



The politics of noise: Case study of the commercialization of Alaçatı Village, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Employing the concept of *biopolitics*, this study explores noise and policy inaction as normalizing technologies of the body and as market discourse through the commercialization of a small village. Noise in Alaçatı Village, which has been increasing since 2015, is analyzed here in terms of its constitutive processes, which include mechanisms of power and resistance. This approach shows how the normalizing technologies of the body, in conjunction with the inaction and contingency policies of biopower, result in the emergence of new power mechanisms with privatized and individualized modes of action. This study employed a qualitative method involving two months of participant observation and 45 qualitative interviews conducted in 2016 and 2017. The outcomes of policy inaction are as follows: (1) excessive noise is accepted and resistants become silent, (2) connections between noise supporters and resistants are lost, (3) responsibility for overcoming noise is individualized, and (4) de-territorialization and re-territorialization occur.

1. Introduction

Foucault defined *biopower* as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power” (Foucault Lecture of 11 January, STP, p. 1, as cited in Tribe, 2009). This concept provides tools for uncovering the constitutive factors that establish the conditions for biopower—the “exercise of power through power over life”—through biopolitics (Lazzarato, 2009, p. 110). Employing this concept of biopolitics, the present study explores three aspects of commercialization and biopoliticization processes: (1) noise as a normalizing technology of the body and as part of the constructive discourse of the market, (2) counterdiscourse and counterconduct against noise (*resistance*) (Venn, 2009, p. 215), and (3) the policy inaction of biopower (*municipalities*), which is another normalizing technology of the body. As such, this paper examines noise in terms of its constitutive actors and their power mechanisms and discourses, their resistance mechanisms, and their policy processes, which include the material, psychological, social, and cultural outcomes of policy inaction. (See Figs. 1 and 2.)

Here, noise is studied as “the absence of silence” (Bijsterveld, 2008,

p. 5) in the context of excessive nightlife noise. The range of noise is more than a mere “bargaining tool” in negotiations to restrict noise levels (Alaçatı Tourism Association Report, 2017). Rather, as will be shown here, when noise becomes a constitutive device of the market and creates a political arena in a small village, it also becomes a discursive subject. To investigate such phenomena, this study examined, as a case study, the commercialization and biopoliticization of Hacımemiş Street in the village of Alaçatı (Çeşme, İzmir, Turkey) over a three-year period.¹

Through these processes of commercialization and biopoliticization, Alaçatı village turned into a “wall-less” (Terranova, 2009, p. 241) space that “links inside and outside, public and private, work and leisure, and so on, through visible connections” (Mattsson, 2013, p. 125). This paper focuses on “governing spaces” such as villages, communities, or individual houses in terms of the production of public spaces and “how architectural boundaries between interiority and exteriority and public space and workplace are increasingly transformed into a pervasive transparency” (Wallenstein, 2013, p. 32). Instead of regulating by means of clear-cut spatial divisions, these spaces “let things happen” (p. 32). Therefore, in the present study, this space is conceptualized as a temporal milieu where touristic and thus commercial activities occur,

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¹ Until the 1980s, the main economic activities in Alaçatı were agriculture and commerce (Tezcani, 2010). The first gentrifiers started coming to the village in the 1990s, when locals were frequenting the village cafes. One early gentrifier described Alaçatı at that time as “a poor town composed of stone houses with flowing exterior.” According to one elderly resident, “It was too poor in here; I do not how to explain. God does not show those days; [now] everyone has sold their houses and left. I am here with my children.” As agricultural production, especially tobacco, slowed in the 1990s, tourism represented a new source of income and employment for residents. During the 2000s, the village rapidly commercialized, resulting in an increase in the population and new construction, all in the absence of local zoning regulations. Tezcani (2010) has described the process of gentrification at Alaçatı as being in its fourth stage in terms of the status of properties and the increasing population.



Fig. 1. A House with a resistant banner in the window.
(Source: Author, 2016.)



Fig. 2. One elderly woman was cleaning in front of her house.
(Source: Author, 2017.)

especially during the summer season. Examining this milieu enables us to understand different forms and outcomes that are revealed “at a distance of one body on another” (Foucault, 2007: 20–21, as cited in Terranova, 2009, p. 241). This milieu gives rise to contingencies that create new power structures of conflict, resistance, and convergence, and produces new power techniques that are localized and flexible (Terranova, 2009), given the lack of a coordinated regulator (inaction policy).

One mechanism of biopolitics is the governance of contingency, which is based on “the logic of the connection of the heterogeneous and it is not, repeat not, the logic of the homogenization of things which are contradictory” (Foucault, 2004a: 44, as cited in Dillon, 2007, p. 44). In the present study, such heterogeneous connections are presented as the diverse interests of opposing groups (noise supporters versus resistants). Yet, this contingency is based on freedoms rooted in the economic and political rights of liberal regimes. Dillon (2007) suggested that “rule through freedom as contingency becomes the continuous governmental management of uncertainty in liberal regimes of power” (p. 46). This

highlights the way public authority grants heterogeneous groups the freedom to act under contingency and then to intervene, govern, manipulate, or do nothing (*inaction*).²

Today, the village examined in this study has many bars and restaurants with open doors or rooftops that produce excessive noise, especially at night. As Hadfield (2006) noted, “The nightlife of cities has long provided an arena for resistance and release” (p. 259). The present study, however, does not take “nightlife” for granted; rather, it analyzes its construction processes, constitutive actors and forms, and outcomes. Thus, the main research questions of this study are as follows: How does noise become a technology of the body and a discourse of the market? How does the nonintervening conduct of biopower create new forms of power and resistance? What are the outcomes of biopower policy inaction in governing contingencies?

This study is based on qualitative research conducted in 2016 and 2017 aiming to provide a comparative approach and understand changes in biopoliticization and commercialization processes. Participant observation was conducted for two months in 2016, and 45 qualitative interviews were conducted in 2016 and 2017. These can be summarized as follows:

2016 (13 interviews + 2 months of participant observation)	2017 (32 interviews)
3 local villagers	13 villagers (including 3 from 2016)
President of the Noise Combatting and Environmental Protection Association (NFEPA),	- President of NFEPA - President of the Alaçatı Tourism Association - A board member of the Alaçatı Tourism Association
1 restaurant owner, 4 hotel owners, and 1 bookstore owner (all were against noise)	1 antique dealer, 1 accessory store owner, and 1 grocer (all were against noise)
President of the municipality 1 municipality representative	President of the municipality 1 municipality representative (the same as in 2016)

² A representative of the municipality mentioned that “the situation in Alaçatı is directly impacted by the nonintervention market policy [of the municipality].”

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