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Otonostalgias and Urban Apartheid

Abstract

A widespread nostalgia for the Ottoman period is visible in numerous urban regeneration projects proliferating across the Middle East. This article explores how Ottoman heritage in Palestine and Istanbul both propels oppressive socio-spatial schemes and forms the basis for social movements formed to contest these schemes. In Istanbul, the banner of urban regeneration has been used to expropriate and displace local populations in a context marked by rapidly escalating real estate values and huge profits realized by developers allied with an entrepreneurial political class. The politically-driven heritagization occurring in Istanbul uncannily resembles the efforts aggressively pushed forward by an alliance between Israeli settlers and the government in Israel/Palestine – a form of class cleansing as opposed to a predominantly ethnic one targeting Palestinians. In response, Palestinian heritage organizations are endeavouring to rehabilitate old cities in towns and villages of the West Bank, in an attempt to improve the economic and social livelihoods of Palestinians and help them resist colonization.

Keywords

Istanbul
Hebron
Ottoman heritage
urban development
urban regeneration
heritagization

This article explores two distinct uses of Ottoman heritage in Palestine and Istanbul to shed light on a paradox of urban politics today – namely, the fact that the language of heritage can be mobilized both as a way to ‘sugarcoat’ gentrification and other oppressive socio-spatial schemes, and as a rallying cry of social movements that help legitimize and solidify new alliances.¹ The Ottoman-built heritage, and especially the architecture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is being rehabilitated in a number of cities and towns across the Middle East.² Despite their common historical referent, however, these proliferating urban-regeneration initiatives intersect with vastly divergent political projects.

Since the beginning of critical heritage studies in the 1980s, a burgeoning body of scholarship has unravelled the deep ties between heritage and nation- and

state-building,³ as well as, even if less so, the role of heritage in the colonial enterprise.⁴ More recently, scholars have noted the correlation between the mounting heritagization of cities across the world, and the gentrification processes that go along with the rapid commodification of urban heritage and urban (sub)cultures.⁵ In a recent essay, Michael Herzfeld and I have shown that this correlation is not at all an uncontested one: heritage can be equally mobilized to support *and* to challenge neoliberal and neocolonial projects of urban restructuring.⁶ In the present article, I examine this ambivalent place of heritage through the lens of what is a pervasive nostalgia for the Ottoman period in both Palestine and Istanbul, showing how heritage can be put to use as an effective technique of both urban governmentality and counter-governmentality.

Defending the Right to the City in Palestine

The occupied Palestinian territories have witnessed a revival of their Ottoman-period built heritage, in the post-Oslo period following the 1994 creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), a semi-autonomous Palestinian governing body. There are several non- and semi-governmental organizations carrying out projects of historic conservation and urban revitalization that have changed the face of towns and villages in the West Bank.⁷ These projects usually combine the restoration of the Ottoman- (and sometimes Mamluk-) period architecture with infrastructure renovation (sewage, street lights, pavements, etc.), the provision of social housing and other services for the urban poor, as well as socio-economic development initiatives. The key objective is to improve infrastructure and livelihoods so as to make people stay in what are dilapidated neighbourhoods often threatened by occupation and colonization, and so half-emptied of their original inhabitants. The broader horizon is the preservation of the vanishing socio-historic landscape of Palestine.

The old cities of East Jerusalem and Hebron provide good examples of such heritage projects that have as their goal welfare and urban regeneration. Both counter a very specific form of military-spatial and historico-discursive appropriation. Both old cities were occupied by Israel in 1967, and yet were not included among the urban areas that Israel handed over to the newly-created PA under the terms of the Oslo Accords. Of course, Jerusalem has always played an enormous symbolic role in both Judaism and Islam (as well as Christianity), and in both nationalisms too. Against international law, Israel unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem as part of its 'eternal and undivided' capital well before the Accords, while the Old City of Hebron remained under full Israeli military control following the special agreement of 1997.⁸

History, politics and lives in these cities are marked by two iconic religious monuments, or rather compounds, around which both urban fabrics have developed through time, and which were transformed in the twentieth century into key sites and symbols of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at large. These are Jerusalem's Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs [Figure 1]. These holy sites are superimposed one upon the other or even coincide, making this 'shared heritage' an intractable dimension of the conflict. Although these monuments are either mosques or have been used as such for centuries, they remain key to Jewish religious traditions because of their ancient Israelite roots. As such, they are considered to be 'Jewish heritage' not only by the Israeli religious-nationalist right, but also by the government, which has designated them as Israeli national heritage sites.⁹



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Figure 1: Palestinians going through the Israeli-run checkpoint in front of Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs.

With the more or less explicit support of the Israeli government and the political establishment, both old cities have been the target of an aggressive colonization campaign by the religious-nationalist fundamentalist settlers' movement in the name of what settlers perceive as their immutable rights to their Jewish heritage. Settlements have grown in the post-Oslo years, and the movement has become increasingly institutionalized to the point of reaching the highest echelons of government – in spite of the fact that the international community considers the establishment of settlements in occupied territories illegal under international law. In Jerusalem and Hebron, settlers aim to take over not only the historic areas but, indeed, the very terrain of what are now mosques but were in antiquity two key Judaic shrines – especially Jerusalem's Temple.¹⁰ It is no surprise that the last two intifadas or Palestinian uprisings were ignited by very prominent Israeli politicians visiting the Haram al-Sharif, these visits being powerful statements of Jewish sovereignty over this sacred site and also clear signs of its incremental assertion.¹¹ For the settlers, the ancient location of the temples and the presence of Jewish holy sites such as the Wailing Wall (a remnant of the ancient wall surrounding the Temple compound), coupled with the fact that Jews had lived in the area in the past, reinforces their belief in rights of land ownership in the present; they experience settling Zion and Judea as a re-enactment of the biblical story. For the settlers, the archaeological sites dotting the settlements substantiate this imagined continuity between the biblical land of Israel and the settlers' present as the very grounding of Jewish-Israeli claims to Palestinian lands.¹² Moreover, architects have helped perpetuate this linkage – particularly by building in a neo-biblical style,¹³ whose fabricated historicity resembles that of Istanbul's renewal projects discussed later in this article [Figure 2].¹⁴

In Jerusalem and Hebron, what settlers and Israeli institutions officially present as 'restoration' is, in actuality, often a reconstruction at best. Good examples of this heavily manufactured heritage are Jerusalem's City of David and the new Jewish Quarter. In the City of David archaeological park, located directly outside the old city, newly-built residences for settlers, which have displaced Palestinian residents, blend in with the ancient architecture on display in the open archaeological trenches. This development began shortly after the 1967 occupation, when a large majority of the ancient structures, including those still in good condition, were torn down to make space for the new 'revitalized' Jewish Quarter adjacent to the Wailing Wall. In order to create a plaza in front of the Wall, Israeli authorities razed to the ground the old, so-called Moroccan quarter and evicted all its inhabitants, while burying three of them under the rubble. According to architect and heritage expert Simone Ricca, the author of a monograph on this topic,

the expression 'restoration of the Jewish Quarter' [...] has been consciously used to describe instead the *construction of a new built environment for a new group of residents*, and to imply 'restoration of the Jewish sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter' according to a partial reading of the diverse history of a multiethnic city.¹⁵

The idea of the Israeli political elite was to 'create an ancient mythical and eternal Jewish capital'.¹⁶

It is perhaps not surprising that one of the means Palestinians have used to resist this aggressive colonization *by heritage* has been heritage itself – namely, a series of urban regeneration projects. Since the 1990s, several



Public Domain.

Figure 2: The settlement of Beit Romano in the Old City of Hebron amidst Palestinian houses. It consists of a yeshiva for Jewish religious studies and a military camp of the Israel Defense Forces. The pictured new addition was built recently in a neo-traditional style.

Palestinian organizations have devoted themselves to preserving the country's vernacular built heritage and its traditional Arab-Islamic architecture. Their work sets itself apart from the regional tradition of colonial archaeology, focusing exclusively on the biblical and pre-Islamic past. Paradoxically, this tradition endures in spite of the emancipatory narrative of its protagonists in the practices of the PA heritage agency, which has inherited the structure of the old colonial-period department of antiquities as well as colonial laws and regulations.¹⁷ Instead, these new organizations took up the legacy of Palestinian heritage groups active in the 1970s and 1980s, when collecting folklore became a nationalist practice and a seedbed for nationalist mobilization.¹⁸ But it is in the post-Oslo period that organizations carrying out urban rehabilitation proliferated, at a time when Palestinian civil society not only expanded dramatically but also became professionalized and adopted developmental goals (in contrast to the political objectives of older groups) with the unprecedented influx of especially US and European donor money in support of so-called peace- and state-building processes.¹⁹

What is striking is that most, if not all, of these new heritage projects turned into platforms for an effective form of anti-colonial spatial resistance.



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Figure 3: A road barricade in the Old City of Hebron.

For example, in Hebron, where I lived and conducted fieldwork in 2005–06, the presence of a number of colonies right in the centre of the Palestinian old city has triggered the militarization of the area and a deep fragmentation of its socio-spatial geography. The urban space is crisscrossed by fences and checkpoints separating the Jewish settlers from Palestinian residents who are subject to routine violence and dispossession [Figures 1 and 3].²⁰ The Palestinian-led restoration of the city's magnificent Ottoman and Mamluk architecture has worked precisely against this form of urban apartheid and the urbicide stemming from the occupation. Indeed, the most successful Palestinian effort to combat the presence of the settlers in Hebron thus far is the urban revitalization project, initiated in 1994 by the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee (HRC).

Historically, the Old City of Hebron was comprised of several separate, densely populated neighbourhoods or *harat*, which appear to have been in place since the Mamluk period, the golden age of Hebron.²¹ The city was divided along kinship lines, as well as ethnic, religious and professional lines, and it had a Jewish and a Christian quarter. While the Christian quarter has disappeared from local memory, the Jewish quarter has been 'revived' by settlers who claim to be the descendants of the older Jewish community. As a consequence, they have cordoned it off from the indigenous Palestinian population, thus turning once-fluid boundaries into thick walls. The oldest parts of Hebron are irregular clusters of tall houses developed organically throughout the centuries around meandering, narrow courtyards (*hosh*). More recent buildings stemming from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century spread around the old fabric of the city and in between the various quarters. These free-standing, two-storey constructions show the characteristic Levantine late-Ottoman central hall (*liwan*) plan and elaborate street façades with large windows. These homes were formerly the residences of the late-Ottoman upper classes, signalling what scholars of Arab-Islamic architecture term the modernization of urban, and especially private, space that began in the mid-nineteenth century.²²

By the mid-1990s, most Palestinian inhabitants had left the old city, leaving only about 400 people to exist in a virtual ghost town; as a consequence, abandoned buildings were easy prey for settlers. However, over the last twenty years the HRC has restored and helped repopulate large tracts of the decaying urban fabric of the old city, which is now on Palestine's Tentative List for World Heritage nominations and earned the HRC several heritage awards for this work.²³ The fact that several thousand Palestinians have now moved back, thus arresting the further expansion of the colonies, is testament to the HRC's original tri-part goals: to preserve this distinct architectural heritage; to revive the old city; and to counter the expansion of the Israeli settlements.²⁴ To achieve these ambitious goals, HRC's architects and engineers not only restored abandoned houses, but they also offered them as subsidized (i.e. nearly free) housing to impoverished families. Over the years, this heritage work was supplemented by a number of developmental initiatives designed to support the local population in an environment that was becoming increasingly violent and dangerous after the explosion of the Second Intifada. In this way, 'development' has become crucial to how the HRC understands its mission – which has expanded to involve improving living conditions, combating poverty, providing jobs to local populations, boosting the dying economy of the old city, and encouraging greater social cohesion. Importantly, human rights advocacy moved to the forefront of HRC's mission, as evidenced by the fact that they established a legal unit to document and raise awareness about human

rights violations in the city, and to help Hebronites find ways to respond to their seemingly unrelenting dispossession and oppression. To sum up, this heritage organization has functioned as a social housing body, while at the same time providing a range of social services for the low-income families that now inhabit the old city, allowing them to stay put. Effectively, HRC has preserved not only the architecture, but also the 'Palestinianness' of the old city.

The story of the HRC tells of the inextricability of heritage and politics in a place like Palestine/Israel. Investing occupied sites with the mantle of 'Palestinian heritage' (including nominating them for inclusion on the World Heritage List as cultural properties of the State of Palestine) is not just a discursive move, but has meaning and effects beyond claiming such sites as legitimately belonging to Palestinians. In places like Hebron, the battle for heritage is a spatial battle that is fought street-by-street, building-by-building; here, the aim is to stop the eviction of Palestinians out of their historic towns. By restoring derelict buildings and bringing people back to live there, Palestinians are endeavouring to maintain control over (parts of) their cities and make them liveable again in the face of an advancing colonization.

Neoliberal Urban Regeneration in Istanbul

In Istanbul, too, historic neighbourhoods are being 'revitalized' in the name of the preservation of the city's Ottoman heritage. Also, in Istanbul the agents of urban regeneration use the language of both heritage-as-development and nationalism to frame what they do. However, heritagization in this global city is saturated with the logic of the market, which effectively works to displace, as opposed to rehouse, the urban poor. An example is the neighbourhood of Tarlabaşı, where one of many ongoing urban renewal or urban transformation projects (*kentsel dönüşüm*) is underway.

To those interested in a booming real estate market, the website of Istanbul's Tarlabaşı 360 Urban Renewal Project promises a highly profitable investment by mobilizing the language of heritage with its motto, 'in Istanbul, a scene of history comes to life' [Figure 4].²⁵ Investing a place with the mantle of heritage and reshaping it as such clearly produces economic value and capital accumulation. I haven't carried out an extended period of fieldwork in Istanbul, but on a number of visits in recent years, I was struck by the radically different meanings and declinations of urban renewal and the preservation of Ottoman heritage – preservation produced instead an extreme form of gentrification. When I visited the Tarlabaşı 360 on-site sales office in 2014, what caught my attention were not only the huge billboards with photographs of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the supporters of the project, which covered the entire expanse of the construction area [Figure 5], but also the ways in which the overarching sales strategy for potential investors and buyers was geared towards producing a 'heritage' atmosphere and the feel of 'living today within [*sic*] history'. At the same time, the project's understanding of historic conservation is markedly different from most heritage experts (e.g. UNESCO), because of its 'demolish-and-reconstruct approach', which at best advocates the preservation of façades and not, as is usual, that of whole buildings. Paradoxically, heritagizing Tarlabaşı means undoing the old while celebrating it, or rather, remaking the neighbourhood while claiming to be on a discovery path of its authentic spirit. In several ways – and in spite of the shared temporal reference with Palestinian urban rehabilitation in Hebron – the politics and techniques of the Tarlabaşı project are more similar to the religious Zionist settlers' approach: what is presented in Istanbul as restoration



Tarlabası 360 Urban Renewal Project.

Figure 4: Screenshot of the website of the Tarlabası 360 Urban Renewal Project.



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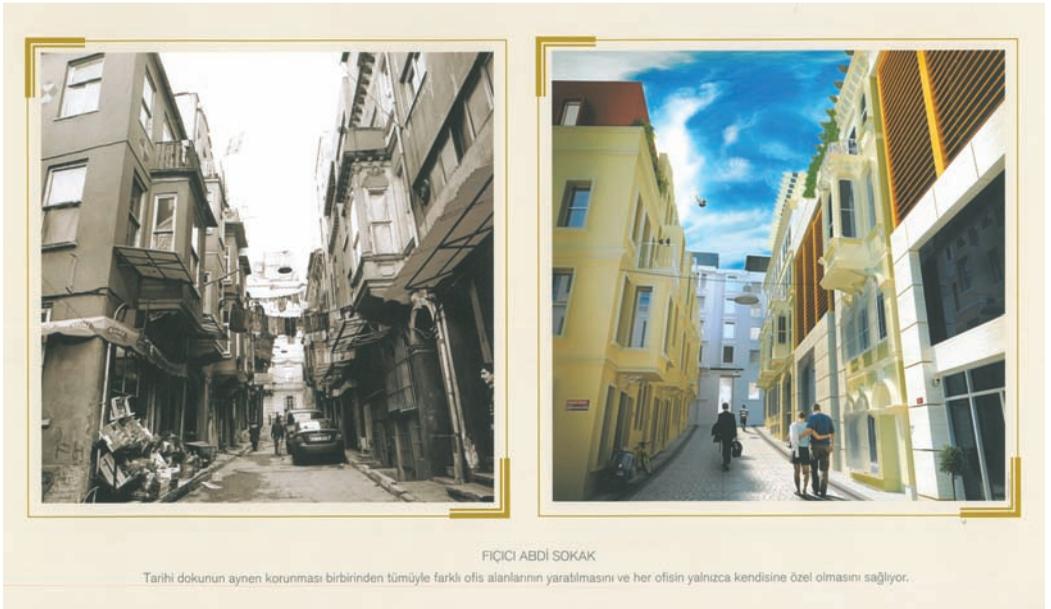
Figure 5: President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on the banner covering the front of the renewal area along Tarlabası Boulevard.

is in fact more of a reconstruction, or rather, the ‘construction of a new built environment for a new group of residents’.²⁶

It is interesting to further explore the peculiar temporality of this neoliberal historical imaginary. The Tarlabası 360 website focuses on history by articulating a teleological narrative that leads from ‘Tarlabası’s yesterday’ via ‘Tarlabası’s today’ to ‘Tarlabası’s tomorrow’.²⁷ The neighbourhood’s past is brought to life thanks to language, à la Jane Jacobs, which evokes a ‘neighbourhood of intimate, warm relations’ that are also ‘sincere’. This positive image, however, applies only to the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century neighbourhood, whose bow-fronted Levantine houses are ‘one of the best examples [of] Istanbul’s nineteenth century city modernization’, at a time when it was largely inhabited by the non-Muslim middle classes, and especially Greeks and Armenians. The pogroms and purges that led to these minorities’ dispossession and displacement in the 1940s and 1950s, are talked about only in terms of the neighbourhood ‘changing hands’ without further details.

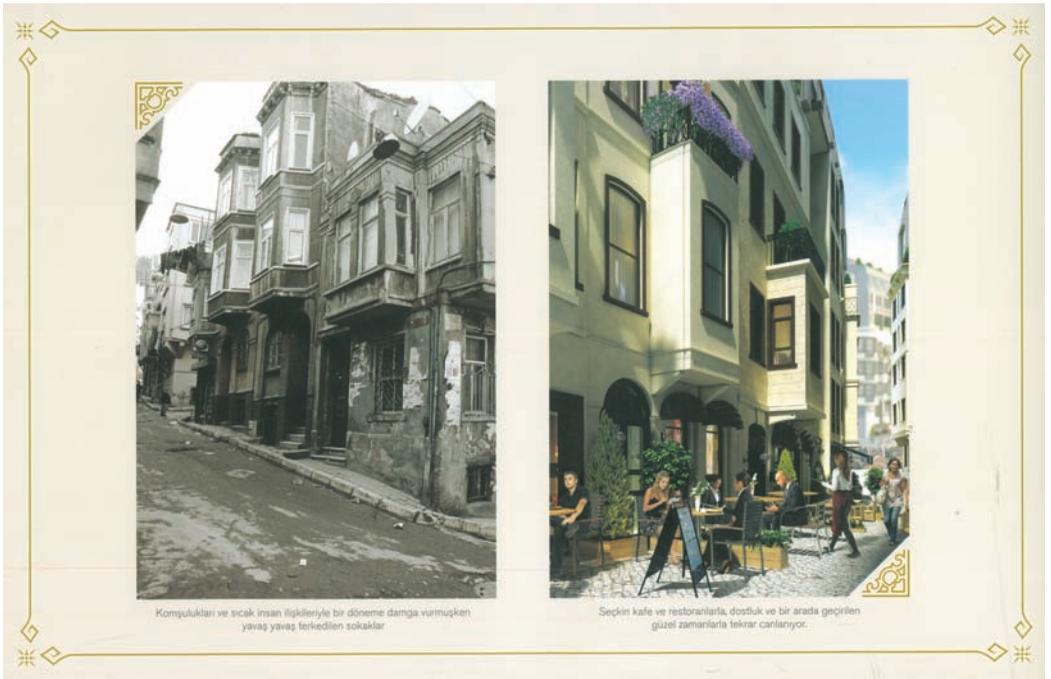
Unlike the positive portrayal of older (i.e. wealthier) residents, the poor rural migrants from Anatolia and the minorities that settled in after the formers’ departure are said to be ‘opportunists’ that ‘invaded’ the abandoned Tarlabası buildings, and used them ‘in unauthorized way[s]’ (because they divided the old homes into smaller units) and ultimately turned this commercial hub into a ‘passive part of the city’. In the project’s representation, these poorer residents are unambiguously depicted as not being able to properly take care of this heritage. Unsurprisingly, Tarlabası 360’s narrative fails to mention that many of these newer residents are Kurds, displaced from their homes in Eastern Anatolia due to the conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK. It also fails to mention that there are many Roma, sex workers and, most recently, Syrian refugees living in this neighbourhood.²⁸ It only emphasizes how such (present) ‘squalidity [sic] will never be [the neighbourhood’s] destiny’ because the Tarlabası 360 Urban Renewal Project – a public-private joint venture bringing together Beyoğlu Municipality with Çalık Real Estate corporation – decided to magnanimously intervene to ‘revive’ and ‘protect’ the neighbourhood, together with its ‘environmental, historical, architectural and cultural values’. In fact, the whole project is financed and run by a subsidiary of Çalık and the construction company GAP İnşaat, whose chief executive officer was until 2014 a close relative of President Erdoğan.²⁹ At the end of the project, GAP will own almost 60 per cent of this area of Beyoğlu right next to the central Taksim Square.

While fetishizing a painful, dissonant heritage, the Tarlabası 360 Urban Renewal Project (together with the local mayor) claims to be promoting local ‘social and economic development’, and to push for the involvement and ‘participation of the property owners, residents of the area and non-governmental organizations’.³⁰ In short, an important selling point is that the project will provide an economic uplift and new opportunities to improve the quality of life of residents. And yet, who are these residents? It is obvious that Tarlabası’s traditional residents are not the ones the developers envisioned inhabiting the newly-heritagized neighbourhood, judging by the multiple 3D online depictions giving potential buyers a glimpse of the future. In this idealized future, the streets are populated by a white, ‘Northern European’-looking, secular (interestingly there are no hijab-wearing women), entrepreneurial class – those best served in the minds of the developers to ‘enjoy’ the ‘elegant restaurants [...] art galleries [...] [and] multicultural atmosphere in an active lifestyle’ programmed by the project [Figures 6 and 7].³¹



Tarlabası 360 Urban Renewal Project, promotional brochure.

Figure 6: Before and after revitalization according to the promotional brochure of the Tarlabası 360 project.



Tarlabası 360 Urban Renewal Project, promotional brochure.

Figure 7: Before and after revitalization according to the promotional brochure of the Tarlabası 360 Urban Renewal Project.

Such rhetoric clashes with the reality of the current residents' evictions and expropriation, not to mention the heritage destruction.³² For many who are critical of the project (and even according to a 2014 negative pronouncement from Turkey's supreme court), the welfare of people is clearly not among the renewal project's goals. The construction company offered building-owners 42 per cent of their property or some other form of compensation in exchange for taking over title of the property. On paper, owners of small shares of these older buildings and tenants (over 70 per cent of Tarlabası's residents) have been offered rights of property in a new public housing development over 35km away, on the outskirts of Istanbul; however, these properties are not only too far from residents' workplaces, but also too expensive for most.³³ Nonetheless, the developers have publicly claimed that 70 per cent of the owners accepted the deal, while critics have protested that 'no financial compensation or other material support has been offered to residents affected by the transformation'.³⁴ They have also argued that the municipality did not intervene to mitigate residents' disadvantageous position. Those who did not comply were simply evicted. Even human rights organizations such as Amnesty International have denounced these evictions.³⁵

Large-scale evictions have been made possible in Turkey by a 2005 heritage law that is seen by critics as providing the legal basis for this kind of state-promoted gentrification.³⁶ Protected under Turkish law since the 1970s, historic areas were left largely undisturbed until the 2000s, when a rise in property values in the historic city centres gave investors a new avenue for profit.³⁷ Since 2005, the 'Law on Preservation by Renewal and Utilization by Revitalization of Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Properties' (no. 5366) has propelled speculative investments in historic areas with little regard for conservation plans; in fact, designating a neighbourhood as a 'renewal area' typically results in skyrocketing real estate values.³⁸ Sadly, the law authorizes mandatory evictions if residents do not agree with redevelopment plans.

Framed as 'conservation', this law exemplifies the paradox of destroying-while-preserving, in that it has ultimately allowed for the destruction of both tangible and intangible heritage in targeted neighbourhoods. The loss of intangible heritage is already a fact in other central areas of Istanbul, like Sulukule, whose historic Roma community and artistic life have been devastated by another urban regeneration project.³⁹ Tellingly, in Sulukule the project was run by Toplu Konut İdaresi (TOKİ), the state housing development agency, while in Tarlabası a private conglomeration with deep ties to (and joint profits with) the government is in charge. Ultimately, however, the state is as officially involved in the latter too, as TOKİ. As for the city's tangible heritage (in Tarlabası, 70 per cent of the buildings are listed), "'renewal" [...] invariably means demolishing the old built fabric, keeping the façades, or simulacra of the façades, and introducing modern and mixed-use built form behind the "old" facades'.⁴⁰ Thus, history is remade anew and displayed as 'stage décor' to meet the desires of the tourist industry, in what both UNESCO and the local Chamber of Architects have criticized as a 'cultural crime'.⁴¹ Interestingly, there is another parallel between Tarlabası's 'revitalization' and Jerusalem's neobiblical remaking, because in both cases spatial cleansing is the product of an alliance between governmental and non-governmental forces: private developers in Istanbul and settlers in Jerusalem.⁴²

Turkey's vast programme of urban transformation has played a crucial economic-cum-political role in reproducing the authoritarian hegemony of the Islamist AKP of President Erdoğan, by turning Istanbul's neighbourhoods into sites of capital accumulation, urban apartheid and surveillance – all

of which have occurred in the context of a broader shift towards a knowledge- and service-oriented economy.⁴³ While not exclusively a feature of AKP discourse and practice, neo-Ottomanism – the revival of the Ottoman past in built and other forms – provides an apt ideology in the service of neoliberalism as well as Turkey’s project of regional hegemony. Neo-Ottomanism has been employed as a key tool of Turkish soft power, particularly towards the Arab world; it also represents an important element in the articulation of AKP’s regional and global policy, a discourse articulated over a pluri-medial constellation of sites and practices (from TV soap operas to heritage development), presenting Turkey as simultaneously European, Islamic, moral, traditional and modern.⁴⁴ In spite of such claims to morality, the Ottoman legacy of multicultural tolerance and coexistence, as is clear from Tarlabası’s former self, has been hijacked by a public-private mafia-like organization to make profits while devastating people’s lives and heritage – and perversely, to dispossess ethnic and other minorities.⁴⁵ Heritage is used as a branding device to give Istanbul’s new urban spaces a kind of globally recognizable and marketable identity.⁴⁶ Indeed, such multicultural Ottoman heritage goes together with AKP’s mega infrastructural projects to ‘mar[k] Istanbul as a global city’.⁴⁷ It also ‘enhances [the] city’s attractiveness in the new global game and gives it cultural cachet in the competition for foreign investments and tourist trade’.⁴⁸

Istanbul’s urban renewal projects have sparked considerable resistance, culminating in the Gezi Park protests of 2013.⁴⁹ These grassroots demonstrations began when a group of environmentalists and local activists openly opposed the transformation of a key site of urban heritage, Gezi Park in central Taksim (just a few hundred metres away from Tarlabası), into a shopping mall-cum-luxury-residences to be housed in a reconstruction of the Ottoman barracks that had once stood there. Protesters assembled in the name of a certain idea of urban heritage – an organic, living one – against the grandiose neo-Ottoman plans of the government. NGOs and many heritage professionals have spearheaded the resistance, including going to the European Court of Human Rights and complaining to UNESCO in the case of Tarlabası. Istanbul’s Chamber of Architects has also played a pivotal role in trying to halt these development projects. While residents have taken part in the resistance, there is always the spectre of owners who, in attempting to maximize their personal gains, end up accepting the developers’ deal. Moreover, residents often do not speak the expert language of heritage, which remains the purview of professionals and something that they cannot control. In spite of such divisions, the protesting owners scored a victory in July 2014 when the Turkish Supreme Court ruled against their expropriation, and reaffirmed an earlier decision that the urban transformation project is not ‘in the common good’. Nonetheless, many buildings in Tarlabası have already been torn down, and the Beyoğlu Municipality declared shortly after the ruling that it had filed an appeal and that it was going ahead with the project.⁵⁰ Thus, the battle continues.

Conclusions

It is striking that the discourse of Palestinian heritage organizations shows similarities with the language adopted by Istanbul’s municipalities and private developers to make heritage into a value-producing device. Indeed, both appropriate a now globally-circulating discourse – what I call the ‘heritage-as-development language’ – that frames heritage and local culture as an essential

component of a more authentic, rooted life, and as something to be ‘brought back to life’ in order to stimulate sustainable socio-economic development.⁵¹ This discourse is promoted by international organizations like UNESCO and the World Bank. And yet, it can be mobilized to serve opposing goals.

In Istanbul, urban apartheid fractures the city, chiefly along class lines, but also according to ethnic divisions, with historic inner-city areas inhabited by the urban poor, Kurdish, Roma, refugees and migrants, being targeted for neoliberal urban renewal. There, the banner of historic conservation has been used to expropriate and displace the local populations – and to destroy their heritage – in a context marked by rapidly escalating real estate values and huge profits, realized by developers who are allied with an entrepreneurial local (and national) government. In Istanbul, speculation on real estate values and commodification are key aspects of the heritagization process. In contrast, this is clearly not the case in either Hebron or Jerusalem, where a Palestinian-led Ottonostalgia has worked over the past twenty years to counteract some of the worst effects of the occupation. Significantly, Palestinian organizations refer to the vernacular architecture that they preserve as ‘Ottoman-period’ and not ‘Ottoman’, and what they do cannot be equated with the profits-driven heritagization championed by the AKP – even though the nostalgia for a cosmopolitan time (before ethno-national strife) is present in Palestine too. In fact, in looking beyond aesthetics, AKP-driven heritagization uncannily resembles the efforts aggressively pushed forward by the alliance between the settlers and the Israeli government, a form of (predominantly) class cleansing as opposed to (predominantly) ethnic cleansing.

Places are not simply heritagized. They are heritagized by specific actors with specific stakes. These actors can be local or national governments, but also corporate actors, civil societies or local coalitions of concerned and committed citizens (and more often than not a constellation of such actors and forces). Transforming a place into (your) heritage means claiming control over it. But heritage can be mobilized to enclose urban commons and displace people as well as, crucially, to defend such commons. It is a site of governmental surveillance, colonial dispossession and capital accumulation, but it can also be turned around and become a platform for resistance. Ultimately, heritage is an important site of the struggle for the control of urban space and for enacting the right to the city.

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Endnotes

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23. For example, the HRC has won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1998, as well as the UN-Habitat World Habitat Awards in 2013.
24. See: <http://www.hebronrc.ps/index.php/en/about-hrc>, accessed December 9, 2015.
25. See: <http://www.tarlabasi360.com/en/>, accessed June 9, 2015. If not otherwise noted, the following quotes come from this website too.
26. Ricca, *Reinventing*, 12.
27. Located respectively on the left side, in the centre, and on the right side of the screen; see: <http://www.tarlabasi360.com/en/>, accessed December 10, 2015. If not mentioned otherwise, all quotes in this section come from this English-language website of the project. That there is an English-language website in addition to the Turkish and Arabic one points to the global spectrum of investors targeted by Tarlabası 360. The English- and Arabic-language sites were available at the time of research for this article. At the time of publication, only the Turkish-language website remains online.
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