

Special Issue

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CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY-TURKEY

UNIVERSITY: POWER, SOLIDARITY AND CITIZENSHIP

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Boğaziçi Resistance: Authoritarianism and university struggles - Interview with **Seda Altuğ** and **Saygun Gökarıksel**

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IN THIS ISSUE

Throughout the history of modern Turkey, the state always had a substantial control over the university. This part of history, sometimes going as far as to making purges, is surprisingly constant from the early Republican period to the present. Undoubtedly, the political identities of those who were purged or the reasons for it were different in each period. Still, the simple motivation behind the purges remained unchanged: to prevent the university from becoming the center of centrifugal tendencies. Sometimes it was the fear that the *ancien régime* would be resurrected, and most of the time, “communism/anarchy/terror threat” was used to legitimize such power interventions. In short, keeping the university under control has always had an important role in the formation of state-citizen relations in Turkey.

What has happened at Boğaziçi University since the first days of 2021 shows once again how alive this historical heritage is. The appointment of an academic from the outside as rector of Boğaziçi University, who was a candidate for parliament from the AKP ranks in the past, and who, according to many, did not qualify for such position, the reactions following this appointment, and the way the political power responded to these reactions can be thought in this context. A university, where intellectual independence and academic merit mechanisms are alive despite everything, is faced with an open attack in front of everyone, without any rational explanation. This administrative measure, which is not surprising considering the political developments in recent years, reveals that the political authorities’ concerns about keeping universities under control continue unabated.

When we take a closer look at this last intervention against Boğaziçi University, and also, at the similar interventions against higher education institutions all over the country in the past, it is possible to say that the landscape before us is shaped by the intersection of two fundamental dynamics. First, just like in many authoritarian populist political regimes all over the world, the AKP, in its own management rationale, sees it as a necessity to occlude the limited areas of freedom that universities have been able to build over the years and in fact in a very fragile way, through the “authentic nation” and “alienated elites” duality made up again by the AKP. Sharing the administrative staff of universities within a narrow circle brings about the dismantlement of academic freedoms further. Moreover, it is also conceived as a critical moment to construct envisioned cultural hegemony on a larger scale. With Boğaziçi University, it is apparent once again, perhaps more evident than ever before, that such intervention does not have a constructive effect in the desired sense, but on the contrary, it brutally abolishes the existing academic norms and conventions, albeit limited. A second dynamic, which is intertwined with the first at times and moving in the opposite direction at other times, is the neoliberalization process of higher education, which we also trace on a global scale. This process, which includes a series of intertwined themes from the marketization of educational activities to the gradual evolution of the management logic of academic institutions into the corporate logic, is certainly not unique to today and here. Moreover, to what extent and in what ways the dynamics of authoritarianism and neoliberalization work together is a question with no explicit answer.

In this issue of **saha**, we precisely take it from this question and try to focus on the last cross-section of the Turkish universities’ journey. Our intention is to understand where the university comes from and where it is destined to, with reference to the interventions against Boğaziçi University, and more importantly, with the inspiration of the solidarity and creativity generated by the resistance to these interventions. Eventually, we hope that studying the transformation of the state-citizen relationship through university as an ecosystem of institutions, ideas and relations will open new ways of thinking and acting.

NEOLIBERALISM GOES TO COLLEGE

The state of crisis of the Turkish university system has much more structural and long-term dimensions that transcend national borders. In a sense, we are witnessing that higher education is in a double grip. Bülent Somay, in his article, questions the causes of this global crisis and reveals the connections between the gradual domination of universities by market mechanisms in the neoliberal era and the oppressive attitude of global authoritarian right-wing policies towards universities.

'The Trivialisation of Truth' started a long time before the so-called era of Post-Truth, with (1) the 'Neoliberal Takeover of Higher Education' and (2) the (potentially) universal access to *information without knowledge* through the Internet and in social media. These two instances resulted in the *ultimate dissociation of information from knowledge*, by making universities purveyors of practical and 'useful' (that is, useful for the capitalist establishment) information and gradually dismantling 'useless' knowledge production (that is, 'useless' from the point of view of capitalism) in the form of humanities, liberal arts and social sciences.¹ This development caused a hasty and mostly heedless turn towards social media as the source of 'Truth', which flourished without any checks and balances from the intellectual strata of society (which were being discredited as 'the elite' themselves, due to the rising wave of right-wing populism) disrupting the old hierarchy without replacing it with a viable alternative. The neoliberalisation of universities created a dog-eat-dog regime in teaching-learning, research and academic publishing. In this new regime, scholars relentlessly compete for grants and eventually succumb to the incessant demand to publish (no matter whether they have something significant to say or not) in order to improve (or even simply *keep*) their position as scholars.² The result has been a rapidly growing walling-in, a profound isolation of the University Discourse, thereby giving even more credence to the populists' accusations of 'elitism'. The grants eventually

established a strong corporate control over university research, and the 'big' (and increasingly profitable) business of so-called 'academic publishing' reinforced this control.

To tell the truth (insofar as it is still possible), University Discourse was never free of all these: blind submission to a mediaeval hierarchy, nepotism, plagiarism, conceit and elitism, and dependence on external financers (be they states or private patrons) were always a part of the university structure. This is why the neoliberal takeover, which is but a more systematic and organised form of all these together, took place without a serious resistance from within the university, except for a few solitary voices who took the submissive/utopian component inherent in the university seriously (which was also there all along), as a space where knowledge was freely produced and shared.

Where this neoliberal takeover failed, especially in some countries in the 'East' and in South America (the most recent example being Brazil), in cultures recently 'modernised' or in the process of 'modernisation', the establishment resorted to brute force and tended to destroy University Discourse altogether. It did this by first covertly, and eventually overtly, promoting ignorance and obedience, without any need for justification.³ This has become the fertile ground on which today's ultra-right populism may flourish, as well as its unmediated result. Wherever this ultra-

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right populism prevails, it first discredits and dismisses University Discourse as the haphazard blabber of the 'elite'.⁴

The gradual walling-in of the universities, and the growing inaccessibility of intellectual production within and around universities, in academic publications almost completely inaccessible for the 'populace', led people to search for the 'Truth' elsewhere, mainly in the social media and more generally throughout the internet, where there are no checks and balances, and a lie or a fallacy has the same semantic value as 'Truth'. Therefore, the final outcome in the West

was almost the same as it was in the East: an almost total *decollement* of 'Truth' from everyday life (Busch).

In the 'democratic' West, on the other hand, and especially in the US and the UK, where the existing 'Regime of Truth', loosely based on the University Discourse and its dissemination in the (both mainstream and alternative) media, is rapidly losing credibility and being replaced with a 'Humpty Dumpty' regime: What remains is not what Marx had hoped to be a more egalitarian regime in which 'the educator[s] themselves are also] educated', but rather a 'Humpty Dumpty Regime':

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.' 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.' 'The question is,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master—that's all.'⁵

What Humpty Dumpty is talking about here is apparently akin to what we will later call a 'Master Signifier', a signifier around which all language is organised and provides an anchor, a 'quilting point' for all other signifiers, 40 years before de Saussure and almost 70 years before Lacan. In the so-called 'Post-Truth' world, words have come to mean whoever the Humpty Dumpty in power chooses them to mean. In these countries, universities were supposed to be 'free' in both research and teaching, although research funding was mostly left to big business and the career paths of scholars were determined by how many grants they get and how they fare in peer-reviewed academic journals almost entirely owned and regulated by big publishing monopolies. Although this system has hitherto managed to maintain at least a semblance of 'Truth', the veil is dropping fast, especially in view of the rapidly impending climate crisis, and the scientists and scholars who managed

In the last decade or so, academic publishing became a battlefield between some universities and NGOs demanding open-access publishing, and many publishing monopolies determined to keep the goose laying golden eggs under bolt and lock.

to survive within this system are being forced to 'put up or shut up', that is, turn into activists as well as scholars, or act as if no such crisis exists.

Academic or 'peer-reviewed' publishing throughout the last four decades, has started to act like St Peter at Pearly Gates, or, worse still, like *Deli Dumrul*.⁶ As it stands now, the existing Academic Publishing 'industry' not only stops all kinds of 'maverick' or 'subversive' ideas even before they are born (most scholars permanently self-censor, because 'publishing' has become more important than writing), but also stops anything published to reach the public by making all scholarly writing (1) conform to 'scholarly' paradigmatic and syntagmatic standards not penetrable by non-scholars; and (2) obscenely expensive lest they are accessed by people non-affiliated to universities.

In the last decade or so, academic publishing became a battlefield between some universities and NGOs demanding open-access publishing, and many publishing monopolies determined to keep the goose laying golden eggs under bolt and lock. Starting from 2012 some universities took a stand against academic publishing monopolies in favour of open-access. These developments, although positive on the

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whole, did not fail to create despicable by-products, e.g., 'predatory' journals which supposedly provide open-access, but charge desperate scholars obscene sums of money just in order to publish their studies. More recently, partly as a result of the pressure from universities demanding open-access, the 'top players' of the academic publishing sector also partly adopted the predatory strategy (under the label 'hybrid') and publishing in academic journals evolved from 'publish or perish' to 'pay or perish', sometimes both.⁷

Once the absolute necessity of publishing as the indispensable prerequisite of academic advancement and survival is firmly established, academic journals, their editors and 'referees' (peers) obtain an unprecedented power over 'writers'. 'There were about 28,100 active scholarly



Photo: Faruk Bilal

peer-reviewed English-language journals in late 2014 (plus a further 6450 non-English-language journals), collectively publishing about 2.5 million articles a year.⁸ In the publishing industry there were approximately 110,000 employees at that time, and even if we assume that all of these were editors (which would be unthinkable), an editor would have to read and evaluate and give feedback on 23 academic articles every year. To share this burden, editors delegate unpaid reviewers ('peers'), most of whom do this as a chore, most of them not exactly in their fields of expertise, and definitely a significant number of them just in order to exercise this uncontested and arbitrary 'power' over their peers, all of which make up an extremely fragile system that does not work.⁹ Richard Smith had asked the crucial question 'Who is a peer?' back in 2006, and the answer he suggested

was not very promising for scholars who were then being eventually dependent upon that system:

But who is a peer? Somebody doing exactly the same kind of research (in which case he or she is probably a direct competitor)? Somebody in the same discipline? Somebody who is an expert on methodology? And what is review? Somebody saying 'The paper looks all right to me', which is sadly what peer review sometimes seems to be. Or somebody pouring all over the paper, asking for raw data, repeating analyses, checking all the references, and making detailed suggestions for improvement? Such a review is vanishingly rare.¹⁰

Assuming that all the standards are met, and the financial hurdles are

cleared, though, this still does not mean that there is a significant exchange of information (let alone knowledge) among the scholarly community. Biswas and Kirchherr remarked in an article (in a non-academic journal, of course) in 2015, which was widely shared in the social media since, an indication that many academics were sincerely concerned about the issue, that:

Even debates among scholars do not seem to function properly. Up to 1.5 million peer-reviewed articles are published annually. However, many are ignored even within scientific communities—82 per cent of articles published in humanities are not even cited once. No one ever refers to 32 per cent of the peer-reviewed articles in the social and 27 per cent in the natural sciences.

If a paper is cited, this does not imply it has actually been read. According to one estimate, only 20 per cent of papers cited have actually been read. We estimate that an average paper in a peer-reviewed journal is read completely by no more than 10 people. Hence, impacts of most peer-reviewed publications even within the scientific community are minuscule.¹¹

The truth is, although the output of academic research constantly rises, it does not mean that the sharing of information and knowledge rises as well: quite to the contrary, the more academic articles are written and published, the less they are read. Furthermore, as Biswas and Kirchherr rightly comment, we do not have any data that having been mentioned or cited in other academic publications means that what we publish are actually read. To name the elephant in the room, a fact most academics know but are not very keen to mention publicly, is that many people who submit articles to journals are slyly careful to cite or mention articles by the editors, favourite authors, or potential reviewers of these journals, probably without reading these in full. It is, therefore, no coincidence that when the open-source website www.academia.edu, which was a free sharing

place for published and unpublished scholarly writing alike, went 'premium' a few years ago, the only thing they charged money for was not *posting* an article, not *downloading* an article, but only *seeing* where you were mentioned and/or cited. Academics as a community may be mildly (or sometimes severely) narcissistic at times, but the fact that they are willing to pay for this (they must be, otherwise this 'premium' practice would have ended a long time ago) cannot be ascribed to narcissism alone: maybe they need some desperate proof that they are not shouting, like Midas, into a dried-up well.

As a further indicator of the inherent fragility of the peer-review system and so-called 'academic publishing' in general, it is a good idea to study the two notorious, unethical, but in their own way, successful 'hoaxes'.¹² These two much publicised 'affairs' which purported to 'prove' the futility and arrogance of inter- and trans-disciplinary fields of study such as Cultural Studies, Gender & Queer Studies or Postcolonial & Decolonial Studies, only proved (if not their own futility and arrogance) the fragility and uselessness of the peer-review system (and the existing regime of academic publishing) as a whole.

'Truth' becomes a product of an endless bargaining between different forms of media, some already directly controlled by despotic and corrupt governments, and others easily manipulated by the rising wave of right-wing populism.

To conclude, the isolation of universities from the public, by letting more and more people in as students (in the US and UK cases, as clients permanently indebted to their creditors), but letting less and less knowledge out by creating a vicious atmosphere of rivalry and competition within, and erecting 'Trump's Walls' of academic publishing around, brings about an almost total collapse of University Discourse. In its stead, 'Truth' becomes a product of an endless bargaining between different forms of media, some already directly controlled by despotic and corrupt governments, and others easily manipulated by the rising wave



Photo: Faruk Bilal



of right-wing populism. What we need today, as scholars both from countries with despotic/authoritarian regimes, where a ruthless persecution of the academia is at full-throttle, and from the supposedly more 'democratic' ones, where academics permanently fall prey to the dog-eat-dog regime generated by the neoliberal university structure and the Academic Publishing sector, to join forces to make some concrete and specific suggestions and on how to confront the crisis of neoliberalised universities and academic publishing together, and how new venues of both teaching-learning and academic publishing can be created.

In an article on Bruno Latour, Ava Kofman also quotes Donna Haraway cautioning against the hazards of turning around and going the opposite way: '[I]t's also an important moment not to go back to very conventional and very bad epistemologies about how scientific knowledge is put together and why and how it holds,' warns Haraway. 'We need to show the bankruptcy of this climate controversy without closing down the fact that science is a set of situated practices and not capital-S science.'¹³

Now that this supposed 'certainty' and 'authority' have proven to be not as firm as it once seemed, now that

'climate-change-deniers', 'flat-earthers', 'intelligent-designers' and 'vaccine-deniers' enjoy almost the same credit (in the 'popular' media at least) as the respected scientists and scholars of old, and an ex-contractor politico invents his 'alternative facts' and makes half a country believe him, the critics of the old 'regime of truth' realise that *critique as such* is not (and has never been) sufficient. What we needed (and still need) was a utopian horizon¹³ alongside the critique of all that exists, a Not-Yet-Conscious (*Noch-Nicht-Bewußten*) to interact with and hopefully help shape the Not-Yet-Become (*Noch-Nicht-Gewordene*), a new way to imagine attaining, producing and disseminating knowledge:

Thus the Not-Yet-Conscious in man belongs completely to the Not-Yet-Become, Not-Yet-Brought-Out, Manifested-Out in the world. Not-Yet-Conscious interacts and reciprocates with Not-Yet-Become, more specifically with what is approaching in history and in the world. And the examination of anticipatory consciousness must fundamentally serve to make comprehensible the actual reflections which now follow, in fact depictions of the wished-for, the anticipated better life, in psychological and material terms. From the

anticipatory, therefore, knowledge is to be gained on the basis of an ontology of the Not-Yet.¹⁴

Scientists, scholars, academics and intellectuals in general, who feel to be firmly rooted in the authority and certainty of the university discourse, are amazed at how flimsy that discourse proved to be, and how easily it collapsed under attacks from self-styled strongmen, PR 'experts' whose ignorance is surpassed only by their self-confidence, twitter trolls and cunningly manipulated 'fake news'. Some of them have even become unwitting co-conspirators in these attacks, as in the *ressentiment*-driven 'hoaxes' we have already seen (Sokal 1995 and 'Grievance Studies' 2018), and some (like Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway) were *accused to be accomplices* just because they had dared question the seemingly unshakeable certainty and authority of 'science' and scholarship. Both sides were culpable of either unquestioningly nestling in the comfort of the 'Truth' of this discourse, or criticising it without a reference to an 'ontology of the Not-Yet', or, what Foucault had named decades before the label 'Post-Truth' became the vogue and the crisis of the University Discourse as well as the University Establishment came to be well underway, a 'new politics of truth':



Photo: Faruk Bilal





Photo: Faruk Bilal

The essential political problem for the intellectual is not that of criticising the ideological content to which science is linked, or to bring it about that his scientific practice should be accompanied by a correct ideology. But of knowing that it is possible to constitute a new politics of truth. The problem is not one of changing people's 'consciousness' or what's in their heads; but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.¹⁵

Since 1977, however, the 'political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth' has changed considerably, due, to a large extent, to the 'neoliberal takeover of higher education' (Busch), although not for the better. This 'takeover' did not only change the 'regime', but also the ways in which this regime connected to the world outside the main structures of the 'production of truth'. It created a new 'regime of truth' which is not exactly a structured narrative, but, as I have remarked before, a Humpty Dumpty regime, which is not sustainable and systematically destroys the 'common world' (Latour) which even the critics of the old 'regime' took for granted. The annihilation of this 'common world' is very much evident in the political, but at the same time economic and cultural schisms all around the globe: the elections in the UK (2019) and US (2020), the previous and current 'centres' of the modern world-system respectively, reveal to us two extremely divided countries,

in which injustices in the distribution of wealth, knowledge and power are more explicit than ever. The authoritarian/ autocratic dictatorships that pop up in the 'East' and in South America split each of the countries in these regions into two, and ethnic, gender and class alienation in each of them cannot be contained and concealed by the narratives of religion and/or the nation-state anymore. The University Discourse, which was supposed to give credibility and sustainability to the existing world-system is broken down by the same neoliberal onslaught aimed at consolidating it:

In their efforts to bring the freedoms of the market world into being, neoliberals have through New Public Management, the Human Capital theory of education, and related changes imposed on everyone new forms of discipline based on various forms of hierarchical control. In contrast, [...] we need a world in which the civic, environmental, industrial, inspirational, opinion, domestic, and other orders of worth are not subordinate to the market order, but in which there is an ongoing discourse about promoting, (re)constructing, and (re)imagining multiple orders of worth.¹⁶

The present crisis (indeed collapse) in the University Discourse and corresponding structures of knowledge production and dissemination has once more demonstrated that: (1) Capitalist production is not compatible with

the production of knowledge other than the knowledge useful only to capitalism itself;¹⁷ and (2) Capitalist forms of property are not compatible with so-called 'Intellectual Property'.¹⁸ Furthermore, it also brought to the fore the awareness (if only in hindsight) that contemporary forms of organisation and distribution of knowledge production, especially in our digital age, were already (that is, even before the neoliberal onslaught) incompatible with the hierarchic organisation of society, which is based on the ancient guild system. The UK system of Lecturer > Reader > Professor, or the US system of Assistant Professor > Associate Professor > Professor, and similar three-step systems in effect almost all over the world, are all based on the ancient Apprentice > Journeyman > Master system of the European Middle Ages, and almost as ossified and inflexible as this guild structure. Lawrence Busch proposes an alternative concept to replace 'hierarchy' in higher education, and connects this to the utopian imagination:¹⁹

[W]e would do well to pursue *heterarch[ies]*, [...] places where multiple orders of worth are discussed and debated, and where organizational goals are understood to be in flux in response to a rapidly changing organizational environment. This is the case because new ideas, new means for enacting those ideas and citizens competent for life in a democracy, emerge from discourse and deliberation. [...] *They*

emerge from the design, debate, and implementation of imagined futures.

Once the mechanisms of producing ('Research'), transmitting ('Teaching') and disseminating ('Publishing') knowledge are reorganised 'heterarchically', that is, horizontally with multiple foci of 'power', and once the acquisition and transmission of knowledge are detached from the mechanisms of domination which are essential for career advancement and profit, we can start thinking about the uses of such knowledge for cleaning up the mess the obdurate profit- drive neoliberalism, as the most recent instalment of the capitalist world-system, left us with. It is only then we can (re)construct a 'Truth' that will be both the basis and the product of the 'common world' we

have taken for granted for centuries, and realised the value thereof once it was gone. This 'Truth', however, as Foucault has constantly reminded us, will not be free of 'systems of power', since 'truth is already itself power':

It's not a question of emancipating truth from every system of power – which would be a chimera, because truth is already itself power– but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony (social, economic, and cultural) within which it operates at the present time...²⁰

Although it is not possible, according to Foucault, to isolate truth from all connections involving and based on power, it is possible to free it from the various forms of domination and

hierarchy, both the ones that are imposed on it by the recent reign of neoliberalism in knowledge production, transmission and dissemination, and the forms that precede it, steeped in mediaeval hierarchies and structures of domination. This emancipatory drive should come not only from within the university (or from what remains of it), but also from without, in the form of alternative loci of knowledge, of teaching-learning and research. The radical restructuring of the existing universities and the creation of alternative loci of knowledge can only be carried out by a co-operative effort from intellectuals and scholars that are being constantly hurt, victimized and excluded by the reigning neoliberal co-optation of universities and the anti-intellectual populist/authoritarian assaults all around the globe.

¹ Flexner, Abraham (1939) 'The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge', *Harpers* 179, June/November; Ordine, Nuccio (2017). *The Usefulness of the Useless*, Çev. Alastair McEwen. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books.

² Busch, Lawrence (2017) *Knowledge for Sale: The Neoliberal Takeover of Higher Education*. Boston: The MIT Press.

³ In 2016, the Vice-Rector of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Dr. Bülent Arı, declared on live TV that he 'trusted in the acumen of the ignorant and uneducated people rather than the cultivated class', and that he was 'exasperated about the rise in literacy.' He was eventually forced to resign his position as a result of public outburst at his words, only to be immediately appointed to the Supervisory Board of the Higher Education Council (<https://www.birgun.net/haber/cahil-kelime-guveniyorum-diyen-profesor-yok-denetleme-kuruluuyeligine-atandi-139491>).

⁴ Busch (2017).

⁵ Carroll, Lewis (1871) *Alice in Wonderland*.

⁶ Deli Dumrul (Dumrul the Mad) is a character from one of the tales in the Turkish *Dede Korkut* saga (*The Book of Dede Korkut* 15th century AD, although the tale in oral culture may be as old as the 10th century). According to the tale, Dumrul 'builds a bridge over a dried-up river bed, to collect *haraç* (extortion, tax), both from the ones who cross the bridge (33 *akcha*), and the ones who don't (40 *akcha* plus a beating).' See, Ayşe Çavdar (2020) "Devlet Kompleksi: Dumrul'un Öksüz ve Yetimleri (III)", *Birikim* 373.

⁷ Hyland, Ken (2015) *Academic Publishing: Issues and Challenges in the Construction of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Michael, Hagner (2018) "Open Access, Data Capitalism and Academic Publishing", *Swiss Med Wkly* 148.

⁸ The STM Report, March 2015; https://www.stm-assoc.org/2015_02_20_STM_Report_2015.pdf.

⁹ Bal, Mieke (2018) "Let's Abolish the Peer-Review System", *Media Theory* 23.

¹⁰ Smith, Richard (2006) "Peer review: A flawed process at the heart of science and Journals", *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 99: p. 178.

¹¹ Biswas, A. K. ve Kirchherr, J "Prof, no one is reading you" *The Strait Times*, 11 April 2015.

¹² For the 'Grievance Studies Hoax' see, <https://areomagazine.com/2018/10/02/academic-grievancestudies-and-the-corruption-of-scholarship/>; <https://www.chronicle.com/article/What-the-Grievance/244753>; <https://slate.com/technology/2018/10/grievance-studies-hoax-not-academic-scandal.html>. For the much older Alan Sokal hoax (1995), there has been accumulated a lot of literature, not to mention the book Sokal himself wrote, with Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense* (1998), in which he sets out to 'devastate' the entire armada of contemporary French philosophers, guided by the false but apparently extremely colossal sense of self-esteem he gathered from having very cleverly deceived the editors of *Social Text*.

¹³ Kofman, A. "Bruno Latour, the post-truth philosopher, mounts a defence of science, *New York Times*, 25 October 2018.

¹⁴ Ernst Bloch (1996) *The Principle of Hope*, c. 1, Cambridge: The MIT Press, p. 13.

¹⁵ Foucault, Michel (1977) "The Political Function of the Intellectual" *Radical Philosophy* 17: p. 14.

¹⁶ Busch (2017), p. 116.

¹⁷ Raunig, Gerald (2013) *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*. Boston: The MIT Press.

¹⁸ Žižek, Slavoj (2003) "L'homo sacer comme objet du discours de l'Université", *Cités* 16(4): 25-41.

¹⁹ Busch (2017), p. 117-118. I must emphasise that this should be a utopian horizon rather than a definite, closed and duly narrated utopia, a utopian locus. For a discussion on the difference between utopian horizon and utopian locus, please see Bülent Somay (2010) *The View from the Masthead: Journey through Dystopia towards an Open-Ended Utopia*, Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press.

²⁰ Foucault (2017), p. 14.

Boğaziçi Resistance: Authoritarianism and university struggles

The appointment of a rector to Boğaziçi University by president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan caused an unexpected widespread wave of protest. There was even a moment when Boğaziçi University became a platform where all kinds of objections came together regarding the institutional collapse Turkey has recently experienced. But, on the other hand, the experiences showed that notions such as academic freedom and autonomy are not given but can only be built from the bottom up through struggles at certain critical junctures. We talked about the details of this substantial experience with Boğaziçi University faculty members Seda Altuğ and Saygun Gökarıksel.



Boğaziçi University protests have been going on for over 100 days now. Can you summarize the milestones of this process for us? Why did such a wave of protests emerge, and where are we with them now?

Saygun Gökarkınel: The night of January 1 was a big incident for us. The first milestone was the appointment of Melih Bulu, who came top-down at Boğaziçi and was determined a rector without consulting the university's components. The other milestones were the efforts to oppress the protests of academics and especially students by force, the heavy police blockade of the campus, and the announcement of new faculties to be established by another presidential decree in the following days. The struggle within the institution continues at the moment. The pressure of law enforcement inside and in the university's

surrounding neighborhood shows that the Boğaziçi crisis continues.

At some point, the defense or struggle that can be perceived as protecting Boğaziçi University has actually evolved into a pluralist, egalitarian, libertarian democratic university struggle. The aim is not only to preserve the old but also to open up space for building something new. And not only for Boğaziçi University. In this struggle, we are trying to rethink the university as a social institution and life; we are almost experiencing it. In this context, institutional autonomy, democracy at the university, and academic freedom are among the essential components of this struggle.

Seda Altuğ: Saygun gave examples of incidents. Let's try to look at what happened over *longue durée*.

The appointment of Melih Bulu on January 1 is considered a milestone in Boğaziçi University. It is seen as the state's or the AKP's intervention to the last fortress, Boğaziçi. I think this is a significant milestone. It is an important milestone both in terms of the scale, size, and determination of the state's intervention and the struggle of the university's administrative and academic staff. But beyond that, it is an important building block because there is also history to it. Boğaziçi has been a public university for at least 50 years. When we consider the university's history, it is a critical turning point, but not a milestone. Likewise, there is an appointment of a rector by the president before, and that was accepted. Before that, a rector appointed by YÖK (Higher Education Council) in the September 12 period managed the university until 1992. So





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actually, there is a sequence of appointments at the university. The appointments of Mehmet Özkan or others appointed before by the junta were not such a comprehensive attack on the internal functioning or democracy of the school. I believe this is an important difference. Undoubtedly, all these appointments are moves that seriously damage institutional autonomy. After all, institutional autonomy is the ground for academic freedom. There was a serious intervention on that ground previously as well. But the previous ones were not as deep, trying to take over the school's administrative structure and keeping silent against the use of force as this one.

S.G.: The previous rector Mehmet Özkan was an insider figure. After all, he was a part of Gülay Barbarosoğlu's administration. There were various oppositions against him then, too. But currently, there is an appointment like parachuting from above; we can also predict what this means and what will follow. They amassed water cannon vehicles and a law enforcement army in the school. He was not just a rector who

He was not just a rector who was passing by. He had an army behind him.

was passing by. He had an army behind him.

What could be the motive for moving in this direction, that is, moving from Mehmet Özkan to Melih Bulu from the government's perspective?

S.A.: Although the previous appointment has weakened the institutional autonomy of Boğaziçi University, we can say that BU could maintain its relative institutional autonomy compared to the rest of the Turkish society and the other universities in Turkey, even if we factor in the damage over the last four years. There is no doubt that they are uncomfortable with this situation. I think the main reason is that there are still opposing voices in the school. Of course, there are also symbolic factors such as the missionary past of this place, the conquest discourse built around it, etc. Still, I think the primary determinant in real terms is the fact that Boğaziçi is still maintaining its relative public autonomy despite everything.

S.G.: It has been written a lot, but it is worth repeating: The inability of the government to build cultural hegemony for so many years and the "reputational capital" in the words of Bülent Küçük, which BU has, may have paved the way for intervention here. They want to get what is already there without the effort of rebuilding an institution with a reputation like BU. Writing Boğaziçi University under the Dean of the Faculty of Law's title on TV screens, a faculty which exists only on paper, is one example. They want to generate a reputation for their policies using the name of the university. This is both symbolic and very pragmatic. Perhaps there is a plan to use Boğaziçi as a *think tank*. This reveals the need for a knowledge-producing institution by the neoliberal, militarist, and conservative regime. The faculties that have been established –such as law school, but a certain kind of law school that will focus on areas such as maritime law, commercial law, and the law of war– indicates this point. It seems like an attempt to find solutions to the regime's problems and crises rather than critical knowledge production.

Melih Bulu was only able to find three people from the university to work together. He appointed four people, including himself, to the head of 43 positions. Despite all the differences between the faculty members, the will to stand together continues.

The surprising thing about the Boğaziçi University event is the strength of the resistance, the resilience of the opposition, and its ability to have such a significant influence. A series of different ailments and demands seem to overlap in this reaction. If you wish, we can sort them out a little bit. What kinds of commonalities and differences specific to the academicians, students, and administrative staff can be mentioned?

S.A.: The first thing to be said is that there is a new side to this seizure attempt, the effort to usurp and subjugate the university's will. Similar things have happened in many institutions before, but an opposition like this one could not be organized. I think the reason why BU stood in a monolithic way—we hold meetings with 390 academics—is that it has maintained its institutional autonomy. Melih Bulu was only able to find three people from the university to work together. He appointed four people, including himself, to the head of 43 positions. Despite all the differences between the faculty members, the will to stand together continues. I think this is significant. The performance of resistance shown until this time is very consistent and continuous. As Bülent Küçük and Zeynep Gambetti conveyed in a TV program, we are faced with a patient, “discreet resistance” that agrees to minimum demands.

S.G.: In addition to what Seda said, we can talk about the experiences of Boğaziçi campus life and its relatively liberal and pluralist environment. The communication, organization, and solidarity between both student communities and educators are effective in this. Students have been extremely influential in this struggle from the very beginning. They took the initiative and tried to establish their own language and action. As you know, this attack

against BU is nothing new. Many other public institutions, including educational institutions, have been subjected to this kind of intervention and much more severe ones. But at the same time, this history has created a history of social struggles. For example, the experience of the Peace Academics' struggle, especially for the academics, helped consolidate some dissenting experiences in BU and became a fulcrum for the ongoing struggle. Besides that, there are many more new encounters. New friendships are born, old ones get stronger. As someone who started working at BU in 2016, I could say that I had the opportunity to meet many new friends and learned more about the university administration and commissions than I expected. We also get a lot of support messages outside the university from people we do not know. These constitute indispensable resources of the Boğaziçi resistance.

Of course, while talking about all these positive experiences, it is also necessary to underline the unevenly distributed fragility, especially the fact that the administrative staff is in a much more fragile and insecure situation. With the pandemic measures taken by the government, this situation has become even more difficult for many university employees. Various ruptures may occur, we hear the news of harsh conflicts in the administrative position. At the same time, there are, of course, inequalities between instructors. Some colleagues like me who have not received their associate professorship may feel much more fragile. Other class and living conditions, care responsibilities on us, all of these are of course important. However, I can say that we are in a constructive and cooperative struggle in general.

As is the case with every resistance movement, there may be different perspectives towards the strategy to be followed or the forms of resistance at Boğaziçi University. In this respect, what kind of difference of opinion can be mentioned between academics or between students and academics?

S.A.: We discuss each issue in the organizing process. Every week, we hold an extensive meeting with a collectively determined agenda. This struggle is progressing with the decisions taken there. We made a serious division of

labor; different commissions work in different fields constantly. There are ten different commissions, from the media commission to the strategy commission. Moreover, these are commissions with academics from various departments who disagree with each other politically. Obviously, the discussions between them are very moderate. We work with Saygun on the commission that writes weekly bulletins. Every Friday we prepare an approximately two-page newsletter summarizing what happened that week. The newsletter has a harsh but cautious language. This is a serious organizational experience in terms of struggle. We observe academics from so many age groups, whether interested in politics or not, and students from different cultural and class backgrounds act together and make decisions.

This struggle has led to the questioning of various hierarchical relations within the university, therefore has the potential to democratize the university further.

Of course, BU has never been an absolutely egalitarian and democratic place. BU was a place of hierarchical relationships between the students, the professors, even between the departments. Nevertheless, this struggle has been particularly instrumental in questioning the hierarchical relations between academics and those unspoken power relations between departments, so this struggle has the potential to democratize the university further.

S.G.: The struggle itself raises a series of questions such as, “Where are we, what are we doing, how does this university work, what is the institutional autonomy of the university?” It does not only raise questions but helps us look for the answers. The structuring of the language to be used and the resistance space in the struggle, the creation, and reminding of the red lines have become our daily practices.

I often think of the following discussion I watched. When I read an article written by our friends from outside the university, I noticed that this was an important analysis that also paid off for



our students. In this article, there was a desire to make the BU resistance the subject of all kinds of struggles in Turkish society. In other words, the argument was that the Boğaziçi resistance should represent and be the carrier of all social struggles. According to this analysis, the political vision of the BU resistance should expand.

This naturally caused some tension and controversy. We had friends who said, “No, we must first consider the struggle in BU. We should protect BU.” This understanding tries to free the talk

of academic freedom from political-social content and thinks in a somewhat narrower sense of institutionalism. However, it would not be wrong to say that the following position is generally adopted after discussions: In fact, university, and academic freedoms, in particular, can only exist with other democratic freedoms such as freedom of thought and freedom of expression. Historically, university struggles (e.g., student movements) have been part of many social and political struggles. Therefore, in the struggle for the university, we are fighting in an extensive

area, especially without trying to be the subject and spokesperson of all kinds of struggles. In other words, the pluralist, egalitarian, libertarian democratic university struggle in BU brings along many struggles ranging from social relations (labor, gender, environment, etc.) within the campus to power relations, including education and knowledge generation.

S.A.: There is another topic of discussion, which is an ongoing debate. There is a deadlock at the point we have reached: the struggle continues with a routine



set of actions. Turning your back on the rectorate, saying “we do not recognize, we do not accept” every day. Insisting on the appointment of executives chosen by us. Our demands are clear, but the actions become routine because, besides the fact that our demands are clear, they do not have closure. That is, we are not against them with a language that says, “If you do not accept our demands...”

The appointed people keep going as they planned – maybe we are slowing down their pace a bit. With four people, they continue to run the university in a way that is uncommon in history.

How should we transform our actions? What should we do so that we have a power of sanction? We should have other tools as well so that we can materialize these demands. Otherwise, we will demand, they will not listen, and this will go on forever. So we seem to be going in two separate parallel universes.

S.G.: This is what I can add to what Seda said: We are calling for resignation, but we expected this resignation would not come. In fact, there is an even greater structural crisis here. This is not an

issue that started or will end with BU. Currently, the university has suffered severe damage. We are trying to reduce this damage as much as possible while building the memory of it. Something devastating is before us: there is a tough, transformative, but not very visionary attack operating in many places, from land, rent, lodgings, buildings, and staff. It is crucial to struggle to get that line back as far as possible.

This, in fact, is not a struggle that started here. It will not end here either. Just as the experiences of other struggles



inspire BU, we hope this will turn into a valuable experience for future struggles.

S.A.: Who knows, maybe this will turn into a trustee struggle. Maybe it will turn into a civilian movement, a struggle for HDP trustees to all those whose will is usurped. We do not know that. For this to happen, other universities need not only support us but also express their own problems. The main thing in the solidarity of western leftists with non-westerns like Palestine, Iraq, etc., is that they focus on how their states are involved. Dissenting statements from other universities in

Turkey about their problems and their functioning, of course, will strengthen us just as the western leftists' criticizing their position and involvement is the real solidarity. If there is going to be a transformation, it will happen then. If resignations are to come, they will come then.

Despite all its dilemmas, the strength of the resistance at Boğaziçi University comes from its tenacity. Beyond its achievements, at least as of these early months, the persistence of this reaction has an empowering side for both inside and outside. Moreover, this

resistance to institutional intervention allowed different kinds of objections and demands to be heard.

S.G.: Very true. Resistance has an instructive and transformative effect on us. For example, in my courses, students, despite everything, take the floor and express their thoughts more acutely and clearly. As a result, the discussions are progressing in a very participatory way.

S.A.: It is really transformative. At the individual level, this was a resistance that made it possible for me to cohere, embrace the school more,



and be more like myself. Likewise, it was reflected in the relations between the instructors. I can claim BU more now, I feel like I belong there. It had an effect that transformed my relationship with other academics. Likewise, I think there is a similar transformation in the relationship of students with the school.

S.G.: Serdar Tekin's statement "University exists through resistance" is very meaningful in this respect. During the BU resistance, we were able to understand what university and academic freedom mean better. We had the opportunity to

see how the university lived as a social space with its financial structure and institutions.

S.A.: I absolutely agree. When British Marxists define class, they emphasize how important experience is and express that class belonging is gained through experience. Indeed, academic freedom is actually a concept that becomes a reality only when you experience it.

S.G.: You are as free as you can perform.

S.A.: Academic freedom is not like the freedom to travel.

Let us come to the global dimension of the material and ideological attacks on the university. In your interview with Ayça Çubukçu, you point to universities having similar problems from India to Hungary. It is useful to clarify this point because although what happened at Boğaziçi University has many aspects regarding Turkey's political environment, we see that universities on a global scale are in the grip of neoliberalization and marketization on the one hand and authoritarianism on the other. What kind of a view do we have when we look at it from this perspective?

S.A.: When we look at Western Europe, Eastern European countries such as Poland and Hungary, and the Middle East, we see that the academy is under similar pressure. We can probably say that neoliberalism has a more prominent role in England. In particular, it is the compulsion to find outsourcing, the closure of the humanities departments considering that they do not have market value, instead of these departments encouraging the departments that are intertwined or will intertwine with capital. In France, we see that state coercion is more decisive. Most recently, we witnessed a debate that embodied in the term "Islamogauchisme" that targeted the academics working in centers that do not agree with the dominant thought and produce dissenting knowledge. We see that the resources that go to those departments are being reduced, so they become increasingly faded and dispossessed more and more. However, both state power and neoliberalism play different roles for each country at different levels. When we look at the Middle East, there is a more complicated landscape. The Arab Revolts were up-and-coming events, but ten years later, we see that here the momentum has turned in the opposite direction, and authoritarian regimes, in some places Islamic governments, have come to power again. When we look at the more "normal" governments in the region, for example, Egypt ruled under another dictator, or Lebanon, which is currently in a terrible financial crisis and witnessed a serious social upheaval just before the pandemic, we can say that both neoliberalism and state violence is very effective on university employees, knowledge generation, and institutions, seriously trying to come down and shape them.

S.G.: The current conjuncture is generally explained as the crisis of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism and the rise of nationalist-conservative populism. For example, Karl Polanyi's "double movement" argument is favored a lot. On the one hand, a neoliberal accumulation of capital and a market economy leading to social erosion and stimulating inequalities. And on the other, right and far-right movements advocating protectionist, conservative social policies against it. This tension is expressed and managed by the "culture wars" waged between the liberal-secular bloc and the nationalist-conservative bloc. Universities are seen as an important front of this battle. Of course, one reason for this is that university is a central part of social, cultural, and ideological reproduction. When we consider what it means socially, the university is a crucial place in terms of capital, workforce, and labor.

For example, there are very similar dynamics in Eastern Europe. When we historicize it a little bit, we see that the student movements and universities had a significant place in the period of state socialism. They became an important part of the mass movements. In Poland, during 1956 and 1968 movements and in the "Solidarity" movement (*Solidarność*), the influence of universities was enormous. In addition to public universities, underground or "flying universities" (*uniwersytet latający*) were established. These were very important in terms of both intergenerational transfer of experience and dissenting information sharing and organizing preparations for action. However, with the neoliberal shock therapy policies implemented after 1989 and the "The Great Transformation," which some Eastern European thinkers refer to Karl Polanyi, deep silence and inertia fell on universities, as in many social and

economic politics fields. Part of this was due to the mass adoption of the liberal and neoliberal consensus, at least by the ruling classes, and the increasingly breaking up of the left opposition, accompanied by the cries of the "end of history."

In particular, with Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, a serious neoliberalization began in education. Higher education, which is made up of public universities, started to be subject to privatization policies. As a matter of fact, after a long hiatus, towards the mid-2010s, universities started to react again to protest the Bologna process. However, in 2015, with the nationalist-conservative populist "Law and Justice" (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) party coming to power, the universities began to stir up even more. As in the judiciary and media spheres, this government sought to make significant changes in education



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along its party line. Claiming that a left-liberal hegemony prevails in schools, they tried to establish the counter-hegemony by attacking the women's and LGBTI movement, which they conceived and still do as alien to "national values." According to the ruling party, universities are run by neo-Marxist, feminist, and "LGBTI ideology" who supposedly are "leftovers" of the communist era. Anti-communist, sexist, homophobic, and racist discourses form the basis of the party's nationalist-conservative ideology. They are trying to control the universities by redesigning the faculties of the universities, by trying to interfere with their financial resources and upgrades, and by declaring the professors and students who oppose them enemies. For example, they consider initiating various disciplinary investigations against academics and students who have recently participated in the popular women's protests (general strike) against

abortion ban. They claim that these groups instrumentalize universities in line with their political ambitions. Jagiellonian University, where I completed my master's degree, has become the target of such purification and punishment policies.

There is a similar situation in Hungary. Very briefly: Viktor Orban's government aims to neutralize institutions that oppose him, especially by financial means and privatizing public universities. Rather than direct political purges and punishments, it cuts down on universities' financial resources, suppresses them through financial inspectors, in some places sells public university lands, and opens them to urban transformation. In other words, it forces the academics and students who may be opposed to him to silence and go abroad by making educational institutions officially inoperable and emptying them. In this sense, the oppression and pressure the Central European University faces are just one of many examples.

In the experiences in Eastern Europe, we see how nationalist-conservative populist regimes try to draw the boundaries of citizenship through universities. They try to ignite social polarization over the local and national values they build. They code those who do not conform to the heteronormative, patriarchal national values they define as elitist, perverted, and deviant. This moralist and indigenous discourse is undoubtedly very familiar in Turkey.

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This indigenous ideological framework is repeating as a pattern. Similar contents are sometimes reproduced by right-wing movements that learn from each other, for example, anti-LGBTI.

S.G.: This is an international network as well. There is also communication between right-wing organizations, ultra-conservatives, or fascists. From Poland to the USA to Brazil, such groups come together and share strategies and tactics.

S.A.: If there is such a partnership between the rulers or between the powers, if they borrow from each other and feed each other, so do the struggles; although they do not have a purely organic relationship, they inspire each other, observe each other, learn from each other's experience. The American University of Beirut (AUB) in Lebanon, for example. It actually has a past like Boğaziçi University. BU is nationalized in Turkey, but the AUB remains a private and autonomous university. There, academics established a union for the first time a year ago. The debates between them, the forms of action, etc. are very similar to the ones here. Therefore, the state of transnationalism prevails not only in governments but also in struggles. The face of Boğaziçi and the Turkish left opposition, in general, is more oriented towards the west. Thus, for example, joint meetings were held with participants from Greece during this process. I also attended various meetings. There were participants from Poland and Hungary. However, we should not ignore the experiences in the East, both in terms of power dynamics and the struggle practices that we can gain inspiration from. ☸



Interview by Cafer Solgun

University in Turkey: Where did we come from, and where are we headed?

The current problems faced by Turkish universities are substantially historical. Undermining academic freedom and autonomy have been an ongoing issue since the proclamation of the republic. On the other hand, despite all the pressures from political authorities, the university has managed to open freedom islets at times. Nevertheless, the quests of both academics and students made the university a platform where public opinion was processed. In this roundtable meeting with Fatmagül Berktaş, Füsün Üstel, and Murat Belge, members of the Citizenship Association, we discussed where Turkish universities came from and where they are headed.

Universities must be one of the most vital issues regarding the general situation and course of the country, especially education. We are with three valuable professors who will share their opinions and evaluations about the YÖK (Higher Education Council) system in universities. First of all, let's start with talking about what kind of legacy universities inherited during the republican period, which started with the abolition of Darülfünun and the establishment of Istanbul University.

Murat Belge: It's a long story with lots of details. As you know, Darülfünun was established during the reign of Abdülmecid with the efforts of Mustafa Reşit Pasha. When you go through the literature, sometimes you come across things that make you smile. For example, they could not find an astronomy teacher for the university. Thereupon, they made the Palace's Head of Astrology the chairman. Probably, astrology and astronomy are the two most contradictory branches. Although it was opened with shortcomings like this, it is an important institution. In the Republican era, in the 1930s, Mustafa Kemal thinks that Darülfünun should become a university. So Darülfünun is closed and reopened as a university with young academicians, many of whom have received new titles. When we consider how those people were chosen, we see a similar scene today. Is this merit or not? The situation is controversial. I conclude

that loyalty rather than merit seems to have been the main reason.

At the time, something no one had calculated beforehand, which in a sense could be called a miracle, happened. When Hitler came to power in 1933, the Jewish purge began. Jews in the universities who had not yet been purged ran to different countries, anticipating what will happen to them. Some of these people came to the eastern countries. And here, Mustafa Kemal made a very good decision and said, "Oh, let's get these guys." I now think that if Mustafa Kemal had not been there and had not made this decision, would the newly established university accept these Germans? It seems to me like it wouldn't. I'm not saying this based on any evidence. But I can say this by bringing together things like sociological observation and Turkey experience. They wouldn't have preferred such competitors for themselves. A lot of academics came. Philosophy, economics, law, agriculture, especially physicians, geologists, and these people established an important university with their works.

University, as a concept, harbors a contradiction since its establishment. In a way, this is a necessary and inevitable contradiction. The university is based on generating science/knowledge. For hundreds of years, starting with the oldest scientists, information about the

University, as a concept, harbors a contradiction since its establishment. In a way, this is a necessary and inevitable contradiction. The university is based on generating science/knowledge. But in addition to generating knowledge, they also have to transfer it to others. Generating knowledge and transferring it can become two contradictory forms of activity, a situation that has recently occupied universities worldwide.

unknown was generated at the university. But in addition to generating knowledge, they also have to transfer it to others. Generating knowledge and transferring it can become two contradictory forms of activity, a situation that has recently occupied universities all around the world.

So, with our rather late university experience are we able to produce knowledge? In which period did universities produce knowledge in Turkey? Did they produce it or did they compile it? I would not want to be unfair to anyone either. There are certainly



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

people who produce knowledge. But mostly, the university I see in Turkey is an institution that compiles the information and transfers it to the student. For example, if we consider institutions such as technical universities, let us say Ahmet Bey went to Germany in 1937 and worked on a dam. Mehmet Bey went to France in 1945 and worked on a dam. In 1960, Hüseyin Bey went elsewhere and worked on a dam. All three of them talk about their experience on how to build a dam. However, Turkey does not have any knowledge on how to build a

dam. Everyone tells what they learned, compiled, that is, what they know.

Füsun Üstel: There is a lot of blemish in the history of universities in Turkey. Therefore, it cannot be said that it fulfills a democratic university ideal. But I suppose it is necessary to say that there are interim periods.

Could a university committed to the state ideology and responsible for producing the state ideology produce knowledge/science in scientific terms?

The university is a dependent institution. But despite everything, certain faculties have their own unique structures, human tissues. That human texture actually gives the academics some freedom and the opportunity to breathe, albeit at certain points and with certain rules. That was the case until very recently.

F.Ü.: Of course not. However, there is probably no university in the world that is totally independent of the government. All universities, even universities in the most democratic countries, are involved with the power or power centers, be it state or capital, at some level. It is not possible to say that ours is any different. But when we look at this long past that Murat Belge talked about, we see that there were indeed much more painful periods. But let us not forget that, and Fatmagül may agree with this, a free environment could be established in the



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan



classroom in some cases – despite the relationship the university institution establishes with power or its dependence on power. It was so for a long time. Of course, this had various risks. Any student could report, or plain-clothes police were already stalking the universities. However, despite this situation, there were good departments in universities due to the faculty members. I think the departmental environments are more effective than the university environment. In other words, a university is an institution, a dependent institution. But despite everything, certain faculties have their unique structures, human tissues. That human texture actually gives the academics some freedom and the

opportunity to breathe, albeit at certain points and with specific rules. It was the case until very recently.

It should not be forgotten that –I am talking about public universities– academics are subject to the Civil Servants Law No. 657 in universities. This law defines an obligation for the lecturer in terms of loyalty to a certain ideology. This law is about loyalty to Turkish nationalism and adopting the Turkish nation's national moral, spiritual, and cultural values. And what is meant here is not only to adopt it but act to develop it. So there is a big problem here. As s/he steps into the university, a faculty member starts with this engagement.

With this engagement, the idea of freedom and autonomy is completely thrown away. However, at times we find an environment of freedom to a certain extent, depending on the individuals, in the research we do with our students. These moments are not scarce.

The same thing exists in the YÖK Law. Here, too, an ideological framework connects/surrounds you to raise generations loyal to Atatürk's principles and reforms and Atatürk's nationalism. Now, how will you generate science at the university by adhering to this ideological framework and your oath? This problem has existed since the establishment of the university. In



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

other words, the state's sensitivity to keep universities under control has not changed. On the contrary, it has become even more rigid in time. Is that so?

Fatmagül Berktaş: Indeed, it is correct. The state achieves this both by command and because people internalize it, especially after the early republic. In addition to all these, it is evident that YÖK exists to practice restrictions. Therefore, the question of whether there is university autonomy/freedom in Turkey or not is a very challenging issue. That is abundantly clear. But there is also the fact that people and departments can make a difference. For example, there were many places where there was an unspoken "contract" between the

instructor and the student, so there was a free discussion environment. I can call this some kind of islet of freedom. For example, this is what I experienced at Istanbul University, Faculty of Political Sciences. But today, those islets of freedom are being destroyed. Now I think this is a significant difference. Therefore, we are faced with a different situation than "this has always been the case."

Though it is impossible to discuss without considering the general environment, when asked what university is, what education is, the answer is primarily to prepare young people for life. This is a crucial point. To raise individuals who, once started, can walk their

own way, think with their own mind, criticize, question but mostly criticize themselves / their side. Today, none of these concepts come to mind when thinking about university. In the context of utilitarian thinking, it will provide a job and the student will join the economy as soon as possible; even if s/he does not participate in the economy, everything s/he learns will definitely serve something. Therefore, to learn for the sake of knowledge, be a knowledge lover, or be *talib-ül ilm* with the old terminology, these are underestimated, if not disregarded. It becomes much more permissible to command the academy about what to teach and what not to teach in such a climate. Same as before.

But now it is happening implacably. So without any embarrassment. Intervention is made by saying, "Of course, this is how it should be." All kinds of tools are used in this intervention; from changing the curriculum, closing departments, closing courses to terrorizing students, and teachers.

For us, the university was where you told the truth, but we knew it was where no truth was also unquestionable. Nowadays, telling the truth is out of the question, which is all related to the cultural, social, political environment. An attempt is made to create a culture of silence in the whole society. Since there are so many concerns about dismissal and job loss, academics can start censoring themselves. When you do this you will not be in the top 500, nor can achieve anything else. I want to say something in parentheses. University autonomy will soon be included among the criteria for university rankings. Where are we now? Where will we be then? This is how we should think. In 2011, Turkey ranked 28th among 29 European countries in terms of university autonomy. Now we have to think beyond that.

I want to talk about the relationship between ethics and university because I think it is related to what I have said so far. After all, we are talking about generating information within ethical standards. Taking ethics only as the control of sexuality and specifically control the sexuality of women and LGBT individuals means that this mentality is not aware of academic ethics. Even if they are aware, they do not see any

The lack of autonomy in the academy should not be discussed merely from the perspective of right violations. Of course, academics are expelled. Of course, students are terrorized. They are subjected to police prosecution and all kinds of maltreatment. But there is an effort to create a culture of silence not only in universities but also in society as a whole.

trouble in violating these ethics. What impressed me so much about the Boğaziçi University rectorship incident was seeing what was written about Melih Bulu when he graduated. It said in the yearbook: "Better lose the saddle than the horse. One is obliged to cheat to get good marks," etc. Certainly, young people often say things they do not mean. If it is specific to the youth period, it is not that much of an issue. What matters is what he does later in life. When we look at Melih Bulu, we see that this way of thinking has become his philosophy in life. In other words, we see that he applies this not only in his academic career but also in his entire life career. Therefore, I think such an understanding of ethics or lack of ethics has disastrous consequences. For example, it enables whistleblowing at the university. It breaks the agreement between the student and the instructor in the classroom that Füsün Üstel drew attention to. We know that after 2016, students personally recorded the words and lectures of the instructors and reported them. In other words, the student is encouraged to report the instructor, the instructor to report the student, and the colleague to report her/his colleague. This is what totalitarian governments want the most. The ideal of creating a society in which no one trusts anyone. Obviously, there will not be creative thinking in such a university, in such a society.

But I also want to say that, in Turkey, students still resist at the academy. We see that. We saw it at the Academics for Peace incident. We saw it in the issue of Statutory Decrees victims. Today at Boğaziçi University, we see the solidarity of the instructors and students and the solidarity of the students. The university is unity in diversity. Boğaziçi University is now showing this. This should also be underlined. This is also an islet of freedom. It is also an islet of hope, a hope for the future. Indeed, it has very significant aspects today that are different from the past.

What would you say about the state of the universities during the coup periods? For example, it is said that the 1961 Constitution, which was adopted after the May 27 coup, "provided a relative democratic environment; it was the most democratic of all constitutions to date." How did this affect the universities?

M.B.: Its reflection was that the junta, called the National Unity Committee, which seized the country's rule, liquidated 147 faculty members at universities. We can say that the 147s are a very heterogeneous community. Some of them were thrown out because they were communists, some were thrown out because they were Islamists, and some were thrown out because they were assumed to be homosexuals. It is an awkward situation. However, with the 147s, the relationships between those who came to power with the coups to follow and the universities that we call "knowledge nest" have taken on a new guise.

In the period following the expulsion of the 147s, they said, again, with the initiatives of various people from the university, let us get them back. And they were taken back. I should also tell you that almost all of those, known as the 147s, who were liquidated, returned to university. Then comes March 12. Nearly ten years after the May 27 coup, a heavier purge of universities took place on March 12.

In general, the government's view of the university gradually transformed from a place transferring the compiled knowledge to a place where knowledge was dangerous. And when we came to September 12, it became clear that knowledge was "detrimental." There is a consensus on this issue on the ruling front. Therefore, it is necessary to eliminate those who transfer detrimental knowledge. Furthermore, hand over knowledge to be transferred to reliable people. However, our triple-coup period



Vignette: İsmail Cem Özkan

brought the university from one point to the other. I am talking about a resulting decline. We are in a period when the university has become unworthy of the title university.

Murat Belge, when AKP came to power in 2002, one of their promises was to abolish YÖK. They declared that the autonomy of YÖK was in their short-term action plan. But they no longer have such an agenda. So what is AKP trying to do in universities? Is there a vision, a strategic plan? Are they intervening in the universities within an objective?

M.B.: I think they have a plan, but it is a straightforward, primitive one. I believe they have a plan that has nothing to do with the concept of democracy or with the concept of the university in our minds, no matter how controversial it may be, and that does not envision anything other than loyalty to them. For example, they stated that they would abolish YÖK, but they continue to use YÖK in its current form. This is one of the situations we are used to in Turkish politics. Another example is the 10 percent electoral threshold, for instance. When they set this electoral threshold, everybody made some noise saying, "How can this be?" But since then, so many came to power or gone, but none of them say let's change this threshold. This is the ruling saying, I accept everything that will make it easier for me to become an oppressive power. Therefore, the YÖK Law already has a mentality of centralizing everything as much as possible, which is very beneficial for the government.

What I worry about the most is the period of coups. These coups used to happen in the name of Kemalism. They had reasons such as deviation from Atatürk's path. There were slogans such as, "Science, knowledge, is the only true guide in life." At the point we are today, there is nothing of that sort anymore. They may still say that the only true guide is science, but when asked which science it is, they would say "fiqh science" or something. This is what they understand of science, and they try to transfer it to people. AKP is trying to institutionalize this to a large extent, but this started to spread after the September 12 practices on YÖK in the previous periods. In some places, I met a variety of faculty members that baffled

me. They rudely purged the lecturers they did not like. New universities are established continually. They are launching a university in each city, just like making any municipal investment. Because what they understand from the university is a building! Rooms and enough desks, here is the university. This is their understanding. Therefore, the understanding of providing education based on religious values started before the AKP came to power. And we came across such people.

"We have not been able to dominate culturally," says the President. "We will raise a devout generation," he says. How will they do it? Universities will be one of the important areas/fields of the process of doing this. Of course, they will start with the family, they will start from the early education stages, but the final step will be the university. These statements already reveal the kind of university they design in their minds. When we observe their behavior, praise be, they are consistent. They do what they say. As a matter of fact, they damaged the university heavily.

In fact, the university has become controversial all over the world. In terms of what it should be, how it should be, what should be done. When we look at the universities of the countries we envy, we see that the business logic has spread like an octopus and has taken over several things. Like a business. These are things that need to be explained at length. This is the case all around the world, and this is nothing to contradict the AKP mentality at length. In other words, one of the objectives they have is to create devout graduates who will follow any word of Reis. Indeed, a few should qualify as business managers, economists, and so on since there is also the economic side of things. It is also necessary to have cadres that will handle and do things that are unique to this government and not known to us much, not like things we know from before. For example, the university should also educate a Central Bank General Manager who will make the President happy. These are what they do.

Turkey has issues with democratization. There are issues of harmonization with the European Union. Although it is said that "If you don't think about it, it does



Illustration: İsmail Cem Özkan

not exist," there is the Kurdish Issue. Alevis have issues and demands. There are ECHR decisions that have not been met. Don't the universities need to have a scientific stance and attitude on the problems of the country?

F.Ü.: What Murat Belge just said is very accurate. There is something called the "Business Revolution" worldwide, and universities have become institutions offered to this "revolution." But we should add that we know that academic freedom is not mentioned in the Higher Education Law of 1981. So there is no word of it in the law. When we think of it from the perspective of the spirit of laws, it has never existed, and it only gradually became a talking point in universities. In 2011, the law was amended in some ways, but the concept of academic freedom did not exist. You may recall that in 2011, after 30 years, the restructuring of higher education started. A number of long workshops were held with academicians of all levels from different universities. Meanwhile, the opinions were asked about what kind of a university it should be. I think there were two most critical points at this stage. One of them was that suggestion. There were five principles in the proposal: diversity, institutional autonomy and accountability, performance evaluation, competition, and finally, financial flexibility, multi-source revenue structure, and quality assurance. In one of these five items, the word academic freedom is loosely mentioned. I had looked into the bill at the time. All this change is made 30 years later, and academic freedom is mentioned in only three places. What it meant is also not clear. Let us say that academic freedom prevails in Turkey, but what

mechanisms will be mobilized in case of a violation? Who will determine if this a violation? How will it be determined? And what are the mechanisms that will be implemented? There is nothing to clarify these questions.

Recently, a friend of mine on social media said, "France is in an awful situation. The academics are divided into various camps, and they report each other; there is a debate called Islamo-gauchisme (Islam-leftism) in France right now. It is a little everywhere, but it broke out very intensely in France." My friend asked, "How did we get to this point?" Now, this is a fundamental question. Because it means asking yourself how you could not see it coming and what kind of mistakes you made as well as asking what needs to be done from this point on. Currently, the situation in France is terrible. We think that our colleagues we know are in one group. They were fragmented in the democratic fraction and even initiated a discussion of taking an oath of loyalty to the principles of the Republic when entering the university. In other words, this business revolution, an increasingly conservative understanding of the university, gradually began to settle in.

What Fatmagül Berktaş says is very important. Some courses and departments are removed. What does it mean? These courses and departments are usually the ones about the vulnerable segments. That is woman, ethnicity, nationalism. And what does that mean?

You are eliminating the knowledge of those vulnerable groups and the subjects of that knowledge from university education. You eliminate it from the curriculum. You ensure that students, next generations, do not encounter that information.

You may remember that in 2005, an Armenian Conference was going to be held in BU. It was like doomsday, and eventually, it took place at Bilgi University. I think that was very critical. Cemil Çiçek, Minister of the Interior of the time, said, "They betrayed us." I mention this because it was an indication that the university has left its dependent role and was becoming a "threat." That was their breakout point. And the political class started to blame the university as an institution. You may even remember that Idris Naim Şahin said: "Terrorism has various places, it can operate in different places, its backyard is an association, it is education, it is a chair at the university." Our community was accused of being "mankurt" and we were put in front of the society as a "threat" in the period that started with the 2005 Armenian Conference. If the university had come out of that period, that is, at all these breaking points, we would not have reached this point. But, of course, the university is not just the history of resistance. When we consider the history of the universities worldwide, not only in our country, we see that it is also a history of allegiances with power. While someone resists, others swear allegiance.

However, after 2005, we witness that universities gradually turn into allegiance, and rectors are among those who can swear allegiance.

Programs are very important. And it was not only the courses that were removed, but conference cancellations have also increased a lot. What does it mean to cancel the conference? The students lost contact with the people coming from the outside and the inside of the university. Both personal contacts and students' contact with the subjects and the fields were cut off. What happens when preparing for a conference? The space is covered with banners. By preventing students to see those posters, certain areas in the visual memory of the students were also erased. By interfering with those posters, the visual material on the subject from the walls, they actually removed the people, the speakers and the moderators. Certain people were constantly prevented from entering the university. Information channels were closed. And it is happening all over the world. Let's call it the new right or radical right, populist right, whatever we like to call it, attacking by owning the opposing concepts and mechanisms. For example, Le Pen and similar extreme right-wingers in Europe also use Gramsci's concept of "cultural hegemony."

Gökhan Çetinkaya published an academic freedom text in his time. It has nine items. But that too remained on the table. He was already about to leave



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

then. He left the university by establishing it and justifying himself a bit. So today, what we all agree on is; something different is happening today. Perhaps various things happened all the time, and there were a university or university departments that resisted that pressure. There was always something. Now that area is deserted. So it's a complete withdrawal and self-censorship. I recently saw a study due to another conference, remarkably interesting research. This is a study carried out by Taştan and Ördem in 2020. They conducted interviews with a group of academics on Academic Freedom in State of Emergency Universities. It concludes, 49 percent of the academics fear being expelled by statutory decree. One-third of them practice self-censorship in their lectures or publications on sensitive issues such as the Kurdish Issue, Armenian Genocide, and LGBTIQ. 84 percent of the academics fear being punished for their social media posts that criticize the government. This being the case, a culture of free approach, conscience, or criticism is not possible. This society is terrorized. The academics are further terrorized, and the student's contact with a lot of areas has been cut off. The women's issue has become a dangerous issue now. The women's liberation, which is the epitome of Turkish modernization, is being shelved in one way or another. Knowledge and practice of thinking are annihilated.

In fact, we can say that the situation of universities is a direct mirror of the general condition, appearance, and course of the country, society. We are going through a period of silence, frustration, erosion, withdrawal; academics fear losing their jobs and students fear being expelled from the university. I don't know if there is an answer free from the general course of the country, but how can the university be freed? So what needs to be done?

F.B.: I think islets of freedom still exist. I mean, all that has been said is true; all is real; I can add many things too. But on the other hand, Turkish society has also become very diverse. In other words, I think society doesn't fit into this dress anymore. For example, students have been under such pressure for many years. Conferences have not been allowed for at least five years, neither have the meetings and clubs. But students still have their meetings

and their shows among themselves. Moreover, they take on the problems of the entire society as their own. I saw this at Boğaziçi University. They advocate diversity in themselves, which is very valuable. Religious and non-religious students stand together defending LGBTIQ rights. This is a very important example. Society does not give allegiance. Women do amazing things. Today, we come across the attitudes typical of big cities or higher educated classes regarding women's freedom locally and in the most unlikely places. The society also reacts to environmental issues. What the government wants to achieve is very clear. But it's not that easy. I think the important thing here is that being native and nationality are constantly warmed and brought to the agenda. What's that? This is an issue of universal values not being valid. Or in China, Iran, where relativism prevails, they say, "Human rights do not apply to us." They defend and practice execution. Now they want to bring it back. That is why ECHR decisions, European Union rules, etc. seem to be under the influence of Westernism or made look so. The cause of all kinds of disasters is presented as "Westernization." The reciprocity of this in the university is to perceive the Erasmus Program as an "agent training project." Both Kemalist instructors and AKP supporters do this. With the Boğaziçi University resistance, "being native" rhetoric reached the point of saying, "There should not be an education in a foreign language, do we need them, why do we learn foreign languages?"

This understanding finds a response in some places, but I do not believe it will find a response in the entire Turkish society. These are the breaking points, and actually, the issues where the power is fragile. One must see that side of it too. I agree with Füsün Üstel. Universities in Turkey did not do their part enough. But I think the Turkish society is not a society like it was in the 50s, the 60s, or the 80s. Benefiting from Hannah Arendt, I always say that there are dark periods. But there are still islets of freedom. Especially young people and women are establishing and spreading these islets.

Universities, university youth, were one of the focal points of the opposition to the impositions of the state, dominant policies, and injustices in society,

especially in the 60s, 70s, and 80s. In the periods when the daunting effects of the September 12 period continued, for example, in 1987, there was a very effective, massive "No to YÖK!" campaign. Universities' demand for autonomy was an issue that was always on the agenda and was embraced by academicians and student masses. I also attach great importance to the resistance at Boğaziçi University, but there are universities in 81 provinces. There was, so to speak, partial support from METU and a few universities. To what extent do you think the students are involved in the problems of the country? When I ask how universities can be freed, I also wonder about your comparisons with the past.

F.B.: What you say is true. We all have been there. We grew up with such a culture. We tried to convey it to our students. But in the 90s I saw that my students have a different understanding of resistance and opposition. Even the academicians did not know what the YÖK Law was. Some rectors came and discovered what was happening in that law, just as this government did. For example, Alemdaroğlu read, underlined, and started to implement the previously unknown or not practiced clauses, sentence by sentence, at Istanbul University. Suddenly we woke up then. We came across the details of the law that we know in general. But today I think, the issue is something different, it is beyond the issue of YÖK and autonomy. Universities are very suppressed, scared, etc. All this is done to spread a culture of silence and whistleblowing. But I think there is some resistance to this in the majority of society. In other words, if there is resistance from the university today, it will not come out of its demand for the YÖK Law to be lifted. That is not our problem today. Today we are faced with something very different, young people and people from various segments of society also see it. Those islets of freedom that I mentioned continue to exist. I just said it, we worked for 20 years and created a department with great effort, and within two months, they destroyed it. But good researches are being made all over Anatolia/outside big cities. After I retired, I had the opportunity to read them more. There is something that has penetrated society to a certain extent. A situation entirely determined by the government has

happened for a while, but I think this is gradually loosening and cannot penetrate the whole society despite all the means they have.

F.Ü.: With the expulsions, the government got rid of the democrats extensively in universities. But science is not only done within the university, it can also be done outside. As a matter of fact, we have seen it with the Decree-Law victims. Solidarity Academies are crucial right now because they continue to keep alive the disciplines and fields the government wants to dispose of. Yes, the academy came out of the university to some extent. But there are still very valuable people inside. Many academics have, from the moment they shut the classroom door, maintained their attitudes that will not please everyone. Let's say the institution collapses, the institution is terrible, but there is still such a thing as an academy in Turkey. There are academicians who follow ethical rules, have critical thinking skills, are well-equipped, curious, and open to world issues; I think it is not very important whether they are within the walls of a university building or not.

I started to see this gradually; the more problematic the universities get in sharing information, the better Solidarity Academies, which we call academy, or various institutes and other institutions get. They fill the conference rooms. And let's not forget that, even after the 80s, there was resistance against YÖK. But today's diversified resistance form is better. In the 80s, LGBTI could not even

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be pronounced. So there was another kind of conservatism. Yes, there was a political struggle, but that political struggle excluded some concepts, some people, institutions and only listened to the voice of its own politics. The style of today's young people is much different; they continue to exist with a variety of attitudes, behaviors, and thoughts. They are few, yes. But we cannot say that Turkish society or the universities have always been very democratic.

F.B.: Füsün also mentioned, but I want to repeat it. Student opposition in the past was very conservative and limited. No offense. I would say it to their faces, too, then. In the 90s, they used to demonstrate at Istanbul University, we wanted to support them, and we used to

join. But they did not know how to create a slogan other than the slogan, "Beyazıt will be fascism's grave." I recall very well telling them to create something new. The students are doing something new now. Moreover, they are constantly doing something new. Just yesterday, Boğaziçi University students uploaded a video on Youtube. It's unbelievable. Well done! So there is something different. They are breaking the routine. It's good to break the routine.

M.B.: I agree with what Fatmagül Berktaş and Füsün Üstel just said. The transformation of an entire society into a democratic society, with a short history of interaction with democracy to start with, takes a lot of time and is difficult to achieve. The masses do not know what it means to be democratic per se. You need intermediate levels. How democratic are those who shout democracy at the middle levels? This is a separate and serious issue. There was a resistance movement in the 70s and 80s. But it was extremely narrow in itself. It was a narrow-minded approach that put everyone in line by saying, "Don't try to widen your point of view or you will deviate," and defining revisionism in strict boundaries. Girls were "sisters" then, who were obliged to bring tea to male revolutionaries talking about making a revolution. LGBTI could never be talked about. Therefore, it is meaningless to claim that, "The movement in the university was a movement that would bring democracy, but they prevented it." Also, as it was quickly turned into a right-



16 Mart 1978'de İstanbul Üniversitesi'nden çıkan öğrencilerin üzerine bomba atıldı; 5 öğrenci ölü, 34 öğrenci yaralı.



left conflict, those who called themselves rightist or leftist immediately went back to their camps, to vicious slogans and not thinking or speaking anything other than that, etc.

Today, the university has lost its knowledge-generating capacity to a great extent. In today's hi-tech era of humanity, steeped in ideologies, the university has become a very archaic and historical tourist attraction. Research laboratories and institutes are insufficient. For example, universities are not researching how to send astronauts to Mars. If they manage to send astronauts to Mars in the next 50 years, perhaps 80 years later than that, there will be some historians in the university who will write about how we got there. But the scientists who will go to Mars will be from private laboratories. Therefore, the benefits of the university in terms of generating knowledge have decreased.

This reminds me of an article that was published in a newspaper in England towards the end of the 50s that said, "The British higher education system is disastrous, and nothing is taught about science; nothing is known about science and technology. It can't go on like this." Thereupon, a literature professor from Cambridge University published a lengthy article and stated, "What should be essential in the university is literature." Literature means criticizing life. Learning literature is not redundant. Studying literature teaches you to look at the world and the issue of morality critically; literature gives it all. I agree with what both authors said. Of course, Mendel's Law, for example, also needs to be learned. The place to do these, after all, is the university. But the university is no longer the institution exploring how to get to Mars; I see it as an institution that compiles information that has already been generated.

In the 1960s, when the strict anti-communism and cold war ideology of the 1950s loosened around the world, social sciences assumed importance. The world did not change with more social sciences being studied at the university, but this led to critical thinking about the world, looking at the course of society, and thinking about what might happen. But considering the years of rulers such as Thatcher in England, Reagan in America,

We complain about our situation, but social sciences have been turned into unnecessary hobbies and superfluous items for both American and British universities. Therefore, the problem we face is universal. The university needs to question its purpose and find its own answer this time instead of adopting a statesman's answer. In Turkey, the improvement of the university is something that can only start with the absence of this government in the first place. With this government in power, we can not even think about it.

Kohl in Germany, they completely liquidated it. We complain about our situation, but social sciences have been turned into unnecessary hobbies and superfluous items for both American and British universities. Therefore, the problem we face is universal. The university needs to question its purpose and find its own answer this time instead of adopting a statesman's answer. In Turkey, the improvement of the university is something that can only start with the absence of this government in the first place. With this government in power, we cannot even think about it.

I want to add an anecdote. It was the first time I read a Habermas book years ago. I have heard about Habermas, but I was reading him for the first time. It was a compilation of articles. The first article was about a university in Israel. A university has been established in Israel that mainly specializes in agriculture. And the university is built on the edge of a desert. Therefore, they have a practical program, and simultaneously they are reclaiming the desert. Habermas is a Marxist writer. While reading, I thought that he would tell, "that's what you call education." But after Habermas finished the chapter on what the university does, he wrote something that would translate as: "I am not convinced with such a university." What you call university creates knowledge, but this should not be linked to practical knowledge. Let somebody else do it, whose job is to think about how to reclaim the desert because the university is oriented towards pure knowledge. At that time, Vahit Turhan was our department head, and he was a professor I was fond of. He said the following: "Eğitim tenzil-i zat-ı sıfatır." This means enriching. Enriching the attributes of the person. This actually means how do I reclaim the drouthy areas in me, not how do I reclaim the

desert. Vahit Bey was a very wise man. I loved that statement of his too. This is my understanding of university. If I shout this out in today's world, about 150 academics will chase me with sticks in their hands.

F.Ü.: In fact, maybe we should think this way. Massive universities actually mean democratization. The university is becoming an institution where more and more students from diverse segments can attend. But there is a problem between the massification and the founding idea of the university. The university is an elite institution, after all. And there is a character mismatch between massification and elitist knowledge production. But, of course, the university has changed a lot. Different generations participated in this change. There have also been positive changes. If we keep making dire predictions about the future, we will lose that institution, too. That institution can be changed, transformed from within, and we can struggle to make it more democratic. Otherwise, this is a disaster; yes, it is a disaster. But it is not a good story saying that we have no strength to resist this disaster.

I always care about the relationship between the instructor and the student. It should still be seen as an achievement. It is necessary to see the problem, not through the rhetoric of losing but through gains and how much more can be gained. Yes, knowledge is also produced outside, science can be done everywhere, and it can be done in different places. But knowledge generation and information sharing within the university are also precious. We will fight for this. We are the old generation, and I do not know if we still have the strength for it. But there are young academics who are ethical and conscientious. I think we should trust them. ☸

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO TURKISH UNIVERSITY HISTORY: AUTONOMY, FREEDOM, RECTORATE

How to comprehend the relationship between the principles of academic autonomy and freedom? With what kind of needs did academic autonomy come to life in Turkey's universities' history, and to what extent? Cenk Yiğiter seeks answers to these questions in this article he wrote based on his doctoral dissertation. He discusses the dynamics behind the anti-democratic practices, which have become entirely prominent recently, over the contradictory historical development of the autonomy principle.



In the process of Ottoman-Turkish modernization, the “adventure” of higher education and universities began in the second half of the 18th century. It was born as a product of the Ottoman Empire’s –which remained at the borders of the center of capitalism, an empire that was gradually falling behind the dynamics of capitalism and the imperialist era– efforts to modernize the state organization, especially the army. In the first place, the issue was to equip the military with modern weapons with the rush of military defeats, which would also turn into deep political traumas. Then, the effort to adopt modern warfare techniques quickly.

The beginning of corporate engineering education in the Ottoman Empire coincided with the burning of the Ottoman navy by the Russian navy in Çeşme Bay in 1770. In 1773, the Hendese Chamber-Shipyard Technical University (*Hendeshane*) was established within the military shipyard. This institution,

which will be named *Mühendishane-i Bahri Hümayun* three years later, is considered the predecessor of not only the Naval Academy but also the Istanbul Technical University. As a matter of fact, both Istanbul Technical University and the Naval Academy determine the establishment date as 1773. In addition, Istanbul University Istanbul Faculty of Medicine defines its establishment as 1827. The year 1827 is the year of the establishment of the *Tıphane-i Amire* (Military Medical Academy), which was established within the army.

By the 19th century, the issue would cease to be just an effort to quickly integrate modern war weapons and the techniques of using and producing these weapons into the army. The modern organization of the military as a whole led to the goal of rebuilding this organization with military personnel who had passed through modern western training. This process, which aimed at the army’s total modernization, had to rise to the state’s total modernization goal at some stage. As a matter of fact, financing a modern army would bring financial reforms, the reorganization of the state, international financing and the search for alliances, a series of legal reforms, and structural transformations that would come to the agenda with the *Tanzimat* and *Islahat* processes. Ultimately, all this will put bureaucracy at the center of reform; this need would give birth to the *Mekteb-i Mülkiye* (School of Political Sciences), which was the predecessor of the Ankara University Faculty of Political Sciences, in 1859 in a chamber of the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Nezareti*), and in 1867 the *Mekteb-i Sultani*, the predecessor of the Galatasaray High School and the Galatasaray University. When it was difficult to find students for modern military schools and these newly established schools, primary education and establishing a central public education organization came to the fore as an issue. This problem created the need for trained teachers and education bureaucrats. The necessity of rapidly raising these human resources triggered a rapid process of higher educationalization by the state.

The goal of bringing teachers to the primary education process, teachers, and education bureaucrats to raise those teachers was to call on stage I.

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the young Republic, higher education and the developing university were tasked with the ideological construction of the new Republic in addition to the task of modernizing the state organization.

Darülfünun, which means “House of Science.” After two unsuccessful attempts in 1845 and 1869, *Darülfünun-ı Şahane* was founded in 1900. Darülfünun would set the goal of training manpower such as engineers and managers in line with the needs of the developing industrial society, as well as the purpose of training personnel for the state.¹

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the young Republic at the end of World War I, higher education and the developing university were tasked with the ideological construction of the new Republic in addition to the task of modernizing the state organization. Thus, Ankara Law School, which was the predecessor of Ankara University Faculty of Law, was opened within the body of the Ministry of Justice on 5 November 1925. During the establishment process of the Ankara Law School, its primary goal was set to train “reformist lawyers who were free from fanaticism”.² At the foundation ceremony of the school, M. Kemal Atatürk described this new school as “the institution that will be the sanction of the Republic.” Although the Istanbul Darülfünunu educated the founders and first teachers of the Ankara Law School, the school represented a new beginning. M. Kemal Atatürk challenged the Ottoman Empire, the *ancien régime*’s legacy Darülfünun’s school of law with a new, revolutionary law school to be established in the new capital of the young Republic.

The Young Republic took over the Istanbul Darülfünunu from the Ottoman Empire. Although the Darülfünun was



not immediately abolished, it was a symbol of the *ancien régime* in the eyes of the founding cadres of the Republic. Since the first years of the Republic, it has been criticized for failing to adapt to the newly established Republic, the “Reforms,” the “Turkish revolution”; and the dose of these criticisms gradually increased. By 1930, the one-party regime was institutionalized. A university structuring suitable for this autocratic way the Republic took on rapidly was possible with the closure of the Istanbul Darülfünunu, one of the last symbols of the *ancien régime*. Thus, with Law No. 2252 enacted on August 1, 1933, Istanbul University was founded.³ The Istanbul Darülfünunu was abolished with the law, which was unanimously accepted in the Turkish Grand National Assembly on May 31, 1933, without any discussion, and the employment relationship of all the academic staff within its body ended the same day. 83 of these faculty members were appointed to Istanbul University, while the remaining 157 were liquidated from the university.⁴

Istanbul University, the first university of the Republic established by law, was born with a great purge. The organizational style of Istanbul University was in no way reminiscent of a university. It seemed completely like a state college, a state high school within the Ministry of Education’s (*Maarif Vekaleti*) hierarchy. In this process, it is not likely to talk about an area of academic freedom within the body of Istanbul University and to say that the university and other bodies that make up the university have an area of institutional autonomy. While the Ministry of Education has the power to appoint all the organs of the university and determine all decision processes, the university trustee (rector), deans, and all the organs and boards related to the university are in a hierarchical sequence to the Ministry of Education and therefore to the political power.

While Istanbul University represented the university landscape of Turkey’s single-party period, simultaneously, another academic institution, Ankara High Agricultural Institute, was established in Ankara in 1933. This institute, which is the predecessor of Ankara University Faculty of Agriculture, can also be considered one of Ankara University’s important forerunners. The

The Young Republic can be at peace with an autonomous and democratic university in technical-practical expectations rather than political and ideological expectations. However, when ideological and political expectations come into play, the university is organized as a state department under the hierarchy of political power.

establishment purpose of Ankara High Institute of Agriculture was to carry out R&D activities in line with the provision of agricultural development and to train the necessary workforce for the modernization of agriculture. Therefore, it was largely free from the ideological duties attributed to Istanbul University, as the expectation of the institute to produce practical results regarding development was at the forefront. As a result of this distinctness, we see an entirely different university structure. In line with the views of German academics, the political power would approve the organization of a university extensively following the Humboldt model. This new institute had a serious autonomy area vis-à-vis the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture. The rector and other institute bodies were determined by the boards and delegations formed by the staff of instructors. In the process of determining the rector, even the instructor assistants-assistants committee

had an influence. Again, the political power did not have legal authority in the decision-making processes of the university. Apparently, the Young Republic can be at peace with an autonomous and democratic university in technical-practical expectations rather than political and ideological expectations. However, when ideological and political expectations come into play, the university is organized as a state department under the hierarchy of political power.

With the end of World War II, the one-party regime will come to an end. In the new world order established after the war, the Republic of Turkey wants to define itself as a part of the “free world,” the capitalist world that comes together under liberal-democratic values. Although not the only determinant, the single-party regime has become more unsustainable because of this. There would be a need for a new university organization during the transition to multi-party politics, for two reasons: i) The universities of the Turkish Republic, which expresses itself around liberal democratic principles and is in the process of integration into the capitalist world, should not resemble the universities of outdated, discredited autocratic-fascist regimes. ii) Multi-party politics will soon be introduced, and the political power will probably change with the popular vote.

For the Republic elite, which reigned under the rule of a single-party but now has to withdraw, a power change with popular vote seems inevitable shortly. In this sense, the university should not be presented to those who will come to power by referendum shortly, but rather should be established as autonomous from the government based on popular vote. Under these conditions, the CHP government, which was preparing

The concept of university autonomy did not come to the fore as a concept related to the principle of academic freedom, and this leap in autonomy did not cause a leap in the field of academic freedom. It is possible to directly follow this in the 1948 DTCF (the Faculty of Languages, History, and Geography) liquidation process and the adventure of the Democrat Party government with the university.

to hand over the power, enacted the University Law No. 4936 in 1946. In this sense, the political power was actually making a move to reduce the power of its successor in this area while abandoning its domination over the university.

With Law No. 4936, the concept of “university autonomy” enters our political history. The aim is to make the university autonomous from the new political power determined by popular vote after the soon-to-be change of rule. In this process, there are no expectations, neither from the university, the civil society, nor the market for the university’s transformation. The concept of university autonomy did not come to the fore as a concept related to the principle of academic freedom, and this leap in autonomy did not cause a leap in the field of academic freedom. It is possible to directly follow this in the 1948 DTCF (the Faculty of Languages, History, and Geography) purge and the adventure of the Democrat Party government with the university. While the anti-communist paranoia of the Cold War was crushing the university, an understanding of autonomy not associated with academic freedom made no sense.

This leap in the axis of the autonomy concept regarding the university consists of a maneuver regarding the position taken in international relations and the possible future power change. For the university, autonomy is just one of the tools to implement the principle of academic freedom, which enables the basic activities of the university to be carried out. In this sense, autonomy is a concept that aims to establish academic freedom and develops around the principle of academic freedom. However, the concept of autonomy, both in the political history of Turkey and in the university culture, took its place disconnected from this context when the single-party regime would come to an end long before the introduction of the academic freedom concept. Even in Turkey’s left-socialist opposition, the concept of academic freedom would start to be used at the end of the 90s, and the term autonomy would always replace the revolutionary-democratic demands regarding the university.

The University Law of 1946 is the pinnacle of a democratic university model based on university autonomy and autonomy in Turkish political history and

The process of achieving a constitutional guarantee for university autonomy is not a product of demands coming from within the university, society, and the market; It is the product of an intra-state discussion and conflict process on the formation of political power.

university history. The Democratic Party, which came to power by popular vote after the single-party regime, took many actions to eradicate and disable this law with the effort of building a plebiscitary dictatorship and succeeded. After the Democratic Party rule ended with a military coup on May 27, 1960, the 1961 Constitution, which was made under the leadership of the military junta, would contain the basic principles of the 1946 University Law, and university autonomy would thus gain constitutional guarantee.



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

However, it is necessary to draw attention to the same point here: The process of achieving constitutional assurance for university autonomy is not a product of the demands coming from within the university, from the civil society, or the market. Instead, it is the product of an intra-state discussion and conflict process on the formation of political power. For this reason, university autonomy has come to the fore as a concept that defines the university not as a tool of the academic freedom principle but as a “supra-political” institution that aims to keep the political power determined by the popular vote under its tutelage.

The “golden age” of Turkish universities at the legal level, the University Law of 1946, and the process of gaining constitutional guarantees of the basic principles of this law in 1961 would get the first blow in the process that started with the Military Memorandum of March

In the university model drawn by the Higher Education Law No. 2547 and the 1982 Constitution, only the legal personality of the university was recognized and the legal personality, autonomy, and decision-making authority of faculties and institutes were virtually eliminated.

12, 1971. The March 12 Military Regime would consider university autonomy to be one of the reasons for the “anarchy environment” in the country. After that, the process of cutting off autonomy

would begin with both constitutional and legal regulations. Finally, with the military coup of September 12, 1980, the 1961 Constitution would be shelved entirely. The Higher Education Law No. 2547 would come into effect on November 6, 1981, before the new Constitution came into effect. Both this law and the 1982 Constitution, a product of fascist military rule, would describe an authoritarian university model that was completely contrary to the spirit of the Universities Law of 1946.

In the university model drawn by the Higher Education Law No. 2547 and the 1982 Constitution, only the legal personality of the university was recognized and the legal personality, autonomy, and decision-making authority of faculties and institutes were virtually eliminated. Although a university with scientific autonomy is mentioned, only the university rectorate



was an autonomous body. Thus, the office of the rectorate was placed at the center of the discussions on university autonomy, which had no established relation regarding academic freedom. While the decision and representation authority of the university emerges through the rector's office, university autonomy, which has lost ties with the principle of academic freedom, became an expression of the rector's –“one-man's”– autonomy, not from the political power in the broadest sense, but from the Constitution, law, basic university values and academic freedom principle, and an expression of her/his absolute dominance over the other components of the university.

While all other bodies, delegations, and boards of the university were subject to the tutelage and hierarchy of the university rector, the university rectors were also under the hierarchy and full

control of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). The authority to determine both YÖK members and university rectors was finally given to the President. In the mindset of the September 12 junta and the 1982 Constitution, the President was conceived as a “supra-political” actor who will supervise the political power determined by the popular vote, keep it under guardianship, has no political responsibilities, but is based on the superior interests of the Republic of Turkey, survival and “national security” within the framework of the political understanding of September 12. In this sense, the post-September 12 universities would be autonomous from the political power determined by the popular vote. Still, they would be institutions linked to the supra-political “state,” which was established around the national security ideology, represented by the President, which is considered a guardianship and semi-military office.

The university model of September 12 began to be criticized in many ways with the transition to a civilian administration in 1982. In this model, the rector was almost an absolute chief-president-one man with dictatorial powers for the university under his rule. This “one-man,” on the other hand, was determined by the President among the candidates proposed by YÖK, which is subject to the President, and subsequently managed the university under the tutelage and sometimes hierarchy of YÖK. All organs, boards, and delegations from the lowest units of the university to the faculties were subordinated by the “one-man,” namely the rector. The most fundamental development affecting this micro-dictator role of the university rector since 6 November 1981, when Law No. 2547 was issued, occurred in 1992 during the DYP-SHP coalition. The amendment made in the Higher Education Law No. 2547 added a candidate selection process made





by faculty members to determine the rector in public universities. According to this, the six candidates with the highest vote in the election, in which only the privileged voters of the faculty members of the university constitute the election, were notified to YÖK, the YÖK proposes three of these six candidates to the President, and ultimately the President appoints the rector.

In the model that came with the 1992 amendment, university students, university staff, and instructor assistants did not have any right to vote. In this model, only faculty members had the right to vote to determine the candidate for the rector. However, there was no guarantee that the candidate with the majority votes from faculty members would become the university rector. The

candidate, who was in sixth place in the election, could be among the top three candidates to be proposed by YÖK, and perhaps this candidate, who has only a couple of votes, could be appointed as the rector by the President. This was about all to the "great reform" of 1992 regarding the appointment of the rector. On the other hand, the rector's hierarchical supervisory position,



absolute power, and “one-man” character against the faculties, institutes, centers, and all other units, delegations, and boards remained the same.

After 1992, this election for rector candidates, where only faculty members could vote, made sense only in some of the “well-established” universities. The candidate with the highest number of

votes from faculty members became the rector, which has been customary in universities such as METU, Boğaziçi University, Hacettepe University, Ankara University, and, up to some time, Istanbul University. YÖK members and presidents considered it a custom to appoint the rector candidate who got the highest number of votes by faculty members at such universities. However, there was

no guarantee that this practice would continue. As a matter of fact, at Istanbul University, another well-established university, this practice continued until 2008. In 2008, the second candidate with the highest number of votes was appointed as the rector, not the rector candidate who received most of the votes from the faculty members.

These elections for rector candidates, in which only a small part of the university components can vote, not even real elections, but in need of the approval of the Council of Higher Education and the President, also gave the dictatorial powers of the rectors in these “long-established” universities a plebiscite character. This quality, which is invisible when the waters are calm, became clearly visible in times of crisis, such as after 15 July. For example, the rector Erkan İbiş, who was one of the perpetrators of the major academic purge at Ankara University in 2017, did not hesitate to emphasize that he was “elected” by voting and that he was a rector representing the will of Ankara University in the process leading to the liquidation of nearly a hundred academics. The understanding of autonomy shaped around this single man who broke with the principle of academic freedom and was never actually able to establish it, combined with this plebiscitary character, quickly turned into a tool for abolishing academic freedom. During the state of emergency, the political power avoided taking responsibility for the purges of academics and pointed to YÖK as the place where the decision was taken. YÖK pointed to the rectors as the position taking the liquidation decisions. On the other hand, rectors were “elected” by their faculty members and represented the will of the “autonomous” university. One of the answers to why Ankara University has taken a leading role in the dissolution of dissident academics can be found here. As a matter of fact, the liquidator rector Erkan İbiş made a significant difference to his rivals in 2012 and was appointed as the first rector. In the election held on 12 July 2016, in which 1696 faculty members voted, he got the votes of 891 faculty members. In this sense, he was not only the candidate who won most of the votes; but he had over 50 percent of the votes, the majority vote, it was indisputable that he was the representative of the “general will” of

the university. This situation is one of the main determinants, if not the only one of Ankara University's pioneering position in terms of the liquidation of academics during the state of emergency.

During the state of emergency after July 15, with the state of the emergency decree dated October 29, 2016, the election process for the rector candidates, in which faculty members participated, was abolished during the appointment process. Thus, the Decree-Law was a return to pre-1992. Accordingly, in public universities, YÖK would determine three members, and the President would appoint any one of them. Such appointments were compared to the process of appointing trustees to replace elected opposition mayors, and the rectors appointed in this way were called "trustees-rectors." Opposition political parties expressed their demand for the "re-establishment" of the rectorial elections and to return to 1992 status, and they also made proposals for laws. However, while the rectors, which are the products of this new status, were called trustees, it was also implicitly stated that the previous rectors were democratically determined. Therefore, the demand of the opposition could not go beyond to return to 1992 status.

Finally, Melih Bulu, not even a faculty member of Boğaziçi University, was appointed as the rector on January 2, 2021. The protests of Boğaziçi University students and lecturers against the appointment of Melih Bulu as a rector found serious support from the opposition and the public. As a result, they became a part of the agenda of the country. Thus, in addition to the actions of the women's movement against the autocracy building of the AKP-MHP government and the Palace Regime, the "Boğaziçi Resistance" has already had an important historical place. However, this process is far from reaching sufficient maturity in terms of discussing, shaping, contenting, and strengthening the demand for academic freedom, democratic university, and university autonomy. As a matter of fact, the framework of the opposition and the general public to discuss the issue, as well as the actions and demands, is stuck with demanding to return to 1992 status. In a university model, the founding principle of which is academic freedom, where all

In a university model, the founding principle of which is academic freedom, where all the components, units, delegations, and boards of the university are organized in a democratic and self-governing approach to realize this basic principle, the rector's meaning for the university will regress to a symbolic and ceremonial field.



the components, units, delegations, and boards of the university are organized in a democratic and self-governing approach to realize this basic principle, the rector's meaning for the university will regress to a symbolic and ceremonial field. In this sense, how and for how long the rector will be elected and determined by which subjects will also become secondary. What brings the rector and the process of determining the rector to the center of the subject is the university model of September 12 fascism, which takes away the power of all the other units of the university and defines the rector as a power center, as a "one-man". Taking this process that started with the Boğaziçi Resistance beyond the debate about the election process of the rector who is a

micro plebiscitary dictator, a "one-man", and directing it to a university debate that made the rectorate as an institution, is important for the days when the autocratic Palace Regime will come to an end. Moreover, it will be a significant preparation for a democratic structuring opportunity for those days to come.

In this process, it is necessary to replace the rector and the concept of autonomy, which was deficient from the beginning, with the concept of academic freedom, the founding principle of the university, and the democratic and self-governing re-establishment of the university based on academic freedom, and place it at the center of the discussion. On the other hand, it is necessary to go beyond the



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

liberal narrow-mindedness peculiar to Turkey, which reduces the concept of academic freedom to a specialized form of fundamental rights and freedoms, human rights, and a violation of human rights. To consider the principle of academic freedom as the basic founding principle of the collective scientific production process and consequently of the university, going beyond seeing it only as a category of rights that should not be violated; starting the discussion by putting forward not only a category of rights specific to the individual but a fundamental principle that imposes responsibility on the individual, scientific community and institutions, will also provide us with the basis for establishing the university of the future.

¹ Although it is not possible to say that the needs in the Ottoman market articulated to capitalism and the rapidly developing and transforming civil society were ineffective in these processes of higher education, it is obvious that the main dynamic that started and leaped the process is the need for the rapid transformation of the state and the state organization. The needs of civil society and the market will, of course, be articulated in this transformation. In expressing this need, the level West has achieved, and the belatedness of the Ottoman society is an important emphasis. What is expected with higher education institutions is not only to respond to the needs of this new world that shook the Ottoman society but to respond “rapidly”.

² For the statements of Süheyy Derbil, one of the commission members assigned for the establishment of the Ankara Law School, regarding the first meeting of the commission, see. Ahmet Mumcu, *From Ankara Law School to Ankara University Faculty of Law*, AÜHF Publications, Ankara 1977.

³ Today, unlike ITU, Istanbul University accepts 1933 as its foundation year.

⁴ Chemist Dr. Cevad Mazhar Bey, who was among the liquidated, was going to commit suicide with the barium chloride he produced. (See Şeref Etker, “How did Dr. Cevad Mazhar Bey commit suicide?”, *Cumhuriyet Bilim Teknik* 730, March 2011.



Counter-academy initiatives as a founding experiment

The academics expelled from universities for signing the “We will not be a party to this crime!” petition put forth enriching and enlightening practices all over Turkey. One of these is the TİHV (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey) Academy, which came to life in İzmir. In this interview, we talked about the meaning of counter-academic practices and experiments in the moment of multiple crises with three veterans of this initiative, Nilgün Toker, Serdar Tekin, and Nermin Biter.

Out of what kind of need did the TİHV Academy arise? What kind of discussions did you go through while initiating it?

Nilgün Toker: As Academics for Peace at Ege University, we met during the investigation process after signing the declaration, “We will not be a party to this crime!” Most of us perhaps recognized each other, but we cannot say that we knew one another. We came together in the criminalization process and turned into a group in solidarity. This is precisely the union of those who are worried about the same problem. And of course, there was a great solidarity network of unions, parties, non-governmental organizations, friends, and lawyers around us. At the time, the feeling that the expulsion made on us was primarily anger, but there was something strange accompanying it. The feeling of, “You kicked us out of school, and did you think we would give up?” Now when you have this sense of not giving up, you have to be doing something. Secondly, we are 11 people who were expelled from Ege University together. We did not want to disperse because the problems we see in the world were very common. In other words, we chose to stand together to show solidarity and resist, stand together, and not give up together.

While we were looking for a way to stay together, the suggestion of applying to an EU project came up. What are we going to apply for? We thought we would look into what we are exposed to.

What are expulsions? What causes these expulsions? What kind of violation of rights are they? We quickly realized that we do not have any legal entity. In order to carry out such research and apply to a project, we need to work with a rights organization with a legal entity. I am a member of the founding board of TİHV. Because other colleagues felt close to them as well, we applied to TİHV, and they accepted us to apply to this project under their roof. In fact, we initiated the TİHV Academy as we wrote the project, not at our first meeting with the corporate identity of the foundation.

The part of writing the project was extraordinarily instructive and transformative. I want to talk about it because I care about it very much. We are a very interdisciplinary group. Among us, there are public health professionals, biologists, sociologists, social scientists, and communicators. But this is an area that most of us do not know. We met in a room of Eğitim-Sen every morning as if we were going to work. In the meantime, we wrote the project, got to know each other better, clung to each other, and got together. This is very important. Togetherness is not established when we say let’s do it, but it happens in collective production. We built that sense of solidarity and friendship in that process. There was an established association when the project was accepted. We created the academy out of this unity. The point here is that we wanted to



remain academics and to intervene in a violation of rights, and naturally, our interests in advocacy and academics merged.

Serdar Tekin: Writing a project is about the external challenges of it. We want to do something together, and we need to find resources to fund research. This is the outer side of the matter. The other side of it, which I think is very exciting academically, is that a heterogeneous

There is dual willpower here: The will to oppose what we are exposed to individually, that is, to continue insisting on being an academic, and the will to oppose what is done, that is, a kind of resistance.

group in academic formation sits down to do a job together, ponder and reach a conclusion. There is willpower here. Will alone is an internal thing. It starts inside you and ends inside you. Unless your will is visible in the world, no one else will know about it. That is, you have the will, and you have some affirmations within you. But they should be visible to the outside world so that they become something real. Let it become what others also know. Therefore, working together was actually the objectification process of this will. There is a dual will here: the will to oppose the situation we are exposed to individually, that is, to continue insisting on being an academic, and the will to oppose it collectively, that is, a kind of resistance.

There were similar initiatives outside of Izmir as well. Therefore, it is possible to

talk about different forms of Solidarity Academies. What do you think makes the experience in Izmir unique?

N.T.: The Izmir Solidarity Academy was established before the TIHV Academy and before we were expelled. The primary purpose there, or let us say the first founding purpose, was to provide a chair for academics who have lost their chairs.

S.T.: This is an invention of a tradition that started in Kocaeli. Our teacher Yücel Demirer explained this very well once, saying that solidarity academies are an invention of tradition. Before anyone was expelled in Izmir, we immediately established the Izmir Solidarity Academy, following the Kocaeli Solidarity Academy. Already in this process, we were meeting as Academics for Peace because the state targeted us.



Nermin Biter: When I think about all these stages, I feel as if we went through a very natural process, and it should be like that. We came side by side with the need for solidarity, that is, togetherness as a form of resistance. What kept us together was the desire to generate knowledge together, even though we were from different fields. For example, we organized a Refugee School that is open to the public and has a certain number of participants. Everyone had given various courses related to immigration, starting from their own field. As a biologist, I gave a lecture on the environment and immigration. In fact, I can say that I have undergone a transformation in terms of the climate crisis or ecological problems, both as a rights defender and someone who strives to produce knowledge on the occasion of this course. With the increase in expels, we started to think about producing knowledge beyond public courses and convey it to others. We tried to get in touch by organizing workshops. In fact, that still continues. It may not be very efficient because each of us has a set of academic habits we follow. Although we are still in a learning process, we continue to think about how to keep these academies afloat.

How would you describe the relationship between TiHV Academy and an institution struggling for human rights? In other words, what would it mean that such an initiative is under the structure of an organization working in the field of rights? To put it a little more abstractly, how do you approach the relationship between the notion of rights and the university or academy?

S.T.: As TiHV Academy, it would be very ambitious to talk about a model. But on the other hand, there is something structural in this process that causes us, as expelled individuals, to knock on the door of the TiHV. Many of those dismissed for signing the Academics for

Peace declaration were people associated with the rights movement. This is the academic side of the issue. The human rights movement has also intertwined the field of rights and the issue of knowledge generation in a very complex way for many years. TiHV is a critical pillar of this because of the specific function it undertakes. As you know, TiHV is dealing with the elimination, restoration, and rehabilitation of both the physical and mental effects of torture. This kind of practice can only be formed based on knowledge. Therefore, TiHV has already had the practice of working with academics for 30 years, and it still does. But these academics were at the university. Thus, the expulsion process, the purges, mean that, for the human rights movement, a group of academics who have been at the university up to now and who have been associated with the human rights movement no longer hold that position at the university and that it becomes highly dependent on their individual circumstances whether they can maintain their old support. Therefore, the TiHV predicted a mid-term crisis for the human rights movement: There is a population that has been expelled from the university here, and this population is our volunteers, supporters, people who are somehow associated with the rights movement. The TiHV thought, if they do not find ways to reproduce this, they will face weakness in the sustainability of the relationship between advocacy and knowledge regarding the human rights movement. TiHV's initiative here is an actual intervention. It is a critical and strategic intervention for the future of the human rights movement to host an initiative such as THIV Academy.

N.T.: As someone who had a good relationship with the Human Rights movement before, even while working at the university, I can say that there has always been an effort to jointly produce

The expulsions, the purges also mean that a group of academics who have been at the university and associated with the human rights movement no longer hold that position at the university and become too dependent on their individual circumstances as to whether they can maintain their previous support for the human rights movement. Therefore, the TiHV made a midterm crisis prediction for the human rights movement. So TiHV's intervention here is a genuinely strategic one.



Illustration: İsmail Cem Özkan

the information demanded by the rights struggle in the human rights movement. TiHV's relationship with the producer of knowledge and its relationship with the academy originating from its field of study is apparent. However, other rights organizations such as İHD (Human Rights Association), İHOP (Human Rights Common Platform), and Citizens' Assembly had to be involved in this liquidation. In that respect, the intervention of the rights movement in the crisis caused by the dismissals of the Peace Academicians, in general, is not a coincidence. The point was to look for new ways to continue producing that knowledge, with people somehow on their periphery standing in front of the unions or rights organizations we were already associated with. That's why I think this is a decision more than a coincidence for all rights organizations. It was a very important example of solidarity. Legal organizations have done this too. They fought the legal battle with us.

What makes your way of intervening in this relationship unique?

N.T.: This question is always in our minds, and I still do not believe it is resolved. The fact that we are somehow getting into the human rights movement does not mean that the academia and the rights movement function perfectly together. Even though they are somehow connected with the human rights movement, academics were actually people who advocated rights by speaking in the field of rights based on their own expertise. Their performance in advocacy was to transfer their specialized knowledge to civil society, that is, to carry a kind of aid. Few of us were in activist practice. When I say activist practice,



Photo: Hasret Gültekin Kozan

How should an academic-activist be? We are actually looking for the answer to this in the human rights movement. It is time to talk about this now. Because if we somehow managed to survive and did it within the human rights movement, we need to rethink production and information modeling here.

I am not talking about status. I mean intervening in violations within the field of rights, learning what to think and discuss from violations. Let me confess this: The history of my human rights work in the field is obviously not the same as our friends' history who have always been in the field.

At the beginning of the process, we were wondering if some kind of academic-activist model would emerge. We were wondering if a figure would appear that would combine academic knowledge with activist performance. Of course, I do not believe that it is provided perfectly. The handicaps of this should also be

discussed. Why is this not fully achieved? We have to clarify what we mean by activist and what we mean by the knowledge that the rights field needs.

I tried to make what I learned from my relationship with the human rights movement the principle of my own activism: Not to convey what I know, but to understand what the field wants from me, learn it, and then produce information. That is why I tried to create knowledge together with my friends in the field. How should an academic-activist be? We are looking for the answer to this question in the human rights movement. I do not have clear answers to such questions. Now is the time to talk about this. Because if we somehow managed to survive and did it within the human rights movement, we also need to rethink its producing and modeling knowledge.

S.T.: I do not think anyone can have clear ideas on this matter. Because it is an ongoing, rapidly changing process, so it is not surprising that we do not have clear answers. It would be surprising if we did.

Human rights organizations have to find financial resources to continue their activities. Some handicaps come

with this kind of fund and project dependency. For example, the narrow-mindedness of donor institutions is an issue. They look through highly bureaucratic mechanisms, expect measurable results, etc. These are very limiting issues for an organization like yours. How do you handle such problems? On what priorities do you determine your activities?

N.B.: I would like to talk through my own experience because it has been a very transformative period for me as someone from the biology major. In fact, you shape the activities and researches of your own accord. But when the factors you mentioned come into play, they start to become very binding. You are in the human rights movement, you are trying to advocate for rights, and you are trying to do this by producing information. I have the feeling that the bureaucracy you encounter in the fundraising processes is blocking you. Most tensions arise because of these bureaucratic obstacles, obviously, like trying to meet deadlines, working against the clock, whether that budget is sufficient for this job, etc.

N.T.: I think this is the most critical issue: You do not define your study topic yourself anymore. We, who are fighting for academic freedom, that is, those who



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

want to decide for themselves which knowledge to pursue, are faced with two problems at this point. It is necessary to associate with the language of the institution and to respond to its interests, and it is necessary to comply with the boundaries of the project you will work on. Thus, we actually change the definition of academic freedom. First, we have to accept this. I answer the question of why we need a university from this perspective. We are indeed conducting an academic activity, but this academic activity is no longer an academic activity of the university. So the determinant of this work is not entirely us anymore. It is necessary to admit that we do not carry out an academic activity in that original academic freedom, both with the interest and field of study of the institution we are in and how the donors you apply for funding perceive those issues. We made a choice by estimating this relationship between funds and projects. But it is debatable whether this choice makes us academics in a pure sense. That is why those in this field now have to become

academics-activists. This needs to be a different academic model than the one at the university. In other words, this is another type of knowledge generation model that the field or the funds/donor determines.

S.T.: I agree with the general framework drawn by Nilgün Toker. Maybe a comparison like this would help. We speak with university and academy terms. But of course, there is also “science.” What is academic research? It is scientific research in the most general sense. What makes science the science? It is the method. Therefore, anyone conducting research using the scientific method can claim the validity of her/his research, whether at the university or elsewhere. Indeed, that’s how it is. In other words, aren’t there any government institutions that invest in scientific research and employ scientific researchers outside the university? There are. Apart from the university and the state, there are companies that employ scientific researchers in the private sector.

Unlike researchers employed in other areas of the state, the private sector, and civil society, what we call a university offers to the researcher is that the academic can pursue her/his own interest. The university exists because modern societies need such an institution. The university employs a community of researchers who follow their interests, have the right to be wrong, and keep trying to make mistakes.

Companies have R&D units. There is science out there too.

Civil society used to do this to a certain extent before all this happened to us. Therefore, what we call a university offers

the researcher to pursue her/his own interest, unlike researchers employed in other areas of the state, private sector, and civil society. The university exists because modern societies need such an institution. The university employs a community of researchers who follow their interests, have the right to be wrong, and keep trying to make mistakes. Undoubtedly, it teaches, but the modern university is a structure based on the coexistence of research and teaching. Academic freedom on the research side of the university is defined by the academic pursuing her/his own interests.

Is this the case in our example? Of course not. That cannot happen. As a philosophy historian, I can work at the university on the relationship between tragedy and philosophy. But that does not concern any human rights organization. It is not their concern as an institution. So, therefore, I have to do something in line with the interests of that institution.

There is, of course, an interesting question here. Then, are the academic knowledge production processes regarding civil society different from, let us say, a State Planning Organization and a company's R&D unit? If yes, in what sense is it different? We call them researchers, not academics. But I think it would be valuable to ask whether we have a real difference when we call ourselves academics and say that we do academic work on the basis of civil society. My answer to this question is that there is a difference.

It is worth pointing out that I believe that the studies carried out by academics working in relation with civil society in Turkey after 2016 have the dimension of thinking on the ground they are in and opening up the interests, ways, and methods of the institutions they are in or work with for discussion. In this respect, it seems to me it is a very different form of relationship and the view of an emerging model from a researcher in the State Planning Organization or a company's R&D unit. But, of course, we are not talking about something finished here. The academic nature of the work we carry out within the human rights movement is not only about researching following the scientific method, but another point is that we become part of the effort regarding the interests of this

Purely pursuing self-knowledge can be troubling as part of the definition of academic freedom. But if the pursuit of knowledge is also a product of the desire to make the world more meaningful to people, then it can also be something based on the responsibility of the knowledge producer to the world.

field itself. You cannot do this in State Planning Organization or an R&D unit. You are told what to research. In other words, there is a series of managers who determine and appoint the needs of that institution. However, civil society as a field of democratic citizenship is not so. Therefore, we are also an active part of the institution/organization/association we are in, in the process of shaping their interests, and we do this with our academic knowledge. Therefore, the definition of academician-activist or activist-academic sounds right to me. In this respect, I think we have a chance to talk about not only research but also academic interest in a sense and the capacity of that academic interest to be decisive.

N.T.: I think we are also talking about figures who do not have the distinction between academics and public intellectuals. Worldwide and in Turkey, differentiation has been made between academics and public intellectuals in the remodeling process of universities. The public responsibility and chasing knowledge and truth are separate. Another kind of hegemony, hegemony of producing knowledge emerged, in which knowledge was also put into a private sphere. When I say academic-activist, I mean figures who do not have this distinction; that is, they act with a kind of public intellectual responsibility when at university. In fact, we are trying to carry a definition of academic freedom that universities no longer have, which includes a kind of academic responsibility to and from knowledge. Purely pursuing self-interest can be problematic for a part of the definition of academic freedom. But if the pursuit of knowledge is also a product of the desire to make the



Illustration: İsmail Cem Özkan

world more meaningful to people, then it can also be something based on the responsibility of the knowledge producer to the world. In fact, our choice to work in the field of human rights can be seen as an expression of this responsibility. Perhaps there may be some boundaries to what we will work on. But what I am trying to say is that these boundaries do not contradict our understanding of freedom. The matter we choose to work on can also be seen as how we freely participate in the world. In the new state of universities, every academic could look for a way to be included in the world. That is what we call the public intellectual figure. In my opinion, we still maintain our academic qualifications because we are those who try to keep being included in the world our way. Moreover, I think we are doing this as a free movement.

S.T.: This is the uniqueness of civil society anyway. Unlike the state and the market, a partial autonomy of some kind of academic interest is still possible here. This does not make any change in the fund and project issue. But if we look into it, the funding issue applies to universities to a large extent all over the world. The problem of funding sources determining research is a very universal one. This is also true for large-scale studies at universities. Since I am a philosopher, there is a big difference between being in university and civil society for me because I work individually. But if you are involved in large-scale research and therefore need the kind of funding that will enable it, the difference between being in or out of a university becomes less in my eyes.

You described your position and qualifications and of a public intellectual with nuance. But, on the other hand, the field of civil society that one enters must also demand this or establish a functioning accordingly. So, if we consider the field of civil society as an ecosystem and keep in mind that it is transforming, becoming increasingly technocratic, and therefore the meaning attributed to information has changed, what would you like to say about the potentials and deadlocks of this ecosystem?

N.T.: It is possible to associate what you said with what Serdar just said. We are talking about a group of people who are capable of thinking about civil society. I am not talking about TİHV in particular, almost all the rights organizations that

tried to establish different structures with the expelled academics had to make a decision. They encountered a new situation that required an expansion of interest, redefining their relationship with knowledge, and stepping back when non-result-oriented knowledge was necessary. They will either include the new entrants or otherwise define those newcomers within themselves. I do not believe that all organizations can solve this handicap definitively. TİHV had an advantage. There was a matter of intellectual preparation or expansion of interest required by the Trauma and Human Rights Institute project, which they tried to project for a long time. But it is clear that whether it is TİHV or other NGOs, they should start by accepting that such an encounter will create an expansion, sometimes change,

sometimes coercion, at least in terms of their own interests and the way they realize those interests. I do not believe that all organizations can overcome this process with a transformation. I do not think that those who can't get over it can cover too much. We do not know what time will show. Each of these is an experience. For example, there is a Human Rights School within İHOP. This school is trying to do something other than the previous activities of İHOP. But we will see if it will remain separate or provide an integration. I have worked side by side with NGOs a lot. Before, they used to call me to see if we could work on an issue. Even in this encounter, there was a transformative effect. After all, every encounter has a transformative impact. But our present encounter demands



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

quite a structural transformation. The civil society movement needs to develop a reflection on itself because the human rights regime in the world is also experiencing a crisis. This encounter in crisis can have valuable consequences. We will experience this too.

S.T.: This emphasis on the ecosystem seems to be valuable for thinking about the issue. Some of these examples will make a difference to the extent that they are successful in the medium term. Let us even give an example from outside the TİHV. One of the very successful examples of this subject is the Hafıza Merkezi. Hafıza Merkezi no longer imports the necessary academic vision and knowledge from outside. In other words, a team with an extremely high academic qualification shaped the work from the very beginning, and this made a tremendous difference in the quality and depth of the work. When such examples increase, a transformation occurs in the ecosystem because some institutions will have integrated the support of other outsider institutions into their structures after a certain period and make it a natural discussion framework for themselves. Therefore, I believe that we will see more long-term effects in time, and the multiplier effect will increase as successful examples increase. What we feel, see, and weigh against our guilt is actually a tiny part of the potential in this regard.

When we talk about civil society, we are talking about a field that is quite wide and includes different subjects. In this sense, what are the conditions for people from other disciplines to make enriching interventions? For example, what is the place of a biologist here?

N.B.: When I signed the petition, I was the only biologist at my university. A biologist literally is a life scientist. I asked myself how I could be alone. It was a reproach that remained on a very intuitive level. I started to understand this during the course of events when I thought I was involved in the human rights movement. Because, in fact, I saw that most people who work on science in Turkey do not think so comprehensively about the definition of biology that I have just described and look at the activity of producing knowledge as a technical task. I want to work on some topics while taking part in the human rights

Acting on an intuitive level – whether it is against a breach or enhancing a movement– isn't enough. It is necessary to change the intuitive course of action. On the one hand, this is something I would say about activists, but I can say the same thing about academics.

movement. But the circumstances are not right. For example, I would like to follow the traces of torture with epigenetic studies in a laboratory. I am talking about a survey that can show intergenerational transmission. And this has something to do with multiplying the field of truth through factual realities. Acting on an intuitive level –whether against a breach or magnifying a movement– is not enough. It is necessary to change the intuitive course of action. On the one hand, this is something I would say about activists, but I can say the same thing about academics. In other words, the desire to act only with knowledge in the human rights movement can remain at an intuitive level that does not define itself very well.

There is, of course, a broader background here as well. The crisis of the university is also something that progresses simultaneously with macro-dynamics on a global scale. On the one hand authoritarianism, on the other, neoliberalization and marketization transform the meaning, function, and quality of knowledge.

N.T.: The new form of capitalism, the abandonment of the collective production sphere, and the emergence of what we call the consumption economy, neoliberalism as its ideology, that is, a kind of atomization, separation, hierarchization, and the consequent significant loss of status of knowledge. As truth-seekers, as advocates of rights, we also have a responsibility to recall the truth in an age called the post-truth. Therefore, we need both factual knowledge and a solid rational discourse to restore the status of knowledge and resist the attitude of eliminating the truth. So, it's not just a concern of social scientists. We know the contributions of names such as Veli Lök and Şebnem Korur Fincancı to the factual determination of

torture in Turkey. Maybe TİHV cannot establish a laboratory for them at the moment, but it enables them to work with those methods and show the need for factual evidence. Therefore, the knowledge produced in the field of human rights is not just a kind of discursive knowledge or theoretical knowledge about what a right is. We need factual evidence to make the truth visible. In the post-truth age, there is no other way we can tell a lie.

S.T.: In the last five years in Turkey, three occupational groups had to call out loud that practicing their profession is not a crime. Being a lawyer is not a crime. Journalism is not a crime. Being an academic is not a crime. While all three of these are undoubtedly very different, the common denominator of academics, lawyers, and journalists is that they all claim factual truth. The journalist does it in one genre, the lawyer in another. The academic does this on another level, using rational and scientific methods. Therefore, if we accept that the attack on the truth is a multidimensional attack and the counter-response can only be a multidimensional one, we can say that the relationship between the rights field and knowledge will continue in the future, and the workers of these areas will stand side by side.

N.T.: Because there is no other way to get through here. The crisis of the human rights movement globally is partly due to this post-truth phenomenon, namely the relativization of knowledge. The human rights regime was actually set up in response to a worldwide crisis. After the great destruction of fascism, the human rights regime was born with the intention that humanity would not experience such evil again. That was the big claim. People, women, workers, etc., struggled hard to accomplish it. What happened then? That written grand canonical system made a turn away from its original claim into a kind of normative control and regulation mechanism. When it became a mechanism that operates independently of the content, that is, when its ties with the public sphere, like all legal systems, were severed, the system itself suddenly turned into something that could legitimize violations of rights. All legal systems have such a handicap. What makes the legal system dynamic is not the legal system itself but the vitality

of publicity and negotiation between citizens that will add content to it.

The same is true for the human rights regime. At the time when the human rights regime expanded with their incredible struggle against the Soviet Union, the capitalist regime turned it into a normative structure with the discourse of sovereignty established by a kind of victory. At the same time, the power relations, the interests, and the benefits of the states began to determine the process. Therefore, the human rights regime, only as a normative regulation, is not currently in a position to respond to the crises that humanity is facing. Today, all the evils at the start of the human rights regime are happening before the eyes of the human rights movement itself globally. Currently, human rights movements worldwide are also deprived of the security that this regime gives them. This normative system, structures such as the UN, EU, were also there to strengthen and support those who struggle for human rights. However, as they backed away from the performance of the human rights movement and turned into a mere normative assessment and evaluation structure, the fields of struggle began to lack support.

The human rights regime, only as a normative regulation, is not currently in a position to respond to the crises that humanity is experiencing. Today, all the evils of the establishment of the human rights regime all over the world are happening before the eyes of the human rights movement itself.

Don't we feel like we are starting to rebuild a lot of things right now? It is as if we are trying to cross the roads we passed before. If the regime is stuck, the human rights movement has to say something against this squeeze. So, we need factual reality, information on how this regime has become so weak, and how to establish mechanisms that will empower us again. We can think of getting out of this crisis as the dynamic of the human rights movement. In other words, the movement, which lacks the

A crisis can throw all opponents out. The opposing who are left outside can also create the power to set up other opposing mechanisms by taking advantage of being outside. I do not mean that the crisis is an advantage, but we have no other choice.

security provided by a regime, must know how to strengthen itself through its own dynamics. And this will happen when each of us produces knowledge and faces the problems in this field. Some things are not accidental. The crisis can throw out all its opponents. Opposites outside can also create the power to set up other opposing mechanisms by taking advantage of being outside. I do not want to say that the crisis is an advantage, but we have no other choice.

S.T.: In this respect, the situation in university history is somewhat similar to the end of the Middle Ages. At the time, there were initiatives such as science associations outside the university. From the middle of the 15th century, with the crippling of the medieval university, they revived the academic field as humanist initiatives. Today, we can see in many instances that a different kind of interest other than the official/corporate university field seeks a medium for itself. Of course, we should add that the special political pressure in Turkey has created a wider spread.

At this point, the attempts after the September 12 coup come to mind.

N.T.: There are similarities and differences between that experience and what we are experiencing today. There is a commonality among those expelled from the university in their insistence on remaining academics. Academics have always retained their eagerness to intervene in some way. I mean academics who have not lost their desire to intervene in public and human affairs. It could be literature, it could be art, or it could be any field. In other words, when I say intervention, I am not just talking about producing information specifically in the area of human rights. I am talking about conveying all kinds of different information about people that

universities do not cover. It is like talking about Marx when Marx is not told when it is forbidden. For example, the Free University experience.

These examples have one more thing in common. After I was expelled, I said in a seminar that both the student's eagerness to learn and to demand knowledge would transform the university. When the channels for requesting information are entirely closed, and there is no space left in the university for students to request, the movement outside will fill this gap. All kinds of requested information are produced and transferred outside the university. And there is demand for this.

The issue here is related to the demand for information. It also shows what information universities have become paralyzed to cover. What made the university spacious? What did the establishment of the modern/democratic university mean? That it can have all kinds of information and plurality. When you monopolize the universities and eliminate plurality, the plurality organizes itself outside. The transformative effect can come from precisely that plurality. The relationship with the struggle for rights is also in this pluralistic issue. To see the plural, to see the difference, to see the diversity.

Of course, we should not miss the transformation of information into a consumption object and the inclusion of information in the neoliberal market. There are also those who make money by selling information such as online seminars, webinars. There is also a kind of sophisticated world, but let us not forget that sophism was a character of democracy. No need to skip. What we call the pluralization of knowledge also has such handicaps.

I understand from what you have said that such experiments are crucial in the context of the reconstruction of the public sphere. Well, isn't it possible for such particular experiments and fields to consolidate congregation and reinforce fragmentation? How will this be overcome?

N.T.: If we cannot get past that, we will be enforcing neoliberalism. Because if we claim that the public sphere has been closed, a truly democratic transformation



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

will be achieved by re-establishing a commonality, a pluralistic partnership, and opening up the possibility of negotiation, albeit in conflict, within this partnership. Congregationalism is a situation that new regimes produce and support right now. So we constantly need to payoff and think about what to do to get past it.

I see it as a chance that academics expelled from universities in Turkey have chosen the field of human rights. But, of course, there could also be fields that produce other kinds of knowledge. But the point here is this: if we cannot overcome the fragmentation in which the struggle for rights is involved, and if we cannot achieve commonality between the fields of rights, we will be far from putting forward the will to change together. Only in this way can the human rights movement overcome its crisis. We call this the politics of rights. I think the main issue here is commonality. Information can be valuable here as it is not produced as private information.

I would also like to add something to the concept of citizenship. When you become a lecturer, there is a definition or a perception of the university as if you leave out your citizenship qualifications as you enter the university. There is a perception supported by practices

such as linking the public statements of academics to the rector's permission and systems for disclosing research results; it is as if the academics left their relations with the public outside and turned into another individual at the university. The Academics for Peace case was a scandal precisely showing that. Our signature was an act of citizenship, not an act of academics. But the university told its members that they could not act as citizens and opened investigations against them, claiming that we, as university employees, could not do this.

The university has a different kind of publicity, that is correct. This is publicity formed in the activity of producing knowledge. But this publicity can only be democratic publicity to the extent that it discusses everything about knowledge. Why were the students in Boğaziçi on the streets all at the same time? Because that campus has something to teach. It is not just about lectures. Because they were citizens at the same time, they went out and acted with civic consciousness. So, this is not just a Boğaziçi issue, but it is a democracy issue. Suddenly, two identities merged. This is how to be an academician, a student, or an administrator in a university. You cannot leave your citizenship ID at the door and enter. That would turn the university into a technical vocational school.

S.T.: I want to add that information is not the issue here. It is true, isn't knowledge produced in universities? Yes, it is. So, is it possible to have a rational discussion on any subject at universities, where arguments and counter-arguments on a controversial topic meet but without fear? It cannot be done in today's Turkish universities. In fact, the intertwined side of the modern publicity with the halls, the newspaper, the Enlightenment, science, etc., is here. The modern public space is also a place where you can enter with a rational manner of speaking, and once you are in, you are responsible for what you say inside, where you have to respond with arguments for arguments.

The post-truth issue we talked about before, the destruction of factual truth in many media, from social media to political language, has also created a universe of speech devaluating rational speaking. Therefore, the struggle to regain and rebuild the public sphere requires, in a sense, the recall of rational modes of discourse. This is an important dimension that can be connected to the topic of academics. The issue here is not just about producing knowledge. It is a matter of a rational way of speaking to find a place for making sense of everyday life. This is another aspect of modern publicity that is worn out and needs to be repaired and rebuilt. ☸

“RURALESQUE” UNIVERSITIES IN THE PROVINCES THAT HAVE CENTRALIZED AND LOST THEIR CENTER

In this article, Giresun University faculty member İlknur Meşe explicitly describes a field she has experienced closely, the provincial universities, with all their contradictions and dilemmas. She evaluates the province phenomenon and the dynamics of provincialization related to the structural transformations that Turkey has recently undergone beyond the usual dichotomies.

We are accustomed to thinking of concepts in terms of unequal binary oppositions, like woman-man, mind-emotion, individual-society, us-them. This duality has a determining/defining and determined/defined side, so the vision is that there is a power relation, not a neighborhood relation. While these conceptual dichotomies are positioned against each other at an abstract level, they also accompany various divisions that create discrimination in individual minds and the field of social reality. Conceptual dichotomies have the power to separate, clear, and demarcate reality by creating socially determined frames of meaning. This is how we can describe the sociological and cognitive division between center-periphery/country. But sharp divisions hide the fact that there are, in fact, sociological intersections, meeting points, and even undeniable similarities between them. So much so that we do not think that the center and the provinces do not even form a homogeneous whole within themselves. However, there are centers and provinces. Sometimes centers and provinces are not far from each other, but they can be closer than we think or even intertwined. For this reason, when we believe that we are near or in the place we define as the center, we can be right in the countryside. But the unstable and

plural nature of the concepts of center and province basically does not mean that there is no unidimensionality and a power struggle between them. Based on Weber’s notion of the ideal type, I propose to use the concept of province as an analytical category that enables identifying deviations and similarities in the concrete situation. According to Weber, the ideal type is constructed from certain authentic elements but is never a literal counterpart or a complete description of concrete reality.

I use the term center, in a Bourdieusian sense, to mean the commodity/power sphere, which has the function of organizing all spheres, including cultural, economic, political, and

Sometimes centers and provinces are not far from each other, but they can be closer than we think or even intertwined. For this reason, when we believe that we are near or in the place we define as the center, we can be right in the countryside.

military. Although the center and its value system have undergone paradigm shifts since the Ottoman Empire, the



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

provinces have preserved the religious and nationalist sacred values patterned with religion. Provincial values started to move towards the power domain in the 1950s, advanced further in the 1980s, and became central with today's AKP. We can say that bringing provincial values to the center is results from authoritarian and populist policies carried out under the name of the democratization process of right-wing politics since 1950. But we cannot peruse this process as a democratization process. The fact that the values dominating the realm of power are the values of the provinces –or the people– does not automatically make it democratic. On the contrary, as in the case of the AKP, this paved the way for establishing a government that sees democracy as an indispensable tool for its power. In reality, it exhibits authoritarian features in terms of mentality and practices.

Weber's concept of the ideal type does not impose a moral point of view, but we can add an ethical perspective to the countryside concept, which we can think of as the ideal. The provincial values of religion (Sunni Islam) and the pattern of conservative nationalist values integrated with religion are not per se bad. But their performance in daily life, the way they determine identity, self, and the relationship with the other, has the potential to produce evil in terms of individual, social and political consequences. Those who live in it do not know how rural values affect them. For them to know it, they must be influenced by a critical discourse and use that discourse as a tool to reflect on what has happened to them and act otherwise. Negative definitions of the countryside were made either by outsiders (those who lived in the countryside for a short period of their life and then left) or outsiders inside. Today, the provinces in Turkey no longer correspond to a geographical location because the whole of Turkey is a country. If all of Turkey is provincial, then who and where is the center? Today, those who rule Turkey tried to demolish the old center and redefine it with rural values, but no new center emerged. They produced an amorphous center that uses the same practices of the past, focuses on symbolic transformations, cannot create a written and institutional culture; in short, it lacks the ability and equipment to be

a center and cannot be a center. There is a provincialization that makes the distinction between center and provinces meaningless, becomes centralized, and loses its center.

When we say provincial, we are talking about a style, a way of thinking and acting. This style presents its system of values as the only truth regime in which reality can speak directly; suppresses diversity and plurality; displays discriminatory attitude regarding the value of human lives; uses an epic language; it brings the concepts out of historicity by sanctifying them. We can make it more practical if we think of the countryside concept as an empty signifier confronting democracy, equality, freedom, and many others for a better life for all. Then we can include capitalism, classism, racism, ethnocentrism, militarism, religiousism, sexism, patriarchy, hatred of democracy, and environmental destruction in the definition of rural, as they make the conditions for a better life unthinkable or impossible for all of us both in Turkey and the world. In short, the rural is whatever keeps us away from creating the conditions of a good life, condemning us to the middle of a bad life and forcing us to live as if it were a good life. If I am to describe it in literature, rural finds its best representation with Kafka's father. In *Letter to the Father*¹ Kafka's father, the creator of the "Kafkaesque" world, is arbitrary, irregular, inconsistent, insulting, ridiculing, slandering, seeing himself as the sole owner of the truth, unjust, creating a sense of nothing in man, demanding obedience, absolutely insensitive and despotic. But he could do all this because it was Kafka standing right before him. He draws his strength from oppressing Kafka. In fact, his father lives entirely dependent on Kafka. Because, according to Kafka, his father is too weak to cope with life. But in this state of incapability, he had to blame Kafka and turn him into a pest to establish a comfortable, carefree order without blaming himself. Based on Kafka's Kafkaesque world, I would like to consider the university a ruralesque location in a "ruralesque" geography.²

According to the 2020 data of YÖK, there are 207 universities in total in Turkey, 129 of which are state universities, 74 foundation universities, and 4 foundation



Illustration: Ismail Cem Özkan

The province is whatever keeps us away from the creation of the conditions of a good life, condemning us to the middle of a bad life and forcing us to live as if it were a good life.

vocational high schools. Again, as of 2020, there are 7,940,133 students in total, 4,538,926 of which are undergraduate, 3,002,964 associate degree, 297,001 master's and 101,242 doctorate. The occupancy rate in higher education programs is 93.5 percent.³ These figures are the result of AKP's pragmatist and non-long-term populist policies. But on the other hand, there are not enough instructors to handle this student load in Turkey. Especially in provincial universities, it is impossible to cope with a small number of instructors and the quotas increased by YÖK every year at primary and secondary education levels. In addition to this, not only the scarcity of educators but the dysfunctionality of them because no students are admitted although some faculties and departments have been opened, the lack of materials such as a map on the wall, laboratory, ball, racket, the insufficiency of the library, the scarcity of state dormitories, low quality of education, lack of affordable food and accommodation opportunities offered to students by the city, etc. are the main problems of the rural universities.



Photo: Hasret Gültekin Kozan

Rural universities were not established for the first time during the AKP period. They are the results of a trend that started in the 1980s and gained momentum in the 1990s. The ruralization of all of Turkey was not with the AKP either, but the AKP enabled institutions, thoughts, and feelings to become ruralized as never before. AKP has built its populist discourse based on the oppressor-oppressed duality. The “oppressor” is the Kemalist discourse and power structures, and the “oppressed” are the religious-conservative people and themselves who deserve to be the true representatives of the people. AKP claimed to have created/ create a new Turkey via “new” buildings, official holidays (15 July National Will and Democracy Day, 26 August Malazgirt Victory), monuments (15 July National Will), nation/tea gardens, historical narratives (New Ottomanism and victimhood narrative), archives (restructuring of Atatürk Research central archive), indigenous modernization narrative, etc. They sometimes did it by destroying the old and sometimes by

re-establishing the old in another way. This claim of a different and new identity is inconsistent because there is no change in the content but only changes at the symbolic level. Because of this inconsistency, we can say that the AKP’s criticism of the past is not a criticism in its true sense. The only innovation that emerged was to create a phantasmatic difference and an ideology of innovation by exchanging symbolic between the old and the new. But in essence, what they created with new names was worse since they replaced the old institutions and agencies that were rigid, became withdrawn and increasingly crippled, and even abandoned in the last instance. The basis of this system of absolute differences, which we can consider as a closed unity, is the underdeveloped democracy that demands and produces identities and subjects and the bipolar political sphere, depending on it. With Laclau and Mouffe (2017), we can speak of popular struggles where discourses tend to establish a single political sphere divided into two opposing spheres; where

struggles imply a plurality of political spheres, we can only speak of democratic struggles.⁴ In this case, the AKP’s struggle over victimization is neither a struggle for freedom nor democracy. In fact, the victimization myth they created has been the instrument of their “conceitedness”⁵ policies. In this process, they tried to reverse the oppressor-oppressed relationship with the claim of creating the new and different and removing the victimization.⁶ Part of this reversal is their opening of rural universities. Millions of young people who cannot get anywhere better come to public universities in the countryside. By opening universities, AKP gave them a hypothetical sense of social mobility. Entering the universities in the provinces with low scores hides the failure in public schools a little bit. In this sense, efforts to open universities in the provinces are political and ideological. There are other motives. They stimulate the economy of the city or district where they are located. Guaranteed-pass roads, “passenger guaranteed” airports, “customer-guaranteed” shopping malls



(which were places open the most during the pandemic when small trades were restricted), and “student-guaranteed” universities all run the exploitation economy in small cities.⁷ They also recruit new followers for congregations and sects and produce the loyalty and partisanship required by rectors and academics who want to be favored. It is enough to watch the websites of 15 universities established after 2006 for a week to see how they produce loyalty and partisanship. You can see how the appointed rectors, who act as small representatives of Erdoğan, operate the entire AKP policy on the university’s website.

Universities in the countryside were established as a result of populist policies. Populism should not be seen as a negative concept in itself, but in AKP policies, populism has not turned into something that increases gains in favor of democracy. Students still come to universities to find a job or hide their unemployment. However, the education

in universities is still unqualified, and the institutional ground is weak, democratic functioning is not possible. The AKP has not been able to mobilize young people through education; on the contrary, it operates policies that are intolerant to the slightest criticism from young people. As their power weakened, the economy contracted, and they became more authoritarian related to these, they moved away from populist rhetoric, evolving into a government in which a small, closed, and absolute group bonded to each other, and the leader of loyalty and interest decides everything. Just as Erdoğan could not promise university students anything, he had previously said that not every diploma should expect a job guarantee. Nowadays, he has reduced the problem to individual capacity by saying that they should be qualified, and he puts the blame on the young people for problems resulting from horizonless and inconsistent policies. This means that students cannot benefit from partisan resource distribution. By creating a precariat among young unemployed graduates, the AKP makes them even more dependent on itself, silences them, and tries to bring criticizing students down on their knees with violent policies ranging from throwing them out of dormitories to imprisoning them. Due to its inconsistent policies, on the one hand, students are advised to be qualified to find a job. While on the other hand, it makes possible a luxurious life that cannot be achieved by working for a small number of young people who are attached to the party in some way. On the one hand, while opening universities that resist institutionalization or whose institutionalization is undesirable, on the other hand, it tries to weaken institutionalized universities by dividing them, dismissing academicians from the profession with the decree, and discrediting them and universities. In either case, what is desired is to establish the party (Erdoğan)-university unification.

AKP stated that it could not be a cultural power. On the other hand, İbrahim Kalın noted the necessity of developing a new understanding of civilization by saying, “it is time to write our own story.” Neither the universities they opened nor the loyal rector and academician crowd achieved this, and there is no sign for them to achieve it either. On the contrary, they try to take revenge

by disrupting the counterculture, by displacement, by destroying it if possible, by simply defaming if they could not do anything else.⁸ As we can see in the Boğaziçi instance, a rector was appointed against the established institutionalization and the practices. The more the institutions are emptied, that is, the more irregularities and arbitrariness prevail, and the less the merit, the more vulnerable we become, and our dependency on people increases. Boğaziçi, as in Lefebvre’s⁹ definition of space is an institution with academicians who have been able to form space and become subjects in this space. Again, according to Lefebvre, “the concept of space connects the mental with the cultural, the social and the historical.”¹⁰ As a social and pedagogical space, the university is a collective representation of routines, affirmations, rules, frames of meaning, the way of presenting the body, a certain subjectivity, and agency, and a certain pedagogy. In this sense, the university is not only a physical structure but also a cultural, social, mental, historical, even political structure. This is what students and teachers are trying to protect in Boğaziçi, and that is the source of their objections.¹¹

I am a faculty member in the sociology department at a rural university in the Black Sea Region. Our students at the university are mostly from the Black Sea Region, with rural origins and a lower socio-economic class. The situation is the same in the sociology department. About 60 students come from various high schools each year. Between the years 2018 to 2020, there are approximately 5 percent, 27 percent, and most recently up to 21 percent from Imam Hatip High Schools among them, in order of the year.¹² They start their university education quite unfamiliar with hard work such as reading, thinking, discussing, and writing which an academic education, especially sociology education, requires. This is because of their pedagogical limitations shaped by traditional culture and the poor test-solving-based education since primary school. In line with my research, experience, and observations regarding them, I can say that students do not believe that they can make changes in Turkish society. They have a cynical attitude to change their daily practices or find solutions to problems, their personal

and social expectations are low, they are pessimistic and anxious about their future. Whether they attend university or not, there is a deepened unemployment and poverty that awaits them.¹³ Still, attending the university has certain gains. Many students are subjected to surveillance, restrictions, prohibitions, and the persecution of gender-related social expectations in their homes, neighborhoods, or villages. The gender factor and socio-economic status combine to increase the intensity of the repression. Therefore, in the eyes of these students, going to another city for a university—even if it is a rural university—means liberation. They feel like individuals at the university. Especially female students feel free because they are exempt from housework, do not fear being watched, can be outside in the evening, travel alone, and flirt. The university is the only place for these

students to escape from home and away from parental and neighborhood pressure. The most important of the difficulties they experienced in distance education during the pandemic period was that they were exposed to this pressure again.

Baskin Oran said that meeting people's demands that can be summarized as "moving up the social ladder" by establishing universities in towns/provinces, which are conservative and dark places, reduces the university education to the high school level, decreases the quality of education, and this results in the ruralization of the university. According to him, "the university is to be established in big cities so that it is as far away from local pressures as possible, and it benefits from the civilized environment as much as possible."¹⁴ It should be noted

that Oran's dichotomy of a civilized metropolitan and dark rural/provincial places does not fully correspond to social reality. Neither the metropolitans are so civilized nor the provinces that dark. Moreover, most of the concepts used in these statements need explanation. For example, "metropolitan", "rural", "town", "civilized environment", "local pressure". It is not right to discuss a reality that we call ruralization by confining it to simple dichotomies on the slippery ground where today's concepts are unstable. Mete Kaan Kaynar, on the other hand, said that the issue is not where the university was founded or the number 207 that it has reached today, that the problem is the uncontrolled, unplanned, and unqualified increase in the number of universities, like the growth of a cancer cell.¹⁵ It makes a more appropriate determination.

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Rural universities have their own problems. Students have pedagogical limitations and predispositions that prevent them from exceeding these limits, processed by provincial values. Students come from poor education and low scores. Unions and organizations close to the government are stronger in the rural universities. In addition to this, there are common problems brought



about by the ruralization experienced in all universities in Turkey today: Sexual abuse, sexist attitudes and prejudices, power relations within the university, lack of competence, high quotas, suppression of freedom of expression and thought, in Nalbantoğlu's¹⁶ words ersatz yuppies or civil servant academics, etc. as. Isn't

it necessary to ask, what can we do in these circumstances? It is not right to see the university as a place with insurmountable structural limitations, where irreconcilable interests collide and are enemies of freedom. Despite all its limitations, we can open cracks, gaps, spaces of freedom for ourselves

and our students to breathe. In the face of political and economic forces that repress, devalue, insecure, and deprive even of fundamental rights, we can / should still make an effort to transform our classrooms into public spaces that can produce democratic, egalitarian, critical subjectivities and agencies.

¹ Franz Kafka (2016). *Letter to the Father*, Trans. Regaip Minareci, Istanbul: İş Bankası Culture Pub.

² I have used this metaphor based on the concept of "Kafkaesque," which is used to express anxiety and fear-inducing atmosphere that paralyzes human action, which dominates Kafka's novels for the first time in my article, "Bir Mekân Olarak 'Taşra Üniversitesi' ve Sosyolojinin Taşrası: Eleştirel Bir Deneyim Analizi" *Moment Dergi*, 6(1), 2019, p. 209-226. For a similar article in which I tried to describe a rural university, see. "Taşra Üniversitesi Nedir? Ne İşe Yarar?" *Birikim* 351, 2018, p. 110-117.

³ See, *Council of Higher Education 2020 Higher Education Institutions Exam Placement Results Report* and istatistik.yok.gov.tr.

⁴ Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2017). *Hegemonya ve Sosyalist Strateji – Radikal Demokratik Bir Politikaya Doğru*, Trans. A. Kardam, Istanbul: İletişim Pub., p. 218.

⁵ In the TDK Dictionary, although the verb of being a victim (mağdur) has nouns such as victimization and victimized (mağdurluk, mağduriyet), indicating the status of being a victim, the verb of being conceit (mağrur) does not exist in the form of "conceitedness" (mağruriyet) as a noun indicating the status of being conceit. But in the Kubbealtı Dictionary, there is the concept of conceitedness and it is defined as being conceit. According to this dictionary, the root of the word conceit (adjective) is "deceiving" (aldatmak). Conceit means deceived, self-righteous, boastful, arrogant, proud, tremendous. The fact that the word conceit means "deceived" (aldanmış) from the root meaning of "to deceive" is a convenient expression that we can use to describe the moods such as greatness, strength, and superiority at the origin of the AKP's discourses are a deliberate illusion – deception. In other words, conceitedness is a state of being deceived by one's own greatness or the greatness of another being/person. However, this concept does not only emphasize a state of affairs, a state of emotion, when embellished with religious elements, it also marks the right of this mood to establish authority over the worldly, regarding non-earthly sources, that is, with an essentialist and transcendent attitude.

⁶ But, according to Laclau (2000: 88), if we "simply reverse this relationship, we will preserve the other (ie, the former oppressor, the persecutor) the same but this time as oppressed and persecuted; on the other hand, this reversal of contents leaves the form of oppression/persecution in place. And as liberated groups acquired their group identity through the rejection of former dominant groups, these dominant groups continue to shape their identities. The reversal process takes place entirely within the old official power system." In other words, it does not evolve into democracy. (*Evensellik, Kimlik ve Özgürleşme*, Trans. E. Başer, Istanbul: Birikim Pub.)

⁷ İsmet Parlak and Mete Kaan Kaynar wrote in 2005 that the policy of opening universities everywhere (province and district) is not an "education policy" but an "economic policy" and that this may lead to the collapse of the university system in Turkey. They state it in the book titled *Her İle Bir Üniversite: Türkiye'de Yükseköğretimin Çöküşü*.

⁸ For example, Sakarya University faculty member Ebubekir Sofuoğlu's words of "universities are prostitution traps". The accusations made by the religionist reactionary, especially the males, using the expressions of prostitution/whoredom are frequently encountered. There are organic ties between the statements saying that there are deist and atheist students brought up at Imam Hatip schools, and the statements saying that Istanbul Convention ruins the family, corrupts the society, and the ones told about universities. In this mentality, instead of approaching social problems realistically, there is always a search for moralism and a scapegoat. This kind of approach has two aims: First of all, as a requirement of an endless revanchist attitude, the polarization and sharpening of identities through stigmatization, defaming, which has functionality in serving to consolidate the conservative religious base of the power and legitimizes the demand for a more "Islamic" life, provided that it is in their own way. The second one is to prevent the emergence and discussion of the real causes of existing problems, to which they themselves are involved. For the article that discusses this understanding in the context of the Istanbul Convention, see. İlknur Meşe (2021). From religious conservative masculine discourse to Islamic feminist discourse: Istanbul Sözleşmesi Tartışmaları ve Feminizm, *Birikim* 381, pp. 82-91 and *Istanbul Sözleşmesi'nin Kaldırılmasının Ardından!*, <https://www.mukavemet.org/istanbul-sozlesmesi-removed-ardindan/>.

⁹ According to Lefebvre (2014: 413), "a group, a class or a class fraction can become a" subject " and be accepted only by creating (producing) space. Ideas that fail to be included in the space by creating (producing) an appropriate morphology, dry up into representations, values, signs, dissolve into abstract stories, become the product of imagination. (*Mekânın Üretimi*. Trans. I. Ergüden, Istanbul: Sel Pub.)

¹⁰ Lefebvre, *ibid*, p. 25.

¹¹ We can see this when we look at the "Boğaziçi Damage Report" announced by the Boğaziçi components. See. <https://medyascope.tv/2021/05/05/bogazici-universitesi-bilesenleri-melih-bulunun-rektorluge-atanmasinin-ardindan-universitesi-yasananlari-duyurdu-bogazicibasarraporu/>.

¹² See, <https://yokatlas.yok.gov.tr/lisans.php?y=104510365#>

¹³ For more detailed information about the young unemployed, see, gencsizler.org.tr.

¹⁴ Interview with academics from the Political Sciences Faculty of Ankara University: "Türkiye'de Bilimsel Özgürlük ve Üniversite", *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 71(1), p. 351-366.

¹⁵ See, <https://www.mukavemet.org/yuksekogretim-istatistikleri-uzerine-dusunceler/>

¹⁶ *Araştırmalar-Bilim, Kültür, Üniversite*, Istanbul: İletişim Pub., 2009.

WHERE ARE WE AT ACADEMIC FREEDOMS?

Turkish universities have historically not been institutions with extensive academic freedoms. Moreover, in recent years, we witnessed a dramatic decline regarding the issue. Ümit Akıncı, Dokuz Eylül University faculty member and Secretary of Eğitim Sen İzmir Branch No. 3, puts forth a detailed breakdown of this period in his article



The issue of academic freedom remains at the center of Turkey's higher education agenda. Although there are many different approaches to the content of the academic freedom concept, many of these approaches frequently refer to the Lima Declaration of 1988. The Lima Declaration approaches the concept of academic freedom with the content of "freedom in researching, analyzing, discussing, documenting, producing, creating, teaching, telling, writing, developing and transferring information." Although it is a different concept, the concept of academic freedom is associated with the concept of academic autonomy. There are also other definitions and approaches for

academic autonomy. It can roughly be considered as the existence of democratic self-management mechanisms established with the equal participation of all academy members, that is, the institutions' ability to determine their own destiny and functioning. Academic autonomy requires establishing democratic and pluralist decision-making processes regarding the functioning, financial affairs, and management of higher education institutions. Another requirement is independence from all other powers of the state and society in establishing their own policies in education/training activities, research and external studies, and other related activities. Indeed, all



Illustration: İsmail Cem Özkan

these mechanisms and functioning must be formed with social responsibility, within the framework of the principle of accountability to the society.

If there is no academic autonomy, there is no academic freedom to talk about. So, in this sense, autonomy protects academic freedoms. There is, of course, the inverse relationship: academic autonomy cannot exist without academic freedoms, academics without certain freedoms cannot participate in the decision-making mechanisms of their institutions, and they cannot decide on the institution's future. The higher education system is a huge system with universities, various other scientific institutions, and supervisory/regulatory institutions. The system includes a wide range of activities such as education/learning and generating science, art, and philosophy. It consists of different areas of employment with academicians, administrative staff, technical staff, workers, and students who have come for the education/learning services to gain knowledge/capability in different fields. Of course, education/learning service, science, and art generated in such a huge system have an undeniable place in the development and welfare of societies.

With this article, we want to answer in titles questions like "Where do academic freedoms stand in academic life?", "Where are Turkish universities in terms of academic freedoms?", "What are the recent developments in academic freedoms?" in such a gigantic system. Of course, there are substantial studies of social scientists regarding the topic. This article does not approach the issue



with the eyes and expertise of a social scientist. Instead, in this article, headlines on the subject are given through the eyes of an academic who has been involved in generating knowledge, and the union struggle at the university, providing teaching services in a state university, for twenty years.

The history of academic freedoms in Turkish universities, in fact, is the history of the struggle in this field. Unfortunately, the struggle in this area went hand in hand with the liquidations. This issue has been examined frequently in the relevant literature.¹ The history of academia in Turkey is a long one, although not as long as in other “developed” countries. However, we must start again by saying that YÖK, the outcome of the 1980 coup d’etat on academic freedoms, is a turning point.

Council of Higher Education (YÖK)

What comes to mind first when we think of YÖK is a law that has been changed over the years and almost turned into a patchwork package. But, in fact, YÖK is nothing more than the whole of the relationships in the academy that have degenerated (and continue to degenerate) after the 1980 coup. When we examine the evolution in the law, which includes many regulations ranging from the administrative mechanisms of universities to the activities carried out, from financial provisions to disciplinary provisions, we see that Turkish universities have rapidly gone back in terms of academic freedom and academic autonomy since the 1980 coup. The oppressive and authoritarian structure in universities has grown day by day. This negative course of events

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has turned the environment into one that is not possible both for the students and for those who created the whole higher education system with their efforts to exist. The rapidly decreasing quality of educational activities, the rapidly increasing number of universities, manager appointments made regardless of merit, and the fact that science, art, and philosophy activities are more frequently referred to as “plagiarism” are just a few of the indicators of this reality. The gradual decline of academic freedom and autonomy should be considered as the main reason for these. Activities such as quality education, quality science, art, and philosophy are not possible without academic freedoms. If we are to talk about academia at the least in the ideal sense today in Turkey, the reason for this is the existence of university staff and students who defend and pursue these principles.

Why is academic freedom necessary?

It is not difficult to see that a free society can be possible under conditions in which individuals can freely realize themselves. But the issue of academic freedom involves more than that. Of course, academic freedoms are based on a free society. This fiction is often thought of as a utopia. History is full of the experiences of people who followed this idea and paid the price. This utopia is nothing to be put aside easily. However, even if we leave aside this utopia, academic freedoms are necessary for the academy to function under the given conditions. Production processes in academia stipulate academic freedom. It does not matter whether it is the natural sciences, social sciences, art itself or its knowledge, philosophy, literature, history, or medicine. Activities of all these fields of expertise start with asking questions and progress by seeking



answers, finding answers, and asking new questions. The academy that is restricted to ask questions and to question does also deny its own existence. All this production in the academy is an extraordinarily collective process: the questions one once asked somewhere were answered by someone else at another time and place, followed by someone else asking other questions in entirely different places. For this to be possible, it requires the existence of the conditions for the unlimited sharing of what is produced in the academy. Even if you ignore the social responsibility of the academy and the necessity of sharing what it produces with the society for the welfare and development of the society, it is obvious that preventing the academicians from expressing his opinion will undermine the production of all whatever is produced in the academy. Without asking questions, questioning, coming up with answers and explanations, neither science nor art

İNTİHAL YAPMAYA BENZEMEZ
DİRENİŞTE KELEPÇE VURMAK!





Photo: Hasret Gültekin Kozan

can be produced, nor can the transfer of knowledge, which is exactly the teaching activity, be realized. If these cannot be generated in a society, we must ask the question, "Where are we in academic freedoms?"

Where are we at academic freedoms?

It is not difficult to see that the academic freedoms we have are declining further day by day. But, of course, we cannot expect the academy to be free in a society where the press is not free, where women are not free, where laborers are not free. In today's world, where society connects individuals, production processes, and institutions more and more with visible or invisible ties, the freedom that does not exist in any segment will eventually disappear in other segments as well. For this reason, academic freedom is not only the problem of the academician but also the

problem of everyone who created the higher education system. Ultimately, it is a problem of those bound by visible or invisible ties to the academy's existence, that is, the whole society.

One day, a public health professor shares the negative effects of industry on the environment and human health with the public, and since then, he becomes a new example of the academy's responsibility to society and the defense of academic freedoms in Turkey. We are talking about Onur Hamzaoğlu and his 2011 study, "Causes of death in industrialized regions: Dilovası example." Onur Hamzaoğlu, who is aware of the scientist's responsibility towards society and has adopted this as a principle in his life, defends academic freedom, then continues to share his thoughts and the results of his studies with the public. He becomes one of the scientists expelled from the university with the decree-law in 2016.²

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The Onur Hamzaoğlu incident is a typical example of the aspects of academic freedom in Turkey today. Unfortunately, other academic violations of the rights at that time were also reported.³ Although what happened to many thinkers who laid the foundations of modern science in



medieval Europe today seems like stories that have remained in the pages of the history of science to us today, the same approach continues to manifest itself in different forms in Turkey. However, it is obvious that many, like Onur Hamzaoğlu, are the defenders of the principles that should not be lost and that they will continue to be so.

Turkey's scientific institutions, academic freedoms, and academic autonomy today

Today, it is hard to talk about any higher education institution in Turkey with a great deal of academic autonomy.

No structure or institution, whether it is a foundation or a state university, or institutions such as TÜBİTAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey) or TÜBA (Turkish Academy of Sciences), or YÖK (!) cannot make their decisions within the framework of social responsibility and accountability. Although there are some differences among Turkish universities in terms of academic freedom and autonomy, with top-down practices (especially after the application of appointment of rectors from above), all universities are rapidly being similarized and rapidly drifting to the point where

academic freedoms and academic autonomy do not exist.

The amendments in the structure of the TÜBA established by Decree No. 497 of 13.08.1993, with the Decree-Law of 2011 and the Presidential Decree No. 4, dated 15.07.2018, were one of the regulations that took the autonomy of the institution backward. Following the change in 2011, TÜBA members expressed the opinion that "it will cause TÜBA to lose its quality of being an academy of sciences" and that "this regulation will break Turkey off from the worldwide scientific community." And it did. After



Today, YÖK continues to amate the gigantic higher education system with a little more than 180 thousand lecturers, administrative staff with nearly the same number, and almost 8 million students.

2001, we were going through a period of meetings held with “stakeholders,” the word that settled in our language after that. In 2011 and 2012, when TÜBA lost its qualification, the YÖK held workshops for the research assistants, assistant professors, rectors, university members, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and media. Following the commission’s draft proposal prepared in October 2011, the text “Towards a new higher education law” emerged in September 2012. In 2013, this was followed by the “proposal of a new draft law.” Then, in June 2014, the “new road map” emerged. Today, the new YÖK law has not been made yet. However, many changes have been made to the current law. But YÖK is still the same YÖK.

Nothing has changed in YÖK!

Nothing changed in YÖK after such a busy period. After every change in the text of the law, the freedoms in our academic life were cut a little more, and autonomy was dragged further away. The academicians withdrew themselves a little more. The number of administrators who were called “plagiarism” increased a little more. One university was opened almost in every city, the number reaching 129 state and 74 foundation universities. Today, YÖK continues to amate the gigantic higher education system with a little more than 180 thousand lecturers, administrative staff with nearly the same number, and almost 8 million students.⁶ With authority given by the law, the assignment of administrative personnel to different units “upon deemed necessity” is used as “exile.” The disciplinary provisions, last amended on April 17, 2020, give disciplinary superiors almost endless powers. Academics who defend academic freedom are subject to disciplinary investigations by provisions

this development, scientists who resigned from TÜBA established the Science Academy the same year.

It goes without saying that YÖK is not an autonomous body. As one of the biggest actors in the cutting academic autonomy and freedoms, 14 of the 21 members of YÖK are appointed directly, and the remaining 7 indirectly by the President after the law change in 2018. Likewise, with its changed structure, TÜBİTAK lost its role as a reinforcer and supporter of the science generation in Turkey. The changes in TÜBA and TÜBİTAK and their possible consequences are widely

covered in the Science Academy 2017-2018 academic freedom report.⁴

The situation is not different in universities, which are the most important institutions of the higher education system. The process of structuring universities from top to bottom continues rapidly. Following the YÖK Strategy Report published in 2006 and the TÜSİAD Higher Education Report in 2008, the new YÖK law process was initiated in March 2011 with the “Declaration on the restructuring of higher education.” During the Bologna Process⁵ in which Turkey was involved in

that can be filled arbitrarily by disciplinary chiefs such as “verbal disrespect to his supervisor on duty,” “To act contrary to the obligation of care required by his title, to behave in an immoral and indecent manner.” YÖK must have been disturbed by these developments. As of 2019, in the annual “University Monitoring and Evaluation General Reports,” “the number of disciplinary investigations opened” in the previous years was published.

YÖK, without any change, is still before us today, with executions from censorship of research subjects of social scientists to the recruitment of faculty members who do not consider the merit, from the appointment of those who have no idea about the university to their practices that will neutralize the institutional decision-making mechanisms defined by the law, from the investigations opened

to students to “citation gangs” that drag higher education to a lower point day by day.

What about foundation universities?

Some studies show that academics of foundation universities feel freer and have a higher level of satisfaction with the administration.⁷ However, especially as we go down the academic hierarchy,

the increasing uncertainty in job descriptions, the perception of students as “customers,” the fact that almost all employees are under contractual status and they are under pressure to renew their contracts at certain periods, result in the academic freedoms not finding enough place in foundation universities as well. In the Foundation Higher Education Institutions 2020 Report

Especially as we go down the academic hierarchy, the increasing uncertainty in job descriptions, the perception of students as “customers,” the fact that almost all employees are under contractual status and they are under pressure to renew their contracts at certain periods, result in the academic freedoms not finding enough place in foundation universities as well.



published by YÖK for the third time in 2020⁸, if the advertising promotion expenses of foundation universities and items such as library expenditures or research project expenditures are compared, the primary motivation will be clear. Likewise, the ratio of spending on scholarships, etc., to education income also reveals the fact that foundation universities are “commercial based.” The introduction part of the report states, “The fact that foundation universities are seen as institutions that carry out tax-free commercial activities far from the value of the concept of foundation in the society’s perception is not valid for the whole system.” It states that the “commercial basis” is not valid for the whole system; unfortunately, it is valid regarding “society’s perception.” The attitude of some foundation universities in the process of Academics for peace⁹

is an indicator of the issue of academic freedom. In this process, the universities that first fired signatory academics were foundation universities. On the other hand, the fact that, during the pandemic process, the individuals who were employed without security in foundation universities, especially those who were at the bottom of the academic hierarchy, were faced with some practices such as unpaid leave, is another situation in these universities where “academic freedoms are relatively higher.”

In the wake of 15 July

The state of emergency, which started on July 21, 2016, just after July 15, ended on July 18, 2018. During the two-year state of emergency, 125,000 public employees were suspended from duty with decrees issued. Among the suspended public servants were 6000 academicians



Illustration: İsmail Cem Özkan

and 1500 administrative staff from universities. Under the pretext of the struggle against the coup, opposition academics who talked about academic freedom, peace, good quality, and public education were also dismissed from the academy.

Details of this process can be found in Eğitim Sen’s “State of Emergency Report in Education and Higher Education” and “University Report in Turkey after the State of Emergency,” reports and “Academics for Peace: Current Situation Report” of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, dated 24 August 2020 and “The State of Emergency of the University: A Study On The Destruction of the Academic Environment.”¹⁰ In addition, violations of academic freedom during this period were also presented in a separate report.¹¹

Academic autonomy was further backed by decrees, while dismissals undermined academic freedoms, which had already come to an end. With Decree No. 676 of October 29, 2016, the rector elections were abolished, the associate professorship system was reorganized with the “Law on the Amendment of the Higher Education Law and Certain Laws and Statutory Decrees” dated March 6, 2018, and the Presidential decree dated September 12, 2018, introduced norm staffing practices to universities.

A study conducted after the appointments made following the abolition of the already undemocratic rector elections showed that 68 rectors in Turkish universities had no international publications at all.¹² This shows us



The Boğaziçi University instance is important not in showing once again the executive appointments made without regard to merit but in terms of protecting these principles with the reaction of academics and students who have adopted academic freedom and academic autonomy culture more than other universities in Turkey.

how far university administrations can improve the university's scientific environment and academic freedoms. Universities are now governed from the top by rectors appointed from the top, deans appointed by them, and department heads appointed by deans. The management of the units with so many different areas from each other, the fact that the units have become unable to make their own decisions, once again tells us how low we are in terms of academic autonomy. As we mentioned in the article's introduction, the declining academic autonomy is the process of academic freedoms becoming vulnerable and later disappearing. One of the latest incidents of a rector appointment from the top is the one in Boğaziçi University. However, before that, rectors were appointed to many universities with the same system. The example of Boğaziçi University is important not in showing

once again the executive appointments made without regard to merit but in terms of protecting these principles with the reaction of academics and students who have adopted academic freedom and academic autonomy culture more than other universities in Turkey.

Conclusion

The academy, which was initially rejected by the oppressive practices of political powers, has become self-denied with the self-censorship internalized in the academic lifestyle today. Academic freedoms, which were initially cut off by the political powers, are now being cut by "academics." The "whistleblower" behavior as a self-censorship mechanism which developed especially after July 15, took roots in universities as well. This, in the international arena, gradually decreases Turkish universities in the ranking of academic freedoms.

All of these create another consequence, apart from the inability to generate qualified knowledge, the inability to perform science, art, and philosophy: 8 million young people currently in the higher education system are educated in institutions that are not self-governing and do not have freedoms. Although it is tried to bring forth behaviors such as "not to self-govern," "not to make their own decisions," "not to say whatever they think," or "not to think" "not to ask" to this segment, who spend an important phase of their lives at the university, our social life is full of examples otherwise. Likewise, even though the picture in the academy is so dark, there are still academics who pursue academic freedom, express their demand for academic autonomy without fear, and above all, think, ask, and announce their answers without fear.

Education International adopted February 10 as "World Academic Freedom Day" upon the application of Eğitim Sen, following the scene engraved in our memories where the police trampled on the gowns at Ankara University Cebeci Campus on February 10, 2017. With the hope of freedoms to be established in the academy in the upcoming "World Academic Freedom Days."

¹ Cenk Yiğiter, *Türkiye'de Akademik Özgürlük ve Üniversite Özerkliği* (1845 - 1961), Unpublished Phd Thesis, Ankara University Institute of Social Sciences, Ankara 2013; Aynur Soydan, "Darülfünundan Günümüze Üniversitede Tasfiyeler", *Toplum ve Hekim* 14(4), July-August 1999.

² Cem Terzi, Emel Yuvayapan and Erkin Başer, *Kapitalizm Kıskaçında Doğa*, *Toplum ve Bilim: Onur Hamzaoğlu Olayı*, Yordam Kitap, 2013.

³ International Working Group on Freedom of Research and Teaching in Turkey (GITTurkey) *Akademide Hak İhlalleri Dosyası*, June 2012.

⁴ Bilim Akademisi, *Akademik Özgürlükler Raporu: 2017-2018*, <https://bilimakademisi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/8-ekim-akademik-ozgurluk-raporu-2017-18.pdf> (Access Date, May 2021).

⁵ Adnan Gümüş and Nejla Kurul, *Üniversitelerde Bologna Süreci Neye Hizmet Ediyor*, Eğitim Sen Publications, March 2011.

⁶ Higher Education Information Management System, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> (Access Date, May 2021).

⁷ Engin Karadağ and Cemil Yücel (UniAr), *Akademik Ekoloji: Akademisyenlerin Gözünden Üniversiteler*, <https://www.uniar.net/ekoloji> (Access Date, May 2021).

⁸ YÖK, *Vakıf Yükseköğretim Kurumları 2020 Raporu*, <https://www.yok.gov.tr/Documents/Yayinlar/Yayinlarimiz/2020/vakif-yuksekogretim-kurumlari-2020-raporu.pdf> (Access Date, May 2021).

⁹ <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/>.

¹⁰ Eğitim Sen, *Eğitimde ve Yükseköğretimde OHAL Raporu*, 19 July 2018, <https://egitimsen.org.tr/egitimde-ve-yuksekogretimde-ohal-raporu/>; Eğitim Sen, *OHAL Sonrası Türkiye'de Üniversiteler Raporu*, 6 November 2018, <https://egitimsen.org.tr/ohal-sonrasi-turkiyede-universiteler-raporu/>; Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı, *Barış İçin Akademisyenler: Güncel Durum Raporu*, August 24, 2020 https://tihv.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/BAK_Guncel_Durum_Raporu_Agustos_2020.pdf; Serdar Tekin, *Üniversitenin Olağanüstü Hâli: Akademik Ortamın Tahribatı Üzerine Bir İnceleme*, November 2019 <https://tihvakademi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/universitesiolaganustuhaliy.pdf>.

¹¹ Demet Sayinta, *OHAL Sonrası Akademik Özgürlük İhlallerini İzleme Raporu*, 2021, <https://insanhaklariokulu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/1%CC%87zleme-Raporu-2021.pdf> (Access Date, May 2021).

¹² Engin Karadağ, *Academic (dis)qualifications of Turkish rectors: Their career paths, H-index, and the number of articles and citations*, Higher Education, 2020.



FROM CAMPUS TO STREET, RED TO BLACK: UNIVERSITY AND RESISTANCE IN FRANCE

In her essay on the student movement centred in Paris, in which she took a personal part, Öykü Gürpınar discusses how the idea and ideal of the university gain diverse features in different times and take shape within multidimensional struggles.

Islam and Islamophobia debate that took place in Autumn 2020 between the French President Emmanuel Macron and Erdoğan entered into the public agenda of Turkey and introduced us to a concept that is identified as the “cancer” of French higher education. As a derogatory concept in the far right lexicon, “Islamism” (*islamo-gauchisme*) refers to the front against Islamophobia, which is mostly made up of left-leaning organizations and individuals in France. It reflects a point of view that accuses radical left organizations of collaborating with Islamist terrorism and is even used by two invariable ministers of education in Macron cabinets, Frédérique Vidal and Jean-Michel Blanquer. In fact, parliamentary motions for banning certain study areas, disciplines, and even social theories and demands for public investigations in higher education institutions are not uncommon at this point by the parties claiming that the left in universities is gaining strength and helping in the formation of an ideological basis, especially in the field of social science. This indicates that academic freedoms are heated public discussion items in France as they are in Turkey. On the other hand, the social opposition is organizing a full-scale struggle, which is largely inspired and supported by the student movement, against a series of reforms and parliamentary resolutions by Macron cabinets, that are seen as “liberticide”. In other words, the student movement is amplifying the defiant voice rising both from universities and

the street against the political project that targets not only universities but also the whole society, social justice, and freedoms. Therefore, the discourse and resistance organized by the student movement as a political actor can be seen as influential as the academic freedoms in the current rise of Islamism debate in universities. In this piece, I will provide a short evaluation of the fifty-year history, demands, and evolution of this resistance and share my observations as a participant since 2018 on the student movement concentrated in Paris.

The past and present of the student movement in France

The first thing that comes to mind while talking about the history of the student movement in France is naturally the May of 1968. Indeed, the '68 has a distinctive place in history due to its global resonance. However if limited to the context of France, this period from the 1960s until today essentially implies a student movement formed against a series of legal proposals and reform initiatives that intended to transform the field of higher education.¹ Demands such as the autonomy, democratic and participatory administration of higher education institutions, abolition of government interference in student life, equality in access to higher education and social justice were, as they are today, the bases of the student movement. Since the founding of the French student union UNEF at the beginning of the 20th Century, these demands

Therefore, the discourse and resistance organized by the student movement as a political actor can be seen as influential as the academic freedoms in the current rise of the Islamism debate in universities.

were vocalized in varying contexts and order, but especially since the 1960s they have always occupied a top place in the political agenda of the student movement. Various projects proposed by governments usually contain attacks on these basic rights, however, when faced with the strong and organized reaction of the student movement they are put aside.

On the path towards the May of 1968, the mass action against the university reform proposed by the Minister of National Education Christian Fouchet in 1966, which sharpened the social sciences vs. humanities division, stipulated specialization, and introduced a “covert” elimination method in access to higher education, played an important role.² The most controversial aspect of this reform was to make universities, which under the constitution should have been free and open for all, accessible

only to a certain social sector, under the guise of “orientation”.³ In any case, because of the strong opposition, this reform was scrapped and the Faure Law, which went into effect on 12 November 1968, marked the historical victory of the student movement. This law ensured a participatory administrative model in which students were included in decision-making, encouraged interdisciplinary content, and guaranteed the autonomy of universities. In the following years, the influence of May '68 remained strong and higher education reforms had to follow this framework.⁴

In the meantime, the student movement in France did not only tackle reforms and draft laws but was also influenced by the left-right clash, which had been the trademark of French political practice. An interesting example was the student resistance against two

consecutive draft laws proposed in the 1980s. The higher education law of 26 January 1984, which was introduced by Alain Savary, the Minister of Higher Education and Research in the socialist cabinet of François Mitterand, sought to reinforce the academic autonomy and freedom established by Faure Law. Most of its articles still in effect today, the Savary Reform understood university and research as a “public service” and clarified the conditions of the charter that private education institutions had to sign with the government, therefore submitted Catholic Institutes, which could only operate as private schools in “laïc” France, under state supervision. Exactly because of this aspect, it faced the serious opposition of the far-right student movement. Organized in 1983, this mass movement employed a wide repertoire of radical action, such as university occupations and Molotov

bomb attacks on public institutions. The mainstream media called this movement “the inverse May '68 (*Mai 68 à l'envers*)”.⁵ As the right-wingers were establishing their separate student unions and organizations, the student union UNEF was suffering from the “negative balance” of the May '68 movement and experiencing factionalism in the 1970s, which prevented the political left from producing a coherent discourse. The right-wing formations came together under the slogan of “free school (*école libre*)” in 1984 and formed one of the most organized Catholic movements of the Fifth Republic. They managed to push back the government and eventually took out the legal arrangement concerning private schools from the draft.⁶

In 1986, this time a new draft by Alain Devaquet, the Minister of Higher Education and Research in Jacques



Photo: Faruk Bilal

Chirac's government, mobilized the leftist student unions by proposing an "elimination" system for university enrollment again. This movement was inspired by the May '68 experience, however, was distant from its values, principles, and "ideology." Now, the label of "inverse May '68" was circulating within the left circles and used to deride the 1986 student movement as the "reverse" of '68.⁷ On the other hand, left and right wing students were involved in violent confrontations with each other on campuses and streets and began to form self-protection units (*service d'ordre*),⁸ since the police did not interfere with the clashes. On the night of 6 December, security forces mobilized to disperse the occupation in Sorbonne University and began to chase students on motorbikes in Paris streets. A student with Algerian origins, Malik Oussekiine was leaving a jazz club in the early morning hours and

became the target of police violence. The death of Oussekiine triggered silent marches that lasted for days and resulted in the withdrawal of the draft.⁹ The institution of a selection and elimination mechanism for university enrollment was achieved only thirty years later by the ORE Law on student orientation and success drafted by Macron administration.

These two facets of the student movement in France (one, its emergence as a reaction to reform initiatives and draft law proposals, and two, its character susceptible to left/right polarization) are important for understanding the student movement organizing against Macron government today. Similar to the student movement, the resistances that mark the last four years in France, such as the Yellow Vest movement or general strikes, aim to stop government reforms and

projects as a first step. All governments in the last fifty years try to implement a series of reforms in accordance with their programs and approach. However, in France, the social opposition has an opportunity to organize, shape its objections and demands, hence has time to push back the government since the complicated procedure that takes years between the introduction of a draft law and its enactment enables a series of parliamentary and public debates.¹⁰ Examples of this political culture can be observed not only during Macron's rule but also in general strike organized against the university reforms proposed by the Sarkozy government in 2007-2009 and the "Up All Night" (*Nuit Debout*) actions against the labor reform (*Loi El Khomri*) proposed by Hollande government in 2016.

In addition, the reform projects are not independent of the political goal of respective governments; therefore, create a context in which the tension between left and right disseminates across the whole social opposition. For example, Yellow Vests at the first stage was a movement organized in the provinces and led by a right wing segment against the hike in fuel prices due to the ecological program of the Macron government. However, it experienced a serious transformation as the radical left in the cities like Paris began to participate in the protests. Underrated by the left as the "movement of the far right" at the beginning, protests caught unions' attention in time and tuned into an anti-Macron movement only in three months. As the ideological differences between left and right were abandoned and a united front against the government—or as it was verbalized often during the protests, a "convergence of the struggles" (*convergence des luttes*)—was formed, Macron responded by deepening and rekindling the polarization between left and right. Contemporary issues like the draft law on discrimination or the Islamo-leftism debate in universities work exactly in Macron's favor and revive the tension that climaxed in the 1980s between the left and right sections of the student movement.¹¹ Therefore, as was the case in the past, today the student movement emerges as an ally of a larger social opposition and elevates the resistance both on campuses and streets.





Photo: Faruk Bilal

The anatomy of a movement: Red Squares

How do students experience this movement in practice, and organize? What kind of discussions they carry out and what is the content of their direct action repertoire? To answer these questions, I will share my experiences and observations on a movement I participated in person: Red Squares.

It all began with the “Welcome to France” (*Bienvenue en France*) project announced by the Minister of Interior at the time, Edouard Philippe on 19 November 2018. This project essentially intended to turn the French higher education and research field into a center of attraction, which can compete at an international scale, especially against the Anglo-Saxon academia. The project determined a benchmark titled “half a million foreign students in 2027,” and set forth a series of regulations. In addition to facilitating visa and residency permit requirements for the students; extending education in English; and organizing campaigns in other countries to promote education in France, the project was proposing “differentiated” tuition rates for foreign students. Accordingly, tuition for foreign students studying in France was going to be 2770€ for undergraduate and 3770€ for graduate levels. Parallel to the tuition hike, fellowship and tuition exemption available for foreign students were going to be tripled. Considering the current tuition rates—around 170€ for undergrad, 240€ for graduate, and 380€ for doctoral level students—this hike meant that foreign students would pay ten to fifteen times more “differentiated” tuition. When asked about the logic behind charging foreign students more in order to make French higher education more attractive, authorities would refer to high tuition rates in America and England and suggest student loans as an alternative solution.

Students were outraged by the announcement. During the following week, more than twenty general assemblies (*assemblée générale*) were organized in fifteen universities around Paris. Students meeting in forums were having heated debates about the discriminatory (even racist) character of the project, calling for a general strike and direct action, and planning mass university occupations. After each university had one internal general

assembly during the week, an inter-university general assembly took place at EHESS on the last day of the week. The call for the inter-university general assembly (*Interfac*) was published in Turkish, English, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean. *Interfac* defined the project as “an extension of discriminatory, racist, classist, and capitalist policies carried out by France [...] against undocumented international students¹² and working class” and announced that it would “not allow the French state transforming our universities into business firms”.¹³ This was the top item in the general assembly’s discussion agenda: France was forcing international students, who were already striving to continue their studies under very hard material and emotional circumstances, to pay higher tuitions. Therefore, it was adding an institutional dimension to xenophobia and everyday racism that every foreign resident in France was already accustomed to. In any case, the general assemblies raised awareness unexpected by the government and exposed a series of discriminatory, xenophobic, and racist bureaucratic practice, which was unknown, unspoken, and unheard of outside the networks of international students until that moment.¹⁴ Putting the university fees aside, foreign students were expressing on any occasion that they never felt “welcome in France” anyways.¹⁵ In addition, the student mobilization overlapped with Yellow Vests and both movements kick started almost simultaneously. The students organized

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the first mass protest against the tuition hike at the Panthéon Square on Saturday, 1 December, and continued in groups to join Yellow Vests who were protesting on Champs-Élysées.

The following few weeks witnessed a series of general assemblies, direct actions, meetings, and solidarity parties; however, the movement ended abruptly on 20 December. The reason was the closure of the universities for one month during the winter break and students traveling back to their hometowns. However, when the campuses reopened in January, the movement could not go back to where it was. The action committee of the inter-university assembly, which was held to prepare for protests organized in front of *Campus France*¹⁶ during December, issued a call for a meeting to be convened on 9 January 2019. This call was the first time “Red Squares (*carrés rouges*)” was used to symbolize the movement. Red square as a symbol originated in the months-long student strikes in 2012 that protested the tuition hikes in Québec. Its connotation derived from the slogan of the strike: “Frankly we are very angry (*carrément dans le rouge*)”.¹⁷ In December 2018, some adopted this symbol during the student resistance against tuition hikes in France, nevertheless, the transformation of the symbol into a movement was only possible with the student protests that responded to the call from the action committee.

We can talk about a few authentic features of Red Squares in France. First of all, this movement was initiated by a grassroots and independent group of mostly international students who does not have any political affiliation. Participants from a political organization or party could join the movement only as individuals and should avoid carrying any other symbol than the red square during protests and meetings.¹⁸ Second of all, the symbol manifested the international character of the movement, since it was originated in the student strike in Québec, hence was sending a salute to student movements from across the world. Third of all, it gave the students and allies an opportunity to express a political view through a red square symbol, which you could wear on your collar, arm, or bag to imply your position against differentiated tuition rates project as a discriminatory



Photo: Faruk Bilal

policy against international students. In addition to political meanings, it had a practical function in bringing people who identify with the movement yet never met each other in protests, campus corridors, or streets together. Fourth of all, the international character of the movement and its cause against a discriminatory policy enabled a natural alliance with the movements of foreigners, migrants, and undocumented in France, therefore kept the moment in strengthening contact with antiracist and antifascists movements. In addition, it partnered with the Yellow Vests over the “social justice demand” and joined Saturday protests as a Red Squares cortege. Finally, Red Squares was a university-based movement as much as a student movement, hence included teaching faculty, university personnel, and administrative staff. In higher education institutions like EHESS, which opposed the differentiated tuition project, it was common to see a very large segment of the campus including security and administrative personnel, researchers,

This movement was initiated by a grassroots and independent group of mostly international students who does not have any political affiliation.

and professors wearing a red square on their collars.

There were also some authentic conditions that rose from the dominant position of international students in the movement. Primarily, the issue of privileges enjoyed by French and European students became visible and expectation from leading foreign students to undertake the main tasks was open for a debate. The idea of international students doing all the heavy work to achieve the visibility they demanded was challenged and eventually, the

viewpoint arguing for an active role of French and European students limited to carrying out mainly the basic chores by using their “privileges” as a concrete action of solidarity became predominant, thanks to the Red Squares movement. A second point was the space provided by the Red Squares movement for foreign students studying in France for different types of socialization, gathering, meeting, and friendships that they could not enjoy before. It created a new form of “belonging” that overcame the barriers posed by cultural and linguistic differences on some occasions and the feeling of loneliness and isolation imposed by various forms of everyday and banal racisms in others. Finally, the international character of the Red Squares movement allowed protesters to go beyond the classical action repertoire of the French student movement such as university occupations. It was only natural for international students and undocumented individuals to avoid forms of action that jeopardize their residency permit in France, therefore



the search for alternatives brought about some very creative results. Since the Red Squares movement could grow with the experiences and action repertoires of foreign students from their country of origin, an infinite number of opportunities and possibilities emerged on the table together with tremendous plurality and richness of ideas.¹⁹ A good example was the “funeral procession” on 11 March 2019, which was inspired by again the 2012 student strike in Québec. Students built coffins that symbolized the French higher education and carried them while playing the funeral march. Carrying red roses and crying in front of the coffins, students “painfully” announced the time of death and “burial of free and egalitarian university”.²⁰ Another example of creative action was the direct action that took place on 10 March 2019, at the library of Georges-Pompidou Center for Art and Culture, which was a study area frequented by international students. Two actions were organized by two groups simultaneously: while one group flew a huge red square banner from the balcony

of *Centre Pompidou*²¹ and addressed to the public with bullhorns, the other group entered the library and silently handed out fliers as a voice recording telling the absurdity of “Welcome to France” project played on wireless speakers.²²

The international character was not the only factor in the diversity of action repertoire. Worried by the growth of the student movement, the government made some modifications in the project, which were partly successful in cooling down the movement, such as applying the new law only to new foreign students and excluding doctoral students and foreign students currently enrolled in France from the purview of the law. Unfortunately, the mass character of the movement weakened over time and apart from foreign students—in fact, even for the foreign students—who were the direct target of the project, the issue lost importance and urgency. Therefore, the action types that could be carried out by few people yet were effective and striking became a necessity. A frequently used action was to follow Minister of Higher Education and Research, Frédérique Vidal’s agenda to make surprise interventions during his public appearances and protest him with handouts, slogans, and songs. So much so that, Minister Vidal had to travel to all events with a police crew and avoid sharing his agenda with the public in advance. The loudest of the surprise protests happened on 20 March 2019 at EHESS during an event attended by two Ministers of Education, Vidal and Blanquer. The purpose of the event was to announce the opening of an international research platform on anti-Semitism and racism and the ministers were invited to talk about the initiatives France introduced on the matter. Naturally, a handful of students were prepared for exposing the hypocrisy of inviting two ministers

who tried to implement a discriminatory and racist practice like diversified tuition rates. However, before they could go into the event hall and start chanting slogans, they suffered an intervention by the police who entered the campus without a warrant. Only after being violently removed from the campus and battered, the administrative staff of EHESS and security personnel intervened and the rector in person ended the police intervention so that the students could hold the protest. Video images of the police intervention and after attracted a relatively serious reaction on social media²³ because the students, who had the backing of the university administration, were battered by the police, who under normal conditions were not permitted on campus. Instead of facing the students and building a dialogue, the ministers used the police and left the campus immediately, thus terminated any chance of communication, which was another factor in arousing public disapproval.

In lieu of conclusion: the legacy of Red Squares

After all, the Red Squares movement could not succeed; the diversified tuition policy is going into effect in the 2021-2022 academic year, after a two-year “transition period” granted to universities. Today only a few universities manage to escape the diversified tuition policy by resorting to the internal “education tuition exemption budget”. Others experience a serious fall in international student numbers due to new tuition rates. In any case, Red Squares was an authentic basis for participation in the student movement during the climax of social opposition in France in 2018-2019 and provided a platform on which foreign students could finally raise their voices. The networks and communication channels established around Red Squares are still in use by

The pluralist structure, authentic character, and openness of the movement that accommodated alternative thinking facilitated the emergence of concrete political practices against everyday discrimination and generated diversified and transformed demands. For example, it enabled concrete proposals regarding social justice such as the student salary against precarity.

other university-based movements.²⁴ The pluralist structure, authentic character, and openness of the movement that accommodated alternative thinking, facilitated the emergence of concrete political practices against everyday discrimination and generated diversified and transformed demands. For example, it enabled concrete proposals regarding social justice such as the student salary against precarity. Verbalized during the Red Squares movement often, the idea of student salary (*salaires étudiants*) acknowledged higher education as work and argued that students carrying out original research and contributing to the academia had a right to become salaried workers. This idea would gain currency again during the pandemic in relation to the precarity and poverty of students who could only afford one meal or would wait in food aid lines for hours only to return back to their student dorms with an empty stomach due to lack of regular income.²⁵

If we accept that the movement was not just about “opposing” the diversified university tuition, a narrative of “failure” or “surrender” can be avoided. Ultimately, instead of focusing on a “negative balance,” acknowledging that a movement’s legacy could inspire, enrich, and multiply means holding a resourceful space for future movements. It also shows why Macron is right to be afraid of the universities, since the movement reminds the possibility of interrupting a kind of politics that feeds on left-right tension and artificial agendas like discrimination law or Islamo-leftism debate, and producing its own authentic agenda that challenges the government’s political strategy.



Photo: Faruk Bilal

¹ Student movements’ relation to macropolitics is a context too large to cover within the scope of this essay. Therefore, I limited the historical analysis to student movements, which emerged as a reaction to government reforms and transfer its legacy to the next generation after their disappearance. However, I want to note that these movements are always in the same situation with the socio-political context of the period and are not of a homogenous, fixed, and unchanging character; for instance, the political polarizations after the Algerian War determined the positions within the student movements in the 1960s.

² Laurent Jalabert, “Transformer l’université : La politique pour l’enseignement supérieur avant la loi Faure (1958-1968)”, in *La loi Edgar Faure : Réformer l’université après 1968*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016, pp. 25-35.

³ So much so that the essence of this reform inspires Bourdieu’s concept of “cultural capital.” Accordingly, the kind of project that Fouchet advocates signifies university as an “elite training institution” and the success of this mission depends on the formation of an elimination mechanism that determines which kind of cultural capital ensures access to higher education. See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Les héritiers: les étudiants et la culture*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1965.

⁴ Jean-François Condette, “Mai 1968 en perspective: Ruptures et continuités, accélérations et résistances à la réforme dans le champ éducatif (1968-1975)”, *Histoire@Politique*, 37, January-April 2019, Access: <https://www.histoire-politique.fr/index.php?numero=37&rub=dossier&item=342>

⁵ Louis Gruel, Olivier Galland ve Guillaume Houzel, *Les étudiants en France: Histoire et sociologie d’une nouvelle jeunesse*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009, p. 115.

⁶ Jacqueline Lalouette, “Enjeux et formes de la mobilisation catholique au XXe siècle : manifestations et meetings (1906-1984)”, in *Histoire des mouvements sociaux en France. De 1814 à nos jours*, Paris: La Découverte, 2014, pp. 305-315.

⁷ Guy Coq, “Mai 68 à l’envers”, *Esprit*, 124 (3), 1987, pp. 34-41, Access: www.jstor.org/stable/24271437

⁸ Formed against the possibility of attack from the far right, these security units still operate today to provide security of the corteges at left-wing actions. In addition, these units sometimes can assume the function of a “political filter” that determines who is permitted in the cortège or not. At the March Against Violence Against Women on 25 November 2018, tension arose regarding this issue. The security unit of the women marching for “the ban on prostitution” tried to push away the cortège of sex workers from the protest and caused a quarrel. As a response, a group of sex workers, Muslim feminists, queers, and lesbians formed a security unit to protect themselves from the “white feminists” and eventually the march could only go on by forming two separate corteges.

⁹ Ismaël Halissat, “Le « syndrome Malik Oussekiné » existe-t-il encore ?”, *Libération*, 5 December 2016, Access: https://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/12/05/le-syndrome-malik-oussekine-existe-t-il-encore_1533123/

¹⁰ Moreover, even though the government ignores and passes the draft law, the opposition continues the struggle and stops the project at the legal level. For example, multiple clauses of the draft law on the prevention of hate crimes on virtual platforms proposed by Laetitia Avia were annulled by the Constitutional Court in June 2020. Therefore, even if the law went into effect, it lost the qualities intended by the government and was, so to speak, “crippled.”

¹¹ For example, active in *École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS)* the autonomist student organization of which I am also a member, named *La Brèche* was attacked by a Neonazi student group wielding sticks and accusing the organization of “Islamism.” In the handouts distributed on the street, they condemned us for simultaneously defending Islam and hosting homosexual and queer “freaks;” therefore, promised to cleanse universities of “degenerates” like us.

¹² The *Undocumented (sans papiers)* is an expression used for foreign nationals who reside and work in France without a residency permit. There are some among the students that came to France to study who could not obtain a residency permit for various reasons as well.

¹³ For the full-text of Interfac’s call in Turkish see: <https://www.facebook.com/events/193908754851065/>

¹⁴ So much so that, during the following months, a series of video-interviews that included witness accounts on the experience of foreign students in French higher education would be published and shared on YouTube with the hashtag #PayeTesFrais (Pay your tuition). See: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYlxldQLIP-Bn-NoEiYT2BWBMYmaaPB_y

¹⁵ On 13 February 2019, in an event against tuition hike at EHESS, I had an opportunity to present my witness account as well. This account was published in the event notes in full-text. See: <https://universiteouverte.org/2019/02/21/carres-rouges-a-lehess-un-compte-rendu/>

¹⁶ Campus France is an official state institution through which every international student planning to study in France has to go through. After receiving acceptance from a higher education institution in France, including Erasmus Program, and before applying for the visa mandatory for arriving in France, the students must report to a Campus France representative in the home country, submit documents that explain their situation, pay the application fee, and get an approval. Required documents and fees vary according to country. Therefore, one could say that an “elimination” system in France, at least for foreign students is already in effect.

¹⁷ Hard to come by with a literal translation due to its figurative connotations, this slogan takes the square from the word “carrément,” which means “openly, frankly,” and takes the color red from the expression “voir rouge,” which means “to see everything in red because of extreme anger.”

¹⁸ In terms of the “autonomous” character of the student movement, political practices naturally lean towards the left and cannot help but stand in a position close to the autonomist movement. Nevertheless, even within the radical left strife to steer a budding upheaval or in a sense “take over (*recuperer*)” the movement is possible, therefore allowing only individual representation was a necessary practice for preserving the autonomy of Red Squares.

¹⁹ On 26 April 2019, in a time when the movement was in a bottleneck, an event on international student movements was organized in EHESS, and presentations and discussions were carried out on the practical action repertoires of the student movements in Québec, Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, Iran, and Syria. In this experience-sharing event that intended to come up with creative action ideas for Red Squares, I contributed with a presentation on the student movement in Gezi uprisings and the 2014 ITU Faculty of Mines occupation. For the event poster see: <https://www.facebook.com/events/282159129387098/>

²⁰ For a selection of photos from the action see: <https://universiteouverte.org/2019/03/12/marche-funebre-pour-luniversite-ouverte-a-tou%2%b7tes/>

²¹ Georges-Pompidou Center is an important cultural and touristic space. Countless artwork, happening, and flash-mob took place in and around the building. In fact, the viewers took the direct action performed by Red Squares as an art performance.

²² For the video of the action see: <https://youtu.be/R5zhEeEzjk4>

²³ Videos covering the police intervention and student protest reached more than a hundred thousand views after going into circulation on Facebook. For a detailed description of the incident and the statement of the students see the video collage at: https://youtu.be/7OLrKR8pB_E

²⁴ See: Université Ouverte (Open University) website: www.universiteouverte.org

²⁵ For an essay detailing the arguments such as, student salary is not a “utopian project,” the activities done by students, who are taxpayers even though they don’t have an income, create a surplus value, therefore they are eligible for an income based on minimum wage, see: <https://universiteouverte.org/2020/04/28/vers-lautonomie-des-etudiant%E2%88%99es-le-salaire-etudiant-comme-outil-de-lutte-contre-la-precarite-comparaisons-europeennes/>



» Seçil Türkkân

Searching for a common “affair” in the student movement of the past and the present: Neoliberalism in “my time”

On a Sunday in May, we met with journalist and trade unionist Ömer Süvari from the student movement following September 12, Foti Benlisoy, writer and lawyer from the mid-90s student movement, Özlem Damla Arık, a student from the Boğaziçi University Molecular Biology and Genetics Department and BOUN Solidarity, Hüsni Beha Yıldız, a student of Boğaziçi University Sociology Department, and looked for an answer: Do these three different movements have a common point, a legacy they feed on?



When you read the conversations, you will notice that every generation uses the word “issue” at least once, but the biggest common denominator cannot be this word. There must be another partnership that calls everyone to say, “the issue.” So, the subject will be the inherited legacy. Although it seems like there is no legacy, we realize that the roots are together. Maybe it is a cliché and boring now, but “commonality” winking enthusiastically at me as a student of the 2000s as it does to my guests: Yes, “the issue” is again and again neoliberalism. Now, there is a point in being “cliché” and “boring,” considering this interview because we live in the very age of neoliberalism.

“Maybe we were participating in the first resistance movement against the neoliberalization of the first universities, while nowadays, our friends are working for the last resistance of the

last universities,” says Ömer. The debate on the neoliberal transformation of universities, which started in the period of September 12 and found its voice in the Coordination, shows today that it completed itself with Prof. Melih Bulu being appointed to Boğaziçi University.

While Damla and Beha from Boğaziçi University use the term “non-political militant” for some of the students at the school, Ömer believes that this mass should be looked at closely. Foti describes the ground of these “apolitical militants,” points out the disappearance of the universal student definition, and the absence of old canteens where a solidaristic perspective can be established. Canteens that look like shopping malls have already replaced them. Also, the old and safe representation of student identity is left behind. Foti reminds us that students “have to live for a CV now.” The legacy of neoliberalism remains, but the

era has changed rapidly. Together with four people from three generations, we watch the beginning, middle, and end of the discussion from their own time intervals.

Ömer, can you tell us how you got involved in the student movement?

Ömer Süvari: Maybe it sounds like a legend to today’s youth because it would feel like we were listening to something ancient when we were told about 68 in the 1980s. It was almost like, “This old man comes to tell us about 68.” (Laughing) Now, when we talk about the 80s, today’s youth will probably listen with a feeling like, “This old man is telling us the legends of 30-35 years ago.” But although the conditions and the dynamics of the opposition movements are quite different, they have similar aspects. I got into the university in 87, right after the student protests on April 14-15. I went to Izmir and studied



Economics at 9 Eylül University, and I was a boarder. I participated in organizing the first dormitory protests and developing the Student Associations process after April 14. In high school, I was already on the search, and we all had an interest in the left, the dissidents, the socialists, and the revolutionary movements. Still, we could not find any outlet for that interest. Since this pressure was felt in the whole society -detentions lasted for 15 days, press and media were censored- very few dissenting publications were accessible.

It was serious adversity even to find a cassette tape before September 12, dissenting music when there was no Internet, mobile phones, or communication systems of today. What I

Ömer: Some of the organized political groups were standing at that time, but the main veins of the social movement were severely cut, and we felt this the most in the student movement.

mean by dissenting music is Zülfü Livaneli and Ruhi Su albums. I remember a severe intellectual, ideological disconnection between the periods before and after September 12. This disconnection lasted until the 90s.

Some of the organized political groups like TKP, TİP, TSİP, Kurtuluş until the 87s,

and an important part of the Kurdish Movement were still standing at that time. However, the main veins of the social movement were severely cut, and we felt this most in the student movement. The student movement was on a serious rise in 1987, and I remember that we had profoundly serious discussions to see our future.

There was a famous clause in the YÖK law regulating the establishment// membership of student associations, claiming that a student must obtain permission from the rectorate to become a member of an association. This was one of the main axes of opposition. Those who were expelled from schools in the period of 86-87 were also on the agenda.



Beyazıt, 1990. Source: Ömer Süvari



Laleli, Beyazıt, 14 April 1987. Source: Ömer Süvari



Boğaziçi Festival of Unity, 1990. Source: Ömer Süvari



Central Campus, Istanbul University. Source: Ömer Süvari



Farewell Ceremony for Uğur Mumcu, January 1993. Source: Ömer Süvari



Ömer Süvari

If you take a course twice and fail, you would be expelled from the school. If I am not mistaken, there were nearly 50 thousand students within this scope, and this was a result that emerged in the 5th or 6th year of YÖK. Exam systems had changed with YÖK after September 12, and there was a serious examination burden. The central dynamic of the student movement at the time was the opposition to September 12, the struggle against YÖK, and the breaking of the police occupation in

universities, which continued until the mid-90s as the main path for the student movement.

I remember that we had the first debates on the need for new searches in the student movement in 89-90, the privatization of the universities, the change in the quality of knowledge, the paving the way for capital to be associated with universities, and the opening of new universities. I remember that we talked about the end of the first era in the student movement in 91, and even this first era ending in defeat. After that, it has turned into a

developing process towards the Coordination. The form of student opposition has changed in Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, and its main issues became different.

Foti Benlisoy: My brother Yorgo was at Istanbul University during the periods Ömer mentioned. He was not a political figure, but he later encountered the “associations process.” And you know that I have a twin brother! We both met the opposition of political consciousness through my older brother’s friends, the discussions within the process of those actions taking place in our home/house. Therefore, I had an ear full of discussions of the past period when I enrolled in Istanbul University Faculty of Law in 94-95.

However, Ömer also mentioned that there was a withdrawal after 91-92. That withdrawal was obvious in universities. There was no doubt that there were groupings within the university discussing the various potentials and possibilities of student movements, but there was an interruption. There is always such a “problem” in university opposition movements. Sometimes very lengthy disruptions. It is always a problem that memory is interrupted while being transferred at the collective level.

At that time, of course, I was on a personal quest too, and I was ready; I called myself a leftist. So, it did not take me long to get acquainted with certain circles. There was an excessive increase in student tuitions towards the summer of that year. If I remember correctly, it



Source: Foti Benlisoy



Source: Foti Benlisoy



Foti Benlisoy

Foti: While the student opposition was mostly following a path against the authoritarian practices of September 12 and YÖK in Ömer's time, our struggle started to form around the neoliberal transformation of the university, the commodification, and the commercialization of education.

was 350 percent, it suddenly became a very serious issue among the students of the period. During the summer months, the cores of a formation that would quickly be called the Istanbul University Coordination began to form, and a petition was in question to revoke the tuition increase. My first encounter with the student movement was in signature collecting activities at that time.

While the student opposition was mostly following a path against the authoritarian practices of September 12 and YÖK in Ömer's time, our struggle started to form around the neoliberal transformation of the university, the commodification,

and the commercialization of education. Such a high increase in tuition -and there were also the canteen mark-ups before that- has become an issue that directly affected the student masses. Therefore, especially during 95-96, there was a very widespread politicization. The common slogan of the period was, "We are students, not customers."

The University Students Platform and other political parties' structures were also present in the Coordination. The platform was organized as a coalition of existing political organizations' youth instruments and was an effort to mobilize their cadres at universities.

From the very beginning of the Coordination, there was always a different organizational experience, and it was important. I think we did not use the term at that time, but it was a horizontal organization, no doubt. This was a structure in the form of a "coordination" of the facades, where almost everyone was directly involved in the decision-making processes in the faculties, and therefore the decision-making processes were horizontal. But, of course, in these discussions, we all acted from fragmented experiences. The Coordination's structure was clustered around the Revolutionary Youth magazine at that time, and it was

this circle that organized the ideas. Even though I was in contact with that circle, I have never been a full member while in the university. It is an old phrase, but common in our time, I was in a cluster called the Undefined Socialist/Leftist.

Ömer: Oh, no! We never called you Undefined. (Laughter)

Foti: It was known that a lot of unorganized leftists were participating in the Coordination. This was a structure in which "unorganized," "undefined" segments could be more effective since it was based on grassroots initiative and individual participation -with problems, of course- of people. This made it easier for the Coordination to meet with large groups of student segments in organizational terms. We used to call it "the Coordi" then; this was one reason why the Coordi achieved such a certain influence.

I think it was on October 20, 1995, with the collected signatures being sent, there was a mass movement in Ankara. We went from Istanbul to Ankara, and of course, they did not let us leave the train station. We were boxed in, and we stayed there for a day. Then, in December 1995, protests became increasingly massive and reached thousands in Beyazit. The

Platform occupied Istanbul University. I think a banner was unfurled in the Parliament the same day, and that also had an impact.

Of course, pressures against student opposition were intense as they are today. The intense pressure of the police and the attack of the fascists... But compared to today, it was a “slightly more relaxed” period because the political power concentration was not at this level. Remember the 90’s; there were weak, powerless coalition governments. They were swiftly swapping positions with each other, so the student opposition could easily penetrate the cracks by taking advantage of the fragmentation of power.

I can say that the Coordination period had two main features. One of them was that it was the first movement we inherited, which Ömer also mentioned and discussed before us, that raised the issue of neoliberal restructuring of education directly, at a mass level, but it could not follow up. Why it could not be followed up was also an important discussion. “Did we get stuck there by compressing the multi-dimensional form of this restructuring to the tuition issue?” The process after the Coordination, that is, after 94-95, the neoliberal transformation of universities continued at a very rapid pace, and this is perhaps an issue we need to discuss.

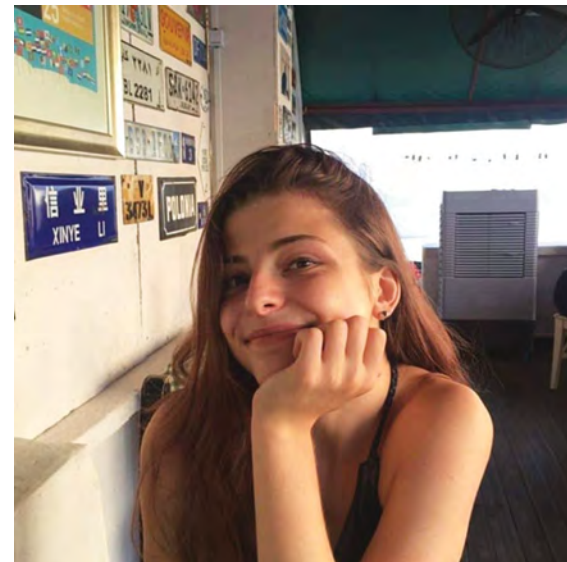
The second feature –which may be a more direct, meaningful, and positive legacy– is the organizational heritage/ understanding that attaches importance to the horizontal, grassroots initiative, participatory, individual-based law. Let me finish like this since I mentioned legacy: This conversation we have is important because we could not discuss this legacy at a collective level, for better or worse, due to the interruptions I mentioned. While prepping for this meeting, I tried to look at what was said about the Coordination. Everyone expressed themselves in their own small pool, that is, everyone talked to their own organizational/political family/community, for better or worse. Therefore, I think it is necessary to take this legacy issue a little more seriously. I believe there is also a huge gap between the student atmosphere of 96’s and today’s; we should also take this into account, of course.

Damla: After we were born into the AKP rule, we did not witness any social opposition movement. Therefore, my peers did not grow up accustomed to strong resistance or political language.

Thanks, Foti. Perhaps it is necessary to add to the conversation whether there is a medium where we can discuss the interruptions. The media also comes into play, in my opinion. Damla, I would like to continue with you. Foti says there is a significant difference between the balance of forces that constituted the political atmosphere of the two eras. If we think of what Ömer said, we understand that the two live in a close and complementary world. Foti inherits the debate that started in Ömer’s time. Was there a member of an organization in your family who got involved with leftism? How did this matter seem? Secondly, how does it feel to listen to Ömer and Foti? Legacy, familiar or distant, how does it make you feel?

Özlem Damla Arık: There is no leftist in my family, there has never been. But it is a dissident family. Think of a traditional CHP family from Izmir, but their attitude is more like, “Oh my daughter, do not get involved in such actions, do not ruin your future.” This was especially the case during the Boğaziçi incidents. They never got involved in politics during their university years, so there is no memory passed on to me.

“Is there any difference?” part of the question caught my attention. It was stated that “the government was more cracked,” but I think the AKP government is also weak now. It has been in a crisis, especially since it started doing politics with MHP. Since my childhood, I have seen the same government - I was born in 99. I have some information because I have read about the previous governments, but most of my peers do not know. After we were born into the AKP government, we did not witness any social opposition movement. All we witnessed was the Gezi protests. There is a retracted opposition. Including the CHP; and the HDP has been accompanying the CHP since 2018 in this lack of politics. Left organizations cannot do politics.



Özlem Damla Arık

Although they are not afraid of politics, to get in front of barricades, they are afraid to speak politically. I keep organizations and parties in different places, but I think the democratic bloc does not oppose and cannot establish social opposition. Therefore, my peers did not grow up accustomed to strong resistance or political language.

I am very active in the Boğaziçi resistance, and while analyzing the mass, I saw that we could not make them do anything because they have no faith in themselves. There have been cafeteria mark-ups at Boğaziçi every year since 2018. The meal, which was 2 and a half liras in 2018, is now 4 and a half liras. There were two attempts to boycott the cafeteria price increases, although Boğaziçi was the most comfortable place for action/ politics among other universities. I know about Istanbul University; no posters are hanging anymore. Of course, there are fascists over there, but it is a shame to be right wing in Boğaziçi. Despite this, the students are so apolitical, so timid, so used to not reacting! They convinced themselves of a world where they “are the educated children of educated families, and the rest of the country is ignorant, uneducated.” East of Ankara does not exist for them, not ever existed except for certain political circles. I will relate this to the Boğaziçi Resistance because, despite such masses, how has this resistance progressed? This is where I see the weakness of the government.

We started fast. It began with a direct reaction. The first motivation was this:



Özlem Damla Arık

not “The rector is appointed, there is an anti-democratic policy,” but “How can someone from the AKP become a rector?” Let me say something sad: The former rector, Mehmet Özkan, was also a trustee, he was also appointed, but he was from within the university. Therefore, he was accepted.

When the former trustee left the building to be replaced by Bulu, he was applauded on the South Campus. Still, over the years, certain political students on the campus turned their backs to this man, and certain instructors quit their jobs because of Mehmet Özkan. Because of Özkan, there was no free atmosphere in Boğaziçi. LGBTI+s have been severely targeted for two years by BİSAK (Boğaziçi Islamic Studies Club), but all of a sudden, everyone forgot what Mehmet Özkan did. First, we explained this to our friends: “The problem is not merit, the problem is not being a Boğaziçi academician, it is not recognition. There is an anti-democratic practice here.”

We spent our first week telling the Boğaziçi students that making politics is not a bad thing. It was like doomsday in the dormitories, people fought each other in Whatsapp groups of thousand people, but we were able to suppress apolitical students there somehow.

Then there was this first big protest, and everyone was there. We were a heterogeneous group, but due to the nature of the resistance, the people of BİSAK withdrew in the case of the Kaaba pictures. Fascists withdrew because

we insisted on mentioning the HDP trustees in between, then LGBTI+ flags became a problem. I will say this with embarrassment, but the following was voted for in the first declaration: Should

Damla: I have vividly experienced at what points and how the left can diverge. I watch political movies made in the 90s and read about the student movement, and I see many similar debates. We seem to be experiencing the same things.

the word LGBTI+ be mentioned or not? It was a Facebook group of 16 thousand people, and the result was no.

We knew where the government was going to attack because the trustee is the hand of the government at the university. Whatever the state does to the country, the trustee will do the same to the university. That is how we knew why we should not embrace trustees; and when



Source: Hüsnü Beha Yıldız

two of our friends were arrested, and the BÜLGBTI+ Club was closed we understood why we should embrace LGBTI+. The day after the arrests, on February 1, I saw the crowd very angry for the first time. We entered the campus, and it was the first time I heard words such as occupying the rectorship from this mass. The crowd came knocking at the door, saying, “Get out, we will occupy, we are not leaving,” but of course, the instructors intervened right away. They have been preventing the protests from proceeding from the very beginning.

The academicians turned their backs to the door, but what they said was, “We will not act together with students, we will not even shout slogans. While we are on guard, you cannot shout slogans either, do not go to mass demonstrations.” Since the academicians were preventing the protests from proceeding from the very beginning, they stood in front of us that day and built a



wall of flesh so that we would not occupy. No matter how politicized Boğaziçi students are, they are not a mass that can react to their educators. I came at our beloved professors, but once I turned back, the crowd was already scattered, and they were saying, “You are right, professor.” But that day, we blockaded the rectorship anyway and said, “Since we cannot occupy, we will not leave until you are held accountable.” Although it was past 9 o’clock, there were a lot of people there, and then police entered the school, 51 people were detained.

We do not live in BOUN Solidarity, but there are serious problems with this organization at school. We are the most prominent initiative now in the school, which is engaged in left politics, wants to carry out politics against the trustee, and because of the letter addressed to the 12th President. We carry out the physical protests, we shape the political language, but we are often lynched by the university. For example, I was targeted by the students.

The difference in Boğaziçi is that fascists cannot attack, cannot walk around like a gang, and the comfort of being a Boğaziçi student. Even if you are an organized Boğaziçi student, there is a difference. As a matter of fact, the government tried to use this, so none of the friends taken from the Kadıköy protests were from Boğaziçi and they were all organized. That is why they were sent off to be arrested. To be able to say, “Organized crowds, provocateurs are coming from outside to stir up the protests.”

BOUN Solidarity is indeed a heterogeneous totality. I have vividly experienced at what points and how the left can diverge. I watch political movies made in the 90s and read about the student movement and see many similar debates with the ones made in the 80s and 90s. We seem to be experiencing the same things. This makes it difficult for us to do something. Sometimes we argue for 4-5 hours over a tweet. It is bad for the left to be this diverged.

My personal opinion is that this resistance has expired, but it will continue as long as the academicians keep on turning their backs. As BOUN Solidarity, we tried to form this: “Bulu will not leave unless the one on top of him does. Same



Hüsnü Beha Yıldız

silhouette, same person, same practices. The major problem of the country is BOUN, not Melih Bulu, so let us make politics, organizations and parties should support it.” We tried very hard to do this. But it did not happen, not just because of the qualities of the mass, they wanted to stop the student movement. This stems entirely from the political attitude of parties such as the HDP and CHP, and their components.

Hüsnü Beha Yıldız: I am a Sunni Muslim, son of a straight family from Izmir, my father was an imam. It took me a long time to contact other dissident segments of society, which means I do not have experience with organized movement. My political awareness was a bit late since I studied at—I am not sure what to call them—FETÖ/community-owned colleges myself, including secondary and high schools.

I have an active role in the Boğaziçi resistance since day one, and there are two differences that separate us from what has been mentioned before. First, as Foti said, it is a matter of legacy and how much it has been discussed. This was missing in Turkish left, and we were identifying it. Turkey was not discussing the left and unfortunately, there was no movement for a long time. Damla said, “There was only Gezi.” With the resistance of the Boğaziçi, we have

brought left politics to debate and argument. As Lenin wrote in "What is to be Done?": "Argue, there is vitality in the place where there is discussion." BOUN Solidarity gathered left-wing politics at an incident and discussed how they view resistance. Because of Zoom's nature, it is not open to dialogue. It progresses like a monologue, but we tried to break the silence of the left within itself, to understand what people think and create an environment for discussion.

The BOUN resistance continues with great struggles. We struggle with the police in the mornings, and we fight each other in Zoom meetings and groups until 3-4 a.m. to make a point. Then, with three hours of sleep, everyone's eyes turned blue from fighting, we went crazy...

Yes, maybe we do not talk much about the legacy like the tuition issue because it is history now, but the effects of that legacy continue as a debate among us. Bulu's appointment to Boğaziçi was perhaps one of the last and most striking examples of neoliberal transformation. The arms industry, competition is working, and Erdoğan and Soyly have a neoliberal tone with statements such as "If we enter a city, we will flatten it." There is actually not a Melih Bulu, but an Erdoğan-Soyly problem. When we think of these, they are in a place that excludes social sciences rather than BOUN's state that produces science. They want it to progress in arms and war-oriented ways, as required by the neoliberal order. Therefore, this is the effect of a much bigger transformation than the tuition issues, and we need to discuss within ourselves how we are experiencing neoliberal changes.

We have a different situation from what Foti and Ömer mentioned before: During their time, they had the luxury of staying around an identity and embracing it. Unfortunately, we do not have this luxury because the neoliberal order is playing all the games of Erdoğan and Soyly on us. Every day there are 2-3 different incidents, and that is why we look within and have a hard time with finding answers to questions such as "What are we defending, where will we establish the line, from where will we oppose," because we cannot remain steady. I am currently taking a course in which we also study the issue of resistance. Thanks

to it, I can distance myself a little bit. Indeed, while the games of neoliberalism are played on us, the inability to remain steady around identity perhaps dampens us and cannot keep the movement going.

But we can say the following with different initiatives: Let Melih Bulu stay. We do not have much of a problem with him. I think he should stay, do not let him go! Because just as Erdoğan uses Bulu as a pawn, we want to use him to weave an opposition in some way because he is an unqualified person. When he was first appointed, the minimum wage was determined as 2 thousand 800 liras, and I was getting angry with myself thinking, "We're talking about this unqualified man rather than talking about millions of people being confined to 2 thousand 800 liras." That is why we want Erdoğan to withdraw somehow, and to organize to achieve this.

Beha: Let Melih Bulu stay; we do not have much of a problem with him. I think he should stay, do not let him go! Because just as Erdoğan uses Bulu as a pawn, we want to use him to weave an opposition in some way.

In addition to what Foti and Ömer said, I am currently observing how the diversity discourse has increased in the student movement. The Boğaziçi mass is not as elite as it used to be, as Yeni Akit introduced. Now people are coming from different places and backgrounds in Turkey. We are neither elite nor subordinate. Between these two, there is what could be called the middle class, but the middle class is disappearing more and more. Here, too, there is a limit within us.

The people I am talking about are people who have never clashed with the police so far. In fact, they still do not clash with them because, in South Campus, it is Damla and I who fight with plain-clothes police, or when the police attack a rainbow flag, it is me who screams at the Police Chief of the District. So, the crowd still lacks contact with the police, but somehow, we can still stand side by side. So, we need to own this diversity. That is why the student movement is doing a good job.

Beha: There are a lot of people in left politics -which we call "concrete left"- trying to rule out feminism or LGBTI+ movements by saying, "These are bourgeois ideology." But no, these are our actual problems and not bourgeois ideology.

There are a lot of people in left politics -which we call "concrete left"- trying to rule out feminism or LGBTI+ movements by saying, "These are bourgeois ideology." But no, the trustees work against LGBTI+ and Kurds. So, these -with all aspects- are our actual problems and not bourgeois ideology. This diversity is very promising for the future compared to the past student movements. The fact that workers can also be LGBTI+, and examples like the feminist struggle of BİMEKS workers show us that these elements can be intertwined with each other. When I look at the LGBTI+ people at school right now, I observe that everyone is eagerly learning Kurdish, including Damla and myself. The club that was instrumental in the most progressive discussions in our school was BÜLGBTİ+. And somehow, we are in close contact with the worker and Kurdish movements, and I think this is very valuable. This is something Erdoğan could not make us do by pointing a gun at us, but something that could be created organically by standing together, when Melih Bulu was appointed.

Now, I want to complete the circle by asking Ömer and Foti how they feel about what they heard. What does it remind you of? Ömer, shall we start with you?

Ömer: There are aspects that make one feel good, and there are parts that do not. Seeing that the same discussions, emotions, and some controversies that did not yield any results before are still ongoing raises a question mark at least. My relationship with the student movement lasted until the late 90s, and then I followed the student movement process until 98-99, even though I got in touch with the civil servant movement. When I saw Boğaziçi University for what it was and when the resistance broke out at the campus, I said: "God, did the



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

student movement rest with Boğaziçi.” For us, Boğaziçi was the last wagon of the student movement.

When I think of Boğaziçi, I think of the union festival organized by İÖDF (Istanbul Student Associations Federation) in 1990, for example. However, Boğaziçi was a place where the student movement could move most easily. The left, socialists, anarchists, and different types of opposition could come together, relations with the university administration could continue, all kinds of opposition movements could swim together. It was a school where there would be no hard, conflictual situations.

Student organizations that could not be found anywhere in Izmir, Ankara, and Istanbul existed in Boğaziçi. The anti-war movement that broke out with the

Gulf War in 1990 also had an impact on the student movement. That process ended with the 92 Boğaziçi occupation. The next period was the period that generated campus-based front studies and subsequently the Coordination.

When we look at today’s discussions, I see that today students are far from the discussions of our time. One of our main discussion agendas was what the student is, what the university is, what the relation between the student and the university with society is. In today’s student opposition, these discussions are very scarce. Beha mentioned a little bit; it seems to me that the relationship between the Kurdish movement and the LGBTI movement is established entirely through leftist organizations. We used to focus on building a relationship with the university.

Beha: I agree that being squeezed into identity politics means reproducing the practices of the language of the government, but I also observe that this politicizes us.

Both Damla and Beha talked about a notion, the “apolitical student movement.” “Is there a movement created by non-political students? Is there a movement at all? What kind of a movement is that?” I would like to take a closer look at what is meant by this apoliticism.

The anti-police campaign carried out with the slogan “Universities belong to us” in the central building of Istanbul University is a campaign that rioted the university

and resulted in the kicking the police out. We threw the police out, and they stayed away for 2 years. Is there an approach to produce and talk about such strategic goals? It seems to me that an overly identity-focused debate is dominant in student politics. The political power drives the student to the identity politics.

“Should the word LGBTI be used on Facebook or not?” The masses are forced to discuss this issue. Still, the mass opposition, which develops the idea of speaking on behalf of the university, has a chance for improvement because what we discuss as a “neoliberal university” is actually a completed process. What we are experiencing now is its crisis; can a student movement be generated to take the university out of this crisis? Maybe we were demonstrating the first neo-liberalized universities’ first resistance, but now our friends are trying to demonstrate the last resistance of the last universities. We need to talk about the problems this generates.

Beha: I agree with the idea that, “What is a student, what is a university?” discussions should be done more. Personally, I do not find it right for the academicians to turn their backs to the rectorship with their robes because the hierarchy created by that robe is no different from the hierarchy imposed by the state on us. We were having these discussions at the beginning of the resistance, and we also did not want the old Boğaziçi University. Because the students, employees, and components had no willpower to choose the rector. Melih Bulu came, and we changed our point of view as follows: “Okay, let the election take place, not only with the participation of the academicians, but the graduates, employees, and students should also participate in it.” We even had a parliamentary agenda based on this. We did not imagine the identity politics where it pushed us, but at a level that could be worked on in the form of a few commissions, but as I said, we could not set that vision because there were too many attacks.

I also think that being squeezed into identity politics means reproducing the practices of the language of the state, but this affects us such: I observe that the government targeting LGBTI+ politics also politicizes people.

I would like to explain a little more in-depth what I mean by non-political Boğaziçilite. These are people who cannot come up with political language against Erdoğan and say “let’s wait till 2023”. While the students did tons of good work there, this is the crowd who shares the videos of the academicians in tears and cry, “Our professors, our professors,” but keeps back from generating any political manifesto.

Damla: A lot of solidarity was established with other universities in the first months of the resistance. We are in coordination with them. We meet every week and learn what kind of activities is carried out in which university. This coordination was very strong for a while. A campaign called “It is on all of us from now on” was also built, in which all the solidarity groups were included, but at that time there were so many protests and arrests that the campaign never became prominent. After that, there was a period of stagnation, the campaign could not stand out again. Actually, the last protest we had in Kadıköy was not planned by BOUN Solidarity, but a protest of all solidarity groups. We are definitely trying to move it forward because the Melih Bulu resistance will end anyway, but it would be great if we get a student movement out of it.

I used the term “apolitical militancy”. There lies a danger in this; for example, we are protesting, and we pay attention to make a political statement but the Boğaziçi crowd does not want to make a political statement. This starts with the separation between the politics of lamentation of those who could buy a PlayStation before but cannot buy it now and who do politics for those who could never buy a PlayStation. Yes, everyone is political, so are our peers. Even the economy alone ensures discomfort from the power, but these people cannot produce political statements. For example, alcohol was banned, people on Twitter were crying out that day, saying, “How can they ban it? I will buy it,” but nobody said, “Let’s get together, let’s go and stand in front of the aisles.” My mother and father did not say it either. I think this is the İmamoğlu politics because, as I said, we only saw the CHP as the opposition. The HDP’s opposition was very different because for a long time, it has progressed through identity, and now



Photo: Fatoş Erdoğan

Damla: This starts with the separation between the politics of lamentation of those who could buy a PlayStation before but cannot buy it now and the politics of people who could never buy a PlayStation.

HDP is trying to adopt İmamoğlu’s politics and establish a democracy bloc. Because the Boğaziçi crowd grew up like this, they say, “We should be careful with society’s sensitivities.”

Foti, we kind of skipped you, but before Damla and Beha intervened, I asked you about your feelings about what they said, and their last statement was both an answer to Ömer and a kind of complementary. What do you say?

Foti: While listening, I was constantly



trying to compare the two periods. At first, I thought, “Our job was easier.” But the comfort I meant is something a little different. The university was more of a universal experience both in my time and Ömer’s. Of course, there was a distinction between a good university and a bad university. Still, the university experience was roughly common or had many mutual grounds whatever the faculty a person studied. This is fragmented today. In other words, I am talking about the difference between studying at the Boğaziçi University and studying at Okan University; I am talking about the difference between studying at Istanbul University and studying at Sabahattin Zaim University. Provincial-center, research, public, foundation, unregistered university... University education has become so widespread and therefore so fragmented... This creates a problem area. Of course, it cannot be entirely universal, but is a student movement

that claims to be universal possible or likely? Is it possible that a movement can incorporate all these experiences and fragmentations? This is not necessarily a disadvantage, it can also turn into an advantage.

Remember, the main issue of the student character in the 60s and the 70s was this: Highlighting the university student as a social figure that will bring knowledge and understanding to enlighten the country with his/her semi-enlightened character. This aspect of the dominant ideology is completely fragmented. Being a university student is no longer a privilege, including Boğaziçi students. How did this happen? In my time, studying at a university was a guaranteed way to gain social status, now there is no such thing... Erdoğan himself said, “There is no such thing as every university graduate will find a job,” consider the fragmentation I

described. There is a structuralization of unemployment, and there is insecurity and flexibility of labor. Therefore, as soon as the student enrolls in a university, s/he begins to feel the pressure of this more intensely. Since this pressure is felt, double major programs are chosen; they live as if writing a CV.

In our time, there was a barrier between being a student and working, these were two separate forms of experience. Now the barrier between studying and working has been lifted, as in the rest of the world, you are working while studying. This was more exceptional in our time, but it is very common now. Even today, if there is such a thing as migrant labor, female labor, there is a type and background color of such labor as student labor. There is student labor that is more insecure and employed in less skilled levels of the service sector. Therefore, being a student is out of that

“privileged”, self-confident space. We are facing a problem that comes along with this. I would like to consider being apolitical in this context as well.

As Ömer also mentioned, we thought that September 12, the Özal generation, was creating apolitical generations due to the defeat and retreat of the left. But when you think about it, one realizes that nobody is apolitical, everybody is political, people are always political. We just may not like or adopt those politics. Neoliberalism is not only an economic policy but also creates a form of subjectivity. It creates a character that says, “How will I generate employment tomorrow? Will I find a good job tomorrow? I should work for it now and enroll in a social accountability project, it will look good on my CV.” This is not a classic apoliticism as we know it, it has other values, that is, politically.

The university is quickly ceasing to be a space, it is becoming a classroom. In fact, with the pandemic, since distance education will become widespread, it will cease to be a classroom and become an examination place. A place where people come and go to take their exams and follow the courses from home, so there is no publicness. This publicity had already disappeared. Students from Boğaziçi may know how the middle canteen of my time was and how it is now. They are poles apart.

There are canteens resembling chain brands or taken over by them, university campuses like shopping malls, with billboards everywhere. Therefore, we are faced with a university colonized by the capital. Along with this, we are confronted with the loss of publicness that allowed students to generate solidarity and oppositional communities in the previous period. This is still possible in Boğaziçi, but I do not know to what degree it is possible in Nişantaşı University, it may not be at all. As I said at the beginning, Ömer’s era and mine are like other historical times, the present is another. Ömer also stated that this neoliberal transformation is actually over. A different university generated a different type of student. I am not saying these in a pessimistic way. Another period, other needs, hence other strategies, other tactics, other forms of organization...

Foti: Canteens resembling chain brands, university campuses like shopping malls are everywhere. It confronts us with the loss of publicity that allows students to produce solidarity and oppositional societies.

The advantage of this social type is that student opposition could get into apparent external solidarity with the laborers in our time. They could come side by side, of course, that would be desirable, but it was two different worlds. Maybe these are part of the same world now. Therefore, the student does not need to act like coming from another world while reaching out to the worker, because he is either already a worker or will be one. Maybe it is easier than yesterday to coexist, to organize around common demands — I am not saying that it is easy. Maybe that is why we mention identity. Maybe that is why s/he has to consider the identities because s/he can no longer act only as a student. Perhaps, integrations -or articulations, alliances, etc.- are easier now. This can turn into an advantage.

I would also like to ask Ömer’s question: Some people are studying at the university, working as a waiter or working on another job, going to university only to take exams or attending some classes; so this experience has nothing to do with university or communality aside from this. Is it possible to juxtapose such a fragmented experience? We always thought, “Left backed off, student movement withdrew, student movement became apolitical.” But no, the experience of being a student, the way of living, therefore what it means to be a university student has changed. Is a student movement that can synchronize with these changes possible?

Damla and Beha started with talking roughly about “apolitical militant” or “apoliticism being bad,” and Foti and Ömer spoke about the ground level of this non-politicalism issue. Who are these apolitical people? Can they harm the struggle?

Damla: : I am not sure if it is correct to say “apoliticism is bad” or to call people

apolitical, but I can say that they avoid political speech. This is not about being afraid either, it is a political strategy as I explained. In fact, our friends think it is better to follow the AKP’s shadow politics. On the issue of the Armenian genocide, 600 people conversed in a chat room opened on Twitter, and we argued as Boğaziçi students. They do not say they should not be involved with politics, but they say, “let it be under the shadow of the AKP, let’s be careful with the sensitive issues, we should do a more national, closer to the center-right politics that will appeal to the whole of Turkey.” What is desired is doing National politics. In non-political militancy, there are some outlets such as let us beat the police, break, trash things, but this action has no basis. So, I think this is the non-political part, and perhaps it is not correct to describe the other part as non-political. I can say that it is aiming at another kind of politics.

Beha: Let me add the following to Damla’s example of April 24. At one of our meetings, someone suggested, “Let’s wave LGBTI+ and Turkish flags side by side in Taksim.” But this is abusing the experiences of those people who have been battered and oppressed under that flag. I do not think that we should tell them, “Go, don’t come back among us again.” Because the circumstances we were born into are making us ignorant, maybe we are left ignorant. With the effects of this fact, the rhetoric is being established wrongly.

I was –as well– going to the cafeteria protests at school, serving food in the alternative cafeteria. Still, I do not know with how much of a political consciousness I did these. I learned to engage in politics with resistance and to generate a political statement in the field. Last semester I was only able to pass two courses. I was in the field, and I could not attend the classes. Let us say I passed one by failing. I got BA from the other one, but was this a waste of time for me? Never. I learned so much in the field, and it is worth it. Foti also said if people work while studying, how could they think about these? Maybe it is a matter of intention. Damla and I are working, and we are also trying to generate policies. The intention here may be what matters. ☸

