

RESEARCH PAPER

Defending Nature: Transformation of the Space Through Grassroots Activism Against the Threat of Extractivism

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Abstract: Despite the violence of law enforcement forces in Turkey, both urban and rural communities are protesting environmental injustices, including the ecological destruction, human rights violations, health problems, and displacement that the extractive industry causes. Despite the recent increase in discussions on the topic, the extractive industry and environmental protests are not recent debates in Turkish politics. Since the military coup of 1980, changes in mining codes have led communities to organize environmental protests to defend their livelihoods, place, and culture. For four decades, many communities have organized successful protests that have helped develop the environmental movement in Turkey. However, while some environmental movements have been ongoing for many years through grassroots activism, others have failed to create a collective identity that enables the entire community to come together. Hence, in this paper, I comparatively analyse the anti-mining environmental struggles of two communities. In doing so, I show how local inhabitants have been able to organize an environmental movement against extractivism to defend their livelihoods and space under an umbrella organization. I argue that as these local inhabitants organized an environmental movement as a place-based struggle to defend the place “where they lived in and acted” (Escobar 2008), a sustainable movement is more likely to arise from the grassroots activism of the community.

Keywords: Anti-mining movements, Extractivism, Turkey, Ecological conflicts, Environmental justice.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite a surge in recent times, debates over the extractive industry and environmental protests are not new in Turkey. Since the 1980 military coup, changes in mining codes have led both urban and rural communities to

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protest against environmental injustices to defend their livelihoods, place, and culture. For four decades, many communities have organized successful protests that have contributed to the environmental movement in Turkey. However, while some environmental movements have lasted for many years through grassroots activism, others have failed to create a collective identity that enables the entire community to come together. Hence, in this paper, I comparatively analyse the anti-mining environmental struggles of two communities, addressing the question of how local inhabitants can create an environmental movement against extractivism to defend their livelihoods and space under an umbrella organization. How/why could the community in Çanakkale—a north-western province of Turkey—not create a collective identity to sustain an environmental movement against common threats, while the community in Artvin—a north-eastern province of Turkey—has been successful in creating joint action wherein residents of the entire city have participated? Given the role of place as an element that shapes community life, I vehemently defend the view that the organizational success of anti-mining environmental movements, at least in Turkey, depends on the social relationships that community members develop in their city.

Figure 1: Location of Artvin



Source: Wikipedia. 2023b. “Artvin in Turkey.”

In Turkey, the military coup on 12 September 1980 was a critical juncture in the state’s environmental and economic policies. The new regime introduced a neoliberal agenda and, accordingly, amendments were made in the legislation to meet the demands of the new economic framework. In 1985, the amendment to Mining Law No 3213 was a turning point for the environment and economy of Turkey, as it granted international private corporations the right to get mining licenses for their projects (Arsel 2013; Erensü 2020). Subsequently, the Cerattepe (Artvin) anti-mining movement

arose to resist a Canadian gold mining company, making it one of the first environmental protests in Turkey at this time. Since the mid-1990s, the Artvin community has been defending its place against the mining threat under the banner of a local civil society organization, the Green Artvin Association (YAD). The community has succeeded in bringing all residents together to defend their space, livelihoods, and culture, irrespective of political and ideological views. It succeeded in casting two Canadian gold mining companies, Cominco Inc and Inmet Mining, out of its territory. Yet, the third company, Cengiz Holding, supported by Turkey's majority party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), has been continuing copper mining activity in the Cerattepe region of Artvin since 2017—after the vigil protests of the community were violently suppressed.¹ Yet, the community continued to struggle for their city, defending not only Artvin, but also the city periphery, against increasing threats of mining in the current political atmosphere of Turkey.

Figure 2: Location of Çanakkale



Source: Wikipedia. 2023d. “Çanakkale in Turkey.”

In 2019, the Kirazlı (Canakkale) anti-mining movement arose against a Canadian gold mining company, Alamos Gold (EJOLT 2015).² At the

¹ The planned mining operations were the cyanide-gold mining projects in Artvin. After a mass demonstration by the community through a vigil protest in 2016, the cyanide-gold mining project was transformed to a copper mining operation, to convince the community to allow them to continue mining operations because copper mining is less harmful than cyanide-gold mining. However, cyanide-gold mining projects are still on the agenda of the current corporation in Artvin. Further information for the planned gold mining projects in Artvin can be found in Mining Maven (2019) and Mining Technology (2023).

² Before the local community kept vigil to defend their livelihoods in Kirazlı village in Çanakkale, the community was not unfamiliar with environmental threats and environmental demonstrations. Since the beginning of the 2000s, environmental protests against mining projects have been ongoing in Canakkale. However, what

beginning of the protests, the Çanakkale residents and those living in other cities in Turkey started to keep a vigil in Kirazlı village (Çanakkale), where the company aimed to construct its mining operations, to defend the place and stop the company. However, the vigil protest of the community did not last, and conflicts arose among the actors of this environmental movement due to their different understandings of environmentalism, politics, and ways of organization and mobilization. Hence, each actor founded its own platform, group, or association to sustain the environmental movement in Çanakkale.

Although there have been many environmental movements against extractivism³ in Turkey, in recent years, the Cerattepe and Kirazlı cases have become popular by adapting the same mobilization strategies—vigil protests. However, the actors in both movements are differently organized. Therefore, research on these cases is crucial to identify the characteristics and transformation of environmental movements in the current atmosphere, where the extractive sector grows day by day and the violence against environmental defenders by law enforcement forces and corporations has been increasing. For this comparative research, I have conducted a month-long fieldwork in both cities. During my fieldwork, I carried out semi-structured interviews with city residents and the active participants of environmental protests, including members of local civil society organizations, lawyers, teachers, journalists, members of municipalities, and shopkeepers. Additionally, I had unofficial and daily conversations with city residents as well as observed their daily lives.

The comparison between these movements demonstrates that the Artvin community could act together to defend their livelihoods and resist law-enforcement officers who violently suppressed the vigil protest in 2017. I argue that the active presence of the local environmental organization, YAD, which locals identify as a supra-political body, contributed to the continuity of the environmental movement through the establishment of common ground among the inhabitants of Artvin. Bearing the Cerattepe (Artvin) example in mind, I assert that strong alliances forged firstly among

makes the vigil protest that took place in 2019 significant is that both the local community and people all around the country come to Kirazlı village to protest the actions of the corporation.

³ In this study, I define extractivism as all projects that destroy human and non-human lives to accumulate capital, leading to distributional and participatory injustices. Given the growth of extractive industries over the last two decades, mining, hydroelectric power plants, and thermal power plants are the most common industries in Turkey. Following these industries, other industries—including geothermal power plants, wind energy systems, and nuclear power plants—are mushrooming. For further information on extractive industries in Turkey.

local community members play a decisive role in furthering alliances with other groups, including but not limited to environmentalists, civil society organizations, and activists at the national scale. However, when alliances with environmental organizations, activists, and environmentalists at the national scale are prioritized, they are less likely to engender environmental justice movements.

There are other factors, such as local differences, which we need to analyse to have a better understanding of the sustainability of environmental movements as well as of the alliances among diverse actors and organizations. Place is an important element to study geographical, historical, and cultural differences and their effects on the organization of local resistances (Escobar 2008). I argue that when local inhabitants organize an environmental movement as a place-based struggle to defend the place “where they lived in and acted” (Escobar 2008), a sustained movement is more likely to arise. In Artvin, the local community defends its livelihoods with an emphasis on Cerattepe as a place where they live, act, and breathe. Additionally, I realized that the history of the city contributed to maintaining the environmental movement under an umbrella environmental association with democratic and participatory decision-making processes. After the military coup in 1980 depoliticized leftist groups in Artvin, these groups used their experience of organization for anti-mining mobilization. In this vein, that community members depoliticized by the military coup see environmental issues as a new field of struggle plays an important role in maintaining the grassroots environmental movement in Artvin (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2015).

2. AN OUTLINE OF THE CERATTEPE AND KIRAZLI ANTI-MINING ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS

The Cerattepe anti-mining movement has been continuing for over two decades in Artvin and has significantly shaped the daily lives of local communities and the relationships among them. On the other hand, the Kirazlı anti-mining environmental movement emerged as a result of grassroots activism in Çanakale, but it quickly attracted the attention of many actors in other cities in Turkey in August 2019. Although this anti-mining movement has been active with protests and involves various environmental organizations, environmentalists, ecologists, and NGOs, grassroots activism could not be maintained because of disagreements among community members.

In 1989, Cominco Inc from Canada acquired licences for cyanide-gold mining in Artvin from the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources. By 1995, local inhabitants had founded YAD. In 2002, Cominco Inc stopped

the project but transferred its licenses to another Canadian company, Inmet Mining. The court cancelled the mining licence of the company in 2008, marking a significant success for the community in terms of realizing environmental justice. Again, in 2011, the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources announced that within the scope of the new mining law, they were going to contract away 1,343 mining sites in Turkey, including Cerattepe and Genya Mounts in Artvin. In 2012, Eti Bakır Corporation, a subsidiary company of Cengiz Holding,⁴ received a mining licence. This triggered a new period of legal action and vigil protests. Yet, in February 2016, law enforcement officers violently crushed the vigil and prohibited people from travelling to the city to support the local community and the protests.⁵

After the July 15 coup attempt in Turkey, the copper mining operation started in Artvin. Taking advantage of the coup-related state of emergency, the governor of the city banned protests for two years. In 2017, YAD filed a lawsuit in the constitutional court to bring a stop to the environmental injustices caused by mining activities; this time, there were 708 complainants. Additionally, YAD worked hard to create networks with other environmental movements mushrooming in different regions in the country in alliance with the umbrella ecological organization, the Ecology Union (EU), which operated at a national scale. One of the ecological struggles that the Artvin community relentlessly monitored and supported was the Kirazlı anti-mining movement, which emerged in August 2019. After mass protests flared up in Kirazlı village, YAD went to Çanakale to support the resistance of the community, which was protesting gold mining projects in Kirazlı by keeping watch for the company's entry into the region. However, the Artvin community emphasized that in the Kirazlı movement, organizational strategies and decision-making processes were completely different from that of the Cerattepe movement. Therefore, it is important to compare the organization of the Cerattepe movement with the Kirazlı movement to understand the conditions that are conducive to the success of grassroots environmental movements.

Similar to Artvin, Çanakale is under threat of planned mining projects, especially because of its mineral resources. In 2010, Alamos Gold bought the Kirazlı cyanide-gold mining project from Teck Resources Ltd and Frontier Development Group. In 2012, the company gained a positive environmental impact assessment (EIA) report. In July 2019, drone images

⁴ A company that has close relationships with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government: <https://www.cengizholding.com.tr/>.

⁵ The law enforcement forces used pepper gas on protestors, and the state filed a penal suit upon those attending the demonstrations. For the further information, see Nilay (2016).

of devastated areas in Kirazlı were displayed on social media by Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion for Reforestation and for Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA), leading to massive public opposition immediately. The members of the İda Solidarity Association, the City Council, and the Çanakkale Municipality established a committee, namely, Water and Conscience, to organize a vigil against the proposed project in the area and announced that all activists and supporters would be invited to come with their tents and join the protests. Hence, protests rapidly erupted with the participation of diverse actors from Çanakkale as well as other cities. After the mass protests against the proposed mining project in August 2019, the Water and Conscience Committee decided to move the vigil protest to the city centre and abandon the project area in Kirazlı village. Yet, others continued to stay in the area until law enforcement violently expelled them in September 2020.

Overall, unlike the Cerattepe anti-mining movement in Artvin, the Kirazlı movement did not continue with alliances under an umbrella local organization in Çanakkale. On the contrary, both movements mobilized diverse actors through various ways of protesting, especially by having held a vigil in the project area. I argue that the use of the same mobilization strategies was the result of the sharing of experiences among distinct local ecological movements for many years. Yet, even if local ecological conflicts learn from each other through experience sharing, use the same mobilization strategies, and try to create alliances, a question remains as to how grassroots activism can continue by mobilizing the whole community with a common purpose to defend their living space against ecological threats. I think that the Kirazlı and Cerattepe movements are two crucial cases for understanding how different organizational strategies and historical and geographical differences impact the emergence and sustainability of grassroots environmental activism.

3. A NEW ERA OF MINERAL DEVELOPMENT

The neoliberalization of the global economy has significantly affected the mining sector and states' relations with capital. Studies on the mining industry and anti-mining conflicts show that since the 1980s, the global economy has entered "a new era of mineral development" through structural shifts in the role of states, and in the relationships among corporations, states, and communities, as well as changes in material needs for extraction (Ballard and Banks 2003; Bridge 2004; Jacka 2018; Yaşın 2019). Focusing on the reasons for the structural shifts in global extractivism, these studies examine the characteristics of the new mineral economy, the links between communities and their space and environment, asymmetrical power relations, political and ecological struggles among

communities and corporations, and mining code reforms (Martinez-Alier 2002; Ballard and Banks 2003; Escobar 2008). The increased social metabolism of a capitalist economy is one of the reasons for the emergence of a new mineral economy (Martinez-Alier 2002; Yaşın 2019). With the growth of the global population, the need for material extraction has risen from the late 1970s to the 2000s (Bridge 2004; Yaşın 2019). So, this capital economy has shaped the characteristics of a new era of mineral development.

Firstly, the erosion of legal compliance is one of the key characteristics of the new mineral development era (Bridge 2004; Jacka 2018). Faced with pressures from international financial institutions such as the World Bank, states—mostly in the Global South—have changed their mineral codes so as to make natural, coastal, and agricultural regions more easily commodified than ever before (Çoban, Özlüer, and Erensü 2015; Jacka 2018). Secondly, not only have NGOs, lawyers, academics, and local communities been involved with the extractive sector since the introduction of neoliberal reforms, but also corporations and new actors that shape social, political, and economic spheres (Ballard and Banks 2003; Bridge 2004). Thirdly, following the neoliberalization and deregulation of the mining sector, environmental concerns became more visible, and key issues were discussed globally (Bridge 2004). On the one hand, local communities resist planned or ongoing extractivist projects. On the other, new measures are taken to supposedly “protect the environment and achieve sustainable development” by states and corporations trying to curb local communities’ mobilization (Ballard and Banks 2003; Bridge 2004; Jacka 2018).

This historical transformation of the global mining industry has reconfigured the relationship between the state, capital, and the environment in Turkey following the spatial and material expansion of mining frontiers (Yaşın 2019). Material extraction and consumption has expanded in Turkey over the last two decades (Yaşın 2019). Following universal debates on environmental protection and sustainability and global changes in the mining industry, the erosion of laws, emerging actors, and increasing environmental concerns define the characteristics of the mining industry. On the one hand, debates on sustainability and environmental protection have opened up new channels for interacting with international actors through environmental NGOs, bringing forth new policies supporting the actions of the economic market for environmental protection coupled with modernization and development (Adaman and Arsel 2005). On the other hand, changes in mining laws facilitated foreign private mining corporations to emerge as new actors in Turkey’s economy, leading natural areas to be used for drilling works by corporations, two of

which are the Cerattepe and Kirazlı gold mining projects.⁶ However, local communities—the other new actors of this era—have organized protests and environmental movements to curb the drilling works and mining projects of these corporations through demands for justice, stemming from the asymmetrical relationships among corporations, the government, and local communities regarding the use of resources (Bridge 2004).

After the 12 September 1980 military coup, a new constitution was created in 1982. The post-coup consensus between the state and capital led to neoliberal reforms. The state adopted economic policies that would more rapidly commodify nature than ever (Çoban, Özlüer, and Erensü 2015).⁷ The amendment to Mining Law No 3213, which granted international private corporations the right to get mining licences for their projects (Arsel 2013; Erensü 2020), was a turning point for the environment and economy of Turkey. Following this amendment, a wave of projects was rapidly declared—the Bergama (İzmir) cyanide-gold mining project in the early 1990s, the Cerattepe (Artvin) cyanide-gold mining project in the early 1990s, and the Kışladağ (Uşak) cyanide-gold mining project in the late 1990s. The state substantially readapted Mining Law No. 3213 in 2004, and, accordingly, the mining activities operated by corporations expanded (Erensü 2020). At the same time, Omnibus Bill No 5177 allowed legally protected areas to be used for mining in 2004 (Çoban 2018). Çoban, Özlüer, and Erensü (2015) argue that the state enacted legal and institutional deregulation through constitutional changes to facilitate the expansion of the market without considering environmental burdens and risks. Relatedly, especially in the 2000s, lands, forests, pastures, and coasts belonging to the state's treasury rapidly became commodified for market investment and construction projects, industrial agriculture, mining activities, and energy projects that caused/will cause various sorts of

⁶ Before these planned mining projects, mining activities continued in order to achieve economic development. However, these were state-led initiatives that were operating the mine fields rather than private corporations.

⁷ From the foundation of the new republic in 1923 till the 1950s, economic policies supported the development of agriculture through protectionist control over foreign trade and exchange (Pamuk 2010; Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2021). The protectionist policies of the state led to the nationalization of existing companies in this time (Pamuk 2010). In the 1950s, industrialization and urbanization shifted state policies away from taking care of agriculture and the countryside—yet, agriculture was still a main area for development (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2021). In the 1960s and 70s, the private sector started to take over state-led industries. In the 1980s, the role of rural players declined in the economy while international players like the IMF and World Bank and market ideology became powerful (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2021). During the AKP era, neoliberalization of the economy deepened through policies supporting the deagrarianisation of the countryside, which opened the way for an unprecedented extractive drive (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2021).

ecological destruction all around the country (Çoban, Özlüer, and Erenşü 2015).

Overall, the expansion of the neoliberal market economy in Turkey has aggravated environmental problems, and thus, opened up a space for civic interventions and resistance against its hazardous impacts (Aydın 2005). Civil society actors replaced the role of the state in shaping environmental policies against the ecological destruction caused by the mushrooming neoliberal actors and policies all around the country. However, many civil society organizations mobilizing to impede ecological destruction in alliance with local communities were limited in capacity in terms of confronting neoliberal market relations. Nevertheless, I argue that civil society organizations substantially contributed to the mobilization of local communities in these ecological struggles and created alliances with them against environmental degradation. As the following sections outline, the results of this contribution, however, were yet to come.

4. THE RISE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS AND PLACE-BASED STRUGGLES

In a globalizing and neoliberalizing world that facilitates the onset of a new mineral era, local communities have increasingly begun to take action to defend their livelihoods, place, and environment. Networks established among different localities around the world help local environmental movements share experiences about forms of mobilization and organization strategies (Martinez-Alier *et al* 2016). Explaining anti-mining environmental movements through two concepts, ecological distribution conflicts and place-based struggles, studies on environmental justice and social movements focus on the historical evolution of environmental justice demands, the rise of ecological conflicts, and diverse kinds of environmentalism.

Environmental justice is a concept that refers to historic conflicts on sulfur dioxide, the Chipko and Chico Mendes cases, current conflicts on the use of carbon sinks, conflicts about dams, cases pertaining to the preservation of rainforests for livelihoods, and many other cases around the world (Martinez-Alier 2002). From the 1980s onwards, early studies on environmental justice paid attention to the uneven distribution of environmental burdens and risks on disadvantaged communities—which were unequally distributed due to their choice of location (Bullard 1990; Agyeman *et al* 2016). Addressing environmental racism against black and Latino communities, scholars used the lens of environmental justice to analyse urban-based environmental movements in the US (Temper, Del Bene, and Martinez-Alier 2015; Scheidel *et al* 2018). These works, however,

neglected the different claims of environmentalism and rural conflicts in the Global South (Martinez-Alier 2002; Martinez-Alier *et al* 2016). Following the emergence of questions on what kinds of values and visions matter, and who is involved in decision-making processes and how, environmental justice frameworks, in recent studies, combine the environmental justice discourses of the Global North with the environmentalism of the Global South through claims of recognition and participation as well as distributive approaches (Temper *et al* 2015; Özkaynak and Rodriguez-Labajos 2017).

Conflicts related to ecological distribution centre on struggles surrounding valuation processes in terms of which values are deemed relevant for decision-making—such as market and monetary values, livelihood values, territorial rights, and ecological values (Martinez-Alier 2002). Resisting extraction that would contaminate their environment in favour of state and corporate profit, and defending livelihoods in ecological distribution conflicts such as mining conflicts, are identified as environmentalism of the poor (Martinez-Alier 2002; Scheidel *et al* 2018). Despite the different motivations and values of these people, their primary reason to create an environmental movement is to protest market relations (Martinez-Alier 2002). In a globalizing world, protests against market relations have become more networked, such that a global environmental justice movement has become possible. In other words, the local community's alignments with other actors, coalitions, and networks at the international scale make mining and environmental issues global (Çoban 2004; Walder 2009). Thus, the protests of different local movements contribute to a larger purpose, not only in opposing and sometimes transforming the unsustainable use of resources, but also by encouraging political debates on the commodification of the environment and renegotiating public values about sustainability (Scheidel *et al* 2018).

On the contrary, other environmental justice and social movement studies criticize the constitution of a global environmental justice movement. Cultural and historical differences are important for a community to develop a collective identity in the development of a social movement. However, the idea of a global environmental justice movement could sometimes neglect these differences (Escobar 2008). A social movement identity is the extent to which both groups and individuals feel part of a collectivity and are able to identify common elements in their past, present, and future experiences (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 2015). So, identity-building in a social movement gives the community a sense of belonging and collectivity that is maintained even after a particular protest has ended (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 2015). In different localities, communities create their collective identity through their attachment to the place and

fight for their place—a constitutive space where they live and act. These communities maintain their grassroots activism through local networks and place-based solidarities, allying with one another through common feelings and values and by encouraging people to participate in the movement (Escobar 2008; Nicholls 2009).

Accordingly, the cases that I comparatively study in this research prove the critique of a global environmental justice movement. In the environmental history of Turkey, the military coup on 12 September 1980 is a critical point to explain the rise of environmental movements. Not surprisingly, the suppression during and following the military coup led to the curious rise of ecological struggles, especially because many environmental organizations started to call their activities non-political (Erensü *et al* 2016). Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the growing role of environmental organizations was revealed in the increasing organizational capacity of local inhabitants to defend their livelihoods in alliance with actors from different levels. Some environmental movements in the aftermath of the 1980s benefitted from the pre-1980 era's organizational strategies and were more likely to ally with socialist and leftist groups and the Green Party (Adem 2005; Erensü *et al* 2016).

Thus, Turkey's post-1980s atmosphere enabled people to come together to expand their personal and political freedoms through environmental activism (Furhan, Aydın, and Özkaynak 2019). In this context, Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut (2015) demonstrate the importance of local differences of place in the creation of an environmental movement through the concept of environmentalism of the malcontent. According to them, the concept of environmentalism of the poor defines those who defend their livelihoods against market relations, which, in other parts of the world, may fail as a definition of the characteristics of environmental movements. After the military coup in 1980, these people organized movements in the depoliticized atmosphere of the era by capitalizing on their experiences of mobilization, and environmental activism replaced the severely suppressed leftist and socialist groups (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2015).

In recent years, ecological struggles have been more rapidly emerging all around the country as the state expands the extraction industry by deregulating the related laws. Since the 2010s, the extraction industry has become a vital factor in reshaping environmental policies during the AKP period through the central government's authority and decisions over land use (Çoban 2018). In this era, centralized decisions about land use, especially in the countryside, have been taken without the participation of local actors in decision-making processes (Özkaynak *et al* 2015). However, despite the rapid rise of environmental movements all around the country,

particularly after the 2010s, only a few have managed to sustain grassroots environmental activism, while many environmental movements were either dissolved by their own local communities or continue through other actors like civil-society initiatives. In this context, to understand the reasons for the failure of grassroots activism and alliances among diverse actors, it is critical to comparatively study the environmental movements of Turkey. Thus, I argue that we need to fully analyse how local communities may be able to sustain their grassroots activism through strong alliances at a local scale because these alliances among community members contribute to creating networks with other environmental organizations and diverse actors at the national and international scales, like in the case of the Cerattepe anti-mining environmental movement.

5. THE PLACE-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IN ARTVIN

Artvin is a provincial city located in the northeastern Black Sea region of Turkey with a population of 170,875 people, sharing its border with Georgia and far from major cities like Istanbul and Ankara. Its ecology is characterized by enormous biodiversity, including endemic species and old-growth forests along the harsh geography extending across the Karçal Mountains. The Çoruh River, which flows in the city and throughout the Çoruh Basin, is particularly significant for the city's ecology. These ecological fields are significant places where community members breathe, spend their time, earn their livelihoods, and shape their memories. In addition, Artvin, historically, is an important city in which leftist political groups organized and were severely suppressed in the 12 September 1980 military coup. A group of inhabitants participated in the Cerattepe environmental movement due to their prior or existing affiliations with the leftist culture and following the traumas of the military coup. Given the ecological and historical characteristics of Artvin, the inhabitants have been protesting mining projects here under an umbrella environmental organization, YAD, since the mid-1990s.

One of the important reasons for why the community has been able to achieve a long-duration environmental movement is its supra-political character—not politicizing environmental issues but rather emphasizing the commonality of mining hazards and risks to the whole community. By becoming supra-political, YAD emphasized the struggle for city, space, and environment in order to locally organize the whole community. It was able to create alliances with political parties and bureaucratic actors to make the problems nationally visible, raising the issue in assemblies in Ankara, the capital city, to demand environmental justice. Thus, YAD created an important space where the whole community could collect, share, and

disseminate information concerning the proposed projects, not only within their own community, but also with potential stakeholders and partners.

To understand why Cerattepe is a significant place in people's daily lives, it is crucial to focus on its geographical location—on top of the mountains just above the city. Since Cerattepe is very close to the urban centre, the community can monitor environmental degradation easily. One of the interviewees underlined that the mining activity violates their lifestyle while undermining the place they act daily. Due to the mining activity, they could not go to the Kafkasör and Cerattepe areas for leisure time activities with their children (Interview 2). The mining activity, in other words, breaks the community's daily routines. At the same time, while complaining about environmental threats in the city, community members usually refer to the destruction caused by the Murgul mining operation,⁸ 47 km away from the city, as well as the Deriner dam and HEPP project constructed on the Çoruh River in 2012. Both these projects are the main reasons why the community has been protesting the Cerattepe mining operation. In other words, the community is already familiar with how a mining project pollutes the environment and the city and threatens the livelihoods of its people. One of the interviewees who previously lived in Murgul mentioned their memories of how the home in which they had lived throughout their childhood had been destroyed during the mining blasts (Interview 13). Another interviewee who lived in Murgul for several years also stated how agricultural products could not be grown anymore because of air pollution (Interview 4). The shared history engraved in their minds, and the threat posed to the very livelihoods of these people, created a common ground on which this all-encompassing, supra-political environmental movement flourished.

Additionally, the historical character of the city contributed to the organization of an environmental movement under an umbrella organization. Even if community members identify this movement as supra-political, for those who share the traumas of the military coup, environmentalism has become a new field of politics. By using their previous experiences of organizing to create an environmental movement, “environmentalism of the malcontent” (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2015) has mobilized people to defend their livelihoods and has reversed the repressed past by creating a new field of activism (Interview 3).

Hence, despite having different motivations and ideologies, the community has found common ground under a supra-political environmental

⁸ It has been operating in Murgukl district in Artvin, destroying an entire city, its ecology, and human health.

organization in Artvin. This common ground is rooted in a defence of place, memories, livelihoods, and daily routines as well as a close attachment to the city, trustful relations among people, cultural values, and improved relations with the environment. In this context, the supra-political character of the movement is critical in thinking about the characteristics of environmental movements in Turkey. As I have demonstrated before, the supra-political character contributed to creating a place-based environmental movement (Escobar 2008) by combining different political ideologies. So, YAD, an essential organization at the local and regional scales, makes the voices of the Artvin people heard within the city centre and surrounding villages.

6. STRUGGLES AMONG COMMUNITY MEMBERS: ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AS A PART OF POLITICS?

Çanakkale is a city located in the Biga Peninsula in the northwestern Aegean region of Turkey with a population of 5,41,548 people. Mount Ida is the highest mountain in the region and extends through the southeast of the Biga Peninsula within the borders of the Çanakkale and Balıkesir provinces (TEMA 2020). The region is geographically characterized by its strategic location, close to Istanbul and Dardanelles, and is surrounded by many holiday destinations, making this area a transition point for travellers from Istanbul and other cities in the Thrace region to the Aegean region. Also, districts such as Küçükuyu and Bayramiç are popular places where people have settled to escape from the difficulties of urban life and to create a lifestyle more engaged with ecological and cultural activities (Aynalı 2020). In this region, thermal power plants and the proposed mining projects pose severe threats to biodiversity, culture, agriculture, and the livelihoods of the inhabitants of the region. Currently, 76% of the Mount Ida region is licensed for extractive activities by the proposed mining projects (TEMA 2020).

In the Kirazlı environmental movement, one of the reasons for opposing the proposed project is water contamination. If the mining project had commenced operations, the Atikhisar dam, a main water resource of the Çanakkale province, would be polluted by mining activity. The protestors, who came from different regions across the country, opposed the project due to the risk of environmental degradation, ecological destruction, air pollution, water contamination, soil erosion, and undemocratic decision-making by the current government. At the regional scale, the Çanakkale municipality assumed a leading role in initiating a Water and Conscience Watch in Balabanlı Hill in 2019. In organizing this protest, the municipality

cooperated with the Ida Solidarity Association⁹ and the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) and created a Water and Conscience Committee. When environmental issues mainly occupied the agenda of the inhabitants in Çanakkale, the Ida Solidarity Association aimed to mobilize all inhabitants under an umbrella organization. Yet, it could not bring the whole community together against a common environmental threat in the city because of different approaches to environmentalism.

In Çanakkale, the local community also involves people living in Küçükkuşu—a small district in Çanakkale—villagers, ecologists, and people from the ecotourism industry. The locals consist of people who migrated from İstanbul, who have been actively organizing environmental struggles against mining and thermal power plant projects since the beginning of the 2000s. These people are organized under an association, namely, the Kazdağı Association for the Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources, founded in 2012. At the same time, others established a platform, namely, the Brotherhood of Kazdağları, to debate the environmental problems of the Mount Ida region (Interview 26). The Kazdağı Association for the Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources allied with the Brotherhood of Kazdağları during the Kirazlı environmental mobilization and those who came from İstanbul to support the environmental protests that occurred in Çanakkale. They also formed a group, namely, Kazdağları İstanbul Solidarity. These people, mostly college-graduated, migrated to Çanakkale at the beginning of the 2000s and then in the 2010s to escape urban life and recognized the importance of environmental issues and mining threats immediately. They linked environmental issues with politics when environmental issues started threatening their lifestyle in their new living place. They saw the environmental movement as a politicized process and believed in the importance of establishing alliances with other environmental activists all around the country. They maintained a watch-keeping protest in Kirazlı in 2019 after the Water and Conscience Watch was ended by the municipality together with some local NGOs. This group saw the environmental movement as a way to protest present governmental policies and aimed to radicalize environmental activism by unmasking the relations between environmental issues and politics (Interviews 21, 26, and 27).

On the other hand, the people organized under the Ida Solidarity Association and allied with the municipality and other local NGOs tended

⁹ Ida Solidarity Association is an organization that was founded in 2015 to achieve environmental and social justice in Çanakkale and allied with the Çanakkale municipality and local NGOs in Çanakkale to organize the environmental movement in the city.

to exclude those who migrated to Çanakkale from Istanbul. They were unwilling to politicize environmental issues, and, instead, identified environmental problems as a problem of livelihood and a non-political issue. In other words, they emphasized that the vigil in Kirazlı village aimed to defend water resources because the Atikhisar dam met the water demand of Çanakkale. Thus, they opposed those who politicized environmental issues. Two interviewees explained that the people who came from Istanbul had identified their environmental mobilization as political, and these migrants or those who came from İstanbul to support their movement should not be allowed to participate in decision-making processes (Interviews 19 and 20). They added that although displaying political flags on Balabanlı Hill during the vigil had been banned, the people from Istanbul had unfurled political flags (Interviews 19 and 20).

Thus, one of the most important reasons why the Çanakkale community could not sustain the supra-political organization, and instead, different environmental groups had mushroomed, is the geographical character of the city. In the organization and mobilization of the Kirazlı environmental movement, a collective identity, based on the place where the protestors live and act, could not be created because of the city's geographical location, and because it functioned as a transition and migration point. The environmental mobilization continued with the support of diverse actors that joined this movement to show their opposition to the current oppressive policies of the government rather than seeing this movement as a place-based struggle. At the same time, because Kirazlı's location is far away from the city centre, this place does not significantly shape the daily lives of citizens, unlike Artvin. Lastly, the lack of a supra-political umbrella organization with democratic and participatory decision-making mechanisms adversely impacted the organizational strategy by hindering the protestors from reaching a common ground based on the defence of place in Çanakkale.

7. DISCUSSION

In this part, I compare the roles of the actors and their place in the rise of environmental movements. In this comparison, I argue that when local inhabitants organize an environmental movement as a place-based struggle to defend the place where they live and act, they are more likely to ally with each other under an umbrella environmental organization against the mining threat by ignoring differences in political views. Although I am referring to a place, I emphasize the historical and geographical attributes of cities. Because these attributes have an impact on social relations among community members, people's relations with the environment, as well as their approaches to environmentalism, I try to understand how a place is an

important factor in the organization and mobilization of the local community in an environmental movement.

Because of Artvin's unique location with enormous mountains surrounding the area, which contributes to the harshness of its geography, it is more isolated and less cosmopolitan, making it harder to access the province. Even though the Cerattepe environmental movement had become very visible all around the country and was supported by diverse actors at the national scale, the number of people who physically visited Artvin to support the environmental movement was limited. In this respect, the local inhabitants were the main actors in organizing the environmental movement. They took on this responsibility by organizing YAD and by labelling their movement as supra-political to bring the whole community together to defend the place they live, love, breathe, and enjoy. At the same time, it is a place visible from the city's downtown, whenever the inhabitants look up at the mountains surrounding the city. As one of the interviewees said, "it is a city with a face-up" (Interview 7). Also, the Artvin inhabitants go to the plateaus and the mountains surrounding Cerattepe in their leisure time. In this respect, the gold-mining activity in Cerattepe breaks the community's daily routine in addition to degrading the environment and transforming the culture embedded in the place. The culture embedded in the place enables inhabitants to create a collective identity through solidarity networks with each other (Nicholls 2009).

In contrast, Çanakkale is located on the west side of Turkey, and it is easily reachable from Istanbul. The geography of Çanakkale is also significantly different from that of Artvin. It is a city that spreads along the coastline rather than being spread throughout the mountains like Artvin. Unlike Artvin, it is hard to recognize environmental destruction from the Çanakkale city centre because Kirazlı village is not visible from downtown. On one hand, the increasing population of the city is crucial to understand the characteristics of the environmental movement in Çanakkale, because those who migrate to the city actively participate in the environmental movement and create alliances with other environmentalist groups all around the region, especially İstanbul. On the other hand, its location close to Istanbul enables many people to come to this region to support environmental mobilization against the mining corporation and ecological destruction in Çanakkale. In this respect, I contend that the geographical location of the city enables diverse actors, including city inhabitants, those who come to support the movement, and others who migrate to the city from other metropolitan cities, to take part in the environmental movement.

In the grassroots environmental activism of Artvin, local inhabitants organized themselves to defend a place that is particularly important for their daily routine in Artvin. Many of the inhabitants are members of this organization, created to defend Cerattepe against the threat of mining. Under YAD, community members take responsibility to defend the place, and their protest activities spread around the city and target corporations, the state, and ecological destruction through an understanding of “*topyeküin çevrecilik*” (Erensü 2014, 2016, 2020) by bringing together those with a leftist past, the “environmentalism of the malcontent” (Adaman *et al* 2015), with more conservative and rightist members of the community. When Cerattepe is viewed as a place that shapes daily life with its geographical features and cultural attributions, community members who have different understandings of environmentalism can come together to identify environmentalism as supra-political activity. For example, when the vigil protest was organized in the Cerattepe region, the atmosphere of solidarity created in Cerattepe was felt in the downtown of the city (Interview 16). In this respect, I argue that the Artvin community has transformed the place into a space for social movement within the environmental movement (Escobar 2008), and in this process, YAD as an organization shapes everyday relations in the city. For this transformation of the city into a social movement space, I also maintain that the supra-political character of YAD played a critical role, as it served as a strategic shift to bring the whole community together above the community members’ political and ideological differences that lead to disagreements.

Compared to the organization of the environmental movement in Artvin, in Çanakkale, the actors of the environmental movement do not share any common history that makes them familiar with the organizational strategies of the movement. In the beginning, the municipality, local NGOs, and some inhabitants tried to organize environmental mobilization to defend the water resources of Çanakkale because the proposed mining project is very close to Atikhisar dam. This group tried to organize by creating a common ground under an umbrella environmental organization such as İda Solidarity Association. Yet, they could not achieve the kind of organization realized by the Artvin community because of a lack of participatory, transparent, and democratic mechanisms. For example, the people from this organization argue that those who migrated from İstanbul to Çanakkale were not local inhabitants of the city, so it was unnecessary for them to take part in decision-making mechanisms in the Kirazlı environmental movement (Interviews 19 and 25).

In contrast to the Cerattepe environmental movement, in the Kirazlı environmental movement, city inhabitants had different motivations for

environmental mobilization and did not have a harmonious relationship with the place they defended. Therefore, they could not create a collective identity based on a place-based environmental struggle, and the place could not become a social movement space. For example, unlike the Artvin case, when police forces pressured the protesters holding the vigil in Kirazlı to stop, the people from the city centre did not come to Kirazlı to support the oppressed, and the oppressive atmosphere in the vigil area was not felt in the city centre. I maintain that when different inhabitants have different relations with the place they defend, reaching a common ground through a local umbrella organization becomes harder. Instead, the movement is maintained by different groups who do not have a common approach to environmental mobilization.

Overall, place has a significant role in the organization and mobilization of an environmental movement and the continuity of grassroots environmental activism. I argue that when the inhabitants of the city create a place-based environmental struggle, it becomes possible to continue grassroots environmental activism under an umbrella organization by reaching a common ground. In place-based environmental struggles, the inhabitants come together to defend their livelihoods, culture, and history, all of which are embedded in the place where they live, as the case of Artvin shows. In this vein, the collective under a supra-political umbrella organization is essential to defend the place and create further alliances with bureaucratic actors and different political parties at the national scale. So, I argue that a supra-political movement does not mean a non-political or apolitical movement, but rather a way to strategically bring different ideological views together around a common cause.

8. CONCLUSION

In Turkey, since the rise of the Bergama anti-mining environmental movement in the early 1990s, many ecological distribution conflicts have emerged from the unequal distribution of environmental risks and burdens against the proposed/operated extraction projects. In some ecological conflicts, environmental mobilization continued through solidarity networks at the local level and in alliance with diverse actors at the national level, whereas others failed to maintain environmental mobilization for several years. For example, in the Artvin case, local inhabitants who had different understandings of environmentalism could be organized under an umbrella association with common ground and through democratic and participatory organization practices. On the contrary, for some environmental movements, it is hard to bring together diverse actors under an umbrella organization, as in the case of Kirazlı. Thus, the rise of grassroots activism and the conditions that enable an alliance of diverse

actors deserve scholarly attention to debate the distinct features of these cases in terms of their organizational forms and mobilization capacities.

Through this research, I tried to comparatively analyse the characteristics of anti-mining environmental movements in Turkey. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to show the ways/conditions under which environmental movements maintain grassroots activism by establishing common ground among diverse actors. On the one hand, the Cerattepe environmental movement was a very particular kind of example where the whole community had been organized under an umbrella organization for over two decades. In Turkey, only a few environmental struggles could achieve such organizational success. On the other hand, the Kirazlı environmental movement is a critical case to analyse because of the city's location. Even if diverse inhabitants of the province could not reach a common ground in Çanakkale, the continuing environmental mobilization and mining opposition in Çanakkale deserve scholarly attention to analyse the evolution of environmental protests.

Besides making some contributions, this research has its shortcomings and points to different areas for further research. Initially in this research, I focused on the organization of the city inhabitants to understand the conditions for realizing successful grassroots environmental activism. Yet, my comparative study did not analyse the conditions for how an environmental movement fails or becomes latent. Because of the pandemic, I had to choose two ongoing environmental movements. If I tried to choose a case that had become latent, it would be more difficult to conduct interviews. For further studies, it is critical to compare an environmental movement that has continued for several years with the latent environmental struggles of Turkey. Additionally, although I realized the importance of gender in sustaining environmental movements and how gender inequality impacts the organization of the movement, I did not have sufficient time to pursue these issues. For further studies, the gender aspect deserves scholarly attention for both bridging the gap between gender and environmental justice studies and understanding how gender inequality impacts environmental organization and mobilization in Turkey.

Ethics Statement: I hereby confirm that this study complies with requirements of ethical approvals from the institutional ethics committee for the conduct of this research.

Data Availability statement: The data used to support this research cannot be shared openly to protect the privacy of study participants and is stated in the paper.

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