

The Attitudes of Turkish Academy Towards Political Issues in the Context of the Kurdish Question*

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ABSTRACT

Academia is believed to be a place or community to tell the truth, and to be able to say the truth needs first a critical point of view. By doing so academics/intellectuals fulfil their social responsibility, which sometimes puts them on the spot and creates a conflict between what s/he is doing and what s/he is expected to do. The power structure wants the academics to be accordant with its official policy and discourse, namely doing their duties, and mostly they move in the frame that has been demarcated in a way that reinforces power. This relationship affects their approaches towards what is going on around, especially political issues. The situation of modern Turkish academia, raised in the 1930s, can be evaluated in this framework. At the beginning of the 1930s Turkish academia played a crucial role in constructing a scientific base for the state's official policy and discourse, and did not intervene in any political issues. One of the issues that state was very sensitive about was the Kurdish issue, and the academics who were interested in this topic paid a price for it. This article examines this situation of Turkish academia, their attitudes towards political issues, their efforts to be critical toward official policy, and the price they paid for it in the context of the Kurdish question, with specific reference to the case of Academics for Peace.

* This article has been restructured and reorganized based on the oral presentation, which was presented in the IISKS First Biennial Conference in Frankfurt/Germany (16-19 September 2017). I am very thankful to John Crofoot and Astrid Keskin for reading, commenting and editing the paper.

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Key Words: Academia, Scholarly ethics, Turkish Academia, Kurdish Issue, Academics for Peace

PUXTE

Tê bawerkirin ku akademî ew cih an jî civak e ku rastiyê tîne ziman; û ji bo bikare rastiyê bibêje serê pêşî pêwîstî bi nêrîneke rexneyî heye. Bi vî awayî akademisyen/ entellektûel berpirsiyariya xwe ya civakî bi cih tînin ku carinan ev yek wan dixwe nav zehmetiyên û di navbera wê yekê de bê çî dîke û jê çî tê hêvîkirin, nakokiyek derdikeve holê. Îqtîdar ji akademîsyenan dixwaze ku bi polîtîka û rabêja fermî re hev kêş bin, ango peywîra xwe bînin cih, û gelek caran jî ew di wê çarçoveyê de tevdişer ku îqtîdarê ew xêz kiriye. Ev têkilî li ser nêrînên wan li hemberî bûyînên derdorê, bi taybetî li hemberî pîrsgirêkên polîtîk bandorê çêdike. Rewşa akademiya modern a Tirkiyeyê ku di salên 1930î de derdikeve meydanê di vê çarçoveyê de dikare bê nîrxandin. Di destpêka salên 1930î de akademiya Tirkiyeyê ji bo avakirina bîngeha zanistî ya polîtîka û rabêja fermî ya dewletê roleke girîng lîst û gelekî mîdexaleyî mijarên polîtîk nekir. Yek ji van mijarên polîtîk jî ku dewlet derbarê wê de gelekî hessas bû, pîrsgirêka Kurdî bû û akademîsyenên ku bi vê mijarê re eleqedar bûn berdêla wê jî dan. Di vê gotarê de, ji destpêkê heta niha rewşa akademiya Tirkiyeyê û helwesta wê li hemberî mijarên polîtîk; hewldana wê ya rexnegirî li hemberî polîtîkayên fermî û berdêlên ku ji bo vê yekê dane, dê di çarçoveya pîrsgirêka Kurdî de û bi mînakê “akademîsyenên bo aşîtiyê” were nîrxandin.

Bêjeyên sereke: Akademî, etîkên zanistî, akademiya Tirkiyeyê, pîrsgirêka Kurdî, akademîsyenên bo aşîtiyê.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The modern Turkish academy has developed in the political and ideological conditions of the newly formed nation-state of the Republic of Turkey, and therefore it has intertwined with the state policy, and has played a role in constructing the scientific bases for this policy from the beginning. This intertwined and politicized character alienated Turkish academy from critical approaches and shaped its attitudes towards political issues that can be seen directly in the context of the Kurdish Question in Turkey.

The Kurdish Question is a long-term issue of the Republic of Turkey since its foundation and it still has effects on economy, politics and social life and also on whole institutions in one or another way, including academia or universities, which have also social responsibilities to *tell and produce the truth*. But they also are supposed to do their duties to maintain the social-political system which leaves them hanging in midair. Hanging on the horns of the dilemma affects their approaches and attitudes towards political issues also.

Taking “Academics for Peace” as a case, this paper aims to discuss the attitudes of Turkish academia towards political issues in general, and the Kurdish issue in particular, in terms of “duties”, “responsibilities” and “critical thought”, which to-

gether form the foundation of scholarly ethics. But, before getting into the topic, the role of the academia in the foundation of the Turkish Republic and in “constructing” a “nation”; and so, the relationship of “academia/academics” to “power” should be viewed.

To make it clear, “intellectual” and “academic” will be used more or less synonymously in this work because both of them, to idealize, use the same namely scientific methods to produce “knowledge”. As Chomsky describes, they think about things, want to understand and analyse them and share the results with the people clearly, in ways that distinguish them from the rest. So, they – at least are supposed to – look at the phenomena, analyse them and infer from the analyses not according to “official paradigms” but realities which makes them always suspicious and critical. It is assumed here that, beside their academic works, they have social and ethic responsibilities.

The case of “Academics for Peace” and later the “counter-statements” or “petition” by another group of academics raised questions about academics’ “duty” and “social responsibility” in general, and the relationship between academy and power in Turkey in particular.¹ The main purpose of this work is to discuss and describe the situation of Turkish academia and its attitudes in the context of approaching the Kurdish Issue. For the description part, there was need to look at the historical progress and process of the constitution of modern Turkish academia, from the early 1930’s to the present. However, it has been benefited from Chomsky and Sartre’s opinions for the “duty” and the “responsibility” of the intellectuals, as well as Gramsci and Althusser’s.

2. ACADEMY/ACADEMICS-INTELLECTUALS

It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies says Chomsky in his well-known article *The Responsibility of Intellectuals* published in 1967 (Chomsky 1967). In an interview, which has also been published as a book in Turkish, Noam Chomsky also says that we should make a distinction between academics’ duties and their “ethical responsibilities” (Chomsky 2005).

According to Chomsky (2005: 8);

1 It should be noted that, at the time of preparing this article/presentation, a worthy article on “Academics for Peace” was published. The article is going on the framework of “critical thought and academic freedom” and I also benefited from the article while preparing mine. For details see. Bahar Baser, Samim Akgönül & Ahmet Erdi Öztürk (2017). “Academics for Peace” in Turkey: a case of criminalising dissent and critical thought via counterterrorism policy”, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 10:2, 274-296

Their duties, namely the reason that the social institutions provide them time and opportunities, are to support the hegemon and authority and actualising the doctrinaire administration by using those opportunities.

This description of their duties can be argued in the frame of “what is the Academy” and “what is it for?”. Academy, *the public garden where Plato taught his school*, became a noun for the place where science and arts were taught, in the 1580s,² and today’s universities, institutions of higher learning.

It would not be wrong to say that the main aim of universities today is to train human resources for the modern world of the rulers. But, on the other hand, time and opportunities the academics have to get the knowledge, make them responsible for the whole humanity and also the social, cultural, political life of the respective country they live in, supposed that they are looking for “truth”.

According to Fikret Başkaya, a Turkish scholar and intellectual, (1996:13), the intellectual has a social responsibility to reveal the truth that wanted to be hidden, and this makes him not “impartial”, and in this terms he should not be, but places him inside of “truth”.

The fundamental ideas of Chomsky, Başkaya and others who think about the role of the intellectuals can be seen also in the works of Gramsci (1891-1937), Althusser (1918-1990) and Sartre (1905-1980).

Gramsci’s assessments are in the frame of the *hegemony* concept. Even though Gramsci differentiates *intellectuals* into two groups, *traditional* professional intellectuals and *organic* intellectuals (Gramsci 1999: 131), he evaluates the group according to the “class” notion and according to their “function”. Though they claim to be “independent” or “autonomous”, they *have their place in the general complex of social relations* (Gottlieb 1989:114-115). The new developments need another type of intellectual and form it for themselves. So, in Gramsci’s words; *The intellectuals are dominant group’s “deputies” exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government* (Quoted by Gottlieb 1989: 118). From this point of view it can be derived that there may also be organic intellectuals within the working class according to their function.

Louis Althusser, also, makes his assessments around *class struggle*, focusing on the *ideology* and the *Ideological State Apparatuses-ISA*. From his point of view, school including universities is also one of the *ideological state apparatus* and even though the notion of intellectuals, their function, role, duties are not clear in his work (Montag 2007: 107), it can be concluded from his work of ISA that he con-

2 http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=academy 03.08.2017

cerned intellectuals as part of this “ideological apparatus”, but they have the choice to select the side of “working class” by being “organic intellectuals” (Gramsci), and he [intellectual] should be a part of the “people” if he wants to understand them (Althusser 2014:28).

Sartre, on the other hand, has a clearer definition of the notion of intellectual and his/her role. He refers to the fundamental criticism of these and says that;

[T]he intellectual is someone who meddles in what is not his business and claims to question both received truths and the accepted behaviour inspired by them, in the name of a global conception of man and of society... (Sartre 1976: 230; Sartre 1997: 11).

According to him, *the intellectual is someone who intervenes in problems that do not concern him* and the rest can be defined as an *technician of practical knowledge*. So, the differentiations in those views, more or less, look like each other. However, Chomsky does not make any difference between intellectuals but separates their *duty* and *ethical responsibilities*. His remarks on the intellectual’s duty were mentioned above, and on the other hand, the ethical responsibilities of intellectuals are totally different and contrast with their duties;

The ethical responsibilities are to try to understand the truth, to work with others to reach a conception of the world, to try to transfer it to other people, to help them to understand and to lay the groundwork for constructive action. These are their responsibilities (Chomsky 2005).

Therefore, it can be said that because of the privileges they have, intellectuals (and also academics), have a social responsibility to make even radical critics against the “official discourse” of state, even at the risk of losing their job. But, as Chomsky states; *There is a conflict here, of course. If you fulfil your responsibilities, you may lose the privileges you have to maintain intellectual activities*. The last statement can be seen as a summary of intellectuals’ situation in Turkey since the foundation of the Republic. They played a crucial role in the “nation-making” process, and whenever they started to criticise the “official discourse” of the state – independently of talking about the Kurdish Issue –, they have faced with the risk of losing their job or, worse, being jailed.

3. ACADEMY AND POWER: CONSTRUCTING A NATION-STATE IN TURKEY

Intellectuals had/have been – and considerably today are – in a dependent relationship with the ruling power, and they have felt obliged to “defend” and “dignify”

the state, in Turkey, in general. With their scientific titles they helped to produce and re-produce the “official ideology”, and by their politicized character, intellectuals and academics played a crucial role in the Turkish nation-building process and constructing a new “nation”.

The Turkish republic was established as a nation-state with a modernist and positivist character on the remains of the Ottoman Empire and turned its back on its long history. Its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, designed the new state as a nation-state that was to be built on “Turkish” ethnicity. On the other hand, western-oriented Atatürk also wanted the newly founded “nation-state” and its history somehow be connected to the West. In this effort, “science” could help him put his ideas into practice.

In this situation, *[t]he field of science has a special and important place in the history of modernization and formation of nation-state in Turkey* (Aydın 2000b:17), and it seems that anthropology stands out as one of the most applied fields of sciences at that time, together with folklore and archaeology.

Upon Atatürk’s request, the *Research Center of Anthropology of Turkey – Centre d’Etudes Anthropologiques de Turquie* – was founded in 1925 at Istanbul University (or Darülfünun at that time), soon after the founding of the Republic (Kansu 1940; Aydın 2000b:19; Aydın 2000a; Toprak 2012). The Center started publishing a journal, *The Journal of Turkish Anthropology*, in the same year, in October, 1925, and continued until 1939 with 22 volumes.³ The aim of the center was, in Atatürk’s words, *studying the Turk and Turkish society* which was in the letter to Dr. Nureddin Ali, the rector of Istanbul University, in November 1925 (Maksudyan 2005:88). Rector Nureddin Ali, who became PM in 1927⁴, stated the aim of the Institution (or center) in an article published in the 4th issue of the journal as follows: *our aim is researching the Turkish race and the other races distributed on the large area of Asia Minor* (Maksudyan 2005:99), and a large amount of anthropometric measurements were done for this purpose.⁵

Those kinds of measurements had a meaning, because western-oriented Atatürk and the founders of the Republic, academics, and elites believed in the positivist approach and “positive sciences” that could help them in achieving their aims.

3 In her work, Nazan Maksudyan (2005:10) says that in fact there were 16 issues of the journal that had been published because of the double issues.

4 It is just an example to show the politicized academics in that time.

5 Afet Inan (adopted daughter of Atatürk) conducted a anthropometric survey on 64.000 people for her doctoral thesis in 1937. This example can show how large the surveys were (Aydın 2002:361).

There were three sides of that research, survey or measurements; first by using “positivist” methods such as *observe, experiment, and measurement* they wanted to “prove” that Turks were not a “barbaric” nation and that the Turkish race was not a member of the inferior Mongoloid race (yellow race) but rather a member of Caucasian/Alpine (White) one, and that it was a “civilization founder” nation which played a leading role in establishing civilization. Second, by applying those kinds of “scientific” methods they could make the “science” superior over the “religious” approach, either.

And third, they wanted to create a “Turkish nation” from the left-behind ethnicities from Ottoman Empire and they needed a “founding mythos” in efforts to construct it. These scientific works would help them to succeed in their efforts. A design of nation that extends from pre-historic times to post-historic and shares the same “blood”, “ancestors”, “language” and “culture” supported by “positive findings”.

In that period, anthropology, which was seen as one of the subsidiary sciences of history,⁶ was considered an important element in the nation-building process (Aydın 2002a; 2002b; Özbudun 2017). Along with anthropology, the field of folklore was also considered a prominent area for revealing the “essence” or “spirit” of the nation’s culture. While anthropology was an important field for the re-construction of the nation’s history, folklore helped the elites of the Republic to construct a “new” culture. As it is known, the field of folklore developed and folklore researches increased with the idea of nationalism and they had been an important instrument of the nation-building process of, mostly, the eastern part of Europe and also the rest of the world. Researchers, intellectuals or academics of the Republic of that time followed the same way.⁷

In such circumstances, where the ties connecting to empire had already been cut and a new nation-building process had been started, anthropology that studied “race” – because anthropology was considered as a science of race in that time by

6 The other ones were archaeology, ethnology, and folklore. See. Aydın (2002b). For example, Atatürk, in a note he wrote for the opening lesson given by Afet İnan, states that “archaeology and anthropology are new sciences that will illuminate the history”, and he believed that those sciences would provide “scientific” documents for the base of Turkish History (Afetinan 1969: 51, quoted by Özbudun 2017).

7 There is a huge amount of literature regarding “Folklore and nationalism”, which reveals direct relations between folklore studies and nationalism or the nation-building process. For Romantic nationalism and Folklore studies see. Wilson (1973); For Folklore and nationalism in Turkey see. Başgöz (1972); Öztürkmen (1998). Works related to folklore had already been started in the first quarter of the 20th century.

elites of the Republic – and folklore that studied on “pure culture” could serve better than sociology. In other words, two main bases for building a “nation” from the population remaining behind the empire: *Biology and culture, or blood and earth* (Özbudun 2017).

Those fields, anthropology and folklore, and also archaeology later on, were necessary for also a new historiography of the new nation-state and Atatürk knew about that if they wanted to succeed in the nation-building process, looking at the examples before him such as new nation-states on the Balkan and in East-Europe, they have to “write” or construct a new history independent from and also excluding the empire’s one. So he concentrated on history and wanted academics to work on this subject. In a statement in 1923 he says:

So far, we have not yet experienced true, scientific, national period in a positive sense. So we did not have a national history either.⁸

As he stated in a opening speech in 1933, he wanted to see in his lifetime that the “true history” of the “great and highly gifted” Turkish Nation was written. The ones who were going to write that “true” history were Turkish intellectuals and academics. The *Turkish History Thesis* (Türk Tarih Tezi) and the *Sun Language Theory* (Güneş Dil Teorisi) emerged in such political, and academic circumstances.

The *Turkish History Thesis*, which marked the ascent of race under Turkish nationalism, emerged in 1930-31. Initially, the Turkish Hearths’ Committee for the Study of Turkish History (Turk Ocakları Turk Tarihi Tetkik Heyeti - TOTTTTH) had nurtured the thesis. The committee, established on 28 April 1930, had been instructed by Atatürk to produce works on Turkish history. Its first major study, a 606-page book titled, *Turk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (*General Themes of Turkish History*),⁹ was published in 1930. This was a survey of Turkish history by Turkish scholars” (Cagaptay 2004:87; Beşikçi 1986).

On the other hand, Beşikçi (1986:40) stated that;

Turkish History Thesis is a more systematic way of continuation of “Turanism” and “Turkism”, developed in 1910s. Not the information that The Grand Chief, members of Turkish Hearts’, [and] the Society for the Study of Turkish History suddenly discovered in 1930s.

8 Yavuz Ercan, “Atatürk ve Tarih”: http://www.todaie.edu.tr/resimler/ekler/76b12b7d4f18af9_ek.pdf?dergi=Amme%20Idaresi%20Dergisi (last accessed: 02.02.2018)

9 1930’s edition was 622 pages. See. http://ulkunet.com/UcuncuSayfa/Turk_Tarihinin_Ana_Hatlari.pdf 15.08.2017

In April, 1931, *Turkish Hearts* (Türk Ocakları) repealed itself due to not being functional anymore under the “title”, and re-organized with the name of the *Society for the Study of Turkish History – Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti-TTTC* and later became *The Institution of Turkish History – Türk Tarih Kurumu (TTK)* in 1935. Beside working on Turkish History, TTTC had other responsibilities such as establishing a committee for language, the *Society for the Study of the Turkish Language – Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti-TDTC* to conduct historical research on Turkish Language which was believed to be the root of Indo-European languages (Çağaptay 2004:88; Beşikçi 1986). For these purposes, firstly, *I. Congress of Turkish History* was held in 1932, 2-11 July, in Ankara; and following this congress, *I. Congress of Turkish Language* was held in İstanbul, between 26th of September -5th October, 1932. *I. History Congress* was an important step to shape or *affirm* (Çağaptay 2004:89) the *Turkish History Thesis*, which had been already worked on, and published in the book of *General Themes of Turkish History*.

According to *Turkish History Thesis*; Turks were not from the *yellow* race but brachycephalic White race, including Indo-European and they had created civilizations all over the world to where they migrated. Because of the dryness, they had to migrate from the main land, Central-Asia, and thus they created glorious civilizations including Sumer, Egypt, Greek, Hittite and so on.¹⁰

What is important here for our subject is that academics and intellectuals, with the “academic” titles in front of their names, emerge, shape, and defend the thesis in the direction of the state’s official ideological discourse to fulfil their duties. However, the Thesis gained *a scientific status* in the Congress (Ersanlı-Behar 1992:14-15) and the speeches there show also the relationship between power and academy in 1930s Turkey. Thus, as Aydın (1996:107) describes, *I. Congress of Turkish History* became a platform in which academy was tamed by Party, the ruling party of Atatürk, CHP (Republican People’s Party).

As stated above, following the History Congress, *I. Turkish Language Congress* was held in the same year between 26th of September and 5th of November, 1932. The *I. Language Congress* became a platform and basis for a language theory, but unlike the *History Thesis*, getting its name, the *Sun-Language Theory*, and *a scientific status* would take place in the 3rd Languages Congress in 1936.

Discussing over the origin of the Turkish language and putting forward the thesis that Turkish had been the source of all languages continued in the 2nd Language Congress in 1934; and; *The theses put forward in the first and second Turkish Language Congresses were expressed as Turkish Language Theory systematically in*

10 For further information and analysis of Turkish History Thesis see. Beşikçi (1986); Çağaptay (2004);

the Third Turkish Language Congress (Beşikçi 1986:160) held in 1936. The theory was called as a theory *put in front of the linguistics by the Turkish genius* in the preface of the proceeding book of the Congress (Beşikçi 1986: 160-161).

After the 2nd Congress, in accordance with the discussions there, *The Institution of Turkish Language – Türk Dil Kurumu-TDK* had been founded in 1935, and with its founding, the *Sun-Language Theory* started to be expressed in a more systematically way. This relation can be seen in the general secretary of the Institution's words in the 3rd Congress:

The Turkish Language Institution, inspired by the lofty genius of Turkish nation, went into an academic field of language studies towards the end of last year with a new discovery that would honour both its and its nations history. We name this discovery as “Sun-Language Theory” (quoted by Beşikçi 1986:161).

According to that “discovery”, or the theory, similar to the *History Thesis*, not only the Ural-Altai languages but also Indo-European languages, and Semitic languages originated from Turkish, so that Turkish was base language for all the languages in the world (Beşikçi 1986).

After the first congress of history and language, *The Faculty of Language, and History-Geography* was founded 1935 in Ankara to make a “scientific” ground for those theses. In other words, the founding of Language, and History-Geography Faculty was a result of those efforts that had been done until then and it was also an “academic” base to legitimize the new approach to Republic.

The mission of the faculty was reflected in its name, and as Ersanlı Behar (1992:169-170) befittingly states that;

...the name of faculty brings together the three main elements of the Turkish History Thesis and contains the following aims related to them: **i. Language** a comparative study of Sumerian, Akkadian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Indo-Chinese languages, that is, languages that are regarded as relatives to the Turkic language; **ii. History** To prove the long existence of Turks who came from Central Asia and its contributions to other civilizations; **iii. Geography** Working on the territories of Anatolia which was seen as the cradle of civilizations and has been claimed to have traces of Turks, and their documentation.

But, the *DTCF (Faculty of Language and History, Geography)*, a new scientific base of the Republic, would be popular again in the 1940s-50s with discharging

some academics, which again shows the (de)politization character of Turkish academia. In the 1940s and later on the “history” and “language” theses had relatively lost their ground. The circumstances of the 2nd World War, and its ending up with the winning of the *Allied Powers* weakened the “racist” approach generally in the world and also in Turkey, a little bit. But by getting closer to the USA and the West, another tendency called “anti-communism” had emerged and affected the bureaucracy and also academy. *The case of DTCF purge* emerged in those circumstances. After long discussions, judgements and anti-communist campaigns Niyazi Berkes, Pertev Naili Boratav, Behice Boran, and Muzaffer Şerif were dismissed from the university in 1948 which once more showed that *academics who criticize the general tendency, or policy of government do not have chance to maintain their “duty” in the universities. The case of DTCF purge in 1948*¹¹ or *discharging of leftist lecturers* is important because; first, it is the first *mass discharging*¹² at a university of Turkey; and second, it shows the “position” of “critical” academics in the eyes of bureaucracy, government and university itself and also shows what would happen to the one who crossed the line.¹³ Even though they were critical about the “general tendency”, what they had done was not an “interference” in the framework discussed in this paper. And they were also “loyal” to Party and Grand Chef.

4. TURKISH ACADEMY AND THE KURDISH ISSUE

In these political and academic circumstances, it does not seem that academia was interested in Kurds and the Kurdish issue. The new Republic was busy with constructing a new “nation” and they did not want to face any problem. Cultural diversities were seen as a “risk” for a newly founded unitary “nation-state”.

It should be noted that *Turkish Hearths (Türk Ocakları)*, a Turkist institution, was active and they had “primordialist” (Toprak 2012:422) and even “racist” approach to “nationalism” which also had effects on the bureaucracy of that time.

Even though Toprak (2012) defends that the government’s or Atatürk’s approach to Kurds and cultural diversities changed after the Sheikh Said Rebellion,

11 For further information about the case and the defending of academics see. Mete Çetik (1998); And also his reviews about Niyazi Berkes’ “memoirs” see. <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/birikim-yazi/5139/unutulan-yillar#.WZP4CdJJbIU> 15.08.2017.

12 In a speech of the History Congress in 1932, Zeki Velidi (Togan) had made criticism about “Turkish History Thesis” and he was not discharged but was forced to resign from his position of Darülfünun (İstanbul University).

13 Still, the way of their punishment was “lighter” than later’s. See. Korkut Boratav (2017). “Üniversite Tasfiyeleri: Geçmişten Bugüne (Universities’ Discharging: From Past to Present), <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/universite-tasfiyeleri-gecmisten-bugune-147393.html> last access: 18.08.2017

some other traces can be seen even before. Comparing the constitution of 1921 and 1924 can reveal clues such as emphasis on Turk/ Turkish and so on. Later on, Kurdish was banned and using Kurdish language or any word was made a crime against the state. Campaigns like *Citizen, Speak Turkish!* (Bali 2006: Aslan 2007)¹⁴ can reveal the policy of the state of turkification and also policy towards Kurds and the Kurdish issue. Academia, on the other hand, was busy theorizing the “superiority” of the Turkish race. Intellectuals and ordinary academics feel more responsibility for defending the state than criticizing the state’s policy. They were trying to do their work with the consciousness of that task. Sociologist İbrahim Yasa’s comment (1958) on the census data of 1955 can be seen as an example of this. After stating that there were 1.514.000 people who speak Kurdish according to the census of 1955, and also giving the number of people and the language that they spoke such as Greek, Armenian, Arabic, Jewish, Romanian, Georgian, Circassian, Laz, Bulgarian, Romanian, Croatian, and a few language groups, Yasa is making the following comment:

According to this situation, in round 90% of the citizens in our country speak Turkish language and quite a crowd of 10% speak other languages than Turkish and this stands as a big issue to be solved in terms of the constitution of the national unity (quoted by Özbudun).

As can be seen his concern is on “solving” the problem for “national unity”. So, academics were not making any criticism about the state’s/or government’s “Kurdish policy” of that time, and they might have not been aware of such a kind of “issue” either. In other words, they followed the state’s “official discourse” which was based on denial of existing Kurds – and also other ethnic minorities. This denial started from mid-1920s until the end of 1980s (Yeğen 1996). In that time or even later and more or less today, *[w]henver the Kurdish question was mentioned in Turkish state discourse, it was in terms of reactionary politics, tribal resistance or regional backwardness, but never as an ethno-political question* (Yeğen 1996:216). The state-controlled centers of production of academic information, such as universities, institutions, research centers, etc., did not let the non-Turks elements to be “subject” in the “academia” (Aras 2014:156). Yet, some efforts against the official discourse can be seen in the Turkish Academic world in the mid-1960s, among them were İsmail Beçikçi and his works, which were the first kind of those efforts.

14 Not only were Kurds but also all the other minorities who speak different languages subjected to this campaign. For an example see. Nuran Savaşkan Akdoğan (2012). To give an idea about prohibition on speaking language from memoir, see. Musa Anter (1999). *Hatıralarım 1-2*, İstanbul: Avesta, pp.31-35.

The military coup of May 27th, 1960 relatively changed the political atmosphere in Turkey. The *Workers Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi-TİP)* was founded in the year after the coup, won 15 seats in the Turkish Parliament in the first following general election, in 1965. This was the time of leftist movements also and both leftist groups and Kurdish students, intellectuals could speak up or raise their voice, especially in the *Meetings of East's* starting in 1967 (Anter 1999; Beşikçi 2014). The term used to refer to the Kurdish Question was “the eastern question” at that time;

The TİP, and in its successors the left student movement, discovered the Kurdish question or, as it was then called, the “question of the East.” The terms “Kurd” and “Kurdistan” were taboo then, and even Kurdish nationalists refrained from using them in public. Doğu, “the East,” was a neutral term that was used to evade explicit reference to the Kurds and Kurdish separatism” (Bruinessen 2005).

In these circumstances, we see some wiggling out in the academy. Ismail Beşikçi's doctoral thesis on Kurdish Tribes, titled *Doğu'da Değişim ve Yapısal Sorunlar: Göçebe Alikan Aşireti – Changes and Structural Problems in the East: The Nomad Tribe Alikan* (1967) can be considered the first “academic work” on Kurds and Kurdish issue. In Bruinessen's words, he “discovered Kurds” and different from the “official discourse” of the state and academy, he dared to say that there was an “ethnic” group named “Kurds”.

Another work about Kurdish tribes was Muzaffer Erdost's, an intellectual and journalist, observations while he was doing his military service in Hakkâri. His Marxist analyses on the topic were published in the left journals *Yön* and *Türk Solu* in 1966 and 1968 (Bruinessen 2005).

Ismail Beşikçi who had “discovered” the Kurds published another work in 1969 titled *The Order of East Anatolia: Socio-economic and Ethnic Structures – Doğu Anadolu'nun Düzeni: Sosyo-ekonomik ve Etnik Temeller*. He continued to “criticise” the official discourse and he had a critical voice in the academy; he paid the price by being dismissed from the university in 1970, and being arrested in 1971. So, the case of İsmail Beşikçi is a good example of the academy and its views towards Kurds and the Kurdish issue, of that time.

Kurds did not become a subject until the 2000s in academia in general, but there are two other examples, not directly related to the Kurdish question but rather related to *critical intellectuals' attitude* against the state's discourse. The first is the case of *Intellectuals' Petition* in the 1984 and second one is the case of Fikret Başkaya in 1991-94.

The Military Coup in 1980, September 12, brought many changes together with institutions including *Higher Education Council (YÖK)* to which all universities are still subject. In such non-democratic circumstances, about 1,300¹⁵ intellectuals including a large number of academics led by Aziz Nesin signed a petition titled *Observations and Demands for a Democratic System in Turkey* and sent it to the office of the President Kenan Evren, the former general who led the 1980 military coup.

In the petition, the intellectuals criticised the political situation in Turkey and demanded that the state should be governed in a democratic way.¹⁶ In spite of the possibility of losing their job or being jailed they still signed the petition – even though some of them withdrew their sign – *in order to promote democracy and human rights in Turkey*.

Subsequently, President Evren launched a violent attack on the petitioners. He accused them of being traitors who wanted to embarrass Turkey abroad with their allegations of disrespect of human rights in the country. Many academics who signed the petition lost their jobs (Ökten & Arin 2016: 5).

In this period, under the constitution prepared by the military junta, the Turkish State turned back to the thesis in the 1930s, denying the existence of Kurds, and claiming that they were not Kurds but “mountain Turks”, till the “official recognizing” of the existence of Kurds in the beginning of the 1990s (Özcan & Aküzüm 2012).¹⁷ Yet, Kurds still were not an “academic” research subject in academia. In these circumstances Fikret Başkaya, a scholar at the Bolu İzzet Baysal University published a book titled *Paradigmanın İflası – The Failure of Paradigm* in 1991, which was a *radical criticism* of the fundamental official discourse of the Republic of Turkey. He was also using terms such as Kurd, Kurdistan which was also “taboo” in Turkish academia.¹⁸ He was sentenced to a fine of 42 thousands Turkish Liras and 20 months in prison. He got the prison sentence in 1994-95 with another

15 The number changes in different sources. While Ökten & Arin (2016:5) are giving the number of 1,383, Feroz Ahmad (1985:225) gives the number of 1,254. Emre Kongar, one of the signers, giving the same number of 1,383. (https://www.kongar.org/remzi/013_Aziz_Nesin_in_Aydinlar_Dilekcesi.php)

16 For petition see. <http://bianet.org/biamag/bianet/19444-aydinlar-dilekcesi-tam-metni> 28.08.2017;

17 In 1989, the president Turgut Özal announced his Kurdish origin which was seen as a “change” in the official discourse of the state. Two years later, in 1991, prohibitions on using Kurdish at home were lifted which brought out new possibilities for the Kurdish language (Özcan & Aküzüm 2012).

18 It should be noted that not anymore the “Kurd”, but “Kurdistan” is still somehow remaining a taboo in the academic society and the universities (n.k).

academician and victim of the 1980 military coup Haluk Gerger in Haymana Prison, and was dismissed also from the university.¹⁹

Research papers, master's theses and doctoral dissertations regarding Kurds and the Kurdish issue – mostly by Kurdish students and academics- started to be seen in academia, in the 2000s. The *AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi –Justice and Development Party)* came into power in 2002. The reforms that they made in the direction of being a member of the EU and the starting of the membership negotiations with the EU in 2005 changed Turkey towards a “democratic country” in general. In addition, lifting the “state of emergency” that had been continuing since 1986 in Kurdish dominant areas; confidential communications with the Kurdish outlawed party PKK; the popularizations of Kurdish parties and politics; opening a 24 hour broadcasting Kurdish TV channel in the state-run TRT; founding of “Living Languages Institutions” also caused Kurds and the Kurdish Issue to be discussed in academia. With the “peace process” starting at the end of 2012, Kurds and the Kurdish issue appeared and were discussed more in the media, politics and also academia. This “opening” process ended slowly towards the general election of June 7th, 2015, which affected also academy and academics.

4.1. Critical Intervention of Academics into the State's Policy towards the Kurdish Issue: The Case of “Academics for Peace”

Turkey headed to the polls in a tense socio-political atmosphere in June, 2015, and after the election the tension increased, and Turkey entered a difficult period, including spiralling violence. The escalating clashes between the PKK-affiliated armed groups and security forces in the urban centres in Kurdish dominated regions resulted in civilian casualties. Meanwhile the election was repeated on the 1st of October, in which ruling AKP got over 49% of the total votes. This did not stop the clashes, as had been expected, but instead clashes escalated and civilian casualties in urban centres of Kurdish dominant region increased. In such circumstances, over 1000 (to be more precise 1128 in the first, exceed later 2000) academics from Turkey and abroad signed the statement titled *We Will Not be a Party of This Crime* and publish it.²⁰ The statement resembled the *Intellectuals' Petition* in 1984, and received a similarly harsh response as before, if not harsher, with attacks from the governmental side and its supporters. With regard to the changes that Turkey had

19 A journal article about Fikret Başkaya and Haluk Gerger. Celal Başlangıç (2004). “40 Yıllık Düşünce Sanığı” Radikal, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/40-yillik-dusunce-sanigi-721626/08.08.2017>

20 For petition see. <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/63>; For a news about it see. <http://bianet.org/english/human-rights/170978-academics-we-will-not-be-a-party-to-this-crime>

undergone in the last decade, no one expected any harsh attacks and most of the academics believed that they were going to make some changes with such a statement. But, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan unexpectedly reacted hard and blaming the academics by saying; *Hey, you so-called intellectuals! You are not enlightened persons, you are dark. You are nothing like intellectuals.*²¹ His reaction recalls the usual reactions before him, and represents the reflexive reaction of state that does not want any critical voice against what has been done. The signing academics working at Turkish universities were indicted by both university councils and prosecution offices. In the investigations at universities, they were trying to be convinced to withdraw their signature, which was even verbalized by politicians in media.

The ones working in the “private” universities were dismissed initially, which again demonstrates the fragile side of academia vis-à-vis the state. Some of them were taken into custody, while some were arrested, and the rest were threatened in one way or another.²² Some of them moved from Turkey, while some had to resign from their job at the universities. Those kind of threats, investigation and prosecutions have made “critical” academics silent, but the situation got worse after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016. The *state of emergency* has been declared by government just after the failed coup attempt and in those circumstances many of the academics have been dismissed from their universities through *decree laws* issued by government, they even can not go abroad because their passports have also been cancelled or seized.²³ Meanwhile, beside all, having any critical expression which is not “compatible” to the state’s official discourse would be and was ended up with investigation, and then dismissing which made the rest of the academics silent about any social, and political problems, especially regarding Kurds and the

21 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-slams-academics-over-petition-invites-chomsky-to-turkey.aspx?PageID=238&NID=93760&NewsCatID=338> Last Access: 05.08.2017; Also see. <http://www.diken.com.tr/erdogandan-baris-cagrisi-yapan-akademisyenlere-aydinmusveddesi-cahil/> Last Access: 05.08.2017

22 For some news related to threatening scholars at that time see. “Why Turkey’s government is threatening academic freedom”, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/01/16/why-turkeys-growing-anti-intellectualism-is-a-threat-to-academic-freedom/?utm_term=.a30e693a406d; “Notorious criminal threatens academics calling for peace in Turkey’s southeast”, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/notorious-criminal-threatens-academics-calling-for-peace-in-turkeys-southeast.aspx?pageID=238&nID=93834&NewsCatID=341>; “Scholars in Turkey Detained, Threatened for Opposing Military Action” <https://academeblog.org/2016/01/18/scholars-in-turkey-detained-threatened-for-opposing-military-action/>

23 For the number of “academics for peace” who faced with the right violations see. <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/314> (10.09.2017); For some news and stories about the “scholars at risk” see. “In Turkey, crackdown threatens academia”, <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/06/turkey-academia.aspx> (10.09.2017).

Kurdish issue.²⁴ They either felt censored or they censored themselves when they are going to say or write something, which is going to result in further weakening of the academy itself in Turkey.²⁵

Consequently, dismissing academics from the universities or censorship/self-censorship will cause leaving behind the academic works in Turkey once more, as it had been in the mid-1980s. Yet, ironically, President Erdoğan in his opening speech at the recent meeting of *The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)* in Kazakhstan in September 10, 2017 was saying as such: *We are losing our most successful children, our brightest brains to Western institutions and countries.*²⁶

5. CONCLUSION

Academia has a great importance in the modern world and for rulers, specifically, but it can play a crucial role for the rest of the people by taking responsibility. It is true that academicians' duty is *to support the rulership and authority and actualising the doctrinaire administration* with the knowledge they have. But, beside their duties, academics and intellectuals have also ethical responsibilities about the social problems in the country they live in and in the world, too. However, not all have felt this kind of "responsibility" of course, otherwise the world could be a better place than it is. But the latter costs many things. When we look at the history of academia in Turkey we can see both. At the beginning of the foundation of the Republic they function to "construct" a "nation" with the "scientific" ways and data. And they were supposed to do the same even later, until now, and mainly they do so. But, academics and intellectuals do not function to "construct" or "write" an "official" history and "nation" as they have done in the first period of the Republic of Turkey, but they are still expected to support the state's policy, if not at least stay silent and "do their duties", such as lecturing and writing articles, but not to criticise the "official" policy. It is more valid regarding Kurds and the Kurdish issue. In the beginning, the Turkish Academy has not "recognized" the existence of Kurds, so they were "unaware" of the issue, either. When they got aware of them, or "discovered" them (like İsmail Beşikçi) they paid the price, too.

24 For an example, see. "Cerablus yorumu nedeniyle üniversiteden uzaklaştırıldı", <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/288510/cerablus-yorumu-nedeniyle-universiteden-uzaklastirildi> (last visited: 10.09.2017).

25 The time when this article was prepared, there was no sign of intervening to Afrin, the Kurdish city in Syria. Now seeing that there is almost no critical opinion from the academics can be taken as a proof for (auto-) censorship.

26 <http://t24.com.tr/haber/erdogan-en-parlak-beyinlerimizi-batiya-kaptiriyoruz,436989> (10.09.2017).

Still, from the 2000s to 2015, Kurds and the Kurdish issue became an *attractive research area*, and Kurds became a subject of scientific fields, without being at too much risk.

So, beginning from 2000s, a relatively academic freedom including “talking about Kurds and Kurdish issue” can be observed until 2015, January. However, after the “statement of academics for peace”, the sword of Damocles once more was hanged over the academy and academics.

The “Academics for Peace” and also the ones who hesitated to sign the petition because of the atmosphere, felt the responsibility to do something to end the clashes and civilian deaths, and also wanted to have the “peace climate” again. They also believed that they had a responsibility and role to play in such circumstances and played – or at least they believe in that – their intellectual’s role by having such a statement, which also once more showed that, the responsibility and role of the academics are being discussed in harsh times, not when everything is in order and goes well. But it also showed that by doing this they would put themselves at the risk, and being at the risk, does not lead the academics and other who are interested in “knowledge”, “truth”, who care about his/her country, world, his/her people, and all humanity’s future, to produce any new ideas for the solution of the problems, especially social. They became silent officers rather than “thinkers”. Without “thinkers” and “critical” opinions, neither the Kurdish issue nor other social problems can be solved. It should be noted that, the more Turkey oppresses, especially, the academics talking or commenting on the Kurdish issue in particular, the more it allows people to become polarized, making it more difficult to solve it.²⁷

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27 What happened at the funeral of arrested, People’s Democratic Party (HDP) Vice Co-chair Aysel Tuğluk’s mother in Ankara, is just an example of how far this polarization can go. See. <https://bianet.org/english/politics/189810-attack-on-funeral-ceremony-of-arrested-hdp-mp-s-mother-hatun-tugluk> 14.09.2017. For a comment on the topic see. Hasan Cemal, 14.08.2017, “Bir Kürd Anası, 78 yaşındaki Hatun Hanım Artık Ankara’da Toprağa Verilemiyorsa...”, <http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/hasan-cemal/bir-kurd-anasi-78-yasindaki-hatun-hanim-artik-ankarada-topraga-verilemiyorsa,18051>

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