objectively reflected events (Le Goff 1978; Le Goff & Nora 1974).

This is why I have not followed an approach that would limit itself with a non-analytical recounting of 'events' expressing either sparks or darker moments of Istanbul's leisure consumption and entertainment scene. On their own and taken out of their temporal and spatial dynamics, these up and down points would only be interesting in the sense of an assembly of trivia. Most studies on leisure consumption and entertainment in Istanbul



unfortunately relied on such narrowly defined lines of reasoning sprinkled with descriptive statements. Events placed within such a-historical and socially un-anchored, almost reified narrative of unconnectedness would be misleading to be used as demonstrators of the 'history as it is'. Although I certainly do not want to go into the complex corridors of a far general discussion on the ontology and epistemology of knowledge, one should certainly also problematize the very possibility and desirability of developing an 'objective' reflection of history as it is.

I refrain from such larger and grand debates and propose instead, that events should be seen as 'dusts of history' as Braudel (1958) would have called them, in their unreliable oscillations. When the focus is fixed upon individual events, the complexity and diversity of factors that shape up their emergence are overshadowed. Instead, I have focused on key transformations and longitudinal sediments left behind those events and sought to provide a meaningful reading of Istanbul's historical sociology of leisure consumption and entertainment. Certainly, when trying to steer away from *histoire événementielle* (history of events, or the *courte durée*, short span, the hitherto dominant archenemy of *longue durée*) I also tried to watch out for the trap of over-theorizing some supposedly trans-historical constants. Such naturalized constants such as an 'age-old' tension between conservatism and modernity shaping up the ebbs and flows of restraining and relaxation of leisure consumption and entertainment are easy to take for granted especially from within an Orientalist reading of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey.

In this sense, numerous events could be portrayed as symptomatic of the ebbs and flows of a 'macro-historical' scene dominated by the pains of oscillating between the polarized political, social and cultural forces of the traditional and the modern. Facing up all these challenges, what I proposed and attempted to develop was a multi-layered perspective à la Hopkins that hopes to speak not only to the concentrations and clustering of leisure and entertainment establishments in Istanbul's space, but also to the continuities and breaks in Byzantine, Ottoman and Republican leisure and entertainment.

V. 5. PERIODS, ACTORS & PROCESSES:

The approach I have developed in this book, provide more comprehensive analytical tools that acknowledge both the historical trends as they are solidified into social mentalités and group identities pertaining both to



consumers and producers, administrative practices by the central and local state as well as numerous other regulatory agents and the ever-changing role of the mediators of different stripes. In developing my periodization, I relied on the complex and dynamic interconnections among the active forces such as consumers and producers as well as mediators and regulators by contextualizing them in their spatial and historical axes. Below, I provide a quick recapping of the major temporal periods I have identified and the findings that are gathered in my study. I classified under each period, the findings associated with my research questions.

V. 5. 1. Byzantine and Classical Ottoman Istanbul until the 19th Century:

In these two periods, the state made its regulatory role felt quite actively on the leisure consumption and entertainment. The imperial authorities and administrators helped directly establish the hierarchical stratification of the clusters of the human resources in leisure consumption and entertainment. The state took this role quite seriously since the showing off of the imperial strength sustain socio-cultural boundaries and promoting subjects' allegiance all depended on such a regulatory role. Apart from the state, religious authorities had additional regulatory and mediating roles. Not only because of the close linkages between the imperial administration and the clergy, religious authorities were active in allowing or condemning and penalizing diverse forms and actors of leisure consumption and entertainment.

During the Byzantine and Classical Ottoman periods, mediating role of the religious authorities were complemented by what I called 'softer' mediators. Intellectuals and chroniclers had key impacts on shaping and influencing taste choices of consumers who were socio-culturally residing on the upper, middle and lower levels of the society. There were clusters of producers who were lined up to cater to higher and middle/lower levels of consumers, respectively. The lower brow consumers were made up of lower echelons of the middle classes as well as the lower classes.

From the Byzantine to the Classical Ottoman periods, the management of diversity worked along the 'ethnic' lines mostly as an administratively (regulatorily) and socio-culturally sustained boundaries. The vocational organization of entertainers under various categories was implemented by taking ethno-religious clusters as the basis, and as such this was the element



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of continuity in both periods. In the Byzantine period, 'ethnic' Greeks were mostly residing on the top slice of entertainers, while 'ethnically different' Roma were either placed on top ('higher-brow') as skilled 'exotics' or at the bottom as slapstick ('lower-brow') entertainers. There was an increasing weight of 'ethnic' diversity during the Classical Ottoman period, most chiefly because of Ottoman *millet* system, the administrative ethno-confessional clustering of groups within the empire. This type of ethnic division of labor became more complex and was also entangled with *lonca* (trade guilds) system. With the continued impact of the Byzantine regulatory practices and the additional impacts of Ottoman millet and lonca systems, leisure consumption and entertainment were social arenas whereby different 'ethnic' or 'ethno-religious' groups were channeled to specific vocations and provisions of various leisure and entertainment services.

V. 5. 2. Reform Ottoman Istanbul, 19th Century-1920:

In this period, the regulatory role of the state in leisure consumption and entertainment continued on. While previous, state-centered concerns such as exhibiting imperial prestige and wealth, sustaining social boundaries and promoting allegiance in the populace dragged on, an important novelty was the introduction of administrative, regulatory as well as cultural policies of westernization, modernization and rationalization. The reformist state administrators used up central as well as modern municipal practices, in order to underwrite the leisure and entertainment as social arenas where such grand transformations were concretely implemented.

Religious authorities as well as mediators also played important roles in bridging supply of and demand for leisure and entertainment. With their direct regulatory impact receding due to westernization and modernization, the religious authorities instead clung on their social role as mediators, morally approving or disapproving new, modern leisure consumption and entertainment trends. The reform period's intellectuals as well as the modernizing media took on new roles as part of a harder mediation, by promoting the acceptable cultural forms of consumption and fortifying the grand split between *alafranga* and *alaturka* stripes, the sides along the symbolic rift separating those endorsing western styles (*alafranga*) and the native, traditional, local ones. Intellectuals, various publications including books and the press, in this sense, were critically important in trying to dictate what the society should do in terms of modernizing itself. Their stands as a mix of success and failure.



In the Reform period, groups of consumers were diversified further and other dynamics of symbolic/cultural rifts, as illustrated by the supposed opposition between *alaturka* and *alafranga* forms, started to underwrite such added divisions. With the advent of ‘cosmopolitans’ as producers and consumers alike (cosmopolitans certainly fortified the ranks of the *alafranga*, but they are a tad different from them in their more immediately direct acculturation within the western styles), the already diverse human scene of leisure consumption and entertainment got more complex. In this period, among the producers, modern forms of entrepreneurship emerged and became stronger. Those new forms of modern entrepreneurship started to replace older forms of artisanal or state-led production of leisure consumption and entertainment.

During the Reform Ottoman period, with the introduction of territorial, constitutional citizenship and –formal– equality between the Muslims and non-Muslims, previous lonca and millet-based stratifications as well as state and religious regulatory bans and limitations were eased. Reform legislation and more permissive societal attitudes allowed Muslims to become more active in entertainment sector and this situation helped flourishing of more flexibility in crossing over among different groups of entertainers. The management of diversity as such, kept the historical role of the Roma and the non-Muslims as key groups as producers. Roma and the non-Muslims were functionally exocitized, but different than the previous classical period, they started to be commodified in the modern sense of the term.

The grand split between the *alafranga* and *alaturka* signified the gaining of power by ‘Occidentalism’ within which especially Western leisure consumption and entertainment forms were seen as expressing distinguishing and prestige-assigning functions. In this new cultural environment, non-Muslims were transformed into a different sort of ‘Other’ and were thus assigned to one side of a supposedly civilizational rift.

V. 5. 3. Republican Istanbul, 1920-1980:

In the early Republican period between 1920 and 1950, thus after the establishment of the Turkish Republic under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the state’s role shifted from mere reformism to a radical implementation of westernizing, modernizing and rationalizing policies.



The new, Turkified nation and its masses were to be trained to find their own dormant, almost naturalized potentials. They were also to be trained in order to teach them to appreciate the high cultural taste of western forms of leisure consumption and entertainment. The period opened up with the multi-party democracy in 1950 and continuing on until 1980 that was marked by the rise of peripheral Fordism and international Keynesianism, promotion of mass consumption in Turkey- implied a transformation of the role of the regulation. In this second period when rural to urban migration speeded up, regulators moved away from unbending ideological enforcers of top-down cultural policies, towards more 'technical bureaucrats' conditioned by populist policies in line with multi-party parliamentary democracy. While the central regulators clung on to their formal, authoritarian façade, they developed a more relaxed attitude letting various informalities sprout in actual practices.

The mediators initially mostly followed through the heritage of Reform Ottoman period in terms of assigning westernization as the most important tendency, but also by transforming this tendency into a mandatory program of top-down cultural modernization. The mediators in this period were thus 'harder' in their zeal as well as their powers aided by their monopoly over the society, sustained by the Kemalist fiat. In the period between 1950 and 1980, the role of the mediators was to be altered significantly. The mediators were fragmented along political lines and socio-cultural attitudes they were promoting. This fragmentation was at once done alongside various lifestyles targeted by the mediators or caterers of the very same lifestyles. This period was also marked by the democratization of access to alternative forms of information, beyond those official publications; development of media, in term of spreading of mass circulation daily newspapers as well as specialized magazines.

In this period, Turkey witnessed the radical transformation from a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional empire to a homogenized nation-state. In this new environment, the sheer demographic weight, social visibility and cultural participation by the non-Muslims took a dive. Now, both as consumers and producers their situation receded. They were to be replaced by their Muslim or Turkish *kalfa* (journeymen) or *çırak* (apprentice) who bought off their establishments at significantly reduced rates. This radical transfer of human, economic, cultural and social capital empowered the increasingly critical status of not only Muslims or Turks, but also the Roma, who have capitalized upon their longitudinal presence within the sectors.



Processes of diversity and ethnicity at play were almost entirely shaped by two key societal dynamics: The dramatic decimation of the non-Muslim ethnic minorities; and the rural to urban migration and the out-migration to Germany and other European destinations. While the non-Muslim minorities were being erased physically, the professional and cultural standards they had set up within the leisure consumption and entertainment trades were still firmly in place. This was certainly a continuation of the previous assignment of the *alafranga* format in leisure consumption and entertainment and non-Muslims as ‘model communities’. However, they were at once targeted due to their purported moral degeneration and excessive cosmopolitanism. The Roma, on the other hand, continued to be socially judged by inner-Orientalism aided by their mainstream portrayal as timeless, fun-loving, highly talented entertainers with supposedly ‘natural’ proclivities.

V. 5. 4. The Global City: 1980s-2010s

The period opened up in 1980, thus in the aftermath of the military coup d'état, radically transformed the role of the state regulation in consumption, significantly altering the parameters of the previous national developmental and populist paternalist period of 1950-1980. The speedily disintegrating ideological orthodoxies of Kemalism were relaxed even further. Pro-market, managerial, neo-liberal and conservative policies put their heavy stamp on the regulation of leisure consumption and entertainment. Those policies were complemented by efforts to promote Istanbul as a global city, which is also a brand on its own.

Within this new neoliberal, global environment, the globalizing slices within consumer groups; the middle class and mainstream consumers as well as marginalized and peripheralized lower income consumers were catered to by producers lined up accordingly. The policies to promote Istanbul—the global city of Turkey of perhaps of the entire region—with simultaneously available ‘authentic’ local characteristics, helped significantly upgrade the infrastructure for finance and service industries and leisure consumption and entertainment sectors alike.

After 1980, the hitherto homogenizing leisure consumption and entertainment forms supported by the state and promoted by the mediators were facing up to the rise of new and hybrid forms. This has significantly elevated the role of global and cosmopolitan lifestyles



speedily adopted mainly by the urban middle classes. In this sense, the increasing commodification of cultural practices and the changing role of the mediators stamped the post-1980 period. The new mediators were promoters of new trend lifestyle liberals, reflexive progressives and *engagé* nostalgics as main groups of mediators were no longer located alongside various political ideologies. They were instead, flag-bearers of new and cross-cutting lifestyles and ethics of leisure consumption and entertainment.

Processes of diversity and ethnicity of the post-1980 period were largely determined by two key societal dynamics: the Kurdish migration from the Southeast Anatolia, and the increasing globalization / trans-nationalization of the population. Those new cosmopolitans and their highly educated, 'white Turk' allies (those upper-class, educated citizens symbolically pitting themselves against the poorer, less educated 'black Turks' as discussed at Chapter IV) were the main groups peopling the upper echelons of the laborscape that was at once at the forefront and thus on display. Kurds and other provincial migrants significantly altered the consumer base and the laborscape of leisure consumption and entertainment in Istanbul. The 'ethnicity' of Kurds and migrants were mostly 'functional' in terms of placing them on the 'back' and 'bottom' of the laborscapes. Roma, as an ethnicized group depended on their prolonged role as key producers of leisure consumption and entertainment. However, escapist and alternative spaces they had created and the spatial clustering they had established were destroyed by the neo-liberal and conservative urban policies. Immigrant women from the former Socialist bloc, eastern / central Europe and Central Asian countries were brutally 'ethnicized' and criminalized within leisure consumption and entertainment. The 'Other' as the erotic exotic was to be hired by the entrepreneurs in the sector. Such transformations went hand in hand with the rise to power of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's *AK Parti* with a neo-liberal / conservative agenda that moralized, stigmatized and criminalized a large array of leisure consumption and entertainment forms. This is certainly in line with the longitudinal tensions residing within the Ottoman-Republican scene of leisure consumption and entertainment.

V. 6. ENTERTAINING THE PUBLIC, MOLDING THE CITIZENRY AND MANAGING DIVERSITY:

Beyond the above findings underlined at each historical period, I would now like to shift the emphasis towards larger theoretical conclusions



that could be drawn from my study. Those could at once be charted by revisiting some key notions identified at Chapter I. There, following Elias and Dunning I had identified leisure consumption and entertainment as part and parcel of a wider set of human activities and practices that provide publicly expressed forms of “pleasurable excitement” (1986:63). Those forms, as my study confirm, not only provide individual self-expression, but also work as vehicles of sociability as well as opening up paths for a ‘healthier’ way of venting social energies.

Leisure consumption and entertainment in this sense appear as fulfilling the social need for establishing a reliable basis of ‘routines’. Such symbolic and ceremonial practices of leisure consumption and entertainment in my case work as conduits of joining and participating in the ‘social’ as a general category and into more particularized, group-based identifications. Certainly, leisure and entertainment also appear as de-routinizing enclaves, serving as conduits for relaxation and carnivalesque transgression of otherwise suffocating norms, conventional rules and pressures of the political order and conservative social dynamics.

In these senses, the historical case of Istanbul confirms all the main characteristics of the ‘spare time-leisure-entertainment continuum’: The representational dimension of mimesis in leisure consumption and entertainment allowed Istanbulites to mimic otherwise harder forms of social mixing as well as boundary setting in ‘real’ life. Istanbul’s residents both mixed with one another, transgressed boundaries, but also kept symbolic boundaries intact or even made those even more steep. The hedonic dimension of enthusiasm prevalent in entertainment served escapism by allowing city dwellers to enjoy being lured towards the different, the exciting, or the exotic. All those are certainly part and parcel of inventing and sustaining ‘Otherness’. Finally, the cathartic, or the therapeutic dimension allowed the citizens to express their otherwise suppressed feelings of emotion or disgruntlement.

In terms of the important historical continuities underlined in my study, in each period leisure and entertainment worked as sites of molding the imperial populace and later, modern citizenry. As such, leisure consumption and entertainment were very critical sites for ‘social engineering’ whereby allegiance to the state was molded. In numerous cases, leisure consumption and entertainment functioned as ways to promote –and even dictate– cultural homogeneity but also at other



occasions, fortify heterogeneity and forms of symbolic distinction. My study seems to have pointed out to the historic continuity between traditional forces (religious, conservative, restrained etc) versus modernization-oriented forces (cosmopolitan, hedonistic, 'naughty' pleasures, use of substances and the like).

Beyond such intricate workings, in each period, leisure consumption and entertainment have shown their longitudinal impact over mediation and regulation. Struggles with and negotiations over what the regulators – with the help of mediators- were willing to allow versus what they aimed to constrain, were experienced on the social sites of leisure consumption and entertainment. They then, appear as key sites –not only reflecting but also actively helping construct power relations. Regulation and mediation also shaped the basic parameters of what is decommodified or commodified in terms of leisure and entertainment. While in some cases, the imperial and nation-state based central state provided such goods and services 'for free' (decommodification) to –as pointed above– shape/educate the populace/citizenry; in more market-oriented periods, commodification of leisure consumption and entertainment were part and parcel of larger, pro-market policies of promotion or revitalization

Finally, I should note that the study of each period demonstrates that diversity is among the indispensable building blocks of the social 'tenement' where leisure consumption and entertainment resided throughout the historical time I have covered. As such a key element, diversity appeared under various layers of clothing, either with confessional, ethno-religious, class or status-group based textures. Leisure consumption and entertainment took on the role of providing for the consumers various types of 'others' with whom they could pair up on their journey. Consumers in this sense were on the look out for the entertaining others to consume, or with whom to consume. Within the spaces of leisure consumption and entertainment, they certainly found such persons. Those types of otherness supplied the feelings of the cathartic or carnivalesque relaxation. Also, as conduits of purgative self-expression, entertainment establishments were the very locations to get to know, socialize with the authentic, exotic and the erotic others. These types of socializations and regulatory make ups within which they are embedded are at once the occasions and places to fortify, underline, challenge or even transgress boundaries between many forms of the 'self' or 'us' and 'others' or them..



V.7. SERIOUSLY, THOUGH... WHERE TO, NOW?

As I sat down to write this concluding page, I am once again haunted by the same question the nightgoers ask one another after an entertaining yet tiring session of sociability: “Ok dudes, what do we do now? Do we split or keep on going? If we keep on going, where to, now?” The moment I am putting down these lines, is not the exactly time period of the day I had guessed it would be. I thought I would write the final page as the first rays of the day would blissfully emerge in the horizon, after an entertaining yet tiring all-nighter of writing... As a former consumer and now a non-drinker of alcohol, I certainly knew the joys of all-nighters as both social outings and solitary insulations yielding into intellectual production. Yet, instead of the early morning, I am writing this final page in one fine Sunday afternoon. The afternoon on March 30th, 2014 to be exact...

In one of the most divisive elections in Ottoman-Republican history, we have cast our votes in municipal balloting. Painted usually as a critical election separating Islam-inspired conservatives and those opposing them, I am certainly worried for a number of reasons, political causes being the determining ones. Yet, I am also hopeful. Both my worries and hopes are also anchored in the leisure consumption and entertainment scene I attempted to analyze in this book. And as I write this concluding page, I do not yet know if my worries or hopes will be seconded. In this sense, the question “do we split or keep on going?” is again, an apt one for me, in this instance... We can “call it a night”, in the literal and metaphorical senses alike. Or we can “keep on going”... But if so, “where to?”

First of all, from the *longue durée* perspective that I have mobilized to comprehend the continuities and breaks in Istanbul’s leisure consumption and entertainment, I now know enough to argue that you can never call it a night, in the definitive, more morbid sense of the term. Certainly, you can call it a night, on that particular night, but you always go back out. Calling a night on that night is, in the Braudelian usage of the term, is merely one tiny *poussiere de l’histoire*, one singular speck of history. Municipal balloting on this fine lazy Sunday afternoon may result in numerous endings, but that would not change the fact it is after all just one dust out of the countless other dusts of historical time. Whatever the result might be, the answer to the first part of the question cannot be to call it a night for good. No form of conservative, moralistic and heavy handed suppression of the leisure consumption and entertainment would suffice to kill of those



nights forever... As sociologically meaningful social formations, leisure consumption and entertainment will exist forever, under various formal or informal forms, no question about that...

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But the second part of the question, “if we keep on going, where to now?” is indeed “a whole different question”... To answer that, let me tie this back again to the autobiographical instance of me, writing this final page on that fine Sunday afternoon. Not the least because this book has been autobiographical in many senses, covering last decade and a half of my life. I can even underline the fact that, with regards to that elongated section of my life journey, *I am definitely calling it a night*.

But less metaphorically and literally, as I am writing down this page, we are getting ready to go over to my cousin's place to watch the election results. There, there will be friends ranging from medical doctors, tango instructors, TV series and theater actors, university professors, musicians, engineers, businesspeople and others. Some friends who confirmed their participation would be citizens of Turkey, both native and naturalized; some others would be shorter-term international visitors as well as expats. On our way there, some will take taxis while some others will use public transport and meddle with Istanbulites of various other socio-cultural stripes, beyond our perhaps professionally and ethnically variegated background which is still socio-economically limited to an upper-bracketed coalition of “white Turks,” “cosmopolitans” and chic ethniques. However, in one way or the other, all these people, including those we crosscut with, will all “keep on going” in various other directions. They will continue to have fun, to entertain themselves and others, listen to music, consume alcohol or have fun without it... They will all go to different directions and places, but all of them will consume leisure and have entertainment...

So, no, we don't split, we keep on going... “Where to?...” Well, to be perfectly honest, that depends entirely on “where you have been, earlier...” So, I guess “I'll catch you down the road”, as the narrator in the movie, *Big Lebowski* said before the final credits rolled up... “I'll catch you up down the road...”

