



Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie:
Diritto, Istituzioni, Società

Analyzing authoritarianism and democracy through academic freedom in Turkey

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Abstract

The article examines the concepts of authoritarianism and democracy in Turkey through an analysis of academic freedom. From its foundation, Turkish democracy has suffered from being hybrid, i.e., a combination of democratic and authoritarian elements. Since 2016, after the attempted coup d'état, Turkish parliamentarianism has been transformed into a one-man regime. This contribution analyses the new type of Turkish authoritarianism from its foundation, since the rise of Justice and Development Party (AKP), using the Gramscian concept of hegemony and the role of the intellectual. Then, the article presents an interview with a scholar still working in a Turkish university to better understand the state of academic freedom in Turkey.

Keywords: Academic Freedom – Authoritarianism – Turkey – AKP– Gramsci.

CONTENTS: 1. Introduction. 2. Towards an investigation of academic freedom in Turkey. 3. Conversation with a scholar who still works in a Turkish public university.

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1. Introduction

Fikret Başkaya, an academician and writer, states that the distinctive feature of intellectuals is their independence from any political power and ruling class and their critical attitude towards them¹. Intellectuals are those who cannot be dependent on political power. Baskaya argues that the important thing is the specific moral and mental inclination². Instead of talking about the objectivity or neutrality of intellectuals, he points out that it is impossible for intellectuals to be completely independent of class interests³. The author criticizes the intelligentsia in Turkey and writes that «they always meet a certain delay with contemporary thought, and they do not largely participate in its production»⁴. This is because Turkey has never enjoyed full democracy throughout its history, which means that the Turkish political system has always been authoritarian and anti-democratic. Its anti-democratic or half-democratic character did not allow the intellectuals to work, write, and freely research.

The situation of academic freedom in a country is also an indication of how its democracy functions and to what extent its institutions are democratically constituted. Since 2016, i.e., after the July 15 failed coup, a systematic attack on academia has intensified because of a peace petition (called *Academics for Peace*) signed by many academics from different ethnic groups and countries. This petition called on the government to halt the military intervention in the Southeast of Turkey, where most of the Kurdish population lives. As a result, many academics have been dismissed from their universities. The recent attack on academic freedom and freedom of expression is not a new phenomenon in Turkey; assaults on academic freedom and, therefore, freedom of expression can be traced back to the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Nevertheless, what differentiates the recent authoritarianism from previous examples is that academics who had been dismissed could return to their jobs and even work in public institutions under the previous authoritarianism.

However, this new one-man type of neoliberal authoritarianism has taken away academics' civil rights such as pension rights and the right to work in another public institution under the accusation of being members of a terrorist group. The Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; henceforth AKP) termed its project “conservative democracy”⁵. R. T. Erdoğan coined this term to differentiate the party from the previous radical Islamist movement and present it as a democratic element within conservatism. Some scholars offered an interpretation of the rise of the AKP, its

¹ F. Başkaya, *Paradigmann İflası: Resmi İdeolojinin Eleştirisine Giriş*, Yordam Kitap, 2006, 14.

² *Idem*, 14.

³ *Idem*, 15.

⁴ *Idem*, 22.

⁵ A. Kaya, *The Inclusion-Moderation Thesis: Turkey's AKP, From Conservative Democracy to Conservatism*, in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2019.

political stability, and transformation through Gramscian concepts such as passive revolution and his theory of the intellectual⁶.

As stated above, AKP's authoritarianism is based on neoliberal policies, which began to operate effectively in the 1980s when Kurdish, Islamist, and feminist social movements also appeared «as a reaction to the crisis of the state-organised mixed economy and state-centred modernisation process»⁷. The AKP's neoliberal regime relied on its critique of state-oriented political and economic system. Additionally, it succeeded in combining neoliberalism and Islam: «appealing to traditional-popular Islamic identity and Islamist movements, the AKP used different strategies than [those of] its conservative predecessors»⁸. This involved promoting Turkey's European Union membership and market economy⁹. It is mostly accepted that the AKP regime is a hybrid type, meaning that democratic, conservative, and authoritarian elements are dominant in its policies¹⁰. This liberal view of AKP is valid for its first period between 2002-2011 when it attempted to work on the goal of EU membership, focus on human rights, and conduct a peace process. However, it seems that, particularly after 2016, this hybrid type transformed itself into a one-dimensional type, i.e., authoritarian, accelerating trends already in evidence after the Gezi protest in 2013. As a result, the AKP hybrid regime turned into a one-dimensional authoritarian regime, which means the end of its liberal-democratic promises¹¹.

Since 2016 when Turkey witnessed the coup attempt, repression has increased, and Turkey has expeditiously moved away from its democratic promises and principles. This led to a growth in the violation of human rights despite Turkey being part of many international human rights conventions. Turkey signed the ECHR Convention (European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms) in 1950 and ratified it in 1954. By doing so, Turkey included the ECHR in its domestic law. In 1987 Turkey recognized the right of Turkish citizens to appeal to the European Commission of Human Rights. In 1988 it joined the Council of Europe and signed the United Nations Conventions for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman Treatment. In

⁶ C. Tugal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism*, Stanford University Press, 2009; M. Yaman, *Intellectual Hegemony of Justice and Development Party in Turkey: A Gramscian Perspective*, Master thesis, METU, 2012.

⁷ B. Yazar, *Reflecting on The Oppositional Discourses Against the AKP's Neoliberalism and Searching for a New Vision for Feminist Counter Politics*, in *Les Cahiers du Cedref: Transformation of Gender regime in Turkey*, no. 22, 2018, journals.openedition.org/cedref/1101.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ F. K. Akkoyunlu, *The rise and fall of the hybrid regime: guardianship and democracy in Iran and Turkey*, PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2014; B. Öney, M. M. Ardag, *The relationship between diffuse support for democracy and governing party support in a hybrid regime: evidence with four representative samples from Turkey*, in *Turkish Studies*, 2021; K. Kippels, *Is Turkey becoming a hybrid regime?*, in *RTE*, 26 November 2019, rte.ie/brainstorm/2019/1121/1094341-is-turkey-becoming-a-hybrid-regime.

¹¹ Yazar describes this shift from a “conservative democrat” to a “one flag one nation” discourse. The author thinks that this refers to a return to the previous Kemalist discourse, which emphasized the importance of state power and integrity of the nation under the one flag. B. Yazar, *Reflecting on The Oppositional Discourses*, cit.

1992 it signed the Helsinki Summit Declaration on Human Rights. However, under the authoritarian regime, these conventions do not have any real force.

In the view of the author, Turkish authoritarianism can be divided for heuristic purposes into two forms. The first type of authoritarianism was based on the military intervention that brought violence, violation of freedom of expression, harsh restrictions on civil society and civil organizations; the second type, which began in the 2000s when the AKP rose to power after the 2002 general elections but manifested itself mainly in 2013, has substituted police forces for military forces. Here the author means the term police forces in a broad sense: «not only the public service designed for the repression of crime, but the totality of forces organized by the State and by private individuals to safeguard the political and economic domination of the ruling classes»¹². However, their common feature is that both have continued to assault freedom of expression, knowledge production, civil organizations, democratic elements such as the right to assemble etc., and most importantly, they amended the Constitution and removed the main principle of democracy, i.e., the separation of powers, to gain more strength.

Therefore, democratic values such as human rights, academic freedom, and freedom of expression have been damaged and repressed. Due to the AKP's democratic promises, scholars tended to label it as a moderate and democratized Islamic party and as a good example for other Islamic democracies. However, since the 2010s, the AKP regime has suffocated society through its restrictions on freedom of expression, media, manifestations, human rights associations, etc. It has increased its authority using physical and psychological violence through the humiliation and marginalization of women, people belonging to the LGBTQ community, academics, and intellectuals. When AKP rose to power, it promised to remove the Council of Higher Education (YÖK, Yüksek Öğretim kurulu), an institution established in 1982 after the 1980 coup d'état that aimed at the centralization of all universities to control them under a single institution. In its place, AKP promised to establish more democratic and autonomous universities, but this remained a promise. Instead of ameliorating and reconstructing the already-existing universities, in conformity with neoliberal policies, i.e., with the integration of foreign and internal capital, AKP founded new universities in different cities. By doing so, the party did not cement its power but rather damaged the quality of universities.

For Gramsci, the consent of people expressed by an electoral victory is not enough for constructing hegemony since it does not only consist of electoral achievements or votes. Hegemony, for Gramsci, means the combination of coercive and consent forces. In other words, a hegemony to prosper needs both coercive power and a solid cultural and ideological development. Thus, in the Gramscian sense, the AKP government cannot succeed in constructing its hegemony because of its lack of ideological and intellectual leadership. Gramsci writes that «the 'normal' exercise of hegemony [...] is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt

¹² A. Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks* (hereafter *SPN*), in Q. Hoare, G. Nowell-Smith (Eds.), Lawrence-Wishart, 1992, 221; A. Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere* (hereafter *QC*, paragraph §), in V. Gerratana (Ed.), Vol. 1, Einaudi, 1977.

is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority»¹³. The philosopher describes the concept of hegemony in opposition to the concept of “mere” domination - which is the exercise of coercion over other (subordinate or subaltern) groups. Thus, hegemony is characterised by domination or coercive force and by an intellectual and moral leadership or moral and cultural mechanism of consensus or persuasion¹⁴. For Gramsci, «the intellectuals are the dominant group’s ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government»¹⁵. Although the AKP’s neoliberal authoritarianism has its “organic intellectuals” who are «the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class»¹⁶ and who serve organizational and sometimes connective functions, they lack the means to affect the ideological and cultural transformations of society. In *Prison Notebook* 19, the Italian author writes that «the supremacy of a social group is manifested in two ways: as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership». A social group is dominant over the antagonistic groups that it wants to “liquidate” or to subdue even with armed force, and it is the leader of related and allied groups. A social group can and indeed must be a leader before obtaining governmental power (this is one of the main conditions for the very conquest of power); afterward, when it exercises power, even strongly, it becomes dominant but must continue to be also a “leader”¹⁷.

Gramsci emphasizes the importance of a social group’s ideological and intellectual domination before it exercises its power. He underlines the important role of intellectuals in the political formation of society and highlights the function of intellectuals as being connective, organizational, and leading. The intellectuals are indispensable to achieving power.

2. Towards an investigation of academic freedom in Turkey

After this short analysis of the current Turkish political regime, I will present and discuss an interview with a scholar still working in a Turkish University, to explain how authoritarianism threatens academic freedom and academic production in Turkish universities. At the end of December 2019, the author conducted field research on academic freedom with scholars working in Turkish universities including private and public universities, located in major cities and provincial towns. The paper *Globalization, Societies and Education*¹⁸ published the results of the research as an

¹³ A. Gramsci, *SPN*, cit., 80.

¹⁴ B. Fontana, *Caesarism and Bonapartism*, cit., 184.

¹⁵ A. Gramsci, *SPN*, cit. 12,

¹⁶ Q. Hoare, G. Nowell-Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the Intellectuals*, in A. Gramsci, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, Lawrence-Wishart, 1992.

¹⁷ A. Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere*, V. Gerratana (Ed.), Einaudi, Vol. 3, 1977, 2010. The first part of the translation of this passage is taken from B. Fontana’s article: *The Concept of Caesarism in Gramsci*, in P. Baehr, M. Richter (Eds.), *Dictatorship in History and Theory: Bonapartism, Caesarism, and Totalitarianism*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 183.

¹⁸ S. Doğan, E. Selenica, *Authoritarianism and academic freedom in neoliberal Turkey*, in *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2021.

article titled *Authoritarianism and academic freedom in neoliberal Turkey*. In the article, I attempted to analyse the structure of academia in Turkey under neoliberal authoritarianism, how this structure damages academic freedom, and the main barriers and difficulties to academic production and freedom. «Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 scholars (4 females/8 males) from across disciplines using digital platforms. [...] Interviews were conducted respecting the anonymity of interviewees as well as that of their university»¹⁹. Most of the scholars were interviewed in Turkish and then the interviews were translated from Turkish into English: out of 12 interviews, only one scholar (a 47-year-old woman) from a university at the metropolitan centre responded to the questions in English. This interview is published in full alongside this article.

All interviews accentuated different problems and controversial issues within the academia and its bureaucracy. The Interviewees referred to several aspects of academic freedom: all of them defined academic freedom as freedom of expression and mentioned academic freedom in relation to censorship and self-censorship; they also claimed that the location of universities in major cities or provincial towns impacted on academic freedom. Furthermore, they underlined that institutional factors, political and governmental pressures, students' repression, and the repression/censorship of politically sensitive subjects affect academic freedom. One scholar added that there is also a language issue. In her opinion, «academic freedom is respected when one can discuss a critical subject in a critical time in his/her native language»²⁰ without any interference from the public or private sectors. «Each of these aspects can be broadly classified as a public or private pressure area, i.e., the former referring to governmental, institutional and societal pressures and the latter to individual pressures from scholars themselves»²¹. Through this research, the author concluded that four different types of censorship could characterize Turkish academia: «the political, social, institutional, and personal (self-) censorship».

Following academic restrictions and dismissal, the interviewees experimented with several adverse effects: «withdrawal; increased use of anti-depressants and other addictive substances; self-censorship; loss of energy and will for research and academic studies; academic mobbing; withholding of the material and financial resources for research». In addition to these outcomes, one young scholar, Mehmet Fatih Traş, committed suicide after his dismissal from the university, and some scholars went on a hunger strike demanding to be reinstated.

Finally, Turkish academia is subjected to political and economic precarity; scholars who work in Turkey were/are exposed to the state and market, which brings relentless consequences. «The fear of being dismissed from academia affects everyone, including those that did not sign the 2016 Academics for Peace petition»²².

¹⁹ *Idem*, 2.

²⁰ *Idem*, 7.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Idem*, 11.

3. Conversation with a scholar who still works at a Turkish public university

Thank you for kindly agreeing to be part of this research and to have this conversation on the state of academic freedom in Turkey. Recently some scholars who have worked on academic freedom in the context of neoliberal-Turkish authoritarianism have put the “Academics for Peace” movement in the center of their research²³. However, in my view, another point worth mentioning and researching further is how scholars who are still in some way engaged in the Turkish university system feel about the state of academic freedom as “survivors”, individuals who have escaped dismissal but still feel under attack. My first question is what do you think about academic freedom in general and what does academic freedom mean in the context of Turkey in particular?

Academic freedom for me denotes the freedom to conduct research, to hold classes (as well as individual meetings with students), to participate in and talk at professional meetings and organizations, and to publish without any interference or censorship from a higher authority with a political, ideological or economic agenda. At the core, it is valued in the same way and for the same reasons as freedom of thought and expression, the best and most compelling justification for which has been provided by J.S. Mill in his famous book *On Liberty*. Leaving aside the question of whether liberty is a value to be upheld as a value in itself (for Mill, it is not), freedom of thought, and by extension, academic freedom is a necessary condition for the development of reason and progress, prosperity, and happiness of humankind.

Academic freedom is thus a necessary condition for conducting research and disseminating the results without any interventions, as you underlined, but what are the most important factors that make academic freedom possible?

In addition to economic power and/or independence and a democratic culture of tolerance within the broader context of society, I find that what contributes most to academic freedom is the institution’s own long-standing culture and heritage. Those academic institutions that have consciously defined and identified themselves as institutions that value academic freedom above all else and that try to instill this value into their community (including faculty, students, personnel, alumni, etc.) via the institutional culture are best able to provide an atmosphere of the greatest academic freedom possible. Unfortunately, without the former two factors (economic/financial strength and a tolerant society at large), this most important factor (self-defined vision

²³ A. Vatansever, *At the Margins of Academia: Exile, Precariousness, and Subjectivity*, Brill, 2020; U. Özkirimli, *How to Liquidate a People? Academic Freedom in Turkey and Beyond*, in *Globalizations*, No. 6, 2017; T. Abbas, A. Zalta, ‘You cannot talk about academic freedom in such an oppressive environment’: perceptions of the *We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime!* petition signatories, in *Turkish Studies*, No. 4, 2017.

of academic freedom) is the most vulnerable, not least because it becomes an obvious target whenever a politically authoritarian regime or a new upsurge in neoliberalism and its economic agenda raises its ugly head. I have witnessed this in my university as well as in the United States; it seems to work that way wherever in the world you are.

To clarify what I mean by “economic power”: of course, there seems to be a tension, if not a self-contradiction, in claiming that it is important to be economically strong while also claiming that academic freedom requires freedom from the intervention of economic concerns. But here, my objection is more to the intervention of external agents (so perhaps we’d have to make a distinction between more immediate and more distant stakeholders). However, to give an example: if a university plays a major role in the production of technological tools that are important for the state or government (perhaps even including the defense industry or the control of access to the worldwide web or big databases), then it has some bargaining power, and can use it to its advantage to preserve its academic freedom (provided that the higher administration of the university has the best interests of its institution and the protection of its academic integrity at heart, which, unfortunately, is not always the case). Perhaps it is also possible for a university to be funded by a foundation committed to academic freedom and maintain its economic independence in that way? However, such foundations are also often under the rule of market forces.

As you know, with the rise of AKP, the number of universities has increased: in 2021, there are 205 universities. Of these, 129 are public universities and 79 are private. While in the 80 years after 1923, 76 universities were opened, during the 2000s, 129 universities were founded without considering any academic quality. Here, your emphasis on institutional “long-standing culture and heritage” becomes crucial for universities’ respect for academic freedom and knowledge production. In this respect, I wonder about your standpoint on academic production. What are the conditions required for academic production or knowledge production? I am not sure whether it is correct or not to use the term “production” while criticizing the neoliberal discourses and policies in the academic world, but we cannot avoid using its term.

Academic production is the production of knowledge along with all else that necessarily gets produced in the search for knowledge, regardless of whether that “all else” ends up being an overt component of the knowledge that gets produced in the end or not. So, along with scientific theories, works of art and technical know-how, questions raised, mistakes made, hypotheses abandoned, and exercises in creative thinking and self-expression are all part of academic production.

As with all production, academic production also requires certain material means and an infrastructure (labs, classrooms, technical devices, etc.) but more importantly, it requires qualified/skilled human labor. Academic production is not possible without qualified faculty and, even more importantly, free-thinking students who are eager to learn and experiment.

*In addition to what you are saying, what comes to my mind is – I guess you know better than me – the Marxian concept of “leisure time” «free from constraining toil and other forms of compulsion»²⁴, or the idea of time that we need for being creative and for human development that we lack under the capitalist mode of production. As William James Booth points out, «No modern political philosopher has been as concerned with the question of time and freedom as was Marx»²⁵. In *Grundrisse*, Marx describes free time as the time for the full development of the individual, in which he underlines the less time the society allocates to produce wheat, cattle etc., the more time it finds for other creativities such as material or mental²⁶. There must/should be a sort of dialectical relation or, more precisely, a logical relation, between free time and labor time. However, without this leisure time, critical and creative thinking and therefore “production” will be impossible; I believe that scholars’ engagement with institutional affairs differs from society to society, but generally speaking, free time is not only a necessary condition for academic creativity but also for all individuals: the body and mind need the possibility of spare time. Maybe we have to celebrate and demand more for free time which allows us to be free from the burden of unnecessary labor time that just leads to the creation of surplus value. With a great passion for knowledge, research, and teaching, scholars are unable to give up working under unconvincing and precarious conditions. So, what is the role and function of academy or universities and academicians in society? How can you relate academics and society (in the context of Turkey)?*

Academics mostly expend indirect labor. Therefore, it is not difficult for those who are hostile to intellectual development to undermine the significance of academics’ concrete contributions to the welfare of society. I do not want to undertake here the task of presenting what I believe would be an easy but long-winded exposition of the ways in which the indirect labor expended by academics ultimately finds its way into overall social production. However, the value that academic activity and production holds for society cannot and should not be subjected to a crude assessment by practical concerns alone. Academic activity does not directly provide for the basic necessities of life but satisfies the need that human beings have for the universal development of their species-character (their capacity to reason, imagine, learn, create, etc.) through free “self-activity”, in early Marx’s terms.

In the context of Turkey, this is a hard position to defend. Almost half the people (which, it should be pointed out, is a number that has been rising when uninterrupted progress would have led to its decline) do not feel respect for academic activity. This lack of respect is partly because they have not developed a taste for the “higher intellectual pleasures” (as J.S. Mill, again, would put it) or an understanding of their value for humanity, but it is also owing in large part to the fact that they themselves are excluded from participating in such activities, and therefore find it unjust that an elite minority can engage in them. They thus resent that minority. What exacerbates the

²⁴ W. J. Booth, *On the Idea of Time in Marx's Political Economy*, in *Political Theory*, No. 1, 1991, 7.

²⁵ *Idem*, 8.

²⁶ K. Marx, *Grundrisse* (1857/58), M. Nicolaus (Trans.), Vintage Books, 1973, 172, 711.

problem is a tendency in Turkish intellectuals, in general, to look down on these “less educated” people while not wanting to spend time or energy with and on them, on understanding and improving their living conditions or their life experiences and viewpoints.

I think this is part of a broader problem with academia worldwide. Increasing specialization as well as class differences has led the concerns and practices of the academic community to become divorced from the concerns and practices of the majority of other people in society. Better relations are sustained with the industrialists and businesspeople, but when it comes to understanding and engaging with the problems of the disempowered groups, there is a glaring reluctance to engage.

In Turkey, this problem is more marked because while the academic elite is accused of looking down on “the uneducated”, they are also made to believe that they have their own “catching up” to do with the academic elite of the West. So perhaps they inevitably tend to believe that “they cannot help others before helping themselves”, which leads them to further retreat into their “ivory towers”.

Another important point worth mentioning here is the meaning and value of academics for a society.

Within today’s class-divided society, academics mean “those who spend mental rather than material labor”—i.e., those who enjoy the time freed up by material laborers to develop themselves intellectually and engage in what may look like leisure activities to those who are excluded from them. In a different type of society, academics could mean “pioneers for new frontiers for all of society”. But perhaps because society tacitly knows this, in many or even most societies, academics have held a relatively respectable status.

When we take a look at the history of Turkey from its foundation to today, do you think the attack on academic freedom is a new phenomenon? Did this problem begin to appear after 2016, with the growth of AKP regime? What kind of problems did the academy have already?

It is not a new phenomenon. At least since the 1980 coup, academic freedom in Turkey has been under attack. However, since I did not have first-hand experience of academic life in Turkey before the AKP regime, my comments on the kinds of problems that the academy had before then would be merely information from books or other similar “interviews” I have read. Yet, I believe it would also not be too controversial to claim that academic freedom has reached a “new low” with the AKP regime.

Considering that the question of academic freedom is not a new phenomenon, what is the main problem for the academy or university now in your opinion?

If you ask me, the main problem is that there is too much control and interference in academic freedom in precisely the sense in which I described academic freedom in

response to the first question: ideological interference from authoritarian rulers or economic pressure (not-so-soft power) from the so-called “rules of the market”.

What we can conclude from what you are saying is that the assault on academic freedom does not change whether the country is authoritarian or democratic; if there is the implementation of neoliberal policies, the restrictions made are inevitable. In this regard, my questions are as follows: Do you think academic freedom is a concerning or alarming issue only in authoritative countries? How are the effects of restrictions felt in liberal and democratic countries?

As my response to the previous question implies, I do not think that academics in “liberal and democratic” countries are so free, either. They are constantly under the surveillance of the “performance principle”, are pressured to “publish or perish”. The internalization of certain implicitly authoritative and ideological norms causes true individuality, originality, or “eccentricity” among academics to be “frowned upon”. This last point is not a trivial one. The uncritical reproduction and perpetuation of dominant norms by the agents of academic production themselves is an important obstacle to academic freedom to be contended with.

Regarding the restrictions that we are talking about, in your institution, do you come up against some restrictions on your academic research or your lecturing during the preparation of your syllabus or academic program?

I have not come up against any explicit censorship in the preparation of my syllabi. The most serious restriction I come up against arises in the form of the “performance principle” and the constant imposition and reiteration of practical concerns. Constant questions raised about how much of what I am doing and producing is “worthwhile” (i.e., worth x-many points) put pressure on me to do more work and research on those types of activities that can more easily be fitted into the pigeon holes of what “the economy” deems worthy. That easily translates into a restriction on what I really want to do and find important because we are left with no time to do those other things.

Sometimes this outcome seems not to be accidental, but one that is clearly intended. For instance, it should not be too difficult to see that constantly increasing the quota for the number of students to be admitted into our programs would reduce the quality of the work that we do, both in our own research and with regard to the academic development of individual students.

We are experiencing a more overt restriction in terms of financial resources. For example, our budgets for participation in international conferences have been severely restricted so that it has become practically next to impossible to afford them. These financial restrictions have more serious consequences for my colleagues working in the natural sciences since they cannot find the money to buy the most basic necessary equipment for their labs and many labs in our university have been closing down. Many research projects have been rejected funding without adequate justification. What renders this a clearer case of “restriction of academic freedom” is the alarming fact that

the financing of projects, labs, assistants, and the like are “handed out” in a blatantly discriminatory fashion, leading to an understanding that those of us who criticize the authorities shall be financially punished.

Another insidious form of restriction, a case of micromanagement, is the constant introduction of changes to systems that were working wonderfully previously and did not need to be changed, with the resulting creation of increased, unnecessary administrative tasks and commissions, where the duties are not clearly defined and the deadlines are unrealistically short or vague (e.g., “asap”); where we are constantly expected to be “ready at command”; and most of which directly detracts from actual academic production.

Another version of this distraction from academic production is constant political agitation, as university campuses can be breeding grounds for this. Not a week goes by when we are not distracted from what we are really trying to work on by some new political “event” or problem on campus.

These all are important points that you raised for academic freedom; on the one hand, there is the financial restriction; on the other hand, there is a vast amount of extension of labor time through unnecessary administrative tasks but no spare time for producing academically. The performance principle forces scholars to do what they do not desire to do and therefore kills their creativity. Furthermore, there are political restrictions since the failed coup d'état of 2016 that resulted in discharging many academics. How does the investigation – especially after the attempted coup in 2016 – of some academics regarding their academic works or critiques of government policies affect your academic work?

First of all, it has demotivated all of us. Disagreements on how strong a reaction should be shown in support of our colleagues have caused tension, mistrust, and even hostility amongst ourselves. It has affected our work also in the sense that these issues become foremost on our agenda, as I said above, causing us to put more theoretical work on the backburner. These issues are very important, but also time-consuming, and, in light of our disenfranchisement, being occupied with them has led to a sense of futility, hopelessness, and loss of self-confidence.

One of the interviewees said that after this mass attack on academics, they understood that academia was not in effect a safe place as they had previously supposed. That means that their academic life is hanging by a thread. Even though they have a job that seems to be a secure position, they feel that this position at this point becomes a more precarious and vulnerable form of employment. At this point, institutional support becomes crucially important. Interviewees indicate that the restrictions and repressions somewhat surprisingly come from the universities in the periphery rather than at the center. How does your institution help you with your academic work? What sort of facilities does it offer?

My institution used to support my academic work with its facilities (e.g., library, campus housing), funding of international conference participation, venues, and technical and financial support for the organizations of conferences and other academic events at my own institution, academic performance awards, and most importantly, a congenial atmosphere of social support and mentorship.

All such support is getting cut down now.

The consequences of these deductions must be heavy. What are the consequences of oppression on academic freedoms? In terms of individual, society, culture, democracy etc.

Interruption of intellectual progress and development.

Loss of so much potential and qualified labor: Students dropping out, losing their sanity (getting institutionalized), even committing suicide; students getting put on trial. Students fleeing the country (legally or illegally); brain drain; faculty and research assistants getting dismissed; faculty retiring or being forced to retire early; loss of trust among ourselves; self-censorship.

Loss of motivation. Loss of self-confidence, hope, trust.

Is it possible to be academically productive under such circumstances?

In addition to these consequences resulting in some serious effects on the creativity and quality of academics' work, there is also the student dimension. How did the constraints on academic freedoms affect students? How did it affect the relationship between students and professors?

Many lose faith in or respect for their teachers if they find that their teachers cannot defend them or fight to protect the academic freedom that is under attack. The more politically active and self-confident ones try to fight back but are severely (and occasionally legally) penalized and end up with their academic future jeopardized. They are also distracted from their academic studies in roughly the same way and for the same reasons that we are, which I already explained (constant political agitation and harassment). They see no hope for their future.

On the bright side, it has strengthened and reinvigorated a sense of solidarity between those students and faculty who try to fight for their freedoms. The same goes for a sense of solidarity among certain academics.

I would like to come back to the concept of production, knowledge production or academic production, whatever you want to call it, in the digital age. It is certain that digital tools have a serious effect on both the production and distribution and accessibility of knowledge and information. How do you define academic freedom in the digital age within the context of these technological developments? Does it facilitate the publication of research results or academic work? What kind of challenges does it create for you?

Technological development has increased the speed of production and dissemination of intellectual material. If improved access to more information always implied access to more knowledge, this would (other things being equal) certainly lead to an increase in academic freedom. However, improved access to information does not equal increased knowledge because the digital age has also created the phenomenon of post-truth and calls attention to the need for a distinction to be drawn between knowledge and information. While the internet seems to be a “commons”, open to all, many crucial academic articles cannot be accessed without paying a sizable fee, which is not affordable for those of us living in less developed countries. However, we love libgen.

The increase in the speed of production and dissemination of intellectual information has also increased the pressures and demands on the use that we make of our time and our research abilities. We are bombarded by requests, propositions, and invitations 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Further, digital technologies have enabled the creation of more quantitative criteria and systems for the evaluation of our academic performance. The recent quartile system, the increased importance given to “the impact factor” and the like, cause those disciplines which do not immediately yield practical results to be pushed to the bottom of the social hierarchy in academia. The fact that such databases and their services are provided by companies that also have economic connections to certain publishers and that they all have the profit motive guiding them leads to the corruption of academic integrity and freedom.

How do digital tools help to gather information about a person and his/her activities? How should we understand the position of universities in relation to censorship and surveillance in the digital age? How and to what extent do they affect academic research?

It certainly makes surveillance easier and becomes a most effective vehicle of the biopower operating on us. We are asked to and constantly reminded to update our CVs through systems like *avesis* or *orcid* or the website of the Higher Education Council in Turkey. Academic Performance Awards often seem like baits to me to lure us into volunteering all kinds of information about ourselves. I personally resist these lures: I do not apply for awards or update my CV. (That’s why I keep getting reminders.) It is not possible to dream of advancing in one’s academic career under these circumstances, but I feel that my freedom and autonomy are more important than my career, so I guess I am just waiting for the nightmare to be over, naïve as I know this stance is.

(Unfortunately, many calls for signatures for petitions, etc., also seem to present the same risk, in my opinion.)

My last but by no means least important question is as follows: what do you think is the main motivation of the government in restricting freedom of expression?

It is to breed stupidity because it is easier to rule over stupid people.