



ETHNIC CONSIDERATIONS

URSULA BIEMANN

Interview with social Anthropologist Suavi Aydin on the reasons for planning the circumnavigation of Kurdish territories of the pipeline trajectory. Suavi Aydin, social anthropologist and Professor at Hacettepe University in Ankara, was hired by BTC to advise the company on the various ethnic groups living along the Southern Turkish section and the social problems that might occur from running the pipeline through their land. The corporate principal was to build the infrastructure with the least amount of contact or friction with local populations, just buying the land and paying them off. The company was surprised and initially very resistant to the local claims for contributions towards a social and cultural development of the poor areas. Under considerable public pressure and the activist engagement of international and local NGOs, BTC had to pay a substantial amount for social benefits and educational projects to communities along the corridor. Their brochure on this is titled 'breaking new ground?', which is also to be understood as a departure from their own corporate practice in the field. (1) The section in the brochure with the heading 'Consultation at every phase?' reads as if the consultation with local representatives was planned all along and took place in the harmony of a mutual agreement. In fact, knowing from conversations conducted with members of the Green Alternative in Tblisi, they fought an arduous battle organizing the villagers, running a national campaign and lobbying in the pro-BTC Georgian government against the pipeline running through a national reserve which shelters the famous Borjomi mineral source. They were concerned that even minor subterranean oil spills would spoil the mineral water which is a major export product of the region. For her fearless struggle pursued despite serious threats from high-rank officials, Manana Kochladze received the Nobel Prize for Environment in 2004. Paradoxically, Nobel's oil revenues were channeled into the prevention of major damage potentially caused by Caspian oil.

Although he was not asked to do so, Aydin also used his professional skills to evaluate the social relations within the BTC corporate structures. These can be reflective of the overall power relations set up by the company in a foreign environment. The different levels of operation are structured hierarchically. BP is head of the overall operation, the BTC Company organizes the construction of the pipeline, Botas is the Turkish contracting company carrying out the construction work of that section, and then there are the independent local suppliers and external advisers. The hierarchy among them becomes obvious in many minute incidents such as deciding on the distribution of vehicles for a common visit on site where BTC and Botas get the best Nissans and the

further down you get on the hierarchical line you are left with lousy cars or none at all. With regards to the relations between foreign workers flown in for the project and the local workforce, resentment was voiced about the considerable difference in salary among same level experts. The difference could also be noted in places like the work camps, where foreign workers had the privilege of a room on their own while 4 local workers had to cram into the same space.

Other observations brought to light a eurocentric management style that seem to come straight out of a colonial handbook. The language of the project is English, even Turks are forced to speak in English among themselves, in and outside the Ankara offices. This imposition seems not only awkward and completely unnecessary but contradicts the project's claim to be sensitive to social and environmental questions. More ironically still, BTC does have a person looking after social relations but he is British who, in the daily dealings with delicate cases, proved to know next to nothing about the culture of social interaction in Turkey. Nevertheless he held a controlling position over Aydin's reports on the villagers along the pipeline. Similar events could be observed in Georgia and Azerbaijan. These relations don't merely affect human relations on the job, they show also the danger of imposing on other, particularly post-socialist contexts, social science categories empowered and backed by Western superiority in technology, politics, and economy.

The BTC construction work in the three countries was carried out by different companies. In Azerbaijan, it was done by CCIC, a Lebanese company. Apart from the Azeri workforce, then, they hired a large number of Indian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Jordanian and Turkish workers, as well as a few from Southeast Asia and Egypt. The manager of the work camp of the Sangachal terminal, Jurriaan Bokum, was a Dutchman. Instead of ordering fresh inexpensive native food and hence involving local business, he flew in the catering from the Netherlands. Since I was not permitted to approach or speak to any worker living in the camp, I will never know whether all these Middle-Eastern and Indian employees appreciated the Dutch cuisine.

Given that the routing of pipelines is largely indifferent to terrain, I want to turn to some important decisions made by the company which are based on political and ethnic considerations. The international press has contributed to building public and official opinion by assigning a wide range of alarming qualities to the territories in question.

When we look at the enormous topographic difficulties the current trajectory must overcome, we recognize that the routing of the BTC pipeline is above all a response to the ethnic and religious mosaic of the republics it crosses. Armenia is circumvented all together because of its armed conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. In Turkey, in view of avoiding sabotage and political struggles that could potentially jeopardize the security of the pipeline, the trajectory draws a big curve around the Kurdish areas, a decision which made the pipeline a lot longer than otherwise

necessary. Whether the effectiveness of these costly measures is realistic remains to be seen since Kurds live in lesser density spread all over the East. In addition, there are various nomadic and seasonal groups of people crossing through the provinces of Southeast Turkey.

(1) breaking new ground - working with the community to enhance the social benefits of oil development and export, BTC Co. The brochure can be downloaded in PDF from their website. www.caspianddevelopmentandexport.com

Cluster: Black Sea Files

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