

## Spatiality, Resistance and the Production of Locality (Mekan, Direnme ve Yerelliğin Üretimine Dair)

*In this moment it is possible to ask what is possible - besides economic victimhood and social incivility. Can we find other ways to be? Can we be other than what globalization makes of us? These questions are challenging ones that ask for daily practices of learning to live differently. I hear them as a call for an "ethics of the local".*

*J.K.Gibson-Graham, from "An ethics of the local", May, 2001*

The "spatial distance" and its attache of everyday life is something that makes difficult to position our being in it and knit the social paths within. What I mean by "social paths" here is "living together". My relation to me and to the "other" is defined through spatial organization led by economic and political decisions. Is there any possibility for a collective action by not glorifying everyday life but considering, researching the dynamic of it? Is there any possibility to think of "locality" as a practice of resistance rather than in a bounded frame of a dualist structure of globalization?

Can we be other than what globalization makes of us?

### **The Spatial Distance**

My neighborhood Tophane.... my street where I live is being situated between Antrepo and Karaköy, which is a district known run-down, poor, dirty and multi-ethnic (kurds, arabs, gypsies) is currently facing slowly a forced change. The small slow changes are sometimes a slow gentrification by the local investors investing in old Rum (Ottoman-Greek) houses; but sometimes it is a converted little house of *muhtar* into an Ottoman style wooden house<sup>1</sup> in Tophane Park by the present municipality; or it is the whole area (from "Istanbul Modern" to Karakoy) that is under the discussion to transform it to a gentrified port area for tourist sea cruises by the global investors in collaboration with

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<sup>1</sup> The municipalities wants to transform or demolish most parts in the city to build ottoman wooden houses

state and corporate architecture offices. As a space under the pressure of spatial politics and different ideologies, Tophane still has an active and dynamic, rich urban life that a lot of communities present themselves within the border of this space. Here “locality” is appearing not as a practice from identities but as a practice of communities that are intervened in spatial network through their relation to space and everyday life that is mostly re-constructed in each every day. My focus is on the production of locality and its specific roots in particular spatial situations. Recently, global strategies of neo-liberal economy associate with local discourses in capitalizing not only the space but also the social relations that try to re-scale the urban space in Istanbul. Especially the state discourse of modernization became a legitimizing tool not only for the attachment of the functions of spaces into the global capitalist chain, but also for the re-production of the recent state ideology flavored with the nostalgia of Ottoman-Turk identity that tries support an ultra-nationalist and conservative background discourse. Brenner/Theodore explain this phenomenon that **the neo-liberal policy experiments in cities that goes along with esteeming the ideological discourses**: “...under these condition, cities have become the incubators for many of the major political and ideological strategies”<sup>2</sup>

If you would walk two-three streets up further from Tophane to Istiklal street; the shops, the activities on street are being transformed into a more common daily life that differences disappear into the inside of little streets. Artist Karl-Heinz Klopff investigated encounters and temporary actions on the street among different communities and pedestrians when he organized small performances at the specific steps in the area (in 9<sup>th</sup> Int.Istanbul Biennial, 2005). Thee work “Mind the Step” (2005) of the artist Karl-Heinz Klopff that was produced in the same area of the neighborhood (Beyoğlu) focused on the performativity of streets engaged with different communities that share limited spaces. *Mind the Steps* created situations in which local people (several communities), an

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<sup>2</sup> **Brenner, N./Theodore, N.** “Cities and Geographies of “actually existing neo-liberalism”, p. 349- 379, 2002, Antipode, Blackwell.

audience and the artist himself participate and encounter each other in a unique “space” that reveals itself through music and dance in relation to specific urban patterns, the “steps”. The meaning of the “steps,” the performances and the encounters is transformed through each event and occasion that the artist evokes. For *Mind the Steps* he picked six streets in the district of Beyoglu-Galata, where he chose six pavements/sets of steps. The steps, which are usually in a neglected state and of an ambiguous nature, are real obstacles when walking in the streets of Istanbul. The collaboration with local musicians and performers from different ethnic, cultural communities not only created an interactive street intervention connecting a diverse audience and local people, but also conveyed trans-local experiences and new insights to the residents and citizens. This area represents the “Other” in the urban conscious of Istanbulians; it is uncanny and insecure, a place to which urban clichés and misconceptions of danger are attached. Uncanny conditions and obscure identifications with place lead to urban discourses based on fear and the need for safety and security. Urban ghettos, peripheries of city centers, gated communities, and other urban areas whose inhabitants have diverse cultural, economical and social backgrounds are permeated with those discourses even if they are not based on real facts. As a global urban phenomenon “Gated Communities” spread out, especially on the outskirts of Istanbul in the last years. In the work of “Perfectly Suited for You”<sup>3</sup> by artist Solmaz Shahbazi, she focuses on the gated communities of “Kemer Country”, “Bahçepehir” and “Optimum” in Istanbul. Partly one work display the interior of one house in “Kemer Country” that we listen the owner/resident of it. The other video shows several images of the gated communities and their surroundings, and is accompanied by a soundtrack of three social scientists discussing urban sprawl. The owner speaks about her domestic life, the reasons her family wanted to move, her new daily habits, and her fear

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<sup>3</sup> video installation, two videos: 1 projection, 1 TV screen, Dvcam (15’30” projection 13’00” TV). 9.International Istanbul Biennial, 2005, Istanbul.

Tan, P. p. Spatial Practices and Politics in Middle East, editors: M,Miessen / A.Carver / S.Bashar, 2007, Publisher: Bidoun/Moutamarat

of Istanbul's city center. She mentions her high security bills and talks about her new hobby, golf. Her fear of the city is convincing, as is her assertion that the development offers a "community feeling." This "communities" is being redefined by the lifestyle of the habitants in the gated communities but the at the other hand, "Other" is again defined by those communities' eyes. Several lifestyles in the city (outside/inside the wall) point out several practices of local modernities in the shared time/space. Analyzing the links between security, segregation, and citizenship reveals how urban discourses are produced and consumed. In the new global city, the notion of citizenship is based on legal rights, on "...norms, practices, meanings and identities"<sup>4</sup>. How do this city relate to these discussions, especially in terms of spatial organization and civil rights? If we come back to Tophane's small hidden streets; we will witness that the "outsider", "other" (that is marked, defined by not only the other citizens but also by the state authorities) are mostly the clear defined ethnic groups that migrated in 90s<sup>5</sup> to Istanbul (according to my conversation with them). Furthermore, 90s Istanbul becomes also a "transit" place, city where refugees and asylum seekers are temporary live<sup>6</sup>. From Tophane, Tarlabası to Aksaray we can witness lifes of transnationalism that is the outcome of border politics, human trafficking and its effect on urban segregation scaled in those districts at the heart of the city. According to researcher/writer Behzad Yaghmanian: *"In Kasimpasa, Tarlabasi, Aksaray, or elsewhere, the refugees live in total isolation from the rest of their host community. They have minimal to no contact to the citizens of their communities. So, naturally, in terms of culture, be it popular culture or not, there is no share experience*

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<sup>4</sup> Isın, E. "Democracy, Citizenship and the City", Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City, ed.E.F.İşin, Routledge, London-New York, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Migrants here are citizens who come from other cities to Istanbul for economical reasons to find a job, to work. The economical reasons sometimes-based on social, political conflicts in their cities. At the other hand, according to displacement report of TESEV (Dilek Kurban, Ayşe Betül Çelik, Deniz Yüksek); citizens forced to migrate because of the conflicts. On the other hand urban poverty is mostly the result of the unsolved social, political problems or wrong strategies by the state authorities. Ethnic diversity supports the organization of the economy of the urban and its poverty.

<sup>6</sup> Tan, P. p.211-215, "Grenzpolitiken und Stadt-Betrachtungen", trans. to German by C.Salzer, Self Service City: İstanbul, editors: S.Lanz/O.Esen, metroZones4, b\_books, 2005. Turkish version: "Sınır Politikaları ve Kente Bakış", XXI. Mimarlık, Kent ve Tasarım Dergisi, İstanbul, Ocak 2004.

*between the host and the refugee community.*”<sup>7</sup>. In case of participation in public spaces in the city, migrants from African, Middle East and East use sometimes spaces such as “non-place” areas as shopping mall, Mcdonalds<sup>8</sup> or they create their own meeting places. In “Brothers and Sisters” (work by Esra Ersen, 2002), one Nigerian from Tarlabası (which is under huge gentrification project nowadays) defines his district as a “camp”; it seems this camp / district justifies the differences, the “community” and the rule of “living together”. Here the justification stems from the “exclusion”; the rule of exclusion of the “other”. Following this, related urban poverty is the outcome of the expansion of the informal economy that communities are organized according to it.<sup>9</sup>

At the other hand, in Anatolian side, near Kalamış district a Checehnian camp (hosts 125 Chenien refugees since 7 years) exist among the districts and military area at the heard of the city. Artist Banu Cennetoğlu focuses on this urban zone and its identity that is not only under several difference definitions but also several claims in her work “Are there any palm trees in grozny?” (2005). A “Camp” which is stuck in-between an area that belongs to state railway, a military area and a potential space of urban renovation/gentrification for an entertainment place near the water shore that are all at the one centre of the city. Cennetoğlu’s observation through her installation of photography on this urban zone which is at the heart of the city but invisible in public space based on the ambiguous and several claims (political/social/economical). The work displays a different reality of an uncertain urban zone that developments and phenomena are overlapped. Public Spaces have several layers that are controlled by authorities for

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<sup>7</sup> Tan,P. p.203-210, “Interview mit Behzad Yaghmanian: Unsicheres Terrain:Istanbul, Grenzpolitiken und Stadt” (March, 2003), trans. to German by C.Salzer, Self Service City: İstanbul, editors: S.Lanz/O.Esen, metroZones4, b\_books, 2005

<sup>8</sup> They often replied to the question “where do you feel save in this city?” that they feel save in big shopping center and in Mcdonalds.

<sup>9</sup> Further information: Buğra,A./Keyder,Ç “Poverty and Social Policy in Contemporary Turkey”, report, Boğazici University Social Policy Forum, January 2005, [www.spf.boun.edu.tr/docs/WP-Bugra-Keyder.pdf](http://www.spf.boun.edu.tr/docs/WP-Bugra-Keyder.pdf)

exercising power. In the meanwhile, unrecognized communities that are the citizens of the city create their own actions and understanding of limited public spaces that are becoming more under pressure of urban transformation/gentrification projects.

### **The Production of Locality**

The concept of “locality” or “local” no longer refers to a homogeneous cultural geography. Likewise, “local” does not simply refer to a place. Especially within the context of an urban sphere, “local” becomes an act in itself, which is contextualized with the politics of space, economical transformation, medium and human behaviors. Informal economy, gender, ethnicity and cross-cultural practices re-produce the local in particular ways. The local as particular small scales examples, is a definition that is usually being positioned within a dualistic structure opposite to the global universalism. In that case: *“...local becomes the empirical, so that any concrete instance of anything is “local”*<sup>10</sup>. Especially, economical or political realities in societies; “local” implications are the single cases or examples related to specific situations of the society that has to do with its history, position in modernization and its global placement internationally that comes out with under the effect of globalization. In that case “local” represents the “particularity”. Unfortunately, this approach not only strengthens the dualistic structure of local/global that we must try to escape that defines “locality” within a generalization of universal globalization. Furthermore, the definition as the local as a response to globalization, here, local means a communal identity opposite to globalization effects as flow of information and capitalism that is *“...a defensive historical reaction to globalizing process.”*<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Arjun Appadurai reintroduces the term locality<sup>12</sup> as “primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial.” According to him, cities are made up of several layers of localities. He approaches locality as an imagination of social practice: *“the work of the imagination allows people to inhabit either multiple localities or a kind*

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<sup>10</sup> p. 744, Volume, F to M, Encyclopedia of globalization, editors: R.Robertson / J.A.Scholte, Routledge. 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.744

<sup>12</sup> Appadurai, A. chapter 9, “The Production of Locality”. book: Modernity at large: Globalization and Cultural Dimension,

*of single and complex sense of locality, in which many different empirical spaces coexist*". However, he bases the locality under the transnational societies and networks societies within nation-state and postcolonial social structures. As he is claiming, his concern is on the concept of "local" in the framework of the nation-state development in global era: *"My concern is with what locality might mean in a situation where the nation-state faces particular sort of transnational de-stabilization"*<sup>13</sup>. As the literature of "locality" seems to position the concept under a So, can we go further? to an understanding and an approach such as that locality is not exactly defined as a "community" but as an experience, practices of communities in urban sphere. According to Rüdiger Korff: *"A locality must be seen as a response to, and attempt to cope with, the metropolitan environment and the globalization process in particular. Although of course spatially bound and referring to specific places, it is not a geographic but first a social category"*.<sup>14</sup>

Neighborhoods often used as the physical spaces that resist against neo-liberal globalization in spatial re-scaling, however; the affirmative idea of neighborhoods gets problematic in the case of "gated communities". But we can develop the argument that the social network intertwined with everyday life and spatial practices could be the base of resistance, empowerment in creating specific localities.

### **Spatiality and Resistance**

The weddings in my neighborhood are always either organized on the street (by closing the street by the Gypsy community) or in the "car wash" garage, which is behind my apartment organized by other communities. Sometimes it happens that both weddings parties exist at the same time with different music in warm summer nights. One of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid,

<sup>14</sup> Berner, E./Korff, R. Globalization and Local Resistance: The creation of Localities in Manila and Bangkok, p.6, Working Paper No 205, Southeast Asia Programme, Bielefeld 1994

*"The city can be described as a kaleidoscope of localities. I would define locality as a socio-spatial clustering of interaction and as interdependency of activities in an area without clear borders. A locality is characterized on one hand by an openness of interaction and social relations, and on the other by an interdependency of activities taking place within the locality."* p. 7, Korff, "City, space and Meaning: Theoretical Perspectives of Urbanism", working paper No.140, Southeast Asia Programme, Bielefeld 1990.

actor (architecture office Tabanlıoğlu) that is participating in the urban transformation from Istanbul Modern to Karaköy with the “Galata Port” project did promise that Tophane square will be lively again with the urban renovation/transformation<sup>15</sup>. Nowadays, Istanbul is under pressure of neo-liberal urban strategies supported fully by state policy that justifies their ultra-nationalist conservative ideology. In 2005, with the Urban Transformation and Renewal policy of 5366, which allows for the full authorization of municipalities for urban renovation/development, the legitimization of the recent projects such as Sulukule transformation, Galataport, Tarlabaşı, Kartal...speeded up. A very recent example is the Sulukule case. Sulukule, the district where a majority of the Gypsy community in Istanbul settled since the Ottoman Era on the historical peninsula, is now facing the possibility of the displacement of its inhabitants. With the policy of 5366, it was decided that the settlement in the district would be demolished on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2006 by the state authorities. As a result, a number of architects and participants from different fields initiated the interdisciplinary platform “40 Gün 40 Gece Sulukule” which received the support of various NGOs and universities and launched public activities that tries to defend the district and work with the habitants for the possibilities of resistance<sup>16</sup>. According to the public events that is being organized by the platform on the 17<sup>th</sup> May, a mutual protocol was signed between parties who have been involved, or interested in the case including universities, municipalities, NGOs and the fellow initiators. Collaboration and organization at a neighborhood level is possible especially in the initiation of temporary events and the use of local networks, which do not only help *the settlements* to participate, but also actors from different fields. Those platforms can re-identify the ideology and make the settlements involve but also the initiators from different academic, activists fields. The presence of those platforms that are initiated by individuals (not exactly by institutions)

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<sup>15</sup> **Erk, N.** M.G.Tabanlıoğlu ile Röportaj, ‘Ey Mimar Bunu Kaldır’ Dediler İstanbul Modern’i Yok Saydık, 17.10.2005, Hürriyet

<sup>16</sup> Sulukule: Interview with Aslı Kıyak İngin (initiator of the platform) by Pelin Tan: [www.arkitera.com/soylesi\\_68\\_asli-kiyak-ingin.html](http://www.arkitera.com/soylesi_68_asli-kiyak-ingin.html). <http://40gun40gece-sulukule.blogspot.com/>



can re-identify the relation between the ideology and space. If we follow Brenner/Theodore's assertion: "...even if cities have been subsumed within neo-liberal agendas of various kinds in recent decades, they also remain vibrant sociopolitical arenas in which alternative practices of everyday life a whole range of institutional experiments, and various traditions of political utopianism continue to flourish.<sup>17</sup>"; It seems that "optimism" and "hope" surrounded with collective/organic activities are nowadays the only way to resist on our rights of spaces, city against neo-liberal globalization, ultra-nationalism that supports racism and violent acts in public.

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<sup>17</sup> **Neil Brenner / Nik Theodore:** Preface: From the "New Localism" to the SPaces of Neoliberalism; 2002, Antipode, Blackwell publishers. p.341-347

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