

**Local Protests in Global Cities: The case of the Arnavutköy District Initiative in
Istanbul**

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Introduction

The present paper presents an anthropological study of a grassroots protest group in a neighbourhood of Istanbul, Turkey¹. The mobilisation began following the announcement of plans for the construction of a Third 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 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.

An anthropological examination of mobilisations such as the *ASG* has the advantage of reminding us that every similarity hides more than one difference (Appadurai 1996: 11). Social movements are not homogeneous collectivities; they are rather what Arjun Appadurai would describe as 'neighbourhoods'; that is, "social forms in which locality as a dimension - is constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts - is invariably realized" (*ibid*: 178). Nevertheless, "however deeply a description is embedded in the particularities of place, soil, and ritual technique, it invariably contains or implies a theory of context – a theory, in other words, of what a neighbourhood is produced from, against, in spite of, and in relation [to]" (*ibid*: 184). In cases like the one this paper focuses on, the collective action of the neighbourhood of Arnavutköy can be seen as a result of changes taking place from the effects of economic and cultural globalisation² (Psimitis 2006). These effects can be seen in any number of social movements organised around, for example, human rights, feminism, consumers' rights, ethnic –religious – cultural minority rights, sexual emancipation, community participation, urban action and environmental issues.

¹ The name of the neighbourhood in which I conducted my fieldwork is Arnavutköy. Even though, in anthropology it is not customary to use the actual name of one's place of research the case of the Third Bosphorus Bridge (*Boğaziçi 3. Köprüsü*) and the civil resistance (*sivil direniş*) by the residents of Arnavutköy has gained so much publicity both within and outside Turkey that maintaining the anonymity of the place seems pointless.

² According to Habermas, in an undoubtedly globalised world – economically and subsequently culturally – there is an increasing awareness of capitalist penetration in areas of life, traditionally protected by it and detached from the values of capitalist society (in Psimitis 2006).

Doing Fieldwork in a City

In 1975, Jack Rollwagen wrote that in order for the study to become significant anthropologists must place their investigations “of one social form, of one neighbourhood, of one city, and/or of one region within a nation, into the context of the nation-state or a region larger than the nation-state” (Rollwagen 1975: 4). I find his comment quite relevant to my study as I believe that the Arnavutköy initiative should not be seen as isolated from larger geographical, historical and political contexts, but as part of what Kemper calls “international urban systems through time and space” (1991b: 374). After all, Arnavutköy is part of one the largest cities on the planet, Istanbul; according to the 2000 Census, the main city’s population is listed at 8,803,468 inhabitants, and 10,018,735 if the peripheral provincial areas are included (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). In addition, as Moore (1996) argues, there are certain organizing principles shared by all cities which create an urban network of distinctive social-cultural and political-economic domains (Kemper 1991b: 374).

Keeping in mind the similarities which Istanbul and Arnavutköy, as part of it, share with other large metropolitan centres, in socio-cultural as well as political and economic domains, my methodological approaches during fieldwork followed a pattern wherein ethnography moved from its conventional single-site location contextualised by macro-constructions of a larger social order (such as the capitalist world system) to multiple sites of observation and participation (Marcus 1995: 95)³. Even though my fieldwork was centred in Istanbul, I also saw it as a global city⁴ (as it had always been in my mind), where the dynamics and processes which became territorialised were also global (Sassen 2001: xix). This means that *ASG* should not be seen as a unique case of a protest action but as one of many protests occurring around the globe in cities with similar socio-economic and demographic development.

³ Kerney (1995: 1) also makes a similar point claiming that, given cultural anthropology's commitment to the study of local communities, globalisation has implications for its theory and methods. In addition, given that anthropology is centred in the so-called Western nations, globalisation entails certain displacements of the production of anthropological knowledge from its historic, national, institutional and cultural contexts to other sites.

⁴ According to Sassen, the more globalised the economy becomes, the higher the agglomeration of central functions in a relatively few sites, which she calls global cities (2001: 5). Her description of such a city is a place where certain kinds of work, that result in control over vast resources, occur. These works concern finance and specialised service industries that restructure the urban social and economic order through concentration. This in turn, results in the requirement of corporate transactions for simultaneous participation of several specialised firms providing legal, accounting, financial, public relations, management, consulting and other such services (*ibid*).

World System Theory has extensively analyzed the global character of economy from which European capitalism, beginning in the 15th century, resulted. As theorists of World System School (Wallerstein 1974) and those influenced by it (Featherstone 1990) claim, concentrations of capital are centred in cities and, in fact, create cities (Kutsche 1989). In this sense, the *ASG* protest should be seen as a protest against a certain kind of capitalist development related to processes of globalisation. This perspective has two advantages. First, it allows for the examination of a development project (such as a bridge in a developing nation) as a construction produced by transnational corporations. This is applicable to the present case, since the construction of the Bosphorus bridges was assigned to foreign companies. Secondly, it privileges an analysis which attempts to depict the full complexity of social life in cities (Sanjek 2004). In this sense, it enables multi-sited research (Marcus 1995) since it inevitably considers the anthropologist's main subjects of study - the people and, in this case, the *ASG* participants - as involved in a multi-leveled discourse produced in several different locales (local and global).

Following Marcus' techniques of multi-sited ethnography, my research revolved around various aspects of the same issue. My fieldwork in Turkey lasted eighteen months, eleven of which I spent in Arnavutköy. As mentioned above, it began as a preliminary investigation mainly through the Internet. After the first meeting in Arnavutköy, I settled in the area, initially in the ARIT 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.

It would be misleading to claim that my fieldwork was directed by a detailed research plan. Apart from travelling in Turkey to become familiar with the country and settling in Arnavutköy, all the other parts of the field research emerged during my residence in Turkey. Soon after my arrival, I came to realize that conducting ethnographic research on the "particular discourse of policy requires different practices and opportunities than to do just fieldwork among the situated communities such a policy affects" (Marcus 1995: 100). Since my focus was the conflict between

the Turkish government and the residents of Arnavutköy, I needed to take into account the point of view of both sides. In order to obtain this kind of information, I needed to use totally different research techniques for each side. While I would not claim that my paper constitutes an ethnography of Turkish bureaucracy, I did devote a large part of my time to interviewing bureaucrats from a variety of locations. They were from Arnavutköy and the surrounding administrative district – *Muhtarlıks*; the Municipality of Beşiktaş (*Beşiktaş Belediyesi*) to which Arnavutköy administratively belongs; and the Ministry of Public Works and Settlements. I kept in mind that a study of bureaucracy constitutes a different research domain; thus, my investigation followed a different pattern and looked for different signs.

The difference between interviewing bureaucrats and participants of *ASG* or residents of Arnavutköy is illuminated when it is realized that for the latter, interviews with journalists (some of them residents of the neighbourhood) had become virtually part of their daily culture; in fact, giving interviews had been one of their main opposition strategies. Consequently, ‘interviews’ about the opposition to the Third Bridge were actually participant observation. Even though interviewing is usually seen as a secondary technique to produce data to supplement participant observation which is the primary method, in this case I used interviewing as a way of participating in the neighbourhood’s life. Hence, participant observation was also multi-sited. It concerned both participation in everyday life through my housemate, participation to the *ASG*’s weekly meetings and its other activities (dinners, demonstrations, discussions) and also interviewing them. Apart from these activities, I also had the chance to interview visitors of the area, scientists, NGO members, representatives from the Chamber of Architects, artists and activists.

George Marcus’ 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” (1995: 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. Finally, travelling in the country made clear for me the existing differences between Istanbul and the rest of Turkey and helped me see the larger picture to which Istanbul and Arnavutköy belong.

The Anthropologist and the Field

As a Greek citizen, choosing Turkey as the country where my fieldwork would be based held personal significance. My paternal grandfather was born in Dikilli, a town on the Aegean coast of Turkey. His father, who was professionally active both in Asia Minor and on the island of Lesbos, decided to move to the island which at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire. My family’s migration to Greece (before Lesbos became part of it) was not, as in many other cases, a violent one; hence our memories are not bitter towards the opposite coast or *karşı* (Even today, many inhabitants of Lesbos use the Turkish term *karşı* for ‘opposite’ in general, not only to refer to the coast of Turkey.) When I was a little girl I discovered that our family name was in fact of Turkish origin, with a slight Hellenised touch: Voulvouli is derived from *Bülbül*, which is a common surname in Turkey and literally means ‘nightingale’. From my part, there had always been the curiosity to visit the *karşı*. From the few times I had been to Turkey, I realized that visiting as a tourist was not enough to satisfy my curiosity and I decided that at some point I would go there to live for a while and learn Turkish. It was my belief that by doing that I might be able to discover my roots, an idea which faded while I was an undergraduate student in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of the Aegean. Even though my studies in anthropology directed my interest in the country to more ‘scientific’ pathways, it was during that time when I began to envision a way to stay in Turkey for more than a few days. I would go as an ethnographer.

Given the historically hostile climate between the two countries, I was aware

that there were presuppositions on both sides regarding the other. Even though I grew up in a family where nationality was never the most important symbol of identity, I was a little afraid that being Greek could be a hindrance to my research. Nevertheless, I considered it as a challenge to discover how I would interact with Turkish people on a long-term basis and how they would react to my presence as well. My fears disappeared after the first weeks of my residence in the country. What I faced in Turkey was simply what any other researcher or foreigner faces. In fact, I often felt that many Turkish people saw Greece as an example to be followed (especially as for its integration in Europe) and that the Greeks were the ‘good’ neighbours of the West as opposed to the ‘bad’ neighbours of the East⁵. However, the issue of why I did not wear a veil gave me a contradictory message.

Occasionally, when in the company of women in a private home, I was asked if I veiled my head when in public. “Are you covered?” (*kapalı*) I was asked sometimes. They were surprised when I explained that as far as I knew women in Greece cover their heads for a number of aesthetic and practical reasons but it is mainly the elderly women (and rarely) who cover their heads for religious purposes and mostly in church. One woman who did not wear a veil commented to me, “I thought that Greek women were like us” but the context of ‘us’ referred to the veiled Muslim women of Turkey, not herself. In other words, she saw Greek women as primarily non-western as she did Turkish women who wore the veil. On another occasion, while a guest for dinner, I refused to taste a *meze*⁶ cooked with wine. The lady of the house (a clearly secularist house), said, “Oh, I will never understand those religious habits” and was obviously relieved when I told her that I was actually agnostic, but unfortunately, allergic to wine. The above incidents suggest that there were indeed pre-conceptions of me. However, those pre-conceptions were related to my religious preferences rather than my ethnic origins and I must admit that as a person who has always felt a bit different in my own culture particularly with respect to religious issues (separation of church and state in Greece has never been fully achieved and 95% of Greek population are Orthodox Christians), during my stay in Turkey I often felt annoyed with fanatically secular individuals. It was easier for me

⁵ To that, among other things, I believe that contributed the efforts of the two countries for ‘good neighbouring’ as politicians call it and the effort of Turkey to join EU.

⁶ *Meze* is a selection of appetisers or small dishes taken with alcohol, which can be served either alone or as the first dish of a meal. In Turkey, *meze* is served with *rakı* and usually consists of cheese, spicy aubergines, various salads, *cacık*, meatballs and *dolma*.

to identify with the marginalised believers than the dominant secularised.

My above comments are relevant to what Gefou-Madianou (1998) points out about the fieldwork experience: As a culturally informed subject, the individual ethnographer always carries his/her identities from which it is impossible for him/her to disengage whilst in the field. Moreover, in my case it was the pre-existing familiarity with the 'other' which triggered my interest in conducting research in Turkey. In addition, even the choice for the content of my research stemmed from my identities and, dare I say, political convictions. Therefore, I agree with those who claim that objectivity in anthropological writing is not possible. To the contrary, in the analysis of my data I tried to be as self-reflexive as possible even if not explicitly, in order to be consistent with the conclusions prompted by my theoretical background; namely that the ethnography of a conflict cannot be seen separately from the historical and political contexts to which both the ethnographer and the informants belong. After all, as Cunningham (1999: 5) claims, "while anthropologists are in the process of discerning globalisation as an analytical phenomenon, they may also be located in – and therefore subject to – the processes of it".

This brings into discussion another aspect of ethnography relating to the closeness of ethnographers to their informants. In her discussion of 'anthropology at home', Gefou-Madianou (1998) states that conducting fieldwork in the home culture (or place of the researcher's origins) involves moral and political issues. An ethnic identification between the ethnographer and the informants poses some difficulties which can be translated into a sense of responsibility of the ethnographer towards the informants. Shared opinions between ethnographer and informants, or feelings of gratitude towards informants for opening their homes can also create feelings of responsibility. How could I be objective in writing about the conflict over the bridge when I, silently but nevertheless, supported their struggle? How could I write something less in favour to the protest when the people had opened not only their houses but also their hearts and minds to a foreigner who did not even speak Turkish very well? I soon realized that I could not. As Paré (in Edelman 2001: 26) writes about his fieldwork in rural Mexico:

For many of us it turned out to be impossible to record acts of repression and forms of exploitation and to witness the difficulties the peasant organisations had in making their voice heard without taking sides [...]. Participation-whether directly in the organisation, in advising groups, in collective analysis with the organisations themselves, in negotiations, in publicity, in solidarity, in

communications, or in the government as a planner, functionary or technician-necessarily implies taking a position, a “committed” vision.

Therefore, I decided to turn to what Marcus describes as a “circumstantial activist, a condition which results from working in a variety of sites, where the politics and ethics of working in any one reflects on work in the others” (1995: 113). As far as the second ethical dilemma is concerned, that is, the gratitude I felt and still feel for *ASG* participants, I decided that the only way to feel less guilty for any potential misjudgement of their battle against the construction of the bridge was to do exactly what I stated at the beginning of this methodological account. Any generalisations that follow concern neither *ASG* nor Arnavutköy as a unique case of protest. This is about the social mobilisation of people defined by multiple dynamics namely cultural, national and socio-political. After all, as Hannerz (1996: 78) reminds us, the multiple, the complex, the ambiguous, the diverse are also socially organised⁷.

The Republic of Turkey (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti)

The early years

Turkey was born from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire which, in terms of commerce, technology and industrialisation, lagged behind Western Europe. The Reformation and the Enlightenment which had given rise to new forces of rational thought and scientific experimentation in the West had limited influence in the East. According to some observers (e.g., Mango 2004), another reason for the weakening of the Ottoman Empire came from local nationalisms and the lack of a Turkish bourgeoisie with the capacity to support the creation of nation-state as did the bourgeoisie in the West. The Young Turks⁸ Movement, an example of internal nationalism, resulted in the Young Turk Revolution (1908 – 1909) which, in turn, led to the War of Independence in 1919 and the abolition of Sultanate in 1922 (Mango 2004). The Republic of Turkey was established on October 29, 1923 as a result of the

⁷ Similarly Edelman (2001: 311) wrote that whether or not we are on the verge of a new cycle of new social movements, it is already evident that understanding today's mobilisations will require new conceptions of what constitutes ethnography, observation, participation, and certainly engagement.

⁸ The Young Turks was a movement of mainly military students that favoured constitutional reform during the monarchy of Sultan *Abdul Hamid II*. The Young Turk Revolution, which eventually led to a coup in 1913, constituted the foundation for *Atatürk's* revolution which subsequently led to the foundation of the Turkish Nation.

Independence War against the Allied Powers⁹ which had begun on May 19, 1919 headed by a young Paşa (general) born in Thessaloniki (at that time part of the Empire, now part of modern Greece). His name was Mustafa Kemal, and on November 24, 1934, the National Assembly granted him the name *Atatürk*, that is, Father of the Turks (Mango 2002).

Following the declaration of the Republic of Turkey, a number of social reforms were enacted, mainly aiming at secularising public life and institutions. The reforms began in 1924 with the unification of education, completed in 1928 with the introduction of the Latin alphabet which replaced the calligraphy of the previous writing system. In 1925, the fez (the religious head-cover) for men was replaced by the hat in both every day life and as the conventional head-wear for state events, religious activities of sects were banned by law and the Western calendar was adopted by the state (Stirling 1993). 1926 saw the rise of the modern secular legislative system as opposed to religious law and the liberation of women as far as political and social rights were concerned. In 1928, the international numeric system was introduced and, in 1931, the metric system became used at the official and eventually common level. Finally, in 1934, religious attire in public was banned (Mango 2004).

Coping with Democracy

In 1945, permission was granted for the foundation of political parties other than the Kemalist and by the 1950s a multi-party democracy replaced the single party regime (Kandiyoti 2002). In the international arena, Turkey became a member of the UN in 1946, joined NATO in 1952, and (along with 19 other countries) signed the Convention founding the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development on the 14th of December, 1960. In 1964 Turkey was granted associate membership by the European Community, later to be named European Union (EU), but in the meantime, the multiparty democracy was interrupted by *coup d'etat* in 1960. A second coup followed on March 12th 1971 aimed at halting the spread of left-wing culture and mentality in the country (Mango 2004). Mass imprisonment of young rebels and assassinations dominated the political scene until the 1973 elections. In

⁹ The main Allied Powers were France, The Russian Empire, the British Empire, and Italy. Their alliance was agreed during World War I and sometimes they are also referred to as the Entente Powers. Later on many other countries joined the Allied Powers.

1974, a coalition government was formed by the secularist *CHP* (Republican People's Party) - which was the party founded by Atatürk - and the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selâmet Partisi - MSP*), a new party with Islamic orientations led by Necmettin Erbakan. The same year, Turkey's invasion of Cyprus posed a problem to foreign relations, even though the climate was positive inside the country. The years that followed were marked by conflicts between right-wing nationalists and left-wing Marxists. Street battles were not uncommon between the conservative Grey Wolves¹⁰ and leftist revolutionaries such as the one on May Day 1977, when right-wing extremists shot and killed 34 left-wing demonstrators (*ibid*).

The economic situation of the country continued to deteriorate, and by 1979, political conflicts had developed into a virtual civil war. With the declaration of the third *coup d'etat* on September 12th 1980, hundreds of thousands of people were imprisoned and hanged, and all the leaders of the political parties were incarcerated or banned from politics. Even as new political parties were formed, 20,000 out of 38,354 NGOs were closed down (Şımşek 2004) and the remaining unions, voluntary organisations and institutions were depoliticised (Beşpınar-Ekici and Gökalp 2006). Finally, another *coup d'etat* came to interrupt once more the democratic process. This was because the winner of the 1995 elections was the Islamist Welfare Party of Necmettin Erbakan who was the first Islamist Prime Minister of the country. His leadership was seen negatively by the National Security Council which in 1997 - with what the press called a 'post-modern or velvet *coup d'etat*' - instituted new rules regarding religious freedoms. Political Islam was banned from public activities and individuals and companies associated with Islamist politics were penalised and punished. Politicians of the ruling party lost their office, including the present Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (elected in 2002 and re-elected in 2007) who was imprisoned under the accusation of spreading religious fanaticism. In addition, the Welfare Party was banned (White 2002).

In spite of the efforts of the 'post-modern *coup*', Islamists had made their way well into Turkish politics, a fact supported by the victory of many pro-Islamist candidates in the municipal elections of 1994. Istanbul was among the municipalities which elected an Islamist mayor, none other than Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of the Justice and Development Party (*AK Parti*) and twice elected Prime Minister.

¹⁰ Grey Wolves (in Turkish *Bozkurtlar*) is the youth organisation of the Turkish Nationalist Movement Party (*MHP*).

The emergence of Islamist politics in local elections in Istanbul did not prove to be what was expected from the, until then, dominant secularist discourse, as far as the cultural level is concerned (Navaro–Yashin 2002). Below, I will try to show that the politics regarding the development of Istanbul had followed a certain pattern either practiced by secularist or Islamist politicians. As an active participant of *ASG* put it in our interview regarding the Third Bridge:

“Ever since the issue was in the agenda, four governments have come to power and five ministers [of Public Works and Settlements] have been in the office. All of them support the bridge project. It does not matter whether it is a coalition, a secularist or an Islamist Minister. They all say yes to the bridge! Do you want to know why? [Because] There are interests behind it. Car companies, oil companies, you name it and you have it. They want to sell cars so they want to make roads to put them on”

Istanbul: A Global City

Istanbul is the largest city of Turkey with 10 million inhabitants (TURSTAT 2004), is situated at the north-western part of Turkey and lies between the Marmara Sea to the south and the Black Sea on the north. The original city was surrounded by seven hills with steep slopes and ample summits. Istanbul is the only city in the world located on two continents, Europe and Asia. The Bosphorus Strait separates the European west side of the city from the Asian east, and is the only seaway from 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 the Old Istanbul (south) and the New Istanbul (north). 36% of the total population of the city lives in the new Asian side of the city lives 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.).

Istanbul in the early Republican years

After the declaration of the Turkish state, one of the first things Kemal Atatürk did was to establish Ankara as the capital of the nation¹¹. Istanbul had already begun to lose its glory before the title of the capital passed to Ankara. According to Mango, by 1923 Istanbul had become provincial and Atatürk's administration did not alter this image. Only a few changes took place such as the rise of new blocks of apartment buildings, monuments of Kemal Atatürk and the building of his summer house on the Florya Beach, close to the Airport. By 1938, when Atatürk died, Istanbul had become an old city and the city's population was getting around by trams built by foreign enterprises (*ibid*). Only a few private cars were in circulation in the narrow streets of the city as well as using the Unkapanı (or Atatürk) Bridge, a pontoon bridge which was completed by a French firm in 1939.

The Marshall Plan and the 1950s

Even though Turkey had managed to remain neutral during World War II¹², it was included in the list of nations to receive financial aid under the Economic Assistant 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 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

¹¹ For Atatürk, Ankara was going to represent the New Turkey and he hand-picked the German town-planner Herman Jansen to design the new capital in 1928. His plan was to design a city that would accommodate millions of people since all the administrative centres, a large number of educational infrastructure and governmental organisations were going to be based to Ankara (Mango 2004).

¹² The successor of Mustafa Kemal, İsmet İnönü, decided to keep Turkey neutral in the event of war, unless the country's vital interests were clearly at stake. Turkey signed a treaty of mutual assistance with Britain and France in 1939 and a nonaggression treaty with Nazi Germany in 1941. Even if pro-Nazi sentiment was increased due to the successes of the Axis forces, Turkey has not permitted the passage of Axis troops, ships, or aircraft through or over Turkey and its waters. Finally, in 1944 Turkey broke diplomatic relations with Adolf Hitler's government and February 1945, declared war on Germany, a necessary precondition for participation in the Conference on International Organisation, held in San Francisco in April 1945, from which the United Nations (UN) emerged. Turkey thereby became one of the fifty-one original members of the world organisation (<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/ww2Timeline/turkey.html>).

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 Assistance 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". 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 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. Gecekondu 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, with the tariff for private cars 3.00 YTL (approximately 1.3 Euro).

The plan for a second bridge was designed as early as in 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 Vaniköy, 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. Like the Bosphorus Bridge it is a suspension highway bridge and the tariff costs the same (3.00 YTL or approximately 1.3 Euro).

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.

Istanbul in the era of Globalisation

The new Millennium and the Marmaray Project

Mass transportation was 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. The idea of a railway tunnel under the Bosphorus Strait was officially considered for the first time in 1860, along with a number of technical impediments which came to attention in both architectural and lay suggestions. Some investigations advised that it would be impossible to allow a tunnel to be placed on or under the seabed; other designs advocated a "floating" type of tunnel which would be suspended on pillars sunk deep into the seabed.

The necessity of a railway mass transit connection from west to east in Istanbul and under the Bosphorus Strait gained momentum in the early 1980s, and the first comprehensive feasibility study conducted in 1987 concluded that such a connection would be feasible and cost-effective. The project was discussed during the following years, and around 1995 it was decided that additional feasibility studies should be more detailed and updated. These studies were completed in 1998, and the findings agreed with the earlier conclusions that the railway transit connections would offer many advantages to the people working and living in Istanbul as well as ease the increasing problems of traffic congestion in the city.

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. The entire undertaking included plans for a 13,3 km Bosphorus crossing and the upgrade of 63 km of suburb line to create a 76,3 km high capacity line between Gebze and Halkalı. Access to the tube would be by tunnels bored from Yenikapı on the European side and Söğütluçesme on the Anatolian side, with intermediate stations at Sirkeci and Üsküdar and an interchange station with the Istanbul Metro at Yenikapı. The line capacity will be 75,000 passengers per hour in each direction.

The inauguration of the Marmaray Tunnel was a highly publicised event. Many members of the cabinet, the Prime Minister as well as mayors of foreign capitals and ministers of transportation from other countries attended the ceremony. Supporters of the government gathered to demonstrate their content for the initiation of the project. *ASG* participants were also present 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.

Local Protests in Global Cities

The ‘city’ as a collectivity of people and a geographic location has been studied by social scientists from different and often heterogeneous backgrounds. Political scientists, economists, geographers, sociologists, social anthropologists have shed light on life in cities as a distinct field of study from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Urban anthropologists often focus on the complexity of social life in cities (Sanjek 2004)¹³ looking at the daily life of migrants (Hannerz 1983), urban poor, work environments, voluntary associations, and social movements (Nash 2005). Drawing on theories of dependency, the world system, globalisation and Marxist perspectives, urban anthropologists shaped a distinct field of study which ‘officially’ emerged in 1972, with the publication of the first issue of the *Urban Anthropology* journal.

Those following the dependency theory model study the ways in which large metropolises of the developed nations dominate the economies of cities emerging in

¹³ See also Moore 1996

developing countries. For example, Kutsche (1989: 130) perceives cities as “centres of power that control semi-peripheral centers, which in turn control other centers along a chain of indefinite length, ultimately controlling satellites”. The Wallerstein model of the World System¹⁴ gained supporters from anthropology who investigate the influence of developed cities not only on other cities but in general on the globe¹⁵. Hannerz (1996) for example, discusses the transnational connections created by world capitalism where, according to his perspective, the globalised world is a product of the dialectic interplay between local and global forces. Having conducted fieldwork in urban settings, Hannerz claims that cities are places where the intensity of this interplay is larger and thus more easily observable. The Marxist point of view favours an analysis of the city as a process (Moore 1996). Urban sociologists such as Walton (in Ho Kwok-Leung 2000) suggest that a city combines market, political authority and community. City life is a process of the interplay of economic forces, political control and community interactions (Ho Kwok-Leung 2000: 4); thus, any theory of the city must begin with an examination of social conflicts between these forces (Castells 1983: 318).

The work of Manuel Castells, one of the most influential theorists in contemporary urban studies, centres on urban change, which, as he claims, is powered by the interests and worldviews of social movements. According to Castells, urban forms and functions are produced and managed by the interaction between space and society, that is, by the historical relationship between human consciousness, matter, energy and information (Castells 1983: xi). He goes on to assert that the city is defined by social interests and values, where the dominant ones have been institutionalised and, thus, resist pressures to change coming from primarily grassroots mobilisations. In this view, urban transformation is a result of the interaction between dominant interests and grassroots resistance. Finally, for Castells, social change is the product of class struggle, the autonomous role of the state, gender relations, ethnic and national movements as well as movements that are self-defined as citizen movements.

¹⁴ Wallerstein describes the world system as the result of the European capitalism that began in the 15th century and went on for centuries to reach its present form as global capitalism. Its clearest form is met in cities where there are large concentrations of capital exercising control over the globe.

¹⁵ Earlier on, the work of Friederich Engels (1892) concerning the impact of capitalism on Manchester was influential one these analyses that focused on housing movements (Du Bois 1899) in big industrial cities.

Similarly, Sassen (2001) claims that global cities host the conflicts and the battles which previously took place in colonies. These new battles occur between the new transnational professional class (the new city users who treat the city as a transterritorial environment) and the underpaid immigrant working class (which provides the material conditions for the corporate world of power). The large numbers of the latter in global cities gives them a strategic role for laying claims on the city, and allows them to negotiate the conditions of their powerlessness as well as to develop a form of politics which challenges the project of the global elites. In this sense, urban social movements can be seen as products of globalisation and more specifically, as responses to economic globalisation that overlooks or demotes locality. This is what Hamel and colleagues (2000: 6) suggest when they claim that “globalisation is intrinsically linked with oppositional cultural activism”. The costs of globalisation are enormous for the biggest part of the population of global cities (Sassen 2001); as one result, urban protests continuously emerge.

The Third Bridge case is one of the most characteristic examples of such protests in Istanbul. As Lewellen (2003) claims, any anthropological definition of globalisation would also have to include the local-level resistances and adaptations to these processes in which the urban political economy becomes less important than the micro-social processes that give birth to urban movements. The social space of operation of such movements is the ‘extra local’ and this defines the difference between urban and other movements. This difference is located to their perspectives of institutions of local development and management when confronted with patterns of domination reproduced by political elites (Hamel *et al* 2000).

Similarly, Castells (1983: xvi) points out that “In order to understand cities and citizens it is essential to analyse the relationship between people and urbanisation. A way to study this relationship is by studying mobilisations that aim to change the city. Thus, the examination of urban movements suggests that they are collective actions consciously aimed at the transformation of the social interests and values embedded in the forms and functions of a historically given city”. Urban social movements, as groups which claim rights to public services and explore new meanings for cities, challenge dominant cultural values and political institutions and refuse the existing spatial forms. In this sense, “urban movements present an opportunity for mediating crises within the system. They represent a bifurcation in the system and they mean to fill this space by pointing to the system’s most glaring crisis,

the flow of capital and its effects upon the communities in which people live their lives” (Wallerstein in Castells: 5).

Big cities in Turkey - such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir - attract human resources through their concentrations of capital which resulted from the liberalisation of the economy. Today 72% of the Turkish population lives in big cities (Ignatow 2007). In Istanbul, with its global character¹⁶, the high priority on efforts to attract foreign investment and development projects relevant to this goal (*ibid*) resulted in the construction of business districts and the support of to facilitate access to them. As Ayşe Öncü (1997: 57) writes about Istanbul: “The internationalised business centre towards the north of the Golden Horn, with its deluxe hotels, modern office towers and wide avenues, was to host global functions, welcoming conventions, businessmen and tourists”. As a result, internal migration to Istanbul is massive. Every year 500,000 migrants come from rural areas to reside in the city (Yalcintan and Erbas 2003). According to the 2000 census, the urban population growth rate is 32,6% and the proportion of urban populations to the rest of Turkey is 59,25% (TURSTAT 2004).

This massive internal migration resulted in the creation of a global city¹⁷ organised by social relationships in both local and transnational contexts. As Hannerz notes, global cities are constituted by four categories of people: transnational entrepreneurs in banking and finance who provide legal services, accounting, technical consulting, telecommunications and international transportation; the research and higher education people; the third world populations; and the people concerned with the promotion of ‘culture and tourism’. Dominant classes in these cities are the transnational elites and thus world cities are structured in a way that serves their lifestyle (Hannerz 1996). This is exactly the assumption of *ASG*, as a 44 year old, high school teacher and active participant of the group stressed:

“The bridges serve only one out of fifteen million individuals who reside in Istanbul. Those individuals live on the Asian side, work downtown and move with their private cars”.

¹⁶According to the Globalisation and World Cities Study Group and Network (GaWC), of Loughborough University, Istanbul is listed as a minor world city of the planet, according to criteria such as the existence of offices of certain multinational companies which provide financial and consulting services.

¹⁷ By the term ‘global city’ I refer to cities highly integrated in the worldwide circuits of capital, acting as control centres of the global economy (Friedman and Wolff 1982) and shaped by transnationalism and new technologies (Hamel *et al* 2000: 7).

As a result many people are displaced, and the areas not used to house business-related buildings host unattractive functions of the developments or are abandoned (Mayer 2000).

The process continues when metropolises such as Istanbul undergo privatisation and individualisation of services and activities which were previously state funded (Nash 2005). In the name of free enterprise, neo-liberal political actors assign the employment of public resources to the private sector in order to make their cities more competitive in the global arena (Kentor *et al* n.d.). Thus, the state seems to withdraw support from public services which are, in turn, privatised, a trend which marks the current situation of the global political economy. The accounts of my informants indicate that the same kind of neo-liberal politics have been followed in Istanbul. A university professor involved in the *ASG* campaign mentioned:

“Public transportation in Istanbul was better before. People used to move with the ferries that were cheaper, cleaner, much more comfortable. If there is good public transportation then people will use it 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* [dock] and all you have to do is buy a few boats and you have them running on a more regular basis, every half an hour lets say. It’s going to be much cheaper and in the long run it is going to be much better”.

As global metropolises, world cities are affected by the currents of economic globalisation to a larger and more systematic degree than cities less integrated in the global processes (Mayer 2000). Istanbul is part of such processes in various ways. To continue with the comments of the above informant:

“The tankers crossing the Bosphorus dump their garbage in the sea and what happens is because of the currents that come very quickly, a lot of the rubbish comes to the surface. And because they built this pyloned road above the sea, the rubbish gets underneath. This really makes a terrible... offensive collection of rubbish on the side. Beşiktaş municipality has a special boat that gathers the rubbish but of course it is very difficult because the rubbish goes underneath the pylons. There was a tanker accident about three or four months ago. Süleyman has some very good slides of what happened. Ten days for the people to clean the village. There was petroleum and it came to the cost of Arnavutköy. And you know people are fishing there...It’s one of the most favourite places. It really created a great pollution. And the frequency is big”.

[Question: Why is this allowed?]

What happens is that sometimes the boats are stopped and controlled and are given a penalty. But there are international laws. You cannot give too much penalty.

Thus, the global-scape in which urban conflicts and movements emerge may constitute the basis of analysis between the functions and activities of the global cities

and the issues and actors of urban social movements (Sassen 2001). The emerging conflicts in such cities have global character in the sense that the economic, political and community forces are shaped by transnationalism. The *ASG* case is an example of such conflicts.

“No to the interests underlying the bridge”¹⁸: The Struggles of a Global City

Istanbul has changed a lot through the centuries. As the capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, it was a location for monumental architectural projects - great palaces, churches, mosques, walls, bridges, and so on. During the 19th century, the wish of the Ottoman rulers to assimilate Western elements in architecture and administration changed the city one more time. The creation of the Turkish nation gave new meaning to urban landscape. Big boulevards, new bridges and highways were constructed. 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 were externally funded as well as the underwater tunnel project. 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 build 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 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 straight 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. One of

¹⁸ *ASG* placard

the main points the press representative of *ASG* stressed in one of our discussions was the following:

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

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. As explained by 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 factor to 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 incoming 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.

Another fact suggesting the transnational character of processes taking place in Istanbul, is that the Bosphorus, which is one of the most essential assets of Istanbul, is the only maritime overland link from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean which allows Istanbul to be an important actor in international trade between the two regions. This international role of the Strait is prioritised over the domestic use of it. The number of ferries which cross the Strait has decreased and currently many residents now use their private cars or public busses to cross the bridges, creating considerable traffic congestion during rush hours. The university professor active in *ASG* mentioned earlier claimed that:

“All the governments have tried to change the city according to the needs that car usage creates, whereas the opposite should have been done... There is a car-industries lobby behind political decisions which does not concern only Istanbul or Turkey. The attempt to increase speed limit for example relates to the effort to render cars more competitive with the rest means of transportation. Car purchase in Europe decreases and this is preoccupying for the car industries”.

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”¹⁹.

Conclusions

Contemporary Istanbul is a global city which combines financial districts with skyscrapers, old mosques and churches, museum-palaces, apartment blocks, gecekondus, small streets and big boulevards, bridges and peripheral highways (çevreyolu) crossed by millions of cars, a small tram line and a small metro line. It seems that ever since 1923, the city’s administrators have been determined to modernise it at any cost by destroying old neighbourhoods or building over them²⁰ and making Istanbul a financial centre. In addition, it seems that this technocratic mentality has survived until today. As a result of this mentality, many of the modern constructions are now considered to be the city’s landmarks. The Bosphorus bridges are two of the most characteristic examples. Many postcards of Istanbul picture the two bridges in a picturesque way, implying that they are one of the city’s charms. The international tourist campaign for Istanbul for the summer period of 2007 sponsored by the Turkish Ministry of Tourism is almost completely based on the Bosphorus bridges presenting them either as the city’s modern achievements or as the city’s

¹⁹ Lenin (1917) and Luxembourg (2003) also wrote that by representing the interests of the capitalist society, the state poses insuperable limits to social transformation.

²⁰ See Bartu 1999

organically evolved development. As one high-ranking official of the Turkish Highways Department told me:

The bridges are necessary and that is why they were built. Istanbul needs more roads, so that people can have easy access to their work. If 15 houses in Arnavutköy must be demolished for the greater benefit of millions of people who need to go to their work quicker, so may it be!

A similar statement, but in a more intense tone, was made by the head of the State Highways Department in 2001 during an interview to Milliyet Newspaper: “We will construct the Third Bridge no matter what!” (3. Köprü yapacağız!).

Yet, the policies that brought about those changes in the past and the globally-informed policies of today 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 Turkish welfare state does not provide housing for these categories of citizens has resulted in poorly constructed, unattractive big apartment buildings and gecekondu. The construction of large boulevards and the Bosphorus bridges, without simultaneous improvement of public transportation has resulted in traffic congestion, air pollution and displacement.

Following this train of thought, the paper examines *ASG* as part of what Falk (1993: 39) named ‘globalisation-from-below’; that is, transnational social forces animated by environmental concerns, human rights, hostility to patriarchy, and a vision of human community based on the unity of diverse cultures seeking an end to poverty, oppression, humiliation, and collective violence. All these elements lead to the need to examine the *ASG* as a mobilisation, such as all mobilisations which are inherent parts of global cities and as a result of political choices which affected Turkey in general and, Istanbul in particular. *ASG* activists claim, such choices should be the product of a democratic governance an opinion expressed by two of them as follows:

“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).

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