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<http://www.diken.com.tr/bogazicinden-ihrac-edilen-docent-levy-aksu-imza-vidani-gorevdi-hic-pisman-degelim/>

[This English version has been translated and edited by Noémi Lévy-Aksu]

What happened? Were you discharged from your university? Who took this decision?

On March 8, Boğaziçi University was notified of a decision of the Higher Education Council [YÖK] dated February 22: according to this decision, the YÖK revoked the work permits of Prof. Abbas Vali (who had just resigned from our Sociology Department) and myself. This decision was not taken by Boğaziçi University but it makes it impossible for me to work there.

Did the YÖK indicate any reason for this revocation of your work permit?

No, the YÖK's letter only mentions our names and the revocation of our work permits.

What was the reaction of the rectorate? How did the newly appointed rector behave? Did they get in touch with you?

I learnt this decision in London, on Wednesday morning [8 March], via an email of Boğaziçi vice-rector. On Thursday, I arrived in Istanbul. Many academics showed me their support but the rector did not contact me [Edit 1: In November 2016, Prof. Mehmed Özkan was appointed rector by the President of the Republic Erdoğan, instead of the rector who had been elected by the academics. He promised to defend the liberal tradition of the university and protect the academics; Edit 2: On March 13, the rector invited me to a meeting with two vice-rectors and himself.]

How long have you been leaving in Turkey?

I have been in Turkey for 13 years. This year, I am a visiting scholar at Birkbeck College Law School. I was granted a Newton International Fellowship to focus on a book project on the invention and implementation of the state of emergency in the late Ottoman Empire.

How did you decide to work on Ottoman history?

A bit by chance. When I was an undergraduate student in France, I took a class on the origins of the modern Arab world. I was most interested in the Ottoman part and I decided to specialize in this field.

As an historian, how do you analyze the current situation in Turkey?

At Boğaziçi, I teach a course on modern Turkish history. State violence and infringements on rights have been recurrent throughout this history. Therefore, it's important to refrain from idealizing the past when we discuss today's situation. Yet, I think that the erosion of the rule

of law, the extent of the purges, the restriction of freedom of speech and the social pressure which characterize the current situation do not have any equivalent in the past.

What has changed since you arrived in Turkey?

My first years in Turkey coincided with the “liberal” years of the AKP government. EU integration process and democratization were on the agenda. I lived in Taksim. The area was extremely lively, with many demonstrations and much entertainment. At that time, there was a space for opposition. In these last years, with the increasing state oppression and the terror attacks, this space has shrunk dramatically. Nevertheless, the Gezi protests, the June 7 [2015] election and the current “No” campaign [to the Constitutional referendum] show that, despite all, this space has not totally disappeared.

What do Turkey and Istanbul mean for you? Where do they stand in your life?

I was not born in Turkey, I am not Turkish. I was 23 when I came to Istanbul. I had planned to stay one year but, after a few months, I decided not to come back. The reason why I stayed was not work, love or nice place-nice weather. Here, I met and became friends with persons of unflagging conscience, belonging to different generations, different backgrounds, and standing against various kinds of oppression. I was deeply impressed not only by their power to resist, but also by their generous, determined and optimistic attitudes towards life. I feel that here I have found myself.

Are you willing to continue to live in Turkey?

Absolutely! Together with my work permit, the Higher Education Council also revoked my residence permit. In the eyes of the Higher Education Council and the state, I am a foreigner but I feel at home here and I will take the necessary steps to be able to stay in Turkey.

The academics are purged, the students’ right to education is violated. How will this process influence the future of Turkey in the next 10-20 years?

The situation is really alarming. Courses are left without instructors, graduate students lose their advisors and the principle of academic merit is reduced to nothing. This process will be hard to reverse.

Can the universities resist the pressure?

Fear and anxiety prevail among many academics and students. However, fortunately there are academics and students who continue to resist despite all. Besides, many academics expelled from their universities continue to share their academic work and express their critical opinions through recently founded alternative academies.

When you signed the petition, did you foresee such consequences?

The aim of the petition was to denounce the war, violations of right and state violence in the Kurdish regions. Signing was a moral duty for me, I did not take the possible consequences

into consideration. I didn't imagine that the petition would raise such reactions but I have absolutely no regrets.

You said you intended to stand against this decision. What will be the next stages?

I am about to file a lawsuit before the administrative court against the decision of the YÖK. I will also ask the University rectorate to file an administrative lawsuit in the name of the university against the decision of the YÖK [Edit: This request was addressed to the university rectorate on March 13]

Besides the legal process, through academic and non academic activities, I will continue to stand against unfair dismissals targeting critical voices at Boğaziçi and elsewhere. This is a collective struggle, which gathers hundreds of academics targeted by the purges.

Beyond this, the war and violations of rights which the peace petition denounced one year ago go on. [Edit: See the recent UN report on South-East Turkey: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/TR/OHCHR_South-East_TurkeyReport_10March2017.pdf]. In my opinion, monitoring this process, defending the rule of law and standing against arbitrary violence under the current state of emergency is a moral duty, beyond political divisions.

What will you do if you lose? If you cannot return to the university?

I have no doubt that I will win this fight, together will all my colleagues who were unfairly discharged. I will be back to Boğaziçi and to my students.