



# Is Corporate Social Responsibility Oiling the Neoliberal Carbon Economy?

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) work the Austrian energy company OMV pursued as it constructed a gas power plant on the shores of the Black Sea. I argue that neither social movement theory nor CSR theory fully explain what happened in this case. Environmental protests quickly became embedded in local politics and national identity figurations, and the CSR work by the company was transformed and domesticated by local actors. While agency and power was thus distributed, various actors also shared a common language, tapping into a globally circulating discourse that has gained traction in Turkey with the current neoliberal policies. The way CSR was played out and negotiated in this case meant that social capital and equity were construed as issues of concern, while environmental issues were downplayed. Thus, in the process, the double bind between the growth economy and ecologies of survival was effectively reproduced.

**KEYWORDS** Social movements; corporate ethics; energy; environmentalism; Turkey; Black Sea.

Turkey is currently experiencing one of the world's highest increases in the consumption of hydrocarbons for energy. This increase is taking place within a neoliberal policy that privileges the investment and involvement of transnational energy companies in the domestic Turkish economy. These companies also often bring novel management and communication strategies that foster new kinds of relationships with authorities and local communities. This study focuses on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) work the Austrian energy company OMV pursued in the region surrounding its newly constructed gas power plant on the shores of the Black Sea. I argue that neither social movement theory nor CSR theory fully explain what happened in this case as environmental protests quickly became embedded in local politics and national identity figurations, and the CSR work by the company was transformed and domesticated by local factionalism, corruption and identity politics.

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This article first reviews the anthropological literature on social movements and CSR before outlining recent developments in Turkish energy policy. This is followed by a description of how the CSR policies of the company mainly concerned public relations. I show that, to some extent, the company's CSR policies reduced the local population's opposition to the power plant; but in the next section, I argue that the major reason for the impotence of the environmental movement's opposition to the plant was the difficulty of mobilising 'above politics' in a context where there is so much sensitivity about separatism, fatherland, political and ethno-religious identities. In the last section, I describe how local actors came to domesticate the energy company's CSR policies in their effort to have the company construct a teachers' college. This article is based upon material gathered in the period 2010–2013 and includes ethnographic fieldwork and interviews in Terme and Ünye on the Turkish Black Sea coast in 2011 and 2013 (totalling eight weeks), an extensive survey of national and especially local news outlets (print as well as Internet), of social media, as well as popular books (in Turkish) on environmental movements.

### **Anthropologies of social movements and CSR**

Studies of social movements have deep roots in sociology. Since the 1960s, attention has focused on 'new social movements' (see Della Porta & Diani 1999, cited in Wastl-Walter 2001), including environmental NGOs. This approach focuses on the transformative potential of resistance and popular protest among 'marginal' groups (e.g. Escobar 1992). Thus, social movements are commonly regarded as providing potential for change, for trying out new ideas of social arrangements and are often considered defenders of place (Escobar *et al.* 2002).

In a critical review of the social movements literature, Edelman (2001) notes that many anthropologists tend to associate themselves with, and study, only one social movement, preferably one they feel sympathetic towards. This, claims Edelman, can be problematic: 'How are we to understand movements ... which we may, in fact, not like at all?' (2001: 311). The apparent congruence between social movement perspectives and the ethnographer's view can be problematic if it is not sufficiently balanced with a reflexive discussion of the justification and implications (Knudsen 2014). Edelman calls for more attention to 'the broader social field' (Edelman 2001: 311) and 'greater sensitivity to the historical and cultural processes' (2001: 309) as well as internal cleavages or differences within social movements.

While social movement theory generally stresses the creativity of activism, anthropological approaches to CSR, on the other hand, tend to emphasise the way companies' CSR policies establish a hegemonic frame for a 'universal' morality that focuses on citizen responsibility, partnership, entrepreneurship and vision. Attempting to transform the character of interaction from one of conflict to collaboration, corporations increasingly try to address local populations' and environmental activists' concerns about a project's environmental impact by including such issues into the companies' 'corporate ethics' (Rajak 2011). Other scholars have focused on the capacity of such corporate-community partnerships to provide new channels/vehicles for patronage, elite-

acting/corruption, and dependency and control (Jones 2007; Welker 2009; Rajak 2011). One major claim emerging from the ethnographies of corporate ethics is that transnational corporations (TNCs), particularly within the energy sector, increasingly bypass the state through local enclaving (Ferguson 2005) or partnership with non-state actors (Gardner 2012). CSR, as practiced by most TNCs, has also been considered neoliberal governmentality, 'a political mode of optimisation, whose flexibility allows it to be modified to suit context' ... 'generating a transfer of the operations of government to non-governmental entities' (Hilgers 2010: 359).

Although there are exceptions, the anthropological literature on CSR tends to focus on what kind of work the language and practice of CSR does for the corporations, how CSR policies help corporations smoothen relations with local communities and authorities, and how corporations' CSR work, in effect, substitute for state roles in society.

There are some distinct differences in the ways in which anthropologists have addressed social movements and CSR, respectively. With the underlying assumption being that CSR is a hegemonic discourse which, within a neoliberal context, privileges the interest of TNCs, CSR is usually approached with a critical distance. The task of anthropology is perceived to be to de-mask or deconstruct the CSR discourse, not to learn from or engage with companies' CSR policies. Nor does this perspective enable us to see how CSR may be claimed from below and even become a resource for (some) local interests and agendas. The underlying assumption concerning social movements, on the other hand, tends to be that they are harbingers of new creative visions, sites of hope and progressive development in the face of oppressive states and capitalism. The anthropologist's role is perceived to be to engage with, learn from and support this potential, as articulated explicitly by Escobar, not to explore these social movements critically (Escobar 2008; see also Knudsen 2014). Both approaches are concerned with the creation of social change, but whereas studies of CSR tend to consider agency as being 'top-down', agency is more regarded as (reactive) 'bottom-up' in studies of social movements.

One may ask whether this non-symmetrical approach to these two topics is sound or not. Politically it may seem wise, but epistemologically it may be problematic. If we put the political motive in parentheses, for the time being, may we ask other questions, learn new things? What if we take the ontologies of CSR and those developed by social movements seriously, but also explore how they work in the world, interrogate what effects the policies might have (cf. Ferguson's 2009 study of 'the uses of neoliberalism'), and investigate how they are framed by different actors and in different contexts? By accounting for a wider social field, history and identities (*pace* Edelman 2001), I am thus aiming here for a more nuanced analysis of both social movements and CSR. I will hold that agency can be more distributed than what anthropological approaches to both social movements and CSR tend to assume, and that framings of both CSR and social movement action can be multiple and contested. Both social movements and CSR can thus emerge as 'learning spaces'<sup>1</sup> from which tactics can be appropriated by different kinds of actors.

In line with this thinking I tried, in fieldwork, to relate to the full range of relevant actors. I realised that my research assistant, who first tried to explore this case, assumed

that she could ascertain the whole truth about the conflict by talking only with ‘political comrades’ on the political left. I cast a wider net and, while staying at a local guesthouse for 6 weeks all told, interacted informally with people in the flow of life, especially around the guesthouse. I also sought out and interviewed and chatted with environmentalists and local opposition (primary focus in 2011), company representatives and local authorities (primary focus in 2013), as well as locals in both Terme and Ünye who had no particular stance on the issue. Thus, I talked with and sometimes took part in the activities of fishers, journalists, local teachers and academicians, village heads, the mayor and staff at the Kozluk Municipality, plant management – in particular those responsible for CSR – and local staff of CSR-funded activities. I also visited many tea-houses where I discussed the power plant with local men.

In many cases interlocutors would take me on ‘walkabouts’ (of the Municipality, the power plant, a village). I presented myself as a social scientist doing research on the conflict concerning the power plant and the CSR policies of the corporation. My long research experience in Turkey (focusing especially on Black Sea fisheries), my mastery of Turkish as a second language, my relative seniority, as well as the fact that I could get around in a rented car gave me a certain status and access. As a foreigner I was also less exposed to being labelled as belonging to any particular identity configuration (such as ‘leftist sociologist’, a common stereotype in Turkey). While most interlocutors thus seemed to position me as a relatively neutral researcher, my interaction with a wide variety of actors may have also resulted in breadth at the sacrifice of depth. This, however, was a conscious choice made so as to understand the complexity of the dynamics involved in the contest surrounding the power plant.

## Neoliberal energy in Turkey

In government and business circles in Turkey, a sense of urgency in increasing Turkish energy production is often articulated. Three main reasons are cited: a growing population, increasing consumption per capita to support economic and welfare development, and Turkey’s high dependency on energy imports. Energy is thus considered of core importance to the Turkish developmentalist model, and economic growth and dynamism are seen as depending on continued growth in energy consumption, which is expected to double from 2010 to 2020 (Demir 2010). Thus, when the Turkish energy and electricity sector, almost totally state-owned and controlled in the 1980s, was one of the first sectors in Turkey that saw real neoliberal reform, the rationale was not public inefficiency, but ‘inability of the government to meet [the increased] demand through public investments’ (Togan & Sevaioğlu 2010: 108). In 1999, the Constitution was amended to facilitate privatisation of public assets; new laws, including the Electricity Market Law of 2001, opened up the whole energy sector for competition; state-owned energy companies involved in import, refining, distribution and production of energy were privatised; and private companies – including foreign – were invited to invest in new energy producing projects. Attracted by the fact that Turkey is considered to be one of the fastest growing energy markets in the world, the energy sector is now ‘drawing the largest amount of private domestic and foreign

investment in Turkey' (McBDC 2013: 3). The strategic importance of the sector is also manifested by the reaffirmation by the parliament in 2012 of the 1983 law that stipulates that there is no right to strike in the petrol and energy sector, underscoring how closely interwoven the 'growth economy', hydrocarbons, and political control are in contemporary Turkey (cf. Mitchell 2011).

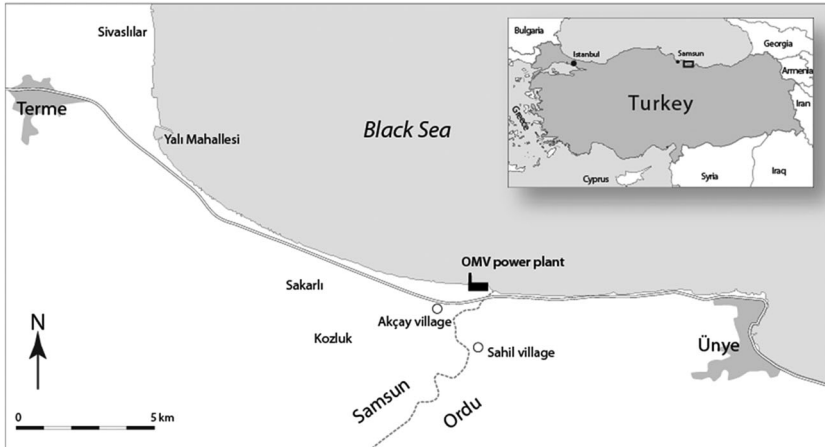
These policies have facilitated a massive increase in the construction of electricity production and in energy infrastructure since the early 2000s (Firat 2016). Overall, Turkish energy consumption is very carbon-dependent, with hydrocarbons accounting for 90% of total energy consumption (EÜAŞ 2013: 11) and more than 50% of electricity production<sup>2</sup>. Natural gas plays an increasing role as its consumption increased approximately 150% from 2002 to 2012 and constitutes 44% of (2013) electricity production. Household consumption of gas is also of increasing importance. In January 2014, 28 gas power plants were under construction, while five new gas power plants started production in 2013, one of which is the Austrian OMV plant in Terme (EÜAŞ 2013: 12–14), which provides approximately 3% of Turkish energy production. Some of these energy developments have a significant impact on environment and livelihoods and are often met with local resistance (Knudsen 2016).

In addition to the importance of energy to Turkey's continued economic growth, Turkey also holds a central geopolitical position in the energy corridor between Europe and fossil fuel-producing countries to the east. This probably impacts the way foreign energy companies consider investments in Turkey. For instance, OMV saw its investment in previously state-owned Petrol Ofisi – the largest network of petrol stations in Turkey – and in the gas power plant on the shores of the Turkish Black Sea coast in the context of its previous investments in Romania and in its (majority) share in the (now aborted) plans for a gas pipeline from Azerbaijan to Austria. At the same time, Turkey depends on gas imports from Russia via the Blue Stream gas pipeline that lands in Samsun on the Black Sea coast and which also provides the gas for OMV's new energy plant.

### **The power plant and OMV's CSR work**

In October 2009, construction started on the 890 MW power plant in the village of Akçay in the District of Terme, Province of Samsun (Figure 1). Objections to the construction of the plant revolved around three major issues: the plant being constructed on good agricultural land, air pollution and the heating of seawater. No concern was voiced over emissions of climate-affecting gases and global warming, reflecting a general lack of attention to these issues in the public debate on energy, which is over-determined by the developmentalist aim to increase energy production.

When asked about their CSR policies in 2013, one manager at the OMV power plant told me that considering that they had started late and poorly, they had been 'extremely successful'. There were significant problems related to empty promises, misinformation etc., before OMV took the company over from other owners in 2009; but with their new policies, OMV's relationship to the community had become fairly good. This statement shows how strongly CSR policies are related to public relations. Indeed, the title of the



**Figure 1.** Map of Terme – Ünye region, location of power plant.

officer at the power plant responsible for their CSR policies is ‘Administrative and Community Relations Manager’, and the officer responsible for CSR at their main office in Istanbul holds the title ‘Director of Corporate Communications and Public Relations’.

In 2010, OMV’s public relations officer in Istanbul, together with the leader of the power plant sub-company, launched a public relations effort in Samsun, telling the press that they ‘had undertaken a dense program to remove anxieties concerning the power plant’. They also stressed the importance of being ‘open and transparent’ and that CSR (*sosyal sorumluluk*) was in the front seat of the company’s policies. In practice, this public relations effort involved taking businessmen and other locals to visit a gas-fired power plant in Bursa for people to see for themselves the minimal damage the plant was inflicting on the environment. The efforts also included organising public information meetings, sponsoring a positive review in a local monthly journal<sup>3</sup> and visits to local authorities, businessmen, the university and NGOs. These efforts paid off. For instance, stories circulated about an elderly peasant being sceptical about the power plant, but changing his opinion when learning from another peasant near the power plant in Bursa that the bees – ‘the most sensitive creatures’ – were still around. An Akçay Facebook group that initially carried many sceptical comments about the power plant gradually changed character during late 2009 and early 2010 as locals gradually came around to support the construction going on right across the road from their village.

The power plant’s Administrative and Community Relations Manager started to develop a range of different CSR initiatives. OMV brought youth from Terme to participate in the OMV Rapid Wien Football Camp in Istanbul; they arranged and funded a sports summer school for children and youth in Ünye; they bought equipment for the Kozluk Municipality and arranged energy seminars in Kozluk; and financially supported a range of activities, such as: a 75,000 Euro prize for the best project in

'Energy Research' at the OMÜ university in Samsun; money for flood victims in the city of Samsun (120,000 TRY); a circumcision ceremony for 100 boys in Ünye; smaller projects in surrounding villages, and a women's weaving project in Ünye.

In an effort to decentralise the way CSR was done, OMV established the Kozluk Development Alliance (Kozluk Gelişme Birliği) through which 0.17 million Euro was distributed during the plant's construction phase. OMV accepts some initiatives by the people they have engaged to staff their two offices, but largely maintains control over the operations of the alliance. A document posted on the OMV webpages states that 'in order to integrate itself into the community and identify and meet community needs, OMV joined the "Kozluk Community Resources Partnership"'.<sup>4</sup> Through rewriting the name of the association and by claiming that it was already there, OMV made an attempt to demonstrate that they adapt to the local communities, whereas OMV was actually instrumental in creating the 'partnership'.

This text is interesting in as much as it is directed at an international readership and very explicitly conveys the globally circulating CSR language. OMV here typically employs a vocabulary that promotes certain techniques of the self (neoliberal subjectivities) (Hilgers 2010: 358): OMV '... is looking forward to being a responsible partner in local projects that promote sustainable development. This will represent a real win-win-win situation for the community, the authorities, and OMV' (see Note 4). The text abounds with formulations such as 'partnership', 'foster entrepreneurship, leadership, and vision', 'care', 'grievance system', 'transparently', 'dialogue', 'trust', 'mutual understanding', 'neighbours' and even claims that 'OMV encourages young talents to become future stars' (see Note 4).

Thus, OMV is bringing an internationally informed understanding of CSR to the Turkish scene. Already during the 1970s, scholars in Turkey who were inspired by American approaches to corporate ethics started writing about CSR, but the big corporations only started to pick up the language of CSR in the 1990s and 2000s (Yamak 2007). Ararat and Göcenoğlu (2005: 11) consider that 'excluding the philanthropic activities, the very first manifestations of CSR were observed in the business conduct of multinational/global companies in Turkey', and illustrate this with BP's CSR work related to the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline (see also Barry 2013). Öztüran (2011) has explored how companies and NGOs perceive and implement the concept of CSR (*Kurumsal Sosyal Sorumluluk*) and concludes that the companies' cooperation with and economic support for *vakıf* (foundation) NGOs has increased. Philanthropy is still the dominant form of CSR in Turkey, and, overall, 'CSR in Turkey has not moved beyond a public relations matter in Turkish companies' (Ararat & Göcenoğlu 2005: 9), which finds its expression, among other things, in the fact that in the large Turkish corporations, CSR is usually handled by their communications departments (*iletişim*) (Öztüran 2011).

OMV's approach to CSR seems to be a mix of Turkish tradition and international standards for CSR, that is, not donating to *vakıf*, but supporting education, research, sports and culture in the communities neighbouring the power plant, paying particular attention to public image. In their interaction with the community and stakeholders in Samsun and Turkey, OMV representatives explicitly refer to 'their CSR' or the Turkish



equivalent '(kurumsal) sosyal sorumluluk' policies, such as in the Turkish PowerPoint presentation shown to visitors, or in the plant management's statements to the press. CSR has become a well-known language in Turkey during the last few years, a language that local actors can relate to as well, and which signifies 'modern' ways of doing things. Thus, what the local OMV management themselves see as public relations work is often externally presented as CSR activity.

OMV's CSR policy clearly contributed to improving OMV's public image, bringing many locals over to their side. However, CSR policies here must be seen as part of a large ensemble of benefits that OMV provides to the surrounding communities: The opportunities for employment, contracts (many sub-contracts were handed to local entrepreneurs) and business opportunities in general were at least as important as CSR and public relations policies in getting local people to support the power plant construction.

An important reason the local population accepted the power plant construction was the fact that local leaders – all representing the AKP – came out early in support of the power plant. AKP – the moderate Islamist party that has been in power since 2002 – has a very strong hold over the population in the District of Terme (garnering 70% of the vote in 2011 parliamentary elections). The village headman in Akçay vocally opposed activists coming to Akçay to collect signatures on a petition against the power plant, while the mayor of Kozluk also supported the construction of the power plant. Common for these two leaders was that they saw the potential in using OMV-resources for furthering their own careers. The Akçay village head became one of the major local sub-contractors during the construction of the power plant, used the profits to invest in a petrol station/restaurant, and also became one of the main contractors when the construction of the teachers' college in Kozluk eventually started.

## Environmental protest<sup>5</sup>

Considering the scale of the construction and the massive protests that some other energy projects in this region have been met with, protests against the OMV power plant have been relatively feeble. In exploring the reasons for this, I emphasise the importance of wider social fields and identities, particularly arguing that environmentalism in Turkey can only be understood in the context of national identity- and party politics.

The literature on environmentalism in Turkey tends to stress its newness and creativity. Scholars have argued that environmentalism, often supported by transnational networks, contributes to 'maturing' Turkish society and politics, including the opening up of a richer civil society, the claiming of new civilian rights and the fostering of alternative expressions of identity. The stress on newness and creativity for environmental protests seems also to have found resonance among activists themselves. They often emphasise that environmental protests mobilise previously politically passive villages, change gender roles and establish new kinds of social relations. One of the most notable of these claims to newness is that the resistance is 'above politics' (*siyasi üstü*). In practice, 'above politics' seems to mean trying to mobilise a range of different actors and organisations in a common effort, often including political parties across the

political spectrum. ‘Above politics’ may also mean above identity divisions such as ‘left’-‘right’ or Sunni-Alevi.

However, my research assistant (Özlem Yeniay) and I have found that, in practice, mobilising ‘above politics’ can be very challenging in many places in the Turkish Black Sea region. This was also the case in two different initiatives to form ‘above politics’ environmental platforms in Terme and in Ünye to protest the construction of the OMV power plant.

In 2009, NGOs, each close to political parties or clearly positioned in the ideological landscape, came together across political divisions in Terme to form a ‘platform’ to protest the planned power plant. During a public meeting in Terme, they arranged for members of the ultra-nationalists to shout ‘Do not sell our fatherland (*Vatanımız satmayın!*)’, which is considered a strong articulation of an ultra-nationalist position in Turkey, and to which leftists react strongly. Criticism from within the ranks of both sides was directed towards those of their own who had participated with their adversaries in this joint effort. After the public meeting, the platform in Terme did not arrange any further activities and disintegrated. In addition to conflict within the platform, they also received little local support, even among local fishers who would likely be among those most affected by the power plant.

In Ünye, protests against the OMV power plant started later and were independent of the protests in Terme. The first mobilisation spanned a wider range of actors than in Terme, from ‘housewives’ to journalists, fishers to academicians, and those with political positions from the far left to far right. Together they formed the loose platform, TÜÇEP,<sup>6</sup> which, during the spring of 2011, arranged a variety of activities. The broad base of the platform also proved to be a challenge as tensions soon emerged between groups and individuals who had not worked together before, did not know each other, and held very different views as to which symbols would best represent the nation and the threats to it. Several incidents strained the collaboration – among other things, people with right-wing inclinations did not want to come to meetings arranged in the leftist teachers’ union offices, and one ultra-nationalist accused the spokesperson of TÜÇEP of being a PKK<sup>7</sup> supporter. The platform managed to file a lawsuit against the OMV power plant construction, but the lawsuit was only signed by 12 plaintiffs – far from the over 100 they, according to the lawyer representing them, had envisaged. The lawyer noted that ‘I can say that we did not manage to get people in Ünye together as much as we aimed for. I’d say we were unsuccessful’.

In May 2011, the State Council, somewhat unexpectedly, ruled in favour of the plaintiffs. When construction continued unabated as legal ambiguities made unclear whose responsibility it was to implement the ruling stopping construction, TÜÇEP mobilised in order to bring attention to the deadlock, but this time without the ultra-nationalists, fishers or academicians. Locally only a hard-core leftist group remained. This group used their leftist network beyond Ünye when mobilising for a protest in front of the OMV power plant in February, 2012. Overall, there was very little local participation in this protest.

A representative of another environmental group in Ünye accused the protesters outside the power plant in February, 2012 of being supporters of PKK, claiming that

he ‘saw the separatist organisation’s scarves’. This resulted in the leaders of the two groups falling out with each other in the local press. The criticism was, if taken literally, unfounded. The alleged yellow scarves of the separatists were actually the ‘yellow print’ (*sarı yazma*) scarves used by women in a village in Kastamonu in Northwestern Turkey and carried as a symbol by the activists from the Loç Valley. However, the incident shows that there is extreme sensitivity concerning separatism, especially in the Black Sea region.

Both in Terme and in Ünye, mobilisation against the power plant initially endeavoured to be ‘above politics’. This ideal disintegrated when confronted with local politics, the distinction between the majority Sunnis and the Alevi sect, and concerns about separatism, which are related to political and cultural processes on a larger, especially national, scale. Rather than stimulating new ways of organising, new relations, and ‘above politics’ mobilisation, protests in Ünye and Terme eventually consolidated established identities and lines of conflict, limiting their ability to effectively work against the construction of the power plant.

In Turkey, identity issues and party politics are pervasive to the point that the political stance of even environmental activists becomes a major concern. Activists are caught in a dilemma where they have to tread very carefully to avoid accusations of being separatists or betrayers of the fatherland (*vatan haini*). Environmental protest has become ‘politicised’ from many sides, not least by the government’s approach to environmental protest. This indeed happened during the Gezi Park protests in June 2013, when a small environmentalist protest against the planned felling of trees in a park adjacent to the central Taksim Square in Istanbul developed into mass mobilisations around the country of a broad coalition of all groups opposing the AKP government. The issues at stake went well beyond environmental concerns, with police violence in particular provoking mass mobilisation in most major cities. In his ‘National Will’ speech in Ankara the day before the Gezi Park was ‘emptied’ by the security forces in June 2013, Prime Minister Erdoğan characterised the occupiers of the park as an ‘organisation’ (*örgüt*),<sup>8</sup> and the protests as a ‘dirty play, a vile trap, treasonous attacks’.<sup>9</sup> Since powerful actors within and beyond the state have much influence over these identity configurations, they can to a large extent impact the frames for interpreting and assessing environmental protest. The concerns about the fatherland, about separatism and strangers, and the configuration of identities that I saw manifesting in Terme-Ünye are not just ‘traditional’ local culture there to be read and interpreted, but have been created, shaped, provoked and manipulated by outside forces, especially sections of the state (see Knudsen 2016). With the addition of (Sunni) Islam to the still prevailing Kemalist identity-territory-enemies configuration, large sections of the Turkish Black Sea population embrace, and are loyal to, the Turkish state.

With this strong configuration in place, with the government’s consistent labelling of environmentalists as betrayers of the fatherland, and with leftist groups’ effort to appropriate the social and political energies of environmental movements for their fight against the state, the AKP and capitalism, the inherent potential of creativity and newness that comes with environmental protest is largely derailed and unsuccessful, as in Terme and Ünye. Thus, the ‘pacification’ of environmental protest against the

power plant was only to some extent a result of CSR or public relation efforts by OMV, and more a result of the difficulty of mobilising 'above politics' in a context where there is so much sensitivity about separatism, fatherland and political and ethno-religious identities.

## David domesticating Goliath

Besides the environmental issues, the Kozluk mayor's effort to have OMV construct a five million Euro Teachers College has been the most contentious issue in OMV's interaction with the surrounding communities. The sequence of events that ultimately led to the construction of the school shows the extent to which OMV was forced to adapt its CSR policies to local politics. Two factors made this possible: the legal framework that gave the mayor considerable leverage in sanctioning OMV, and the mayor's as well as the local population's skilful use of and impact on public opinion through active use of local and social media.

In 2009, the area on which the plant was being constructed was transferred to the Kozluk municipality, in effect giving local authorities stronger legal rights to sanction OMV's activities. This municipality had elected a new mayor earlier that year, the energetic Şenol Kul, who had a university education and experience from business and longer stays abroad. The mayor was in favour of the construction, but also saw the potential to gain resources from OMV. In December 2009, the preparations for the construction started with ground works and the erection of administrative buildings. Şenol Kul did not wait long before he acted: In February 2010, he locked up and sealed the construction site since the company had not acquired the necessary licences. The company duly undertook the necessary paperwork within the one-month period they were given, the seal was removed and construction continued. Interestingly, a few months later, OMV provided Kozluk Municipality with a range of 'urgently needed equipment' (see Note 4). Although there exists no record of the deal, seen in light of later developments, it is likely that the mayor used the closure to force OMV to support his municipality with the equipment.

In August 2010, the mayor brought the Teachers College to the agenda for the first time. Local management of OMV had figured that providing food for the fast-breaking meals during Ramadan in communities in Kozluk and Akçay was a proper way, in accordance with local tradition, of showing their commitment to the communities. However, this backfired. Although wealthy patrons are expected to support their neighbours and employees during religious festivals, such support can also be considered as bribery, which another power plant construction in the region had earlier experienced (Telatar 2008: 31). In a rather harshly worded statement to the local press, the Kozluk mayor criticised OMV's CSR offer for support during Ramadan as being not 'social responsibility' but rather 'social irresponsibility'. He stated that as 'citizens of the Turkish Republic, a first class world nation, we are not beggars' and do not want (condescending) favours (*lütüf*). Rather, he expected greater visions from a wealthy global company and suggested that this could be realised with OMV sponsoring the construction of a Teachers College or an Energy Vocational College. From Istanbul, OMVs

Corporate Communications and Public Affairs official responded that making a school in Kozluk was 'not on our agenda'.

At the power plant's foundation-laying ceremony – delayed because of the disagreement about the school – in front of the Turkish ministers, the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the company leadership from Austria, and apparently to the surprise of local OMV officials, the mayor repeated his demand for a Teachers College. OMV finally gave in: only two days later, the company CEO in Austria gave the green light. However, the game of tug of war between the mayor and OMV was not over with this capitulation. Two months later, the mayor again addressed the press: 'The company does not act on their promise, we are waiting for their next step'. He wanted them to sign a protocol about the school. In February 2011, he again ordered that the construction site be sealed. Negotiations between the parties continued and in early April 2011, the protocol was finally signed. However, the uncertainty about the future of the power plant created by the surprising decision by the State Council in May 2011 likely made the OMV leadership wary about committing themselves to making a major investment in the community and construction of the school was again delayed.

Once more, the Kozluk mayor interfered in the work of OMV. Referring to the lack of a proper licence, he sealed off the restaurant in which the environmental impact assessment (EIA) meeting for OMV's construction of transmission lines from the power plant were to be held in August 2011. This got things moving. The Kozluk mayor went to Austria and negotiated directly with the company leadership in November 2011. Unlike most mayors of small municipalities in Turkey, Şenol Kul speaks English fluently and has extensive experience dealing with foreigners. The date for the 'laying the foundation' ceremony for the school was set to February 2012. However, on that date, construction still had not been started. The State Council decision was reconfirmed twice, in late autumn 2011 and in May 2012, and the company's appeal was finally rejected in February 2013. In late May 2013, the Ministry for Energy and Natural Resources, turning the table, ruled that due to the fact that the plant was already constructed and 'in the interest of the public good', OMV could be allocated the licence that the court had retracted. Thereafter, electricity production soon started. But OMV still did not commence construction of the school.

The mayor had also taken the initiative to set up several other projects in the small township of only 3000 inhabitants: construction of and upgrading of roads, the laying out of a new central square, an extensive irrigation project, a sports field and sports hall, and the acquisition of an impressive selection of vehicles and equipment. He was very conscious about this success, and openly boasted of this in local media. Also, when I talked to him in September 2013, he conveyed this image of success: 'Kozluk', he said, 'has acquired a very nice image'. He stressed that, contrary to public opinion, only the school was sponsored by OMV.

Despite its small size, the Kozluk municipality became renowned within the Province of Samsun, and the mayor famous beyond the province. He was selected to represent Turkish municipalities at an EU-wide meeting about local governance. Many started to speak about him as the preferred next mayor of the much larger Terme Municipality.

In September 2013, he married. People considered that ‘Erdoğan (the prime minister and leader of the AKP) wouldn’t want an unmarried man (as AKP candidate)’. At his formal wedding ceremony, the mayor of Samsun Metropolitan Municipality actually conducted the wedding process, and one local commented to me that ‘everyone among the bureaucrats are here, upper, lower and middle ranks. If he stands for election, it is certain that he will win’. The day after, headlines in the local press read: ‘The political world came together at the wedding’.

The mayor had a very conscious media strategy. When travelling around the township and villages, his assistant took photos of us in front of the important ‘projects’ while the mayor expertly arranged our standing and posture to make the best of the photo (they considered doing a news item about my visit). The mayor had engaged this assistant as a full-time media worker, producing news about Kozluk and the mayor and maintaining the Facebook pages of the municipality. Şenol Kul spoke frequently to the press about the need to ‘brand’ Kozluk and Terme, to have ‘projects’ and about the need for new and ambitious ‘visions’. To me he stressed that the development should be based on science and should strive towards city life (*şehir hayatı*). All in all, he expounded a ‘modern’ vision with little reference to Islam and more to business culture, while also relying on well-proven local strategies for political mobilisation, as seen with the strategic arrangement of the wedding. By the time he announced that he would be standing for the AKP candidacy for the Terme Municipality, the construction of the school had started and the ‘lay the foundation’ ceremony had been held. As Şenol Kul campaigned, the school was built on the land he had donated and it played a major role in the promotion of his candidacy during the campaign and his eventual successful election. However, he was not alone in making sure that OMV actually kept its word and started construction.

Since there had been no progress for a couple years on the school issue, people in Akçay and Kozluk started to discuss this on Facebook, and on 12 July 2013, formed the open Facebook group ‘OMV Kozluk we want our school’ which reached a membership of 3000. The initiative was led by a bank ‘project manager’ in Istanbul hailing from Kozluk, and many other members in the group were living outside of Terme, a few even in Europe. Some group members were clearly well aware of the character of the international context within which OMV operates, and made their views explicit through Facebook posts: ‘When multinational firms make investments in foreign countries, their first rule is to be on good terms with the local population’; ‘Companies are required to undertake CSR projects’.

This action was independent of the activities of the Kozluk mayor, and some members in the group even questioned the mayor’s silence on the school issue. Members in the group suggested a range of actions to attract attention to the issue, most importantly planning for a demonstration in front of the power plant, for which they also used Twitter.

A month after the launch of the Facebook group and only three days before the planned demonstration, OMV declared to the local press that they would start the construction of the school right after the upcoming religious festival of Eid. The Facebook

group had reached its goal and was closed down. OMV finally kept their word. In December 2013, a high profile and crowded ‘laying the foundation’ ceremony was held.

## Conclusions

Corporate ethics did not play out quite as intended by the OMV. The company could not control the CSR process, and local authorities – supported by popular mobilisation – clearly had power to claim CSR from below, shape it to their needs and adapt it into local politics and careers. The request for investment in a teachers college school came as an unwelcome wildcard to OMV and resulted in an expenditure probably far beyond what OMV had planned for and expected. Relations with the Kozluk mayor had apparently been very strained. One manager at the power plant complained that ‘we paid Kozluk Municipality 1000% more for the licence than what it is worth’, the ‘payment’ being the CSR efforts – primarily, the school. Meanwhile, CSR was less important in addressing environmental concerns. Albeit OMV’s public relations efforts did diminish concerns about its impact on local nature and human health, it was the fact that the activists could not escape the polarised identity politics in Turkey that made environmental protest difficult.

Thus, agency in this case is wielded not only by local ‘big men’, by OMV representatives and environmental activists, but also by a diffuse network of individuals within and beyond Kozluk and Akçay. The basis for each kind of agency is different: legal, capital, public opinion. For all, the public opinion is important. Posts on the ‘We want our school’ Facebook page explicitly acknowledge this. And it is important for them precisely because public relations are so important for OMV. Both the CSR discourse and social movements can have transformative power, but, in this case, these powers were only realised to a limited extent, before being transformed and transmuted by powerful local actors. The outcome of interaction between the company, local and national authorities, and local population could not be anticipated either by conventional CSR or social movements theory.

While CSR was created at the interface between company, authorities and local population, CSR language was also flexible enough to accommodate the outcome: the school – even though OMV long considered it outside of their OMV policies – was post hoc presented as the archetypical OMV CSR policy. In a press statement from OMV about the ‘lay the foundation’ ceremony for the school, the OMV Turkey CEO stated that: ‘OMV has performed many different corporate social responsibility projects especially in education and sports in Samsun so far, but the most important one of these is “Kozluk OMV Anatolian Teachers College”’.<sup>10</sup>

There are intriguing parallels between the language of OMV and the language of the mayor who led the campaign for the school. This is not because the mayor has learned from or had adapted to OMV, but because they both tap into a globally circulating discourse that also has gained traction in Turkey with the current neoliberal policies. In this language, ‘environmental concerns and climate justice are not ... categories of significance’ (Eriksen and Schober, this issue). Overall, the neoliberal policies pursued in Turkey during the last decades, especially since 2000, set the scene for the sequence of

events in this case. First, the neoliberal energy policies made it attractive for OMV to invest in the power plant. Second, the popularisation – even naturalisation – of a certain ‘neoliberal’ way of talking about societal development facilitated simultaneously both the mayor’s ‘visions’ about ‘branding’ and ‘projects’, and OMV’s language and practice of corporate ethics. Thus, neoliberalisation does not necessarily imply a minimalisation of state power, but can rather involve re-deployment of state power and development of new governance techniques.

Other ways the Turkish authorities can be seen acting in this case points to the continued power and authority of certain sectors of the state, such as in the denouncing the actions of environmentalists as separatism. Moreover, the overturning of the court decision not to grant OMV its operating licence was allegedly a result of direct negotiations between the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Austria.<sup>11</sup> We may never know for sure whether that is true or not, but it is very likely that some high-level international negotiation was instrumental in finally granting OMV its licence to operate. CSR did, in fact, oil the carbon economy, but, to a large extent, local actors impacted the amount and quality of the ‘oil’. And – beyond the purview of conventional ethnography – it may be the case that the ‘anointing’ of officials at a higher level was perhaps more critical. Nevertheless, the way CSR was played out and negotiated in this case meant that social capital and equity were construed as issues of concern, while environmental issues were downplayed. Thus, in the process, the double bind between the growth economy and ecologies of survival was effectively reproduced.

## Notes

1. I am indebted to Elisabeth Schober for this suggestion.
2. Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources web 12.12.14.
3. ‘Akçay’dan Ünye ve Terme’ye Asitli Yağmur Yağmayacak’ (Acid Rain from Akçay [the power plant] Will Not Fall in Ünye and Terme), *Canik*, Volume 1, Issue 2, April-May 2010.
4. ‘Stakeholder Involvement and Community Relations with regard to the Samsun CCPP’, OMV Group web pages, accessed 15. November 2013, [http://www.omv.com/portal/01/com/omv/OMVgroup/Sustainability/Our\\_Initiatives/Local\\_Stakeholder\\_Dialogues/Samsun\\_Power\\_Plant/!ut/p/b/1/04\\_SjzQyMDczMjQyNNOP0I\\_KSyzLTE8syczPS8wB8aPM4s0NLE2MjA2MLA1CA50NPEPdHZ3MXAOMTbwN9YNT8\\_RzoxwVAVUR6\\_8!](http://www.omv.com/portal/01/com/omv/OMVgroup/Sustainability/Our_Initiatives/Local_Stakeholder_Dialogues/Samsun_Power_Plant/!ut/p/b/1/04_SjzQyMDczMjQyNNOP0I_KSyzLTE8syczPS8wB8aPM4s0NLE2MjA2MLA1CA50NPEPdHZ3MXAOMTbwN9YNT8_RzoxwVAVUR6_8!/)
5. This section is based on a fuller discussion of the issue in Knudsen (2016), which the reader can also consult for relevant references.
6. Temiz Ünye Çevre Platformu - Clean Ünye Environment Platform.
7. Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), a military and political organisation that since 1984 has been involved in armed struggle for Kurdish rights in Turkey.
8. In Turkey *örgüt* is often used as a synonym for PKK or illegal organisations.
9. ‘Bakan’dan çevrecilere savaş’, *Milliyet Gazetesi* 3. April 2012. [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/332120/Bakan\\_dan\\_cenvrecilere\\_savas.html#](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/332120/Bakan_dan_cenvrecilere_savas.html#) (accessed 4. February 2014).
10. ‘OMV, Kozluk’ta Anadolu Öğretmen Lisesi inşa ediyor’, *Bugün Gazetesi*, 18. December 2013, accessed 16. January 2015. <http://www.bugun.com.tr/son-dakika/omv-kozlukta-anadolu-ogretmen--haberi/902514>.
11. ‘Ruhsat için Erdoğan’la görüşüldü’, *Samsun Kent Haber* 1. March 2013, accessed 27. November 2013. <http://www.samsunkenthaber.com/haber/guncel/ruhsat-icin-erdogan-la-gorusuldu/11074.html>.



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