To Füsun Üstel

[1]On 5 December 2017, the first trials began in Istanbul for members of Academics for Peace (*Barış İçin Akademisyenler*, hereafter BAK). Almost two years prior, the defendants had been signatories to a peace petition, 'We will not be a party to this crime!', calling for an end to the Turkish state's human rights violations in its war against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, hereafter PKK).[2] Written as a refusal of academic complicity with state-sponsored violence in the Kurdish region, the petition was formulated explicitly so as to break the political taboo on speaking publicly about ongoing state violence towards the Kurds. Addressing the Turkish state directly, the petition named state actions as being criminal under national and international law and made an urgent call for a return to the peace process abandoned by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkındırma Partisi*, hereafter AKP) after having suffered heavy parliamentary losses in the June 2015 general election. Signed in digital form, the petition garnered 1,128 academic signatories from across 89 universities in Turkey and 355 academic signatories from abroad. Following a condemnatory speech from Erdoğan on 15 March accusing the 'so-called academics' as traitors and potential terrorists, an additional 800 Turkish academics both in and outside Turkey signed the petition in support of their colleagues. With the failed coup attempt of July 2016 mass disciplinary action against academics followed, resulting on 1 September 2016 in the dismissal of 2,346 scholars and the closure of 15 universities. On 23 September 2017, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office filed Bills of Indictment on

the basis of Article 7(2) denouncing the petition as 'overt propaganda for the Kurdistan Workers' Party/Union of Kurdistan Communities' (Istanbul Chief 2017). Although the bill was uniform, the lawsuits were filed separately. The calls to trial were sent both to those signatories who still held positions in state and private universities in Istanbul and to those who had been dismissed by order of the Council of Higher Education (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu*, hereafter YÖK). The political, ethnic, and academic background of those who received the call did not seem to matter for the prosecutors; what mattered was that they had been signatories to an internationally announced peace petition that had dared break the public silence on the human rights violations in the region.

Over the course of three years, 406 signatories were purged from their institutions. through the State of Emergency Decrees (*Kanun Hükmünde Kararname*, hereafter KHK). Until March 2019, 666 signatories were put on trial[3]. While defence counsels had requested that the cases be filed together due to the court having used a uniform Bill of Indictment, the court refused. Treating them as individual legal cases allowed the specially appointed courts to interrogate the accused on their views regarding the legitimacy of state violence, their knowledge of Kurdish democratic autonomy (Leezenberg 2016), their decision to criticise state violence rather than violence perpetrated by the PKK, and the reason for having circulated the petition in English (Ertur and Butler 2017; Erol et al 2018; Başer, Akgönül and Öztürk 2017; Odman 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d).

All signatories denied the accusations levelled by the state against them, the common stance being that they had signed as citizens of the Republic of Turkey so as to call attention to the necessity of a return to the peace process. In their testimonies, they insisted on the lack of evidence proving their connection to terrorist acts or organisations and highlighted the

ample evidence of human rights violations and civilian casualties in Turkey's Kurdish region. Some academics supported their testimony by attaching human rights violations reports produced by local, national, and transnational organisations. The purpose of each defence statement was not to appeal to the court's sense of justice, but to enter evidence into the official record and construct an archive of collective memory about this virulent period in the history of Turkish state repression.

Academics who finished arguing their defence received sentences of 15 to 36 months. No explanation was provided for the differences between the sentences issued for the same 'crime.' They were announced in court as if they were the decision of the judge, like the sovereign in Agamben's (1998) sense who could decide on the exception. Scholars with 15-month sentences were given the option of a 'deferral of the announcement of the verdict' in which the sentence would not be carried out and the record would be expunged provided that no offence was committed within a five-year period. Of the 150 people charged, 119 chose the deferral and renounced their right to appeal. Some of the remaining 31 signatories rejected the offer and some were given over 24 months, which meant that they could not defer (HRFT 2019; 21). They have appealed and are waiting for a Supreme Court decision. The only exception is Füsun Üstel, a prominent political scientist, who was one of the first signatories that refused the deferral of the announcement of the verdict and made the first appeal to the Supreme Court. In March 2019, her verdict has been approved by the Supreme Court. As I write these lines, Füsun Üstel has been waiting for her imprisonment to be executed.

This nightmare of shared precarity

Meanwhile, we, the members of Academics for Peace UK (BAK-UK 2017), signatories from Turkey living and working in UK universities, have had to consider the best course of action. In this nightmare of shared precarity, uncertainties about next steps vexed us. How might we extend our spaces and modes of solidarity across now-difficult borders? Should we organise an international committee to watch the trials or can we attend them in Istanbul? As signatories, defendants, activists on behalf of the accused, and academics working to produce public knowledge on subjects deemed taboo, should we consider ourselves academics in exile? Are we emotionally ready to declare ourselves in exile before receiving legal notice that we have been banned from re-entering our country of origin? How might our legal status in our host countries be affected by our status as signatories? How might being an academic in exile affect our commitment and connection to the academic knowledge we produce?

In November 2017, few of us were thinking out loud about our changing status as we waited for the audience to file into the University of Cambridge auditorium of a seminar on authoritarianism and academic freedom in Turkey and Egypt (Fahmy et al 2017). The conversation swiftly turned to the case of Giulio Regeni, an Italian PhD student at Cambridge who had been tortured and killed while conducting field research in Egypt. An article in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* had recently stated that Regeni's PhD supervisor, who had been summoned by Italian prosecutors to give a statement, was potentially being held accountable for having sent her student to carry out research in an unsafe environment (Bonini and Foschini 2017). Based on evidence implicating Egypt's security forces in the murder, Cambridge academics were circulating a petition denouncing the article's apportioning of blame to Regeni's supervisor (Letters 2017). Instead, they called upon the University of Cambridge to support their colleague at every step of the ongoing investigation.

They speculated that the shifting focus of the investigation reported in *La Repubblica* was related to the deepening of economic ties between Egypt and Italy as the Italian government reopened its embassy in Cairo. London and Cairo were now in close contact, discussing the long-term impact of Regeni's death. As a colleague from the Cambridge sociology department shared his views, we speculated about the ways in which our academic spaces and lives are governed by and encroached upon by the economic and political strategies of nation-states.

Anti-terror laws, legal status as migrants, and citizens, economic and political insecurities, universities as spaces occupied by neoliberal, conservative, and authoritarian regimes – these are some political building blocks of the precarity scholars experience in today's academy. The case of BAK in Turkey had become the embodiment of them all. Subjected to increasingly repressive measures through surveillance, legal inquiries, imprisonment, and civil death in the loss of work and lifetime bans from academic and civil employment, BAK scholars' passports have been cancelled or confiscated. Unfolding the tangible and intangible effects of the repressive regime in Turkey is thus a way to index the conditions of precarity as we experience and reproduce them. This vantage point of ours that straddles multiple sites in Turkey, the UK, and beyond reveals certain trajectories which, though fragmented, are constitutive of what I would like call 'precarious solidarities'.

Judith Butler (2004; 2010) defines precarity as an essential quality of social life that implies exposure to and dependency on people one knows and people one does not know. Although precarity stands as a quality intrinsic to life, Butler argues that it may be aggravated under politically induced conditions where people are exposed to violence, poverty, and hunger, and suffer from the failure or absence of economic and social support. Precarity in

this sense produces another form of dependency where people without many options appeal to the state for protection. But, she argues, for those at the mercy of political precarity involving the state, the state is what they need protection from: 'To be protected from violence by the nation-state is to be exposed to the violence wielded by the nation-state, so to rely on the nation-state for protection *from* violence is precisely to exchange one potential violence for another' (Butler 2010: 26).

How then do we within BAK proceed if we move along this double meaning of precarity: precarity as the ontologically vulnerable condition of (inter)dependency that can be taken on willingly and claimed as an ethical politics of co-existence expressed as resistance and a 'solidarity from below' (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016: x); precarity as a politically vulnerable condition in relation to the state that one may fall into and need protection from. In what follows, I dwell on this double meaning of precarity as I search for possibilities to resist the political, social, and affective confinements that we experience as academics living in precarity due to our various and sundry legal, political, and social positions. My focus here is the predicament of living life as an academic when what we do and what we produce are perceived as manifestations of 'poisonous knowledge' and hence as a threat to the state. Veena Das uses the notion of poisonous knowledge to explore the relationship between traumatic past and present. In her view, traumatic memory cannot be understood as a possession of the past. Rather, it manifests as poisonous knowledge that "is constantly mediated by the manner in which the world is being re-inhabited" (Das 2007; 221). Poisonous knowledge does not come to the consciousness as past events but is "incorporated into the temporal structure of relationships" (222). People do not reveal it all the time. They engage with this knowledge "through a descent into the everyday," "through the everyday work of repair" (208). I consider the experience and memory of political

violence in the Kurdish region to be poisonous knowledge and suggest that engaging with the peace petition and its aftermath is one of its most visible and explosive manifestations that penetrate spaces of everyday life and mediate relationships across time and space. In tracing these relationships, I reveal how engagement with poisonous knowledge shapes and perpetuates the conditions of our political precarity. My reflections arise from myriad tensions that emerge from my daily predicaments as an academic in a neoliberal higher education system in the UK and my commitment as a signatory member of the Academics for Peace community. Can a critique of the conditions of our precarity help to develop resilience in life lived under violence? How can we continue to resist in solidarity as precarious academics when academia itself is seen as a threat to neoliberal and militaristic modes of state governance?

The production of 'poisonous knowledge'

The military conflict between the Turkish Armed Forces and the PKK spans three decades. Since 1984 and the declaration of emergency rule, the conflict has resulted in the deaths of more than 45,000 civilians, militants, and soldiers, thousands of casualties and disappearances, the displacement of millions, and the forced evacuation of nearly 4,000 villages and towns (Güneș and Zeydanlıoğlu 2013). In 1999, after the arrest of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK declared a uniliteral ceasefire but maintained its guerrilla forces as leverage in negotiating with the Turkish state. That same year, the EU recognised Turkey as a candidate for EU accession on equal footing with other states, further encouraging the state to take steps towards a partial demilitarisation of the Kurdish region and to end the state of emergency.

In the decades prior to 2000, very little scholarly work on conditions of life in the Kurdish region was published. Political scientist Ismail Beşikçi conducted research in the later 1960s, but was arrested just before the 1971 military coup in that his writings defended the political and historical presence of the Kurds within Turkey as a separate socio-political community (Beşikçi 1969) and spent 17 years in prison. In the 1980s, the anthropologist Lale Yalçın-Heckman (1991) conducted her ethnographic research on the kinship structure of Kurdish tribal families along the Turkish-Iranian border. The bulk of knowledge produced during 1990s was prepared by human rights organisations. With the lifting of the state of emergency in 1999 came a turning point; the region was opened to visits from scholars, activists, and tourists who came to get a glimpse of authentic Mesopotamian culture in the underdeveloped 'terror zone,' document past violations, or witness the emergence of normal life.

In 2000, I was one of those visitors. As a young anthropology student working on a PhD at Cambridge, I was interested in understanding the experience of political violence in the Kurdish region. Between 2000 and 2015 I travelled between the border province of Mardin and the diasporic Syriac Christian communities in Germany and Sweden, tracing the movement of absented communities, particularly Syriacs, their attempts at return, their fears of encountering and co-existing with their old neighbours. Each time I returned to the city of Mardin from abroad, I brought with me another fragment of buried history. The city of Mardin, witness to both the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the recent Kurdish conflict, was preoccupied during this period with numerous development projects of heritage, tourism, restoration, and art. Questions about the exact number and identities of the past and present dead lingered together with other life projects that included reparation, restoration, and destruction of the built environment, desire for recognition, sudden enrichment, legal and

illegal struggles over the confiscation and possession of the land, attempts to receive compensation for material loss, and desperate efforts to escape from the accumulation of material and immaterial debts. For 15 years I witnessed the production and unfolding of the poisonous knowledge that emanated from the experience and memory of traumatic events in the region – the massacres, blood feuds, honour crimes, the Kurdish conflict. I witnessed many different forms of transmission of this poisonous knowledge for so long that in some cases I had been asked to record and in others to erase the knowledge and to never return to the place where I had heard it transmitted. I traced the ways people were re-inhabiting the space of everyday to cope with the ghosts of past. The disclosure of the poisonous knowledge has been my work as an ethnographer. Life as a researcher in the region was precarious not solely because of what you learned or knew, but also because of the dependencies upon which you relied or learned to rely. An inevitable component of social life, these dependencies were what made life possible, liveable, and sustainable for me as a researcher; and at the same time they produced new predicaments concerning the representation of such complicated social lives in this politically volatile environment. I was burdened with the responsibility of writing against the idea of cultures of conflict; the celebration of the invented multi-culturalism in the conflict region; and producing a critique of violence beyond the ethical limits and political commitments of the Kurdish resistance movement. There were multiple frames of violence and multiple manifestations of its cost (*bedel*).

At the same time, I was protected through my relationships and, ironically, through the uncertainty of the ceasefires and the peace process, such as it was. In the absence of the legal infrastructure necessary for the consolidation of peace, the socio-political field was full of exceptions that allowed not only for the continued suspension of the state of emergency, but also for democratisation packages, peace talks, and development projects. The state

repeatedly channelled cash for heritage-making, restoration projects, compensation, and other forms of credit for the encouragement of agriculture, cadastral surveys, development projects and universities. While legal, political, economic, and military uncertainty produced precarity for life and research in the region, it also allowed me to adopt various positions with which to negotiate the daily struggles to conduct research, gain acceptance and seek justice.

With the ascension of AKP rule in 2002, neoliberal policies aggressively and rapidly penetrated the system of higher education and Erdoğan set about imposing stricter control over YÖK and the universities. Academic freedom has never been a feature of Turkish universities, so its absence under AKP rule is not exceptional. In the wake of the 1980 coup d'état, the military government sought to consolidate state control over higher education by establishing YÖK as the supervisory organ in charge of regulating the economic, academic, and administrative life of Turkish universities. As from 2002, the AKP government's two-pronged approach towards tightening control was to outnumber its 'detractors' within academia by installing AKP supporters in some 92 new universities established across the country (Çağlar 2017; Odman 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d). Ten of these were introduced in the Kurdish region as 'peace universities'. Over a decade and a half of AKP rule, the student population increased from 1.3 million to 7.5 million, surveillance over politically taboo subjects increased, and student arrest and imprisonment became part of the landscape of higher education in Turkey (Odman 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d). Despite all its murkiness, the politics of the post-2000 period had allowed for openness, accessibility, mobility of ideas, practices, and people. It allowed new production of knowledge about the Kurdish region by me and many other researchers originating both in and outside the region. A new generation of scholars was able to examine the legacies of violence and conduct fine-grained participant observation research on daily life in the region. This generation produced new discourses and

conceptual languages beyond the development and culture talk of previous generations. It allowed for the establishment of the Academics for Peace network in 2012 following their first public petition calling on the state to acquiesce to the demands of Kurdish political prisoners and in so doing declaring the important value of knowledge production in pursuit of peace and reconciliation. There was hope and optimism.

In 2015 July, following the general elections that ended with the loss of the AKP majority, the peace process was abandoned. This was not a return to the conflict of the 1990s. It was a new type of war that emerged from the changing conditions, ideologies, and practices made possible since 1999 (Ertür and Martel 2016).The war did not take place in the mountains against the guerrillas, but in cities and towns where Kurdish youth fought to materialise the 'democratic autonomy' promised by the PKK's self-governance movement through their stone- and Molotov cocktail-throwing clashes with police (Darıcı 2016). In Mardin, where I had friends who could recount the story, the war took the form of round-the-clock curfews where civilians were forced to live, witness, and survive in the midst of an endless exchange of fire between Kurdish youth and Turkish security forces. Neighbourhoods turned into open battlegrounds. As the youth dug trenches deeper into the neighbourhoods, the security forces intensified their use of force, led to the destruction of infrastructure and the loss of lives (International Crisis Group 2016; OHCHR 2017). Unable to bury those caught in the crossfire during the curfew, locals were forced to live in their houses alongside their dead relatives. 'We watched it, we witnessed it, and we could not do anything about it; even if we turned away, our eyes could not help but see it,' a close friend wrote to me. Death was the order of the day, even outside the region. After two bombs in Ankara on 10 October 2015 targeted a peace demonstration, killing 109 and injuring over 500, another close friend who was a university lecturer recounted how she could not breathe in her class the next

morning. She wanted to talk with her students about it but did not know what to say. 'I decided to talk about mourning. "Can we talk about mourning? Can we just talk about mourning this morning? Are we allowed to mourn?" They avoided eye contact', she told me over the phone. The knowledge about violence could not be assimilated.

Solidarity. Complicity and Civil Death

The 2016 peace petition came out of this enforced silence; the poisonous public silence of being forced to witness and thus integrate our first-hand knowledge of the violation of the right to life, yet remain silent on it. The act of signing the petition was therefore not about a shared position with regard to the resolution of the Kurdish conflict or about political ideas on co-existence. It was a collective response to the growing authoritarianism in Turkey, an ethical and political statement voicing the solidarity of academics living predominantly outside the Kurdish region with what we knew to be happening there. It was not the first time that academics had produced such petitions to criticise state repression, but it was the most direct, explicit statement that offered no compromises in terms of political terminology.

President Erdoğan responded to the petition with publicly performed rage, signalling openly the forthcoming academic repression and laying the groundwork for anti-intellectualism and societal polarisation. Names and photos of the signatories were published in the newspapers. Outside Ankara and Istanbul, academics were accosted at their universities by mobs. Some had their office door nametag crossed out or found members of the right-wing nationalist party waiting outside their homes or office buildings. Private universities in particular placed immense pressure on faculty to withdraw their signatures, and some signatories were summarily dismissed.

After the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, repression of BAK signatories took place in the hyperlegal (Hussain 2007; Gökarıksel and Türem 2019) context in which universities known to be connected to Gülenists were shut down. Thousands of state employees, including the BAK signatories, were dismissed via special emergency decrees which imposed on them a lifetime ban on the right to state employment and state insurance, and the cancellation of their passports. Legally stigmatised, their Turkish identification numbers were re-registered under a special code that made their new status immediately visible to any state institution that could view it for such sundry purposes as municipal registration, national insurance, or at consulates and embassies. A procedural form of civil death. Private universities would not employ anyone with this ID number. Because the decrees were not declared in one go, waiting for the next decree to be announced became an everyday practice. Fridays at midnight during major events such as elections, bombings, or military incursions into Syria were when they re-registered citizens with the banned code. It is no longer a public secret that the majority of university deans and rectors were complicit in the dismissals, having passed the names of academics to the governor. The few universities that appear not to have complied are now under surveillance through the appointment of new rectors who tighten restrictions on freedom of speech by the day.

Such intensified complicity meant that the modes and public expressions of solidarity were precarious. We heard many stories from our colleagues. It was not uncommon for BAK signatories to receive emotional and political support from colleagues on the other side of the political spectrum while at the same time being alienated by long-time friends and political allies. Guilt mingled with fear and anxiety about the possibility of being subjected to this process of civil death. While academic and administrative staff in universities in the Kurdish region took their distance from the signatories, locals in some of the cities came out in

solidarity with the signatories, visiting the rectors to request their understanding and empathy. Students from various universities across Turkey stood for days in solidarity with the signatories, accompanied them on their last day at the university, continued to publicly commemorate their absence. The number of students imprisoned for such acts of solidarity increased, ruining both their present and future prospects as scholars.

There were other incidents, rare and banal but nonetheless frightening, that we heard about from our colleagues in Turkey that hearkened back to the first days following the peace petition announcement where we had been accused of using teaching for the promotion of terror. Recordings of lectures were heavily edited and uploaded to YouTube as 'evidence' of the 'real' intentions of these academics.

In universities in the Kurdish cities, majority of the signatories were the non-local academics. Living the everyday reality of curfews, most local academics had chosen not to sign on the assumption that they would be targeted. In effect, those who signed and those who did not act together in a shared statement concerning their knowledge of the state. 'I knew what the state would do to a non-submissive employee', said one academic. 'It was a life-changing signature. I knew it from the start'. 'It was all about honour. When I say honour, it was about ethics for me', said another Kurdish friend who was subjected to civil death. Legal and psychological support became the main component of BAK academic life in Turkey and abroad. 'I worked obsessively', said another friend. 'After my dismissal, I worked madly on article drafts. Non-stop, as if I would never again have the chance to read or write. I was unable to stop myself until I decided to see a therapist'. Another colleague from a different university in the Kurdish region who chose not to sign expressed her sense of powerlessness.

> We were paralysed, unresponsive in the surge of events. We couldn't even come out in solidarity with our signatory friends. Months later came the petition against minibus drivers who were becoming increasingly reckless, disobeying traffic rules, breaking the speed limit. We wrote a petition against minibus terrorism, signed and circulated it. We projected all our misery, sadness, and pain onto that petition.

Displacement of Critical Scholarship

The increasing authoritarianism of the state had a devastating effect across the higher education ecosystem, above all on those academic hubs known for their critical scholarship in Turkey. While disciplinary and criminal investigations targeted many prominent academics, they landed hardest on the younger generation of early career scholars whose employment status was more precarious. The majority were assistant professors, adjunct faculty, and postdoc or predoc research assistants working under temporary contracts or with special contractual agreements allowing them to complete their PhD studies in well-established metropolitan universities in Turkey or abroad on condition that upon graduation they take posts in recently established regional universities across the country**.**

Despite pre-existing limitations on academic freedom, this group of older and younger scholars constituted an engaged critical mass interested in the production of knowledge on major socio-political events in Turkey. The post-petition process silenced this community. Those who were not dismissed believed that they remained under surveillance, every word they discussed, taught, or wrote was scrutinised. Complicity with this erasure extended into academic publishing and dissertation work: dismissed scholars were removed from the

editorial boards of Turkish academic journals; scholar's work was removed from second editions of collected volumes; PhD students were warned not to pursue dissertations on subjects deemed taboo on penalty of admission rejection, obligation to change the content of already completed theses, and even short-term detainment. Already in contractual agreement with the state to return to Turkey for the obligatory service in regional universities, students who had received scholarships to study abroad were placed under particular pressure. Monitored via their social media accounts and in some cases threatened with criminal investigation, international students were given the impossible choice of either changing their topic or refunding the Turkish state for the exorbitant cost of their foreign education. They were now in debt to the state.

In this environment, academics who had not been dismissed and banned from travel began searching for ways to leave the country. Those with cultural capital in the form of foreign language skills and publications found temporary opportunities in universities abroad through expanded one- or two-year fellowship programmes for 'scholars at risk', resulting in the formation of new academic schisms and enclaves. Because the criteria for *at risk* was vague, scholars who demonstrated their ability to acclimatise to the academic environment of the host country or university were privileged. Scholars who had published exclusively in Turkish or who had been denied the travel documents to go abroad remained in Turkey. Initiating critical discussions about academia as space, institution, and entity, these scholars from different generations worked creatively and collaboratively to open new platforms for transmitting and producing knowledge outside the academy. Solidarity Academies (*dayanışma akademileri*) were established as spaces where these scholars could actively reclaim their lost academic freedoms (Erdem and Akın 2019). Their most important challenge now is to reclaim the critical space and mass that was the immediate target of the

post-petition decrees. Precarious and vulnerable, these new formations continue to produce and disseminate knowledge despite the fact they may easily be subjected to state surveillance and censure.

The Limits of Precarious Solidarity: BAK in the UK

Coping with the academy's political precarity meant that BAK discussions abroad revolved around the target and strategic form of our solidarity. Should we act as human rights activists and devote our intellectual and political resources to combatting *human rights violations* across society, the academy included? Or should we produce a path that would address *academia's political precarity* so that we might contribute our critical insights to the strategic production of knowledge? For those of us in the UK, we woke to messages from our circle of friends here reminding us of the expiry date of the foreign visas on their cancelled passports or the scarcity of resources to meet the minimal requirements of life. Other mornings brought news of the death of Mehmet Fırat Traș who ended his life after a desperate search both in Turkey and abroad to find employment where he could live up to his ideals and commitments as an academic. Possibilities melting in air. Guilt for not being there for him. Fear that this might happen to other colleagues. Other mornings brought reminders to think of ways to extend our support to Nuriye Gülmen and Selim Özakça, dismissed educators on a hunger strike to be reinstated. Where in London? In Trafalgar Square? Somewhere else? What action can we take to show our solidarity? Join in the hunger strike for a day? A hunger strike was a step too far for a collective of individuals with divergent political backgrounds, experiences, levels of engagement, not to mention the anger, desperation, resentment, preoccupation with the responsibilities and burdens of daily life.

But what do we do in the name of solidarity? The discussion continued over email as I sat apprehensively in the British Library with my internal monologues, processing the new self that had become the repository of all this poisonous knowledge of the violent events orbiting the peace and post-petition processes. Should I call my lawyer friend in Turkey who had witnessed such things up close in the past? She would likely advise me not to intervene. Who am I to even suggest intervention? How do we think about life in the face of the deaths – slow, sudden, spectral – that we are witnessing in the intimacy of shared precarity?

BAK-UK was a group of academics who had settled in the UK over the past three decades. Most signatories had temporary academic positions and resident permits. Our oppositional stance to the repressive regime of the AKP was a common ground that made us feel precarious as Turkish citizens living abroad. Most of us were not Kurdish and had not experienced living in the midst of violence. Most had not been attacked or accused by the state as academics or citizens of Turkey. As a new politically minoritised community, our non-Kurdish backgrounds no longer afforded us the protection and privilege that we were used to living with. We were not accustomed to the experience of being marginalised or exiled. Our Kurdish BAK-UK friends were acutely aware of the differences between our positions, privileges and our responses to the violations that were taking place at the time. They responded with the resilience that comes from living in exile or in a conflict region. The solidarity between us was precarious because we had to rely on each other's actions, support and will, as Judith Butler has stated in relation to the ontological character of precarity. Our solidarity was precarious because our differences -whether internalised as part of our habitus or externalised as part of our political consciousness awareness- stood as glass and even cement walls between us, affecting our sense of trust in each other. Our interpretations of human rights documents or the nature of responses to news of human rights violations were

remarkably different. The majority of us were not used to the instant, immediate, explicit and sharp nature of activism. Identifying the source of any piece of news or evidence was crucial for many of our friends, and they would scrutinize the information to ensure that it was consistent. As we negotiated these details, the event would become outdated as still more violations of the right to live emerged. The pace of our activism was not synchronised with the pace of political violence in Turkey. Our understanding of the infrastructure required to execute long-term academic projects was also fragmented and hence often not complementary due to different political commitments and positions within academia. After a while, we dropped the idea of maintaining an organised presence around BAK-UK and gradually stopped devoting time and energy to reconciling those differences and to turning them into knowledge that would allow us to solidify our precarious solidarities. In other words, we could not find a way to carve out a new political space that would be free from the effects of those historically embedded inequalities. While our Kurdish friends failed to remember that they might essentialise the differences among us through their tendency to interpret the actions of the other with reference to Turkishness, the majority of us from non-Kurdish backgrounds and/or habituses failed to question privilege as a source of difference that underlines the form and meaning of solidarity movements.

Our political and historical backgrounds were not the only reasons for the fragmentation of the BAK-UK community. Economic and political precarity co-existed as components of our lives. BAK members abroad found themselves exposed to the neoliberal academy's own mechanisms of exploitation, exclusion and marginalisation (see Ōzdemir, Mutluer and Ōzyürek 2019). When academics went on strike in the UK, we were reminded of the complex web of obstacles that prevented us from becoming permanent members of the UK system of higher education. The majority of the members were academics in economic

precarity with short term contracts. The political precarity of being a member of BAK was complemented by an economic precarity that might never end. Some members were academics with UK citizenship or who had settled in the UK. They were under constant pressure to teach on short term contracts and/or produce publications in order to increase their chances of success in the eternal search for a new job.

Recently arrived colleagues spoke often of the visible and invisible bars into the system and spelled out possibilities for changing professions and transferring out of academia altogether. Fellowships for Turkish 'scholars at risk' were rarer in the UK than in other parts of Europe. The political stance of the British home office, academic and funding institutions, and scholars at risk NGOs was carefully crafted so as not to appear critical of the Turkish state[4]. Choosing to continue their long-standing collaboration with TUBITAK, the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, we were told by few applicant colleagues that at certain occasions, UK research councils applied the authoritarian Turkish state's new assessment criteria, disqualifying grant proposals on the basis of their proposed topics and research sites, despite the high support of referees for these projects. That British NGOs supporting scholars at risk in the UK also worked in collaboration with the Turkish state on a programme designed to settle Syrian academics in Turkish higher education institutions, they were constrained from openly criticising the situation of academics in Turkey. In some cases, Syrian academics were given academic positions only recently vacated by Turkish and Kurdish academics and BAK signatories dismissed by the emergency decrees.

In March 2019, the BAK-UK community turned into a silent crowd of people who signed the peace petition or were in support of opposition to the authoritarian regime. We felt angry, disturbed and hopeless. But there was still room for solidarity. Some BAK-UK members

worked to establish a charity called the "Centre for Peace and Democracy Research (CPDR)". They volunteered to actualise a long-term project to create resources and build connections of support and solidarity with the Academics for Peace who remained in Turkey. In this process, they were able to find more tangible ways of tackling the existential challenges that we had faced.

The precarious solidarity of academic research

Given the repressive censorship of knowledge production on taboo subjects within Turkey and the reluctance within the UK to take a critical stance on such autocratic repression of academic freedoms, BAK signatories to the peace petition have found themselves subject to political precarity. Numerous acts of solidarity have centred on the creation of an archive of post-petition process violations, often made available in translation. As indicated above, BAK signatories' defence arguments and the documents put into evidence by their lawyers form a part of this archival work. Further evidence was shared in front of an international audience in Paris at the International Permanent People's Tribunal on Turkey and Kurds (PPT-TK 2018). According to the evidence gathered over the course of decades, the violence in the Kurdish region of Turkey never ceased. Even the peace process BAK demanded be restarted did not bring peace.

All this begs the question of what to do as academics with this archive of poisonous knowledge so as to engage it with critical questions about what we have witnessed and carried within us. Were we to assemble, catalogue, and translate the dispersed mass of testimonies and reports produced by human rights activists and lawyers, would this be enough to make sense of the ontological and political precarities that have long been brought

to bear on knowledge production in Turkey? What will happen to the scholarship critical researchers if they stay in Turkey? What shape will scholarship take for those who continue to live in exile?

The question haunted me while listening to Khaled Fahmy's presentation at Cambridge on authoritarianism and academic freedom. An Egyptian historian who had returned to Egypt after the January 25 Revolution of 2011 but who had recently felt obliged to leave again into exile, Fahmy recounted the tragic story of the young researcher Gulio Regeni's death. The lesson to be learned, he argued, was not that there are consequences to conducting research in politically volatile environments, but rather that with Regeni's death, the Egyptian state had in effect implicitly threatened scholars wishing to conduct research in Egypt. Regeni's death embodied in the most sinister fashion the absence of academic freedom and academics' human rights in Egypt and substantiated the enactment of Egyptian state violence against academic institutions. In his view, academic projects should not bend to these unspoken, unwritten restrictions, but should be continued to be formulated as they have always been. The academy must not permit the internalisation of autocratic state censorship; the way to resist is to continue the conduct of research. Acquiescing to self-censorship will not bring an end to our political precarity as researchers. On the contrary, such suppression of our critiques of the state and its power to render lives precarious will serve only to increase our vulnerability.

In February 2019, an undergraduate anthropology student came to see me at the University of Kent. He was full of enthusiasm and aspiration to do an ethnography of conflict in the war zones of the Middle East. He presented me his transcript and references, all of which were excellent, showed me his research papers and the books on classical

anthropological approaches to conflict that he had read, along with his first aid certificates. With courteous and professional approach, he asked if I would be his supervisor. I listened to him in silence, trying to hide my facial expressions, afraid that they would reflect the flashbacks I was having to my PhD supervision days with Yael Navaro in Cambridge, the tragic story of Gulio and Fahmy's reminders about academic resistance to state censorship. I was excited but also puzzled by his enthusiastic determination. Was he aware of what he was intending to engage with? I started to ask him questions about the ethics of survival. "You would help people on the front lines, but who would help *you* there?" I asked. "My mum is telling me the same thing," he said. "And you have done it," he reminded me. "Yes, but… when I was conducting field work there was no intense military conflict. And I have spent many years making connections, finding subtle ways to do the work." I gave a long speech about the themes that might help him to think through the potential violence. The word 'subtle' echoed between us. I knew that I would support the efforts of this young enthusiastic anthropologist. I knew that I should not say no to a bright student who was willing to pay his own fees to join our programme. I knew that he had no idea of the responsibility of engaging with violence and the precarities that it would engender. It was an endless struggle not only with the nation states, funding institutions, universities and interlocutors but with one's own self.

He also did not know that just before our meeting, I was in the midst of yet another existential and intellectual struggle over a text that I was co-authoring with two friends. We were exploring the symbolic and political meanings of colours in creating public spaces in the cities of the Kurdish region post-2016. We were writing about poisonous knowledge buried in colourful spaces. Just as we finished revising the text, my friends decided to not publish it. They were already under investigation and had a trial date pending for signing the petition. I

reminded them that the text did not include any explicit analysis or politically provocative statements. My friends reminded me that prosecutors do not need tangible evidence to file charges. They told me that the colours could be provocative enough to serve as grounds for targeting them. I was not living under the pressure of internal and external surveillance in the Kurdish region that led my friends to self-censor. Would self-censorship protect us from our political vulnerabilities? I felt speechless.

I boarded the London train, keen to leave behind the feeling of confinement that haunted me during the conversation with the young anthropology student and my friends. As I was idly looking at my phone, I saw WhatsApp messages from a friend in Mardin. I knew what it was and decided not to read it right away. My friend had been sending me short passages describing her life under curfew in 2016 for some time now. They would appear on my phone whenever she could bring herself to write. They were like long sentences from a diary. She would erase them as soon as she pressed the send button. She was afraid that she would forget what she had witnessed but was afraid to archive them on her device. She sent them to me because hoped to share them with her children one day. I didn't know what to do with them. This was poisonous knowledge that she wanted to remember so that she could grapple with her own affective and political state of precarity. This was knowledge that I wanted to archive for her so that I could carve out an invisible space of solidarity and grapple with the guilt and anxiety that fed into my everyday tensions and predicaments as a BAK signatory, academic and a researcher who bears the burden of accumulated memories of voices of the dead and the living. That day, my friend wrote "…Things are getting more difficult every single day. The forbidden days, hours are still here. It has never been so disturbing to get used to something. Voices, explosions, ambulances, military vehicles. We

are getting used to… We are starting to see and hear less of these things even as they increased in number and size..."

I have learned that the precarious solidarities that we sought to craft were fragile, but they were embedded in those small or large private or public acts. I learned from Füsun Üstel's decision not to defer the verdict that precarities, especially those that need protection from the state, become the most resilient forms of solidarity. These are forms of solidarity that resist the banalisation of evil and the normalisation of violence, ensuring that we are not forced to feel and act like an "Imprisoned Citizen" (*Mahkum Vatandaş*).

In her recent public lecture[5], "In Pursuit of the Imprisoned Citizen (*Mahkûm Vatandaşın Peşinde*)", Üstel introduced this term to sketch out a new category of citizen whom the Turkish state considers to be an unrepentant recidivist who must be imprisoned. With reference to her own experience, Üstel revealed that the emphasis on unrepentant traits of the defendant was placed in the documents of the court order as one of the reasons to justify the ruling of the imprisonment of the signatories who refused to defer the verdict. In that liminal space of waiting for her own imprisonment, Üstel, as a citizen and Academic for Peace, was suggesting that we resist being stigmatised and confined to this status. In her view, the verdict was not executed yet, so we must allow ourselves to entertain this thought and strive to re-capture and re-signify the persona and role of the *Mahkûm Vatandaş*. "…We will create the Imprisoned Citizen together. This imprisoned citizen is not depressed or withdrawn from societal concerns. She is not someone who bows to the order of the state. We will build this citizen by expanding the scope of our knowledge and sharing our experiences…" *(my translation).*

Epilogue

Füsun Üstel was imprisoned in Eskişehir on May 8, 2019 and released on July 22 with the suspension of the execution of the sentence. A week later, having examined 10 individual application of Academics for Peace, including Ustel's, the general assembly of the constitutional court ruled that the penalisation of Academic for Peace on charge of terror propaganda led to the violation of their freedom of expression. The verdict of the constitutional court have changed the ruling for the on-going cases. Together with Füsun Üstel, between September 2019 and November 2019, 486 academics for peace were acquitted while 336 academics have still been awaiting for the court ruling. While the imprisoned citizens were acquitted with the ruling of the constitutional court, their material and immaterial loss that emerged from the last three years have neither been official acknowledged nor repaired. As I try to bring this text into a final closure, the conversation continues among the Academics for Peace with an ambivalent hope to seek justice against the violation of their citizenship rights.

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[2] The peace petition is available in English, French, German, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, and Greek at https://afp.hypotheses.org/documentation/the-peace-declaration.

3 For up-to-date statistics on the number of dismissed academics and number of signatories on trials and their results, see (HRFT 2019; 17-21). The same report provides a comprehensive history of the Academics for Peace. For up-to-date reports on the trials andappealshttps://bianet.org/archives/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=hearing+academics&sec=english.

4 It is important to note that UCU (University College Union) and Birkbeck School Law took a different position and expressed their solidarity with the signatories in an explicit way. As an expression of solidarity, UCU published online petition on 15 March 2019, see

https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/10014/Turkey-UCU-protest-at-jail-sentence-for-peace-petition-signatory?list=6216 (Accessed 15 April 2019) and on 17 July 2019, published an online solidarity letter in support of the jailed academics in Turkey, see https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/10150/Turkey-academics-for-peace?list=6216 (Accessed 19 July 2019). Recently, Birkbeck School of Law also published an online statement to express their concern about the situation of the signatories of the Academics for Peace petition in Turkey, see http://www.bbk.ac.uk/law/news/statement-on-the-judicial-harassment-of-academics-in-turkey-1 (Accessed 19 July 2019).

[5] Füsun Üstel delivered this public lecture on 19 April 2019 at the Istanbul Branch of Association of Doctors. The title of her lecture refers to her book, *Makbul Vatandaş'ın Peşinde* (In Pursuit of the Desirable Citizen, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004) where she has provided a comprehensive and critical analysis of the official discourses and practices in the construction of Turkish citizenship. For the full video of Füsun Üstel' s lecture, see https://www.pscp.tv/w/1gqGvVLXrdlGB?fbclid=IwAR0Dwxtz2T7MsaOttt6_e9lvKMtKaUhYPrss4JMMQnIMuS25GH0FToJsvWs (Accessed 20 April 2019). For the news about the lecture, see https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2019/04/19/prof-fusun-ustelden-son-ders-mahkum-vatandasin-pesinde/; https://bianet.org/bianet/ifade-ozgurlugu/207682-prof-dr-fusun-ustel-den-son-ders-mahkum-vatandasin-pesinde (Accessed 20 April 2019)