

ETHNOLOGHIA ON LINE

Ετήσιο Επιστημονικό Ηλεκτρονικό Περιοδικό
Εκδοτική Επιμέλεια: Ελληνική Εταιρεία Εθνολογίας
An Annual Scholarly Electronic Journal
Published by the Greek Society for Ethnology



Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul

Συγγραφέας - Author: Emilia Voulvouli

Πηγή - Source: Ethnologia on-line, Vol.: 1, Μάιος 2010 (σσ.: 1-30) - May 2010 (pp. 1-30)

Εκδοτική Επιμέλεια: Ελληνική Εταιρεία Εθνολογίας - Published by: The Greek Society for Ethnology

www.societyforethnology.gr

Επικοινωνία - Contact: societyforethnology@yahoo.com

Stable URL: <http://www.societyforethnology.gr/site/pdf/TheidentitiesofASG.pdf>

Δευτέρα 10 Μαΐου 2010 - Monday 10 May 2010

Τα άρθρα που κατατίθενται στο *Ethnologia on line* αποτελούν πνευματική ιδιοκτησία των συγγραφέων τους. Άρθρα του *Ethnologia on line* που μεταφράζονται ή επανατυπώνονται αλλού οφείλουν να παραπέμπουν στην πρωτότυπη δημοσίευση.

Articles submitted to the journal are the intellectual property of the writer. Translations or reprints of articles from *Ethnologia On Line* should refer to the original publication.

Το ηλεκτρονικό περιοδικό *Ethnologia on line* αποτελεί ετήσια επιστημονική έκδοση της Ελληνικής Εταιρείας Εθνολογίας και εκδίδεται παράλληλα με το έντυπο περιοδικό σύγγραμμα *Εθνολογία*. Στόχος του είναι να προβάλλει το θεωρητικό και επιστημονικό υπόβαθρο μελετών που άπτονται του γνωστικού αντικείμενου της Ανθρωπολογίας και της Εθνολογίας και να δώσει την ευκαιρία σε επιστήμονες εθνολόγους και ανθρωπολόγους άμεσης παρουσίας της δουλειάς τους

The electronic journal *Ethnologia On Line* is an annual scholarly publication of the Greek Society for Ethnology, distinct from its annual printed journal *Ethnologia*. Its aim is to stimulate and promote discourse in the disciplines of Anthropology and Ethnology with an emphasis on issues of theory and methodology, while also giving anthropologists and ethnologists a venue to present their work speedily.

ISSN: 1792-9628



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul

Emilia Voulvouli

Abstract

The present article presents an anthropological study of an urban protest group in a neighbourhood of Istanbul, Turkey. The mobilisation began following the announcement of plans for the construction of a third (added to the two already existing bridges) bridge over the Bosphorus Strait which would connect the Asian with the European shores of Istanbul. In opposition to the construction of the bridge, the residents of the European neighbourhood (Arnavutköy) in which foundations of the bridge would be placed organised an initiative called *Arnavutköy District Initiative* – in Turkish *ASG (Arnavutköy Semt Girişimi)*. After a brief presentation of the city’s development projects, the article focuses on the fact that the changes that took place in Istanbul were “beyond ordinary people’s control” which, I propose, is the key to understand the opposition against the construction of the Third Bosphorus Bridge. More than that, the article suggests that *ASG* is an urban group the particular character of which is formed by the identities of the individual participants, the people with roots in Arnavutköy (active participants, less-active participants, non-active participants) and the supporters with sympathies rooted in the ideals of the *ASG*.

Keywords: *ASG, Third Bridge, Istanbul, active participants, less-active participants, non-active participants, supporters of ASG, urban protest.*



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Introduction

The present article presents an anthropological study of a grassroots protest group in a neighbourhood of Istanbul, Turkey. The mobilisation began following the announcement of plans for the construction of a third (added to the two already existing bridges) bridge over the Bosphorus Strait which would connect the Asian with the European shores of Istanbul. In opposition to the construction of the bridge, the residents of the European neighbourhood (Arnavutköy) in which foundations of the bridge would be placed organised an initiative called *Arnavutköy District Initiative* – in Turkish *ASG (Arnavutköy Semt Girişimi)*. According to the participants of *ASG*, the reasons for their resistance concerned the destructive effects that the construction of the bridge would have on the area’s natural and cultural assets as well as on the life of its residents. In addition, the participants of the initiative make wider claims than the anti-bridge claim. Such claims concern, the architectural and developmental choices followed in the case of Istanbul and make wider demands which transform the initiative from a “we don’t want the bridge in our neighbourhood” to a “we don’t want the bridge in any other neighbourhood” group.

Given this, a brief presentation of the city’s development projects allows for the conceptualisation of the ‘Third Bridge’ as part of an “urban milieu in which change is inherent” (Moore 1996: 24). What is of interest to the present work is the fact that the changes that took place in Istanbul were “beyond ordinary people’s control” (Gulick 1984: 296) which, I propose, is the key to understand the opposition against the construction of the Third Bosphorus Bridge. As an extension of this point, I consider *ASG* as a protest-product of the effects that urban policies have on ordinary people. In a larger, perhaps more significant scope, this article presents the urban history of Istanbul as a path to understanding contemporary societal change and structure (Hobsbawm in Çelik 1993: 18). This choice is based on the premise, that the [urban] (my emphasis) environment, “is not only an ecological problem; it becomes a social (or even societal) problem at the end. It is a collective good that serves as a new medium in rearranging social relations between groups, thus rearranging relations of power and restructuring forms of social inequality” (Kousis and Eder 2001:25).

Given the above, I define the *ASG* as an urban protest group - the particular character which I had the opportunity to experience through participant observation. This character concerns the identities of the individual participants, the people with roots in Arnavutköy, the supporters with sympathies rooted in the ideals of the *ASG*. As Barbara Bender (1995: 2) suggests, “the way in which people – anywhere, everywhere – understand and engage with their worlds will depend upon the specific time and place and historical conditions. It will depend upon their gender, age, class, caste and on their social and economic



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

situation”. In her analysis, she stresses that there are various interpretations of and connections with the world according to people’s social identities, which are various and coexisting as in the case of ASG. These interpretations can be very fruitful in analysing and understanding the reasons of resistance in the case of the Third Bridge as well as in portraying the urban character of the initiative.

A few methodological remarks

My fieldwork in Turkey lasted eighteen months, eleven of which I spent in Arnavutköy. It began as a preliminary investigation mainly through the Internet. After the first meeting in Arnavutköy, I settled in the area, initially in a guesthouse and later on, in the house of one of my informants. I continued my research after I had left Istanbul by keeping in contact with my informants, receiving newsletters by ASG and keeping up emerging events related to the issue of the bridge through the electronic press. While in the field, the main methods of my data production were multi-levelled, including participant observation, interviewing, collecting news articles, travelling within the country, and keeping the classic ethnographic diary.

George Marcus’ (1995) multi-sited ethnography consists of techniques which he entitles ‘following’. In my research I engaged in, what he designates as ‘follow the metaphor’. His suggestions include observing the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors relating to the subject of study. Therefore, aside from the interviews, I followed the Third Bridge issue as it appeared in the popular press. Through the archives of the ASG, the Istanbul Chamber of Architects (*İstanbul Mimarlar Odası*), the electronic records of national and international press as well as the hardcopy national press, I collected articles referring to the Third Bridge issue. My aim was to identify the verbal practices and the rhetoric used to speak about the issue. In Marcus’ words, I tried to “trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media” (*ibid*: 108). Keeping a diary while I was living in Arnavutköy was not only for writing down things to remember for future reference but also to incorporate my informants’ biographical data in a more coherent way than the interview text. This technique helped me create an ethnographic space in which the issue of the conflict over the construction of the Third Bridge was seen - as possible as this can be - through the eyes of the people opposing the bridge.

The conflict

Arnavutköy (in English it translates as ‘Albanian village’) is located on the European shores of the Bosphorus Strait between Kuruçeşme and Akıntıburnu districts and the larger area of Ortaköy where the



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

first Bosphorus bridge is located and Rumeli Hisarı where the European pylon of the Fatih Sultan Mehmet bridge lays. It belongs to the Municipality of Beşiktaş and it is a separate *muhtarlık* (local administrative district), a few miles from Taksim Square, which is considered to be the heart of Istanbul. It is a hilly area, built amphitheatrically from the top of the hill to the edge of a high-speed road that separates the buildings from the sea and the Arnavutköy İskele (Ferry station).

The buildings are very close to one another and the very narrow streets often lead to dead-ends. Some of the streets are still stone-paved, a skill for which the Albanian residents of the area were famous. Arnavutköy has a reputation for its Ottoman timber houses, some of which still exist today contributing to the picturesque atmosphere of the area. However, in many cases the high cost of maintenance of such houses enforced the replacement of the timber parts with concrete or the complete demolition of the house, and their replacement with a modern construction.

Arnavutköy is not a typical neighbourhood of a global city as one might call Istanbul. There is a sense of closeness among the residents being expressed in their everyday activities. It is impossible to exit your doorstep without saying ‘hello’ to at least one person on your way to the grocer’s (*bakal*), green-grocer’s (*manav*), butcher’s (*kasap*), shoe-repairer’s (*ayakkabıcı*), fisherman’s (*balık satıcısı*). Many of the residents know each-other, pay one-another home visits, meet at dinners or at the famous coffeehouses of the area. In short, there is a small-town feeling, which has been nurtured and strengthened especially ever-since ASG was formed, because of participants’ efforts to raise consciousness for the Third Bridge issue at the beginning of 1998.

During that year, the Municipality of Istanbul (*İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi*) assigned the preparation of a traffic master plan for the city to Istanbul Technical University (*İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi - İTÜ*). The master plan was delivered in December 1998 and amongst other solutions for traffic congestion suggested an underwater tube tunnel to improve public transportation. The construction of a Third Bridge was not part of it whatsoever (İTÜ ve İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi: 1998). However, in November 1998, a month before the master plan had been completed and submitted, newspapers published that the Ministry of Public Works and Settlements was planning the construction of a Third Bridge which would connect the European with the Asian sides of Bosphorus. The bridge would rest in Arnavutköy (European side) and Kandilli (Asian side).

ASG was formed in 1998 immediately after the construction of the Third Bridge had been announced. Ever since, weekly meetings have been taking place, press releases have been printed, festivals have been held as well as dinners, tea-parties and educational panels on the effects that the bridge would have on the neighbourhood’s life. In addition, an oral history project of the area has been launched. All these activities aim at increasing the awareness of the area’s important cultural and architectural history as well as of the



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

destructive effects of the construction of the bridge. The arguments supporting this claim revolve mainly around the environmental effects of the bridge. Within the context of this discourse ASG involves concepts of global environmentalism such as sustainability, natural and cultural heritage preservation and it also incorporates issues of democratic participation and human rights.

Istanbul: Two Bridges and a Tunnel

Istanbul is the largest city of Turkey with approximately 10 million inhabitants (TURSTAT 2004), is situated at the north-western part of Turkey, lies between the Marmara Sea to the south and the Black Sea on the north and it is the only city in the world located on two continents, Europe and Asia. The original city was surrounded by seven hills with steep slopes and ample summits. The Bosphorus Strait separates the European west side of the city from the Asian east, and is the only seaway from the Black Sea to the Aegean Sea and the Mediterranean. The European side of Istanbul is also divided by a waterline, the Golden Horn, which divides Old Istanbul (south) and New Istanbul (north).

One third (36%) of the total population of the city lives in the new Asian side of the city whereas 64% (Bliss n.d) lives on the European side. The old city is well-known for its very old buildings in narrow streets and many important historical buildings such as Topkapı Palace, Hagia Sophia, the hippodrome, the Grand Bazaar and Istanbul University. However, the old city is also characterised by the squatter settlements or *gecekondu* (literally meaning ‘built overnight’) which surround it and consist 65% of all buildings in the city (Yalcintan and Erbas 2003).

Today the greater Istanbul area is home to manufacturing plants which comprise 35% of the country’s manufacturing industry. In addition, automobiles, concrete, cigarettes, fruits, olive oil, silk, glass, cotton, leather and pottery are produced in the peripheral areas of the city. Istanbul is the largest port in Turkey, thus shipping is a major source of income; the city is a main financial centre as well as a top tourist attraction (Bliss n.d.).

The Marshall Plan and the 1950s

In one of my first encounters with one with my subsequent main informants she told me:

“If you want to study our protest, you have to look back. We are not just reacting to the bridge. We are reacting to a series of policies implemented in this country,



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

in our city [Istanbul]. These policies started more than fifty years ago, when Turkey decided to receive US financial aid; you know, the Marshall Plan”.

I followed my informant’s advice. As Paul Durrenberger (2003: 276) maintains: “The states in serving the interests of corporations are unable to serve the interests of their citizens by protecting their environments or insuring their economic welfare. In democratic states, those in which citizens elect governments, this causes tensions. There is a tension between the interests of corporations and interests of populations. That is what we see playing out in the process of globalisation as numbers of people gather from around the world to protest wherever international bodies meet to discuss policies of world trade. If we want to understand these movements and their manifestations from protest to suicidal attacks, we must understand the system that gives rise to them”.

Even though Turkey had managed to remain neutral during World War II, it was included in the list of nations to receive financial aid under the Economic Assistance Act or as it was better known, ‘The Marshall Plan’. The plan was presented by the US Secretary of State George C. Marshall in 1947 as a solution to the catastrophic consequences from which the Europeans suffered due to World War II. It suggested that the US provide financial aid to stop hunger, poverty and desperation in Europe and revive a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions could exist. In other words, the plan aimed at stabilising the international order in a way favourable to the development of political democracy and free-market economies. Subsequently, the prevention of the spread of communism in Western Europe was also in the agenda. A result of that proposal was the Economic Assistant Act (EAA) signed by President Harry S Truman who enacted the plan (April 3, 1948). Almost all European countries, except for those of the Soviet bloc, were part of the plan, including Turkey. The American Congress appropriated \$13.3 billion for capital and materials to help rebuild Europe’s economy. Furthermore, the plan provided goods, created trading partnerships and extended the administration of the American policy into areas outside the United States (<http://loc.gov.exhibits/marshal>).

As Keyder mentions (1999: 12), the post-war period of national development in Turkey was heavily regulated by political decision making and relied on strict control over imports, foreign investment and international exchange. The Marshall Plan aid was supervised by the donors (i.e. the Americans) and as an article entitled “How to Do Business under the Marshall Plan” in Kiplinger Magazine (a publication for financiers) stated: “The Marshall Plan is very much a business plan” (<http://loc.gov.exhibits/marshal>). Hence the receiving country (Turkey in this case) had to be accountable to its donor, and in response, the Americans “created a plan for the construction of Turkish roads and contributed to the creation of the Turkish Highways Department” (Mango 2004: 44). The then Prime Minister Adnan Menders favoured



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

the construction of large boulevards – such as can be seen today in Istanbul - where private cars but not public transportation vehicles could circulate easily (Keyder 1999). His vision was that “Turkey would become little America” (Yalçın 2002).

During the 1950s Istanbul began to experience a rapid population growth due to internal migration and its architectural landscape started changing drastically. *Gecekondus* (see p. 7) began to mushroom and, by 1960, the city’s population had risen to 1,500,000 inhabitants, double the 1938 figure (740,000). Private car ownership increased too; many modern buildings began to be constructed and unplanned architectural growth continued until the 1970s. The number of cars increased and the need for new crossings over the Bosphorus began to emerge. For example, the Golden Horn Bridge was erected in 1974 and financed by Japanese Credit as part of a long-distance expressway network connecting Asia and Europe (Masashiro, Toshimitsu and Mitsubiro n.d.). This network included the construction of the two bridges across Bosphorus in the early 1970s and late 1980s. Even though the decision to build a bridge across the Bosphorus was made in 1957, when [Adnan Menderes](#) was the Prime Minister, the contract was signed with the British firm [Freeman Fox and Partners](#) for TL 303 million in 1968, and the construction of the first bridge started on February 10, 1970. It was completed in 1973 and the bridge was named after the Strait; i.e., the Bosphorus Bridge (*Boğaziçi Köprüsü*) (<http://adayinlife.typepad.com>). It is a suspension bridge mainly used by private cars as well as public transportation buses.

The plan for a second bridge was designed as early as 1977, four years after the first bridge was constructed. The initial plan, prepared by the British construction company Freeman Fox & Partners, was designed to accommodate five bridges. The first one would connect Rumeli Hisarı and Anadolu Hisarı areas. Initially it was planned as a double bridge in the shape of a delta. Its second part would be the second bridge. The third and fourth bridge would be constructed between Arnavutköy and Vanıköy, areas which were also designed to accommodate two sections. Finally, the fifth bridge was designed to be constructed between Emirgan and Kanlıca areas. So far, one of those bridges has been constructed, the Fatih Mehmet Sultan Köprüsü (Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge), named after Fatih the Conqueror which was completed in 1988.

In summary, beginning in 1948 Istanbul developed according to a foreign Western technocratic mentality imported through capital and expertise. In terms of transportation, choices for development favoured large highways (rather than railways), designed to accommodate private vehicles, which connected to the Bosphorus crossings. Currently, mass transportation on these highways and bridges is limited to public buses without pedestrian or bicycle-motorcycle lanes.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Mass transportation improved during the 1990s when the Istanbul Metro was constructed; initiated in 1992, the first line was completed in 2000. The 1990s were the decade of the Islamist-oriented mayors of Istanbul (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Ali Müfit Gürtuna), who were more concerned with improving the city’s social life and cultural politics (see Navaro-Yashin 2002) than focusing on infrastructure needs. The public policy agenda of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave high priority to environmental issues; e.g., the improvement of water distribution to Istanbul, the publication of books on environmental issues and the encouragement of well-known environmental activists to present their views (Özdemir 2003). The decade was marked with the 1994 and 1999 economic crises which continued into the new millennium, a fact that did not permit large infrastructural developments.

Nevertheless, in 2004 one of the largest and most ambitious constructions in the history of the city was inaugurated: the Marmaray Underwater Tunnel. A loan agreement signed in Ankara on 19th August 1999 released 117 million US dollars from a total funding of 866 million US dollars provided by the Japan's Overseas Economic Co-operation Fund. Unfortunately, the 2001 economic crisis prevented state funding and the project was slowed down. In 2003 and 2004 discussions were held with European Investment Bank (EIB) so that major portions of those projects should get funded. Principle agreements to fund major portions of the Commuter Rail Systems were made in autumn 2004 (<http://www.marmaray.com>). Finally, on 9th May 2004 the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan inaugurated the Marmaray Underwater Tunnel Project. ASG participants were present at the inauguration in an effort to declare their support to the Marmaray Project as clearly preferable to the Bridge Project. In this way they situated themselves in favour of an urban development goal which gave priority to improved public services such as mass rather than private transportation, an issue in many contemporary large metropolises.

“No to the interests underlying the bridge”: The Struggles of a City

As Turkey has integrated itself into Western capitalism and more recently (from the 1980s on) into economic liberalism, it has also established a relationship of interdependence; first, through import of aid and expertise and, secondly, through international loans and exports (Karafotakis 2000). Some bridge projects as well as the underwater tunnel project were externally funded. As the ASG claims, the Third Bridge project, is a product of underlying interests; interests that have to do with maximisation of economic profits. To a certain extent the governments’ opinion concurs with this claim. In response to my question, “Why does the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement insist on having the bridge built in Arnavutköy”, a high ranking Ministry bureaucrat replied:

“First of all we have to protect our environment. Building a bridge to the northern part of Bosphorus where all the water reserves of Istanbul are situated would be



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

criminal. Therefore this alternative has been rejected. Our second choice is Arnavutköy because the distance between the two parts of the city [Asian and European] is small and the construction will cost less than in other parts where the strait is not so narrow”

Of course this was not *ASG*'s allegation but as an active informant implicitly put it:

“There is a lobby behind the bridge. Car companies mostly. We call it ‘black lobby’. The tunnel lobby, we call it ‘white lobby’”.

The comments indicate that *ASG* members acknowledge that there are economic interests behind any project, even behind the project they support. For my informants, the Bosphorus bridges, and the Third Bridge are not simply undesirable development projects; they are symbols of Turkish obedience to foreign donors and big capital and this is why on one of their banners hanging above one of the main streets of Arnavutköy is written what is used as a title to this subsection (No to the interests underlying the bridge – *Çıkar köprüsüne hayır*). As explained by Ayfer, a teacher of foreign languages who resides in Arnavutköy and participates in *ASG*:

“At some point those who rule this country, must understand that people, all Turkish people should be heard and their opinion should be a factored in their decision making”.

Unfortunately for *ASG*, Istanbul appears to be highly integrated in the world political economy and in processes transcending the national context which relate to economic forces, uninformed of ordinary citizens' concerns and needs. As mentioned above, dating to the 19th century, Istanbul began to receive foreign investments which were regulated by political decisions. After the second half of the 20th century the in-coming flow of foreign capital took the form of Marshall Plan aid which was used under the supervision of the donors. In fact, the Department of State Highways - one of the main actors of the Third Bridge conflict as well as of the construction of the other two bridges - was founded under the guidance of US experts. One of its purposes was to make sure that the distribution of incoming funds for building Istanbul's network of boulevards and peripheral highways would be distributed in an official and accountable manner.

ASG as an Urban Protest Group

In one of the most acclaimed works in the literature on urban movements entitled *The City and the Grassroots*, Manuel Castells (1983: xiii), gives a detailed analysis of the characteristics of urban movements, and argues that there are four basic elements which define them. “The first is that urban



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

movements articulate the three goals of collective consumption demands, community culture, and political self management. The second is that they are self-aware, and the third is that they are connected to society through media, professionals and political parties”. Nonetheless, - and this is the fourth element - although connected to the political system, the urban movements that he is describing are autonomous of any political party. For Castells, urban protest movements in our societies and in our epoch particularly seem to be developing around three major themes: demands focusing on collective consumption, in terms of goods and services provided by the state; defence of cultural identity concerning a specific territory; and finally, political mobilisations regarding the state and particularly the local government.

Following the definition given by Castells, in this article I examine *ASG* as an urban protest, as its struggle is articulated with collective consumption demands, community culture and it is connected with the wider society through media, professionals and political parties. Throughout the course of its life, *ASG* rendered the issue public by having issued press releases and by launching an Internet website not only within the country but also internationally. Foreign newspapers published articles on the *ASG* struggle, *ICOMOS* (International Council on Monuments and Sites) listed Arnavutköy as HERITAGE @RISK, national and foreign NGOs were supportive to the campaign, scientists, politicians and celebrities declared their opposition to the construction of the bridge.

Moreover, these developments are not the only aspects of urban character of *ASG* as a protest. The *ASG* struggle is a realm where various identities meet and reinforce the involvement with the campaign. In this sense, the urban face of *ASG* is evident through the participation of all the different subgroups within *ASG* that come together wishing to challenge existing public services (Lowe 1986). Therefore, below, I examine the different identities that co-exist within *ASG*. These identities form different subgroups with distinct characteristics which in turn compose *ASG*. The latter consists of a core and a multilayered periphery. The core is constituted by the active participants, a group of nine people who are always present in meetings, events and are always informed about all the new developments on the Third Bridge issue. The second group of people, which I call less-active participants consists of five persons less involved but very strongly motivated against the construction of the bridge. Although their attendance to the meetings and the rest of the events is less frequent than that of the active participants, they are informed about any new developments of the group and the Third Bridge issue. The non-active participants are those persons that have never been systematically involved in the campaign but still support the cause. Finally, the fourth group is the group of the supporters. The supporters are not residents of the Arnavutköy but have participated in meetings and other events and have contributed to the campaign. Most of them are scientists-experts in the subjects of traffic and architecture and others are



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

activists and celebrities. These four groups have been co-existing within ASG dating back to December 1998 when meetings started to take place and the residents began to think and plan an anti-bridge action.

“Many people were against it from the first moment, we started discussing it and just like that ASG was born”. (AP – 60 years old pensioner)

“Academics and other experts informed us about the harmful effects that the bridge will have on our surroundings”. (AP – 50 years old businessman)

ASG: Arnavutköy Semt Girişimi

The ASG is an informal group of 15 people who live in a middle-class neighbourhood of a global city. This group, supported by the majority of the residents of the neighbourhood, was baptised as the *Arnavutköy District Initiative* in 1998, and was formed in order to protest against the proclamation for the construction of a bridge above Arnavutköy. Since this description tends to characterise the ASG as merely an interest group the actions of which are being triggered by NIMBY concerns, I suggest examining the identities of its participants as one of the main reasons that sustain their struggle. The reason I chose this analysis stems from my belief that ASG is much more than a local NIMBY protest. On the contrary it is a collective action with political references. As Jamison *et al* (1990) claim, contemporary social movements combine identity and political action. Therefore, in order to examine such movements we have to focus upon the actual strategies of environmental organisations but also the examination of the identity formation of their participants. This approach allows for an analysis of contemporary social movements both as the quest for new socio-political identities and as political activity aiming at achieving certain tactical results.

Before discussing the composition of the group I should first mention that the ASG is not an official organisation in terms of having a statute and thus an official recognition by the state. Because of this, I refer to the people who participate in ASG activities as ‘participants’ and not as ‘members’ since no subscription is needed for people to be involved in its activities. According to my informants, the decision not to ask for official recognition was deliberate. As one of them told me, if they had claimed official status, the bureaucratic obstacles would have been most likely impenetrable. The official formation of organisations that have political aspects in their agendas - such as ASG that criticises the way environmental and traffic policy is implemented - tend to be rejected by the state. This is probably a remnant of the 1982 Constitution which weakened the freedom of movements, associations, and



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

demonstrations (Beşpınar-Ekici and Gökalp 2006), even though the Turkish constitution as amended in 2001 mentions that everyone has the right to form associations provided that it neither threatens national security, public order, morals, health nor protects crime (The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 2001). Official status is granted to the Bosphorus Association of Arnavutköy (*Boğaziçi Arnavutköylüleri Derneği - BAD*) which is a local cultural association and the participants of which are *ASG* members. Nevertheless, it should be noted that all *ASG* participants are members of *BAD*, but not all *BAD* members are participants of *ASG*.

As mentioned above there are four subdivisions of *ASG* participants. In this article I use the following definition of activists: “Social movements include not only activists but also supporters. Movement activists are those who are committed to public actions intended to influence the behaviour of the policy system and of the broader population. Committed activists are the core of a movement and have been the subject of much recent work in the social movements literature” (Stern *et al* 1999). For Stern *et al*, the movement becomes an important part of their lives and a central element in their identities. Movement supporters are those who are sympathetic to the movement and who are willing to take some action and bear some costs in order support the movement. Of course, the boundary between supporters and activists is fuzzy and people often move back and forth, being activists for a time then retreating to a less committed but still supportive role.

Following this definition, I would suggest that in order to understand the role of the active participants, one should examine them through their leftist and secularist identity - on which I will focus later on - in relation to their demographic characteristics. For these individuals, the bridge project is not an isolated issue. It should be seen as a result of decades of liberal economic politics that “serve the interests of the few instead of the interests of the people”, as one of them claimed.

The role of the less-active participants of *ASG* is clearer when seen under the prism of their global citizenship. This sub-group of *ASG* seems sensitive to issues existing in the national and international agenda of civil society. For them, the Third Bridge is one of these issues, seemingly dissimilar but part of the same discourse, namely that of the global civil society. The non-active participants are those who do not identify themselves with a greater community. For them, Arnavutköy is their identity, their place.

The supporters of the *ASG* are very close to what Beşpınar-Ekici and Gökalp (2006) call the ‘power brokers’. According to their definition, the power brokers of CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) are middle-class professionals and academic circles with ‘formal’ expertise who assume the representation of the ‘local’. In our case, they are scientists, activists, members of professional associations and celebrities. People who, due to their status, are entitled to articulate claims at the same level at which the officials of the Ministry of Public Works operate, rendering *ASG* a dialogue partner with more powerful centres.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Active Participants (AP)

As mentioned above, the active-participant group of *ASG*, consists of 9 people. The reason that I place them in this group relates to their high level of involvement with the campaign. These people, even though almost all of them are professionally active, are involved with the campaign on an every-day basis. Doing something for *ASG* is part of their everyday schedule, as is going to work or running errands. Five of them are women and also five of them are university graduates (two undergraduates, one postgraduate, two PhDs) while the rest are high-school graduates. This fact, in a country where only 18% of the population holds a university degree and where the illiteracy rate is 13,5% (a number that during the 1980s, when most of my informants went to school, was over 30%) (LoC 2006) suggests that *ASG* active participants are very well-educated persons for the Turkish context. All of the active participants work except one who is a pensioner. Five of them are either self-employed or are freelancers and three of them are employed in education (preliminary, secondary and university). Only three of them are married and the rest are either single or divorced. My fieldwork indicates that their living standards are medium-high, if compared with the living standards of the majority of Turkish people. In this sense, I would say that they belong to the middle and upper middle class of the country as many of the residents of Arnavutköy and the other Bosphorus areas.

Many of the active participants pointed out the importance of politics in terms of the choices that the governments have made and the way policy making is carried out in Turkey. As one of them stressed:

“If *ASG* was formed in the ’70s it would not be so important. Back then everyone was into politics. After the ’80s this changed and collective action has not been part of our public life. Our society has become more individualistic and movements like *ASG* are rare; that is why it is so important”. (AP – 40 years old tourist guide)

When I conveyed to him the view that their campaign was accused of being a leftist reaction rather than an honest local mobilisation he told me that:

“Our initiative does not consist of leftists even though some of us do indeed have a leftist political orientation but you know something? Only a leftist can see things in a way that allows him to re-act and resist”.

Less politically-active informants also underline the importance of politics in the Third Bridge issue like the one below:



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

“It is interesting to see why different ministries have different agendas regarding the Third Bridge issue. It is all about interests”. (AP – 60 years old pensioner)

New Social Movements theorists claim that social movements mobilise around common identities which, in order to be successful, should construct an enemy and move against it (Tarrow 1998). In the case of the active participants of *ASG*, the opposition takes the form of a leftist, secular identity against an Islamist, neo-liberal government. The following example of an active participant, illustrates this point.

Ayşe is a middle aged woman born and raised in a big Turkish city. She is a college graduate married to a university professor, mother of two children. She could be described as a contemporary woman with a nice house, a satisfactory income a circle of friends consisting of well educated, upper middle class individuals. Her beliefs are clearly secular a fact visible not only in her looks as she does not wear a veil but also in her arguments regarding the pro-Islamist ruling party. She made the following comment to one of her friends, in my presence, the day after the local elections of 2004, when the candidates favoured by *AKP*¹ won almost every major municipality in Turkey.

“It is our fault that they won the elections. We shouldn’t have let them gain all that power. Now we pay for our mistakes and they have taken over all the municipalities of the country”.

Her beliefs however, are not limited to secularist ideals. During the *coup d’etat* of the 1980s Ayşe and her husband had to leave Turkey due to their political beliefs. One day she told me:

“I like to think of my self as a leftist and I am very proud of it. I don’t care about mainstream ideologies and about all those who condemn lifestyles like mine and all those who claim that the bridge will benefit Istanbul, serving big corporate interests, even though they very well know it will not. I can sleep at night with no guilt and I don’t care if I chose to wash my own dishes”.

In fact, when I conveyed the opinion (mentioned earlier) of the supporter of the bridge project to her, similarly to the other AP mentioned above she said:

“We do not oppose to the bridge because we are leftists. In our initiative, there are individuals of diverse political persuasions. As a leftist, however, I believe that leftists are more sensitive than others to such issues”.

For the active participants of *ASG*, the bridge issue has not been an isolated problem to deal with. They see the decision to construct the bridge as one link of a whole chain of political decisions which has led

¹ *AKP* (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) which in English translates into Justice and Development Party is the successor of the Islamist Welfare Party and Turkey’s ruling party.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

back to a particular development model chosen by the Turkish state. Another one of the active participants said:

“The whole bridge issue started with the Marshall Plan that Menderes got. After that, roads were built and we [Turkey] started to become little America” (See also Keyder 1999).

Similarly, the press representative of ASG who also belongs to the AP group of participants said:

“We don’t just focus on the bridge. The bridge is just the cherry on a cake that started to be baked a long time ago. The technocratic mentality of the Turkish state started in the late’40s when we accepted help from the Americans. This is when all started... This kind of politics has been followed by all the governments. For example, Özal, who was prime-minister in the 1980s, was known as the “King of bridges””.

Along with references to leftist, the secularist identity came up very often in my discussions with most of the active-participants. Almost all of them expressed explicitly their disapproval of the Erdoğan administration, and some of them were associated with secularist parties. Many of them told me that the best thing that ever happened to Turkey was the decision taken by the founder of the Turkish state to make the country a secular republic. Also, many of them stated their trust in the army as a safeguard of their secular establishment. One of my informants would hang pictures of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the front window of her house in celebration of Turkey’s secular holidays (*bayramlar*); of course she refused to celebrate religious holidays in a similar way. In her view religious holidays were less important than secular ones.

It should not come as surprise that leftist and secularist beliefs are intermingled since leftism, in terms of Marxism, is intrinsically linked with atheist and secular beliefs. Nevertheless, this article does not suggest that, leftist and secularist identities were the reason for the ASG mobilisation; They are though the two main identities around which active participants unite and develop the solidarity needed for initiatives such as ASG. This solidarity fuses with the concerns of the rest of ASG, such as the environment and creates a platform for the expression of ‘sameness’ to the outsiders (Stephen 2005).

Less-active Participants (LAP)

During my fieldwork, five people comprised the less-active participant group. Three of them were employed full-time: as a university professor, newspaper journalist and English teacher. One was a



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

housewife and one was unemployed. Like the active participants, most of them spent a significant part of their lives abroad, mainly for education. For them, the construction of the bridge represents a threat to their lifestyle and as a result, they protest against it. As Edelman (2001) informs us, protests born out of the threat on a group's lifestyle can be feminist, environmentalist, gay and lesbian, oppressed minorities movements that seek new collective identities. As it is evident from the next account, similar issues play their role in the formation of an *ASG* identity.

Deniz is transsexual. She has been living in Arnavutköy all her life. Her house is one of the houses that would have to be demolished if the bridge would be built. My first encounter with Deniz was during a *BAD* meeting which we both attended. What was surprising to my ‘orientalist’ part of intellect was that the acceptance of her ‘preference’ by the people who were also attending the meeting. Throughout my fieldwork, I did not notice any specific reactions to her, either in the *ASG* meetings or at different social occasions attended by Deniz. When I interviewed her regarding the Third Bridge, she said:

“I was born and raised here. I am both Arnavutköylite and transsexual. If the Third Bridge comes here, my struggle will start all over again. If the Third Bridge doesn't come, Arnavutköy for me will be my paradise. If the bridge comes, I will have to move and start struggling for my particularity. I definitely don't want the Third Bridge here”.

Deniz implied that her effort to establish herself as an equal member of neighbourhood and participant of *ASG* had not been easy. Nevertheless, in her opinion she managed to establish a *modus vivendi* between herself and the rest of the community, something which the construction of the bridge would destroy. Therefore, Deniz's participation in *ASG* was mainly motivated by her own individual reasons and her opinions about the bridge also express personal concerns. In Turkey, public statements about a taboo issue as delicate as transsexualism is the result of public demands made by transsexual individuals and transnational human rights movements concerning state recognition and respect (Kandiyoti 2002). For Deniz the demand for respect to her and her neighbours is much like the demand for respect to her and her transsexual friends.

Similarly, the profile of the other less-active participants is not mainstream; for example, Ayfer is a single, middle-aged woman, of non-Turkish origin who is politically conscious and socially active. An excerpt from an interview with her provides insight:

“Here in Turkey, in our country, people feel that they are guided and whatever the government does they accept it. They complain about it, they say it is good, they say it is bad but they accept it eventually. It is probably the first time in my life that I saw that a non-governmental organisation...I don't know if you can call it an organisation



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

or a group, a very small group of people are struggling... at least they can say no - which is very good”.

Like Deniz and Ayfer, those who participate in *ASG* have their own personal reasons for their involvement, but their motives stem from collective rather than private interests. These people consciously participate in the *ASG* initiative and previously they were active citizens in other communities. As Göle (1994) mentions, the development of civil society in Turkey brought forward groups of people who were marginalised or stigmatised by the state. Such groups include Islamics, Kurdish, ecologists, gays and transsexuals. Their participation in those communities shapes their identities which are not merely individual self-definitions, but emerge from a ‘civil society’ discourse at national and transnational level.

Many times *ASG* participants state that they are part of civil society and that they are supported by NGOs and transnational organisations.

“We have been in touch with a lot of European Universities. For example, there is an organisation of Mediterranean cities in Barcelona. They are waiting to hear from us. If we say to them “Arnavutköy is in danger”, they will start sending e-mails, protests etc, so I think that this will make the government think twice, or three times before taking a stupid action”. (LAP – 60 years old architect)

After the 1980s, the concept of civil society emerged in Turkey as a counterbalance of the statist influence. Activists who claim to be part of it declare that civil initiative can contribute to the stabilisation of democracy in the country and the same rhetoric is often used by *ASG* participants:

“The last 5-10 years, civil initiatives in Turkey – Non Governmental Organisations – have become very important. Especially after Habitat II (the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements held in 1996 in Istanbul, in order to address the issue of “Adequate shelter for all” and “Sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world”). I think it was in 1996 here in Istanbul, more than 10,000 people went. Habitat II was an initiator for a lot of NGOs, especially protecting women and children and the environment. Many civil societies have been formed after that, and it has created an awareness of the importance of non-political, civil resistance, civil disobedience in this country. The governments are edgy, too! They realize that this is a new force in the society. So, I think it will be very stupid for any government to disregard Arnavutköy and their resistance and say “who are these Arnavutköylites? I don’t care, I want to build the bridge”. There will be a big problem and there will be an international crime. So, I think things have changed since the first bridge was built.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

The first bridge was built in 1973, 31 years ago. Turkey was a different country, Europe was a different place; now the man in the street, the civilian population is more important than before and that is, I suppose, part of becoming more democratic and more civilised”. (LAP – 60 years old architect)

European perspectives of Turkey and prospects for the country’s future is another issue that appears quite often in my discussions with less-active participants. Some of my informants stated that they wish to enter the EU as a nation because they believe that certain rights should be protected:

“The intention to enter Europe means that people have to reach certain standards of the protection of the environment, of the protection of civil rights, of the protection of democracy. So, it is definitely a positive thing. And it prevents bureaucrats, it prevents civil servants and governments from behaving very irresponsibly”. (LAP – 60 years old architect)

Less-active participants of ASG have created a transnational identity by reflecting on national and broader developments which - combined with their demographic characteristics - form an identity of global activists. And it is this identity more than anything else which motivates their participation in the ASG. In contrast, as will be discussed in the following section, the next group of ASG participants are motivated from more localist concerns.

Non-active Participants (NAP)

The number of the non-active participants is larger than the other two sub-groups. In the course of my fieldwork I met dozens of people who belong in this category. Some of them I interviewed; others I did not; thus, I do not have a complete demographic profile for this category of participants. Even so, I would say that they are representative of all the types of people in the neighbourhood: working individuals, unemployed, students, pupils, housewives, pensioners, and so on. My fieldwork revealed that the majority of the residents of Arnavutköy are indeed against the bridge; in fact, no one told me that he/she supports the bridge – not in formal interviews or in discussions as part of everyday interactions. It is my overwhelming impression that their opposition stems from the fact that the construction of the bridge would detach them from their ‘place’.

Tim Ingold (1993) suggests that local perception of place is revealed through experience from dwelling in a particular place. This relationship is better expressed by the concept of place as advanced by Tilley (1994: 34), a concept which “privileges difference and singularity”. Knowledge of place depends on experience, and experience is translated into ‘dwelling’. In this sense, place draws on the social practice of dwelling,



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

the concept of which is epitomised by Macnaghten and Urry (2001), who define dwelling in terms of participation. For them “human subjects are united with their environment and there is no distance between people and things” (*ibid*: 6). In other words, dwelling is a social practice which describes a unified world between people and things. Similarly, Feld and Basso (1996) argue that dwelling depends on situational and local contexts. Thus, “‘place’ represents the particular to which are ascribed senses, practice, memory and desire, dwelling and movement” (*ibid*: 8).

My fieldwork has revealed that the residents of Arnavutköy oppose not so much the construction of the bridge but, rather, the detachment from their ‘place’. Many of them will have to move from their houses and those whose houses will not be torn down will have to adjust to a new reality that the construction of the bridge will impose. For example, Ortaköy where the first bridge was built faced the transformation of the seafront from a residential area to an area full of coffeehouses and restaurants. The area where the second bridge was built became undesirable for its residents, many of whom had to move due to noise and air pollution. However, none of my informants were willing to move from Arnavutköy or live in a different, changed Arnavutköy:

“I was born and raised here. I buy my bread here. My father had a shop in Arnavutköy. I breathe the air of Arnavutköy. It is a special place. Wherever I go, I always come back”. (19 years old – high school student)

“Arnavutköy is my life”. (38 years old - tailor)

“You can’t stay out of this struggle. Your natural instinct pushes you to fight. It’s like somebody is killing you... This house is the same for generations, and it will not change. My grandson will grow up here”. (40 years old - businessman)

Of course these issues do not concern only the non-active ASG participants of Arnavutköylites, but for them it is the main issue. For the active and less-active participants it is a significant, but not the most significant, reason which reinforces the opposition to the bridge. The residents of Arnavutköy do not want to leave the place they have inhabited for the longest period of their lives. The words of a resident describe this view:

“Arnavutköy is my home. Now when we finish I am going to go back to Arnavutköy and I feel very happy there. I walk very happily in the streets, I run early in the morning along the coast, I go to my barber and we chat a lot and he says: “why didn’t



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

you come? It’s been a long time since I last saw you!”. That sort of thing, it’s my life. And like everybody else I would like to protect my life with the best possible means I have. That’s why I fight. I am a school teacher by accident. I am Arnavutköylü first and then a school teacher. And it happens that the school I work in is not very far from Arnavutköy! But the important thing is that I would like to save the life and the world that I love”. (NAP – 60 years old - academic)

ASG Supporters

Finally, there are the supporters of ASG who are not residents of Arnavutköy but scientists and activists who provide ASG with scientific data, artists and public figures who help organise events and publicise the issues to a wider public simply because their well-known names or faces are associated with the initiative. These people are what could be called the power brokers (Beşpınar-Ekici and Gökalp 2006) of the initiative. These issues are brought to the agenda by individuals who lend their expertise and legitimacy as scientists, activists or professional associations to ASG and mediate on the latter’s account to public discourse.

In addition to environmental action groups [*Çekul Vakfı*, *DHKD - Doğal Hayatı ve Koruma Derneği* (Association for the Protection of the Natural World)], ASG has been supported by scientists, members of the Chamber of Architects (*Mimarlar Odası*), artists, intellectuals and individuals from various parts of the country and outside its borders, since the issue (as already mentioned) has been picked up by international media such as *Washington Post*, *L.A. Times* and *Le Monde*. The co-ordinators of the master plan project of Istanbul also support the initiative. The periodical publication of the chamber of architects (*Mimarlara Mektup*) very often mentions the issue and explicitly states its support to ASG. In a recent documentary prepared on their account, entitled ‘City Crimes’ (*Kent Suçları*), there have been references to the architectural ‘crimes’ that took place or are about to take place in Istanbul; the Third Bridge is mentioned, too. A good number of artists and lay people have been supporting the movement against the construction of the Third Bridge; for example: Sezen Aksu, a very popular singer who actually shot one of her video clips (*Sarı Odalar*) in Arnavutköy as an act of solidarity to the Arnavutköy struggle; artists who volunteer to perform to the annual festival; and third, the Alumni of the highly appreciated Robert College, the first private American High School of Istanbul whose buildings are in the area, launched an anti-bridge signature campaign.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

The preservation and restoration of Arnavutköy’s Ottoman architecture, the protection of its physical environment, the exposition of its historical and cultural heritage, the development of projects that constitute the area a leisurely walk district, the prohibition of cars in the heart of the neighbourhood and, finally, the protection of people’s civil rights as well as respect for people’s opinion on their place of living everywhere - not only in Arnavutköy -are general ideals. They are not directly linked to the Third Bridge; they are rather legitimate issues to be discussed with official sites of power which do not take the focus off the Third Bridge even though they may not directly address it. In other cases, such as the documentary made by the Istanbul Chamber of Architects, the reference is explicitly made to legitimate the discourse in terms of architectural history and aesthetics.

Through activities such as the above, the supporters of *ASG* emerge as agents between dominant knowledge regarding environmental and cultural heritage protection and the rest of the public. This knowledge concerns environmentalism as expressed by international NGOs, the European Union which Turkey aspires to join and, as paradoxical as it may seem, by state authorities as well; and this is knowledge which the active participants of *ASG* are well aware of and, to a large extent, endorse. During the first months of the campaign - thanks to the help of its supporters – *ASG*, managed to include Arnavutköy at the *ICOMOS* heritage@risk list and tried to find allies within the administration of the government. Lobbying efforts did not stop there. *ASG* participants informed national and international media, Turkish and international NGOs, and they have tried not only to convey their messages but also to incorporate the principles of these actors in their discourse. For example, a 52 years old architect said:

“If you build railways, if you focus on public transportation nobody would use cars. Using cars means more pollution... I mean public transportation is cheaper, cleaner, much more comfortable, if there is good public transportation and I still don’t understand why they don’t focus on that. I mean, building a bridge is much more expensive, if you use the sea is less expensive. You build the *iskele* (ferry station) and all you have to do is buy a few boats and you put more regular, every half an hour let’s say. It’s going to be much cheaper and in the long run it is going to be much better”.

And a 50 years old journalist:

“May the *UNESCO* project help Arnavutköy to remain old. This way it will be a touristic place”.

And a 56 years old architect:

“The ministry might have done research but we also have scientific research papers published by scientists and NGOs which prove that the atmospheric pollution caused by the cars that cross the bridges is enormous”.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

And a 52 years old engineer:

“What Arnavutköy people have done you may heard, we have reached *ICOMOS* [...] *ICOMOS* has listed Arnavutköy as *HERITAGE@RISK*. So there is international support”.

Conclusions

The policies that brought about the changes described above in Istanbul, have not only great achievements to be proud of. The transformation of Istanbul to a financial centre has attracted internal and foreign immigrants who need somewhere to live and the fact that the Turkish welfare state does not provide housing for these categories of citizens has resulted in poorly constructed, unattractive big apartment buildings and *gecekondu*s. The construction of large boulevards and the Bosphorus bridges, without simultaneous improvement of public transportation has resulted in traffic congestion, air pollution and displacement.

The story of the *ASG* is a story of such a (potential) displacement. It is a story of an urban conflict between the state and a neighbourhood initiative which brings together people from different backgrounds and unites their issue-specific interests and goals. The *ASG* is a group of people consisting of a core and a multilayered periphery with a core of the active participants and the periphery divided into the less active participants, the non-active participants and finally the supporters. This conclusion or model emerges from observations of the different subgroups participating in the initiative, which according to my research are formed by different identities which in turn constitute decisions for the opposition to the Third Bridge. All these identities have political references, and, although they constitute different subgroups within *ASG*, they share a common cause: to prevent the construction of the bridge; not just because it is going to be placed in their backyard. More important, should they succeed in having the decision annulled, they will have managed to render Arnavutköy everyone’s backyard, the issue of public transportation of Istanbul everyone’s issue and the problems of democracy in their country, everyone’s problems. An excerpt from a paper written by two *ASG* participants relays the logic and emotion of the issue:

“*ASG*’s final victory shall come when the central government in Ankara will decide to permit the decision for a Third Bridge project over the Bosphorus to be taken by the citizens of the Municipality of Istanbul” (Danışman and Üstün 2003: 8).

All of the subgroups that participate in *ASG* share a common objective which is to prevent the bridge from being built. This objective fuses with wider beliefs regarding polity, lifestyles, science and life in



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

general and along with the resources available to *ASG*, synthesise a legitimate agenda of discourses against the Third Bridge. The *ASG* participants claim that the Third Bridge issue is the result of years of bad development policies. This politicisation along with the dissemination of their demands through their use of the media and internet technology, open forums in the community, public celebrations and celebrity spokespersons, manage to radiate the claims of *ASG* outward from the neighbourhood to the city and transnationally in Europe and testify that *ASG* is a collective action which makes urban demands in many levels.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

References:

Bender, B 1995

Introduction: Landscape – Meaning and Action. In: Bender B (ed.) *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*. Oxford, Berg.

Beşpınar-Ekici, U F and D Gökalp 2006

Power Brokers, Local Beneficiaries and Empowering the Powerless: A Critical Assessment of the NGOs, Civil Society and Democracy in Turkey. Paper presented in the Graduate Student Conference. Institute for International and Regional Studies, Princeton University, 7-8 April 2006.

Bliss, S n.d.

Mega Cities: Istanbul – Asian and European City. Macquarie University.

Castells, M 1983

The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Çelik, Z 1993

The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century. University of California Press

Danışman, G and İ Üstün 2003

“Contentious Politics at a Bosphorus Neighbourhood. Perspectives on Conflict and Solidarity during the 20th Century”. Paper presented at the conference on *Contentious Politics and the Economic Opportunity Structure: Mediterranean Perspectives*. University of Crete, Rethimno 17-18 October 2003.

Durrenberger, E P 2003

Global Processes, Local Systems *Urban Anthropology* 32(3-4): 253-279.

Edelman, M 2001

Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 285-317.

Feld, S and H Basso 1996

Introduction. In Feld, S and H Basso (eds.) *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe, School of American Research Press.

Göle, N 1994

Towards an Autonomization of Politics and Civil Society in Turkey. In: Heper, M (ed.) *Politics in the Third Turkish Republic*. Boulder: Westview Press.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Gulick, J 1984

The Essence of Urban Anthropology: Integration of Micro and Macro Research Perspectives. *Urban Anthropology* 13(2-3): 295 – 306.

Ingold, T 1993

Globes and spheres: the topology of environmentalism. In: Milton K (ed.) *Environmentalism: The View from Anthropology*. London, New York, Routledge.

İTÜ ve İstanbul Büyük Şehir Belediyesi 1998

İstanbul Ulaşım Ana Planı

Jamison, A, R Eyerman, Cramer, J and J Læssøe 1990

The Making of the New Environmental Consciousness: A Comparative Study of the Environmental Movements in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

Kandiyoti, D 2002

Introduction. In : Kandiyoti, D and A Saktanber (eds.) *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*. London and New York, I.B. Tauris & Co Publishers.

Karafotakis, E 2000

Diamòrfosi tis Sighronis Tourkikis Oikonomias. Athens: Kèntro Politikis Èrevnas ke Epikoinonias.

Keyder, Ç 1999

A Tale of Two Neighbourhoods. In: Keyder, Ç (ed.) *Istanbul between the Global and the Local*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Kousis, M and K Eder 2001

Introduction: EU policy-making, local action, and the emergence of institutions of collective action. A theoretical perspective on Southern Europe. In: Kousis, M and K Eder (eds.) *Environmental Politics in Southern Europe: Actors, Institutions and Discourses in a Europeanizing Society*. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

LoC 2006 Library of the Congress

Lowe, S 1986

Urban Social Movements: The City After Castells. MacMillan Education ltd.

Macnaghten, P and J Urry 2001

Introduction. In: Macnaghten P and Urry J (eds.) *Bodies of Nature*. London, SAGE Publications.

Mango, A 2004

Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey. The Overlook Press.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Marcus, G 1995

Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* **24**: 95-117

Masashiro Y, M Toshimitsu and Mitsubiro, K n.d

Repair of the “Golden Horn Bridge” in Turkey. *IHI Engineering Review*

Moore, D 1996

Marxism, Culture, and Political Ecology: Environmental Struggles in Zimbabwe’s Eastern Highlands. In: Peet, R and M Watts (eds.) *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, development, social movements*. Routledge.

Navaro – Yashin, Y 2002

Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press.

Özdemir, İ 2003

The Development of Environmental Consciousness in Modern Turkey. In: Richard Foltz (ed.), *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*. Boston: MIT Press.

Rona, B 1999

Turkish in Three Months. Hugo Press.

Schönwälder, G 2002

Linking Civil Society and the State: Urban Popular Movements, the left, the local government in Peru, 1980-1992. Pennsylvania State University Press.

Stephen, L 2005

Gender, Citizenship, and the Politics of Identity. In: Nash, J (ed.) *Social Movements: An Anthropological Reader*. Blackwell Publishing.

Stern, P C, T Dietz, Abel, T, G A Guagnano and Kalof, L 1999

A Value-Belief-Norm Theory of Support for Social Movements: The Case of Environmentalism. *Human Ecology Review* **6**(2): 81-97.

Tarrow, S 1998

Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Cambridge University Press.

Tilley, C 1994

A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments. Oxford, Berg.

Turkish constitution 2001

TURSTAT 2004 Turkish Statistical Institute.

Yalçın, A 2002

American Impact on Turkish Social Life (1945-1965). *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* **15**: 41-54.



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Yalcintan, M C and A E Erbas 2003

Impacts of ‘Gecekondu’ on the Electoral Geography of Istanbul. *International Labor and Working-Class History* **64**: 91 -111.

Web sites:

<http://adayinlife.typepad.com>

<http://loc.gov.exhibits/marshal>

<http://www.marmaray.com>



Emilia Voulvouli, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Αριστερισμός, Εκκοσμίκευση, Διεθνισμός και Τοπικισμός: Οι Ταυτότητες μιας Αστικής Διαμαρτυρίας στη σύγχρονη Κωνσταντινούπολη

Αιμιλία Βουλβούλη

Περίληψη

Το παρόν άρθρο αποτελεί μια εθνογραφική μελέτη μιας κινητοποίησης βάσης (grassroots mobilisation) στην περιοχή Αρναβούτκιοϊ της Κωνσταντινούπολης. Η κινητοποίηση αυτή οργανώθηκε ως απάντηση των κατοίκων της περιοχής στην απόφαση της Τουρκικής κυβέρνησης για την κατασκευή μιας γέφυρας που θα ενώνει το ασιατικό με το ευρωπαϊκό κομμάτι της πόλης. Αντιτιθέμενοι στην κατασκευή της γέφυρας οι κάτοικοι του Αρναβούτκιοϊ συγκρότησαν μία ομάδα την οποία ονόμασαν Πρωτοβουλία Περιοχής Αρναβούτκιοϊ (στα τουρκικά *Arnavutköy Semt Girişimi – ASG*). Ακολουθώντας τα επιχειρήματα των πληροφορητών μου, το άρθρο αυτό εστιάζει - μετά από μια συνοπτική παρουσίαση των έργων υποδομής που υλοποιήθηκαν στην Κωνσταντινούπολη από το 1950 και έπειτα - στο γεγονός ότι οι αλλαγές που πραγματοποιήθηκαν στην πόλη ήταν «πέρα από τον έλεγχο των απλών ανθρώπων», γεγονός που φαίνεται να είναι κεντρικό στην κατανόηση της διαμαρτυρίας. Επιπλέον το άρθρο προτείνει ότι η Πρωτοβουλία ASG έχει τα χαρακτηριστικά μιας αστακής ομάδας διαμαρτυρίας, ο ιδιαίτερος χαρακτήρας της οποίας διαμορφώνεται από τις ταυτότητες των ατόμων που συμμετέχουν: Οι κάτοικοι της περιοχής τους οποίους το άρθρο κατηγοριοποιεί σε ενεργούς συμμετέχοντες, σε λιγότερο ενεργούς συμμετέχοντες, σε μη ενεργούς συμμετέχοντες, και οι υποστηρικτές της Πρωτοβουλίας, οι οποίοι δεν είναι κάτοικοι της περιοχής αλλά υποστηρίζουν την Πρωτοβουλία.

Λέξεις Κλειδιά: *ASG, Τρίτη Γέφυρα, Κωνσταντινούπολη, ενεργοί συμμετέχοντες, λιγότερο ενεργοί συμμετέχοντες, μη ενεργοί συμμετέχοντες, υποστηρικτές, αστακή διαμαρτυρία.*



Emilia Voulvoul, 05/2010

“Leftism, Secularism, Transnationalism and Localism: The Identities of an Urban Protest in Contemporary Istanbul”

Βιογραφικό

Η Αιμιλία Βουλβούλη είναι διδάκτορας Κοινωνικής Ανθρωπολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου του Λονδίνου (UCL) και διδάσκουσα του Τμήματος Πολιτισμικής Τεχνολογίας & Επικοινωνίας του Πανεπιστημίου Αιγαίου. Έχει διεξαγάγει εθνογραφική έρευνα στην Τουρκία και στην Ελλάδα και είναι συγγραφέας του βιβλίου *From Environmentalism to Transenvironmentalism: The Ethnography of an Urban Protest in Modern Istanbul* το οποίο κυκλοφορεί από τον εκδοτικό οίκο Peter Lang.