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### Creativity, Counterpublics and Çapulcu [looters] Cosmopolitics in Beyoğlu (Istanbul)

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## CREATIVITY, COUNTERPUBLICS AND ÇAPULCU [LOOTERS] COSMOPOLITICS IN BEYOĞLU (ISTANBUL)

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### ABSTRACT

*The Gezi exodus in 2013 challenges us to examine retrospectively the synthesis and the dynamics of the main actors of the Gezi protest who were discriminated against after being characterized as 'Çapulcu' (looters) by R.T. Erdoğan. Since 2008, systematic ethnographic fieldwork has been conducted among feminist activists, artists, architects, writers and academics in the broader area of Beyoğlu, the modern heart of the current Global city of Istanbul. It is this ethnographic fieldwork that permits us to study the broader practices, aesthetics and agency of 'counterpublics'. These ethnographic encounters with the local critical voices producing reflexive 'texts' directed the focus of the study presented in this paper on the impact of the cultural turn as priority for social protests, i.e. identities' activism and artistic creativity in interaction with broader counter-publics. The latter seems to correspond with authoritarian rule, Islamist conservative ethics, fantasies and governmental police control technologies, applied in accordance to the neoliberal projects of gentrification and Istanbul's transformation into a creative city since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pamuk's project, The Museum of Innocence, a case study on which this paper focuses, describes ironically and metonymically the process of transformation of dynamic counterpublics into significant looters' (Çapulcu) cosmopolitics.*

*Keywords: Istanbul, creative city, counterpublics, authoritarian rule, new Islamist ethics, Çapulcu cosmopolitics*

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ΔΗΜΙΟΥΡΓΙΚΟΤΗΤΑ, ΕΝΑΛΛΑΚΤΙΚΕΣ  
ΔΗΜΟΣΙΟΤΗΤΕΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΚΟΣΜΟΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ  
ΤΩΝ ‘ΠΛΙΑΤΣΙΚΟΛΟΓΩΝ’  
ΣΤΟ ΜΠΕΝΟΓΛΟΥ (ΙΣΤΑΝΜΠΟΥΛ)

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η έξοδος στο Γκεζί το 2013 μας προκαλεί να εξετάσουμε αναδρομικά τη σύνθεση και τη δυναμική των κύριων δραστηριοτήτων που έλαβαν μέρος στις διαμαρτυρίες του Γκεζί, αυτούς που ο Ρ.Τ. Ερντογάν στιγματίσει αποκαλώντας τους ‘πλιατσικολόγους’. Η μελέτη βασίζεται σε επιτόπια έρευνα που πραγματοποιείται από το 2008 στην περιοχή του Μπέηογλου, ανάμεσα σε φεμινίστριες, καλλιτέχνες, αρχιτέκτονες, συγγραφείς και ακαδημαϊκούς που ζουν ή/και δραστηριοποιούνται σε αυτήν την μοντέρνα καρδιά της σύγχρονης παγκόσμιας πόλης Ιστανμπούλ. Η συγκεκριμένη επιτόπια εθνογραφική έρευνα μας επιτρέπει να εξετάσουμε τις διευρυμένες πρακτικές, αισθητική και εμπρόθετη δράση που ανιχνεύονται μέσα σε εναλλακτικές δημοσιότητες. Οι εθνογραφικές συναντήσεις με τις τοπικές κριτικές φωνές που παράγουν αναστοχαστικά ‘κείμενα’ έδωσαν το στίγμα αυτής της μελέτης που εστιάζει στην σημασία της πολιτισμικής στροφής στα κινήματα κοινωνικής διαμαρτυρίας, δηλαδή τη στροφή στον ακτιβισμό των ταυτοτήτων, στην καλλιτεχνική δημιουργία και στη διάδραση με τις εναλλακτικές δημοσιότητες. Οι συγκεκριμένες μορφές κοινωνικής διαμαρτυρίας αποτελούν αντιδράσεις απέναντι στην αυταρχική διακυβέρνηση, στη νέο ισλαμιστική ηθική, τις φαντασιώσεις και τις κυβερνητικές τεχνολογίες αστυνόμευσης που επιβάλλονται σε σύμπραξη με τα νεοφιλελεύθερα προγράμματα εξευγενισμού και μετατροπής της Ιστανμπούλ σε δημιουργική πόλη, από το τέλος του 20ού αι. Το Μουσείο της Αθωότητας, ως πρότζεκτ του δημιουργού Ορχάν Παμούκ αποτελεί μια βασική μελέτη περίπτωσης στην οποία εστιάζει το παρόν άρθρο, επειδή συμπυκνώνει ειρωνικά και μετωπικά τις εναλλακτικές δημοσιότητες που μετασχηματίζονται σε σημαίνουσα κοσμοπολιτική των πλιατσικολόγων.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Ιστανμπούλ, δημιουργική πόλη, εναλλακτικές δημοσιότητες, αυταρχική διακυβέρνηση, νέα Ισλαμικά ήθη, κοσμοπολιτική των πλιατσικολόγων

## INTRODUCTION

The case of Istanbul, just before Gezi and its artistic aroma of protesting after May 2013, is urging us to explore the ways in which art, creativity, and social activism have developed in the district of Beyoğlu - the locus of otherness, full of contradictions, early Modern cosmopolitanism, ethnic and social marginality, late Modern neoliberal precarity and cultural creativity (Komins, 2002; Mills, 2010; Aksoy and Robins, 2011). To do so, we have to account in detail for the early modern progressive spirit of capitalist development, the middle class prosperity of the non-ethnic Turks (Greeks, Levantines, Armenians, and Jews) and the late modern neoliberal gentrification plans, cultural production, feminist and minorities' activism in the aftermaths of the 1980 military coup (Arat, 2004; Baykan and Hatuka, 2010; Yumul, 2009). Beyoğlu, and its proximate neighborhoods (Peran, Taksim, Gihangir, Galata, Tarlabasi and Gezi), became the district of par excellence commercialization of culture after the 1990s, following nostalgic paths and artistic creativity as part of the main investment plan for the global city center (Keyder, 1999; Göktürk et al., 2010; Derviş, 2014; Durmaz and Bahar, 2015). Its residents, ranging from transsexuals to feminists, left anarchist to bourgeois bohemians, (i.e. academics, architects and artists, educated Turks), Anatolian and Kurdish migrants to 'Istanbulu' residents and foreign passengers (for short or longer period), intervened dynamically to reclaim the right to ethnic differences. Thus, plural anti-conventional subjectivities come to oppose authoritarian plans of growth (i.e. privatization of the public space and eviction of low income residents from Beyoğlu) and governance (i.e. police repression, state patriarchal morality and the new Islamist ethics in the public sphere).

The continuum of authoritarian rule and patriarchal hegemonies coming from old Ottoman norms or Modern Western aspirations (i.e. Kemalism) led to the construction of the Modern Turkish state's militarist and pedagogical idiom of governance. Among its main enforcements we found the instrumental use of women in the public sphere and the progressive elimination of differences and minorities (ethnic, gender, sexual, social and so forth) in bureaucratic practices, nationalism and parliamentary representations (Navaro-Yashin, 2002; Öktem, 2011). However, following the great repression of the leftist resistance in the 1970s, and the 1980 military coup, this same continuum of authoritarianism and military control in the public sphere has given birth to the proliferation of dissent counterpublics.<sup>1</sup>

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1. According to some representative bibliography (Fraser, 1997; Johnston, 2000; Kohn,

Dissent counterpublics created by those educated agents who use activism, civil society, social poetics, and other artistic ways to conceptualize and experience the right to being different in the public sphere, sharing the desire for the democratization of Turkey before its future integration in the EE (Lelandais, 2013). Moreover, it is not accidental that in the process of globalization and the global cultural turn, Istanbul became a global and creative city at the same time that ‘precarity’, as an existential socio-economic condition for all concerned people, and new social movements were mixing with counter-publics (Sışmek, 2004). After the 1990s, all these social agents with artistic motivations seem to follow an urban bohemian lifestyle, newly born around Beyoğlu (Parmaksioğlu, 2009; Jale, 2010), a workshop that has given birth to new cosmopolitics on the occasion of the Gezi protests. We understand cosmopolitics as plural cosmopolitanisms (Pollock et al., 2000),<sup>2</sup> on the antipode of modern cosmopolitanism and

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2001; Warner, 2002; Starrett, 2008; Loehwing and Motter, 2009; Farmer, 2013) we consider counterpublics as voices and texts coming from less privileged categories of people (i.e. women, ethnic, racial and sexual minorities or indigenous populations) or voices of dissent by social agents fighting against power and hegemony. Counterpublics seem to express an alternative way towards the modern technologies of publicity, protest and resistance. Identity activists, intellectuals, artists, literary authors and other agents who act in the public sphere through ethical dispositions, dynamics of the space, cultural heritage and current global trends seem to challenge and contest the analytical concepts and political categories of ‘public sphere’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘subjectivity’, in accordance and/or beyond the modern mainstream narratives of public critique or presence in the public sphere (i.e. nationalism, cosmopolitanism, journalism, party system, syndicalism, civil society). Nevertheless, as counterpublics could acquire various forms of expression and use different technologies for the communication of the message (i.e. Zapatistas militarism, creative writing, music, film, dressing code, religious piety, secular laïcité etc.) we notice a selective use of dissent against power, norms and moral ethics, as well as different stance towards generalized solidarity. In this frame, new Islamist ethics and Western bourgeois philanthropy, as selective technologies of acting in the public sphere, submitted to specific moral ethics and gender discrimination assumptions, could not seem compatible with counterpublics of dissent, critique and openness, as subaltern cosmopolitics tend to be.

2. We should clarify in advance the meaning we attribute to *cosmopolitics*, according to the relevant social and political theory, the notion can be summarized as follows: (i) cosmopolitics that can only work beyond binary distinctions between the East and the West, as well as at the intersection of old and new assumptions about private and public spaces and other distinctions, (ii) cosmopolitics that concern solidarity practices of care and love, i.e. common housing, sharing food, immediate economic exchange and so forth (iii) cosmopolitics, as politics happening in the global South conditionality that can only be applied as specific spatial experiences of subaltern people within some neighborhoods of a metropolis or some country areas, in the modality of the direct participant experience towards the right to city, land, commons etc, more than through political parties representation, (iv) cosmopolitics that can invest

its Eurocentric hierarchies, that may include the creative side of dissent through multiple global/local encounters and subaltern counterpublics.

More specifically, in the name of human and cultural rights and as the technology of civil society was promoted by the EU and USA experts after the 1990s, feminist, sexual and ethnic rights associations started to collaborate with anti-gentrification movements. According to Saskia Sassen's analysis (2001), a global city is characterized by the following 3 Ts: Talent, Technology and Tolerance. Applied in the case of Beyoğlu, these 3 Ts entail people who are young, qualified enough, quite globalized, and sensitive to minorities, ready to respond with agency and creativity to the challenge of the 'cultural turn' (Gibb, 2001). During and after the Gezi park protests in May-June 2013, Beyoğlu, this historical district of otherness, social exclusion, dissent and bourgeois life-style, became the place where those characterized as looters, *çapulcu* by R.T. Erdoğan, chose to spend their everyday activities, interacting with the lived space in the spirit of new *cosmopolitics*.

Nevertheless, it is only after the 1998 earthquake when we first realize the proliferation of alternative discourses and performances of dissent springing from the new social movements which defend the right to the city, the habitat, the public space, the human, sexual, gender and ethnic differences. Feminists, left-wing activists, anarchists, novelists, architects and artists start to negotiate the master nationalist narratives such as the Western orientalist assumptions, the new ottoman fantasies and the modern Kemalist militarist regularities. In Beyoğlu, all of them seem to intersect, building both bohemian subjectivity and tolerant citizenship through spatial anti-conformism and experiences of dissent against authoritarian rule (Arat, 2004; Sişmek, op.cit; Parmaksioğlu, 2010; Harvey, 2012; Le-landais, op.cit; Acar and Uluğ, 2014).

In the present contingency, the above complex sociocultural context, that founds Istanbul as a global city, has challenged our urban anthropology project. It became very obvious from the data collected for this project that urban anthropology tools need to move away from Modern positivism and redefine thick description through polyvalent local/global encounters within urban settings (Poewe, 1996; Mukherjee, 2011). It is an emergency for an Anthropology of social movements and protests, as the

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more in the politics of emotions than rational choice, and thus, are carrying in evident way the signature of every agent acting in creative spirit, beyond Modern Eurocentric hierarchies and priorities (Latour, 2004; Stengers, 2005; de la Cadena, 2010; Watson, 2014) .

case from Istanbul city center shows, to maintain an open dialogue with those key-informants/agents. The latter, being reflexive about their own culture in their narratives through art, cinema, literary and cultural studies, imagine and suggest the ways in which subjectivities and citizenship could be re-shaped. Additionally, and beyond rational analysis and planning of resistance, trivial and exceptional embodied emotional dissent practices can be shared within particular urban spaces of hope (Harvey, 2000; Sitrin, 2013). Thus, the empathy the anthropologist feels towards the key discussants, as creative agents in the fieldwork, could multiply the mirrors of representation, reflection and critical understanding (Herzfeld, 1997).

The main argument in the present paper unfolds around the transformation of Istanbul into a Global/creative city of capital and culture (Tasbasi, 2014), against the backdrop of the impact of neoliberal governmentality, old and new Islamist authoritarian rule on the birth of creative counter-publics, following the 'cultural turn activism' that opened the floor for the production of subaltern cosmopolitics by active looters.

#### REFLECTIONS ON FIELDWORK IN BEYOĞLU: FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND CREATIVITY AFTER THE CULTURAL TURN

Beyoğlu and its proximate neighborhoods Peran, Taksim, Gihangir, Galata, Tarlabasi and Gezi became after the 1990s the locus of tourist entertainment, consumerism and artistic creativity. At the same time, feminist, sexual rights orientation and human rights activism found shelter also within this urban district (Lelandais, *op.cit.*; Tasbasi, *op.cit.*). Here, some neoliberal projects should be mentioned such as the commercial malls on the pedestrian Istiklal Caddesi replacing small, middle class commercial activities; the eviction of poor Kurdish in Tarlabasi; the Erdoğan's new Islamist plans for the transformation of the Gezi Park into a private hotel area. The latter, in the broader Taksim square area, should be surrounded by the rebuilding of old military Ottoman stables, next to a new big mosque, facing the old orthodox church of Agia Triada.

On the other hand, after the 1990s, the global cultural turn in social activism (Özkan, 2015) met in situ with minority mobilizations as social excluded categories (i.e. transsexuals) and new Anatolian internal migrants, mostly Kurds, who since the 1960s started occupying the abandoned houses of the Rum Christian community.<sup>3</sup> Within this merging and

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3. The Greek (or Rum) speaking minorities, following the September 1955 pogrom and



creative city spirit (Hoyng, 2014), new bourgeois bohemian, i.e. bobos lifestyle and nostalgic counterpublics reflections over the city's past mix together with anarchist aspirations and interventions of artistic tolerance (Sışmek, op.cit.; Baykan and Hatuka, op.cit.; Parmaksioğlu, op.cit.). All kind of different actors ranging from transsexual to feminists, from left anarchist to bourgeois bohemians, (i.e. academics, architects and artists, educated Turks), from Anatolian and Kurdish migrants to Istanbul residents and foreign passengers (for short or longer period) are feeding discursive and artistic counterpublics that intersect with other forms of social and cultural activism. By coming together, they reclaim a new anti-conventional lifestyle, oppose the sympraxis in the public sphere of the authoritarian neoliberal gentrification governmental plans with the new Islamist moral ethics (Atasoy, 2009).

The ethnographic research in Beyoğlu started in fall 2008 at the feminist bookshop of Amargi in Tel Sokak, located at the back of the main pedestrian Istiklal Caddesi street. Since the very beginning of this fieldwork, I had been bombarded with information related to my informants' activism as a discursive production in the streets, performances in theaters, editing, organizing events between feminist of action and academics, opposing authoritarian rule, militarism, patriarchy and discrimination against women, sexual and ethnic minorities. I had to follow up all this intensive productivity and situate their experiences within the broader context –that of broader dissent counterpublics in Beyoğlu. I noticed the intersection of my feminists informants with LGBT activists and their common platform of protest with other Islamist or Kurdish feminist associations, their opposition to gentrification governmental plans in Tarlabasi, their support to female workers of a famous Turkish shoe brand. In addition to their regular daily activities at the feminist bookshop, their cooperative reunions, their periodical demonstrations, as well as different types of support to gay, lesbian and transsexual individuals claiming the right of being different, I noticed also an anti-hierarchical engagement with more participatory management of the commons (de Angellis, 2010; Baykan and Hatuka, op.cit.).<sup>4</sup>

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oppressive fiscal and citizenship discrimination policies coming from the Turkish state, had to abandon Turkey in masses in the early 1920s: from being about 100 000 people in 1920s to being today no more than 3000.

4. For example, the support shown to a transsexual person, who was running for elective head representative (*mukhtar*) of Beyoğlu district during the 2009 municipal elections.



At that time, there were two personalities that inspired me, as field-work discussants. First, the sociologist Pinar Selek, founding member of the *Amargi* - this horizontal and open anti-hierarchical association/cooperative-, who was accused of being a terrorist by the Turkish state. Selek introduced me first to the issue of sexual and gender exclusions within the streets of Beyoğlu (Selek, 2001). Secondly, Esmeray, a transsexual *arkadash* (companion) of the former, a feminist stand-up comedy performer, whom I met at the *Amargi* bookshop and became a key-informant for my ethnographic research in Beyoğlu (Tsibiridou, 2014). Soon I realized that these key-informants, as active agents, intersect with the broader counterpublics, i.e. reflexive texts (social critical analysis and literary texts) coming from agents inspired mostly upon lived experiences in the public urban spaces of Istanbul's city center (Dokmeci et al., 2013). Particularly, when Pinar Selek published an almost autobiographical novel in 2011 (*La maison du Bosphore* (2013),<sup>5</sup> Orhan Pamuk was preparing his project on the *Museum of innocence* in Çukurcuma (2012). In addition, other research discussants had produced reflexive texts and installations as for example the dictionary/encyclopedia *Becoming Istanbul* to the meanings of which I had to turn my research attention too (Tsibiridou and Palantzias, 2014).

Every time I was visiting Istanbul I had the feeling of being in a versatile city: events, happenings, installations and meetings multiplied significantly since 2008: my informants (feminists and sexual activists, anti-gentrification protesters, artists, curators, colleagues and bohemian friends) replied before being asked through their sophisticated and detailed texts and lifestyle to my research hypothesis: they responded immediately through installations, texts, projects, and performances, coming to my knowledge automatically and randomly. It dawned on me that the surrealist *coincidences* I was looking for when I was studying Social Anthropology in Paris -after my undergraduate studies in French literature- came into use during my fieldwork research in Istanbul.

In a way, I felt the urge to turn to my earlier literary studies when I heard about Orhan Pamuk's creative project, *The Museum of Innocence* (novel and Museum installation). As we are going to see below in more detail, this was a non-direct answer to its persecution by the government, accused as someone insulting Turkishness by defending rights of the mi-

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5. In a forthcoming study and under the frame of new challenges raised by urban ethnography (Tsibiridou in Prato & Pardo (eds), forthcoming 2017), I discuss her case in juxtaposition with indicative Gezi protest happenings and its aftermath.

norities (sic). In my view, his project was in the genre of literary critique adopting 'reflective' instead of any other kind of 'restorative nostalgia', following Svetlana Boym's analysis (2001). Pamuk abandoned the cosmopolitan melancholic nostalgia spread in his previous book *Istanbul* (2003) and, in an attempt to dissent against the state authoritarian repressive control, he suggested an alternative to the national master narrative discourse. *The Museum of Innocence*, both as a novel (2008) and as museum project (2012), seems to shape counterpublics as texts, making use of the reflective nostalgia for creative fiction and installation -named by the curators as 'parafiction' (see below)- that, in my view feed the current flow of subaltern cosmopolitics around Beyoğlu.

Pamuk's project, which plays with intimate memories and everyday nostalgia, seems to ironically and metonymically translate the atmosphere of creative counterpublics in the broader district of Beyoğlu. Since 2000, writers, architects, curators, precarious living young academics, artists, bourgeois bohemians, local and foreigners, who were just passing through or were residents of Beyoğlu and its neighborhoods - myself included- shared some sense of common intention. That is, a will for critical self-understanding of the lived experiences in Beyoğlu, a will to move beyond any positivist social analysis through the use of social poetics, a will to reflect and interact towards each other with tolerance inspired by the lived space (Derviş et al., 2008; Jale 2010; Göktürk et al., 2010, Derviş, 2014; Tsibiridou, 2014). In other words, within this urban space, its legacy and current dynamics I noticed some new possibilities (Reuthmann, 2013): urban activism for my field informants seemed to shape subjectivities through tolerance, solidarity and creativity, but was also about a will to experience bohemian life and taste the city on the scale of the neighborhood, a desire to multiply connections of love, care and sharing.

The peak moment of such plural creativity was when Istanbul became the *Cultural Capital of Europe* (2010). Few years earlier to and after 2010, we notice similar productions coming from NGO's, and commercial banks collaborating with artistic galleries. For example, the Beyoğlu Salt Gallery and Galata Salt Gallery were both sponsored by the Garanti Bank, and hosted reflexive expositions such as *Becoming Istanbul* (2008) and *How did we get here* (2015). In all cases, the literary style and the right to the city anti-gentrification platforms (i.e. *Bir Umut*) intersect with the feminist activism (i.e. Amargi and other feminist movements, the filming company *Filmmore* or more popular virtual cinema and TV productions). All the above reflect critically and nostalgically towards the city experiences

(place, buildings history) and otherness.<sup>6</sup> They produce texts of cultural critique that negotiate authoritarian rule, patriarchal values and minority discriminations of the authors'/agents own society and culture. These texts of cultural critique have been spread around Beyoğlu by agents, who used to act through the modality of love, entertainment, cinema, literature and artistic installations.

It was an emergency then for this urban Anthropology project not only to engage with the study of the public space and sphere (Low, 2003; Checker, 2009; Prato and Pardo, 2013), but equally open a dialogue with such critical, creative and reflexive local voices. I had to multiply the mirrors and devices of the specific cultural representations (Marcus and Fisher, 1986; Herzfeld, 1997) as I was following the transformation of Istanbul from “consumable brand into a ‘cool city’ phenomenon” (Özkan 2015). However, it was only on the occasion of and after the Gezi events in May 2013<sup>7</sup> that such counterpublics, feminist and other social protests, met openly and proliferated solidarity practices and artistic creativity through the local devices of humor, sharing, love and care (Çolak, 2014). Those 20 days of protest, communing and creativity of those accused as ‘looters’, who faced extreme police brutality, became the filter for reevaluating my fieldwork data on the counterpublics in Beyoğlu since 2008. I was motivated to explore how materialized reflective nostalgia works in the frame of interactive, face to face experiences, before, during and after the Gezi resonances, during their encounters with the Arab revolts and the Occupy movements since 2011 around the globe (Agathangelou and Soguk, 2013; Tsibiridou and Bartsidis, 2016). When in 2014, I read in the booklet of the project *An Innocent city* that its curator sees Pamuk’s project of the *Museum of Innocence* as part of broader cosmopolitics, I took it as a sign to start elaborate further my present argument on the trope of ‘*çapulcu* cosmopolitics’.

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6. For cinema and TV productions I will only refer to Tömrís Giritlioglu’s four projects: the *Hatırla Sevgili* [Remember my love], *Blesses of the Autumn*, *Asi* and *Kayıp Şehir* [Lost city]. In all of them, Tömrís is establishing counter-publics of reflective nostalgia for broader audiences, inside an outside Turkey. Always in reference to Beyoğlu, its ambivalent memories and urban experiences (Yenikkaya, 2015), her approach is worthy to be analyzed from an anthropological perspective in a future study.

7. In the aftermath of the Gezi protest, I noticed the impact of past and present solidarity and other creative embodied practices leading to alternative citizenship and subjectivity participatory experiences on the level of neighborhood or through the modality of ‘*komşuluk*’ (to act as neighbors). (i.e. *Bir Umut*, *Odasi* project, *Solidarity platform* etc.).

### ÇAPULCU-ÇAPULERS-ÇAPULING: FROM A COUNTERPUBLICS' IRONY TO THE METONYMY OF TURKISH COSMOPOLITICS

When the Gezi exodus started in May 2013 with the massive assembling of people in the Taksim Square, the CNN Turk continued broadcasting a documentary with penguins in Antarctica. After Erdoğan's accusation of the protesters as *çapulcu*, all of them *protesting* started wearing print penguins saying *I am çapulging* [looting]. This phrase became the humorous and ironic sign of those 'looters' reclaiming rights, tolerance and hope:

*'Thousands of young people started call themselves "çapulcu" - looter in Turkish - after PM Erdoğan coined the term for the first time on June 2 [2013] to name peaceful demonstrators of Taksim Gezi Park. "Çapul-ing"' has already become synonym with "resisting" - a term also used by Noam Chomsky and Patti Smith to support the protestors.' ... Almost 64 percent of around 3,000 pollsters were aged between 19 to 30 years old... When you first look at protestors, you see soccer fans, heavy metal band listeners, comic book readers, tree huggers, TV show watchers, computer geek victims of YouTube ban, beer lovers, etc....They first seem to have nothing in common and not at all interested in traditional politics. But in fact, it is the anger towards PM Erdoğan and his policies since 2002 that brought all these young people together.'*<sup>8</sup>

*'Why did people suddenly take to the streets in the millions? Ask ten different çapulers why they participated in the protests, and you are likely to get ten different answers. Young Kemalists were out on the streets to defend Atatürk's legacy; Kurds to draw attention to their decades-old struggle for self-determination; LGBT activists to stand proud, without fear of being attacked or targeted for who they are; communists to fight for the workers; anarchists to resist brutal state repression; feminists to secure a rightful place for women in society; environmentalists to raise awareness about the destruction of Turkey's natural environment — doctors, lawyers, students, workers, housewives, artists, football fans, and ordinary people from all walks of life stood their ground for very personal reasons, frustrations, motivations, fears and angers.'*<sup>9</sup>

From anti-capitalist Muslims to horizontally organized forums and associations defending ethnic, sexual and women's rights, these looters (sic) had political and philosophical connections with global movements, inspired by

8. [http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/features/apulcu-generation-shakes-political-culture-in-turkey\\_15681](http://www.yourmiddleeast.com/features/apulcu-generation-shakes-political-culture-in-turkey_15681)

9. <https://roarmag.org/essays/roar-symposium-gezi-uprising-turkey/>

the practices of Zapatistas and their simple slogan “*preguntando caminamos*” (“asking we walk”).<sup>10</sup> This is the reason why the Gezi protests, as field experiences in my view, are begging to consider them metonymically as the *par excellence* carnivalesque moment (Bakhtin, 1941) of Turkish cosmopolitics, taking place mostly around the global/creative city of Istanbul.

Art, literature, humor, music, cinema, theater, performance seem to become the media and technologies that can fully explain motivations and intentions carrying ambiguities, conflicts and contradictions experienced by people, while being alerted, sensible and respectful to the right of being different within the city in various ways (Çolak, 2014). As if cosmopolitics, which seem to be the case in Turkey and its metonymical moment during the Gezi exodus, could happen within small eutopias (from the Greek word εὐτοπία), enclaves of solidarity and care practices, surrounded by outside antagonistic main stream habits and hate practices.

In this paper, I suggest to proceed in the search of a retrospective challenge of this ‘*çapulcu* cosmopolitics’, just before Gezi, as more and more reflexive voices whisper about the pre-existing experience of resistance against the neoliberal spatial politics of the AKP.<sup>11</sup> We are looking for practices of dissent by people who were accused to live metaphorically as ‘looters’, but could literally act as ‘creative *bricoleurs*’ (Farmer, 2013) in the Levi Straussian savage mind pattern (1962). Ironically, both “looter” and “bricoleur” become relevant because agents are acting in the same spirit of indigenous inventiveness of bricolage: a practical reasoning/action to construct something new by using old pieces, by appropriating old structural pieces for new purposes. However, if this re-creation can only happen within a framework of resistance and dissent which can be found within the creative district of Beyoğlu (Tasbasi, op.cit.; Durmaz, 2015), it was its global resonances that also matter. For instance, in a gesture of solidarity, global sites added “chapuling” as a neologism synonymous to “claiming rights” and “protest” as a new trope of resistance. “*One of Turkey’s leading businessmen Cem Boyner, head of Boyner Holding, joined the protests at Istanbul’s Taksim square with a banner reading: ‘I’m neither rightist, nor leftist. I’m çapulung.’*”<sup>12</sup>

Back to Orhan Pamuk’s “*çapulcu*” project of the *Museum of Innocence*, a project funded with money of Pamuk’s Nobel Prize,<sup>13</sup> becomes an ideal

10. <https://roarmag.org/essays/gezi-legitimation-crisis-capitalism/>

11. <https://roarmag.org/essays/resistance-urban-neoliberalism-turkey/>

12. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/560640/chapulling-turkish-protesters-spread-the-edgy-word/>

13. This information comes from another creative resonance of the project, the documenta-

text, full of meanings that translates the implementation of the global process with the local inventiveness: in the MoI located in Beyoğlu, in Çukurcuma neighborhood we materialize the praxis of transition from dissent counterpublics into parafiction modality of *çapulcu* cosmopolitics.

### THE 'MUSEUM OF INNOCENCE' IN ÇUKURCUMA: NEIGHBORHOOD AND ITS GLOCAL RESONANCES

One day in January 2013, I visited the *Museum of Innocence* in Çukurcuma, a back street neighborhood of Beyoğlu. Without having read Pamuk's book (2008) in advance, I discovered little by little the message of disobedience that he communicates and shares with the visitors. Through the device of the protagonist's Kemal Bey romantic love for a low class young girl called Füsün, a distant relative of his, Pamuk speaks metaphorically for the main fragmentations of the Modern Turkish national culture. As it is mentioned in its modest manifesto,<sup>14</sup> on the level of neighborhood and by paying attention to everyday material culture of objects, small museums could inspire individuals to become more human at the same time emotions coming from the attachment with the objects to each other could motivate further thoughts under the modality of love. By doing so, Pamuk defends the right to classless distinction that has been troubling, confusing and discriminating the Modern Turkish citizens by creating a huge gap between rich and poor, elites and the people. These main pillars of social distinctions are used instrumentally by the state rulers in order to monopolize social memory and identities, as well as institutionalize difference into otherness (Tuominen, 2013). However, beyond this main discrimination, we can read metaphorically and metonymically more recent mutations experienced in this same neighborhood of Beyoğlu district by its inhabitants:

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ry *The Innocence of Memories*, Grand Gee and Orhan Pamuk (2015). This visual text came only later to our knowledge (November 2017), just before the publication of the present paper. See in, <https://gomovies.tech/film/innocence-of-memories-12805/>

14. We read in the Museum's catalogue *The Innocent Objects*, the *Modest Manifesto for Museums* in which Pamuk offers his manifesto thoughts through 11 basic arguments: "...7. The aim of present and future museums must not be to represent the state, but to re-create the world of single human beings- the same human beings who have laboured under ruthless oppression for hundreds of years"...10. Monumental buildings that dominate neighborhoods and entire cities do not bring out our humanity; on the contrary, they quash it. Instead, we need modest museums that honor the neighborhoods and streets and the homes and shops nearby, and turn them into elements of their exhibitions." 11. The future of museums in inside our own homes." <http://en.masumiyetmuzesi.org/page/a-modest-manifesto-for-museums>

between secular Kemalist and new Islamist people, Anatolian Kurds and Westernizers, Black Sea Kurds and White city Turks. Metonymically, Beyoğlu and its neighborhoods could include, thanks to the historical contingency and the place disposition, all the contradictions and distinctions of the Modern Turkish culture. Besides wealth and origin, contradictions in Beyoğlu's symbiosis regard distinctions on the basis of education, language, religion, occupation, native town/village/location, skin color, sexual preference etc..

Pamuk's project on the *Museum of Innocence* (2012) is one case of counterpublics that reminds to everyone the value to act as neighbors and the meaning of material objects for people who experience relationships of sharing through that level. The MoI project intersects spatially within the broader climate of social protests, bohemian life style, creativity and reflective nostalgia that can unfold mostly around Taksim in Beyoğlu. Creative actors are using reflexivity towards their own society and culture, being aware of the fact that they want to protect their social memory and intimate everyday habits through trivial relationships, with people and objects, on the level of their neighborhood. By doing so, the present analysis suggests that these agents are building cosmopolitics, based on the modality of reflective nostalgia of the *komşuluk* (to act as neighbors) and creative claims above their rights to be different from the main stream Turkish national narratives and culture, or any orientalist and Eurocentric parochial representation of cosmopolitanism.

We read in the cultural studies project, *An Innocent City* (2014), a follow up on Pamuk's project, how the latter is undermining distinctions through love and everyday materiality of sharing objects and experiences:

*The Museum of Innocence* in Çukurcuma, Istanbul opened in the summer of 2012. It houses a collection of everyday objects that were collected over two decades by Nobel-prize winning author Orhan Pamuk. Pamuk, who used the objects as inspiration for the creation of the characters, scenes and stories of his novel of the same name (2008) which tells the tale of the intimate affair of the mid-thirties, bourgeois man named Kemal, and a younger, working-class woman named Füsün in 1970's Istanbul. Kemal bey was in love with her in more than 9 years and because of this obsessive love he was trying to connect with her through the objects she was touching or the moments they were sharing without touching each other. The narrative structure of the novel revolves around objects, their details, and how they evoke intimate relationships and memories of times gone by. The character Kemal collects the objects that testify to his love for Füsün (and



her innocence), and in the culmination of the novel, asks Pamuk to build a museum –collapsing the boundary between the imagined world of nostalgia in the novel and the real life nostalgia of Pamuk as a collector and curator of a museum. Through the device of the non-accomplished love Pamuk talks alternatively for its relation to this city, questioning master narratives coming from the state and its nationalism, undermining upper class Westernized ethics and their aversion to the Turkish Anatolian intimate habits. He is doing this as an effort to preserve some part of the rapidly changing neighborhoods of Çukurcuma and Cihangir, neighborhoods bordering the district of Beyoğlu, Istanbul.’ (Rassel, 2014, p. 12).

*The Museum of Innocence* (MoI) project with its open declaration to claim the right to act as neighbors through reflective nostalgia devices, located into materialized everyday culture and inappropriate love passion, reminds us of the power of the taste and memories in Proust’s individuality, reflected in his autobiographical novel, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927). In the MoI project, there is not only the will to reconstruct the self within a social vacuum, but equally to reestablish the relations of class and other distinctions within the neighborhood. This alternative narrative project within the national Turkish culture, was probably Pamuk’s public response to his personal state attack against his entitlement to defend the right to inscribe within the urban space of Beyoğlu an alternative reading of the past: “Pamuk was charged under Article 301 of the revised penal code, which criminalizes criticism of “Turkishness” and of state institutions” (Rassel, 2014, p. 21), because he talked about the Armenian massacre by the Turks. Elif Shafak faced similar accusations for supporting the so-called ‘Armenian genocide’ issue. Both, as other writers, journalists, scholars and activists, were accused and persecuted for their opinions and ideas over Turkish taboos.<sup>15</sup> They chose emotional paths and everyday embodied gestures to act in the public sphere: ‘Perhaps, the Museum is where Pamuk found an alternative political voice in the acts of archiving and display-allowing things to speak for him, by letting them speak for themselves’ (op.cit., p. 22).

The reflexive ideas about everyday museums (see footnote 14 about the manifesto) as projects of managing social memory in counter-hegemonic

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15. The story continues in January 2016 through the persecution of over 1200 Turkish academics who through their petition are asking the government to stop the war crimes against the Kurdish populations in Anatolia. Erdoğan’s response was to accuse them of and persecute them for assisting terrorist attacks before and even worst after attempted military coup on 15 July 2016.

ways is at the core of cosmopolitics, a subaltern way of reaction before the master Turkish state narratives, neo-liberal gentrification plans, imperial neo-Ottoman fantasies and new Islamist moral ethics (Rassel, op.cit., p. 24). According to the curator of the *Innocent City*, the MoI project is following Isabelle Stengers' definition of 'cosmopolitics' inscribed in the current political ecology trend, 'away from a politics of modernization to a politics of composition' (op.cit., p. 10). The curator sees the MoI project '...restoring the integrity of things and the dignity of relations, which form the basis for a constitutional cultural heritage among people...In this sense, it is not simply a politics of humans' agency over things but an issue of human and civil rights to be with and amongst material things and equally participate in the manifestation of these relations as an act of social sculpture' (Rassel, op.cit., p. 11)

#### LOVE, REFELCTIVE NOSTALGIA AND 'KOMŞULUK' ETHICS

It seems that in Pamuks' intimate way of obsessively romantic love, nostalgia and Modern passion for the Turkish cinema do not contradict its respect to local social poetics such as habitus, moral and norms of pretending, modesty and honor of the low-income neighborhoods of Istanbul. Ambiguous feeling and hesitation manners could motivate emotions and new ethics in politics of living side by side with difference. Defending ambiguous feelings above its own culture is an alternative suggested way of not only compromising with ambivalent subjectivity features (Foucault, 1982) but also finding a way to build creative counterpublics of dissent. It is equally ironic and sarcastic to categorize the Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk as part of the looters living around Beyoğlu, but to my eyes –and not only–, the MoI project ended up to represent the broader *çapulcu* cosmopolitics, an hypothesis I am developing at the end of this paper. Pamuk moves beyond the '*flâneur*'s surrealist and cosmopolitan nostalgia of private melancholy, found in his previous autobiographical book *Istanbul*. In *The Museum of Innocence* he turns into the more intimate poetic context of the Turkish communal melancholy, peacefulness and joy, i.e. '*hüzün*' (Puchner, 2014). In Pamuk's words, '*hüzün*' is 'a way of looking at life ... affirming as it is negating'.<sup>16</sup> According to the story of the book the protag-

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16. We should also associate the word '*hüzün*' with its Sufi meanings: as distance between us and God. In order to find or stay in the path people should follow everyday joyful rituals of sharing pray, food and drinks. See in: <https://cambridgeforecast.wordpress.com/2006/10/12/>

onist moves and defends the right to build an everyday Museum within a low-income neighborhood. To this spatial transfer of '*komşuluk*' ethics we need to add reflective nostalgia and its devices of polyphonic dialogues, ambiguous feelings, mirroring and multiple meta-narratives mixing fiction and reality. Pamuk comments on gendered subjectivity and social memory constructed as materialized embodied urban experiences, where everyday technology of love for each/other through material things could motivate people metaphorically or/and literally to surpass distinctions and discriminations additionally imposed by the nation state. Pamuk safeguards the right of *Istanbulu* people to protect their neighborhood ethics, their love for the city, its things, habits and ambiguous feelings sharing social memory, not through melancholy for the lost past glory, but through tolerance hidden in love for each other and innocent memories of sharing objects, feelings and obsessive passion.

Love and everyday material ethics of sharing through objects have been used instrumentally by Pamuk in order to generate an inter-active and counter-hegemony platform of agency for alternative exchange of generalized experiences at the broader city center neighborhood: among the writer and the curators, among them and the visitors, inside and outside Turkey, among all of them, the students and the academia. These agentive initiatives are contesting the right of the government to being the only authority speaking on the city and people's memories through gentrification projects and neo Islamist fantasies musealising the past by imitating the Western modernity or fantasizing the Ottoman one.

This project becomes a good prototype for further reflective and interdisciplinary collaborations for critical, reflexive and glocal encounters. Beyond Western hegemonic cosmopolitanism, Cartesian mind-body split, the MoI is "bringing insights into the tension between tradition and Westernization in Istanbul as reflected in the lifestyle of its middle-class in the mid-twentieth-century- it manages to invest all of this with a mood, a lyrical atmosphere, an aesthetic appeal, that subsists in the space between knowing and feeling, through emotion" (Rassel, op.cit, p. 35).

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orhan-pamuk-istanbul-the-concept-of-huzun/. In this sense '*hüzün*' becomes also the right to take a brake and be palalyzed, as spoiled from everyday small pleasures. For a visual prove see also the photos by Ara Güler.

### CREATIVE AESTHETICS AND ÇAPULCU COSMOPOLITICS

There are so many associations that may be drawn from the book and the Museum but, due to the word limit, this paper could only refer to one such immediate aftermath that came to support our working hypothesis on transition from creative counterpublics to subaltern cosmopolitics. This is the case of the project *Innocent City* (2014) as we have already mentioned,<sup>17</sup> according to which the MoI project is equal to a parafictional archive testifying to the dignity<sup>18</sup> of everyday life in Istanbul as well as a radical movement for trivial habits and ordinary stories.

“Parafiction” device – the museum as art and as platform-medium (Mark Dion in Rassel, op.cit.), becomes the genre of ironic “radical innocence” to deal with authoritarian governance and censorship: presenting everyday things, telling stories through them, and thus, allowing them to avoid the control by the state, which wishes to supervise every Museum. “Parafiction” initiatives, mixing art with dissent, reality with fantasy, locating and materializing emotions and memories through objects, tastes and other emotional experiences of love and everyday habitus with particular urban settings and ethics (i.e. *komşuluk*) are leading to the production of new cosmopolitan eutopias (best place in Greek): these “good shelter place” (i.e. *The Museum of Innocence*) where ordinary lovers can kiss each other without shame and state repression as they could only do before in particular sacred and profane public spaces, as ethnographic fieldwork has shown in Saint Antoine Church, in *meihane* taverns, in cafés chantant etc. (Albera and Fliche, 2012). Parafiction, as creative aesthetics, becomes one main new expressive platform for subaltern cosmopolitics, free from the state control, where truth and fiction are mixed, where the protagonist of the book is identified with the writer and he works as an anthropologist conducting fieldwork for his ethnographic text, as we read throughout the 81 chapter of the book (Pamuk, 2008).

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17. “*An Innocent City* is an exhibition of stories and illustrations of the everyday objects of Istanbul. The objects presented here were inspired by objects on display in the cases of the *Museum of Innocence* in Çukurcuma. Graduate students from Koç University choose objects from the Museum and searched the streets of Istanbul to find the lives of these objects in the city today. ...*An Innocent City* is a platform for considering the different meanings and shared significance of the everyday objects in our lives...We welcome you to enjoy the exhibition, read the stories, and if you would like, share a story of your own” (Ian Alden Russel, Istanbul, June 2014).

18. For the concept of ‘dignity’, as a main claim issue by new social movements negotiating civic virtue, see Tsibiridou & Bartsidis 2016.

The sympraxis of art, dissent and emotions, unfolding around this city district generates, following interpretations of the fieldwork data,<sup>19</sup> three successive and interconnected paths for the production of *çapulcu* cosmopolitics. The first is to act as neighbors, i.e. through sharing experiences of dissent and caring among excluded, persecuted or precariously living persons as well as by promoting solidarity to each other. This is the case for the feminist, LGBT, Kurdish and other horizontally organized associations, platforms and groups fighting for human, social, ethnic and sexual rights, and dissent lives tolerant to differences. The second path follows the artistic production and management of reflective nostalgia, including many embodied emotional experiences, aiming to the right to defend public space and social memory, and to the right to be different from the mainstream norms (i.e. the visibility of ethnic and linguistic minorities as well as the distance from any nationalist or religious enclosure). The third path to cosmopolitics can be found in the encounter of the two previous practical and emotional motivations with the intimate aesthetics of love, care and solidarity within the same event, which was the case of the Gezi Park's performative exodus in May 2013.

In an era of exertive neoliberal governmentality as an oasis for all kind of lovers can be found within the MoI, a broader one for all kind of activists can be found in the city center, at the heart of Beyoğlu. Paradoxically even if it cannot be conceptualized as 'neighborhood'/*mahale* by the local academia and activists, because *Mahale* is too Ottoman for Beyoğlu's Western Modern disposition of life-style, the latter became the place, par excellence where social activism is lanced in total through the desire to cultivate *komşuluk*, the vernacular style to act as neighbors (see footnote 7). Thus, creative 'looters', produce cosmopolitics full of local radical innocence and use devices of reflective nostalgia of love and sharing on the level of the neighborhood, while inspired by the global virtues of freedom, justice and dignity.

When ethnography engages with empathy and opens a dialogue with such reflexive voices from the field in the frame and beyond the cultural

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19. Close to other artistic projects and installations willing to tell a story of the city center, subjectivities and citizenship, are the following two artistic and academic projects: *Becoming and Mapping Istanbul* (2008) and the latest exhibition of Salt Galleries (2015) *How did we get over there*. This is also the case of the platform protest against the demolition of Emek cinema and similar other cases generating anti-gentrification platforms. This is the case for feminist activists such of Selek's stories and Esmeray's performances, all based on autobiographical reflexive experiences (Tsibiridou, 2014; Tsibiridou & Palantzas, 2016; Tsibiridou forthcoming).

critique (Marcus and Fischer, 1986), then critical understanding multiplies within aesthetics that become political (Sharman, 1997; Moore, 2010). Fieldwork data of this kind can be found within creative counterpublics of dissent, with which ethnographer needs to open dialogue. The case of Pamuk's project, his texts on innocence and irony, his creative aesthetics to act as neighbors through sharing, his poetics on love through objects, suggest an alternative discourse about the right to the city. Within such multivalent urban settings, emotional inventiveness of parafiction deriving from such glocal creative voices not only challenges ethnographic realism and truth, applied in/on the city, but challenges also the categories of time, space, body, sex, gender, subjectivities and citizenship, negotiated through urban dynamic experiences.

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