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SOCIAL SCIENTIST UNDER THREAT: RESISTANCE AND SELF-CENSORSHIP IN TURKISH ACADEMIA

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ABSTRACT: Attacks on academic freedom in Turkey have become increasingly systematic in recent years and thousands of academics have been dismissed. This study reflects on the effects of this worsening repression through interviews with academics in the social sciences, both those dismissed and those still active in their profession. Although the dismissed academics are socially in a very precarious position, they are continuing their scholarly activities in alternative, underground forms. This resistance stands in contrast to the accommodation and self-censorship that seem, according to the interviewees, to prevail in university departments.

Keywords: academic freedom, Turkey, self-censorship, resistance

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of democracy and the contemporary slide toward authoritarianism goes hand in hand with targeting scholars and academic institutions. In Vladimir Putin's Russia and Viktor Orban's Hungary, international universities are threatened with closure (Craciun and Mihut, 2017), but assaults on academic freedom are particularly severe and wide-ranging in Erdogan's Turkey, especially after the failed military coup of 15 July 2016.

The Scholars at Risk (SAR) network has made the most systematic attempt to collect data on various defined attacks on academic freedom, including wrongful prosecution, imprisonment, loss of position and travel restrictions in today's Turkey. According to the network's latest estimates (SAR, 2018), at least 1236 Turkish university employees and students have been physically detained since January 2016 and in total 8535 university employees (e.g. teachers, researchers and administrative staff) have been dismissed. The dismissals entail a lifetime ban on applying for any civil service position, not only in higher education. The dismissal decisions are also linked to restrictions on travel for an indefinite period of time, preventing dismissed Turkish academics from applying for positions abroad.

The aim of this study is to explore the social reality behind these figures. What is life like for dismissed academics in Turkey and how do they view their own futures

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and opportunities to continue pursuing their research? Restrictions on academic freedom, however, affect not only those who have lost their positions at universities. How repression affects those who still have academic positions is an equally important issue. Another question therefore concerns the impact on those not yet stripped of their university positions: What does it mean to live in fear of dismissal and how are relationships among scholars affected by the repressive climate?

2. ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Academic freedom has a long and multifaceted history (Collini, 2012; Hayes, 2009; Hofstadter, 1955; Williams, 2016) and there is no universally accepted definition of academic freedom (Hayes, 2009; Karran, 2009; Russell, 1993). However, by a general and conventional definition, academic freedom involves ‘the freedom of members of the academic community, individually or collectively, in the pursuit, development and transmission of knowledge, through research, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation, teaching, lecturing and writing’ (UNESCO, 1997). The conventional understanding of academic freedom is thus one of freedom from interference from the state or other external actors (e.g. Berdahl, 1990). This freedom from interference in the activities of individual scholars is predicated on institutional autonomy. The state thus has a duty not only to facilitate higher education in various ways, but also to ensure freedom of research by giving universities the right to self-government, i.e. the organizational freedom to decide on matters such as objectives, academic programs and recruitment (Altbach, 2001; Berdahl, 1990; Butler, 2017).

As clearly indicated by the conventional definition, academic freedom cannot be meaningfully understood outside the context of the larger society surrounding universities. Academic freedom depends on a plural, democratic society. Hence, universities and scholars are, as Cole (2017, p. 866) suggests, not ‘collateral casualties’ of authoritarianism. As a critical component in fostering democracy and engaged citizenry, academic freedom is often one of the first targets of authoritarian policy. The close link between authoritarian policy and threats to academic freedom is evident in the history of modern Turkey. Depending on the political state of affairs the extent of restrictions on this freedom has varied from sharply curtailed freedom during periods of military dictatorship to greater maneuvering room under more democratic conditions. Notable historical examples of threats to academia include the dismissals of 147 academics in the wake of the 1960 military coup (Demir, 2006; Gunduz, 2013; Seggie and Gökbel, 2015) and of 1402 after the military coup in 1980 (Kongar, 2017). Academics have also been jailed, as in the notorious case of İsmail Beşikçi, a sociologist who spent 17 years in prison for conducting research into the Kurdish question (Ördek, 2016). From a period of relative ‘intellectual prosperity’ at times during the 1990s (Göle, 2017, p. 878), the threat to academic freedom has become a clear and present danger in recent years. As Baser *et al.* (2017) suggested, this has involved a rapid escalation from sporadic attacks – such as restrictions on

opportunities to explore the situation of the country's Kurdish minority or to study the Armenian genocide – to systematic, large-scale attacks on academic freedom. The latter are strongly connected to two events.

On 11 January 2016, 1128 Turkish academics signed a declaration, *We will not be party to this crime* (Bu Suca Ortak Olmavacağız), often called the Peace Petition. The Petition demanded that the Turkish state abandon its violent actions against the Kurds in southeastern Turkey and that the government prepare the conditions for peace talks. The reaction from Turkish President Erdogan was brutal. The signatories were accused of using terrorist propaganda to undermine national security and Erdogan exhorted public institutions to immediately punish them (Abbas and Zalta, 2017). In response to this exhortation, the Turkish public prosecutor and the Turkish Higher Education Board (YÖK) took legal action against the signatories, with dismissals, arrests and imprisonment as a result (Özkirimli, 2017).

The failed military coup of 15 July of the same year became a catalyst for another, much broader attack on academic freedom. According to the government, the attempted coup was the work of generals who were followers of Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim cleric living in self-imposed exile in the United States. Under successively renewed state-of-emergency laws, arrests and significant purges of academics and other public employees were carried out within the state system. The dismissals were implemented without trial and those affected had no recourse to appeal. Formally, these and other repressive measures were aimed at Gulen's 'terrorist network', but in practice they affected all opposition to the ruling Justice and Development Party (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

The attacks on academic freedom in Turkey have targeted not only individual academics, but also the autonomy of universities. It is often hard for academic institutions to resist attacks on academic freedom because they depend on the state in various ways, either directly in the case of state universities or indirectly in the case of private and foundation-controlled institutions that rely on state grants and accreditations. There have been strong ties between the state and Turkish universities for a long time. According to a 2011 study by the European University Association, Turkey was ranked 28th for organizational autonomy out of a total of 29 European countries studied (see Uslu, 2017). Yükseköğretim Kurulu (YÖK), the Turkish Higher Education Board, has been a key instrument used to further strengthen state control over universities. YÖK was established after the military coup in 1980 to control and monitor universities (Baser *et al.*, 2017). One of several constraints on institutional autonomy involves the appointment of university rectors. Since the autumn of 2016, university faculty members no longer nominate candidates for these positions. The nomination process is instead controlled by YÖK, which nominates the candidates and presents them to the president for his decision (SAR, 2016). Not unexpectedly, university rectors have since played an active role in undertaking their own investigations of 'unsuitable' academics and taking disciplinary measures.

3. METHOD

Conducting a study that sheds light on the effects of the repression of Turkish scholars makes exceptional demands. Data must be collected in secret and be presented in a way that guarantees respondent anonymity. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that, to our knowledge, only one other similar study has been published thus far. Abbas and Zalta (2017) conducted a questionnaire study of members of an e-group used by many signatories of the Peace Petition. However, with a nonresponse rate of about 97%, this study could neither produce generalizable results nor allow the researchers to dig deeper into the research question. A qualitative interview study in which the interviewer can interact with the respondents is better suited for gaining access to the respondents' experiences of the process of dismissal, thoughts about relationships in academia, plans and strategies for dealing with the situation.

Unlike the study by Abbas and Zalta (2017), this study is based on exhaustive qualitative interviews with social scientists at Turkish universities. Social scientists were selected based on a clearly discernible pattern in the attacks on academics in recent years: scholars in all academic disciplines have been victims of attacks on academic freedom in Turkey, but social scientists have been particular targets (e.g. Abbot, 2017). This seems to be a general phenomenon. As Clark (1987) suggests in his study of academics in the USA, 'the sharper problems of academic freedom' (p. 138) are to be found in the social sciences because the social sciences often address issues that are ideologically and politically controversial and more open to interpretations.

A total of 28 qualitative interviews were conducted in Turkey in the summer of 2017 to analyze the experiences of Turkish academics. Thirteen of the respondents had signed the Peace Petition in 2016 and had subsequently been dismissed, while 15 of them were still working at various Turkish universities. Of those respondents who had lost their jobs, seven were men and six were women, ranging in age between 27 and 55 years. Of those who were still working, 5 were men and 10 were women, ranging in age between 28 and 64 years. The average age of male respondents was 42 years while the average age of female respondents was 41.

The respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences of events in academia since the launching of the Peace Petition and the failed coup in 2016. Most of the questions were identical for both groups, i.e. the dismissed academics and those still working at universities. The discussions came to focus, for example, on the dismissals from the universities, the respondents' relationships with other academics and plans for the future. However, the dismissed academics were also asked about their strategies for coping with their situation after having been dismissed. Those still working at universities were also asked if the purges had affected their research activities.

Both groups (i.e. the dismissed and current academics) consisted of a wide range of academics, such as full professors (6), associate professors (5), assistant

professors (4) and lecturers (13). They also came from several academic disciplines that, in Turkey, belong to the general category of social sciences: anthropology (2), political science (4), sociology (3), psychology (6), communication and journalism (4), philosophy (2), linguistics (4) and economics (3). To create regional variation among the respondents, the respondents were selected from 10 different universities in 6 Turkish cities.

The respondents were located with the help of snowball sampling, a non-probability method especially suitable for locating respondents when the characteristics to be captured by samples are rare and difficult to find. It is also a suitable sampling method when the research question is sensitive and arranging interviews requires referrals. However, oversampling a particular network of peers can lead to selection bias (Griffiths *et al.*, 1993; Kaplan *et al.*, 1987). To avoid such bias, several academics functioned as starting points for finding new respondents willing to participate in an interview. The interviews lasted on average about 1.5 h and were conducted in Turkish. They were mostly conducted in private homes and cafés, but some of the interviews took place in the respondents' offices at the universities. All respondents received information about the aims of the study, participation being voluntary, and the interviews being confidential because of the sensitive nature of the study and the risks involved for the participants.

The interview data were subjected to a thematic analysis. The authors coded the data, and after several readings and discussions a number of themes emerged. The members of the two groups were analyzed separately to identify possible differences in their experiences. During the interviews, the focus was not only on what the academics had personally experienced but also on other academics of whom they had knowledge; as such, the interviewees were both respondents and informants. The presentation of the themes will start with the academics who had been dismissed and will conclude with those still working at Turkish universities.

4. RESISTANCE AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

Shedding light on the situations of academics who have lost their positions at universities does not suffice to understand the attacks on academic freedom in Turkey of recent years. Another crucial question is how the repression is affecting conditions for those who still hold academic positions. For this reason, the presentation of interview data begins with a report on the circumstances of dismissed academics, followed by a description of the circumstances of academics still working in university departments.

Scholars Who Have Been Dismissed

Civil Death

Most interviewees (11 of 13) who had been dismissed from their universities said that their signing the Peace Petition was within the scope of freedom of speech

rather than a violation of any law. However, several of them (5 of 13) described the consequences the government's response as 'civil death', which they perceived as resulting from losing certain civil rights relating to freedom of travel, ability to find work to support oneself and social security. All reported that their passports had been cancelled and some even lamented that their families had been affected. For example, participant 14 said that 'they also confiscated the passports of my spouse and my son'. All interviewees also complained that their social rights and ability to earn a living had been taken away by the state. For example, Respondent 1 said that 'my social security is gone' and 'I cannot work anywhere else. I cannot apply for a public job'. While it was in theory possible to find a job in the private sector, the interviewees argued that this too had become difficult. Respondent 14 explained:

If I want to work in the private sector, the employer will be targeted. For example, they send an inspector, they make calls saying that 'the person you employed is... [dismissed]', or an informal letter saying, 'pay more attention to this...'

Many interviewees argued that the authorities did not always need to take such action, as potential employers were already deterred from hiring dismissed academics because of 'a mark' in their social official records indicating that they had been dismissed from a university. Respondent 1 explained that

when the employer wants to pay your Turkish government health insurance [Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu, SGK], it shows on the screen that you were dismissed because of the KHK laws [i.e. Kanun Hükmünde Kararname (Decrees on measures to be taken under the state of emergency)]. If the employer takes the risk, you can work. Most employers choose not to take the risk.

Also, starting your own business is difficult, as Respondent 2 explained:

For example, four academics who were dismissed opened a meatball shop, but as they were dismissed because of the emergency law, the municipality came to them every day and fined them. They would not let them work. They got fined five to ten thousand liras each day. In the end they had to close.

Although social contacts can be helpful in finding work in the private sector, the process is not entirely risk free for those who want to help. Respondent 5 said:

I found a job with help from a friend, but I could not apply for it. My social security records indicate that I was dismissed because of an investigation and I did not want to leave my friend in a tight spot.

The political situation also affects international organizations' willingness to employ some of the thousands of dismissed academics in Turkey. Respondent 8 argued that 'many international institutions refrain from hiring those who have been dismissed because they worry about their relationship with Turkey'.

All interviewees said that Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası (EGİTİM-SEN), the Education and Science Workers' Union, actively supported the

dismissed academics' fight for their legal, social and civil rights. They expressed thankfulness to the union lawyers as they prepared the dismissed academics' statements and did not charge for legal help. Some other lawyers and law teachers also attempted to provide legal support. Respondent 25 explained that 'the union and the voluntary lawyers have created a great network'. As a result of the union involvement, most scholars under investigation for having signed the Peace Petition gave the same written statement, arguing that there is no legal basis for such an investigation.

Despite these legal efforts to contest the investigations, the interviewees expressed disappointment with the Turkish legal system, which in the words of Respondent 2 'does not work'. This perception of illegality had led to attempts to deal with the situation in other ways. As Respondent 10 said, 'We are aware of our legal rights. What matters is that your interlocutor should be aware of them'. In addition, Respondent 25 argued: 'We are aware of our rights, but it doesn't help. Not only do we try to pursue legal action, but we also try our luck in political ways too. For example, we organize marches and sit-ins every Saturday, and stage hunger strikes'.

Street Academies

All the dismissed academics interviewed for this study described severe obstacles to continuing their scientific activities because of the investigations and subsequent dismissals. Many interviewees (7 of 13) said that they had experienced increasing difficulties in publishing books and scientific articles in Turkey. For example, Respondent 25 claimed that this was directly caused by the investigations and dismissals: 'Some publishers are hesitant to publish our books because we are connected to the KHK investigation'. Respondent 8 told about a colleague of his: 'A journal did not publish an article that he had written, even though it was already accepted [for publication]'.

Some academics (4 of 13) attributed these difficulties to increasing political pressure on the publishers. For example, Respondent 8 claimed that the 'Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey [Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu, TÜBİTAK] sent a warning to all academic journals to check whether any dismissed academics work there', and another academic, Respondent 9, further complained that 'some were eliminated from the editorial boards of refereed journals'. In addition, the difficulty of cooperating with some of the scholars who still have their jobs has made publishing difficult. Respondent 10 explained that those academics who support the government 'wouldn't invite me [to participate] if they were to write a book'. Another dismissed academic, Respondent 25, cited a practical example of the difficulties: 'A couple of authors who had written a book with a researcher who was under investigation withdrew their contributions from the book, as they did not want their names to appear on the same cover'.

To deal with the new situation, those dismissed academics who still want to continue their academic lives in Turkey without emigrating have sought alternative routes, for example, by trying to continue their academic activities anonymously. This can involve teaching outside the universities. For example, Respondent 2 said: ‘We established an academic company that doesn’t have our names anywhere. In the company, we teach statistics’. Some academics have also attempted to continue their research. Respondent 14 said: ‘I work anonymously on some research projects’. Another dismissed academic, Respondent 8, clarified that such anonymity requires cooperation with and goodwill from someone who has not been dismissed, and when participating in a research group or coauthoring a scientific article, ‘usually the name of someone else appears in the legal documentation’.

An intriguing development among the dismissed scholars is the rise of what they called ‘street academies’ or ‘solidarity academies’. As Respondent 14 said with excitement, ‘The academy is no longer limited inside the university. It is freer now. There are street academies now – academic knowledge is in the streets!’ This means in practice that dismissed academics have attempted to act collectively to establish forums for alternative academic activities. For example, Respondent 2 said: ‘We established an educational cooperative for preparing lecture materials, publishing articles and books’. Respondent 25 explained that the goal is not only to help individual scholars who have lost their jobs but also to better connect academia to the rest of society:

Our struggle is to give life to academic life outside [the universities] and to build an alternative [-]. Solidarity academies were established some time ago. It coordinates activities that endeavor to bring together academia and life outside it, for example, lectures and workshops. Since February 7, 2017, there have been 29 lectures, seminars, and workshops.

Respondent 14 cited an example of what these activities can be like, as researchers have a chance to interact with other scholars and an interested public: ‘The academics make short presentations, 20 to 30 minutes. Everyone focuses on his or her area of specialization. The presentations are then followed by a question–answer session’. The phenomenon of street academies relies not only on dismissed academics who cherish teaching and research, but also depends on help from sympathetic people. Respondent 14 explained that ‘supportive people, graduates, some departments, teachers, even people living abroad, make contributions. Some publishing houses give free books. Some non-governmental organizations create employment opportunities by asking us to give seminars and pay us [for doing so]’.

Respondent 1 summarized the development by saying that ‘there are now 13 to 14 solidarity academies. Some of the lectures are given at EGITIM-SEN [i.e. the union]. We are not academics because the state pays us. We are creating a freer academic environment’. However, despite all the support, the difficulties of continuing with academic work and the need to earn a better

living have driven many dismissed scholars to related fields. For example, Respondent 14 said: 'I do some editing, I write for newspapers – I also get some money from that'. Several interviewees, such as Respondent 8, said that they now 'work as translators, as many academics do'. Still, these odd jobs must be generally carried out without the authorities finding out and they do not generate adequate income. Almost all the interviewed dismissed academics therefore reported being dependent on external help. Most said that they received a TRY 1700 (approx. GBP 276/USD 370) monthly payment from the EGITIM-SEN solidarity fund, and some also received financial support from their former colleagues or depended on their relatives and spouses who work.

Academic Relationships

Most of the interviewed academics (11 of 13) said that they had never had close relationships with colleagues who were believed to support the government. As Respondent 20 explained, 'We only used to say hello'. Many of the contacts were professional and necessitated by sharing the same workplace. However, the polarization of Turkish academia became increasingly obvious and gained strength after the failed coup attempt and the subsequent investigation and purges at universities. For example, Respondent 24 said, 'I do not have much contact with the academics supporting the current political structure. I started to have more contact with the group affiliated with KHK. We talked more often with them. A new social circle formed'. Eventually this new social circle became stronger out of practical necessity. For example, Respondent 1 said, 'My relationship with the signatories grew stronger. We had to stick together to defend what we believe in'.

Some dismissed academics (3 of 13) also reported having contact with academics who had endeavored to remain neutral during the investigations but still showed sympathy toward their dismissed colleagues after the purges. Respondent 9 said: 'Our relationship with the nonpartisan academics grew stronger after KHK. For example, some people call me from time to time'. Respondent 3 was more specific about his experiences about who had been most supportive and stated that, 'pro-power or not, especially young academics supported us a lot'.

However, some dismissed academics (4 of 13) expressed considerable disappointment with those whom they called 'leftists'. Respondent 1 explained that fault lines started to appear as soon as the investigations were launched:

A couple of academics calling themselves leftists, who did not sign the Peace Petition, severed contact with us on purpose. For example, a colleague of mine, with whom I shared an office, started to act as if I did not exist.

Similar experiences were reported by other fired academics such as Respondent 25:

We lost contact with some of our friends who stayed at the university after KHK. We stopped talking to each other when they could have helped us but chose not to do so during the process. They didn't bother saying goodbye to us! I had worked at the same institution for 30 years . . . They chose to keep away while I was packing my things. Interestingly enough, those people claim to be liberal, social democrats, and even fanatical leftists.

Mixed Feelings and the Future

'I am glad I was dismissed, it cleared the air!' exclaimed Respondent 8. She explained her feelings by saying that 'the campus has a tense atmosphere. It was psychologically difficult to teach. It was torture to work in that environment'. Another academic, Respondent 7, said that he had tweeted 'Finally free!' after being forced to leave his job. In some cases, this sudden feeling of freedom was also expressed by comparing oneself with other scholars still working at Turkish universities. Respondent 14 claimed: 'Our friends who were not dismissed and continue to work at the university are extremely unhappy, only going to the university when they have a class. Other than that, they do not want to go there. They are unhappier than us'. While the dismissed academics all voiced frustration about their own future, they were sometimes even more pessimistic about the future of Turkey and local academic life. For example, Respondent 2 said that, after having been dismissed, his first post on social media was entitled 'Damn professorship!' This expressed a strong sense of resignation at developments in academia that partially overshadowed the sadness caused by the personal loss of career opportunities.

Other interviewed academics instead described their feelings by saying that they were 'furious'. For them, being dismissed meant becoming more active on social media and becoming more oppositional toward the government: 'We are a bit furious. We oppose with ease', Respondent 14 explained. However, not all academics felt the same freedom, but rather restrained themselves. Respondent 8 lamented that 'people were taken into custody because of their social media posts', which had made him 'write with more self-restraint'. Sometimes family responsibilities increased this tendency. Another academic, Respondent 10, explained: 'I started to manage my social media accounts with more care to protect my spouse'.

Despite the difficulties that they had experienced, some of the interviewees (5 of 13) expressed hope that they would one day be employed again by a university in Turkey. For example, Respondent 1 exclaimed with optimism: 'I have hope in Turkey . . . we should be back with compensation!' However, most believed that the change would not occur that rapidly. Some set their hopes on reforming the legal system. Respondent 14 believed that 'it will take eight to nine years. I think they [i.e. the universities] will make it right as soon as the legal system is established'. Respondent 24 hoped that a solution to the Kurdish-Turkish conflict would set the stage for a possible restoration of academic positions: 'It might take up to ten years for us to return. The

progress will be closely connected with the steps taken in regarding the Kurdish question. After the state of emergency is over, we might be back in one or two years’.

Despite these hopes, there was general pessimism about the future among many interviewees who had lost their jobs. Respondent 8 claimed that ‘everyone is now more pessimistic . . . people are starting to stage hunger strikes to return to their jobs’. However, not everyone was keen on returning to the universities, as the conflict has increased polarization in academia. Respondent 8 explained:

I don’t think it will happen in the near future in Turkey. Universities suffered great damage. I don’t think people will be back unless the political environment changes. We always talk about this. Would we return tomorrow? I don’t want to work at a university if conditions do not improve. Many of our friends who continue to work kept silent. They avoid us like the plague. I don’t want to return to this environment.

The polarization of Turkish academia had also been strengthened, as dismissed academics were in some cases physically banned from the university campuses. Respondent 8 continued:

We are not admitted at the doors to the campus. The dean needs to be called, he needs to give the order. That’s the only way you are allowed inside. Most academics who still have their jobs left are ok with the idea of not letting us inside. This says a lot about the future of the academy [in Turkey]. I don’t want to be in that environment again.

These misgivings are often reflected in the discussions that the fired academics have with each other. Respondent 20 explained: ‘After I was dismissed, we started to talk about issues such as what is happening in this country, when will this country become better, and is it good to be in academia?’ The process of investigation and dismissal gave rise not only to the increasing polarization of academia and to a sense of resignation, but also to a need for many academics to share their experience with others. As Respondent 10 said, ‘I need to share my experience because other academics who didn’t go through the same process have trouble understanding what it is like’. Respondent 24 explained that in practice many conversations with other dismissed academics concern managing ‘the effects of what happens in our daily lives’. Others seek solutions to the problems they have identified: ‘If this is the solution, what contributions can we make, what can we do?’ Respondent 25 asked. While the situation in Turkey had often previously been discussed without reference to personal experience, as Respondent 10 said, ‘after the 15th of July, 2016, and KHK, theoretical talk was replaced with more practical issues’.

*Scholars Who Still Work at Universities**Self-censorship and Loss of Motivation*

All but one of the interviewees who still work at universities (14 of 15) reported that self-censorship because of the political situation and the related investigations and dismissals had affected academics' scientific production. For example, Respondent 23 claimed that 'It is harder to study the Kurdish question and the domestic migration it causes ... issues that are a source of individual trauma'. Another academic, Respondent 28, also said that 'it has become problematic to do research on values and political ideology' because of the existing political polarization in the country. Therefore, when planning their research, many academics feel forced to reformulate their research questions. Respondent 16 explained that 'many people started to change the titles that they had chosen and the descriptions of what they really meant in the text, censoring themselves. This especially started after the new law enacted after the Peace Petition'. Older scholars sometimes tried to help younger ones to navigate the new academic environment. For example, Respondent 16 added that 'the supervisors changed the title of my thesis because of the current political situation in the country. They did this because they care about me'.

Several interviewees (4 of 15) also reported that self-censorship has negatively affected academic freedom in classrooms. Respondent 13 lamented that 'students can make voice recordings without asking us. I am worried that I would be targeted during a lecture'. Respondent 11 cited an example of the kind of consequences this can have for both the teacher and the academic department:

In a class that one of our colleagues was teaching there was a week dedicated to the topic of discrimination. We cancelled that week and the activities related to it because some students and teachers had developed an informant system. If a teacher says 'Kurdish question' during a lecture, and a student reports him, saying that the teacher is a separatist, the teacher will be subject to an investigation.

A dismissed academic, Respondent 25, explained that the informant system works with the help of students who actively monitor the teachers: 'For example, a student asks a question during a lecture. You answer it, but the question turns into a trap for the teacher ... As a result, teachers have started being more careful about what they say'. Respondent 27 said that self-censorship sometimes leads to a loss of motivation for those scholars who still work at universities: 'I censor myself, so I have lost the desire to work'.

One of the most tangible consequences of the failed coup attempt for the interviewed academics was restrictions on travel, which have negatively affected their scientific activities. A middle-aged academic, Respondent 18, reported that

The frequency with which I take part in scientific activities changed after July 15. Since July 15, academics have had to deal with some problems. For example, I couldn't attend scientific conferences in Germany and England because we were not allowed to go abroad. The ban was later removed, but I had already cancelled

my ticket. We were required to be at our workplaces after July 15. For one to two months, we had to wait in our offices. Now the approval and signature of the university president are required for travel abroad.

While some dismissed academics (5 of 13) used the concept ‘civil death’ to describe their situation after the purges, many of those interviewees who were still employed by universities also described their life in academia in very negative terms. As Respondent 13 put it,

This is how KHK affected us: It was like death to us. We literally mourned. I lost motivation. Things that I had done for a while started to make no sense. I started to doubt my reasons for staying in academia. I still take part in scientific activities, but I have lost motivation . . . That it has no purpose any more caused ‘rage’ in me.

Some of the interviewees expressed shame in addition to loss of motivation. An older academic, Respondent 22, lamented: ‘I lost motivation during this process. I considered retirement. I was ashamed of not getting dismissed and still being in the academic life’. The motivational problems and shame of still being in academia were partly caused by the inability to express oneself freely in scientific contexts. As Respondent 4 explained, ‘We started to attend fewer scientific activities after July 15 because we worried that we would not be able to say what we wanted’.

Another academic, Respondent 22, complained: ‘I am a researcher who usually has several research projects, but nowadays I only wait. I do nothing’. Often, this loss of motivation is caused by the expectation of not receiving funding to undertake the desired research. As Respondent 27 put it, ‘When I realized that I was censoring myself when preparing an application to TUBITAK, as my project would not [otherwise] get accepted and receive support, I decided to do nothing’. Others complained that the administrative process of getting research funding has become more difficult. Respondent 17 explained that, ‘To get support, we can apply to TUBITAK or to the Scientific Research Projects [BAB] of the university. After the things that happened last year, we faced restrictions. That is, TUBITAK started to reject projects or make the procedures too long’. Another academic, Respondent 19, who worked for the BAB commission of a university, reported that ‘there was a considerable decrease in the number of project applications submitted to BAB. There might be a variety of reasons for this. For example, a big group of people got dismissed after the KHK decree’. He also suspected that projects often ‘require group work and that losing a colleague may decrease the enthusiasm to pursue projects to a conclusion’.

Another academic, Respondent 26, said that ‘projects are evaluated with new criteria now. The first question is to see whether the person preparing the project is a [political] threat or not . . . The second question is not related to the scientific but the political quality of the subject . . . Almost anything is delicate today’. These political tensions caused many fears among the interviewed academics.

Fears and Misgivings

The political tensions and the investigations have impacted the atmosphere at universities. Some interviewed academics now only go to campus when they have classes to teach and avoid spending time in their offices. Respondent 22 exclaimed: 'After July 15, every time I get home I say thank God I'm home!' The situation has also negatively affected many academics' work, including research, conference attendance, and publishing. Another academic, Respondent 11, said: 'I have not applied to attend any scientific conferences for the past one and a half years, neither national nor international. This is of course based on worry – I worry that if I talk about the things I could talk about before, I will put myself in danger'. These fears can be about the risk of being excluded from academia. Respondent 26 explained that some academics had been excluded from a conference after the organizers

realized that you are an 'academic for peace.' Warning messages were sent to the editors of journals after examinations by Turkish Academic Network and Information Center [Ulusal Akademik Ağ ve Bilgi Merkezi, ULAKBIM]. So, exclusion from the academic community, restrictions individuals impose on themselves, and self-censorship are present.

The fears have also affected the academics' freedom of expression on social media. Almost all the interviewees said that they suspected that not only were their online activities monitored but also that their phones were wiretapped. Respondent 27 said: 'I used to be more comfortable about this, but after July 15 I can't talk about my political opinions'. Another academic, Respondent 19, lamented: 'It is no joke losing your personal rights. I am being more careful not to face the same thing. I became more careful after July 15'. Some even feared that they might face imprisonment if they were to express their opinions. Respondent 21 said that 'a sentence you utter on social media can put you in jail'. Respondent 23 further explained:

At any moment you can be accused of being affiliated with the [Gulen] community or something else and might be dismissed. You might be dismissed based on the state of emergency decree and can't claim to have any rights. That is why we keep silent and refrain from expressing our opinions.

Most interviewed academics (13 of 15) said that they were careful not to share their opinions with people they did not trust. For example, Respondent 26 explained: 'Whether or not we talk about our political opinions depends on where we are and who we are talking to'. Respondent 11 said that they did this 'because of informants ... I am scared. I am scared of serving time in prison because of some comment I could make. I know some teachers and colleagues who were taken into custody or who were under investigation because of their posts on social media'.

The political tensions and polarization in society had also created misgivings among all interviewees about the reliability of the mainstream media, increasing their reliance on social media. As Respondent 23 said, 'I don't trust the mainstream media. I instead follow Twitter'. Similarly, Respondent 27 said, 'I only use Facebook to keep myself updated – I don't find the mainstream media trustworthy'. While most

academics said that they mostly use Facebook and Twitter, not all actively share anything, as there is a risk of being targeted by the authorities. Rather, as Respondent 28 explained, many simply use social media as their main source of information and news: ‘The most important sources of news are some independent sites on Twitter and some journalists I trust. Also, I follow some journalists on Twitter’.

The Future

When asked about their future, the interviewees fell into two groups. One group, mostly younger academics (6 of 15), said that they would prefer to emigrate and work at foreign universities. Some said that their desire to leave Turkey was based on fear for personal safety and misgivings about future developments. For example, Respondent 23 argued that ‘this country is not a secure place to live, neither for me nor for my children. Everything will get worse’. Others felt that they could not function as good academics because of self-censorship and external restrictions on them. For example, Respondent 21 said that he would prefer to emigrate:

Because we can’t work here as academics. After the actions that they took, I have come to the realization that we were actually fired. We are constantly thinking about what the future holds for us. I can’t concentrate on academic activities.

The other group (3 of 15), mostly senior academics, some of whom had already worked abroad, were either uncertain about what to do or felt that they should stay in Turkey to work for a better future. Respondent 13 expressed uncertainty about whether he wanted to stay: ‘I find it a puzzling subject – I want it and I don’t want it’. Respondent 4 explained such mixed feelings by saying that ‘Working abroad would of course make life easier for me, but I would not be spiritually comfortable because of the debris I would have to leave behind’. Respondent 18 also expressed a mixture of resignation and a will to act: ‘I have this feeling that we fought for this country for nothing, but I am still determined to fight’. Some interviewees felt a duty to stay so that they could help younger scholars and help improve the future of Turkish academia. As one older academic, Respondent 23, said, ‘The feeling of hopelessness and depression is common among youth. We lived through the 1980 military coup and it makes us more resilient compared to this generation. We need to be here to help the youth keep going’.

Many of those who expressed a strong desire to stay in Turkey (6 of 15) used expressions such as ‘I am needed here’ and ‘I don’t feel I can fight abroad’, but that did not mean that everyone would become an activist. Some simply felt that they would find it difficult to leave their relatives and friends. Moreover, the fear of losing their jobs and personal security were also important considerations for keeping a low profile rather than opting for political activism. As one academic, Respondent 6, admitted, ‘To be honest, I don’t want to be unemployed. I don’t want to be labeled. I am not emotionally strong enough to fight’.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Academic freedom is often one of the first targets of authoritarian policy and in many parts of today's world, the drift toward authoritarianism has involved attacks on universities and scholars. The situation is especially grave in Turkey where academic institutions are weakened and individual academic careers are destroyed on an unprecedented scale. The aim of this study was to reflect on the social reality that this worsening repression has engendered for both the academics who have lost their positions and who live in fear of dismissal.

Thousands of Turkish academics have been banned from working in their fields. The dismissed academics are socially in a very precarious position. As well as being stripped of their positions at the universities, they are banned from all civil service positions and are prevented by travel restrictions from seeking academic positions abroad. Through what appears to be a system of informal pressure on employers, it is also difficult for them to get jobs in the private sector. As well, these academics' dismissals often have drastic consequences for their scholarship. Not only are the dismissed academics prevented from conducting research as university-based scholars but, out of fear that the regime will interfere with their activities, Turkish scholarly publishers and journals are reluctant to publish manuscripts submitted by dismissed researchers.

One interesting and paradoxical finding from the interviews with the dismissed academics is that the regime, despite its concerted efforts, has not managed to silence them. To some extent, critical academic discussions have instead moved from the universities to alternative, underground academies. Lectures and seminars are given in these 'street academies' or 'solidarity academies' and new forums for publication – both alternative publishers and journals – are being established.

In the interviews, academics under threat of dismissal emphasized the hardships of conducting research. Opportunities for international exchange, at scientific conferences, for example, have been curtailed, along with opportunities to obtain grants for research suspected of being politically or ideologically sensitive. Several informants spoke openly about how formerly critical discussion has been replaced by self-censorship and fear of denunciation. Oppositional academics must be careful about what they say, both during research seminars and in encounters with students in the classroom. Moreover, for many academics, traditional media have been replaced by social media as sources of information, but they also fear that their activities on social media are monitored.

The contrast between the dismissed academics and those who still retain their positions is stark. The social exclusion of dismissed academics is accompanied by a defiant sense of newfound freedom, of no longer needing to avoid sensitive issues. The mood among the academics living with the threat of dismissal is entirely different. Here, rather than defiance, there is a pervasive sense of resignation and lack of motivation. For them, scholarship is no longer a calling; rather, it has become no more than a means of supporting themselves that constantly demands new compromises.

This study has given new insights into the challenges faced by Turkish academia, analyzing the predicament for both dismissed social scientists and for those who still work at Turkish universities after the failed military coup of 15 July 2016. However, further studies are needed to explore the identified themes more in depth. In particular, future studies should seek to explore the organization and functions of alternative ‘street academics’ or ‘solidarity academics’.

The future of academic freedom in Turkey is uncertain. Some of the dismissed respondents saw migration as the only realistic option while others hoped that they would eventually return to their careers. As academic freedom depends on a plural, democratic society, the future of Turkish academics will be closely linked to the local and regional political developments which are difficult to predict. However, one thing is clear: the violation of academic freedom in Turkey deserves serious attention from the international scholarly community.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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