

Emergent Repertoires of Resistance and Commoning in Higher Education: The Solidarity Academies Movement in Turkey

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Emergent Repertoires of Resistance and Commoning in Higher Education: The Solidarity Academies Movement in Turkey

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Abstract

The article addresses the current restructuring of academia in Turkey through the example of the Academics for Peace petition and the institutional mechanisms of repression it instigated. We focus on the Solidarity Academies as alternative spaces of education and a unique form of collective resistance against the academic purges. We provide an empirically informed analysis of Solidarity Academies as spaces of commoning, i.e., the collective production and sharing of knowledge by emergent communities of struggle.

Keywords Academics for Peace Turkey, academic freedom, educational commons, knowledge commons

In recent years, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) regime in Turkey has undertaken “substantial modif[ications to] the legal and administrative structures of the State” (OHCHR 2018: 9) in an effort to consolidate its power over key institutions such as education, the judiciary, the military, and the media. This political struggle has been accompanied by the en masse purge of dissenting voices, a drastic the erosion of the rule of law, and the suspension of basic democratic rights (Akdeniz and Altıparmak 2018; Baser, Akgönül, and Öztürk 2017; Odman 2018). The impact is increasingly being felt in the university system as well, with academic freedoms being curtailed, academics dismissed, and universities closed down or restructured, or new ones founded in a top-down manner.

In this article, we document some of the key measures aimed at realigning the higher education sector with the current regime and put these in a broader historical context. Our focus, however, lies in the

unique repertoires of resistance developed by academics in Turkey in light of these repressions. We specifically analyze the movement around Solidarity Academies, which has emerged as a bulwark of academic freedom and a mobilizing force for constructing alternative academic spaces dedicated to the collective production and sharing of knowledge, or knowledge commoning. After providing a brief historical overview of infringements on academic freedoms in Turkey,¹ we will introduce the Academics for Peace initiative as the example of a collective intervention of the academic community for human rights. In particular, we will explore the Solidarity Academies, which were founded by members from Academics for Peace under exceptionally adverse political circumstances, as concrete experiments to reterritorialize academia as a space of critical thinking and knowledge commoning. We provide an empirically informed analysis of the collective practices, resources and subjectivities characterizing this endeavor and conclude with a brief discussion of some of the challenges that lie ahead.

The limits of academic freedom in Turkey

Academic freedom has always been subject to contestation and curtailment in Turkey, even if the current repressions signal a uniquely authoritarian turn in the governance of universities. Following Aytaç and Yılmaz (2008), we distinguish three distinct factors that pose a threat to academic freedom: state intervention, the commodification of higher education, and the political and social fault lines of the hegemonic order inscribed in academic life.²

First, state intervention aimed at restricting academic freedom is not new. As Vatansever (2018: 4) argues, “the authoritarian state tradition in Turkey and the organic ties of the universities to the state since their foundation have always impeded critical thought to a certain degree”. Periods characterized by ruptures in the political regime, however, have been particularly prone to state interference in the higher education system. In the early years of the Republic, the Ottoman *Darülfünun* was relaunched according to the modernist nation-building project, its name changed to İstanbul University, and more than half of its staff replaced by scholars fleeing the Nazi regime in 1933 (Vatansever 2018). After World War II, universities benefitted from the liberal political turn, which occurred as the one-party rule gave way to a pluralist parliamentary system. Under the University Law of 1946, institutions of higher education were granted administrative autonomy (Özen 1999). In practice, however, Turkish universities failed to protect the academic community against politically motivated dismissals.³ In an

infamous controversy from 1948, the appointment of three prominent leftist professors⁴ at Ankara University was revoked on the grounds that their work was inappropriate for students (Çelik 1998). The military coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980 were all accompanied by extensive purges of academics (Özen 1999: 279–81). In terms of its vision of higher education, however, the first military regime differed insofar as academic freedom and the autonomy of universities became enshrined in the 1961 Constitution. From the 1960s onward, rapid industrialization and urbanization, coupled with increasing socioeconomic conflicts, turned campuses into spaces for the mass political mobilization of the Left, but also among nationalist and Islamic factions. After the right-wing coup of 1971, the hold of state authorities on university campuses increased in the name of law and order. Academic autonomy and liberties were curtailed. With the 1980 coup, academic institutions were placed under the complete control of a new powerful central authority, the Higher Education Council (YÖK), and higher education came to be regarded as a matter of national security (Dönmez Atbaşı 2011). Article 130 of the 1982 Constitution states that “universities, members of the teaching staff and their assistants may freely engage in all kinds of scientific research and publication. However, this shall not include the liberty to engage in activities against the existence and independence of the State, and against the integrity and indivisibility of the nation and the country.”⁵

Still, the government’s current “sweeping and targeted measures against Turkey’s higher education sector” (Scholars at Risk 2017: 12) have surpassed all previous measures. Following the coup attempt and the declaration of the state of emergency in July 2016, members of the academic community have been subject to detention, arrest, and wrongful prosecutions for alleged links to terrorist organizations. The last remnants of academic self-governance have been dismantled with university rectors now being directly appointed by the country’s president. Fifteen private foundation universities have been closed down by decree laws for alleged links to the coup. As of late 2017, more than 5,800 academics of all ranks and from 118 universities had been dismissed without due process (Akdeniz and Altıparmak 2018: 39). In a clear violation of basic civil liberties such as the freedom of movement and the right to work, the dismissals have come with a lifelong ban from civil service, a prohibition from leaving the country, restrictions in social citizenship rights, and no effective judicial appeal mechanism against the expulsions. In violation of the principle of individual legal responsibility, punitive measures have been extended to include the families of the dismissed (OHCHR 2018; Amnesty International 2017).

Second, there has been a politically driven expansion of higher education, including the introduction of

private nonprofit universities, from the 1990s onward. This development can be linked to the need to respond to the rising demand for higher education, to deliver on the promise of economic development in peripheral areas with knowledge-based economies acting as a pull factor (Aytaç and Yılmaz 2008), and to reconfigure the sphere of education to match the regime's sociocultural vision for Turkey.⁶ As a result, the number of universities increased from 33 in 1991 (with just one private university) to 181 in 2018, including 69 private universities.⁷ Most recently, legislation was passed, without prior consultation with the academic community and despite significant protests, to add another twenty universities to this list, thirteen of which will consist of faculties to be split off from existent public universities and consolidated into new entities (Resmi Gazete 2018).

These policies have come at the expense of the quality and freedom of academic work. The perception of higher education as a lucrative investment for the private sector with students being regarded as clients purchasing marketable educational services, the imposition of heavy teaching loads and administrative chores on academics, the fostering of competition among colleagues, the lack of job security, and the inadequacy of the infrastructure on many campuses (especially in the peripheries of large cities and in provincial towns) all contribute to the malaise of the university system (Vatansever and Gezici Yalçın 2015; Gülbudak 2018). Commenting on the current crisis of academia, Vatansever (2018:5) has argued that “the nature of academic labor itself, the structural violence of the neo-liberal labor market and the submissiveness of the university to the state converge to create a toxic academic environment in Turkey”.

However, it would be a mistake to reduce the problem of academic freedom to state and market interference. Campuses have always been spaces where the entanglement of institutional power dynamics and societal conflicts has led to repression (Aytaç and Yılmaz 2008). This is the third cause of the restriction of academic freedom. Approximately seventy thousand students were imprisoned as of 2016, unable to continue their studies.⁸ University administrations have repeatedly violated Kurdish students' right to education and freedom of expression⁹ and have opened investigations against researchers working on topics related to Kurdish citizenship rights (GIT Turkey 2013). Most prominently, sociologist İsmail Beşikçi, whose research focuses on state violence and institutional racism against the Kurds, was denounced by his colleagues and spent seventeen years in prison (Ünlü and Değer 2011; Ünlü 2012). In that sense, the reactions to the intervention by Academics for Peace, documented below, merely constitute the most recent episode in a long history of the complicity of

academics in the persecution of members of their community.

Academics for Peace: A Petition and Academia Unraveling

The Academics for Peace (AfP) network was initiated in 2012 to contribute to the ongoing Turkish-Kurdish peace negotiations from a scholarly perspective - through research, publications, critical monitoring, and civil society dialogues (Academics for Peace 2018a). By 2015, however, the fragile process of peace negotiations had unraveled and armed conflicts resumed in urban areas. Prolonged military operations and curfews imposed by the Turkish state in the ensuing months not only suspended everyday life in the Kurdish regions, but resulted in the internal displacement of several hundred thousand people and “numerous cases of excessive use of force; killings; enforced disappearances; torture; destruction of housing and cultural heritage; incitement to hatred; prevention of access to emergency medical care, food, water and livelihoods; violence against women; and severe curtailment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression as well as political participation” (OHCHR 2017: 2).

In January 2016, AfP sought to draw attention to the plight of the Kurdish population through the petition titled “We will not be party to this crime!”¹⁰ The now infamous text, which was signed by 1,128 academics from 89 universities, called on the Turkish government to abide by the laws, end the state violence against its Kurdish citizens, and resume peace negotiations.¹¹ The petition infuriated the authorities and signatories were targeted by pro-government media, nationalist academics, and right-wing groups. In response, the number of signatories rose to 2,212 and many civil society organizations issued statements of support. According to Ünlü (2016), the nationalist outrage stemmed from the fact that the petitioners openly breached the social contract of unconditional allegiance to the state and the Turkish nation. At the prompting of President Erdoğan, university administrations launched disciplinary investigations and the judiciary initiated criminal investigations on charges of “terrorist propaganda”. Repressive measures against AfP included detentions, dismissals, and various forms of intimidation and discrimination on campus (Scholars at Risk 2017: 12–19). The persecution reached a new systemic quality after the state of emergency was declared in July 2016, as decree laws turned out to be convenient (il)legal instruments for the en masse expulsion of hundreds of AfP from universities (HRFT 2018).¹² Several academics have been sentenced to fifteen months of deferred imprisonment (Akdeniz and Altıparmak 2018: 42–47). In response to these repressions, AfP members have succeeded in building an extraordinary network of mutual support. However, the most innovative response has

come in the form of Solidarity Academies founded by dismissed AfP.

Solidarity Academies as Spaces of Commoning

Solidarity Academies (SoliAcads) are experiments in the reterritorialization of academia, which for us means more than a simple spatial relocation of dismissed AfP. More significantly, reterritorialization also signifies the desire to transform academic space through emancipatory collective practices, imaginaries, and institutional structures; in other words, to put in place concrete alternatives that go beyond a reform to the current university system. As of 2018, there exist twelve academies in ten cities across Turkey (in Eskişehir, Kocaeli, Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Antalya, Mersin, Dersim, Urfa, and Mardin) alongside two initiatives started by exiled AfP, namely OFF-University and the Solidarity Academy in Germany (Solidarity Academies 2018; OFF-University 2018).

Our study is based on participant observation and interviews conducted with three SoliAcads, namely, Ankara Solidarity Academy (ADA), Kocaeli Solidarity Academy (KODA), and the Street Academy Ankara, in March-April 2017. While we identify some general contours of the SoliAcad movement, readers should note that each Academy is conceptually unique and embedded in its own distinct local context. We are particularly interested in exploring the myriad forms and practices of collective labor that make the SoliAcads possible, the organizational structure that frames their activities, and the emergent academic communities of struggle affiliated with these autonomous spaces. We draw on “commons as both an analytical concept and political ideal” (Means, Ford, and Slater 2017: 2) to gain a better understanding of the collective production and sharing of knowledge through SoliAcads. Cognizant of the different traditions of theorizing commons, we propose the concept of *commoning*, or doing in common (Linebaugh 2008; De Angelis 2017), as a theoretical entry point to our analysis. The verb form *commoning*, first of all, serves to highlight social labor and cooperation as constituent factors of what is generated in common (Hardt 2010; Amin and Howell 2016). As the Edu-factory manifesto succinctly puts it, “knowledge is a common good ... because it is produced and reproduced by living labor and social cooperation” (Edu-Factory Collective 2007). Second, commoning draws attention to the process - the ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions associated with learning-by-doing how knowledge can be produced and shared within a collectivity. Third, commoning opens up a space for a postcapitalist politics (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2016), including different imaginaries of what the “university of the common” might look like in juxtaposition to the familiar models of public

and private education (Edu-Factory Collective 2009). As such, doing in common accentuates the “threshold” character of commons. As Stavrides (2010:40) argues, “recognizing, opening, creating and inhabiting thresholds can become an important characteristic of emergent emancipatory spatialities,” which in our context implies an openness toward rethinking and renegotiating the possible trajectories, constituencies, modalities, and ethical coordinates of knowledge commoning.

Practices of Commoning

The distinct practices of commoning at SoliAcads identified by our research can be summarized under six subheadings:¹³

1. *Organizing academic life*: A tremendous amount of (largely unpaid) work goes into organizing the panels, workshops, seminars, courses, and summer schools.¹⁴ Planning and implementing these academic activities requires the coordination of topics and schedules among lecturers, finding suitable venues, and negotiating the terms of use; arranging technical equipment, designing posters announcing the activities, managing social media accounts, taking care of custodial tasks, and so on. The events are live-streamed so as to amplify the impact and visibility of SoliAcads, with the audiovisual archive serving to document the emergence of this unique movement of knowledge commoning.

The academies have succeeded in getting organized in an amazingly short period of time. However, as our interviewee from ADA admitted, “Everything is proceeding so fast, we try not to get lost at this rapid pace.” The lack of time for critical reflection means that problems such as the unequal division of labor based on gender and academic seniority in organizing the academic events, while recognized, cannot be fully tackled. The financial sustainability of activities organized free of charge and for the most part open to the general public is another challenge. While KODA has managed to secure some project funding, most academies are run with virtually no money, which means that lecturers have to rely on financial support from their trade union or alternative sources of income.

2. *Participatory learning*: In contrast to university campuses, which often resemble gated communities, SoliAcads seek to nurture inclusive learning environments that help dismantle the physical and social barriers separating academia from the urban social fabric. Hence, the collective immaterial labor that goes into developing nonhierarchical, socially transformative

formats of education:

The excitement, the motivation of building something from scratch, and the liberating energy that comes with being able to do everything that was problematized about the university in a better, different way ... Hence, despite the exhaustion and the complaints, our conversations revolve around [the question of] “how can we do this together?” (KODA interview)

[Participants] should consider themselves to be part of a process, [feeling] “I came to a SoliAcad, this is a collective process” rather than a classical classroom environment. (ADA interview)

As much as SoliAcads try to learn from and connect to initiatives for alternative pedagogy in Turkey and elsewhere, it involves a lot of experiential learning.¹⁵ One of the challenges encountered is the facilitation of the collective learning experience through the active participation of a heterogeneous group of participants. This requires finding a common vocabulary that is theoretically informed, yet accessible to all. Echoing Roggero’s (2010: 368) remark that “the common is always organized in translation,” SoliAcads engage in a conscious effort to “convey our concerns in a language that is accessible, more balanced, more down-to-earth, a language that is cognizant of social change and struggles” (KODA interview).

3. *Academic guidance*: In SoliAcads’ shadow thesis advisory committees, postgraduate students can continue working with their former thesis advisors who have been barred from serving on university committees after their dismissal. Students are also encouraged to gain teaching experience under the mentoring of senior scholars.
4. *Affective labor*: The resilience of the emergent SoliAcad communities critically hinges upon the ability to transform the concrete experiences of working together into a shared sense of trust, belonging, and commitment, a way of “being-in-common” (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2016: 196):

Keeping the spirit of solidarity alive requires educational, political, social praxis at every stage of this endeavor. It requires collective thinking and acting. A minimal level of trust and affection is really a constitutive factor. Without these, there cannot be a true relation of solidarity. (ADA interview)

While some scholars knew each other through academic or activist networks, the vast majority of the signatories of the AfP petition were not acquainted personally; they only met in the

process of developing collective practices of resistance. Hence, a substantial amount of time and effort is dedicated to what one KODA member called “giving labor to each other” (“birbirine emek vermek”), or nurturing peer relationships based on mutual respect, care, and solidarity born out of “a tremendous sense of responsibility for each other.”

5. *Cooperation*: SoliAcads meet at regular intervals to share and collectively reflect on their experiences of educational commoning and to encourage commoning across SoliAcads through collaborative projects. While the umbrella association *BIRARADA* (“together”) has recently been founded for the purposes of coordination, the network values the singularity, autonomy and local embeddedness of each Academy as the basis for the resilience and rhizomatic quality of the movement.
6. *Advocacy and activism*: SoliAcads have developed a multiplicity of collaborative formats with trade unions, human rights organizations, and professional organizations,¹⁶ which share their professional skills, donate resources, or open their doors to SoliAcads. These activities increase the viability and visibility of the academies and raise the public awareness around repressions in the higher education system. They also constitute a form of knowledge commoning that speaks to SoliAcads’ ideal of engaged scholarship. Furthermore, the public presence of academics affiliated with SoliAcads lends critical support to ongoing political struggles for democracy in Turkey. As a KODA member put it, “compared to the social and political struggles ... across the country ... ours is quite small and insignificant, but by standing together shoulder to shoulder our voice becomes stronger.”

Collective Organization for Commoning

Roggero (2010: 367) has remarked that “the common ... is collective decision and organization immanent to the cooperation of living labor, the richness of collective production”. Looking at the structure that frames commoning at SoliAcads, we observe that, as of mid-2018, the academies operate under a range of legal and economic formats. After prolonged bureaucratic battles, KODA managed to become incorporated as a nonprofit association to engage in research and consulting towards a societal vision of “autonomous, scientific, secular, egalitarian, and emancipatory universities.”¹⁷ ADA has been incorporated as a cooperative. In Germany, SoliAcad is part of the association founded by AfP Germany and OFF University is registered as a nonprofit organization. In Mersin, “Kültürhane” was founded by AfP as an enterprise serving as a library, cafe, seminar room, and project space (Bayraktar

2018).

Irrespective of their legal status, what sets SoliAcads apart from mainstream academia is their effort to develop democratic, nonhierarchical forms of self-management. At KODA and the Street Academy, core groups of scholar-activists have emerged who meet at regular intervals to collectively decide on all matters of common concern (Bakirezer and Koçak 2017: 27–28). ADA, which has a comparatively larger constituency, has set up working groups for program coordination, media and communications, the digital university project, and for establishing an educational cooperative. These working groups report to the general assembly, which is the main decision-making body. Everyone is invited to participate in the deliberative process and “to have a say to the extent to which they contribute to the collective labor process” (ADA interview). Decisions are ideally taken after a substantive process of deliberation and consensus building rather than simply voting on proposals. Figuring out egalitarian modes of decision-making irrespective of academic rank involves a collective learning process: “In contrast to the hierarchical order at the university, this is a process in which people learn to tolerate different points of view, to try to listen and understand, to develop ourselves... There are habits, deeply sedimented issues around gender, class, ethnicity. But mindful of the importance of what is being built, there is a sincere effort to overcome resentments, to discuss again and again” (KODA interview).

Communities of commoning

As Gudeman (2001, 27) has notably put it, “without a commons, there is no community; without a community, there is no commons”. The elective political affinity of AfP, referred to as “imza kardeşliği” (brotherhood/sisterhood of signatories) in the network, has been crucial as a basis for organizing through SoliAcads. The bonds of collective resistance, solidarity, and mutual care forged in the face of political adversity cannot be overestimated. For example, the shared traumatic experience of the nineteen signatories from Kocaeli University being taken into police custody, having their homes and offices raided, being subjected to administrative and criminal investigations, and finally expelled collectively with a statutory decree in September 2016 had a pivotal impact on organizing KODA (Bakirezer and Koçak 2017). Similarly, the mass expulsions at Ankara University in February 2017 led to a rapid mobilization to welcome dismissed academics at ADA. As our interviewees underlined, in the absence of the mass expulsions the momentum for the SoliAcad movement would probably not have emerged.

However, the rationale of SoliAcads cannot be reduced to the collective injuries suffered by AfP. Relating to each other as “sharers, carers, developers, creators and re-creators” of collective knowledge, to forge and sustain a community “presupposes a particular culture, a set of interrelated meanings and values that are shared, understandable, performable or evocative—in short, some common ground” (De Angelis 2017: 126). Rejecting a discourse of victimization, SoliAcads consider their work as part of the acute struggle for democracy in Turkey. Commoning thus implies building new academic communities of struggle with strong organic ties to local civil society initiatives. The shared values and aims of SoliAcads that we identified in our research can be summarized as follows:

- *Resistance*: The attempt to reterritorialize academia by forming alternative networks of knowledge production constitutes a highly political act of collective defiance against the state's violent attempts to hinder AfP from pursuing their academic work. The slogan of KODA, “We will not leave our students and the city!”, is a succinct articulation of how SoliAcads stake a critical claim to contribute to the field of education.
- *Critical research*: A striking characteristic of SoliAcads is the strong commitment to critical research for the common good, focused especially on “peace, nonviolence and justice” and the desire to make this knowledge widely accessible and open to public debate (Solidarity Academies 2018). As the range of topics covered by SoliAcads illustrates, they take on a double role as a collective of public intellectuals and a popular education movement in an increasingly polarized country.
- *Democracy and social inclusion*: In the face of increasing political and religious interference, commodification, hierarchization and nepotism in the Turkish higher education, SoliAcads embody the desire to build universities based on the principles of “equality, freedom, and solidarity,” the right to education, democratic structures of governance, and an inclusive learning environment that encourages cooperation rather than competition (Solidarity Academies 2018).
- *Solidarity*: SoliAcads serve as spatial-institutional anchors to build resilient networks of solidarity in the face of the enormous political and economic pressures encountered. The myriad ways in which participants contribute to and take responsibility for SoliAcads define these academic communities of struggle, giving them the staying power to realize their visions and to persevere as individuals and as a collectivity in the face of adversity.

These values, together with the everyday practices of doing in common discussed earlier, form the basis of an ongoing process of community building at the SoliAcads, that is, “the becoming of a commoning-community” (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2016: 207). Exemplifying how social transformation is “immanent to the production of subjectivity and the common” (Roggero 2010: 368), one interviewee recalled the professional disorientation he had experienced after the dismissal and shared with us the sense of pride and achievement he felt when signing a student reference letter with his new title: Member of KODA. Given the violent attempts of the regime to destroy their careers and delegitimize their professional identities, the institutional affiliation accorded by SoliAcads signifies an act of collective resistance embedded in the broader struggle for democracy and peace in Turkey.

Our interviewee from ADA, however, cautions against the illusion of a smooth process of community building: “Currently, we fail to act as a true collective. ... We have a problem of trust, there is a tendency to say ‘what will be the outcome of this?’ But that’s not how we see it. When you are going forward, you do not debate what will or will not come out of it. ... You go forward, you act, speak up, and try to collect as much [experience] as possible.” Indeed, building a movement that is truly diverse and egalitarian also requires a process of unlearning, or dis-identification from the traditional academic habitus and a critical reflection of one's own internalization of and investedness in academic hierarchies. More broadly, it requires the development of institutional mechanisms to guard against the reproduction of inequalities based on academic status, gender, ethnicity, and social class within the SoliAcads. The diversity of participants at SoliAcad activities, including not just students but also political activists, trade unionists, and representatives from civil society organizations testifies to the ability of SoliAcad to reach out to constituencies beyond the traditional confines of academia. One of the challenges is how to transform this support into an active engagement toward building resilient alliances of commoning.

Excursus: Activist Commoning

The Street Academy can be regarded as an example of “activist commoning” in the sense of a “grassroots movement that makes horizontality and direct action two key principles of their political

praxis” (De Angelis 2017: 231). The outdoor lectures of the Street Academy involve a threefold commoning process, of space, knowledge, and food. First, building on the legacy of the forums held during the Gezi uprising, public spaces across the city of Ankara are temporarily appropriated as spaces of commoning for people to come together in an informal way. This articulates a willingness on the part of participants to reclaim public spaces despite the restrictions imposed by the emergency rule and anxieties around security.

The second dimension is the commoning of knowledge through open lectures. The choice of topics and locations is motivated by the desire to develop a popular education format that revitalizes the public sphere, increases critical awareness about the situation of expelled AfP, and helps strengthen networks of civic solidarity in the struggle for democracy. With a nod toward Antonio Gramsci, the first lecture was titled “Hegemony and Counter-hegemony.”¹⁸ The emblematic blackboard always accompanies the activities of the Street Academy.¹⁹ The length of the lectures (10-15 minutes) seeks to accommodate environmental factors such as weather conditions and distractions through street noise or passersby. The desire to generate enact commoning in an everyday nonacademic setting is further underlined by spatial practices that express horizontality (e.g., the ground being level) and performative speech acts that address participants as peers engaging in a collective learning process. After the lectures, participants are invited to continue their discussions while enjoying the nutritious meals prepared by the food-saving initiative “Çerçöp Çorbacılar,” which makes up the third dimension of commoning at the Street Academy.

Conclusion: Potentiality and Challenges

The SoliAcads came into existence in a crisis situation characterized by the urgent need to mobilize in the face of state violence against AfP. Resistance against repression was coupled with a commitment to the academic profession and a strong desire to build alternative spaces based on the principles of critical pedagogy, academic freedom, collective knowledge production, and democratic structures of governance. As Bakirezer, Demirer, and Yeşilyurt (2018) point out, the critical question now is whether the SoliAcad movement will be able to sustain the educational commons generated since 2016, whether this “relationship ... between constituent processes and concrete political forms, between event and organizational sedimentation, and between breaking of capitalist capture and common production will evolve into resilient local networks” (Roggero 2010: 369). Clearly, the criminalization of AfP and

the suspension of basic civil rights, such as the freedom of expression or the freedom of assembly and association under the current regime, constitute major challenges for SoliAcads. In the ongoing trials of AfP, the prosecutor has charged SoliAcad with inciting student rebellion (“Barış İçin Akademisyenler İddianamesi” 2017). In their everyday activities, SoliAcads are faced with acts of intimidation and harassment by state authorities in the form of police surveillance of people attending the activities or pressuring organizations and firms not to do business with SoliAcads. Onur Hamzaoğlu, a member of KODA and leading expert in public health, was detained for more than five months on charges related to a press statement demanding peace (Front Line Defenders 2018).

However, our analysis revealed two points that are of critical advantage to SoliAcads. First of all, there is a high level of discontent with the poor quality and political instrumentalization of the education system in Turkey. Second, SoliAcads enjoy an enormous amount of support from civil society. As a movement committed to democratic values and critical thinking, SoliAcads are well placed to offer credible educational alternatives that are likely to resonate with sizable sections of society. The main challenge will be to develop structures to enhance the economic resilience of SoliAcads, allowing the scholar-activists to secure their livelihoods through the income generated. The ability to develop formal institutional structures appears critical in this regard.

Writing this article in mid-2018, the question of what will happen once the political conjuncture changes remains. So far, the existence of SoliAcad has been closely linked to the continuing political crisis. Only time will tell whether the dismissed AfP will carry on their work at SoliAcads, whether they will return to their previous jobs one day, and to what extent they will then have the power to change mainstream academia. Irrespective of the answers to these questions, it is fair to say that the praxis of SoliAcads demonstrates that “the proper expression of academic autonomy in the 21st century is the preservation, defense and expansion of knowledge commons” (Caffentzis 2008).

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Notes

- ¹ For the international debate, see, Watkins 2009.
- ² For a broader overview of discriminatory practices at universities, see the report by the trade union Eğitim-Sen (2014).
- ³ See Boratav 2017 for a personal account of the repression of academic freedom in Turkey.
- ⁴ These were Behice Boran, Niyazi Berkes, and Pertev Naili Boratav.
- ⁵ For the full text of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey at the official website of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, see global.tbmm.gov.tr/constitution_en.pdf
- ⁶ In a speech delivered in December 2015, President Erdoğan admitted that during the AKP's thirteen years in government, education and culture had been areas in which they had not been able to further their "dava" (cause) as intended. He called on officials to urgently take action to change the contents of education so that new generations would be raised in accordance with their vision of civilisation (*medeniyet tasavvurumuz*). See "President Erdoğan" 2015.
- ⁷ This figure excludes private institutions of higher education that provide vocational qualifications. See Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi 2018.
- ⁸ For statistics on numbers of students in prison, see TCPS 2017.
- ⁹ In December 2017, Turkey was convicted by the European Court of Human Rights on this matter (Söylemez 2017).
- ¹⁰ For the English translation of the petition see Academics for Peace 2016.
- ¹¹ See Baser, Akgönül, and Öztürk 2017 for examples worldwide of public intellectuals campaigning to protest state-led violence.
- ¹² For the latest statistics on the repressions, see Academics for Peace 2018b.
For a detailed account of the experience of signatories from Kocaeli University, see Bakirezer and Koçak 2017. Personal narratives of fifteen Academics for Peace can be found in Lordoğlu 2018.
- ¹³ For a detailed documentation of KODA activities in the Academic Year 2016/17, see Bakirezer and Koçak 2017.
- ¹⁴ For a detailed account on KODA's activities, see Bakirezer, Demirer, and Yeşilyurt 2018; Bakirezer and Koçak 2017; and KODA 2018a.
ADA opted for a range of different academic formats such as seminars, panels, workshops, and team-teaching in regular courses so as to incorporate academics at different stages of their careers, from graduate students to senior professors.
- ¹⁵ Relevant past experiences of alternative pedagogy include Özgür Üniversite (Free University) founded in 1994, BİLAR, which was started after the 1980 military coup, leftist education workers' trade-unions (TÖB-DER, TÖS, Öğretim Elemanları Sendikası), the Mathematics Village in Turkey, the people's university of May 1968 in France, and Gramscian ideas on popular education.
- ¹⁶ Examples for collaborative learning formats include KODA workshops at the Chamber of Engineers and the seminars on antidiscrimination organized by ADA in partnership with the Human Rights Mutual Platform. See Article 4 of the bylaws KODA 2018b.
- ¹⁷ Further examples include the lectures held in support of Nuriye Gülmen and Semih Özakça, an academic and a teacher, during their hunger strike, which lasted close to a year. The lecture on the topic of resistance was held at the site of the hunger strike in front of the human rights monument in central Ankara. After their arrest, a lecture on prisons and science was held in front of the Sinan prison complex on the outskirts of the capital.
- ¹⁹ The inspiration for this idea came from the film "The Blackboards" by Iranian filmmaker Samira Makhmalbaf.