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Seed politics in Turkey: the awakening of a landrace wheat and its prospects

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the current state of seed politics in Turkey focusing on the recent appropriation and commercialization of a wheat landrace, *Karakılçık buğdayı* (black-awn wheat) in Seferihisar, a small coastal town in the Aegean. It lays bare the long-drawn-out, often arduous but politically innovative processes that brought together various stakeholders, including the local municipality, a seed preservation centre, producer cooperatives, and urban-based alternative food networks. This paper argues that institutional mechanisms with strong grassroots support have the potential to weave together small-producer initiatives and disparate consumer interests and imbue them with the power to transform national agriculture and food politics.

KEYWORDS

Seed activism; wheat farming; alternative food networks; consumer cooperatives; Turkish agriculture; landraces

Introduction

Turkey is no exception to the growing interest for landrace wheat varieties and food products around the world. *Siyez*, *kavılca*, and *iza* are some of the popular landrace¹ wheat varieties that readily come to mind, which have found their way into the market and have become familiar to middle-class consumers in the past several years, especially in big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir.² Breads and other food products made with these types of wheat are considered to be healthier and more nutritious. In this paper, we explore the political and social context through which a long-forgotten landrace wheat variety, *Karakılçık*, rose to regional popularity in recent years. Focusing on the case of a single landrace wheat variety allows us to problematize the capacity of alternative food networks³ to produce alternative social relationalities that challenge the growing corporate power over our food chains globally.

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¹In this study, landrace refers to a traditional variety of a species of a plant adapted to the ecological and cultural environment in which it originates.

²For an illuminating account of the rising popularity of *siyez* wheat in Turkey, see Atalan-Helicke (2018).

³The term alternative food networks in this study is used as a broad term to cover networks of various actors including producers, consumers, and other stakeholders that embody alternatives to the more standardized industrial agriculture and food supply (Renting, Marsden, and Banks 2003, 394); have the potential to capture more value for food producers (Guthman 2008, 1176) and link rural spaces into agro-food sector as part of a new paradigm of rural development (Murdoch 2000, 407). The literature on alternative food networks in Turkey is still in its infancy. For a recent article

Karakılçık wheat, especially its *topan* variety, is relatively little known and its prominence is currently limited to Seferihisar, a district of Izmir, and Izmir's hinterland. *Karakılçık*, literally translated as black-awn wheat, is a sturdy wheat variety, and bread made from it is most delicious.⁴ According to many popular accounts, the story began six years ago when a Seferihisar Municipality official came upon this little-known wheat variety, bagged away in the musty cellar of an old farmer who lives in the remote mountain village of Gödençe, Seferihisar. While this is a charming story, it is our contention that neither the encounter between the municipality official and the old farmer nor the rising popularity of this local wheat variety were serendipitous events and developments.

Firstly, there were important local and regional actors involved, such as a regional seed conservation and distribution centre (*Can Yücel Tohum Merkezi*), a local municipality keen on empowering local people through its tourism and agricultural policies, and several producer cooperatives. Sustained efforts of these local actors for a more just food economy in the region and their year-long interactions with the local producers and villagers have contributed to development of conditions ripe for these types of encounters. There have to be channels for relations to emerge and, more significantly, mutual trust and companionship must exist for these relations to be productive. Secondly, the story of *Karakılçık* in Seferihisar in the 2010s cannot be understood independently of the broader history of seeds and agriculture in Turkey and its particular twists and turns in the last decades. This history has been shaped both by the deregulation and liberalization of the economy and agricultural sector, and by significant dissent in rural and urban areas against the resulting social ills and disembedding trends.⁵ Many grassroots initiatives including consumer cooperatives, community-supported agricultural groups, urban farming groups, unions and occupational organizations, often closely tied to urban food politics, played a significant role in establishing bridges between city and village communities by raising awareness about food and agriculture-related issues. Therefore, landrace seeds and their appropriation should also be situated in the changing trajectory of urban-rural relations in the contemporary period.

We will situate the local story of *Karakılçık* within the context of the national discussion of the 2006 Seed Law and its recent amendment in 2018. Hence, *Karakılçık's* narrative will enable us to explore the national politics of seed and agriculture in Turkey, novel dimensions of urban-rural entanglements, and their global implications. We aim to lay bare the often arduous and politically innovative processes that bring together various stakeholders, including the local municipality, a seed preservation centre, producer cooperatives and urban-based alternative food networks. We hope to contribute to the discussion on the role of local governments, state-society relations and bottom-up

exploring the alternative food movements in Turkey focusing on the case of a university-based consumer food cooperative, see Öz and Aksoy (2019). See also Kadirbeyoğlu and Konya (2017) for a critical survey of contemporary alternative food initiatives in Turkey.

⁴Wheat is economically, nutritionally and culturally very important in Turkey, where it is the basic staple crop. Around 25 million tons of wheat are produced on an area larger than seven million hectares in present-day Turkey. A substantial amount of wheat is used for baking bread, which is the main staple of the country. Annual wheat consumption in the form of either bread or other wheat products (such as pasta, bulgur, tarhana, keshkek, etc.) is one of the highest in the world with 20 kilograms per capita. Bread symbolizes survival and sacredness, and even small increases in bread prices may result in significant popular unrest (Özberk et al. 2016).

⁵In *The Great Transformation*, Polanyi ([1944] 1957) discusses the corrosion that the expansion of the market and its disembedding from society cause and how society protects itself against market destruction through various social defence mechanisms that develop spontaneously and which he calls 'the double movement.'

policy-making processes in the construction of food sovereignty (Schiaivoni 2017; Felicien et al. 2018). We argue that institutional mechanisms with strong grassroots support have the potential to weave together small-producer initiatives and disparate consumer interests and bestow them with power on national agriculture and food politics. As we are going to discuss in detail in the following, inspired by Pottinger's conceptualization of seed savers's practices of cultivating and exchanging in the UK, we define various types of activism shaping seeds politics since the introduction of the 2006 Seed Law as a form of 'quiet activism' that give emphasis to 'embodied, practical, tactile and creative ways of acting, resisting, reworking' to conserve heritage seeds and biodiversity and to challenge corporate control of food and seed systems (Pottinger 2017, 217).⁶

This paper draws upon multiple site visits to Seferihisar in the past five years. We have been following the story of *Karakılçık* almost from the beginning with visits to various Seferihisar villages and interviews with producers, municipality officials, academics and local residents. In addition to 12 in-depth interviews in three villages (Gödençe, Beyler and Ulaş) we have conducted 16 semi-structured interviews in Ulaş Market with rural producers who are connected with *Karakılçık* cultivation and trade. We have also carried out seven key informant interviews with professionals from local institutions (municipality, agricultural cooperatives, seed bank, universities and research institutions). We also surveyed the existing secondary literature and web material about *Karakılçık*.

In the following, we first situate *Karakılçık* in the larger historical trajectory of wheat landraces in Turkey. In the second section, we discuss the major transformations in the seed sector in the post-1980 period, which are framed by waves of deregulation and liberalization. We examine *Karakılçık* wheat in depth and analyse the major tensions and turning points in its recent history focusing on the case of Seferihisar in the third section. Finally, we turn to the current political state of affairs concerning seed production and trade in Turkey, shaped by a 2018 legislative decree that made certification compulsory for growing and even bartering local landraces.

The 1960s: 'Mexican wheat' takes over farmlands

As in most countries in the world, wheat agriculture in Turkey largely relies on the use of high-yielding hybrid varieties. This well-known and by now well-told global story goes back to the post World War II period when the capital and fossil fuel-intensive model of agriculture made its debut in Turkey. Previously uncultivated lands were brought under cultivation with the help of imported tractors. High-yielding varieties were introduced and adopted through various research programmes under the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Foundation. The National Wheat Release and Training Project established in 1967 marked the start of the Green Revolution in Turkey (Tansey 1984; FAO 2015). These programmes, which became particularly widespread for wheat as well as barley, potato, maize and sunflower, resulted in the use of more chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides in wheat farming. Consequently, agricultural productivity began to increase through mechanization, irrigation projects, chemical innovations and seed improvement.

⁶Pottinger (2017, 220) argues that 'quietness, stillness and rootedness are not merely negative oppositions of mobile, audibly and visibly demonstrative forms of protest, but count ... as active embodied stances, capable in their own right of preserving desired ways of living'.

This led to a swift commodification and commercialization in agriculture as increasing number of producers reoriented their activities away from subsistence farming towards the market. In order to be more competitive, many producers abandoned traditional landraces they and their ancestors had been cultivating for decades if not centuries, and adopted 'Mexican wheat,' as it was called back then (Karagöz 2014).

Wheat landraces endemic to Turkey have historically constituted a fertile germplasm pool for the rest of the world and the basis for advances in plant genetics. Many of the genetic traits that were used to produce disease-resistant and fertilizer-responsive hybrid varieties originated in Turkey (Kan et al. 2016; Zencirci et al. 2018).⁷ Currently, though, only a very small portion of wheat production relies on local landraces. According to some estimates, the share of landraces does not exceed 1 per cent of total wheat production in the country and the entire amount of land on which landrace varieties (for both wheat and barley) are cultivated is around 565,312 hectares (Kan et al. 2016; Karagöz 2014, 152). Recent studies on the availability, distribution and genetic content of wheat landraces in Turkey clearly demonstrate that there is a significant decline in genetic diversity (Morgounov et al. 2016, 9).

Karakılçık wheat is one of those wheat landraces that has survived in different parts of Turkey. It is generally found in Northeastern and Southeastern Anatolia as well as in Mediterranean regions. Like *Kırık* and *Topbaş*, *Karakılçık* is known for its high adaptability and excellent grain qualities. It is considered a bread wheat landrace as opposed to a durum landrace, which is mainly used for cooking different food products other than bread (Morgounov et al. 2016, 5).

A majority of the producers who still cultivate landrace wheat varieties in Turkey are subsistence producers with relatively older ages who live in remote mountain villages, usually away from markets. In their discussion on the persistence of wheat landraces in Turkey, Brush Stephen and Meng (1998, 143) suggest that one of the main factors that contributes to the continued cultivation of wheat landraces in Turkey is related with market access.⁸ The level of market integration for most of the landrace producers is very low and they have rather limited connections with grain trade. Many landrace cultivators point to the admirable adaptive capacity of landraces to cold and drought conditions and to their high grain quality for both storing and baking (Kan et al. 2016; Morgounov et al. 2016).⁹ As would be expected, their cultivated lands are small in size, much lower than regional averages. A substantial number of these producers (43 per cent for bread wheat landraces and 31 per cent for durum wheat landraces) do not exchange seeds (Morgounov et al. 2016, 9). They are in general involved in non-

⁷The Turkish case is no exception: we observe similar patterns in germplasm transfers for many food commodities mainly between core and peripheral countries. Generally speaking, core (Northern) countries are gene-poor while peripheral (Southern) countries are gene-rich. Germplasm resources of the Third World have historically been considered a free good, 'the common heritage of mankind.' Most of today's widely used and commercially successful hybrid and GMO varieties whose production and trade are largely controlled by TNCs rely heavily on the appropriation and modification of germplasm transferred from peripheral countries (Kloppenborg 1988).

⁸According to Brush and Meng's research on the cultivation of traditional varieties in Turkey in 1992, taste, bread quality, milling quality, yield, disease resistance and draught resistance are other factors that are reflected in the production and consumption of landraces (Brush and Meng 1998: 145).

⁹There are also some producers who cultivate both modern hybrid varieties and landraces. According to Aksoy's research on farmers who cultivate traditional seed varieties in Eskişehir and Balıkesir, there is not necessarily a trade off between modern cultivars and landraces. Most producers who cultivate both traditional and modern varieties view the landrace variety as some kind of 'insurance against possible losses from the modern variety'. (237)

mechanized farming practices: hand planting and the use of primitive spreaders is widespread. In other words, landrace seeds can be reproduced thanks to smallholders involved in agricultural production at the subsistence level in socially and economically marginalized places, which are still relatively unaffected by industrial development.

There is also a gendered dimension of landrace cultivation, which is worthwhile to emphasize. Indigenous knowledge about local landrace types is important not only for the conservation of landrace seed varieties but for their use in farming practices. Women, especially older women, have typically been the carriers of this knowledge from one generation to another (Çelik 2013, 64). This seems to be mainly related to the gendered division of labour in the home. As in many other places in the world,¹⁰ seed selection and preservation is a vital part of reproductive labour in rural households in which the spatial distinction between home and work is not as clearly delineated as it is in urban households.¹¹ Therefore, it is not surprising to see women caring for seeds to prevent the loss of local varieties vital for the survival (reproduction) of their families, as well as for traditional culinary cultures and flavours (Çelik 2013).

The neoliberal turn in agriculture and food production in the 1980s constitutes a significant episode in the overall history of seed varieties in Turkey. It brought about the deepening of commodification and commercialization processes in seed production and trade that further relegated local wheat varieties to the agricultural margins. Yet, it also paved the way for the formation of urban niche markets for wheat products made with local seed varieties and the integration of some small-scale producers of traditional wheat varieties to these emerging markets. In the next section, we turn our attention to the liberalization of agriculture in the 1980s and its implications for the seed sector.

The 1980s: the liberalization of agriculture and the seed sector

The erosion of government regulation and concomitant liberalization of the economy in Turkey have had important consequences in the agricultural and food sectors, especially for small producers. The main pillars of the agricultural sector, erected parallel to the political and economic priorities of a developmentalist state, were dismantled piece by piece (Keyder and Yenal 2011; Aydın 2010). This included first and foremost the gradual and selective elimination of agricultural support policies (including subsidies, cheap credits and minimum price policy) and of a protectionist trade regime. The privatization of state economic enterprises in agricultural industries and restructuring of sales cooperatives responsible for the procurement and the marketing of agricultural products in conjunction with free-market imperatives constituted other significant dimensions of this process. Even though the state did not completely withdraw from agriculture, its presence was now limited to introducing market-friendly policies and rewarding the producers who could more successfully adapt to market conditions. For example, producers and firms who could engage in certified production (such as Good Agricultural Practice) or

¹⁰Thrupp (2000) suggests that 'in many societies, rural women are particularly knowledgeable about plant and tree species and about their uses for health care, fuel and fodder, as well as food'. (268)

¹¹In his research on market provisioning and the viability of peasant agriculture in Guatemalan highlands Isakson suggests that higher female participation in subsistence farming and reproductive activities is related with limited employment opportunities for women in rural labour markets (Isakson 2009, 752). This suggestion may well apply to the Turkish case as we know that off-farm employment and extra-agricultural incomes especially for male members of rural households have been one of the defining features of rural livelihoods in the last two decades (Keyder and Yenal 2011)

produce for export markets have been the primary beneficiaries of selective and varied governmental support for agricultural producers. The corporate presence in the supply chain of most food products grew and reached unprecedented heights thanks to ongoing privatization and growing foreign investments in the agro-food sector. Big buyers such as supermarket chains, wholesalers and food corporations, all of which are fortified with strong foreign capital participation, came to dominate the agricultural scene and food production. Under these conditions, reaching consumer markets has become even more difficult for individual producers, and smaller producers are encountering serious obstacles in marketing their produce (Hatanaka and Busch 2008).

Under these conditions, the relative security and immunity that producers had experienced under the protective aegis of the state from the 1950s to the 1980s were significantly undermined. Producers with fewer economic resources and limited access to the market suffered increasing hardship and insecurity. Drastic decreases in government support for 'traditional' cash crops such as cotton and tobacco resulted in a significant decline in production, leading many producers to shift to alternative products and search for ways to complement their incomes with non-farm employment (Keyder and Yenel 2011). Drastic changes in land use patterns in the countryside and the increasing commodification of land and natural resources including water also contributed to the growing instability of rural households after the 1980s. Agricultural and communal lands such as forests and grazing lands (meadows) were opened up to tourism, mining and energy production through legislation facilitating property development in rural areas (Adaman, Arsel, and Akbulut 2018). Village commons shrank dramatically and this resulted in new social differentiation patterns in the countryside and in novel forms of exclusions for rural households with limited means.

All these changes in the agricultural sector with various implications for rural producers were brought about with the help of new legislation aimed at restructuring the agro-food sector. More than 20 different laws were passed between 1999 and 2007 that enabled further liberalization and privatization of agricultural production and trade. However, none of these laws caused such long sustained social discontent as the Seed Law (No. 5553), which came into effect in 2006 (TBMM 2006). This law, its outcomes and the responses it elicited deserve a closer look.

The 2006 Law was a crucial part of a series of legislation, rules and regulations¹² related to intellectual property rights and the seed sector which generate significant impediments for producers who conserve genetic resources by cultivating landraces (Aksoy 2010). At the time of its introduction, the new Seed Law was justified by the ninth round of EU harmonization negotiations. It was prepared with the objective of improving productivity and quality in plant production, setting regulations for seed production and trade, and restructuring the seed sector. The new law replaced the Seed Law of 1963 that had endowed the Ministry of Agriculture with the authority to control all certification and seed test measures, and to determine which crops were to be subject to compulsory registration

¹²Aksoy (2010) elegantly discusses the role of 2006 Seed Law and related legal and institutional arrangements regarding the seed sector in the neoliberal restructuring of Turkish agro-food sector after the 2000s. She suggests that while the Law on the Protection of Breeders' Rights for New Plant Varieties (Law No. 5042) of 2004 and Turkey's UPOV membership that came into effect with all these legislations 'provide a legal-institutional framework for intellectual property rights, the Seed Law (No. 5553) establishes the context for rules of the market in the seed sector with important implications for production and trade' (Aksoy 2010, 221).

(Louwaars 2002, 161; Gisselquist et al. 1997, 113–114). As clearly stated in the official justification note (TBMM 2004), the new Seed Law aimed to shift the responsibility for controlling and regulating formal seed systems from public authorities to the private sector. This seed law introduced many new standards for privatizing registrations, certifications, reproductions, sales and exports of seeds.

The 2006 Seed Law contributed to the liberalization of the seed sector in two ways. Firstly, by outlawing the commercial trade of landrace seeds, it intensified the processes of commercialization in formal seed systems. Secondly, by facilitating the establishment of an association of seed growers, Turkey Seed Growers Association-TURKTOB,¹³ and opening the way for further consolidation of corporate interests in the sector, it enhanced the tendencies for further privatization. In other words, the restructuring of the national seed sector under this new law first and foremost involved a shift of responsibility from the public to the private sector in seed production and exchange as well as in related quality control tasks. Hence, in both spirit and content, the new Seed Law shared the main characteristics of the wave of legislation that facilitated the expansion of the corporate sector in seed production and distribution in the Global South in the 2000s (Santilli 2012).

Before the 1980s, public institutions heavily dominated the seed sector (TIGEM 2017). They had implemented plant breeding and variety development programmes for many years by funding research and seed production on state farms. Thanks to a 1948 provision in law (TBMM 1948) which regulates the allocation of seeds to poor producers, the seeds produced on state farms were distributed to producers either free of charge or at heavily subsidized prices. The General Directorate of Agricultural Enterprises and General Directorate of Agricultural Research were the two main state agencies responsible for the regulation of the seed sector. An important by-product of this institutional framework was the marginalization of the informal seed systems long before the legislation introducing intellectual property rights for plant varieties. To put it differently, the state-dominated nature of the seed sector in Turkey led to the increasing use of certified seeds,¹⁴ that is, the improved versions of wild varieties promoted by public institutions, and many producers were already integrated into the state-controlled supply chain of certified seeds before the 1980s neoliberal onslaught.

In the early 1980s, liberalization policies ended the public dominance in the seed sector in a piecemeal fashion by gradually dismantling existing state support systems in agriculture and encouraging the development of private seed enterprises. These processes included the liberalization of seed prices (1983), the liberalization of seed imports (1984), the introduction of low-interest credits and subsidies for private companies (1985), and tax exemptions for imported seeds (1988) (TURKTOP 2017; TIGEM 2017). Despite all these measures that aimed to enhance corporate power in the seed sector, it was not easy to eradicate the public presence in the seed sector and only three

¹³TURKTOB is the Association of Seed Growers, a public legal institution representing the actors involved in seed production. The seed grower must be a member of the unions operating under TURKTOB: including seven unions Plant Breeders (BISAB), Sapling Manufacturers (FÜAB), Seedling Growing (FİDEBİRLİK), Ornamental Plants Producers (SÜSBİR), Seed Distributors (TODAB), Seed Industrialists and Producers (TSÜAB) and Seed Growers (TYAB). As stated in their website, the mandate of this association 'is to contribute to the restructuring of the seed sector by supporting a quality oriented, innovative, highly competitive and fair business environment, and creating effective, sustainable and advocating/lobbying capacity for private enterprises' (TURKTOB)

¹⁴In this study, 'certified seeds' is broadly used to cover the improved versions of wild varieties of wheat and improved versions of landraces.

private companies were involved in seed production throughout the 1980s with a market share of just 2 per cent. The impact of the liberal reforms in agriculture was not uniform, though. While state farms were still major seed suppliers for some crops, including wheat, barley and cotton, the private sector was increasing its share in maize, sunflower and various vegetables (TIGEM 2017).

The 2006 Seed Law has exacerbated these tendencies in the direction of further expansion of corporate power in the seed sector. In its aftermath, there was a rapid increase in the market share of private corporations, reaching 100 per cent for some crops, including corn, sunflower, and cotton. The share of the private sector in wheat seed production has increased from 3 per cent in 1995 to 20 per cent in 2006, and to 69 per cent in 2017 (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry).

During this period, the scope of international trade also expanded. The official data reveals that the value of seed imports increased from 55.3 million USD in 2002 to 185.2 million USD in 2017, and the value of exports increased from 17.3 million USD to 136.2 million USD in 2017 (TURKTOP 2017). The production of certified seed increased from 145 thousand tons in 2002 to 958 thousand tonnes in 2016, and reached more than 1 million tons in 2017 (Hürriyet 2018). No doubt all these took a heavier toll in the budgets and livelihoods of small peasantry who were already struggling to adapt to the newly emerging and often-volatile neoliberal market conditions. That is probably why the 2006 Seed Law engendered a rather strong and sustained political mobilization against increasing corporate power in agriculture.¹⁵

The 2000s: the rise of quiet activism

The 2006 Seed Law almost immediately triggered a rising tide of public discussion and dissent.¹⁶ Various networks, organizations and initiatives with diverse social backgrounds took the political centre stage, particularly criticizing and challenging the new ban on the commercial exchange of traditional varieties.¹⁷ These networks built alliances by mobilizing scientists, researchers, academicians, activists, public officers, trade unions, trade associations, environmental associations and consumer cooperatives, regardless of their previous experience with local seeds. Among the main protagonists were urban middle-class activists who were active in creating linkages between rural producers and urban consumers through small-scale food trade.

Growing attention and care to seed and agriculture-related issues by urbanites in the 2000s have a lot to do with healthy eating trends among middle classes in Turkey that became increasingly prevalent in the last several decades. A major outcome of these

¹⁵There have been, of course, other significant cases of political mobilizations in response to growing market encroachment of various kinds in rural Turkey in the neoliberal era. Hazelnut producers blocking intercity roads to protest low hazelnut prices in 2006 (Gürel, Küçük and Taş 2019), villagers struggling against gold mining operations, and their harmful environmental and health effects in Bergama in the 1990s (Özen and Özen 2018) and, more recently, local villagers protesting against the construction of small-scale hydro-electrical plants in the Eastern Black Sea Region (Özen 2014) are exemplary cases in point. However, these were comparatively short-lived and did not have as much nation-wide influence as the mobilization against the 2006 Seed Law.

¹⁶According to Aksoy (2010), market-friendly features and exclusionary nature of 'the Seed Law with respect to farmers' rights and priorities gave rise to intense debates about the likely implications for the future of farming communities and agriculture in Turkey' (221).

¹⁷The Initiative for the Confederation of Farmer Unions, the Turkish Agricultural Engineers' Board (ZMO) and several environmental NGOs were in the forefront of the growing opposition to the new Law (Aksoy 2010, 222).

trends of health-conscious food consumption has been the increasing demand for traditional grain varieties and other ‘miracle foods’ (such as quinoa, avocado, and, more recently, jackfruit) as in many other countries in the recent past (McDonnell 2015). Ancient wheat varieties such as *siyez* ‘have been promoted as tasty health food at national markets by local business associations, non-profit groups, nutritionists and gourmet food writers, and through various media, including cookbooks and television cooking shows’ (Atalan-Helicke 2018, 39). Even though the consumption of these wheat varieties and other miracle foods are largely limited to middle classes with higher economic and cultural capital due to their higher-than-average prices on the supermarket shelves, commercialization of landraces gained momentum recently thanks to the growing politicization of seeds. Newly established consumer cooperatives as well as some internet-based fairs and healthy shopping initiatives have emerged to promote the consumption of traditional grain varieties and local food items produced by small producers. In other words, intermingling of health concerns of the middle classes with ecological and social justice-oriented interests in consumption have contributed to the growing segmentation in food consumption in Turkey by giving way to the formation of another niche food market, this time one that has a political flavour. This is one of the defining characteristics of seed politics and changing urban-rural encounters in contemporary Turkey.

The newly found collaborations between local political actors and global initiatives were yet another contributing factor to the growing politicization of seeds. These collaborations were especially important in terms of raising awareness and strengthening community-building projects with respect to the crucial role of seed sovereignty in achieving food sovereignty. While in some cases these collaborations took the form of financial support, in other cases, it involved sharing experiences and knowledge, and forming political alliances. For example, some associations including *Buğday*, *Yer Gök Anadolu* and *Emanetçiler*¹⁸ conducted landrace-multiplication projects with the financial support of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).¹⁹ They also organized different kinds of activities to raise awareness on the importance of local seeds for biodiversity and environmental sustainability. These activities include arranging seed swapping events in many cities and villages, organizing workshops and publications about local seeds, and initiating fair food exchange networks between small rural producers and urban consumers.

Many political platforms such as *Karasaban* (Primitive Plough), *Yaşasın Tohumlar* (Long Live Seeds) and *Ağaçlar* (Trees) sprang up and successfully brought together the advocates of global organizations and local activists from grassroots movements in meetings and workshops. Producer unions, environmental groups, non-GMO networks, and professional chambers such as agricultural engineers that have progressive political agendas have actively supported these platforms and their activities.²⁰ We participated in some of

¹⁸The names of these associations tell their stories: *Buğday* means wheat; *Yer Gök Anadolu* means Earth and Heaven in Anatolia; *Emanetçiler* is the plural form of *Emanetçi*, which literally means the one who keeps and protects things until the actual owner arrives. Metaphorically it is also used to mean preserving natural and cultural artifacts for generations to come.

¹⁹The GEF allocates funds for projects aimed at achieving the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (signed by Turkey in 1992, and ratified in 1997). Therefore, the GEF proved to be an effective source of funding for capacity building in important seed-related projects. For instance, the GEF funded the project of in situ Conservation of Plant Genetic Diversity Project undertaken in 1993–1998 with the aim of developing in situ (on-site) conservation of wild relatives of cultivated plants and increasing Turkey’s institutional capacity in the in situ conservation of landraces (Aksoy 2004)

²⁰Some people who were in the leadership position of these new initiatives came from the ranks of pre-1980 leftist movements that were brutally crushed by the 1980 military coup.

these activities as part of our research and witnessed how scientists, researchers, and farmers' rights activists from both Turkey and abroad come together to discuss the future of food and agriculture with emphasis on family farming, indigenous knowledge and food sovereignty.²¹ In almost all of these meetings, seed issues took centre stage, sometimes leading to the establishment of social networks such as *Kibele Kooperatifi* (Kibele Cooperative), *Pembe Domates Ağı* (Pink Tomatoes Network), and *Tohum Takas Ağı* (Seed Barter Network) with an exclusive focus on seed sovereignty. The knowledge and experience-sharing with global networks, including Slow Food, Navdanya and La Via Campesina have helped the local actors in designing and implementing alternative methods and policies for the protection of traditional varieties (Navdanya 2015).

Last but not least, another contributing factor to the politicization of the seed scene in the 2000s emanated from the opposition to GMOs. *No to GMO* was one of the most important networks to mobilize broadly for the prohibition of GMOs from 2004 until 2010, when a Biosafety Law²² prohibiting the growing of GMOs in Turkey was finally issued (Yagci 2018). The coalition against GMOs brought together diverse political groups and organizations with a left-wing and post-materialist agenda and this helped to popularize seed-related issues in the general public. An emblematic event during those years was the *Büyük Anadolu Yürüyüşü* (Great March of Anatolia) launched in April 2011. Hundreds of people from different parts of Turkey walked to Ankara from their villages and cities in 40 days. Throughout this walk, biodiversity loss and environmental injustice were the major issues people rallied for. This movement no doubt contributed to the growing public awareness of the detrimental effects of the depletion of natural resources due to mining and power plants. A famous and revered novelist, Yaşar Kemal, supported this ecological movement with a manifesto entitled '*Anadolu'yu Vermeyeceğiz*' ('We won't give up Anatolia') (T24, 13 April 2011). In short, the *No to GMO* initiative and some ecological movements, whose objectives overlapped with the emerging opposition to the 2006 Seed Law, acted as an important catalyser for the politicization of seed-related issues among the general public in the 2000s.

Local seeds have gradually become a symbol of grassroots movements fighting against trade liberalization policies, the rise of the agro-industrial model, the increasing power of multinational corporations and the decline of family farming in agriculture. In other words, the 2006 Seed Law triggered the formation of a counter-hegemonic movement by establishing networks linking rural producers with urban activists in groups promoting community-supported agriculture, local seed networks/fairs and food coops advocating alternative food networks. Seed swaps have been among the main practical outcomes of the political dynamism prompted by the Seed Law.

In the seven years that followed the first local seed-sharing festival held in 2010 in *Torbali*, a district of İzmir, 40 different seed swaps were organized by local municipalities with the support of various initiatives and organizations all over Turkey. What is noteworthy about these festivals is that they are not actually a medium for individual producers

²¹Good cases in point are two international workshops on seeds, biodiversity and just food in April 21-22, 2007 and in May 27-28, 2009 in Istanbul. On both occasions, members of different peasant organizations and just food movements from various countries, including Vandana Shiva from Navdanya movement in India and Carlo Petrini from Slow Food Italy, were invited to participate in the discussions and share their experiences (Karasaban 2007; 2009).

²²The production of GMOs in Turkey is prohibited. However, the importation of food and animal feed containing GMOs is legal conditional to regulatory approval.

to exchange seeds for the purpose of farming. As Çelik (2013, 118) observes, most producers who participate in these events continue to rely on their own seeds and are not particularly willing to plant the exchanged seeds on their own farms, yet they are willing to share their seeds with others. Seed-sharing festivals are in fact active platforms where different groups and organizations, not necessarily all with rural backgrounds, get together and share their experiences and grievances with each other. Hence, they are significant tools for building alliances and connecting local initiatives to regional and national (and sometimes global) organizations and groups around seed and agricultural issues. They contribute to the growing culture of dissent as well as solidarity among rural producers. This is particularly true for women producers. Seed-sharing activities have significantly improved the self-esteem and the communication skills of women who participate in these events not only by exchanging seeds but also by preparing and selling homemade foods and handcrafts. Seed festivals and similar events enable them to become more active participants in emerging informal network relations that do not require a formal/legal membership and, hence, are not dominated by men as in the case of cooperatives (Çelik 2013, 133).

Various types of activism that shaped seeds politics since the introduction of the 2006 Seed Law, from international workshops to seed swaps, can be conceptualized as a form of 'quiet activism' that challenge and rework the dominant modes of production and consumption through small, every day, embodied actions (Pottinger 2017). Inspired by Tarrow's work (2011) on political opportunity structure, we can read these as signs of greater access for new political actors and the formation of new political spaces that bring together urban and rural interests in novel forms, eventually encouraging people to engage in contentious politics. Quiet activism entails moments of political action or 'ethico-political engagement' during which participants have the opportunity to socialize with like-minded people and share not only their seeds but also their criticisms and experiences against the corporate control of seed systems (Pottinger 2018, 218). They contribute to the formation of a discursive framing that draws together and renders legible a range of interwoven practical concerns, enthusiasms, interpersonal relationships, and careful and generous interactions (Pottinger 2018). This discursive framing has been a vital dimension of the growing public awareness about the 'commons' character of seed and food and, invoking Montenegro de Wit's (2017) conceptualization, they ensure 'commoning' as a dynamic and evolving social activity. Hence, these forms of activism resulted in a shift from hegemonic narratives of food as a private good towards an alternative narrative of food as a common good protected through collective cooperation (Vivero-Pol 2017).

We argue that the discursive framing that emphasizes the commons character of seed, as led by the rising tide of quiet activism in Turkey, was able to bring together the disparate interests of rural and urban groups. Here the driving motive was not necessarily generating material gains predicated upon the private uses of traditional seeds, but rather prompting public awareness about the social and public character of land and seeds. Drawing attention to the perils of the unabated processes of liberalization and privatization of seed and natural resources through reiterated and engaging encounters among different organizations and initiatives led to the opening of a new political space of contestation around rural issues with enduring vibrancy. This political space was particularly conducive for designing social policies to be implemented by local municipalities with the aim of enhancing rural resilience. In other words, we argue that quiet activism

contributed to the rise of rural resilience-oriented social policies which emphasize social innovation and entrepreneurship that are able to address the rising needs and expectations of not only rural producers but also urban consumers. The case of Seferihisar and *Karakılçık* wheat demonstrates that the involvement of Seferihisar Municipality was a constitutive part of bottom-up policy making and the formation of alternative food networks that matured alongside quiet activism.

The arguments of Kay et al. (2018) offer important insights to further conceptualize the curious case of *Karakılçık* in Seferihisar. They argue that cities have recently emerged as key sites for the development of innovative food policies due to the lack of action at a national level. The new urban food policies have two main tenets: (1) taking a holistic approach to the demands for sustainability, fair trade and healthy practices in food production; and (2) creating new spaces for participation in which new alliances are being built between different stakeholders. This newly emerging policy area demands a redefinition of the role of the state, new forms of municipalism and the establishment of relationships with civil society to create multiple sovereignties (Kay et al. 2018). Within this paradigm, territorial development and the territorial planning of food systems present new opportunities for convergence and solidarity among different actors. Local markets can be vital instruments in the creation of alternative food networks, territorial food systems and solidarity purchasing groups based on alliances between rural and urban social actors. These social economies offer healthy/nutritious food to consumers and fair revenue to producers. Through the marketing of local foods, one of the primary examples of which are landraces, the urban community becomes an ally of small-scale producers based on the retention of the added value within the territorial economy. Our case study reveals the importance of local policies that are developed as an outcome of continuous negotiations and contestations among the actors and the public at large, not singlehandedly devised and implemented by the local government. The Seferihisar Municipality has set out a progressive agenda, prioritizing local resources, needs and expectations, in cooperation with different stakeholders across all scales of policy making, from local to global. New deliberative spaces like food markets at the local level and the virtual *Cittaslow* network at the global level were mobilized to create new opportunities for the re-establishment of sustainable and fair local food systems.²³ Now we turn to the case of Seferihisar and *Karakılçık* wheat to see how all these interactions and entanglements between quiet activism, rural resilience and new food policies unfolded in a rural setting in Western Turkey.

The 2010s: the curious case of a landrace in Seferihisar

Seferihisar is a small town in the province of İzmir in western Turkey which is one of the oldest cities in the Mediterranean region and is the third largest city in the country. Seferihisar witnessed rapid urbanization from the 1970s onwards with the building of summerhouses and condominiums, especially in coastal areas. As is the case with many other

²³A crucial dimension of agrobiodiversity is the cultivation of landraces (Thrupp 2000: 267). Producers who continue to select and grow landraces contribute to the preservation of agrobiodiversity and make significant contributions to long-term food security (Brush and Meng 1998: 149). Hence, landrace cultivation serves to broader social interests and environmental sustainability. From this point of view, Aksoy (2005, 245) calls for the recognition of the practices of producers who cultivate traditional varieties of wheat in conserving agricultural biodiversity in Turkey. Aksoy (2005) rightfully suggests that an urgent step towards maintaining the conservation of agro-diversity will be the recognition of producers' rights in the legal-institutional arrangements in Turkey.

seaside towns in Turkey, it was becoming an overly built and overly crowded summer resort in which the tangerine and olive orchards were fast disappearing. This sleepy small summer town took a turn in the aftermath of the 2009 local elections. The then new municipality began to actively apply policies in support of the region's agricultural activities and rural tourism, while also putting it on the map as an attractive place not only for summerhouse residents but also for year-round tourism. A major push in this direction came when the Seferihisar Municipality established local food markets as a provision of *Cittaslow* in 2009.²⁴ This was important in enabling Seferihisar to compete with the nearby and already popular summer towns of Urla and Çeşme. Subsequently, its population increased from around 28,000 (2009) to 43,500 (2018) (Seferihisar n.d.).

'Discovering' Karakılıç in Gödençe village

Since 2009, the municipality, under the leadership of the progressive mayor Tunç Soyer, has launched a series of policies and projects to support producers' livelihoods. The municipality has actively encouraged local tangerine and olive-oil producers to organize cooperatives. To increase the willingness of local producers to become cooperative members and to facilitate their access to consumer markets, the town council has also been involved in product certification processes. These are confined to organic products such as olives, olive oil and tangerines, which are grown in compliance with Good Agricultural Practice standards.²⁵ The municipality has also established small-size groceries (*Seferibakkallar*) for the sale of packaged goods produced by the producer cooperatives in several places including downtown Seferihisar and nearby towns like Sığacık and Ürkmez. Most of the projects initiated by the Seferihisar Municipality seek to address the issue of access to consumer markets, a problem faced by many small rural producers all over Turkey whose market access has deteriorated with the erosion of government support.

Seferihisar Municipality's agricultural activities and initiatives contribute to rural resilience, a salient topic in recent discussions of contemporary agrarian transformations. Many scholars argue that rural resilience is a bottom-up process that is shaped mostly by regional organizations with the aim of creating alternative networks of culturally and ecologically embedded food producers and consumers in the face of the growing control of corporate farming, driven primarily by supermarket-led agri-food capital (Friedmann and McNair 2008, 410; Van Der Ploeg and Ye 2016). The public narratives of 'rural resilience' change the way we understand the potential or capacity of rural regions to adapt to changing conditions in the neoliberal world in a very dramatic way (Anthopoulou, Kaberis, and Petrou 2017). New prospects emerge for the 'rural' as a site of social innovation and opportunities for entrepreneurship. The social innovation approach is closely related to the shift in global policies for rural development, from protectionist and

²⁴*Cittaslow* (slow city) movement began in Tuscany, Italy in 1999 and envisaged the creation of a network of towns with a slow pace of life and quiet living. The towns in this network were to take a different development approach. The main goal was to extend the philosophy of Slow Food to the governance of the local environment and communities through the use of clean energy, the preservation of local taste, and the promotion of historical and cultural values and local products. The town of Seferihisar joined the *Cittaslow* organization shortly after Tunç Soyer became the mayor in 2009.

²⁵The certification standard Global Partnership for Good Agricultural Practice (GLOBALGAP) is now one of the leading certification standards in the world. There are currently more than 100 independent and certified bodies affiliated with GLOBALGAP in more than 80 countries. The GAP certification system first became known in Turkey in the 2000s, due mainly to the marketing problems encountered in European markets by Turkish exporters (Keyder and Yenal 2011).

interventionist approaches to the encouragement of 'self-help' (Herberst-Cheshire, 2000 cited in Onitsuka and Hoshino 2018, 124). The withdrawal of the State from the field, shifting the responsibility for the planning of agricultural and rural policies from the public to the private realm led to the rise of new social actors engaged in projects involving social innovation and networking, mostly between producer and non-producer groups. Many see the potential to transform the paradigm of rural development through new governance systems that are not limited by geographical or administrative borders (Onitsuka and Hoshino 2018, 124). The Seferihisar case, however, reminds us of the continuing importance of geography and regional boundaries in rural revitalization projects. In the absence of central state involvement, local governmental bodies, such as local municipalities, may gain importance in the provision of resources, and in the facilitation of collective farming projects and fair distribution. This is particularly important in late industrializing countries like Turkey where welfare regimes are characterized by the inadequacy of the formal social security system in providing social protection to the larger population (Buğra and Keyder 2006; Buğra and Adar 2008).

Savaşkan (2017, 2019) makes a distinction between early industrialized countries and late industrializing countries in terms of the changing role of the local administrations in the age of neoliberalization (i.e. post-1980). He argues that in the former, local administrations abandoned Keynesian welfare policies and adopted market-friendly policies with the aim of attracting more capital investments after the 1980s. This was not the case in the latter countries such as Turkey, Brazil, China and Korea. Here we saw local administrations becoming important actors in the social policy field. In Turkey, while the already weak national welfare institutions and systems have further crumbled in the aftermath of the 1980s, local municipalities, especially in big cities, have continued to engage in various social policies ranging from health benefits to income subsidies, food aid and free educational services. This trend gained more momentum in the past two decades under the AKP (*Justice and Development Party*) rule and was accompanied by cultural policies designed especially for women and youth that would fortify the government's conservative, religious and populist stance. However, as Savaşkan argues, this does not necessarily translate into growing decentralization and strengthening of local administrations *vis-à-vis* the central government. The central government curbed the local government's autonomous powers mainly by keeping the fiscal and political control in its hands (Savaşkan 2017). In this conjuncture, engaging in producer and consumer friendly food policies seems to be an alternative form of welfare provision in a municipality like Seferihisar, which already operates with a limited budget not only because of its size but because, as a municipality run by an opposition party, it is bereft of the rewards and financial support of the national government.

This politically vibrant environment has prepared a fertile ground for the discovery of local seeds such as *Karakılçık* and their appreciation by the people of Seferihisar. In our interview with the civil servant overseeing the provision of agricultural services in the municipality, he described the first time *Karakılçık* wheat caught his attention:

I was researching local seeds in preparation for our local seed festival in 2011. As I was chatting with an elderly villager in Gödençe Village, I learned that he had a small amount of *Karakılçık* wheat. Until then, I only knew wheat as wheat, and had no knowledge of existing varieties. This wheat was very peculiar; it did not resemble any wheat I had seen before. The tufts of the wheat were different from the fringes, and it looked primitive, with a flattened head,

etc. Altogether, he had 40–50 kilograms of it stored, most of which was covered with mould. We sorted out the seeds individually with the old man's assistance.

Gödençe, the village in which our *Karakılçık* wheat surfaced, is a mountain village of Seferihisar with a total population of 300. The village is host to a relatively old olive-oil producer cooperative, and the villagers whom we talked to seemed to be pleased with the efforts of the cooperative to improve the production and packaging facilities, although they complained about not being able to reach out to urban customers. The villagers, including the *muhtar* (village headman), spoke positively about the municipality, mentioning how useful it was that the municipality facilitates their access to organic certification, both for olive oil and grapes. When we talked to the head of the Gödençe cooperative, he told us about his long experience in the cooperative movement, going back to the 1970s. For him, the 1980 military coup violently repressed the growing cooperative movement and very few producer cooperatives survived the hostile economic and political conditions that prevailed in the country.

Here a caveat is in order. The agricultural sales cooperatives and unions, which used to be significant market actors in the formation and organization of supply chains in which small producers are dominant, were privatized in 2000, and their financial support was cut off. In the ensuing period, cooperatives in Turkey faced serious problems in gaining access to credits and inputs offered to producers, who then started to suffer even more from the cost-price squeeze (Nizam 2011, 2017). That said, more recently, the increasing number of cooperatives like the one in Gödençe (and others in Seferihisar like *Hıdırlık Tarımsal Kooperatifi* and *Doğanbey Tarımsal Kalkınma Kooperatifi*) are regarded as part of a new wave of cooperatives that are enjoying success in operating under free-market capitalism as autonomous cooperatives. Most of these cooperatives, which have been portrayed as successful showcases in the media, are in fact supported by local municipalities. As we shall discuss further below, the local municipality in Seferihisar supports agricultural production through contract farming and through the establishment of local markets bringing together producers and consumers in short supply chains under the principle of 'social municipality' (Seferihisar n.d.).

Multiplying Karakılçık seeds and the Can Yücel Seed Center

The Can Yücel Seed Center began to cultivate and multiply *Karakılçık* seeds in the fall of 2011. Thanks to the collective efforts of the Center and of the local producers who supplied it with the initial seeds, the number of producers producing *Karakılçık* wheat has increased over the past few years.

The *Can Yücel Tohum Merkezi* (Can Yücel Seed Center) was founded in 2011 by the Seferihisar Municipality. The centre proudly carries the name of Can Yücel, a late prominent Turkish poet beloved by both progressives and liberals alike, and known for his poems emphasizing social justice. The Center works with a barter system, since the current legislation prevents the sale of unregistered seed varieties on the market, and people often come bringing traditional seeds (mostly landrace varieties), and leave the Center with other seeds.

The last time we visited the Center, back in 2018, the director was sorting through a straw-like pile that we later discovered included black radish, leek and broccoli seeds. In the Center, the seeds are kept in jars away from direct sunlight. Reminiscent of a simple seed bank,²⁶ the Center at the time had more than 100 seed samples from all over Turkey, including Artvin corn, Çeşme melon and Birgi tomatoes. Immediately outside the tiny cottage in which the Center is housed is a garden in which the staff cultivates and multiplies the seeds to make them available in larger quantities.

The director told us that they are working closely with various NGOs, schools and producer organizations for the propagation and wider distribution of domestic landrace seed varieties. She explained that the cost of landrace seeds is much lower and that they are more resistant to diseases when compared to the hybrid seeds on the market. She stated that consumers are becoming more conscious, and today often ask if what is being offered are landrace varieties. She added that there are now similar seed conservation and distribution centres in İzmir, Eskişehir, Bursa, Çanakkale and Muğla with which they share their know-how about seed conservation and distribution.

Growing Karakılçık and baking bread

It was only in 2018 that *Karakılçık* seeds were cultivated for the first time in larger quantities by independent producers in Seferihisar, leading to the production of the wheat flour that would eventually be used for bread making. Needless to say, this was a major change for many producers who had long abandoned wheat landraces in favour of hybrid seeds. When we asked the villagers over 50 years old who could still remember *Karakılçık* growing in the region why they had switched to hybrid seeds in the past, they generally underlined productivity concerns as the following quote exemplifies:

It is difficult to harvest the *Karakılçık* variety due to its tendency to fold under its own weight, the plant grows taller and falls over in the field. In contrast, it is very easy to harvest Mexican wheat and it gives more, and that's why we shifted from *Karakılçık* to this hybrid seed.

The municipality succeeded in convincing local producers to grow *Karakılçık* wheat, regardless of its low productivity and the difficulties in harvesting. The interviews with municipality officials revealed that persuading producers to grow *Karakılçık* wheat was not easy. Nobody could clearly foresee the marketing potential of this 'new' wheat variety when it was baked into bread. The consultant specialized in agriculture-related projects in the municipality tells the rest of the story in the following way:

Our peasants cannot adapt to a product without seeing it, without touching it; so we, the municipality, started to work on bread. First, we brought wheat cultivation to Ulamiş – a village located on a plain. Gödence was not conducive to the expansion of wheat cultivation, being a mountain village. The wheat grown in Ulamiş was turned into flour by hand mills. Then, using sour yeast, we baked bread in traditional ovens, and the bread made with this flour was introduced to the villagers. The peasants understood from this that the wheat was reputable, and they were thus convinced to cultivate more *Karakılçık* wheat. Today, people visit the weekly producers' market in Ulamiş from various parts of İzmir just to buy that bread. I should also note that our municipality has two groceries [Seferibakkals] where people can buy this bread.

²⁶For an excellent essay on the current state of global seed banks, see Seabrook (2007).

Ulaımiş is a village where most producers are involved in petty commodity production. Over 50 percent of all *Karakılçık* wheat production takes place in Ulaımiş (270 hectares out of a total of 500 hectares in Seferihisar). There are around 25 producers cultivating *Karakılçık* in this village thanks to the municipality's 'Purchase Guaranteed *Karakılçık* Wheat Growing Project.'²⁷ The project works as follows: the municipality provides the producers with *Karakılçık* seeds and guarantees that it will buy all the produce at a price double that to be announced by the Soil Products Office (the government's main procurement office for agricultural products).

Despite the apparent similarity of this approach with contract farming, it is quite dissimilar. The project prioritizes the rights, gains and well-being of the supplier rather than those of the buyer.²⁸ The wheat producers sell their entire harvest to the *Doğınbey* Agricultural Development Cooperative, a social cooperative recently established by the municipality, which makes the necessary arrangements to grind the wheat into flour in traditional mills and sell it to villagers who are interested in baking and selling bread at a low price. According to the calculation of one bread-maker, the cost of flour per bread is around 2.5 Turkish liras while the market price of this bread is 10 Turkish liras. As was stated by municipality officials, it is clear that the *Doğınbey* cooperative runs this programme without any profit-making objective and simply acts as an intermediary between the producers and the bakers who are all villagers. Having been engaged in many agriculture-related projects over the years, the municipality knows that one of the major difficulties faced by small producers these days is to obtain decent and secure procurement deals. Confronting significant administrative and financial challenges as a municipality run by the opposition party and not being able to make direct purchases from the producers, the solution found was to set up a cooperative. In other words, the municipality plays a leadership role in the design of social entrepreneurship to support rural communities, not by drawing upon its own financial resources but by developing trust relations and collaborations among different interest groups, such as local peasant communities, consumer cooperatives and seed associations.

Selling *Karakılçık* bread

In the summer of 2018, *Karakılçık* bread was selling like hotcakes in the *Seferibakkals*. The breads arrived around 9 o'clock in the morning and had all vanished an hour later. The cashier in the *Seferibakkal* was selling two loaves of bread per person. One morning in August 2018, we saw a mother send her 10-year old daughter back to the store after

²⁷Even if the seed of this traditional variety was found in Gödence, the villages which are on the plain including Ulaımiş seem to benefit from the municipality's project. The officials explain the reason why Ulaımiş became the production and trade center of *Karakılçık* with its larger arable lands and its low visibility/popularity when compared to Gödence. The Seferihisar Municipality has conducted several projects with the motto of 'One Project for Each Village'. The municipality aimed to promote Ulaımiş with the project of 'the Purchase Guaranteed *Karakılçık* Wheat Growing'. The policy of limiting the cultivation of this landrace within the boundaries of Seferihisar has changed after Tunç Soyer became the Mayor of Izmir Metropolitan Municipality in 2019. A shift in the space of governance from a small city to metropolitan city has led to a change in the policy of regulating the practices of landrace cultivation. Its cultivation has now been expanded from the southern to the northern edges of Izmir, that is from Seferihisar to Menemen.

²⁸Contracts in Turkey, as elsewhere, generally include terms and clauses that can be considered exacting for producers. The terms that the producers must comply with are set out in contracts so as to minimize uncertainty for the purchaser. There is no such precision in the buyer's responsibilities and obligations – stipulations regarding the pricing of the output are vague and complicated, and the schedule for payment is unclear. For a detailed discussion on the expansion of contract farming and its social consequences in the Turkish countryside after the 1980s, see Islamođlu (2017).

having bought one herself. In the winter of 2018, *Karakılçık* bread was the star of the Ula miş villager's market again. On their weekend outings, Izmirians were eager to taste this delicious and hearty-looking bread alongside other homemade foods prepared by the Ula miş women. We can safely say that *Karakılçık* is no longer a forgotten landrace seed at the brink of extinction in the region but rather a rising local star.

The producers' market in Ula miş was promoted with festivals and similar public events organized by the municipality in the past two years. Especially in the summer and spring months, many Izmirians with summerhouses in Seferihisar and neighbouring towns visit and shop at the market. Most villagers we talked to noted that there has been growing demand for the market since its establishment. More than 60 women living in this village set up stalls in the market as rural entrepreneurs selling home- and hand-made products based on traditional recipes. It is fairly obvious that the most popular items in the market are bread, pastry and pasta made with *Karakılçık* flour. The bread's reputation is due to the fact that it is made with local raw materials using traditional recipes.

The women stall keepers that we interviewed were very happy about the valorization of their local crops and products. The market seems to contribute to the empowerment of rural women by increasing their household income. Their low-risk entrepreneurial qualifications include their ancestral knowledge and traditional recipes, and engaging in small-scale production using family labour. It is noteworthy that young women 20–40 years old, with no experience of bread making, learned how to cook bread from their elderly relatives. There seems to be a division of labour between the young and old women. While young women sell bread alongside innovative products made from *Karakılçık* such as tri-colored noodles, veggie pasta and sweet pastries, the elderly woman sell only bread.

Problematizing the triumphant story of *Karakılçık*

We have seen how the discovery of *Karakılçık* in Gödençe was not a serendipitous event. The village where it was found was already an exemplary village for hosting one of the rare enduring producer cooperatives in rural Turkey. The social and scientific activities facilitated by the cooperative, such as popular lectures by agronomists, festivals and local markets, contributed to the awareness of the importance of local resources and indigenous knowledge. Thanks to the producer-friendly policies of the local municipality, the villagers had already developed trust in the local government and perhaps it was partly this trust that enabled the old man to share his landrace seeds with the municipality representative.

All of these are elements of a story of triumph of a landrace seed in the face of neoliberal transformations, empowerment of the locals by a progressive municipality and the victory of activists promoting short supply chains. Yet, as we discussed above, this celebratory account does not exhaust the dynamics of the complex relationship between the micro story of *Karakılçık* and the macro politics of seed in Turkey.

This triumphant story may be complicated if we look at it through the lens of Guthman's (2008) arguments on the changing nature of agro-food politics in California in the neoliberal era. She observes how the rise of foodie-ism (that is, 'the unprecedented mass interest – some would say obsession – in rarified, specialized and/or health-oriented food preparation and eating') in the 1980s has rendered food consumption a site of

politics. Yet, she points to the serious limitations of an emerging understanding of transformative politics which consists primarily of purchasing decisions. In this kind of framework, alternative food networks and short supply chains are readily and comfortably acknowledged as alternatives to neoliberalism and resistance to capitalist globalization. This tendency is further exacerbated by contemporary food activism in California, which is largely defined by market-driven values and priorities including consumer choice, localism, entrepreneurialism, and self-improvement.²⁹ What we observe in Seferihisar is rather similar. It is the healthy eating quest of the middle classes and their search for authenticity through consumption that has ensured the success of *Karakılıçık*. The story of this landrace can also be written as a case of politics of consumption shaped by the mobilization of neoliberal subjectivities and rationalities.

The neat story of government policies to deepen liberalization of the seed market and a rather consistent and long-term national resistance developed by activist groups against the loss of biodiversity and seed sovereignty can also be problematized. While this manuscript is being written, seed politics seems to be taking a new turn in Turkey. This is due to a new decree (no. 30570) published on October 19, 2018 (TBMM 2018) implementing the Seed Law of 2006. It liberates the registration, certification, production and marketing of landraces. In the new decree, producers are not included in the list of actors who are allowed to register landraces. There are some other limitations as well. For example, traditional seeds cannot carry their local names while being registered in the national landraces list and they can be produced and cultivated only in the region where they originate.

There are two different views on the impacts of this decree on the future of local seeds. The first approach sees this decree as a step in the right direction and an achievement of the counter movements against agro-industrial seed systems. The other approach argues that this decree serves to commercialize the informal seed systems in a way that allows the multinational corporations to further enclose agricultural commons.³⁰ For example, Özkaya (2018) argues that the decree benefits transnational corporations by introducing a legal mechanism that facilitates their easy access to germplasm for further experimentation.³¹ The two points of view and political tensions that emanate from them can be conceptualized with the distinction between the ownership approach and the stewardship approach (Anderson 2006 cited in Peschard 2017). While 'the proponents of the ownership approach support the granting of breeders' rights to producers, proponents of the stewardship approach seek to exempt producers' varieties from the breeders' rights system' (Peschard 2017, 146). As Peschard (2017) explains, the stewardship approach defends the creation of a legal space outside the conventional legal

²⁹Guthman (2008) is careful, though, of not overgeneralizing her argument and provides the reader with the major contours of California's food history, particularly in terms of agrarian development, property and labour relations, and food culture. Guthman's reminder about indeterminacy of neoliberalism and the dialectical relationship between activist projects and their objects are among the major motivations that have led us to look closer at the *Karakılıçık* case in Seferihisar within the context of agro-food relations in Turkey and local dynamics of the area.

³⁰Landraces been an important source of germplasm and agricultural biodiversity provides raw materials for crop improvement programmes (Brush and Meng 1998, Aksoy 2005). The local knowledge of cultivating landraces is also as an important source for breeders and agricultural scientists, and traditional farming systems with landraces can be considered as crop evolutionary laboratories for agricultural science (Brush and Meng 1998, 149).

³¹International Winter Wheat Improvement Program (IWWIP) gives access to germplasm. IWWIP is 'a joint program between the Government of Turkey, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and International Center for Agricultural Research in The Dry Areas (ICARDA). The Programme's main objective is to develop winter/facultative wheat germplasm for the region of Central and West Asia. IWWIP also facilitates the winter wheat germplasm exchange for the global breeding community'. (IWWIP n.d.)

framework to protect producers' rights, enabling them to act as stewards of biodiversity on their own terms.

These divergences in the assessment of the new decree have eroded the consensus among seed activists who have cooperated harmoniously for the past decade. In the immediate aftermath of the decree's publication, one prominent seed activist, *Buğday Derneği*,³² issued a largely supportive and only mildly critical declaration. On the other hand, a court suit was immediately filed by a group of 23 civil society organizations, including farmers' trade unions, consumer cooperatives, environment associations and chamber of agriculture and food engineers, to halt the execution of the decree (ZMO 2018). This group opposes any kind of property rights on traditional or wild varieties, in line with the stewardship principle.

This new development needs to be evaluated within the framework of an emerging trope in governmental discourse promoting 'native and national' in a range of fields, from an emphasis and call for 'native and national technology' to 'native and national art.' This trope is rampant and mobilized in all spheres of economic, political and cultural life in the face of increasing economic difficulties and tensions and of the rise of populist authoritarianism. Seed is no exception. In the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of state-sponsored activities advocating local seeds. For instance, in 2017 and 2018, the government organized three official 'Local Seed Meetings' (*Yerel Tohum Buluşmaları*).³³ In these meetings, citizens were called on to mobilize politically to achieve the objective of 'National Agriculture Revival' which emphasizes the importance of local seeds in national food security (Yeniasır 2017; Samsun Tarım ve Orman İl Müdürlüğü 2017). In particular, the new policy aims to register and certify landrace seeds into the national official seed system (Tarimorman.gov.tr 2017). While the government's discourse is nationalist and is framed within the current authoritarian populism and its haphazard protectionism, we would like to argue that seed activism of the past decade did contribute to the popularization of seed-related issues in the public at large and played a significant role in making the government respond to this vibrancy at the grassroots level. The government's discourse may be more patrimonial and may employ a completely different language than the activists, for example by staying clear from a defence of the commons or a critique of capitalism, but in the current conjuncture they have converged in their promotion and protection of local seeds. Hence, at this moment we cannot talk about a government blindly pursuing full-scale liberalization of the seed sector and a protectionist opposition.

In short, the neat story of the triumph of *Karakılçık* in Seferihisar can be complicated on both ends: firstly, by emphasizing the dormant neoliberal motivations and analytics in local seed markets; and, secondly, by drawing attention to the changing positions of the government and the opposition concerning the current state of seed regulation in Turkey. However, we contend that neither of these complications is strong enough to obliterate the achievements of the seed politics and its quiet and enduring activism. By protecting landrace seeds against extinction, the local seed movement contributed to the commercialization of the local landraces and to the integration of marginal mountain

³²*Buğday Derneği* (Buğday Support for Ecological Life Association) has been one of the leading organizations in the agro-food politics in Turkey since 1990. It has not only engaged in various projects regarding agro-food activism but also became actively involved in many organic food markets, seed swaps, rural outreach activities in ecological farming and tourism.

³³The first national/official seed event was held in Kemalpaşa district of İzmir on March 31, 2017; the second in Samsun on May 18, 2017, and the third in Urfa on April 25, 2018.

areas into formal/informal emerging niche markets. The case of *Karakılıçık* reveals the entrepreneurial attitudes of the municipality, local producers and ecologically minded seed activists, and socially aware middle-class consumers.³⁴ All these remind us of Fonte and Cucco's (2017, 299) arguments about a new model of alternative food networks that links food production to the delivery of services to local communities, largely driven by the diffusion of entrepreneurial attitudes based on social responsibility. Likewise in Seferihisar we also witness the emergence of territorial food networks among producers, private enterprises, activists, residents and public institutions on the basis of social cooperation, community development, and community-oriented agriculture. As Fonte and Cucco (2017) argue, all these create direct links between producers and consumers leading towards nested markets protecting small family farms against the ravages of the fierce competition in global markets, by increasing their farm incomes.

Conclusion

The story of *Karakılıçık* and the politics of seed in Turkey are on-going processes that are taking new forms as we write. Both structural and conjunctural elements shape these dynamic processes.

The structural tensions emanating from the uneasy relationship between consumer driven politics and progressive agricultural politics that we outlined above complicate the contemporary success of *Karakılıçık* and render the future of this success unpredictable. We are yet to see here in Seferihisar, in Izmir, in Turkey and globally how the politics of consumption will play out in agricultural production relations and rural politics. Put differently, we are yet to see the shaping power of neoliberal middle-class consumers' whims.

Conjunctural elements also render various parts of our story ambiguous. The scene of Turkish seed politics is far too complex and dynamic to untangle and analytically categorize its various positions at this moment in time. There are the dormant neoliberal motivations in local seed markets, the changing position of the government especially with the latest seed law, and the on-going struggle of the heterogeneous opposition to adapt to these new developments.

Yet we still have a conclusive argument to offer which we believe is globally relevant. What ensured the current success of this particular landrace are the institutional frames that 'quiet activism', the local government, and alternative food networks provided. Without the local seed centre, without a producer cooperative that has endured and was further strengthened by the local government, without local peasant markets initiated and encouraged by the municipality, and without community-supported agricultural initiatives, *Karakılıçık* would have continued to mould in the old man's cellar.

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³⁴This space for the revitalization of a landrace and the local empowerment and wealth that it generates is partly promoted by neoliberal attitudes and approaches, partly driven by consumer demand and market forces, and its success is ensured by the further expansion and strengthening of market relations. Here is how Harvey formulates these tensions: 'It is here that the contradictions faced by capitalists as they search for monopoly rent assume a certain structural significance. By seeking to trade on values of authenticity, locality, history, culture, collective memories and tradition, they open up a space for political thought and action within which alternatives can be both devised and pursued. That space deserves intense exploration and cultivation ...' (Harvey 2001, 109).

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