

Anti-intellectualism and discrediting of critical academics in Turkey: an approach to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the anti-intellectualism in Turkey in relation to the oppression, persecution, and discrediting of critical academics. It shows how this anti-intellectualism affects the reproduction and re-legitimation of war policies in regards to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. To this end, first it presents excerpts from in-depth interviews with academics who were dismissed from universities by presidential decrees for signing a peace petition criticizing the military operations and human rights violations in Kurdish-majority cities. Subsequently, it shows some Twitter entries from a larger dataset where critical academics are attacked to legitimize police violence in a university campus. It concludes with underlining the importance of re-legitimation of critical academics and intellectual work in Turkey if authoritarianism is to be

overcome.

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Introduction

This essay aims to examine the growing anti-intellectualism in Turkey and discrediting of critical academics, which strongly hinders the possibilities of a peaceful solution to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. It argues that there is a close link between the trivialization and persecution of critical academics, and the promotion of war policies. It starts with explaining how ‘anti-intellectualism’ is conceptualized, and discussing its manifestations in contemporary Turkey. Afterwards, it presents brief information about the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Subsequently, it explains how the rising anti-intellectualism and trivialization of critical academia make it difficult to offer a nonviolent solution to the conflict. It presents some examples that show the effects of anti-intellectualism on academia in relation to the conflict. Presented interview excerpts are taken from my in-depth interviews from 2018 with six academics who were dismissed for signing the ‘peace petition’ that criticizes human rights violations of Turkish security forces in Kurdish-populated cities in late 2015. Examples from Twitter entries are taken from an ongoing research project where I examine the legitimation of state violence targeting university actors in Turkey in 2017. At the end of this essay, I will suggest possible areas for further discussion to re-legitimize the intellectuals and critical academic work in Turkey. It should be noted that the interview excerpts and tweets are presented to enrich the discussion and provide examples, which means that this essay is not solely based on these examples. Instead, it discusses the state of art and contemporary manifestations in regards to anti-intellectualism in Turkey.

Anti-intellectualism in Turkey

While anti-intellectualism is considered a complex of traits, it was generally formulated as both ‘a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it’ and ‘a disposition constantly to minimize the value of that life’.² Today,

² Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 5.



anti-intellectualism is usually manifested by either completely subordinating intellectual activity to economic objectives based on neoliberal logic, or subordinating intellectual activity to national security and reproduction of status quo based on state-centered conservatism. Anti-intellectualism is not simply a rejection of any inherent value of intellectual activity. While it is true that anti-intellectual rationality considers intellectuals ‘useless’, it also presents them as ‘harmful’ elements to the society. In the neoliberal logic, this means that intellectual activity is considered ‘counter-productive’, and for state-centered conservatism it is ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘treasonous’.

I argue that contemporary anti-intellectualism has two main roots. One is the neoliberalization, which means ‘extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action’.³ What is meant by market values here include individualism, competitiveness, rivalry, and productivity, among others. The other root is authoritarianism, which means the adoption of an anti-democratic governmental rationality where authority is exercised over a population without its consent.⁴ While it is certainly true that the Turkish state and society have always been anti-intellectualist to a certain level,⁵ these two factors considerably worsened the situation.

At this point I should briefly note how the past anti-intellectualist practices occurred in Turkey in relation to critical academics. Among the examples there are the dismissal of 91 of the 151 academics of Darülfünun (which was transformed into İstanbul University) in 1933;⁶ the government oppression and attacks from right-wing extremist mobs targeting four supposedly communist faculty

³ Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 39–40.

⁴ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 117.

⁵ Ash Vatasever, “Partners in Crime: The Anti-Intellectual Complicity between the State and the Universities in Turkey,” *The Journal of Interrupted Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2018): 13, doi:10.1163/25430149-00101004.

⁶ Seçkin Sertdemir Özdemir, “Civic Death as a Mechanism of Retributive Punishment: Academic Purges in Turkey,” *Punishment & Society* 23, no. 2 (April 2021): 145–163, doi:10.1177/1462474520941744.

members of Ankara University who have been dismissed from their posts in 1948 by the state;⁷ dismissals of 147 faculty members after the 1960 military coup;⁸ the dismissal and arrest of İsmail Beşikçi following the 1971 military coup for conducting sociological research on Kurdish people;⁹ and the dismissal of 78 academics following the 1980 military coup.¹⁰ However, politically motivated dismissals of academics following the declaration of state of emergency in 2016 are considerably broader in scope. More than 6000 academics have been dismissed in Turkey since September 2016, and 549 of them were signatories of the aforementioned ‘peace petition’.¹¹ While not all signatories have been dismissed, considering that this number only includes academics that were directly dismissed by public universities, and thus, excludes people that were fired by private universities, resigned, or were working at foreign institutions in the first place, it can be seen that the pressure on peace academics was unprecedented in its scope.

This can be linked to the neoliberalization of universities, which subordinated them to non-academic institutions by implementing evaluation criteria and institutional policies that have non-academic and non-intellectual priorities. These priorities are mostly based on the needs of the market (e.g. technical know-how for the future workforce, economic growth, legitimation and reproduction of status quo), which especially devalues critical thinking and intellectual freedom.¹² Since the triumph of neoliberalism in academia in early

⁷ Mete Çetık, *Üniversitede Cadı Avı: 1948 DTCE Tasfiyesi ve P.N. Boratar'ın Müdafası* (Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2008).

⁸ Taner Timur, *Toplumsal Değişme ve Üniversiteler* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 2000).

⁹ İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı, “Academic Rights Violations in The Field Of Kurdish Studies at Turkish Universities” (İstanbul, 2020), https://www.ismailbesikcivakfi.org/uploads/files/IBV_Rapor_IINGLIZCE.pdf.

¹⁰ Gül Banu Kayır, “Faustian Bargain: How the Academics in Turkey Dealt with University Purges, 1960s-1980s” (The University of British Columbia, 2020).

¹¹ Serhat Tutkal, “Academia and Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Turkey: The Embodied Consequences of the ‘Peace Petition,’” *Journal of Education Policy*, October 2021, 6, doi:10.1080/02680939.2021.1990414.

¹² Isaura Castela-Huerta, “Investigaciones Sobre Los Efectos de La Neoliberalización de La Educación Superior Pública En América Latina,” *Educação e Pesquisa* 47 (2021): 1–24, doi:10.1590/s1678-4634202147232882.



21st century,¹³ higher education providers were increasingly labeled as ‘pointless, elitist and irrelevant’,¹⁴ which goes hand in hand with anti-intellectualism.¹⁵ Growing authoritarianism and the discourse of ‘national security’ also created a strong wave of anti-intellectualism.¹⁶ One of its main targets has been the academia, which resulted in violent oppression of student movements and critical academics in authoritarian countries.¹⁷

Implementation of neoliberal authoritarianism in Turkey meant adopting a neoliberal program that privileges ‘the executive as the sole arbiter of social and economic policy’ while systematically blocking democratic and popular avenues for contestation.¹⁸ As a result, critical intellectuals have been constantly discredited, delegitimized, and oppressed.¹⁹ This anti-intellectualism led by the far-right Erdoğan’s government affected most sectors of the society, which provoked the reproduction of this anti-intellectualist discourse by diverse social actors, including some that are supposedly critical of the ruling far-right political coalition of Turkey. Following the alleged coup attempt in 15 July 2016, which resulted in the consolidation of Erdoğan’s anti-democratic rule, anti-intellectualism has been increasingly manifested on both the traditional and social media, as well as in discourses of public figures. This anti-intellectualist discourse especially targeted critical academics. Mocking the academics and academic activities became very common in Turkey, not just among the supporters of Erdoğan, but also among the wider society. Academics were portrayed as ‘whining

¹³ Heike Jöns and Michael Hoyler, “Global Geographies of Higher Education: The Perspective of World University Rankings,” *Geoforum* 46 (May 2013): 45–59, doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.12.014.

¹⁴ Peter Fleming, *Dark Academia: How Universities Die* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 100.

¹⁵ Gisela Catanzaro, “Aportes Para Una Crítica Dialéctica de La Relación Entre Universidad y Neoliberalismo Desde La Experiencia de Las Universidades Públicas Argentinas,” *Atenea (Concepción)* 25, no. 522 (June 2020): 39–57, doi:10.29393/At522-95ACGC10095.

¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004).

¹⁷ Aziz Choudry, “Reflections on Academia, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge and Learning,” *International Journal of Human Rights* 24, no. 1 (2019): 41, doi:10.1080/13642987.2019.1630382.

¹⁸ Cemal Burak Tansel, “Reproducing Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Turkey: Urban Governance and State Restructuring in the Shadow of Executive Centralization,” *Globalizations* 16, no. 3 (April 2019): 321, doi:10.1080/14747731.2018.1502494.

¹⁹ Tutkal, “Academia and Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Turkey: The Embodied Consequences of the ‘Peace Petition,’” 5.

elitists' that are out of touch with 'people's reality', a laughingstock that supposedly writes things that nobody reads or cares, except for areas that are directly linked to 'economic growth' or 'national security'. Meanwhile, social responsibilities of universities such as promoting 'a true dialogue for peace'²⁰ are either seen as unproductive 'political' activities that takes away precious time and causes problems, or simply as treason. By discrediting and delegitimizing critical academics, many opponents of the government unintentionally helped eradicating one of the biggest social movements in Turkey that dared criticizing the government's policies of war and actually volunteered to help establishing inclusionary and democratic peace negotiations.

It should be noted that the prevailing anti-intellectualism does not mean that critical intellectuals have not been able to construct possibilities of resistance. In the case of critical academics, various initiatives have been launched to resist authoritarian neoliberalism and anti-intellectualism. Solidarity academies, street academies, and international solidary organizations are examples of these initiatives.²¹ While solidarity academies proposed different ways of knowledge production²², street academies meant establishing new contacts between the public and the processes of knowledge production.²³ Creating new spaces of construction and transmission of critical knowledges allows the critical intellectuals to survive when faced with authoritarian governments.²⁴ The acts of resistance by critical intellectuals should not be overlooked while accepting that the existence of forms of resistance does not mean that the rising anti-intellectualism in Turkey is not an important phenomenon.

²⁰ Juan Ramon de la Fuente, "Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility," *Higher Education Policy*, 2002, 338, doi:10.1016/S0952-8733(02)00022-3.

²¹ Serhat Tutkal, "Power, Knowledge, and Universities: Turkey's Dismissed 'Academics for Peace,'" *Critical Studies in Education* 63, no. 5 (October 2022): 639–654, doi:10.1080/17508487.2020.1783335.

²² Can İrmak Özınanır, "Where Do the Solidarity Academies Stand in Relation to the Commons?," in *The Politics of the Commons: From Theory to Struggle*, ed. Erkin Erdoğan, Nuran Yüce, and Özdeş Özbay (İstanbul: Sivil ve Ekolojik Haklar Derneği, 2018), 99–112.

²³ Vezir Aktas et al., "TAKING TO THE STREETS: A STUDY OF THE STREET ACADEMY IN ANKARA," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 68, no. 3 (2020): 365–388, doi:10.1080/00071005.2019.1708265.

²⁴ Tutkal, "Power, Knowledge, and Universities: Turkey's Dismissed 'Academics for Peace.'"



Turkish-Kurdish conflict

While the roots of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict can be traced to Ottoman Empire,²⁵ the conflict became what it is today following the partition of Kurdistan after World War I.²⁶ Since Kurdish Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, which occurred 15 months after the foundation of the Republic, Turkish state faced an intermittent armed conflict with Kurdish insurgent groups.²⁷ Currently, the armed conflict is between the Turkish state and the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê or Kurdistan Workers' Party), which was founded in 1978. While PKK went through various transformations since its foundation and abandoned the target of constructing an independent nation-state,²⁸ the conflict is still ongoing.

It should also be noted that starting from early years of the Republic to 1990s, even the existence of Kurdish people was denied by the Turkish state.²⁹ Thus, it was almost impossible to conduct academic research on Kurdish people in Turkey due to the assimilationist state policies and national security concerns linked to the conflict, and few academics that dared to show their interest in the topic were criminalized and expelled from academic institutions.³⁰

During the peace negotiations that were announced by then-Prime Minister Erdoğan in 2012 these restrictions on Kurdish studies were partially lifted. However, the negotiations were ended by the government after June 2015 elections. This was followed by major

²⁵ Mesut Yeğen, "Armed Struggle to Peace Negotiations: Independent Kurdistan to Democratic Autonomy, or The PKK in Context," *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 4 (October 2016): 365–383, doi:10.1080/19436149.2016.1218162.

²⁶ Joost Jongerden, "Looking beyond the State: Transitional Justice and the Kurdish Issue in Turkey," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 4 (March 2018): 721–738, doi:10.1080/01419870.2017.1330486.

²⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992).

²⁸ Yeğen, "Armed Struggle to Peace Negotiations: Independent Kurdistan to Democratic Autonomy, or The PKK in Context."

²⁹ Jason Dockstader and Rojin Mükriyan, "Kurdish Liberty," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 48, no. 8 (October 2022): 1174–1196, doi:10.1177/01914537211040250.

³⁰ İsmail Beşikçi Vakfı, "Academic Rights Violations in The Field Of Kurdish Studies at Turkish Universities."

military operations in Kurdish-majority cities.³¹ Academics for Peace Initiative, founded in 2012, published a petition entitled ‘We will not be a party to this crime’ in January 2016, which was eventually signed by 2212 academics. These academics were heavily targeted by mainstream media, criminal organizations, right-wing political groups, and sometimes even by their government-supporting colleagues and students.³² The signatories immediately faced disciplinary investigations in most public universities³³ and at least 549 of them were dismissed from public universities by presidential decrees.³⁴

During my in-depth interviews with six dismissed academics, some of them explicitly mentioned the importance of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict and anti-Kurdish politics in Turkey as the chief reason for dismissals. One interviewee was especially bothered by how opposition media and other organizations presented the news about dismissed academics. She particularly criticized one, where it was argued that the ‘left-wing academics’ were dismissed:

Wait a minute, if I was dismissed because I was a leftist academic, there are professors who have been working longer than my age and I can argue that they are more ‘Marxist’ than me because they claim so in their articles. Why they were not dismissed? No, we objected a specific state policy in regards to the Kurdish question, this is not about socialism... The state knows who is Marxist and who is not; they would know who to dismiss... You [the criticized organization] are afraid of even pronouncing the Kurdish question. We were not dismissed because we were leftists, we were dismissed because we signed the peace petition.

³¹ Beja Protner, “The Limits of an ‘Open Mind’: State Violence, Turkification, and Complicity in the Turkish–Kurdish Conflict,” *Turkish Studies* 19, no. 5 (October 2018): 671–696, doi:10.1080/14683849.2018.1514494.

³² Tutkal, “Power, Knowledge, and Universities: Turkey’s Dismissed ‘Academics for Peace.’”

³³ Kerem Altıparmak and Yaman Akdeniz, *Academics for Peace: Defending Academic Freedoms in Times of Emergency* (Ankara: İHOP, 2017).

³⁴ Tutkal, “Academia and Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Turkey: The Embodied Consequences of the ‘Peace Petition.’”



Similar criticism from various dismissed academics focused on the invisibilization of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict by highlighting the ‘opposition’ identities of the dismissed academics. They argued that the dismissals were first and foremost linked to the pro-Kurdish position. Another interviewee clearly manifested this:

The academic labor was disciplined. How? They were reminded what to work on by the state. The state told this: you will not work on the Kurdish issue...and if you do, you will whitewash the state...certainly there were many theses discussing the Kurdish issue during the solution process, many theses and articles that criticized state violence were written. After 15 July (2016), this stopped at once. Because they got the message: do not get involved with ethnic issues.

It was mentioned by some interviewees that while some critical universities were relatively less affected during the dismissals, the faculties where Kurdish political movement was strong were stamped on and the academics that especially work on the Turkish-Kurdish conflict from a critical position were targeted. As a result, many academics that were not dismissed at first felt the need to employ self-censorship in regards to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, as one interviewee tells:

Before the petition I felt more comfortable, I was able to say ‘Kurdistan’ when talking about the region. Or I was expressing myself more comfortably about the crimes that I argued that the state committed...Later I started to find myself employing self-censorship. For example, I started to say ‘Kurdish region’ (Kürt coğrafyası) instead of Kurdistan.

The dismissals resulted in a complete transformation of Turkish academia not only by excluding the majority of outspoken critical academics, but also making them the ‘deterrent factor’ to discipline the remaining academics.³⁵ By removing the critical postures from universities and turning higher education institutions into technical

³⁵ Tutkal, 14.

schools, the possibilities of peacebuilding in the country are also greatly diminished. I will first explain the specific strategies that were employed by the Turkish State to achieve this outcome, and subsequently elaborate on how this situation affects the continuation of war policies in Turkey.

Strategies of anti-intellectual statism

The three major anti-intellectualist strategies employed in Turkey include a) neoliberal evaluation of universities and intellectual work, b) trivialization of social sciences and humanities, and c) enemization of academics based on religious-nationalist discourse. In the following, I explain their effects on academia and critical thinking.

Neoliberal evaluation of universities and intellectual work

This strategy referring to neoliberal criteria was used to discredit critical intellectuals and academic work as a whole. The aim was delegitimizing their authority as intellectuals by evaluating them according to neoliberal productivist criteria. To make my point clear, I will mention some tweets about a specific case of police violence targeting dismissed academics and their supporters.

With the statutory decree issued on 7 February 2017, 78 faculty members of Ankara University (mostly signatories of the peace petition) were dismissed by the state for political reasons. Many of the remaining academic staff at the Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University organized a press briefing to protest the dismissals. The government responded by sending in public security forces, which resulted in brutal police violence targeting the academics and their supporters. Photographs depicting police violence generated a heated debate on Twitter. Discrediting the attacked academics based on neoliberal logic frequently occurred among tweets by government supporters. I will present three examples from the tweets before continuing. Tweets mentioned throughout this essay were translated from Turkish by the author and



they were anonymized due to ethical and legal issues of publishing non-anonymized tweets in academic research.³⁶

I approve the interference to terrorism-supporting professors. Hacks that don't even write 2 papers a year.

You called intellectuals (the chosen Turkish word literally means "illuminated") to these, but they cannot even illuminate themselves. Copycat ATM officials that cannot produce anything.

These academics don't write a thing except for petitions.

In these examples, it can be seen that critical intellectuals are being discredited by applying market-based productivist criteria. 'Uselessness' accusations allow for devaluing the statements of critical intellectuals and delegitimizing critical academics. Here, intellectual work is reduced to market-based use value, commented on by mere quantification of 'products' without actually discussing the content. These accusations were used to legitimize state violence, which shows the level of dehumanization resulting from neoliberal logic. Unproductivity accusations work to the degree that it is considered legitimate by right-wing government supporters to actually exercise violence toward these academics.

Trivialization of social sciences and humanities

This strategy consists of general discrediting of social sciences and humanities by implying that they are not really science and they are unproductive. This is common in far-right discourse around the world and it was also the case for Turkey, where government supporters tried to delegitimize critical social scientists and initiatives

³⁶ Matthew L Williams, Pete Burnap, and Luke Sloan, "Towards an Ethical Framework for Publishing Twitter Data in Social Research: Taking into Account Users' Views, Online Context and Algorithmic Estimation," *Sociology* 51, no. 6 (December 2017): 1149–1168, doi:10.1177/0038038517708140; Wasim Ahmed, Peter A. Bath, and Gianluca Demartini, "Using Twitter as a Data Source: An Overview of Ethical, Legal, and Methodological Challenges," in *The Ethics of Online Research (Advances in Research Ethics and Integrity, Vol. 2)*, ed. Kandy Woodfield (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 79–107, doi:10.1108/S2398-60182018000002004.

of social responsibility in universities. I present some examples of tweets with these references from my dataset:

It is like they were going to fucking invent the teleportation but right-wingers stopped them.

Fuck them, it isn't like they were going to send shuttles to space.

Is this why we are in space, in Antarctica, or among the major players of defense industry?

By mocking social scientists and intellectuals, the idea is excluding them from decision-making mechanisms and discrediting them in the eyes of society. This is achieved by collaboration among neoliberalism and state-centered patriotism. Here, it is implied that intellectual activity and science are only valuable if they generate revenues or if they have military use. By this logic, critical thinking is completely useless or even harmful in most cases since it can cause distraction from 'productive' activities, or it can 'hurt' the state's military power by forcing it to respect national and international norms, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This logic legitimizes the dismissal of academics and subsequent attacks targeting them because these academics were not considered 'useful' to the state or the industry.

Enemization of academics based on religious-nationalist discourse

The final strategy was presenting critical academics as 'enemies' based on the dichotomy of 'us-enemies', which results in moral exclusion of the 'other'. Here, critical thinking is considered an unpatriotic activity, which is used to criminalize intellectuals. There were various examples of this strategy in the corpus:

These heretical treacherous so-called academics should be glad that they were not deported.



Do you think you are better than the nation because you are professors; that you can say no to everything, dislike the leader, and treason the fatherland?

How many of these so-called academics live with the culture and morals of this country?

It is again seen that the scientific and intellectual work is subordinated, but this time to the interests of the state, Turkish nation, and the unofficial state religion (Sunni Islam). Critical academics are discredited by accusing them of treason, comparing them to non-Muslim ethnic minorities, implying that they are irreligious, and attributing them immorality. By discrediting critical academics, the government and its supporters aim to undermine their possibilities of promoting a culture of peace and resisting to authoritarian neoliberal policies. This especially affects the Turkish-Kurdish conflict by obstructing nonviolent conflict resolution mechanisms.

Prevailing culture of war, possibilities of culture of peace

Dealing with structural violence and systemic racism requires constructing a culture of peace to delegitimize the use of political violence and the existence of violent structures.³⁷ As it has been shown, it is mainly through discourse that ethnic prejudice is acquired and ethnic discrimination is both enacted and legitimized; likewise, a crucial part of antiracist resistance and solidarity is also discursive.³⁸ Thus, discursive delegitimation of critical intellectuals that promote an anti-racist and nonviolent political position plays a vital role in the reproduction of structural violence and systemic racism.

Ridiculing and mocking critical academics, trivializing their work by using market-based evaluation criteria, and constructing them as

³⁷ Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (August 1990): 291–305, doi:10.1177/0022343390027003005.

³⁸ Teun A. van Dijk, *Antiracist Discourse: Theory and History of a Macromovement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

enemies who became alienated from the people are three strategies that go hand in hand in order to reduce their possibilities of challenging the status quo and ongoing policies of war. A pejorative joke is not just a joke, but it is a discursive strategy of diminishing an actor's potential of contributing to social change. Constantly reproducing stereotypes about academics that present them as privileged individuals who are useless to society obstructs the possibilities of challenging to government. A fundamental cultural change cannot be undertaken without critical work of intellectuals and activities of knowledge production and transmission that challenge the prevailing power relations. That is why I argue that any autocratic regime that wants to ensure its survival must ridicule, discredit, and intimidate critical intellectuals. As Foucault said half century ago, the intellectual is rejected and persecuted at the precise moment when the facts become incontrovertible, and it becomes 'forbidden to say that the emperor had no clothes',³⁹ and Erdoğan's authoritarian Turkey is no exception.

Implementing neoliberal policies has considerably facilitated the task for authoritarian governments. By encouraging competitiveness and rivalry, creating divisions among academics, and directly oppressing the intellectuals that dare to challenge the government, authoritarian neoliberal governments can easily destroy the academic community and solidarity networks of critical intellectuals.⁴⁰ Weakened by the government oppression and problems derived from neoliberal policies such as loss of job security, critical academics themselves actually start ridiculing each other and help the government to accomplish its task. Anti-intellectualist discourse is being used by critical academics themselves in Turkey when they criticize each other based on popularity (e.g. the argument of 'nobody reads your work'), neoliberal evaluation criteria (e.g. mocking based on quantitative metrics such as citation numbers), or accuse each other

³⁹ Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals & Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 207.

⁴⁰ Tutkal, "Academia and Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Turkey: The Embodied Consequences of the 'Peace Petition.'"



of elitism without commenting on the content of each other's work. In this situation, it is understandable that critical academics cannot focus on delegitimizing the cultural promotion of war and state violence.

Final remarks

Mocking the academics and intellectual institutions, subordinating them to market-based evaluation, and constructing them as 'public enemies' are strategies that allowed the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or Justice and Development Party) government to discredit critical intellectuals in Turkey. Combined with criminal cases and disciplinary investigations, these strategies allowed the government to discipline the whole academic sphere. This was done by creating division among academics and intellectuals, discrediting them in the eyes of the public, spreading fear and anxiety to intimidate critical academics, and inflicting mental and emotional harm.⁴¹

As the 'peace petition' by Academics for Peace Initiative shows, critical academics were one of the important groups that promoted peacebuilding and challenged the adoption of war policies. Their discrediting allowed the government to garner the necessary public support to its policies of war. Reproduction of anti-intellectualism has been crucial during this process, which vastly diminished the power of intellectuals on the public perception of important issues in Turkey.

As the recent arrest of Şebnem Korur Fincancı, president of Turkish Medical Association and forensic medicine expert who was arrested for stating that the accusations of chemical weapon use of Turkish army targeting PKK militants should be investigated, shows how critical academics became very vulnerable in Turkey. They are mocked by the public, persecuted by the state, and threatened by neoliberal policies. The Turkish-Kurdish conflict has been vastly affected by this transformation since challenging the status quo

⁴¹ Tutkal.

requires heavy intellectual work, which can subsequently delegitimize the oppressors and their actions.

Re-legitimation of intellectuals and critical academic work is an absolute necessity in Turkey if the ruling authoritarian neoliberalism is to be overcome. It should be remembered that theory is practice, it is 'a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious'.⁴² Delegitimizing the theory, intellectual work, and critical academia hinder the possibilities of resistance when faced with the creation of an authoritarian system of oppression and subordination. This also means the impossibility of constructing peace in a country that suffers from decades-long armed conflict and systemic racism. Focusing on specific ways of how intellectuals are delegitimized in Turkey seems like a good first step to subsequently explore possible ways of reversing this process of delegitimation. Following Galtung, it can be argued that while entire cultures cannot be classified as 'violent', there are aspects of cultures that can be used to legitimize violence.⁴³ Promoting a culture of peace requires scrutinizing cultural references that allow for legitimizing violence. It can be argued that in Turkey too, cultural references that allow for reproducing anti-intellectualism should be scrutinized if the rising authoritarianism will be overcome.

⁴² Foucault and Deleuze, "Intellectuals & Power : A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze," 208.

⁴³ Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 291.

