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‘Mirror, Mirror on the Wall’: A Reflection on Engaged Just Transformations Research under Turkey’s Authoritarian Populist Regime

**Begüm Özkaynak, Ethemcan Turhan and
Cem İskender Aydın**

Introduction

Sustainability transformations call for self-reflection and repositioning researchers’ roles in knowledge co-production. While we were investigating the transformations and resistance to fossil fuel rush in Yeni Foça, Turkey, between 2016 and 2019, our lives as engaged and situated researchers, our institutions as leading public research universities, and our country – where we conduct research, co-produce knowledge and put it to use for environmental and social justice – transformed drastically. We have witnessed ‘the dark side of transformation’ that took its toll on the environmental justice movements we cooperate with, on the public universities we work in and the academics we ally with, and finally, on the political landscape of the country in which we live, work and play (and which more and more frequently – unfortunately – we leave). In this chapter, we want to turn the tables and reflect on transformations based on our experiences and take-homes from Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi University in Turkey, both under intense attack from the authoritarian neoliberalism of the Erdoğan regime. This reflection, hopefully, will provide some food for thought for other researchers in other places also struggling against the clenched fists of populist, conservative authoritarianism unleashed onto their socio-natures while they try to co-produce knowledge with EJ resistance movements.

What is popular in the debates around social transformations is the depiction of and quest for success, where grassroots movements and activists resist some unsustainable socio-economic and ecological practices of state and market, which then drive a fundamental systemic change. A shift for the better in existing structures of meaning, values, identities and patterns of interactions occurs (Feola 2015, Meadowcroft 2009). Yet there are also many other instances where structural conditions and given circumstances push societal resistance to primarily play the role of preventing the worst-case scenario and keep the door open for alternative

paths, even if they cannot make existing power structures like the state or market take an immediate step back. Hence, the issue sometimes is not around changing policy for the better but instead fighting a malignant transformation¹ and ensuring that a shift for the worse does not occur at its full pace. This is usually the case in authoritarian regimes where there is a colossal power inequality between the state and the resisting groups: the legal struggle seldom delivers just outcomes, the political battle seems ineffective and the parliament has no real function. Standard rules and procedures do not work, and there is no negotiation logic for revising rules or room for mediation (Cavatorta 2013; Vu 2017). The state is acting more and more boldly and unlawfully, and the movement's braking power is weakening. Then, people resisting usually find themselves asking: What is the purpose of all this? How do we make sense of this situation? Are we even doing the right things?

These were the questions we were asking ourselves when our lives as engaged and situated researchers, in our institutions as renowned public research universities, and in our country – where we conduct research, co-produce knowledge and put it to use for environmental and social justice – transformed drastically. We have witnessed the dark side of transformation² (Blythe et al. 2018) in Turkey under the Erdoğan regime. Indeed, the country was presented as a 'model democracy' in the early years of AKP government between 2002 and 2012 (Akyol 2011) following its attempts at political liberalization and at curbing the military influence over the government, but it is nowadays touted as a typical example of 'democratic backsliding', where democracy is reduced to the electoral majority (Tansel 2018).³ While some claim that there were always signs of the current authoritarian regime even in their early days (Babacan et al. 2021), the so-called 'authoritarian turn' occurred in full swing following the Gezi Park protests in 2013 (Özkaynak et al. 2015) and the coup attempt in July 2016 (Tansel 2018).

As we will depict below, this transformation has had its toll on the environmental justice movements with whom we cooperate, the public universities in which we work, the academics with whom we ally, and finally, the political landscape of the country in which we live, work and play (see also Gambetti 2022). In this process, we realized that in such depressive settings, it is essential to distinguish different layers of transformation in the ultimate quest for a radical change, keep away from simplistic narratives built around victory and defeat, and appreciate the nuances. To sustain social movements, there is also a need to create new ways of thinking about resistance, power and previously unimagined possibilities. Otherwise, when you only focus on the outcome as an indicator of success, it seems like you have been beaten and gained nothing in return. But this is not true, and in this chapter, we explain why.

Today, a growing body of literature recognizes that transformation is a process of ongoing learning about how change happens. In this context, Duncan et al. (2018) highlight the importance of practice-based transformation encounters to inform policy and theory, and argue that transformation is experienced and not delivered. In this chapter, we reflect on our own experiences and the transformation processes

in which we are taking part, based on two cases of conflict we were involved with in Turkey – one being in Yeni Foça, an industrial zone and ecological sacrifice setting that has been on the frontline of environmental resistance since the 1980s, and the other in Boğaziçi University, a public university acclaimed for its academic autonomy, critical approach to teaching and research excellence. In both contexts, the state plays a significant top-down interventionist role and structural influences offer an unfriendly setting in many ways. In response resistances play a crucial role as catalysers by pushing the authorities towards a more non-conformist position. Unsurprisingly, the state also brings many new obstacles in the battle for strategic purposes. The critical message to be delivered is that even if these two counter-movements cannot achieve the transformations they desire in the short term, the fact that they have acted as a handbrake to the authoritarian regime and contributed to maintaining hope, as well as conditions for alternative transformations, is an outstanding achievement.

We conducted the Yeni Foça case study as engaged researchers between 2016 and 2019, as part of the ACKnowl-EJ project. Our involvement in the field was facilitated by our earlier acquaintances and engagement in various environmental organizations that have focused on the region in the past decade. Below we report back from our engagement in the field by building on our longitudinal work with a grassroots organization, Yeni Foça Forum, fighting primarily but not solely against fossil fuel infrastructure in the Aliğa region (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1 Research Methodology for Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi Struggles	
Yeni Foça	Boğaziçi University
<p>Desktop research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of 859 newspaper clippings from two major national newspapers (<i>Milliyet</i> and <i>Cumhuriyet</i>) to look back (1980–2015) • Review of official reports (investment plans, EIA, court decisions) • Literature review <p>Engaged and situated research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethemcan Turhan has family ties in the region and often visits the site; some family members are actively involved in the grassroots movement <p>Qualitative research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth interviews and three focus groups (in April 2017, August 2017 and September 2018) with community members • A participatory scenario workshop with Yeni Foça Forum to look forward (2030–50) in August 2017 	<p>Desktop research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of books and booklets on Boğaziçi University • Media and news archive • Review of the resistance website as a rich source of material: https://universitybogazici.wordpress.com/ • Literature review <p>Engaged and situated research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begüm Özkaynak (since 2005) and Cem İskender Aydın (since 2020) are members of faculty at Boğaziçi University, and actively participated in forums, panels, workshops and commissions

On the other hand, we directly experienced the struggle for academic freedom and autonomy in Boğaziçi University – which has been under attack by the Erdoğan regime from 2016 onwards – as situated actors, faculty members and academics who actively took part in the resistance movement. We believe that, while these social movements' outcomes and impacts might not be apparent initially, both stories in Yeni Foça and at Boğaziçi are worth telling from within. We do not intend to compare the two cases, or to offer their comprehensive accounts, but rather to build on a narrative around some similarities we have seen while fighting against malignant transformations.

Using the Rodríguez and Inturias (2018) Conflict Transformations Framework, we explore the power dynamics between the state and local movements. Our analytical attention is on 1) changes in structural, visible power in terms of institutions and legal frameworks; 2) changes in people and networks, including some new alliances; and 3) changes in culture, values, worldviews and discourses. By exploring how hegemonic power has transformed itself in these cases and how the social movements have responded and transformed themselves in return, our findings hint at the 'unruly politics' of transformation (Scoones 2016) which encompasses multiple ways of knowing and experiencing a place.

We believe that better understanding the dynamics of the struggles in these three forms of power and knowing that transformations usually do not come suddenly or all at once is of great value. We claim that, thanks to their leverage status, grassroots social movements in Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi University provide a window of opportunity for just and sustainable transformations beyond simple success or failure considerations. Our reflections and take-homes will hopefully provide insights into those struggling against the clenched fists of populist, conservative authoritarianism in other places. This investigation will also enhance our understanding that transformations for the better are multi-level, multi-scalar and cascading. An awareness of these matters is essential for reflexive evaluation for social-ecological change and strategy-building for sustainability transformations.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: the second and third parts will consecutively introduce the two cases from Turkey, which both explain the conflicts and oppositional movements in Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi University. Then, the fourth part will show in three subsections – following the power transformation framework with power in institutions, in people and networks, and in worldviews and discourses – that while hegemonic power has transformed itself in these localities, the social movements have responded well in return in all forms and gained significant leverage without a definite short-term visible outcome, but long-term implications. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing why it is important not to underestimate the different achievements and ruptures and what sets the limits of the possible within a given time frame.

What Has Happened in Yeni Foça?

Driving northbound from the *İzmir–Çanakkale* highway, you arrive at the Yeni Foça district overlooking the Aliğa Bay at night, passing through modern illuminated landscapes. Then, you wake up in the morning in an idyllic seaside town. But just over the hill, there is a coal-fired power plant, a floating LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminal, a whole peninsula owned by Azeri oil giant SOCAR, then another refinery just above it, some petrochemical industries scattered around, and a major shipbreaking site a stone's throw away. Due to a complex history embedded in labour and environmental struggles, this coastal town in western Turkey 50 km north of *İzmir* indeed reflects quite an unsettled character. While overlooking some heavy industrial facilities and energy investments dominated by fossil fuels of all sorts, it is still a summer vacation destination thanks to its lovely sea and agricultural surroundings. The archaeological excavations for the Kyme ruins, dating back more than 2,000 years, which have been continuing on and off since 1985, also sit at the heart of the region's landscape (see Figure 3.1).

Though undoubtedly it has not found its ideal balance or alternative vision, you wonder about the complex story behind this quiet vista and what it would look like if environmental activists had not been defending it since the late 1970s. As is well known, the region has a history of social struggles stretching over the past forty years, featuring the rise and demise of working-class action against large-scale privatizations, with a fierce environmental movement propelled by the local community in tandem with local authorities and other actors throughout the 1990s and after 2000 (Turhan et al. 2019).

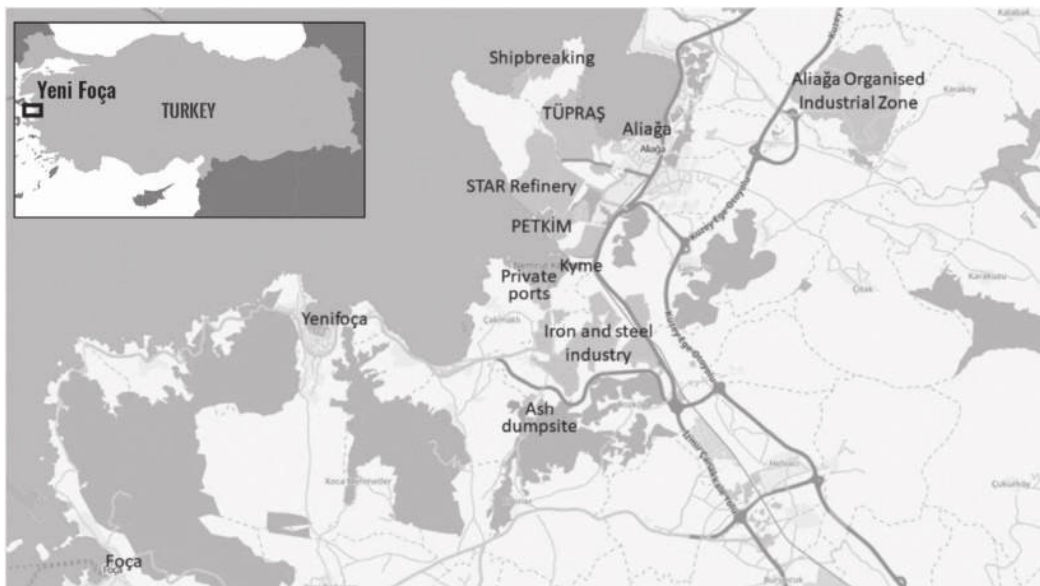


Figure 3.1 Map of Yeni Foça, Aliğa Bay and its industrial environs

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Indeed, the region's structural transformation followed the global and national trends prevalent in the world since the mid-twentieth century. The area, despite its tourism potential along with its natural and historic sites, was chosen by the state as an industrial development zone back in the 1960s, followed by the establishment of state-led heavy industry infrastructures during the 1980s, namely the establishment of PETKİM (the petrochemical industry) and TÜPRAŞ (the oil refinery). Around these two state-owned facilities, small- and medium-scale industries, such as shipbreaking, iron-steel smelting, cement and energy, were established. Turkey witnessed its economic liberalization in the 1980s – again in line with general trends in the world – led by the centre-right politician Turgut Özal. During this period, private industries were established in the region with substantial formal and informal state support, mainly through direct subsidies and build-operate-transfer schemes (Özkaynak et al. 2020).

Later, during the 1990s, new environmentalism grew in Turkey, on the shoulders of various environmental groups, ranging from the radical and anti-institutional to the scientific and institutional. This was mainly because, in the mid-1990s, the environment was seen as a critical entry point for a civil society where citizens were using the constitutional setting and appealing to the court to cancel project plans (Turhan et al. 2019; Aydın 2005). Legal appeals were, in general, supported by mass mobilization. This was also when the rally against the planned coal-fired thermal power plant started in the region. On 6 May 1990, more than 50,000 people formed a human chain stretching 24 km along the road connecting *İzmir*, the metropolitan city, to its industrial district Aliğa (see Figure 3.2). Following the demonstrations



Figure 3.2 Human chain protest in 1990 against the planned coal-fired thermal power plant (Photo courtesy of Ümit Otan)

came the storm of court cases led by lawyers from the *İzmir* Bar Association and an influential MP at the time, Kemal Anadol, who took the case to the Council of State. Anadol would later refer to this ‘never-ending fight’ as the first instance of organized citizen reaction in the aftermath of the bloody 1980 coup (Anadol 1991: 35). Overall, in the 1990s, the environmental movement in the region at large was lively and used diverse non-violent strategies of resistance (e.g. referendums, court appeals, appeals against EIA, alternative reports, data collection on health impacts, and collaboration between scientists and activists; workers’ festivals; signature campaigns; walks between *İzmir*, *Aliğa* and *Bergama*; Greek Island–Turkish Aegean coast meetings, etc.). Coupled with the widespread public pressure, the legal process eventually yielded a victory on 8 May 1990, when the Council of State stopped the *Aliğa* coal thermal power project.

Unfortunately, the story did not end here with the local people living happily ever after in the area. After three major economic crises in 1994, 1999 and 2001, the tectonic shifts in Turkish governments brought Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power, which embarked on an all-out liberalization of the energy sector in line with IMF plans. One of the most concrete outcomes of this process has been the shift of most energy production from the public sector to the private sector. Forgotten for about a decade, the plans for increased coal-fired power capacity in *Aliğa* Bay revived in the aftermath of this period. As the country’s economic liberalization gathered speed, many previously state-owned enterprises in the region, most notably fuel industries and oil refineries, were privatized between 2000 and 2015 (Öniş 2011).

As expected, local groups started reorganizing and mobilizing against polluting sectors and their new coal ash dumpsites, mainly receiving waste from iron-steel industries in the region and the coal-fired furnaces inside them. The resistance revitalization brought residents together under a grassroots group called FOÇEP (Foça Environment Platform) in 2009. Following the Gezi Park protests in 2013, which culminated in different neighbourhood forums across Turkey (Ergenç and Çelik 2021), local residents also formed the Yeni Foça Forum to go beyond a single-issue movement and develop a more overarching method of local activism against polluting infrastructure. Middle-class, educated, retired citizens who had time and resources to dedicate to local activism started to collaborate with other regional actors (e.g. an environmental platform for the Aegean region, environmental lawyers), national organizations (e.g. Ekoloji Kolektifi Derneği, Ekoloji Birliği) and international NGOs (e.g. Greenpeace, 350.org, Climate Action Network). One significant point in the resistance was during 2015–16 when the global climate activism network 350.org included *Aliğa* as part of its ‘Break Free from Fossil Fuels’ campaign (see Figure 3.3), where a mass demonstration took place in Yeni Foça on 15 May 2016 that brought together diverse groups, from local citizen organizations to political parties, national NGOs and mayors (Turhan et al. 2019).



Figure 3.3 Break Free from Fossil Fuels protest on 15 May 2016 (Photo courtesy of Umut Vedat)

Environmental struggles and legal battles in the region are still ongoing, with the case of a discarded Brazilian navy ship loaded with hundreds of tons of asbestos heading to the region for shipbreaking as we write these lines in July 2022. Despite their shortcomings, the mobilizations in the region have been able to impact the decisions of international financial institutions as they withdraw their support from polluting investments, and allegedly influenced the design of a floating LNG terminal due to investors' fear of widespread protests against a land-based one. In addition, a cement factory decided not to invest in the region. In 2019, in a moment of *déjà vu*, the local court argued against the accuracy of EIA reports on two coal-fired power plant projects in Aliğa, declared them unlawful and annulled the investments again, this time based on a lack of cumulative impact assessment. The Yeni Foça Forum and other local community groups were also heavily involved in following up a major oil spill in the summer of 2019 that resulted from a ship sent to the nearby shipbreaking site in Aliğa – an incident that well illustrates the permanent state of emergency in the region, and the need for environmental defenders continuously in action.

What Has Happened at Boğaziçi University?

On the night of 2 January 2021, the Boğaziçi University community learned from a presidential decree in the official gazette⁴ that President Erdoğan had appointed a new rector called Melih Bulu, who is known to have close ties with the ruling

party AKP.⁵ The controversial appointment was instantly met with intense reaction from the university community (faculty members, students and alumni) and the general public due to concerns about Bulu's questionable merit to run one of the most distinguished public universities in the country. It was quite unusual for Boğaziçi University to host a rector who had not already been working there as an academic and who lacked the necessary credentials (with allegations of plagiarism) and experience for the post (Kirişçi et al. 2022). Bulu's credentials even failed to satisfy the minimum necessary criteria to be appointed to any department at Boğaziçi University as a professor. Therefore, this appointment was considered as a blatant attempt to seize control of the university and another manifestation of the rising authoritarianism in the country. What followed were numerous protests and a long-lived peaceful resistance movement that started eighteen months ago and continues to this day, with several ups and downs along the way.

Before elaborating further on the details of the resistance movement and its transformative character, it is necessary to understand the previous events that led up to this questionable appointment on 2 January 2021, and to recount the historical significance of Boğaziçi University as a critical institution for the democratization and autonomy of all of the universities in Turkey.

Boğaziçi University was transformed into a public university in 1971 from Robert College, the first American college outside the USA. It has since become a symbol of scientific excellence and academic autonomy in the country. However, despite its reputation as an institution with a democratic, bottom-up management approach, it too was significantly impacted by the anti-democratic political developments in the country. Bulu was not even the first rector appointed to Boğaziçi University from the outside. After the 1980 coup, the junta administration of the period established the Council of Higher Education to increase its control over universities. One of the first things the Council did was to appoint a rector from another university to Boğaziçi.

Against the backdrop of the post-coup political re-liberalization at the beginning of the 1990s, Boğaziçi University academics, seeing that this method of rector appointment posed an obstacle to the scientific autonomy of the university, organized an unofficial election among themselves and elected *Üstün Ergüder* as their rector. This was later communicated diplomatically to the government of the era, and the method was accepted as the official method for determining rectors in other public universities. This process was suspended in 2016 (shortly after the coup attempt on 15 July) due to a conflict between the elected rector (who received 82% of the total votes) and President Erdoğan. It was subsequently replaced by the current top-down appointment method, resulting in the appointment of Bulu.

Bulu could only stay in his post for around six months, until 15 July 2021, when he was removed from the office in a fashion similar to his appointment – with a late-night presidential decree published in the official gazette.⁶ During his short term, he failed to gain enough support from within the university – only

three professors agreed to work with him, one of whom (Naci İnci) became the new appointee-rector after Bulu's dismissal. However, this brief stint did not prevent Bulu from causing severe damage to the university.⁷ To increase the number of allies seated in the University Senate and University Executive Board and the number of pro-government academics, two new schools (Law and Communication) were established with an overnight decision and without the consent of the senate or the board. The Faculty of Law (dubbed 'Unlawful' Law Faculty) was immediately appointed a dean from outside the university.⁸

While *İnci* satisfied many more criteria than Bulu as a 'would-be' rector (such as already being a professor at Boğaziçi and having better academic credentials), he was still opposed by 95% of the faculty.⁹ However, *İnci* being a Boğaziçi academic did not stop the government from trying to seize complete control of the university; if anything, it aggravated the situation. *İnci* generously used all the powers granted to him by the Council of Higher Education as rector, recruiting new pro-government academics through illegitimate job postings, launching disciplinary proceedings against protesting students and scholars, suing them in court, unlawfully firing some full-time and part-time academics (Gürel 2022) and last but not least, dismissing three elected deans to complete the takeover of the university's executive board and senate (Bianet 2022a; MCO 2022).

In the face of the attack against their institution, the Boğaziçi University community put up strong resistance from the very beginning with the motto 'We do not accept, we do not give up', which characterized the core of all their various acts of resistance (Bianet 2021). The image of the resistance seen by the public on social media is one of daily vigils at noon, where academics gather in front of the rectorate building and silently turn their backs to the appointed rector in a symbolic manner, followed on Fridays by weekly bulletins¹⁰ about the status of the resistance (see Figure 3.4). Academics also wielded other democratic resistance means, such as using the university senate and executive board (before these seats were taken over with the dismissal of the elected deans) to enforce the university bylaws and rules and prevent the appointed rector from evading them through illegitimate tactics. On top of this, academics have taken to court most of the presidential decrees concerning the university (such as the establishment of new schools and institutes) and unlawful decisions by the rectors (such as illegitimate recruitments and the arbitrary dismissal of academics) (Kirişçi et al. 2022).

There are evident similarities between the Boğaziçi resistance and other well-known mobilizations in Turkey, such as the *Gezi Park* protests (Kirişçi et al. 2022; Özkaynak et al. 2015), in that, as Gökıksel (2022) also argues, both are part of a counter- or dissident body politic, which strives to rethink and rejuvenate rising neoliberal authoritarianism in Turkey. Indeed, Boğaziçi University is one of the few institutions in the country that have so far remained somewhat (although only partially) excluded from the role assigned to the universities by global neoliberalism – acting as another cog in the capitalist machinery (Gambetti



Figure 3.4 Daily vigil at noon by Boğaziçi University academics on 22 July 2022 (Photo courtesy of Can Candan)

and Gökarıksel 2022). Finally, as also voiced very clearly in the demands of the resisting academics, this is not only a matter of saving Boğaziçi University from the authoritarian takeover, but a struggle for free, autonomous and democratic universities all around the country (Gürel 2022).

How Transformation(s) Take(s) Place (or Why They Fail When They Do)

This section considers the elements of power and power relations encountered in the two cases – the anti-coal movement in Yeni Foça and the resistance at Boğaziçi University – with actors involved in the dynamics of change and transformation from the ground up. Overall, we aim to provide a combination of the theoretical framework and the practical knowledge we acquired in the field as academic activists. Both cases presented here are illustrative of the social-political-economic crisis in Turkey and the oppositional movement that has emerged against it. This is in line with Bourdieu (Burawoy 2018), arguing that what is usually taken for granted becomes questioned in crisis contexts to a greater extent. Accordingly, people are more inclined than usual towards symbolic and political mobilization strategies. And there is always a role for activists and researchers in such conjunctures for sustainability-aligned transformations.

On the one hand, in the Yeni Foça case, the economic crises that Turkey experienced throughout the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s provided the grounds for the state to discredit the pre-existing policy regime, and hence facilitated the neoliberal turn in the country, which then opened the way to large-scale industrial investments in the Yeni Foça region. The plans for increased coal-fired power capacity and LNG terminal construction were also implemented after the 2001 crisis, which led to devastating environmental impacts on the area, triggering an existing clash and socio-environmental resistance. On the other hand, at the root of Boğaziçi University's problematic situation lies a political crisis for President Erdoğan, which started early on with the Gezi Park protests of 2013 (Özkaynak et al. 2015) and continues with his increasingly authoritarian regime (Tansel 2018). Then, as Erdoğan's AKP lost Turkey's major cities in mayoral elections in 2019, and hence the control over resources of metropolitan municipalities, the hegemonic system needed new sources to exploit to maintain the power bloc. For years, the incumbent Turkish government was systematically altering the country's higher education institutions with a long-term political agenda, and Boğaziçi University seemed like the last stronghold of secular education built on academic autonomy and scientific excellence to be conquered, at a time when this was much needed politically (Kadioğlu 2021). Indeed, these two economic and political crisis settings provided entry points, corresponding openings for change and opportunities for opposition movements.

We explain below in three subsections how the opposition movements in these two distinct contexts experienced and reacted to power shifts under the same authoritarian regime. For both cases, we look at how hegemonic power is confronted, contested and to some extent impacted, first and foremost in a visible manner and structurally through institutions and legal frameworks; then behind the scenes by people's organizations and networks; and finally in an invisible form through discursive practices, worldviews and values embedded in knowledge systems and vocabularies. We also discuss the opposing groups' tactical shifts and strategies in due process. We mainly observe that while the easiest method for the hegemonic system is structural control, the real strength lies in people, networks and their discourses – in the ability to speak to society. This is a point of crucial importance for any counter-hegemonic alternative.

Changes in the outset – in institutions and legal frameworks

To elaborate on how counter-hegemonic challenges drive transformations in Turkey, it is useful to first assess the institutional and legal settings that govern these 'terrains of resistance' (Routledge 1994). Drawing on our fieldwork and individual experiences, we can assert that both conflicts result from a top-down imposition of regulations and policies (new industrial developments and energy production on the one side, and a wholly irrelevant rector appointment and sudden establishment of two faculties on the other), and the lack of meaningful participation and

representation of stakeholders in decisions that have a severe and negative impact on their everyday life. Overall, both Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi University are sites of contestation born from crisis settings in which injustices over access to information and recognition of rights and a shared legitimate grievance about government choices loom large.

We observe that in both cases the Turkish state – now fully transformed under twenty years of Erdoğan’s rule – reacted to collective action and resistance at these sites by changing the rules of the game (i.e. the institutional and legal frameworks) whenever necessary and to some extent possible. The direct use of legislative and executive powers in authoritarian regimes is no surprise but well established as an easy and effective instrument of domination in the short run (Akçay 2021). For instance, in the case of Yeni Foça, while the opposition was growing against the Aliğa coal-power plant in 1989, the Council of Ministers issued a governmental decree officially announcing the establishment of a joint venture company (70% Japanese, 30% Turkish capital) for the investment, which would become the country’s first plant running on imported coal owned mainly by foreign investors. The critical legal trick was using the free trade zones law, which was meant to facilitate land allocation for export-oriented purposes. So many things could be done with the legal apparatuses of the state in one night! This was also the case for the governance setting at Boğaziçi University when the rector elections for Turkey’s state universities were suddenly lifted in 2016, with a late-night emergency decree when President Erdoğan did not want to appoint the rector-elect. A new regulation was passed in a day, giving Erdoğan the authority to appoint whomever he wishes as rector at Boğaziçi University, and across all universities in Turkey (Coşkun and Kölemen 2020).

Legislative changes in both circumstances exacerbated the conflicts and further intensified political struggles. And, as the crises deepened, procedural violence over these territories became a common form of domination at the expense of consensus-based rule. In this sense, the move in the political climate away from democratic governance principles at Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi was remarkable but no surprise under the Erdoğan regime. For example, when in Yeni Foça, the activists, as environmental defenders of their touristic and historical sites, problematized the EIA processes – seen as a bureaucratic stage to complete by the investors – of the coal-power facility planned near historical ruins, they were initially able to paralyse the project proposed in 2017. Yet instead of seeking independent consultation and monitoring, the state changed the EIA regulations and designed them to overcome the court’s verdict and bypass the laws with an EIA exempt judgement for energy, mining and construction projects (Erensü 2018). This eventually led the court to stop investments after new legal appeals, based on the lack of cumulative EIA arguments. It is also telling that, despite environmental regulations, critical environmental data supposed to be produced by government agencies (such as air pollution measurements) in an industrial zone are never made publicly available.

Examples of procedural violence by the appointed and illegitimate administration at Boğaziçi included – against all established customary practices and democratic procedures – suspending elections for the director of the graduate institutes, expelling those elected from the official meetings and inviting some who had no right to be there, disregarding the quorum in the University Executive Board meeting, allowing double voting in the Senate to achieve the majority, and finally shutting down microphones of elected members in online platforms against legitimate complaints about irregularities in these meetings. The ultimate aim was to pave the way for politically motivated appointments to the university's decision-making bodies like the University Executive Council and the Senate and hire new faculty in a top-down manner by changing standards and procedures for academic promotions and posts.

On various occasions, the state bureaucracy in both contexts concentrated its strategic moves on direct economic and structural exploitation and harassment, through criminal investigations and arrests within and outside formal decision-making spaces. At Yeni Foça, environmental activists were labelled as enemies of the state and anti-developmentalists. At Boğaziçi, security cameras were installed all around the campus; the number of private security guards increased dramatically; over 500 disciplinary investigations and over 150 lawsuits were initiated on baseless pretexts against students and members of academic and administrative staff, and penalties were applied for some, including termination of employment, dismissal from the campus and random arrests; student clubs (e.g. LGBTQ+) and activities (e.g. photography and film exhibitions) were banned. The rectorate also made top-down decisions to close or move the offices of several research centres, and stopped the activities of Boğaziçi University Press under the pretext of space and budget limitations.

Note also that in both contexts, it was important not to view the state as one single monolithic body or the only part of the problem, but also as the solution. Against increased pressure, both social movements used every available safe way to mobilize and seize opportunities for legitimate action. As such, the constituents of these struggles appealed in judicial activism and engaged in legal battles on every occasion by making applications to the Council of the State and opening lawsuits in various administrative courts for the cancellation of decisions (in the case of Yeni Foça, regarding biased EIA reports and in the case of Boğaziçi, regarding the appointment of the rector and opening of new faculties with a presidential pen stroke). As resistances often suffer from lack of access to information, another key strategy was to mobilize the Right to Information Act as much as possible. Even if lawlessness is the order of the day, using all legal avenues in tandem becomes important, not only as an effective way of publicizing the struggle and making violations heard but also because such legal openings are crucial for maintaining hope in bad times, sustaining objections under formal public records and pushing open new windows of opportunity in the quest for justice.

Changes behind the scenes – in people and networks

The presence of grassroots resistance and activism in Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi under authoritarian constraints not only altered the initial state of affairs in these localities but also relations and connections of practice in an unprecedented manner at personal, local and collective levels. In both communities, issue-specific activism brought a diverse set of actors together, helped them to get to know and understand one another, and allowed them to network and collaborate despite their differences. More importantly, these crisis settings enhanced the sense of belonging and collective agency by strengthening the community culture beyond imagination. The people of Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi University were reminded why they care about localities and identities and how they relate to local and institutional histories.

Indeed, the rise and consolidation of these movements as respected and known counter-hegemonic actors at regional levels, their continuity over long periods and their impacts beyond their borders are quite remarkable. One significant achievement for Yeni Foça was forming a coalition of different opposition movements and groups – villagers, local authorities, environmentalists, opposition parties in parliament, professional associations and labour unions – around an environmental justice claim. The anti-coal struggle in Aliğa marks a significant point in the history of environmental movements in Turkey in building politically conscious environmental resistance towards the emblematic Bergama gold mine case and beyond (Gönenç 2022). Moreover, the environmental lawsuits were the first of their kind in Turkey, which led to a pro bono lawyer group, which later facilitated the formation of nationally coordinated lawyers of environmental and ecologist movements. In a similar vein, the state interference in Boğaziçi University's democratic governance structures led to a genuine struggle for academic freedoms nationwide where Boğaziçi academics, students, personnel and alumni were spontaneously united around a common goal: 'defending and maintaining with greater determination than ever the values that make this university *a universitas*' (Bianet 2022b).

Local power did not of course emerge automatically in either context, but due to a devotion to organizational structures and participatory processes that were able to carry some tension while strategies were built in small increments. Therefore, in both cases, it was essential to keep the culture of participatory democracy within the movement along the way. Individuals' powerlessness against structural influences was broken within political activism spaces such as forums, working groups and commissions, and decentralized local networks. While deciding on arenas of contestation to be mobilized, care was taken to respect the common wisdom that discussions bring. In many instances, alternatives and practices with no clear legitimate or consensual grounds were discarded. Retirees, in both contexts, played a crucial role in ensuring the integrity of the movements as they brought their experience of constructive and self-reflexive criticism into the discursive processes. From time to time, different activists and researchers became spokespersons of their resistance in the media. The visibility and effectiveness of both oppositions were also

enhanced by direct relations with national and international organizations. As Silva et al. (2018) point out, connections to political parties served as bridging mechanisms that allowed both movements to directly influence the drafting of policy agendas at election times. Overall, solidarity was forged within these localities and with national and international partners, which were crucial for transforming despair and grief into a valuable and productive rage.

Needless to say, for activists surviving a long-term struggle while keeping up with daily responsibilities and a multitude of tasks is tremendously challenging. Given the burning issues that the community members deal with and act on every day, it was also crucial for them to pause working on their immediate problems and collectively reflect on their roles, capabilities and desired futures from time to time. As engaged researchers, our involvement in the Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi struggles is also meant to open up such spaces for the community to reflect on actions and challenges and better understand the opposition's role in these dynamic, ongoing conflictual processes. Yeni Foça Forum members, for instance, as our knowledge co-producers, have explicitly asked us to produce outputs with strategic relevance, including an overview of the historical struggles in the region to enhance their visibility at national and international levels.

On the other front, the dominant and pro-government circles, apart from antagonizing resisting groups, also dedicated time and energy to appropriating critical positions and controlling political decisions, lobbying, and image-remaking as a counter-strategy (Özen 2022). At Yeni Foça, for instance, new companies and sectors were introduced. SOCAR tried once to sideline potential local opposition by taking the chiefs (*muhtar*) of the nearby villages on a fully paid trip to Germany to show how similar 'clean' power plants operated. At Boğaziçi, the hidden actor on the government side seemed to be the Boğaziçi University Reunion Association (BURA). This conservative organization was established in 2003, with President Erdoğan joining its general assembly in 2018. While the most experienced academics and managers were dismissed or demoted to second- and third-degree positions in unlawful manners, the ex-chairman of BURA was appointed as the general secretariat – a critical senior managerial role on campus, now left to a person who gained his PhD just before the appointment and was inexperienced in administrative matters. One can only wonder at the possibility of such a coincidence! Among many illegitimate acts, the most disgraceful and scandalous was perhaps the appointment of three new deans from outside the university after the dismissal of the three elected deans, as if no one else in the university would be eligible for these posts. It is therefore not surprising that the positions of these three appointees hang now on a tightrope.

Changes in invisible power – in values and discourses

What impact did the proliferation of action against top-down policies and decisions have in these regions, if any? These social movements, above all, wanted to act as a

brake on the hegemonic powers' malignant transformation through oppositional politics. Taken together, the evidence suggests they have already achieved this, as the state could not carry out its agenda as smoothly as it would have liked. In both contexts, political mobilization, in many ways, interrupted some state actions, led to delays and partly redirected them along the way (see again Turhan et al. 2019 for Yeni Foça, and Gambetti 2022 for Boğaziçi). But above all, thanks to the crucial role played by these movements, and their vocal and legitimate stance, today, the majority of the public acknowledges that what happened in Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi is disgraceful and illegitimate. In the case of Boğaziçi, for instance, according to a nationwide survey taken in January 2021, during the early stages of resistance, 73% of respondents among those who were knowledgeable about the resistance stated that 'the university faculty members should be able to choose their rectors' (Duvar 2021). Another survey conducted in March 2022 delivered similar results – 83% of the respondents said the faculty members should be consulted during the process of rector appointment (Medyascope 2022) – confirming the legitimacy of the demands of the resisting academics and the public support for the Boğaziçi community.

From the beginning, there was a clash of worldviews between these localities and the government, and domination was manifested invisibly but purposively through populist discursive practices and control of ideas. In both cases, activists felt the responsibility to discredit false rhetoric or ungrounded accusations and tried to disseminate all available factual evidence when necessary, without fear. The fact that the Aliğa region has been declared an ecological sacrifice zone on several occasions by governments, for instance, made the opposition feel weak. This was on top of energy scarcity, and energy discourses were often used at the national level to legitimize top-down decisions, the former being imminent in the country from the early 1980s and the latter as part of the Erdoğan regime's national development programme (Özkaynak et al. 2020; Turhan et al. 2019). The social movement in Yeni Foça ultimately found the strength to go against these discourses, believed in social action, and acknowledged the importance of being more explicit about alternative knowledge and futures. In this context, the scenario workshops we conducted as part of the ACKnowl-EJ project were helpful, as people felt they gained a better awareness of their agency and alternative visions for the future. Of course, local activists also knew they needed to sustain their discourses on solid grounds and scientific knowledge. So, whenever they could, they consulted academics for peer-reviewed, high-quality scientific knowledge documenting the impacts of the industrial activities in the region and ordered reports through professional chambers of engineers and health professionals.

After years of experience, the social movement in Yeni Foça produced a discursive and material transformation for the area by claiming to 'defend life' beyond the polluting fossil fuel projects. The movement's decisive and openly

political stand against polluting investments and active engagement with all other actors (including local authorities, national authorities and other grassroots groups in the region) have given them leverage to amplify their messages. The principal statement of the Yeni Foça Forum is telling in this context:

With every passing day, knowing that our environment is under a systematic assault and considering the environment as the basic right to life, we as the witnesses of this assault are coming together to form Yeni Foça Forum to build environmental awareness, strengthen it and widen the solidarity, reclaim our historical and cultural values and pass them on to the next generations, defend life with all its diversity and colors.

Of course, while investors still have power over locals and as always, themes like jobs and national energy act as influential narratives for the investors to maintain locals' buy-in, establishing a positive framing for the struggle that would motivate people to become more active in the political arena – next to their everyday environmentalism – was a vital move for agenda setting (Kelz 2019).

In a similar vein, for Boğaziçi's struggle, being transparent and explicit regarding moral principles, values and a campus culture embraced by an old, respected university and its constituents, as well as a dedication to excellence in education and research, was extremely important. This was especially the case at a time when post-truth politics was at its peak in Turkey as protests were designated as elitism and terrorism by President Erdoğan himself; the interior minister deemed opposing the will of the president 'fascistic', the new vice-rector responsible for research announced on his Twitter that 'Boğaziçi is, at last, doing science' and the rectorate's rhetoric at large implied that an authoritarian, hierarchical structure is natural in university settings, and even necessary for efficiency (Gambetti 2022). Against such organized lying, fundamental principles¹¹ on academic functioning and governance embraced by Boğaziçi and approved by the Senate in 2012 were publicized (e.g. Boğaziçi Ayakta, 2021, 2022; Kolluoglu and Akarun 2023; Çolakoğlu and Demirci 2022; Freely 2013) published on Boğaziçi's legacy and history were disseminated; public speeches, video artworks and short classes were organized by students, alumni and academics on campus and broadcasted regularly through internet platforms; a university governance proposal¹² was drafted and disseminated nationwide; and panels and conferences were organized on the future of higher education and academic freedoms, again in collaboration with academics and alumni.

These counter-acts not only served to disqualify untruths and set the agenda for Turkey's academic landscape but also synergized people outside the university. Undoubtedly thanks to these events, there have been references to Boğaziçi's spirit on several occasions inspiring everybody in the country to fight against injustices.¹³ Knowing Boğaziçi is fighting, others are fighting (e.g. the Middle East Technical University (METU)). Therefore, as previously mentioned,

here we mainly assert that while the easiest method for the hegemonic system is structural control, the real strength lies in people, networks and their discourses – in the ability to speak to society. This is crucial for any counter-hegemonic struggle. The fact that the authoritarian government, despite all efforts around antagonism and populism, cannot construct a legitimate discourse to produce consent while the resistance has a natural one and can shout truth to power is what gives people hope.

What Sets the Limits of the Possible? The Way Forward

In this chapter, we have provided a combination of theoretical knowledge and the practical insights we acquired in two oppositional movement contexts of which we were a part: Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi University. In doing so, we discussed different layers of power transformation within a double movement setting (Ford 2003). In particular, we depicted how the contradictory forces, the ruling and subordinate groups, try to improve their relative positions in the three spheres of power elaborated by Rodríguez et al. (2015) and Rodríguez and Inturias (2018). We also demonstrated how oppositional movements fighting on multiple fronts, though seemingly beaten, challenge the hegemonic system and complicate our understanding of the change process. Such awareness is fundamental since, as we have already pointed out, people are primarily inclined to disregard the dynamic and multiple ways in which transformations take place and often instead prioritize a narrow set of outcomes designated as successes or failures. Yet the issue is sometimes around fighting a malignant transformation first and ensuring that a shift for the worse does not occur at its full pace. Therefore, it is important not to expect too much at once and to be conscious and patient with the necessary process for transformative change, particularly in the case of an authoritarian breakdown.

Moreover, we sense that people often get hung up on power transformations they observe at the outset, and miss or overlook the importance of the hidden and invisible power spheres. Presumably, such omissions make people feel powerless in the battleground and keep them away from acting from time to time. However, it is crucial to remember that from an institutional perspective, changes at the outset, without public support and coherent and legitimate discourse, can neither produce expected results nor remain stable and sustainable in the long run. Therefore, it is crucial to keep believing in collective agency, take responsibility as needed at the forefront by reacting to institutional pressures, and never stop proactively imagining and building alternative futures. Insights from these cases also demonstrate that for social movements under an authoritarian turn, one key area to keep an eye on is the increasing threat to democratic knowledge co-production and the free press. Surely, a solid understanding of complex forms of knowledge politics and anti-politics will undoubtedly be essential for those struggling for a more just, egalitarian and plural society.

Outside our analytical gaze, our individual life experiences were shaped and influenced by the events in Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi. As researchers with family ties to Yeni Foça (in Ethemcan's case) or as academics in both senior and junior positions (in Begüm and Cem's case), we became the subjects of ongoing changes in Yeni Foça and Boğaziçi and, therefore, naturally had to embrace the changes, join the struggles and maintain the pickets we witnessed. Consequently, we paid the utmost attention to catering to these ongoing struggles' needs through our research engagement. We collectively distilled from these experiences that the second-worst option is still better than the worst-case scenario; hence, there is always something worth fighting for. This is in line with Out of the Woods Collective's (2020: 34) formulation of hope against hope, which does not translate as an expectation of change or undue optimism but rather as a way to build different futures with solidarity and struggle.

While we caution against overly optimistic approaches to policy changes without durable shifts in power structures (Silva et al. 2018), our central contention is that those social movements acting as a handbrake on malign transformations are valuable. Moreover, even in bad times there are reasons to be hopeful, since resistance movements consciously or unconsciously impact multiple power spheres, creating favourable conditions for positive and sustainability-aligned change in the medium and long run. The societal experience itself is very precious, and presumably is the one that makes a difference in the long term. It is true that sometimes, social movements abandon some of their radical ideas, put them to bed temporarily, and make concessions – but still they know that with a potential structural change or any other new window of opportunity, the revolutionary ideas and built-in values are there and ready to be used. Therefore, no matter what, it is essential to keep asking and discussing how alternative transformative futures can come into being, and confronting whatever sets the limits of the possible.

Notes

- 1 At this juncture, we argue that it is important to embrace the inherent uncertainty in transformations and answer the questions put forth by Scoones and Stirling (2020) clearly before branding any transformation as benign or malign: 'What methods, processes and mobilizations can tilt the balance towards more positive outcomes? How can alternatives be prefigured to reinforce this new politics? Who is centred in transformatory spaces, and who is to the side? And what solidarities, ethics and styles of reflexivity are required for this new politics of uncertainty?' (ibid., pp. 20–1).
- 2 Following Blythe et al. (2018), we refer to the dark side of transformation as 'the risks associated with discourse and practice that constructs transformation as apolitical, inevitable, or universally beneficial, has the potential to produce significant material and discursive consequences'. Our working definition of malignant transformation can, therefore, be understood as thorough structural changes that produce worse outcomes than the initial condition.

- 3 The AKP (and Erdoğan) initially rose to power in 2002 following the previous governments' critical political and economic failures. It delivered the promise of a liberal welfare state with major structural economic and political reforms (Turhan et al. 2019) and gained major electoral support.
- 4 See Official Gazette no: 31352, www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2021/01/20210102-7.pdf.
- 5 Bulu was a parliamentary candidate for Erdoğan's AKP in 2015 (AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – Justice and Development Party).
- 6 See Official Gazette no: 31542, www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2021/07/20210715M1-2.pdf.
- 7 For a complete list of damages compiled by Boğaziçi academics, see <https://university-bogazici.wordpress.com/hasarlar-talepler-damages-demands/>.
- 8 The appointed dean resigned on 26 July 2022 (one day before the faculty presentation meeting to the candidate students) citing health problems, and the Faculty of Law had to begin education in the autumn 2022 term with no full professors on its academic staff list.
- 9 Boğaziçi academics organized a 'vote of no confidence' on 31 July 2021; 82% of 746 eligible/registered voters participated in the voting.
- 10 See all bulletins here: <https://universitybogazici.wordpress.com/bulten/>.
- 11 The key motivation behind this statement regarding the structure and functioning of public universities was to contribute to the discussion of the university system and the rules in relation to higher education in Turkey. See the English version: https://universitybogazici.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/bogazici-university-academic-principles_senate-2012-resolution.pdf.
- 12 See the report in Turkish: <https://universitybogazici.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/uyykrapor13temmuz2021.pdf>.
- 13 For a list of awards as a reflection of inspirations see: <https://universitybogazici.wordpress.com/oduller-awards/>.

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