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Making distance from our displacement: A cross-section of the academic life of displaced scholars from Turkey working on displacement in Germany

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Abstract

The article interrogates the different ways in which exiled researchers, who have migrated from the field of uncertainty created by the authoritarian regime to the field of precariousness created by extensive marketization, address the issue of displacement in these two different fields of uncertainty. The first part of the article will elucidate how displacement turns into a transformative experience of loss, which is the starting point and direction of movement. In the second part, the tensions in the processes of exiled researchers seeking scholarship and writing in order to continue their careers through problematising the displacement that they themselves now experience. Following section aims thematising by an insider's look at their efforts to overcome marginalising or exclusionary attitudes that emerge through internalized patterns about the experience of being exiled and displacement, and to resettle. In short, how exiled academics' own experiences are reflected in their academic production and professions on the axes of gender and precarity can be summarized as the problematic on which the article proceeds.

Keywords: loss; creative destruction; uncertainty; exiled scholar; displacement; gender

1 An uncanny introduction: 'De te fabula narratur'

The last university I worked at in Turkey was in one of the big cities on the Syrian border. When we started working with our Syrian colleagues, I tried to be on the solidarity side of the displacement. Today, I realize how inadequate those efforts were, and why they made them feel good despite the inadequacy. As the academy in Turkey operates with more permanent employment and long-term contracts, the way displaced academics participate in the Turkish academy also pointed to the risk of precarity that awaits *us* as residents. However, precarity is not only a part of work, however, also an inseparable part of the regimes of insecurity and oppression caused by political conditions. The wind that zapped me and other colleagues I interviewed in Germany is just one way of illustrating the political climate and forms of violence with which displaced people are familiar.

My experience of displacement did not start when I crammed the things from my house in Turkey into a small basement and arrived in Germany with three suitcases. When I

feel it from today's standpoint, it certainly had no beginning. It appears that this experience occurs in many moments, slowly penetrating into all concepts. In long waiting lines, in those crowded halls where I got the impression that I was waiting in *the corridors of Germany* when I was inside Germany, I wrote about everything I experienced and encountered, one by one, including all my feelings. What I see in these notes is a confrontation that I did not notice when I was in Turkey.

Realizing on the 7th of June that it lost the elections and the majority in the parliament, the authoritarian government put Turkey under extraordinary conditions. Between the General Elections on the 7th of June and its repetition on the 1st of November 2015, Turkey was the scene of numerous horrific massacres. To put it mildly, it allowed massacres to take place on a very large scale (Pope & Göksel, 2016; Mandıracı, 2017). With a series of brutal 'security operations' in the Kurdish provinces, the government officially announced its withdrawal from the dialogue of peace building. In subsequent days, a declaration (in short, the Peace Petition) written and signed by academics who had openly objected to this process became a target for many in the academy. The declaration was in fact a criticism of the suspension of the peace process at the end of 2015. Indeed, these people, who in following process called themselves Peace Academics, did not turn a blind eye to the government's role in the massacre. Then, the authoritarian regime in Turkey abolished the independence of the judiciary and the legislature and turned these two independent powers into parts of its own executive power (Kaygusuz, 2018). Moreover, day after day, the government curtailed democratic rights and freedom while using the cudgel of unlawful prosecutions against the political opposition. At the end of this process, we witnessed a coup attempt on July 15, 2016, claimed to relate to a religious sect which had flourished in the police, military, and various branches of the state under the wings of its alliance with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), when their alliance was broken. Many dissidents or people who did not openly obey the government were deprived of their jobs and freedom (Akça et al., 2018). The academy and many other spaces including NGOs, newspapers and other cultural activities were affected by this period of uncertainty and oppression. Many pro-peace academics, artists, journalists, political figures and peace activists, especially the signatory academics, were dismissed from their jobs and left alone to face judicial troubles. Thus, some of *us* travelled abroad, some of *us* continued to stay in Turkey by renouncing academia. This article is about academics who experienced this process in Turkey with losses and continued their lives and work in Germany. Especially displaced academics whose life experiences intersect with their subject of study.

There are two interconnected key reasons for writing this article. The first is the desire to discuss the distance between the research field and the researcher as an exiled scholar in racialized and gendered academic system. My intention is to discuss the insider and outsider as the position of the researcher, in terms of exile and displacement, and to comprehend the influence of the researcher's experience on their own research. I would note that the definition and writing of research topics have a structural framework that transcends the researcher.

The bizarre and ordinary experiences we have remind me of the feeling of fragility and being out of place for the same reasons. The way that forced migration is discussed in the literature seems to suggest a world exactly unlike our own, despite the given that being exiled is an integral part of intellectual history. In today's world, where paper borders create greater barriers than geographical distances and borders, the experience of immigration not only defines our lives with inescapable labels, but also confines it to legal borders and statuses.

The precarity that determines our working life deepens with uncertainty. However, we can object to labelling that homogenizes and ignores the layered nature of the experience of uncertainty and precarity. As Ettlinger points out:

> Yet despite the implications for a frenzied existence wrought of the precarity produced through shifting fields of power, it would be a mistake to pursue the academic practice of mapping a singular subjectivity onto an objectified condition [...]. Recognizing multiple subjectivities signifies that any one actor may react differently to the same objectified condition at different times, and reactions to a particular objectified condition is likely to differ among actors. This approach avoids homogenizing marginalized populations, provides space for different types of voices among the marginalized, and explains variation among the marginalized regarding expressions of agency as well as effects of exclusion and subjection (Ettlinger, 2020, p. 405).

The second reason is more introspective, moreover, connected my personnel experience to Ettlinger's quote: to understand the reality I am exposed to while waiting and standing in limbo; to position myself in spaces of rethinking driven away from privileges wounded by loss; and to politicize it with shared and divergent experiences, away from the misleading rewriting of feelings. This confrontation will be very familiar to those who are exposed to precarious working conditions. Adding a layer of forcibly displaced people to the precariousness some are familiar with will be included in the article, in contrast to the experience of transnational migration. In other words, I combine the two losses. The first is the loss that became visible due to the repression under the authoritarian regime and caused the migration. I conceptualize this loss as cumulative. Secondly, there is the loss resulting from the tension inherent in the capability to remain in neoliberal academia and seek a fresh path.

Even though uncertainty and precarity are experienced differently across subjects, its most significant common characteristic is its unpredictable nature. In this way, uncertainty makes visible its nature, affecting every aspect of home, work, or everyday life. Hierarchies can therefore become destructive in the face of the unpredictability and spontaneity of exceptionality and behaviour. The fact that academia is an institutional structure based on hierarchy and acceptance makes it possible to see the destructive nature of that precarity. This feature of academia is instantly the cornerstone of an eliminationist system of success. According to Ettlinger, the demarcation of a state of exception establishes the rule that breaking both formal and tacit rules is legitimate (Ettlinger, 2020, p. 403). In this respect, I identify multiple subjectivities as a key concept for a group of academics, including myself, to rethink and problematize the experience of displacement and their distance from the subject of study.

As a methodological summary, I interviewed eleven female and one male (Rasim) displaced academics within members of the Academics for Peace Germany[1] (AfP Germany) group, who have an academic interest in migration and/or displacement between December 2021 and January 2022. I conducted nine of the interviews online because of the circumstances of the pandemic. As a method I carried out field research, which included in-depth

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[1] 'Academics for Peace Germany is a non-profit association that was founded in Germany in October 2017 by the academics who signed the now well-known "Peace Petition" in Turkey in January 2016, as well as their colleagues who supported the values of academic freedom and freedom of speech' (https://www.academicsforpeace-germany.org).

interviews, participant observations and conversations in Berlin. Throughout the article, I used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of all interviewees. The interviewees were all exiled academics who were displaced from Turkey in the period of 2016–2017 and lived in Germany. All the interviewees held a doctorate and worked as postdoctoral fellows, and their academic work centres on, or touches upon displacement/migration. Interviewees were in the 35–55 years group. Five of them (Seher, Leman, Aygül, Cansel, Demet) immigrated with their spouse and child, and one (Zahide) is as a single parent; the rest of the interviewees (Rasim, Lale, Banu, Özüm, İrem, Nida) migrated and resettled without parental duties. I conducted semi-structured interviews with all participants. With their verbal consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. This research basically focuses on comparing the academic work process before and after displacement. I also participated in various activities of the newly displaced academics, activists and artists.

The question the article focuses on is how displaced researchers who have migrated from the area of uncertainty created by the authoritarian regime to the area of precarity shaped by intense marketization approach the displacement phenomenon in between experiencing two different areas of uncertainty. In this way, the first part of the article will elucidate how displacement turns into a transformative experience of loss, which is the starting point and direction of movement. In the second part, the tensions in the processes of exiled researchers seeking scholarship and writing in order to continue their careers through problematising the displacement that they themselves now experience. The following section aims to thematize an insider's look at their efforts to overcome marginalising or exclusionary attitudes that emerge through internalized patterns about the experience of being exiled and displaced, and to resettle. In short, how exiled academics' own experiences are reflected in their academic production and professions on the axes of gender and precarity can be summarized as the problematic on which the article proceeds.

2 Losses as creative destruction

Uncertainty and losses are the most recurring concepts of displacement. These concepts are filled with intermediate layers such as gender, status, and occupation. During our migration to Germany (not to say settling down yet), we encountered *another* academy. An academy that is surprisingly more male-dominated, Eurocentric and conducted via interwoven projects, thus easily enwrapping exiled academics, but normalizing job insecurity and life uncertainty (Bădoi, 2021; Gallas, 2018; Ohm, 2016; Telli, 2022; Sertdemir Özdemir et al., 2019; Ullrich, 2019; Vatansever, 2018; Vatansever, 2022). Moreover, as I plan to show in more detail below, there are many challenging experiences for exiled academics who want to continue their profession in Germany (Mutluer, 2017; Sertdemir Özdemir et al, 2019; Telli, 2022; Vatansever, 2018). Because of the displacement, the relationship with the bureaucracy can turn into an impasse, especially regarding resident permits and the requirements of everyday life (Vatansever, 2018). According to Auyero, the bureaucracy is the construction of temporality and temporal processes in and through which political subordination is reproduced (Auyero, 2012, p. 15). Academic job insecurity is designed to reproduce the political obedience that particularly challenges the fragile life of exiles (Sertdemir Özdemir et al., 2019). Combining with the precarity of academia and uncertainty of bureaucracy might directly demarcate the resilience of displaced scholars.

Academic positions that are highly competitive are usually open for six months to three years. Women and people of colour are typically underrepresented in these positions and tend to participate in niche academic fields, considering they are implicitly discouraged from male-dominated mainstream academic fields (Bozzon et al., 2019). Performance is a crucial criterion for receiving these scholarships. In the case of scholars from war zones who cannot prove their qualifications or work, the process to remain in the profession is mostly knottier; *waiting time* posed by asylum applications to get work/residential permits can cause the scholars to become stuck in underqualified work (von Hausen, 2010; Weiß, 2010). Additionally, high screening criteria can be devastating for the researcher who is still trying to overcome the trauma of displacement. You are as likely to encounter an immigrant who runs a restaurant as a doctor who is a taxi driver, as well as an officer who works at a job at an employment office with the title of doctor. We might also observe some exiled academics move to careers outside of academia. This transition is also a struggle for them, as it is a group that has obtained a residence permit for just academic work. Therefore, the transition can turn the feeling of loss into trap that reinforces loss of professionally self-worth (Akdemir, forthcoming) and the sense of infantilization (Vatansever, 2022, p. 8).

However, the concept of loss should not only refer to trauma in a negative sense and in a continuous manner. For the concept of loss has a transformative power (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p. 3), whether it refers to the stages of forced migration as Freudian psychology points out or to the destruction in Benjamin's famous passage, the *Angel of History* (Benjamin, 2009). The literature that relates the concept of loss to psychology comprehended psychological states such as grief, rejection, coping with a break with the past, and recovery (Akhtar, 2007; Butler, 2003; Oakes, 2003). As Butler reminds us, there can be a way to think about loss as transformative feeling embedded with constituting social, political, and aesthetic relations:

> The presumptions that the future follows the past, that mourning might follow melancholia, that mourning might be completed are all poignantly called into question in these pages as we realize a series of paradoxes: the past is irrecoverable and the past is not past; the past is the resource for the future and the future is the redemption of the past; loss must be marked and it cannot be represented; loss fractures representation itself and loss precipitates its own modes of expression (Butler, 2003, p. 467).

The destruction implied by the concept of loss gains a dialectical perspective in the footsteps of Benjamin and is found with reference to the possibility of a revolutionary recreation of the subject in the face of destruction (Benjamin, 2009, p. 42). While 'creative destruction' is a concept developed by Schumpeter (1994) within the Marxist movement in 1942 to explain the dynamics of capital accumulation in relation to technological innovation, it is used by Berman (1988) to explain urban development and by Harvey (2007) to refer to capital's restructuring of the built environment to accelerate the cycle of capital accumulation. From the other perspective, the concept of creative destruction bears enormous similarities to the well-known expression of Said out of place, namely the loss of the home and everything familiar and the praxis of reconstructing it within political struggles. The creation promised by the destruction is quite painful and inspiring, as we read from the pens of the displaced writers. When I remember that Edward Said, who said that criticism allows to start, to start again, to experience it over and over again (Said, 1985, p. xiv), made these pains a part of his own methodology in the writing process, I will always wonder how privileged I was to encounter this tender process, as someone who lived through displacement and uncertainty.

Certainly, like every newcomer, the exiled scholar settles in a new structural order which they did not have to know before. It means learning everything again, like a child. Sometimes it can be traumatic to see their experience and skills become dysfunctional or valueless. Considering that migration, which is mostly caused by the experience of displacement, is a traumatic process and can create spatial and temporal interruptions in the continuity of life (Akhtar, 2007; Varvin, 2016). According to Hannson (2006, p. 90), 'Exile, then, is a three-tiered concept that involves the experience of dwelling in a place perceived as alien in some respect; the idea that home is located elsewhere, and the prospect or futile hope of a return to this lost home-place.'

We have engaged in the project-based work regime of the German academy by displacing ourselves from the insecurities created by authoritarianism and from the threats created directly by legal prosecution directed against us. *We* migrated from the risks created by authoritarian state pressure to the uncertainty created by the over marketization. If comparing the migration process from an occupational perspective, it is probably not a repeating that we find ourselves in more precarious positions than in our previous work experiences (we were privileged as those working at state universities). Although I use the category of 'we', *we* have been part of the same experience of oppression and displacement with many of *our differences.* However, differences in gender, professional experience, social status, political engagement, and the way of managing everyday life have differentiated the way of coping with the experience of displacement and the way of making this experience the subject of writing and academic work. This point now makes it possible to expand the analysis with an intersectional perspective and to revive the encounters under the trace of the concept of loss.

3 Writing losses in uncertainty

I define the concept of loss as the temporary/uncertain position in the professional and daily life experience and losing the ability to intervene to change one's life. Manifestly, loss is the key concept of the article. The loss that interrupted the ordinary flow of life before migration is also grounds for the migration; in conjunction with the situation of not being able to continue the normal flow of life after displacement/asylum/resettlement defines the feeling of loss. On the other hand, contrary to the negative emphasis on loss, it also contains the power of change and new possibilities. In this respect, defining loss is closely related to class, gender as well as politicized or non-politicized identities. Moreover, the face of the process related to displacement is also stratified with gender inequality, racialized practices, and class position. This stratification is also reflected methodologically in academic studies.

Giving an anecdotal case in point, Aygül's methodological emphasis on the distinction between the researcher and the subject of the research in academic studies is remarkable. By referring to the transformative power of loss when comparing her academic research before and after her displacement experience; her position, which enabled her to find solutions for the people she interviewed on some of their difficulties or to build networks for them, has disappeared after migration and has turned into a more equal frame: 'I am very useless to them now', she says, while continuing with the loss in the field of research. She explains to define her relationship with her losses as 'a transition from empathic learning to politicization in an effort to making new life'. Experiences of displacement offer a researcher the opportunity to equate with the object of the study, which differs from displacement studies in that they are concerned with *others*. According to Özüm:

> I always wanted to produce knowledge about a situation I found myself in. Now I have this opportunity. But I understand better how important distance is. Now I find it easier to conduct interviews, but I am unsure what is important and what is interesting scientifically. Sometimes I can't calm down enough to write a describe what I observed after the interviews.

I have been in a similar situation. For some time now, my academic field of study has been determined by the field research in which I am an insider. As such, I see clearly that it is possible to generate questions and analyses that derive from a wealth of experience. However, I also find this situation emotionally challenging for writing. The motivation for focusing on displacement was described by some interviewees not only as scientific curiosity, but also as political responsibility. By following Gramscian perspectives, *political responsibility* means both the establishment of solidarity relationships and a political stance expressed in a sense of responsibility towards those who remained invisible. For the interviewees, this position shapes not only the relationship they have built with academia in the post-displacement period, but also how they describe their losses. According to Aygül, the experience of displacement, which she always viewed and tried to understand from a distance, was not just a matter of method. The process was one that led her to question what her presence in academia was for.

> I was trying to support people who somehow trusted me enough to take the time to give me the most intimate information. At least I could support them by meeting with some networks. I was someone they could ask questions of. Here I am learning from them, furthermore I have nothing more to give them.

In the debate concerning whether academia have a political responsibility, there is also an implied question about migrant academics' scientific capabilities. In a question to Özüm at a conference on her presentation about migration and affect, we can see an extreme example of exactly this negative connection:

After she finished her presentation, a member of the audience asked her, 'Okay, you had a lot of problems, but now it's over. Why you do not forget all that, isn't it time to work on a normal subject like a normal academic?' Özüm had tried to keep calm herself, although she was annoyed by the insinuation that she was obsessed with focusing on her own pain, and began her sentence with 'I would like to talk about the sources of my academic curiosity first,' explaining that she had studied migration before her displacement and that she also would continue these fields after her displacement. She completed the answer with:

> Everyone looks at their field of study with their own personal history, that it is a methodological discussion that took place many years ago, and that it is not possible to work as a *normal* academic on *normal* topics, whether they migrate or not.

The connection of knowledge and meaning production to power relations and hegemony is more palpable today than ever before. Today, working on normal and meaningful issues can mean being confined to certain agendas in order to be accepted in male-dominated, hierarchical and project-based neoliberal universities and to maintain one's profession. While the political articulation of the experiences of loss, displacement and resettlement lived by Said, Adorno and Arendt, and many displaced writers, and their place in the social sciences is beyond doubt, today it is presented as the only infallible truth that the only way to integrate into the European academy is to adapt to the neoliberal university system. The themes stating that the definitions of *normal* discussed at length in Gülbenkian commission report

(Wallerstein et al., 1996) entitled O*pening up the Social Sciences* are male, and Eurocentric are still with us nearly 30 years later. As Haraway (1988) points out, objectivity embodies a very specific position (male, white, heterosexual, human) hidden behind neutrality or nowhere (but embracing all) and making this position universal. Haraway also refers to this man-oeuvre as the 'god trick' (Haraway, 1988, p. 587), which has deep ethical and political im-plications: It invalidates all other positions by eroding subjectivity, voice, and presence. As Alvares argued that knowledge of the local did not become universal enough to influence theory, but the history of the local, categorized as Europe and the West, is accepted as *normal* for the entire science system; adding that 'imperialism has thus remained an intrinsic fea-ture of the World knowledge system' (Alvares, 2011, p. 75). In addition Churchill stresses how the system works:

> The system of Eurosupremacist domination depends for its continued maintenance and expan-sion, even its survival, upon the reproduction of its own intellectual paradigm – its approved way of thinking, seeing, understanding, and being – to the ultimate exclusion of all others. (Churchill, 2002, p. 25)

A significant part of the displaced people has to start their lives again in order to com-pensate for the loss, and sometimes they should gain new professions in which their experi-ences were ignored. Although the situation of displaced academics may seem a little more advantageous, it actually allows us to follow a similar process. In order to maintain aca-demic jobs, it is important to write articles, carry out projects, prepare new job application proposals and give lectures. Ironically, both a sense of security and *time/space of their own* are essential for the experience of writing on losses and uncertainties. More generally, the fact that the contribution that displaced researchers should also make to the European aca-demic framework (Telli, 2022, p. 191) is defined here also and turns this situation into a trap. It creates the hesitation that displaced researchers, instead of moving into multi-layered aca-demic citizenship (Rossi, 2008) like other academic nomads, may be trapped in the double absence (Sayad, 2004). It even prevents migrants from reflecting the abundance of the aca-demic environment in which they grew up to and they are resettled, thus weakening the way of academic knowledge production. Of course, displaced researchers' challenges (Telli, 2022, p. 191) in terms of fluency in the academic language, networking, accessing the knowledge of the academic system and establishing social relations are also important in this regard.

The question of what is important and what is worth investigating methodically pro-vokes reflection on the problem of distance. According to Aygün, the loss caused by migration changed her view of the profession, and at the same time the role she had defined as a respon-sibility of solidarity melted into a mere source of income. Seher expressed that, as an academ-ic working on displacement in the dimension of internal migration, she was surprised that she could not keep distance from her research field for the first time after migration. As she characterized that had done her professional work with political motivation and 'the possibil-ity of making a difference together', she stated to feel purposeless, and her biggest loss is a lack of gravitates of academic works in everyday life. By making the subject of academic works her own life, she has lost her enthusiasm and motivation in science, as her academic studies have lost the power to influence life. Lale also describes the same situation as Seher:

> When your voice is not echoed on the street, every sentence you write is just left on the shelf. I just did the profession with an intellectual responsibility and now, uncertainty of my profession became a source of anxiety, when I think about the future. It's very hard to bear.

As the research fields have become their own lives, the emotional cost of displacement has made some topics unspeakable. Irem summarized, 'we get scholarship with our work that we put on top of our political injuries, and we worry about the value of our work,' but her refusal to answer questions about the intersection of her work and life also shows enough the emotional difficulty.

The loss also describes a situation in which many migrants, especially displaced people and refugees, develop coping strategies on many issues, such as their qualifications, work experience, and how much of their networks they can or cannot take with them as well as the usability of knowledge in daily life (Vouyioukas & Liapi, 2013). However, unlike an immigrant, the asylum procedure and the integration process in terms of social and economic participation are a kind of exclusion criterion for a refugee (von Hausen, 2010). Although some scholarships specifically for refugees and at-risk academics aim to mitigate the impact of this situation to some extent, it should also be noted that the exclusion criterion continues based on numerous dimensions.

In summary, the losses we have experienced nourish our academic work as academics in exile. However, it is also quite clear that the ways of experiencing and coping with losses vary depending on the subjectivities of the interviewees. Rasim, describes his condition as being in limbo. Although he knows from his own academic works that this exceptional state can last for years without being motivated to do anything, he states that the uncertainty is structurally interconnected between unreliable residency and precarious academic work. He embodies the loss by saying that 'where one cannot find any security about how to live, of course, one constantly experiences hesitation and lack of motivation, and this is a vicious circle.' Similarly, Zahide argues that the suspended life never provides a suitable working regime in such an academy, so the more the experienced insecurity becoming normal, the more the political manifestation of the process will emerge. From her panorama, in the struggle of life, either a more solidarist academic production will be made politically or it will withdraw into its own shell and observe the research field in disconnect from the political intervention. According to Cansel, who stands in a completely opposite position, the contemporary academy never offered permanent jobs in Western universities. So, living with one's imagined *secureness past* in a world where precariousness is the norm is a melancholic reaction. Where I stand, the cost of moving to other jobs and starting over still seems to outweigh the cost of continuing academic work, despite all its precariousness.

In conclusion, arguing that the losing economic status of the displaced academics is also intertwined with the loss of their social and political status, that is, their transforming capacity to shape their daily lives. The effort to integrate into social/political life through localization or into academia through transnationalization can be observed as a gruelling, contextual way of tolerating this loss. Naturally, this struggle sets the stage for the movement of academics who are displaced within the gendered and racially constituted labour market and personal characteristics.

4 Out of the categories

Displaced academics who work on refugees, migration, and displacement have a difficult relationship with status and other categories. The transformation of various forms of migration into a label (Zetter, 1991) rather than a legal framework that governs life after immigration,

and the role of this framework in the accumulation of disadvantage (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p. 4) is not only a primary reading of the migration literature, but also a roadmap for us as exiled scholar. During the period I mentioned in the introduction of this article, more than two thousand academics were prosecuted, dismissed from their jobs, had their passports cancelled and were restricted from travelling abroad because they objected to the government's low-intensity conflict policies in Turkey. This has brought about many challenging experiences for displaced researchers. For example, as their passports expired, they experienced a kind of paperless experience, and had difficulty in carrying out some of the basic necessities of daily life, such as paying bills, enrolling their children in school, and opening a bank account. In the face of these difficulties, the solution offered by the German authorities was to apply for asylum. However, this was not a solution, but another legal restriction.

Zahide's experience shows that residential status is also political. She often has to explain what her rights are to the authorities who want to classify her as a refugee, in spite of many academics in a similar situation benefitting from a legal exception. Zahide could translate her experience defined by *undocumented* into her academic studies:

> While I explained border regimes in human rights to my students, I told them I was also undocumented. That was true, and I already follow a feminist methodology in all courses. This made it easier for the students to talk about their migration experiences and changed the language used in class. However, a few participants reacted to this. I think they rejected such an encounter with undocumented people who are equal or higher than them. The situation was similar for some of my colleagues. People believe that undocumented people are always in need of help; correspondingly, exiled academics must be victims, not politically or individually equal to them.

Every displaced person, considered hypothetically as a refugee, is likewise assumed a victim. As the entire legal framework was established with this idea, this labelling also determines the framework in social relations. Banu's experience, who worked for a non-governmental organization focused on refugees when she first came to Germany, is quite interesting:

> Because they really see you in one place, they think that if you flee the authoritarian regime there, you must seek asylum. Although they theoretically know that there can be other ways and that rights are actually won through struggles, their reaction is not like that when they encounter it. My colleagues avoided talking to me, asking questions, and working together because they didn't know how to relate. Suddenly, the relationship with the people with whom one worked in the same status just six months ago turned different. It was assumed that you are a refugee, even if you are still working with the same status. I felt lonely and devalued. This is mirrored in academic positions as well.

It is a fascinating paradox to see how the state-centred perspective determines solidaristic social relations and some of the daily mindsets of those who follow critical knowledge.

My experience contrasts with that of the other interviewees, since I applied for asylum from the first moment. My struggle with unreasonable procedures, which I later found out was only due to the initiative of the staff at the Foreigners' Registration Office, pushed me to think about all processes what I faced in the waiting period. The place where this acquaintance led me was Aretxaga's article 'Maddining State' (2003): She draws attention to the subjects who work on behalf of the state to establish the power of the state and order, saying: 'The state cannot exist without this subjective component, which links its form to

the dynamics of people and movements. A major part of this essay is therefore devoted to this problem' (Aretxaga, 2003, p. 395). Again, she explains the states' clarification of their status by placing immigrants in certain categories as follows:

> The official gaze constantly scans these bodies for signs (of the criminal, the terrorist, the immigrant, the undocumented), in an attempt to render them transparent, to extricate the secret opacity of its uncanny familiarity. Practices of legibility are not detached but invested with affect. (Aretxaga, 2003, p. 404)

Indeed, the circumstance that it is not positioned within the usual practices of the authorities also reveals a bargaining power. The fact that AfP Germany corresponds to a place within the established diasporic political relations has made it possible to establish other ways than the asylum process provided by the authorities in this context. For me and some colleagues in a similar situation, the process entailed struggles within the given categories from the beginning.

Legal frameworks fix exiled people in categories by embodying paper borders. The experience of being in limbo makes their residency status vital. Especially, a residence permit that depends on the duration of the employment contract and employment contracts that depend on the residence permit can lead to an impasse. Often, these challenges cannot be resolved without the intervention of the relevant offices in the academic institutions. For those not in refugee status, the periodic cycles of residence and work permits, the confluence of the labour market with project-based contracts for academic work, and the lack of return options are inevitably unsettling. In this sense, it is obvious that displaced academics are in a more precarious condition than academics who are still citizens or have a permanent residence permit.

Time works differently, as the strata of *otherization* overlap. According to Auyero, 'Time, its veiling and its manipulation, was and still is a key symbolic dimension in the workings of this seemingly perennial political arrangement' (Auyero, 2012, p. 2). The experiences on female respondents with childcare responsibilities particularly highlight the time inequality. The emphasis on female respondents with childcare responsibilities particularly highlights the time inequality: the constancy demanded by family and care responsibilities contrasts with the temporality of academic work and the permanence of displacement. In this context, gender roles intricately complicate academic life in limbo.

Gender-based inequalities affect displaced women in a layered way in connection with the social relations in which women are involved. As Freedmans points out that refugee women's experiences vary by class, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social capital and cannot be generalized is also significant here (Freedman, 2015, p. 31). The theoretical ground on which the various experiences are built becomes visible at the intersection of work precariousness, being in exile, and being a woman.

As Seher describes how the experience of being a woman in exile impacted her studies, she explains that the system that places the burden of care only on women has caused women to be eliminated from economic life for their care responsibilities for the domestic sphere:

> It was my social connections that I knit around me in the place I call home that determined my opportunities in academia the most, I understood this when I first came here, because I was alone. Even I put my child in kindergarten, I could work for a period depends on their agenda. The institutional care system in Germany requires you to plan life according to the child. It redisciplines you but makes you a parental figure instead of someone who can work efficiently. These conditions

are hard for me because I am making a start from scratch here, and I must work all the time, as if I didn't have such obligations. I do not know if I can compensate for the loss due to displacement. But I am so exhausted.

Additionally, Cansel and Demet indicate that while their care responsibilities have limited mobility and working time for their research, they are also able to build more solidarity networks through the bonds they form over the children. Aygül says that her children's need for stability limits the scope of potential job applications and of her research, but she still feels committed to continue despite the difficulties. Zahide's experience also shows that it was only through these ties of solidarity that she could leave her child and work in teaching in other cities. Leman states that she could not apply for jobs that were very suitable for her because she did not want to change her child's school.

In almost all interviews, it was highlighted that the crisis of care in the home had deepened during the pandemic period, however the work climate itself can also be difficult or facilitating in this sense. Simply put, many issues reveal the implicit gender structure of the academy (Bozzon et al., 2019), from organizing meeting times during work hours with the possibility of someone else caring for children to be cared for by someone else, to performance expectation based on article publication, and to whether academic communication within the department is afforded.

İrem comments that very few women academics work in her field, that her work is easily ignored and devalued, and that some fields are completely unofficially configured to exclude women: 'There is a network of mutual references in academic matters, and if you have a closer look, you realize that it is an all-male club.' Additionally, Banu expresses her surprise that the condescending attitude and innuendos she faced are mainly related to the fact that she is an exiled woman in academia and that she experiences such things even in Turkey, which is less common.

5 A familiar conclusion

Being in exile amidst the uncertainty and precariousness of academia complicates and hides *our* experiences. The effort to politicize the losses and resilience that we greet with multiple subjectivities in this invisibility involves us resuming our lives in many situations that seem inevitably contradictory, such as solidarity, competitive opportunities, competition with a hierarchy of privileges and losses.

The most significant consequence of displacement in the academic context for those whose academic background and focus is on Turkey is the fact that they cannot work and continue their research in Turkey. It means not only losing one's home, but also breaking one's connections to the locality and social space. Another concern is our profession, which we engage in with a political intellectual responsibility and as a political effort, might become purely an otiose job. We learn from the story of exile that it takes time to restore broken ties to place and to reassume political responsibility. Returning to the question of how scholarly work can be done while dealing with all these losses, my answer is methodological. I did not conduct the research in a way that could only remain as a writer and researcher and look from the outside. A motivation to understand where the loss in the process of forced migration and displacement comes from, how the disadvantages accumulate, and how women

cope with it began with seeking answers to the process I witnessed myself. It was inevitable that my own experiences became the field and that the field transformed my experiences. Therefore, I made use of critical autoethnography in this method of research. I'm quoting Alexander's gorgeous statement, in which I find my position:

> critical autoethnography captures a moment in that borderless frame and holds it a particular scrutiny-of-the-self with hermeneutics of theorising the self. Yet in the process of such an engagement, there is always a feeling of risk: a risk of bleeding, in which the presumed categorical containment of your identity threatens to exceed its borders, revealing the ways in which we are always messy. (Alexander, 2014, p. 110)

As Bektaş-Ata emphasized, autoethnographic studies revealing the value of the personal does not mean that it is stuck in it, on the contrary, it makes it possible to deal with the individual in its social context with its political aspect (Bektaş-Ata, 2020). Works, which I did during the period of silence of my academic migration, also build up my academic self-worthiness and show how to politicize the new conditions in which I was placed. In this sense, in our work we do not only take the position of an insider or outsider, we define the place where we will stand, we also strengthen our academic background and ideological stance.

Exile's trauma may not continue, and it may overcome, or it may persist, but the transformation of its destructive potential into a creative force depends on the strength of solidarity; especially for women. In this respect, I think it is appropriate to find myself in a limbo situation where the insider/outsider knowledge production dilemma becomes unclear. The same is true for the dilemma of temporality/permanence. In academic studies of post-displacement experiences, the combination of this experience not only determines the location, but also makes *me*, the designer of the research and an interviewee of the research at the same time. Moreover, the fields are not only intertwined with my experience, but also guides my mapping of possibilities and risks within my life experience. After the research is over, *I* will continue to be in the field as it is. Defining academic motivation is the ability to differentiate a common experience such as uncertainty, inherent in the social structure, across many contexts and enrich the scientific field while transforming intersections, collaborations, and differences into social words through academic studies.

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