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# Ironies of History and the Dissidence of Memory

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Located at the heart of Ankara, Turkey's national capital, Middle East Technical University (METU) is among the largest public universities in Turkey, with an international reputation in education and research excellence. Its history, however, offers a compelling story concerning the ironies of history and the urgency of dissident memory to inform contemporary social justice struggles across the globe. This dissident memory is rooted in political struggles and revolutionary dreams of a passionate generation of university students for social justice and freedom.

Founded in 1956, METU was indeed designed as an exemplary Turkish university for the education of technical personnel in accordance with the American university system and western standards. It was part of a deliberate Cold War anti-communist strategy in higher education. The historical irony, however, is that it soon became a stronghold of revolutionary activism by university students in the '60s and '70s with a passionate embrace of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-fascist sentiments. It became a stronghold of the '68 movement in the country with revolutionary student leaders involved in widespread solidarity campaigns, including land occupations by the dispossessed peasantry, factory occupations by the industrial working class, and associated strikes and demonstrations.

In 1968, a handful of revolutionary students inscribed the word Devrim (Revolution in Turkish) in giant

letters on the stands of the METU stadium. The legend is that the revolutionaries "invented" an "unremovable" paint that made the stadium's destruction the only way to get rid of the letters. The legend's relation to historical reality has already become beside the point as the Devrim Stadium has fed dissident collective memory, inspiring generations of young revolutionaries since then. For decades, it has been the place for large-scale sports events, collective forums, spring festivals, political marches, and graduation ceremonies. The joy meets activist passion here; banners calling for revolution decorate concerts and festivals. The dissident collective memory welcomes the youth, inviting them to imagine an alternative future.

It is, however, a source of fear for the forces of order. Given the country's increasingly authoritarian political climate, the university administration has been trying to "ban" spring festivals, trans parade marches, and even official graduation ceremonies at the Devrim Stadium. Together with progressive faculty and staff, the METU students have been resisting the pro-government university administration's attempt to eradicate this historical monument while reclaiming the collective memory inscribed into dissident tradition via the "unremovable" legend of D-E-V-R-I-M!

**IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE RESISTING METU  
STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF!**



*Devrim (Revolution) Stadium at METU, Ankara-Turkey*  
*Photo Credit: Georgina Cerda Salvarrey (2022)*