The Relationship Between Authoritarian Regimes and the Precarization of Academics and Media Professionals

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ABSTRACT

With a focus on contemporary Turkey, this paper examines how authoritarian regimes affect the precarization of labour and how the precarious labour field strengthens the power of oppressive regimes. A range of research has focused on the relationship between neoliberalism and precarization so far. However, although neoliberalism has indeed had an effect on the labour market in Turkey since the 1980s onwards, it is not the only reason for precarization. In fact, while neoliberalism has made labour market flexible, unstable and precarious, repressive regimes have accelerated and deepened this process.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with academics and journalists from Turkey who have lived and continued their occupations in the UK because of political pressures and severe sanctions in their home country, reveal the overlapping and mutually constitutive relationship between authoritarian regimes and the precarization of labour in academia and the media. The data also reveals new ways of intellectual production beyond conventional structures and institutions, as well as how the interviewees' professional and personal lives are maintained in the UK despite precarity and political trauma.

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[1] Dr Bermal Aydin (B.Aydin1@lse.ac.uk and bermal.aydin@gmail.com) is a postdoctoral researcher in the Center for Study of Human Rights at the LSE. Her research interests include alternative media, precarity, authoritarianism, gender, film analysis, etc. She completed her PhD at Galatasaray University in Turkey on the topic of 'Türkiye'de Televizyon Yayinciliginda Alternatif Arayislar: Hayat ve IMC Kanalları' [The Alternative Pursuits of Television Broadcasting in Turkey: Hayat and IMC Channels]. She has worked on a research project at LSE regarding the relationship between authoritarian regimes and precarity of academia and media professionals in Turkey.

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, research has mainly and justifiably focused on the relationship between neoliberal capitalism, globalization, and the unprecedented precarization of the labour market (Standing, 2011; Wade, 2013; Schram, 2015), although 'unemployment, underemployment, insecurity and precariousness are hardly new conditions for the working class' (Jørgensen, 2016: 963). In this literature, neoliberalism, as a set of practices taken up by different state and private actors, is deemed to be responsible for the increasing precarity of the population, and also as Butler states (2013: 33) so '[t]oo, are security regimes, and new forms of state racism and fascism'. In this sense, it is not only neoliberalism that has made the labor market flexible and precarious to the detriment of individual workers, but that repressive regimes have also accelerated the process.

After World War II, there were several pioneering attempts to understand mass support for fascism and authoritarianism (for example Adorno *et al.*, 1950, 1993; Reich, 1972). As Arendt (1970: 46) stressed, 'institutionalized power often appears in the guise of authority, demanding instant, unquestioning recognition'. In order to reach this recognition, authoritarian rulers often tend to repress and domesticate the labour force, especially intellectual labour, which might otherwise constitute a threat to the regime through its critical thinking and questioning. Moreover, neoliberal ideas occasionally match authoritarianism in terms of concerns over a loss of the control and therefore may not allow the institution of democracy.

In addition to authoritarian regimes compatible with neoliberalism in the periphery, such as many Latin American countries whose authoritarian regimes collaborated with neoliberalism until the post-1977 wave of democratization (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liňán, 2013), authoritarianism can be present in Western liberal democracies, where it comes to resistance against capitalist interests and hegemony. In this sense, Foucault's (2007, 2008) concept of 'governmentality' – what he also called 'biopower' – refers to the governmental power practices over life and shapes individuals as governable subjects is a useful term for thinking through a neoliberal logic compatible with authoritarianism. As Foucault (2007: 108) stated, governmentality is a collection of 'institutions, procedures […] calculations, and tactics' that sees 'the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument.' Neoliberalism also makes people 'accept responsibility for handling the shocks of marketization' (Schram, 2015: 71) as Jørgensen (2016: 966) properly emphasizes;

> *Unemployment is framed as an individual problem, and governments develop policies that sanction and punish groups believed to be burden. This conveys a liberal-paternalistic message, which is a key element of neoliberalism: that society, in Wacquant's words, is liberal and free at the top and restrictive, paternalistic and authoritarian at the bottom.*

All these aspects point to common elements of both authoritarian rulers and the precarization of labour, which means 'living with a lot of fear and anxiety', according to Bauman (2013: 25). In this context, it can be claimed that masses terrified by the threats of an unstable and precarious labour market have been very important for the ruling classes efforts to subjugate people without any significant resistance. As will be argued in this paper, people's fears of losing their jobs may strengthen the power of governments and authoritarian regimes in a manner compatible with neoliberalism as it appears in Turkey, and which is not rooted in democracy.

In this paper, I want to focus on the mutual relationship between precarization of the media and the academy and authoritarian regimes, focusing on the case of Turkey. The scope of this research stems from the idea that an independent media and academia is crucial to building the critical, participatory and multicultural public sphere which is necessary for a vibrant and properly functioning democracy.

1.1   Methodology and Research Design

In this paper, the focus will be on contemporary Turkey, and the following three questions will be addressed in more detail below:

1. How do repressive regime periods in Turkey implicate precarization?
2. How does a precarious labour field strengthen repressive regimes?
3. How and through which mechanisms can critical intellectual production be maintained under authoritarian regimes and neoliberal policies?

In order to answer these questions an in-depth review of the literature and series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews were undertaken. Semi-structured, in-depth interviewing was chosen because it allows biographic-narratives (Wengraf, 2001: 29). Furthermore, as a type of conversational face-to-face interaction, it also allows for improvisation in a careful, analytical and theorized way.

The interviewees consisted of four academics and four journalists, mostly of Turkish descent, but residing in the UK. All interviewees espouse left-wing ideologies and are sympathetic to the Turkish left, apart from one journalist who is a native of Britain and he is professionally interested in the Kurdish issue and the Kurdish political movement in Turkey. Finding out what a foreign journalist experienced in Turkey when he gathered news is also important to understanding the challenges journalists face in Turkey regardless of whether they are native or not. Foreign journalists criticizing Erdoğan's regime and chasing politically dangerous issues such as Kurdish issue, Kurdish imprisoned politicians and their trials, the government members' corruption scandals and so on are targets of the regime. They are stigmatized as terrorists, spies and foreign agents. Further, they are arbitrarily exposed to custody and arrestment through these alleged accusations as seen in the cases of German journalist Deniz

Yücel, British reporters Jake Hanrahan and Philip Pendlebury, French journalist Loup Bureu[2] and so on. All these recent examples demonstrate how journalism has become a crime in Turkey in a general manner and how Turkey has become one of the most dangerous countries for not only natives but also foreign journalists.

I carefully sampled my interviewees in terms of suitability and relevance for the research's subject and the scope of the research. In this case, the criteria of selection of interviewees was based on the level of danger they faced in Turkey under authoritarianism and their persistence in continuing their professions in the UK. I also prioritized selecting interviewees from different generations and different career levels. Even though there are relatively few interviewees, those different individual cases represent a general picture of how Turkey's former and current authoritarian regimes have made the labour market precarious on the basis of political and ideological motives. For instance, more than 110,000 public employees have been dismissed from their jobs through emergency decrees, while tens of thousands have been suspended since the 2016 coup attempt[3] through alleged accusations of terrorism that these numbers indicate a large-scale purge beyond individual and specific cases.

I explained the subject and the aims of my research and the interviewees' roles in the research before conducting interviews and I sought informed consent from them. From an ethics perspective, interviewees were guaranteed that their real names and some other details would be hidden[4] in order to prevent all possible threats due to their controversial and politically dangerous circumstances in Turkey.

All the interviews were conducted face to face in London and only voice recordings were taken during the interviews. The interviews took place between December 2017 and March 2018. The interviewees' ages varied from about 30 to almost 60.

After transcribing the interviews, a thematic field analysis (TFA) was conducted to analyze and interpret them, 'aiming to reconstruct the structuring principles of the story-as-told; its gestalt' (Wengraf, 2001: 241). The themes of my analysis were mainly related to working conditions, job security, and political pressures that the interviewees experienced in their professions in Turkey. Seeking new and alternative ways of knowledge production was also an important theme in the analysis, which I hope may inspire those who have suffered under authoritarian regimes. Another sub-themes of the analysis related to the conditions and

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[2] See Bozkurt (2017), URL: https://www.turkishminute.com/2017/09/27/opinion-turkey-targets-foreign-journalists-systematically-and-deliberately

[3] See URL: http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/over-18-500-turkish-public-workers-dismissed-with-new-emergency-state-decree-134290

[4] Synonyms were used below, ages were also changed.

challenges of living and working of in a foreign country – England in this case – which revealed the overwhelming precarity of a competitive labour market.

However, before presenting the analysis of my data, I will develop a conceptual framework linking neoliberalism, precarization and authoritarianism in the case of Turkey.

2 MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP OF PRECARIZATION AND AUTHORITARIANISM IN TURKEY IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Turkey has experienced precarization due to both the adoption of neoliberal policies and the authoritarian nature of its regime. However, authoritarianism is not a recent phenomenon in Turkey. Besides Ottoman times, Turkey has also experienced authoritarian rule after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. As Atabaki and Zürcher (2004) mention, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was the founder and first president of contemporary Turkey, led elite-driven modernization in which state elites imposed modernization on society from the top to the bottom. Further, Atatürk's 'People's Republican Party' (the *CHP*) founded in 1923 institutionalized his personal, authoritarian rule of the country as a single party state until 1950.

Authoritarianism refers to a style of government 'in which the rulers demand unquestioning obedience from the ruled' (McLean and McMillan, 2016: 30). This chimes with Schneiderman (2015: 272), who states that 'authority always demands obedience and its success or failure depends upon followers obeying authoritative demands'. Authoritarianism can be divided into two forms: right-wing and left-wing authoritarianism. While Stalin's rule in Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) from the mid-1920s until his death in 1953 represents an example of left-wing authoritarianism, Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, Erdoğan's Turkey, and Putin's Russia, can be seen as examples of right-wing authoritarian and totalitarian rule. As Fuchs (2018: 55) states, right-wing authoritarianism includes hierarchical leadership, nationalism, the friend/enemy scheme, patriarchy and a militarism compatible with authoritarian capitalism.

As a form of governance and as a set of political-economic practices compatible with capitalist class' interests (Harvey, 2005), neoliberalism refers to an agenda 'promoting deregulation, a withdrawal of the state and advocating the primacy of the market' (Cammaerts and Calabrese, 2011: 2). Neoliberal logic seeks to 'extend the rationalities of the market' (Foucault, 2008: 323). Via the economization and marketization of social and political life, extending to everything and everyone, neoliberalism is deemed to cause an erosion of democratic values. As Brown (2015: 44) argues, 'neoliberalism is the rationality through which capitalism finally swallows humanity'. Economic rationality has become the basis of all human activities and political governance in the neoliberal era and rights pertain to capital, not to citizens (Cruz and Brown,

2016: 72). Hence, neoliberalism relentlessly turns human-beings into a *homo economicus* (Brown, 2015: 31).

Neoliberalism also triggers precarization and produces a new and fractured class or category globally named 'the precariat', which Standing (2013: 49) calls a dangerous evolving class due to its potential for collective organizing and revolutionary capacities (Standing, 2013 and Harvey, 2012), while Bauman (2013: 26) asserts that it represents a new social category because of liquid modern work-places, mutual suspiciousness, and the stimulation of competitiveness between precariats. Precariousness is still, as Standing (2011: 57) argues, 'an agenda for transferring risks and insecurity onto workers and their families.' Flexibility and unstable working conditions constitute the precariat's perceptions of itself as worthless and easily dispensable. Precarity, here, indicates informal labour, conditional employment, temporariness, uncertainty, squeezed wages, social risk and fragmented life situations without security, protection and predictability (Schierup and Jørgensen, 2016: 948).

The first step in the precarization of Turkey was an economic program named the *24th January Economic Decisions* which aimed to transform the economic system from a statist, protectionist economic structure to a free market economy. The planned changes of the program were implemented after the coup in 1980. This period was dominated by an authoritarian military regime without a civil government and political parties (they were allowed again in 1983). During this period of military rule, the pressures on the academy, left-wing and Kurdish groups, and critical organizations such as unions, newspapers and so on were extremely severe. The 1980-coup also took away previously gained rights of the working class and suppressed the organized left in Turkey.

Almost thirty years after the 1980 coup, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002. In its first years the AKP displayed liberal features, adopting the European Union's (EU) harmonization laws and reducing the military's influence and intervention in politics (see Esen and Gumuscu, 2016: 1584-5). However, the party and its president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have gradually moved towards authoritarianism and steadily increased repression, especially after the Gezi Park Uprising in 2013 and more notably after the coup-attempt of July 2016.

Since the 2016 coup-attempt, there has been an extreme liquidation and precarization of the labour market even for public sector employees who thought that they had secure and permanent job positions. However, in Harvey's (2005: 169) words, they were reduced to 'use and throw away precariats'. According to the report titled *The Effects of Emergency State and Decree Laws in Turkey*, which was published by The Union of Education and Science Workers' (*Eğitim-Sen*) almost one year after the failed coup, more than 100.000 public sector employees have lost their jobs between 21st of July 2016 and 5th of May 2017.

Academics and journalists, in particular, have been subjects to the most severe repression. As Başer *et al.,* (2017: 292 – emphasis in original) assert, '[t]hey are forced to live a *civil death* by

being deprived of their basic rights'. Although political pressures on the higher education and media are not new in Turkey, after the latest coup-attempt there has been an unprecedented purge of these sectors in Turkey. Precarization has been a useful instrument for both previous and current authoritarian rulers to achieve their social and political goals.

3 ELECTORAL/COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM, PRECARIZATION AND ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF INTELLECTUAL PRODUCTION

Democracy basically means 'the combination of popular sovereignty and majority rule' through free, fair and competitive elections (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012: 10). It also requires the participation of all social classes, ethnic and religious groups, minorities and genders in the political life and the protection of civil rights, and the proper implementation of the principle of separation of powers in terms of the existence of 'checks and balances' (Dahl, 1982). Furthermore, freedom of expression, freedom to form and join organizations, the right to vote for all citizens regardless of their ethnicities, classes, and the existence of pluralistic information sources (Dahl, 1982) are fundamental indicators of liberal democracy. However, democracies can show authoritarian features, for example in terms of how they violently repress systemic protest, so according to Bölme (2015: 11) it is important to determine 'the tendency of a regime (toward authoritarian or democracy)'. In this sense, Turkey's current regime can be called *electoral (competitive) authoritarian* with a dominant leader, president Erdoğan and a hegemonic party, the AKP. In this sense, Turkey is a good example of electoral or competitive authoritarianism, as Mainwaring and Pérez-Liňán (2013: 11) observe 'in authoritarian regimes, the most important actors always include the president and often include a hegemonic party'. Bora (2017) names this regime 'Erdoğanizm', while Esen and Gumuscu (2016: 1586) call 'competitive authoritarianism' that which basically includes 'unfair elections, the violation of civil liberties, and the existence of an uneven playing field'. In such a regime, elections still exist, but they are controlled and heavily manipulated by the ruling party and the president. In addition to severe pressures over civil liberties, the judiciary is not independent and subservient to Erdoğan and his party.

As proof of an uneven playing field and unfair elections, the *TRT,* which is the only public radio and television broadcasting institution in Turkey, allocated 46% of its airtime to the ruling AKP alone during the June 2015 election campaign. Private media outlets further undermined the opposition's access to media by allocating one third of their live coverage to the AKP leaders during the campaign of the November 2015 election (Esen and Gumuscu, 2016: 1588).

Moreover, a strong connection between precarization and liquidation of labour on the one hand and authoritarian rule in Turkey on the other hand, can be observed since the Gezi Park Uprising in 2013. In the immediate aftermath, 143 journalists were either fired or forced to resign and this number rose to 339 by 2014 (Esen and Gumuscu, 2016: 1591). However, since the failed coup in 2016, an unprecedented amount of authoritarian pressure, liquidation, and precarization of the intellectual labour field – especially academic and journalistic ones – has been apparent in Turkey. According to Human Rights Watch[5] (2018), since the 2016 coup attempt, more than 5,800 academics have been dismissed from public universities under emergency decrees. Besides this, Amnesty International[6] (2017) reported that more than 120 journalists and other media workers were imprisoned and in addition to this, thousands of media workers were made unemployed due to the closure of 156 media outlets after the failed coup. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists[7] (2017), Turkey is one of the biggest prisons for journalists in the world, along with China and Egypt. All this implies a general crackdown and a series of authoritarian measures severely limiting freedom of expression and freedom of press.

4 ACADEMY UNDER ATTACK: THE CASE OF ACADEMICS FOR PEACE

The interviewee Dr. Serpil (42, female) used to be an academic in Turkey for many years. During the interview, she explained that the political climate transformed considerably after the failed coup in 2016 and spoke of how she experienced this transformation as an academic who signed the Peace Petition. As she stated:

> *I talked to the rector at my university in Turkey for my sabbatical. First, the rector seemed to support me. Then, I went to another country for the sabbatical with my family. But the rector's attitude changed after the coup attempt. After the first three months of my sabbatical, the rectorate wanted me to go back to Turkey, instead of extending the sabbatical. Also, they cancelled a symposium in Brussels that I organized. All these things happened to me because I had signed the Peace Petition.*

(Serpil, personal interview).

The Peace Petition was issued on January 2016 and was entitled 'We will not be a party to this crime'. It was signed by more than 2.000 academics and it criticized state violence in Kurdish

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[5] See URL: https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/14/turkey-government-targeting-academics

[6] See URL: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/02/free-turkey-media/

[7] See URL: https://cpj.org/reports/2017/12/journalists-prison-jail-record-number-turkey-china-egypt.php

populated areas of Turkey, as well as demanding that the government start peace negotiations on the Kurdish issue. Immediately after the petition was published, president Erdoğan labelled all the peace academics terrorists and betrayers[8], using a discourse of counter-terrorism which 'blurs the boundaries between actual terrorism and civil disobedience' (Başer *et al.*, 2017: 276). Erdoğan also called on public prosecutors and rectors to punish these academics. After this call, many of those who signed the Peace Petition were detained, four were arrested for 40 days, others were forced or encouraged to withdraw their signatures, and judicial and administrative investigations were launched. Most of the peace academics lost their jobs through a variety of methods, such as non-renewal of their job contracts, or having to resign from their jobs because of the pressures and sanctions against them, as was the case with Serpil (personal interview).

Many of my academic interviewees attested to how their academic lives radically transformed under the current authoritarian regime. Whereas Serpil resigned as a result of the pressures placed upon her, Baran (57, male), a former assistant professor lost his job via a statutory decree during the state of emergency as a result of signing the Peace Petition. This is another example of politically motivated precarization of the academy under authoritarianism. As he remarked:

> *I am one of the signatories of the petition. After launching the petition and the signatories, our university launched administrative investigations against us. Then, the anti-terror branch in the police called us to testify because a judicial investigation was launched. As a result of the administrative investigation, we had the condemnation penalty which may affect our careers negatively. […] I was suspended at first; I was not fired totally at that time. I lost my job after a statutory decree on 29 October 2016, which banned me from all public jobs in addition to losing my job*

> (Baran, personal interview).

These pressures on and sanctioning of academics was not only a sign of the rise of authoritarianism, but led to the increasing precarity of the academy. According to Başer *et al.* (2017: 289),

> *[t]he outcome of the peace academics case showed the long-standing vulnerability and precarious existence of academics in Turkey. The absence of job security and the ease with which they can be dismissed from universities because of their political views has always been [an] issue.*

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[8] For more on Erdoğan's reaction and some expressions of support for the Peace Academics, see Weaver (2016) and Butler and Ertür (2017).

This precarity in academia is not new, however. The Higher Education Law #2547, which was put in place by the military dictatorship to regulate the employment in academia, stipulates that all academic staff apart from professors and associate professors can be hired by 1, 2 or 3-year renewable contracts and this remains the case today. Further, YÖK (The Higher Education Council of Turkey) which was established as a constitutional organ in 1981 by the military dictatorship functions to prevent universities from politicization compatible with authoritarian measures and conservative cultural priorities (Ergül *et al*, 2017: 149-150).

Although the *YÖK* has played an important role in the restructuring of the higher education system in Turkey, the decree-laws passed during the state of emergency and the various administrations of the universities have in recent years proven a productive means through which to purge the academy of critical voices. There have been many professors, associate professors, teaching assistants and assistant professors among the academics dismissed through the statutory decrees.

Even though a professorship and an associate professorship used to be the among the most secure academic jobs in Turkey, this has changed significantly since the coup attempt in 2016. In her World Report, Devi (2018) states that since the 2016 coup attempt, 6,081 academics have been dismissed from their jobs and banned from any civic duty with statutory decrees, including an accompanying cancellation of their passports. In this sense, another interviewee Jülide (33, female) who used to be a research assistant and a doctoral student and also one of the signatories of the petition indicated that new kinds of precarity are emerging, driven by political motivations:

> *The situation is even worse today. Unemployment and precariousness have come to the last stage now. There is no a job security for anyone anymore. Not only for research assistants but also for professors and associate professors. Everyone can lose their jobs through a statutory decree. Precariousness is clearly explicit now more than ever through statutory decrees, investigations or not renewing job contracts arbitrarily.*

> (Jülide, personal interview)

Another interviewee, who used to be an assistant professor not only lost his job, but had his passport revoked by a statutory decree in October 2016. As one of the signatories of the Peace Petition, Emrah (48, male) believes that the reason for losing his job was not only the petition, but also his longstanding involvement in organized struggle and political activism:

I used to be an active member of The Union of Education and Science Workers (Eğitim-Sen)
at my university in Turkey. So, I was always politically active and participating in organized
struggle. I do not want to reduce the reason of losing my job to my signature in the petition.
Because half of my ten friends who lost their jobs by the same decree along with me were not
signatories. They were dismissed without the signature as they were constantly active in the
trade union and political struggle. That's why we lost our jobs.

(Emrah, personal interview)

Based on statements such as these, it could be concluded that the reasons for the precarization of the academy in Turkey today go beyond the usual performance concerns of the neoliberal university or 'performing/managerial university' (Morrissey, 2013), in which the academic subject is transformed into 'human capital' (Berg *et al.*, 2016: 171) and measurable, governable 'performing subjects' (Morrisey, 2013). Even though performance criteria are still important and some academics were dismissed due to such performance criteria (especially in the private universities), ideological and political pressures were far more influential in Turkey's current political atmosphere - whether one is looking at the case of a public university or not. It is a distinctive feature which distinguishes Turkey's academia from the neoliberal university environment in the Western world, where education has become a business and a market-place, where learning is an investment (Simons, 2006) and where everything, everyone and every term and discourse, is approached on the bases of market-principles and terminology (Ahmed, 2006; Ahmed, 2007a; Ahmed, 2007b).

Baran (personal interview) states in this regard that the case of Academics for Peace is a prominent example of a distinctive feature of the academy in Turkey:

The circumstances we are facing now are seriously different than those of the neoliberal
universities in the rest of the world. […] There is a new ideology and political theology in
Turkey now. People who are not in harmony with this political theology have been eliminated
and externalized from the universities. There have been performance criteria in Turkey, as
well. However, why we lost our jobs is not because we did not fulfill performance criteria.
Hence, when we criticize the neoliberal process, we should pay attention and highlight the
particular conditions and differences between Turkey and other countries.

On the basis of my analysis, one can observe that although the most determining factor of precarization of labour in Turkey is authoritarianism, this does not mean that neoliberalism is therefore absent. On the contrary, authoritarian governance terms such as the 1980 military coup or Erdoğan's current regime have been the leading practitioners of a neoliberalism that I would denote as 'neoliberal electoral (competitive) authoritarianism'. Although competitive authoritarianism may include democratic institutions and processes such as elections, the guarantee and legitimization of gaining power, the opposition's ability to compete is seriously limited due to abused and politicized state institutions – courts, security forces, tax authorities,

local authorities and so on, as well as a highly controlled media system (Levitsky and Loxton, 2012: 62).

 The draconian reaction of the Erdoğan regime against the Peace Academics was the first step in an existential crisis of an academy facing increasing authoritarian pressures. The oppressive measures of the government, the YÖK and the universities as institutions were quite unison in their repressive reaction against the Peace Academics. This indicates more a crisis of neoliberal measures wielded by the authoritarian regime than a crisis of the universities themselves (Ergül *et al.*, 2017: 157).

In addition to administrative investigations, trials against Peace Academics, including the interviewees Serpil and Emrah, have also begun. It is the expectation that all signatories of the petition will be called to the courts over the time, university by university, city by city:

> *A trial has been carried out about me through the accusation of terrorist propaganda as I had*
> *signed the petition. [...] It is a very political charge and we all know this.*

<div align="right">(Emrah, personal interview).</div>

> I am accused of making terrorist propaganda and I was invited to the court [...] It was very difficult to answer the questions from the judges because they tried to put us into a difficult situation by their questions.

<div align="right">(Serpil, personal interview).</div>

5 BEING A FOREIGN ACADEMIC IN THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

Apart from Baran, all of the academic interviewees evaluated themselves as being inadequate for the UK's academic system, which is an excellent case of the neoliberal university. As Morrissey (2013: 800) notes, universities in the UK 'are increasingly attendant to rankings, benchmarking and competitiveness'. Also, their experiences as foreign academics in the UK has forced them to re-think their professional careers beyond the university in order to afford their lives.

> *I think I do not attain the performance criteria here. I have been hearing good comments*
> *about my research. But it is an academic world that I cannot be in it totally*

<div align="right">(Jülide, personal interview)</div>

I do not think I can find a very good job as a lecturer at a good university […] you need at least one or two international publications a year. The education we received in Turkey and our academic background is not enough here. The language is not adequate either. Some of the native academics cannot even fulfill these conditions. Even if I would find a good academic job here the fight will begin from the moment I get in. I think of other things, then. I can work as an electrician. I read and write intellectually in the rest of the time. I do not have to be connected to a university

<div align="right">(Emrah, personal interview)</div>

I cannot compete with academics as I am not English, I am not proficient in the language and culture of England. I have not even studied here. I can write one or two articles at most in a year. How can I compete with them? Even if I do something in the academia, I should do another job and have another life, another rhythm. […] Instead of dealing with peer-review journals, I can write articles for regular magazines. My life is based on reading and writing. I cannot give that up but I can give up the academy.

<div align="right">(Serpil, personal interview)</div>

An analysis of these statements indicates how foreign academics feel about themselves in the UK's neoliberal university system, with its competitive and precarious features. Although academic development requires time in order to read relevant literature, gain data, write and interpret all of these aspects, the neoliberal university system wants academics to do everything including publishing and lecturing, as quickly as possible.

As Couldry (2011: 1) argues regarding higher education in the UK, for more than a decade academic production has been intensively regulated through *the Research Assessment Exercise* (RAE) on the bases of performance calculations of research outputs. Under this regulation, the requirement of at least four high-quality outputs per assessment period, which refers to usually one monograph and three peer-reviewed articles over 5-6 years for UK academics, has been the norm for a while. Also, the dominance of English in the neoliberal university system restricts academics who have high levels of expertise but write in their native language (Çetinkaya, 2017: 75).

The interviewees, who became members of the precariat in Turkey because of the authoritarian policies of the Turkish state, have since also experienced precariousness in the UK due to their unstable and temporary jobs/scholarship positions, as well as their status as migrants - '[t]he *migrant* being the quintessential incarnation of precarity' (Schierup and Jørgensen, 2016: 949) and '[m]igrant labour embodying the experience of precarity, given that the mobility which is the key characteristic of migration is also the response to borders and identities' (Jørgensen, 2016: 961). However, precarity is not unique to migrants given the high levels of unemployment in Greece, Spain and so on, although migrants still constitute a central part of the precariat.

Moreover, when considering the case of Stefan Grim, who used to work at Imperial College in London as a professor for many years and was found dead in his house after he was fired by Imperial College for a failure to fulfill grant income targets (Berg *et al.*, 2016: 169), it is clear that the neoliberal university system does not offer a safe world to anyone regardless of their hierarchical status and/or nationalities. In addition to this, due to the pressures inherent in the neoliberal university system, it prevents academics from creating and expressing widespread solidarity.

6   NEW POSSIBLE WAYS OF ACADEMIC PRODUCTION

Two of my interviewees, Baran and Serpil, pointed towards some national and international initiatives beyond conventional universities and campuses which provided support beyond the academy, such as the newly-founded *Center for Peace and Democracy Research* in London (an initiative of Academics for Peace UK), the *Solidarity Academies* in different cities in Turkey by the dismissed Peace Academics, the *Open University*, and *Off-Campus*.

> *[The] Center for Peace and Democracy Research will give some urgent opportunities for all colleagues in Turkey, who have preferred stay in the country or have to stay there due to the passport cancellations by the state, in order to maintain their academic productions.*

> (Baran, personal interview)

> *There are some important initiatives such as Off-campus, Open University and Solidarity Academies in Turkey. Social media and online systems can be very helpful in this.*

> (Serpil, personal interview)

Although all these initiatives are crucial to finding alternative ways of academic production and to maintaining teaching, the Solidarity Academies founded by dismissed Peace Academics in Turkey have a special importance among all these alternatives due to their persistence in maintaining traditions of intellectual production and sharing the knowledge so created for free. As Başer *et al.* (2017: 292) state, 'they teach for free or they find people without campus initiatives in order to pursue their academic ideals by underlining that they do not need an institution for intellectual activities'.

In addition to the Solidarity Academies, NYLON – a doctoral students' network formed by Richard Sennett at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and Craig Calhoun at New York University (NYU) – is another good example of alternative networks in the academy (Couldry, 2011: 10).

Furthermore, the production and distribution of knowledge is also possible through the use of new technologies. In this context, *Turkey Uncensored[9]*, an online project by Index on Censorship enables censored and/or dismissed Turkish writers, journalists, academics, artists and translators to publish their work on the website, as well as other online initiatives.

7 MEDIA LABOUR UNDER AUTHORITARIAN ATTACK

The labour force in the media industry in Turkey was heavily affected by both the neoliberal economic program of January 24 and the 1980 coup. The implementation of neoliberal policies since the 1980s, mainly the 24th of January Decisions, has also triggered the integration of the media field with large commercial interests creating oligopolies and media-moguls. Meanwhile, this was accompanied by a great amount of precarization and led to the regression of labour rights of journalists.

As a result, numerous media workers have been employed without a press card, through contracts outside of the Press Labor Law #212[10]. Although there are reporters and journalists who are employed in accordance with the Press Labour Law, protection provides no guarantees against accidents at work or illness. Moreover, the internship process in the media sector is long and interns are often employed without pay or job security during their internship (Çamuroğlu Çığ and Çığ, 2015: 223).

The 1980 coup accelerated the precarization of media workers through pressures on trade unions and media outlets - left-wing and dissident ones in particular. In this sense, the interviewee Zeynep's (60, female) experiences in Turkey as a former journalist illustrates the pressures on dissident media outlets and journalists after the 12th September 1980 coup:

> *Before the 1980 coup, newspapers had a certain political position, but they aimed to cover all democratic groups. They were shut down after the coup along with all other left-wing publications.*

> (Zeynep, personal interview)

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[9] See URL: https://www.indexoncensorship.org/campaigns/turkey/turkey-uncensored/

[10] This law first was launched in 1961 in order to protect journalists' rights against employers and regulate the media labour field. For further information see Yanardag (2004), URL: https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/37360-gazetecinin-drami-212-sayili-yasanin-oykusu

After persecution that she perceived as being due to her left-wing political activism, Zeynep moved to the UK (Zeynep, personal interview).

Similar to Zeynep's story, another journalist Ahmet (40, male), who was working at a Kurdish news agency in Turkey, came to the UK as a result of authoritarian pressures. Ahmet's statement demonstrates in detail how being a Kurdish journalist at a Kurdish media outlet is different from being a journalist in the mainstream media in Turkey:

> *When it concerns Kurdistan, the mainstream media is usually on the side of the police, they gather their news behind the panzers. Unfortunately, we never had the right to be on that side, and if we were we experienced damage there. I stayed on the police's side twice through trusting friends working in other news agencies. In both cases, my camera was broken just for being part of [a Kurdish news agency].*

(Ahmet, personal interview)

After the failed coup, pressures on dissident and Kurdish media outlets became severe. According to a report by Reporters Without Borders (2017), Turkey has become the largest prison for journalists in the world. According to the Media Observation Report from the Independent Communication Network (BİA) (Önderoğlu, 2016), soon after the coup attempt in 2016, more than 100 journalists were imprisoned. Eight of these journalists were arrested because of their involvement in Kurdish newspapers and news agencies such as *Özgür Gündem, Jinha, Dicle News Agency (DİHA)* and *Azadiya Welat* (Önderoğlu, 2016).

There are also legal repercussions against journalists, insofar as many have been prosecuted on terrorism charges for sympathizing with the Kurdish cause, for involvement in the Kurdish political movement and/or for their support of Kurdish media outlets such as the newspaper *Özgür Gündem* (Free Agenda) which covered Kurdish issues and was shut down after the 15th July coup attempt. It emerged during the interviews that several of the journalists had been victims of these legal repercussions.

Besides the targeting and prosecution of journalists, the state also forcibly closed down many media organisations. According to Amnesty International (2016) at least 169 media organizations were shut down in Turkey directly after the coup-attempt of 2016. The story of my interviewee Ali and how he lost his job is a case in point. Ali (49, male) worked as a UK correspondent in various forms of media. After the failed coup, Ali lost his job at the organisation at which he worked after it was closed down by a statutory decree (personal interview).

Table 1. The number of arrested journalists over the period 03/2015 – 03/2016

Zeynep provided a historical perspective on the reasons, motivations, and ways of precarization of media labour in Turkey, thereby denoting the differences between the years she started as a journalist in 1970s Turkey and the current period:

> *Although the unionization rates and the job security has always been very low in Turkey's media labour, there were some non-written rules that people would not get out of their jobs unless they had very important issues. But later on, we heard and testified that people had been taken out of work because of new technologies, competition and performance, and so on when big media conglomerates emerged. But now a lot of people have lost their jobs for political reasons.*

(Zeynep, personal interview)

In addition to the pressures on dissident media outlets and journalists, much of the mainstream media in Turkey is under the control and manipulation of Erdoğan's regime, resulting in a situation in which there is no longer a 'free' mainstream media to speak of. The sale of Dogan Media, which used to be Turkey's biggest media group, to the pro-government and pro-Erdoğan conglomerate Demirören Holding, in March 2018, led to the total collapse of

diversity in Turkey's mainstream media. According to the 'Media Ownership Monitor'[11] published by RSF (Reporters without Borders) and the website of the Independent Communication Network, Bianet (Bagimsiz Iletisim Agi-BIA), 80% of the Turkish media landscape is currently financially or politically, dependent on the AKP government, and by extension, Erdoğan in particular. After the sale of Dogan Media Group, nine of the ten most-watched TV channels and nine of the ten most-read national daily newspapers are now owned by pro-government businessmen and companies (RSF and BIA, 2018). However, this capture of the media is not necessarily unique to Turkey, as

> *the structure of the global capitalist system is maintained through the support of millions of citizens guided by charismatic personalities who routinely take control of the media and politics to manipulate emotions and logic. (Robinson, 2004: 159)*

Not only journalists from Turkey, but also foreign journalists gathering information about politically sensitive subjects in Turkey, such as the Kurdish issue and the trials of Kurdish politicians, have faced serious challenges. Stuart's (42, male) experiences in Turkey as a visiting British journalist, serve to illustrate how difficult doing journalism is in country controlled by an authoritarian regime.

As was evident from my discussions with Stuart, gathering news on controversial subjects such as the Kurdish issue or protests is extremely difficult under the current regime. Journalists, whether Turkish citizens or not, are routinely labeled as terrorists enabling the government to use stringent Anti-Terror Laws to suppress and criminalize journalists as well as all dissent. Foreign journalists can be easily and arbitrarily banned from the country and face security threats against their freedom and even their lives. Death threats and assassinations against journalists such as Uğur Mumcu, Abdi İpekçi, Metin Göktepe remain in popular memory. Both Stuart's statements and an assassination attempt in May 2016 against Can Dündar who is a journalist, a writer and former executive editor of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, indicate that such threats still exist.

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[11] See URL: https://rsf.org/en/news/dogan-media-group-sale-completes-government-control-turkish-media

8 THE NEW POSSIBLE WAYS OF NEWS PRODUCTION AND CIRCULATION

According to interviewee Zeynep, the media pools created after the massive leaks of the Paradise and Malta Papers are important examples of new and alternative ways of news production and circulation. She also points to a number of online news collectives and platforms which have been founded by journalists from Turkey such as *1HaberVar* and *Özgürüz TV* as interesting developments.

The online news platform *1HaberVar* was founded in December 2016 in the Kurdish city Diyarbakır by a handful of journalists from Kurdish television and radio outlets which were shut down by a statutory decree in September 2016. These journalists tried to practice their own form of independent journalism through the platform until it was shut down by its editors on June 1, 2018 due to financial challenges, extensive judicial investigations, lawsuits and access blockages by the Information Technologies Institution.

Özgürüz TV is another interesting example. Founded by exiled journalist Can Dündar, it began broadcasting online on 24 January 2017. Just as *1HaberVar* had done, it used Periscope[12] to report news that it felt was being ignored by the mainstream media controlled by the Erdoğan regime. In addition to these two platforms, *Medyascope TV*, founded by a former mainstream journalist Ruşen Çakır, is another important example of digital news platforms broadcasting through new technologies. *Medyascope* was also the recipient of International Press Institute's (IPI) Free Media Pioneer Award in 2016. However, there are new regulations in the pipeline which are expected to present some challenges for these online platforms in Turkey.

According to the proposed new regulation, the powers of The Supreme Council of Radio and Television Broadcasting in Turkey (*Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu- the RTÜK*) - the authority in charge of issuing broadcasting licences to radio and television outlets and checking the content of their broadcasts - will be extended to video/music platforms and television broadcasts on the internet. Digital services will thus have to pay for a license from the *RTÜK* in order to maintain their broadcasts, and *RTÜK* will be able to block access to digital platforms classified as morally, religiously or politically inappropriate. The regulation will fundamentally affect national and transnational online video and music servers such as Netflix, Spotify, Youtube, Periscope, *Puhu TV, Blu TV* and so on, as well as *The Evrensel WebTV*, *Özgürüz TV, Medyascope* and other alternative news broadcasts on the internet.

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[12] Periscope is a live video streaming application for Android and iOS devices. It enables users to make and broadcast their videos online.

My interviewee Ali expressed the view that people always find their own ways to continue journalism under authoritarian regimes through the use of new technologies, novel forms of citizen journalism. He gave the *Evrensel* WebTV show as an example of such new ways of news production. It is an online news platform belonging to the hard-copy newspaper *Evrensel* which has been subject to severe pressures as a dissident, left-wing newspaper.

> *[Evrensel WebTV] has been shooting footages, preparing and broadcasting news and even making presentations. […] People will find their own ways somehow, no matter what is done. In the worst case, citizen journalism can be done, people can distribute the newspapers from hand to hand. The truth is conveyed to people and such regimes will never last long.*

(Ali, personal interview).

As is apparent from my analysis of the interviews, new technologies and infrastructures are essential to maintaining news production and circulation, especially under authoritarian pressures. However, we should still consider some of the issues arising over this shift to digital media, such as questions of governance, repressive regulation, access inequalities, new threats to journalism's viability through fake news, misinformation etc., personal data harvesting, surveillance or 'dataveillance' (Lupton and Michael, 2017).

Even so, there is still a crucial need for standing in solidarity across the world against repressive regimes anywhere, creating globally shared fundamental journalistic rights, making and circulating news, and announcing ignored people's voices to the globe through globally coordinated networks beyond countries and institutional boundaries in order to overcome particular pressures over journalists and journalism.

9 CONCLUSION

In light of my analysis of the interviews, as well as various reports, it can be concluded that many people in academia and the media lost their jobs and had to leave Turkey because of political reasons and due to an authoritarian regime determined to repress and close down all dissent. What they have experienced in Turkey goes way beyond the usual neoliberal performance concerns of academics and journalists elsewhere. Even though neoliberalism has, since the 1980s, been carried forward alongside authoritarianism in Turkey, the current period witnesses the most severe precarization of academic and media labour in Turkey's recent history.

Lives and careers under precarity and authoritarianism can be ruined at will or by accident; their persistence and continuity is no longer guaranteed. The precarization of labour and permanent unemployment threats that result from measures inspired by both neoliberalism and authoritarianism lead to a generalized and large-scale sense of insecurity and acceptance

of the exploitation among labourers, as well as political subjugation to the dominant hegemony. In this sense, neoliberal and authoritarian policies have systematically targeted solidarity and collective struggle.

Solidarity is more difficult to achieve under conditions of individual competition, precariousness and authoritarianism. However, as Couldry states (2011: 8), it is still important to create spaces for more open exchange and to develop innovative practice which sustain a sense that *each other's* work matters. As shown in the analysis above, new practices and alternative networks to resist both authoritarianism and neoliberalism are being built – virtual and offline ones, national and transnational ones. This is crucial for those who have suffered under both authoritarian regimes and neoliberal pressures.

Given that we are presently seeing an authoritarian turn in many other countries, such as the United States, Hungary, Poland, Russia, the Philippines, India etc., this fight against authoritarian neoliberalism and precarity is not only a Turkish one, and requires *transnational* solidarity across borders and cultures. We all have to act together not only against precarity as such, but also against authoritarianism. Overcoming these issues, establishing safe labour conditions and building robust democracies and free societies requires a global struggle by the oppressed. Also useful would be the creation of 'schools of thought' (Dello Buono, 2010: 21) in the sense of the regional-integrative thinking dedicated to transnational resistance building that is essential for social mobilization globally. As Standing (2013: 51) rightly states, "we must remember that social progress only comes when enough people join together and demand change."

As such, we should turn the precariat into a 'dangerous' class and thereby strengthen as well as embolden the struggle against neoliberalism and authoritarianism.

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