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Marketization of Academia and Authoritarian Governments: The Cases of Hungary and Turkey in Critical Perspective

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Abstract

This article analyses the recent political repression of academia in Hungary and Turkey within the critical scholarship on globalization and neoliberalisation of higher education. We introduce and challenge the hegemonic definitions of academic freedom that sit comfortably with the capitalist logic as well as repressive governing forms and assess the recent attacks on university communities with emphasis on both academic labour and freedom. Adopting a case study approach, we investigate how economic and political forms of repression accompany and reinforce one another within the specificities of both country contexts. We delineate the underlying structural and historical dynamics as well as emergence and evolution of methods of struggle and resistance employed by diverse university communities in their shared and divergent characteristics. Our conclusions include critical reflections on the broader implications of higher education restructuring, authoritarian interventions, and the future of systemic level resistance.

Keywords

Education, Globalization, Labor, Neoliberalism, Political Economy, Social Justice, Turkey, Hungary

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Introduction

Attacks on academic freedom and autonomy have surged in parallel to rising authoritarianism across the globe over the past decade and led to the emergence of a dense scholarly debate drawing on some of the key visible cases and country contexts (Cole, 2017; Stockemer and Kim, 2020; Bard, 2020). The longer-term structural transformations of higher education (HE), which intensified the overall impact of recent political repression, have not featured substantially in mainstream accounts albeit notable exceptions within the critical (higher) education literature (e.g. Giroux, 2010; Ivancheva, 2015; Szadkowski and Krzeski, 2019; Vatansever, 2016; 2018). As a result, 'ivory tower' conceptions of universities as spaces of knowledge production that are (and should be) demarcated from social relations have been perpetuated intentionally or otherwise. Academic freedom is often conceived as a liberal principle and right 'before the law' concealing the inequalities and power relations in the hidden sphere of knowledge production (Tierney, 2001: 8-10). Worryingly enough these accounts have (un)intentionally reinforced authoritarian discourses and policies by reproducing conceptions of society as an allegedly non- and anti-intellectual domain.

Against this background we argue that the recent attacks on academia cannot be solely attributed to the changing political spectrum but also need to be thought within the transformations of the labor market and the economic conditions of academic knowledge production. To this end we aim to position the recent attacks against university communities in Hungary and Turkey critically within global societal transformations (Yang, 2003; Ozga and Lingard, 2007). Such an orientation allows us to bring visibility and centrality to the conditions and processes of academic labour and openly acknowledge its connection to concerns around academic freedom in the analysis. These two cases are chosen as they represent increasingly authoritarian political systems and intense attacks on political and economic rights with different temporalities and articulations. The rise of authoritarianism alongside neoliberal restructuring aggravates the insecurity and precariousness of academic labor (Vatansever, 2020) which, in turn, has an impact on the practice of academic freedom by diverse constituencies of the university community. However, political repression has not precluded the emergence of academic labour-focused struggles in absolute terms. The latter still flourished and evolved building on previous resistance practices.

The paper proceeds as follows; we first introduce and challenge the hegemonic definitions of academic freedom that sit comfortably with the neoliberal logic as well as repressive governing forms. To engage

with the conditions of labour in academic knowledge production and its interconnection with academic freedom comprehensively, we position our framework within the critical scholarship on HE globalization and neoliberalisation in the following section. The fourth section assesses the recent attacks on university communities in Turkey and Hungary through this expansive lens. In the final section we delineate the similarities and differences between the methods of struggle and resistance employed by university communities.

Academic freedom –What’s in a name?

There is a rich scholarship on academic freedom which largely draws on the historical emergence and evolution of the concept in the 18th -19th centuries in European and Anglo-Saxon academic contexts and experiences. (Altbach, 2001: 206-7; Berdahl, 1990: 171; Zeleza, 2003: 151) This rather Western-centric orientation in the literature (Jeppesen and Nazar, 2012: 91, 98) has been challenged by several scholars who assessed struggles for academic freedom in tandem with the neoliberal restructuring of African economies and societies during the 1980s and 1990s led by the IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs (Zeleza, 2003; Federici, 2009; Caffentzis, 2005).

Besides the issue of Western-centricism, there are several definitional controversies surrounding the concept itself. To start with, scholars have problematised the acting subject of academic freedom. Namely the question is whether it refers primarily to the *individual* freedom of academics to produce knowledge even when it is challenging the hegemonic practices and discourses in society or to the *institutional* autonomy of the universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) in their operations and decision making *from* the state (Berdahl, 1990: 171-2; Lynch and Ivancheva, 2015). In the case of the latter further complications follow: by institutional autonomy do we refer to the ‘power of the university or college in its corporate form to determine its own goals and programmes’ (substantive autonomy) or ‘to determine the means by which its goals and programmes will be pursued’ (procedural autonomy) (Berdahl, 1990: 172)?

The form of the supposed freedom is also problematised: Does academic freedom constitute a *negative* freedom from the political in a strictly liberal sense and propagate the intrinsic value of *neutrality* or a *positive* freedom which comes along with a public *duty* and *responsibility* to act upon and intervene in social and political processes? (Zeleza, 2003: 151) Increasingly scholars refer to a contradiction or mismatch between the *ideal* and the *practice* of academic freedom as it is experienced by the university communities today (Jeppesen and Nazar, 2012: 90). Zeleza draws on Rorty’s warning against providing

'epistemological justifications for academic freedom' in favour of 'socio-political justifications' to be 'more honest and clearheaded' as well as Fish's assertion that 'the debate about academic freedom is never between the inclusive and exclusive university but between competing structures of exclusion' (Rorty, 1994 and Fish, 1999 quoted in Zeleza, 2003: 152).

We could make sense of these definitional controversies and tensions when we contextualize the demarcation of academia and academic freedom within the foundational characteristic of capitalist social relations: the separation of the economic from the political and the perpetuation of externally defined and isolated terrains with their own logics and modes of operation. Practices and discourses that perpetuate these lines of demarcation of the academic sphere become both the means and outcome of naturalizing the unequal, conflict-ridden capitalist social relations. They disguise mechanisms of exploitation and subjugation in academic knowledge production and labour processes in the name of heralding academic freedom as yet another commodity in the marketplace (Caffentzis, 2005: 599).

In the recent public debates on attacks on academia in Hungary and Turkey, the hegemonic narratives have tended to promote further distancing of academic institutions and those who work in them from broader society. The institutional identities of the universities are often merged with the individual and collective identities of academics, students, and university workers (Harris, 2005 cited in Jeppesen and Nazar, 2012: 95-6). This results in the homogenization of university communities and neutralization of multifaceted contradictions and struggles that take place *within* HEIs.

Therefore, in this article we are not interested in providing formulaic definitions of academic freedom or engaging in a debate of its esoteric particulars, devoid of a broader social and political critique. We contend that a radical conceptualisation of the term with a renewed emphasis on academic labour while establishing its intrinsic, if not conflictual, relationship with academic freedom is capable of challenging the dominant narratives. In the following section, we turn our attention towards academic labour processes as part of the neoliberal restructuring of economies and HEIs from the 1980s-1990s onwards.

Academic labour and neoliberal universities in critical global perspective

Unsurprisingly the neoliberal turn in the restructuring of economies and societies has not left the field of (higher) education untouched across the globe. In the UK, a series of education reform legislations from the late 1980s onwards drastically transformed the relationship of the universities with the government and the market very much in favour of the latter (Berdahl, 1990: 176; Harvie, 2006: 3; Taberner, 2018).

What has followed in both the core and periphery of global capitalism is the gradual penetration of corporations and privately funded research, endowments, patenting and intellectual property agreements, changing university funding and budgeting procedures. Rising managerialism has contributed to the diminishing of space for academics in making and implementing decisions regarding university life, their own research/teaching activities and overall governing of HEIs (Altbach, 2001: 216; Giroux, 2002: 433, 436-9, 444; O'Sullivan, 2016: 14; Robertson, 2010). Ultimately these processes have yielded comprehensive instrumentalisation and 'commercialization of learning' (Zeleva, 2003: 164, 166; Nixon et. al., 2018). With reference to the Canadian context, Jeppesen and Nazar (2012: 94) argue that neoliberalism had consequences in terms of *structure* ('neoliberal practices and values on governing structures') and *content* ('the propagation of neoliberal economic content: theory, ideology and culture in the classroom and in research') in relation to academic freedom (see also Giroux, 2002: 427, 441).

This process has also come hand in hand with the changing contractual and employment relationships in universities which restructured the academics' relationship with the HEIs (Bauder, 2006; Ivancheva et. al., 2019). As education is conceived less as a 'public good' and more as 'job training', professors are conceived increasingly as 'academic entrepreneurs' (Giroux, 2002: 432-3). Those who are not privileged enough end up becoming part-time or hourly paid academic workers or members of the 'academic precariat': 'a reserve army of workers with ever shorter, lower paid, hyper-flexible contracts and ever more temporally fragmented and geographically displaced hyper-mobile lives' (Ivancheva, 2015: 39). This has indeed been an increasingly visible trend among graduate students, PhD researchers and early career academics from the late 1990s onwards across the globe (Percy and Beumont, 2008; Leathwood and Read, 2020). With reference to David L. Kirp's ideas, Giroux (2002: 442) notes that the type of employment these workers are subjected to are 'equivalent of temp agency fill-ins' which ultimately has an impact on the 'intellectual culture and the academic energy of higher education'.

What happens to academic freedom *in practice* in such a context? Jeppesen and Nazar (2012: 98) argue that

[a]cademic freedom, it would seem, is more readily available to those who are older, have established careers and have tenure, whereas graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and part-time and non-tenured faculty, varying intersectionally in relationship to their race, class, gender, sexual orientation and (dis)ability status, have reduced access to academic freedom in practice, as they are engaged in precarious labour in the "academic parking lot", working as sessional instructors, postdoctoral researchers or limited-term appointees (Stanford et. al., 2008).

Investigating how neoliberalism compresses time under the capitalist logic in higher education and impacts on the everyday lives of academic workers, Davies and Bansel (2005: 51) argue that these processes yield 'work intensification, including extension of the working day, speeding up work and job enlargement'. Ultimately an 'illusion of autonomy' is created where 'the subject assumes an autonomy and responsibility that suggest a freedom to choose and act, a freedom in which the self is always the locus of success or failure'. (Davies and Bansel, 2005: 51)

This is what Caffentzis (2005: 599) defines as the neoliberal notion 'which takes knowledge to be a commodity, education as a service to be privatized and academic freedom the ability to market knowledge and education services without governmental regulation' as opposed to the 'commoner' notion which configures 'education as a public good, and academic freedom as the enlarging of the capacity of all to access and produce knowledge' (see also Harland et.al., 2010). Federici (2009: 455, 458-9), with specific reference to the WB and IMF-led structural adjustment under debt crisis in the African context in the 1980s, highlights the global character of this process as a 'recolonization' and the 'enclosure of knowledge' with the rise of 'global university' in the US and its immediate adoption by the higher education systems across the globe in a variety of forms (see Amthor and Metzger, 2011 for a discussion of these processes in the context of East Europe).

In this context the necessity to build bridges and broaden the struggles from the 'sphere of higher education' or 'outraged faculty' towards anti-systemic struggles against neoliberal capitalism across university campuses and broader society emerges as an urgent step forward (Giroux, 2002: 453; Harvie, 2006: 20-26; Lucas, 2014: 216; Szadkowski and Krzeski, 2019: 471-3).

Unfolding repression within neoliberalism and attacks on academia

As Altbach (2001: 209) notes, academic freedom has always been a 'contested terrain'. The historical precedents of attacks on academia date much longer than the so-called neoliberal turn of the 1980s and the authoritarian turn of the late 2000s. One may cite the systematic repression of universities in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and the 'Cold War era anticommunist hysteria' of the 1950s in the US and beyond as renowned examples in this respect. In some public universities in California and New York during McCarthyism, professors were directly forced out of their positions by state regulations. Moving beyond the European and North American geographies, we can further observe that universities in the colonized countries prior to 1945 were not granted academic autonomy at all unlike their Western counterparts (Altbach, 2001: 209). Zeleza (2003: 154) strongly argues:

To many African academics, it has always made sense to see issues of academic freedom beyond the gated confines of the university or the nexus of academe-state relations, for they understand, even if they may not like it, that the university as a social arena and a state apparatus is inscribed by complex, internal and external political practices, as is the process of knowledge production.

He further notes that 'the reason why the question of academic freedom and social responsibility dominates African discourses lies in the acute politicisation of African social formations, a product of long histories of struggle against the barbarities of the slave trade, colonialism, and postcolonial misrule' (Zeleza, 2003: 154-5). In the experience of African intellectuals, this process translated into double struggles: 'institutionally, against the authoritarian state, and intellectually, against domineering western paradigms' (Zeleza, 2003: 158).

Against this background, the recent unfolding of authoritarianism and growth of right-wing political movements and governments under a still predominant neoliberal accumulation regime comes as no surprise in the current global crisis of capitalism. The developments in Hungary and Turkey are not exceptional that can be explained away solely as a symptom of late capitalism, the so-called 'underdeveloped' characteristics of civil society, or the overpowering role of a strong state as mainstream perspectives often suggest. In contrast, we observe a similar trend of intensifying attacks on academia in the core capitalist countries as well (Scholars at Risk, 2016; 2017; Daniels and Stein, 2017; Wesemann, 2017).

With reference to the post-2001 war on terror context in the US, Caffentzis (2005: 601) however cautions that those problematising attacks on academic freedom should be aware of the potentially two different struggles with different protagonists and interests. While the first is the *neoliberal attack* and 'enclosure' of knowledge, the second is the *governmental attacks on this neoliberal form of academic freedom*. While such governmental attacks should certainly be opposed by the defenders of academic freedom, the critique must not end there but extend against the marketization of knowledge and corporatization of higher education if a progressive line of resistance is to be forged comprehensively (Caffentzis, 2005: 601).

The following two subsections provide a critical assessment of the recent attacks on academia in the specific contexts of Turkey and Hungary tracing both forms of attacks conceptualised by Caffentzis. Our starting point will be an overview of the HE restructuring and marketisation in both countries which will be followed by a review of two overt attacks against university communities: Repression of the Academics for Peace initiative and the 'We will not be a party to this crime' petition signatories in Turkey

from early 2016 onwards and the attacks against the HE system in Hungary throughout the 2010s with focus on the case of Central European University from 2017 onwards.

a. Marketisation of higher education and attacks on academic labour in Turkey and Hungary

There have been comprehensive analyses of marketisation and neoliberalisation of higher education in Turkey and Hungary in the existent literature (Cosar and Ergul, 2015; Firat and Akkuzu, 2015; Pusztai and Szabo, 2008; Parson and Steele, 2019). In the Turkish context, the restructuring was preceded by the drastic politicization of university campuses alongside the radical societal mobilisation of the 1960s and 1970s which was eventually repressed by 1980 military coup (Cosar and Ergul, 2015: 105). The HE restructuring deepened during this militaristic governing period. The key objective of neoliberal transformation was to contain, repress and discipline the university communities while reconfiguring HEIs under the market imperative in a top-down manner (YÖK History, n.d.; Cosar and Ergul, 108-9). Universities and all other HEIs that were previously regulated by the Ministry of Education or other related ministries were brought under the Higher Education Council (YÖK). YÖK was established in 1981 and was given full responsibility to oversee the universities administratively, academically and financially. (YÖK Statistics, n.d.; Duman and Donmez, forthcoming).

As a result, the limited autonomy given to the universities in previous decades were completely taken away. Further changes included the centralization of university entrance examination, introduction of student contribution fees at public universities and giving non-profit foundations the permission to establish private HEIs (Mızıkacı, 2006: 19). Initially, the growing share of private universities in the intellectual life was seen as a contributory factor to diversity and academic freedoms in Turkey. Despite their increasing numbers in this period (79 as of 2020), their faculty size (24,367 faculty members as of 2020) has not kept up vis a vis public HEIs (YOK, 2020). The excessive burden on the academics working in the private sector and the high student to faculty ratios show the decreasing quality after privatization, and difficulties of conducting research given excessive workloads. Unsurprisingly academic staff began to experience job insecurity, limited social security benefits and lack of adequate and sustainable income alongside heavier attacks on academic freedoms (Yiğiter 2006 cited in Tural 2007: 70; Vatansever and Yalcin, 2015).

One of the most controversial reforms was the removal of elections and granting of the right to appoint rectors to the President. While the law was partially amended in 1992 and the faculty members were once again given the ability to vote, the approval requirement by the President was kept in place (Kural,

2016). However, it should be noted that this Presidential right was hardly exercised until the AKP government took office. Since Erdoğan became the President, there have been multiple instances where candidates who were not ranked at the top of the election lists were appointed as rectors to public universities. Since the failed coup attempt in 2016, with a state decree, the President has appointed rectors without any elections carried out at the university level. Turkey presents a unique case in this regard as other European countries have either university councils electing rectors or government officials appointing the top ranked candidates (Ecoi.net,2017).

In Hungary, while pro-market reforms had been already underway since the mid-1960s across different sectors (Melegh, 2011: 267, 274, 280), the HE reforms visibly accelerated in the 1990s at the onset of the so-called 'transition' (Kozma, 1990; Pusztai and Szabo, 2008: 86; on the post-1949 educational reforms and inequalities, Hanley and McGeever, 1997; for a comprehensive review of the historiography of Hungarian higher education prior to the Bologna process, Parson and Steele, 2019). The HE restructuring to meet the labour market and skills needs of this new phase of capital accumulation driven by the multinational corporations (MNCs) and mediated by the state is particularly noteworthy in this period (Freeman, 1997; Tarlea, 2017).

The Higher Education Act in 1993 aspired to initiate the 'decentralization of higher education, the establishment of the autonomy of HEIs, and the replacement of Soviet-type higher education' in an effort to make the system 'eurocompatible' (Pusztai and Szabo, 2008: 86). Morgan (2015: 23) argues that restructuring was driven by the reformers in Hungary and the World Bank and the 'government's desire to have *more for less*—to expand access to higher education but at a lower cost' within the broader 'desire to "catch up with Europe" in both economic and educational terms' (see also Ivancheva and Syndicus, 2019).

Two main elements of this reform process were the introduction of lay boards and intermediary bodies (Pusztai and Szabo, 2008: 87) at institutional and national levels and the mergers of HEIs the governance and funding of which, until then, remained fragmented across multiple ministries similar to the case of Turkey (Kozma, 1990: 384-5). This new reform wave, although not imposed repressively by a military government as in Turkey, initiated a tighter control and centralization process which, ironically, came to full fruition with the governmental change in 2010 elections (Kovats, 2018: 653; Tarlea, 2017).

The key institutional actor of centralization was the Ministry of Education which initiated the merging of 41 university-level institutions into 17 universities and 22 college-level institutions into 13 colleges

(Morgan, 2015: 23-4). Eventually different committees and boards were integrated into the Bologna Board. Hungarian Accreditation Committee emerged as part of this process as a crucial institution making decisions about the new educational programs and providing the accreditation required in line with the European regulations (Pusztai and Szabo, 2008: 87). Private HE provision through foundation-run and church institutions was permitted and promoted via multiple legislations during the 1990s (Nagy-Darvas, 2005; Parson and Steele, 2019: 12).

These transformations have had serious repercussions on the conditions of academic labour. As highlighted by many scholars (Andrei et. al., 2010; Tarlea, 2017: 673), the student numbers in HEIs increased dramatically during the post-socialist period. However this was not accompanied by a proportionate rise in lecturers which led to a rise of 6.26 students per faculty in 1990 to 17.77 students in 2008 (Andrei et.al, 2010: 292). In addition to intensifying workloads, Deák (2015: 25) emphasises that academics in public HEIs remain among the lowest paid in Hungary which forces them to take up secondary employment within and/or outside academia. Pusztai and Szabo (2008: 91-5) uncover the contested character of the post-socialist reforms and the Bologna Process and presence of resistance during this period despite the dominance of neoliberal approach at policy level (see also Kovats, 2018: 653).

b. Governmental attacks on academic freedom in Turkey and Hungary

Against this background, this section assesses two prominent attacks against university communities that began in mid-2010s and continued onwards in both countries. In the context of Turkey, the process was set off in January 2016 when 1128 academics from Turkey and 383 international scholars have signed a petition to call on the Turkish state to stop the ongoing violence and end the human rights violations taking place in the Kurdish provinces. This initiative emerged in response to escalated violence following the June 2015 elections which witnessed the significant rise of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP) in polls.

The Turkish government and the pro-government media initiated a swift smear campaign against the signatories in the form of investigations carried out nationwide as well as by the university administrations that the scholars were employed in (Vatansever, 2016). It has led to dismissals, resignations, forced-retirements, suspensions and police arrests of a large number of signatories. Three academics were exposed to a 40-day long unlawful pre-trial detention. In October 2017, the situation escalated further with an indictment against all signatories calling for 7.5 years of imprisonment on the

charge of “propagandasing for a terrorist organisation”. 822 signatories were put to trial across 57 different courts across the country with almost a full year (313 days) spent in hearings at courthouses (BAK, Hearing Statistics, 2020; Baser et. al., 2017).

The coup attempt which took place on 15 July 2016 has only exacerbated and intensified the degree and reach of this systematic repression against academics in Turkey. The key development in this respect has been the issuance of six separate governmental decrees. As of August 2020, 549 Peace Petition signatories were either removed and banned from public service with the decree laws, dismissed, resigned or retired (BAK, Rights Violations, 2020)[1]. Signatory academics based in Turkey, who experienced the harshest effects of this systematic attack, came from diverse public and private HEIs across the country. While this particular attack could initially be seen as a governmental attack on the neo-liberal form of academic freedom as identified by Caffentzis, it is crucial to highlight that the rights violations were mobilised by both the state and HEIs targeting academics *individually* and *collectively* as highlighted earlier.

A closer look into the composition of signatories reveals the complexity of the double attack experienced by the academics further: 184 of the signatories have been research assistants, the majority of whom were PhD students at the time (BAK, Rights Violations, 2020). This signatory group, together with other academics who were employed on short-term, insecure contracts in majority private as well as some public universities, had long been subject to casualisation and precarisation of their labour (Vatansever and Yalcin, 2015) in addition to the newly unfolding governmental repression that fully took away their academic freedom. There is a clear coupling of economic and political violence evident in their experience even though the former remains less visible than the latter. From a ‘commoner’ perspective (Caffentzis, 2005), mass dismissals at various levels affected not only the signatories’ livelihoods and academic freedoms but those of their students and the future of their research as well. In many universities, students lost their supervisors, departments closed down entire fields of study within social sciences and humanities (Duman and Donmez, forthcoming).

In the Hungarian context, differently from the Turkish case, the most publicised event that propelled academic freedom and institutional autonomy to centre stage of international public debate focused on a single higher education institution based in Budapest: Central European University (CEU) - a privately funded US-accredited university which was founded by George Soros in 1991. CEU became a clear target of the Orban government from early 2017 onwards (Hungary Today, 2017; The Budapest Beacon, 2017;

Times Higher Education, 2017) even though the insidious control over Hungarian (higher) education and attacks on academic freedoms had been underway since 2011 (Kovats, 2018; Neumann and Meszaros, 2019: 140-141). The reduction of state-funded positions in public universities under the new HE law in line with a broader post-crisis austerity agenda and resulting exacerbation of access and inequalities along both socio-economic and ethnic grounds, the introduction of the chancellor system and a dual leadership structure alongside rectors enhancing governmental influence in the funding and administration of universities, changes infringing on the autonomy of HEIs in the Constitution accompanied the marketisation and redirection of the content and management of (higher) education and vocational training to meet MNCs' needs (Füzessi, 2013; Kovats, 2018: 653-3; Tarlea, 2017: 674-6).

In 2017, the events unfolded rapidly from 28th March onwards when the law on the modification of the Higher Education Law that intended to change the status and eventual presence of CEU in Hungary was brought to the parliament (CEU Timeline, n.d; Bard, 2020). The amended law introduced new requirements for the university to fulfill in order to be eligible to provide education and receive accreditation in Hungary. However the potential for such direct state and legislative action was evident when a series of attacks targeting particular departments of the university (Sociology and Social Anthropology and Gender Studies) were published in the pro-government daily, Figyelo, in early February (CEU, 2017; The Budapest Beacon, 3 Feb 2017).

Despite a series of demonstrations and protests organised autonomously in the first week of April, the government and the President persisted in their stance of legislating and approving the amendments to the law (CEU Timeline, n.d). During this period, the senior university administration focused on internationalizing and publicizing the matter as an attack on academic freedom in order to put pressure on the Hungarian government to withdraw the law which was ultimately unsuccessful.

It is telling, however, to observe the predominantly neoliberal approach to academic freedom highlighted by Caffentzis (2005: 599) within the European Commission's statement regarding Lex CEU:

...on the basis of an in-depth legal assessment of the Hungarian Higher Education Law of 4 April, the European Commission concluded that the law is not compatible with the fundamental internal market freedoms, notably the freedom to provide services and the freedom of establishment but also with the right of academic freedom, the right to education and the freedom to conduct a business as provided by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, as well as with the Union's legal obligations under international trade law. (European Commission, 26 April 2017)

CEU controversy, like the Academics for Peace petition case in Turkey, emerged as a particular manifestation of a broader and deeper crisis of capitalism in material as well as ideological terms accompanied with growing political repression in both country contexts. Nevertheless, the CEU case presents itself more strongly as a governmental attack on the neo-liberal conception of academic freedom to the point that it rendered both the neoliberal attack and the attack on the individual and collective academic freedoms of diverse university community members invisible. Existing mainstream narratives have predominantly framed the issue as a matter of high politics and conflict between key regional and global political actors as well as individuals while placing CEU as a singular, monolithic actor with homogenous interests and motivations within such a configuration of social and political forces.

Diverse positionalities and vulnerabilities of the academic, administrative, subcontracted workers of the university, permanent and temporary/casualised staff, Hungarian, EEA and non-EEA national university workers and students and their individual and collective rights' violations were largely overshadowed. Throughout this process the voices of large working populations, marginalised groups and social classes within Hungary have also been silenced; equally subdued by the singular, hegemonic voice of the governing party in the country. The critical responses have only gone so far as framing the issue as a matter of infringement of academic freedoms within the liberal paradigm except some interventions to subvert this narrative (Links, 2017). In turn, and quite conveniently, the government politicised the Hungarian public around the private ownership, funding and the alleged liberal agenda of the university.

Overt economic violence on public HEIs accompanied the political attacks more visibly from the mid-2018 onwards with the privatisation plans of Corvinus University, the overhaul of budgetary autonomy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTK-HAS), and closure of gender studies programmes in Eotvos Lorand University (ELTE) (Reuters, 2018; The Guardian, 2018; Butterbrodt, 2019; Szucs, 2019)[2]. Individual academics were similarly targeted and blacklisted in pro-government media in Hungary (Verseck, 2018) but it was not followed by arrests, imprisonment, bans from public service or court trials as in the case of Turkey.

c. Resistance, solidarity strategies and future prospects

The process of exponential repression has met its resistance in both countries. In this section we provide an overview of the repertoire of struggles in their similarities and differences. When academia is conceived in an embedded relationship with social relations as we outlined in the earlier sections, it becomes implausible to attribute an innate transformative power that would emerge singularly within

the university domain. That is to say, the prospects of resistance are internally related to the broader configuration of social forces in historically specific contexts. Without these considerations, the issues framed as belonging exclusively to academia may risk serving political agendas that divert attention from the fundamental issues of societal concern and conflict. With this disclaimer we focus on three related issues in this section: First, the ability of the university communities and academics to establish links with broader student and worker movements and the specific forms that these solidarity initiatives have taken in respective countries. Second, the presence and strength of solidarity building at international scale. Third, the political content and horizon of these initiatives on the basis of the particular conceptions of academic freedom they adhered to and whether/to what extent they established and combined struggles around the issue of academic labour simultaneously.

Turkey

In the case of Turkey, the degree and systematic nature of repression yielded an abrupt, violent expulsion of many signatory academics from their workplace, scholarly work, communities and livelihoods. The impact was felt drastically by academics living and working outside key urban centres with limited international networks and possibilities to continue their academic work abroad while experiencing a more vicious stigmatisation, those who were already on precarious, insecure contracts, with family commitments, and those already experiencing exclusion and marginalisation intersectionally within the traditional academic structures. In such a context, the most active and politicised trade union of education and science workers, Egitim-Sen, led the financial solidarity efforts to support dismissed academics who have lost their jobs in public universities whereas Social Research Foundation (SAV) organised similar support for signatories dismissed from private universities and those forced to resign from public universities (BAK, 2017).

Solidarity/Street Academies emerge as key examples of challenging the traditional boundaries of university and reconnecting academia with broader society in such a constrained context. While the idea behind the Street Academies has been bringing students, researchers and the general public together in streets, parks and outdoor spaces, the Solidarity Academies have followed suit through organizing lectures and classes indoors. Both types of Academies, which run in multiple cities across the country, aim to provide an alternative forum in which freedom of knowledge production and dissemination is upheld. In 2018, the Birarada Foundation was established following the collective workshops organised by the Solidarity Academies. It aims to provide collaboration and communication opportunities for

independent researchers, students and dismissed academics from all over Turkey. Besides these initiatives, the linkages between the plight of academics and the broader struggles around economic and political oppressions have been established most visibly in the sit-in protest and hunger strike carried out by two dismissed public sector workers and Egitim-Sen union members– one of them a university lecturer and petition signatory, Nuriye Gulmen; and the other a school teacher, Semih Ozakca – at the heart of the capital city, Ankara, between November 2016 and January 2018.

Solidarity at the international scale has taken the form of both direct condemnations of the Turkish government (e.g. UCU, 2019; Front Line Defenders, n.d) and material scholarly support in the form of fellowships to enable the academics to leave the country. The latter was hindered for many scholars whose passports were invalidated and revoked by the state. Those who were able to leave formed new communities of exiled academics gradually. Several solidarity actions were initiated by them that addressed the international public opinion, HEIs and scholarly communities to raise awareness of the rights violations taking place in the country (e.g. AfP Germany, n.d).

Regarding linkages with academic labour processes, it is noteworthy that autonomous mobilizations that problematised precarious employment practices in universities had preceded the 2016 political attacks. This mobilisation was led by research assistants who were employed under casualised employment contracts and subjected to exploitative work conditions (Bianet, 2009; Egitim-Sen, 2014; Ugurlu, 2015). They were organized outside the Education and Science Workers' Union as 'Assistant Solidarities' despite the fact that many of the key organisers were unionized university workers (Ugurlu, 2015: 57-8). Since their inception, they have encountered multiple structural, organisational, and ideological challenges but their very presence was crucial in furthering debates on academic labour within and outside the traditional trade union structures (Ugurlu, 2015:60). The documented impact of expropriation and expulsion on precarious university workers from 2016 onwards has gradually brought visibility to the interconnection between and simultaneity of economic and political forms of violence (Vatansever, 2016, 2018; Duman and Donmez, forthcoming).

Indeed this sensibility towards academic freedom and labour linkages have carried forward in making sense of the experiences of exiled academics in the highly marketized, neoliberal academic environment in Europe. Despite the initial impetus towards solidarity funding and support schemes in the initial years of displacement, dismissed academics have very soon found themselves within the precarious and insecure academic work conditions across Europe. The fellowship support in many cases has remained

provisional and short-term which introduced the need to apply for funds on a continuous basis or seek employment in European HEIs in subsequent years. Many academics' passports were cancelled or revoked with the post-2016 decree laws which meant that even for those abroad the precarity of their residency and status persisted forcing some of the displaced academics to apply for asylum (Vatansever, 2016: 19-20; 2018; 2020: 86-88). Exiled academics have engaged in and led initiatives to open up debates and forge common struggles on this front within the European academic sphere as well (GEW, n.d.).

The peace petition signatories were acquitted of all charges of terrorist propaganda with a Constitutional Court ruling in July 2019. Nevertheless, the precariousness of their employment status continues to this day as their return to public service and universities is yet to materialize (Duman and Donmez, forthcoming).

Hungary

In Hungary, a key difference from the Turkish case is that the public and media attention have largely focused on a single, highly privileged *institution* of higher education in the post-2017 context as we highlighted earlier. This substantial difference has had repercussions on the prospects of transcending this singular focus and connecting with other movements and issue areas of broader societal relevance. This is particularly noteworthy considering, long before the onset of the CEU controversy, (higher) education system had already become a target of the Orban government from 2010 onwards as noted earlier. Neumann and Meszaros (2019: 132) note that the influence of trade unions in the education sector has significantly weakened since 2010. Therefore a repertoire of resistance was developed by grassroots student/faculty and teachers collectives instead (The Student Network (HaHa) and Lecturers' Network (OHA)), which organised outside trade union structures, similar to the experiences in Turkey, in response to the first round of attacks in challenging the new HE act during 2012 and 2013 (Füzessi, 2013; Hallgatói Hálózat, 2013; Neumann and Meszaros, 2019: 132-3; Zontea, 2015). Demands articulated by the movements have evolved over time from single-issue focused reactions against government legislations towards systemic issues including teachers' long working hours and employment conditions by 2016 (Neumann and Meszaros, 2019: 132).

Lex CEU controversy witnessed the emergence of large scale demonstrations with tens of thousands in attendance in a matter of weeks. The initial round of demonstrations were not organized or led by the university management but by a collective of students organised around the Oktatási Szabadságot (Freedom for Education) initiative. In the very first demonstration held on 2nd April, a declaration of

support was read in solidarity with Academics for Peace Turkey. The mass demonstrations garnered support from academic and research institutions based not only in Budapest but also other cities in Hungary as well as abroad (Cinar, 2017).

One of the significant differences we can identify in the Hungarian context is that the senior administration of the university referred to the notion of academic freedom systematically yet interchangeably with the institutional autonomy of the university administration as delineated by Berdhal (1990: 171-2). Institutional efforts were pronounced in leading the first solidarity initiatives with the 'I stand with CEU' campaign led by the CEU administration itself, petitioning the Hungarian government and later the President to withdraw the law by different public universities, institutes and research centres. While these solidarity actions were meaningful, concerns around academic labour processes, university hierarchies as well as broader dynamics and mechanisms of inequalities and exclusion that affect large swathes of Hungarian public as well as Hungarian public (higher) education were not particularly evident in these early articulations. Teach-In initiatives led by the students and faculty members across multiple universities in the country were an exception in this regard. These platforms, building on the legacy of previous mobilisations in 2012-13, became spaces where the problems of higher education were discussed in a broader fashion moving beyond the case of CEU.

Despite these critical interventions, relatively weaker links remained in this respect until governmental attacks intensified and diversified more visibly beyond CEU from late 2018 onwards. During the first phase of mobilization in 2017, the Hungarian government was successful in framing the attempts to speak out against Lex CEU as synonymous to being 'pro-Soros' and defending the privileges of the university. This has been a particularly difficult line of argument to challenge with an alternative, counter-hegemonic discourse without being pushed into another competing hegemonic narrative- that of the pro-EU, Western liberalism (Gagy, 2017).

With the escalation of attacks towards several other public HEIs and specific degree programmes, more active connections were created between students and working populations as part of the growing societal politicisation under the highly contested measures proposed in the Overtime Act tabled in December 2018.[3] These developments have created the material conditions within which solidarity could be forged more strongly with a more radical and inclusive embrace of a diversity of connected struggles. This in turn enabled the elevation of critical voices within university communities to point attention to the deepening repression taking place within the academic domain in connection to the

national as well as global scale processes of exploitation, expropriation and authoritarianism. The new wave of mobilization still built on and elevated the legacy of university occupations and 'free university' initiatives that have been long prevalent in the protest repertoire of students and education communities and workers in the country as noted by Gagyi and Gerocs (2019).

This period witnessed the emergence of more radicalised student organising (e.g. Kovacs, 2018; Lem, 2020) and more open debates regarding the working conditions of university workers, job insecurity and short-term contracts within CEU aided by the revitalisation of the university's trade union from late 2018 onwards with the collective initiative of several administrative and academic workers (AMEDOSZ, n.d). The Hungarian Academy Staff Forum (Akadémiai Dolgozók Fóruma) was launched in the Academy of Sciences in early 2019 bringing both academic labour and freedom concerns onto their agenda in addressing governmental attacks (ADF, n.d).

Therefore it appears more constructive to assess the evolution of the struggles within a continuum that involve strengths, limitations, and collective learning rather than conceive them as disconnected episodes of success or failure achieved in the short term. Such a perspective allows us to envisage the future potential of struggles while still retaining a critical gaze towards the longer term, structural transformations of HE and academic labour processes to uncover the material constraints that these dynamics introduce for prospects of resistance. At the time of writing, mass protests and a student occupation are underway for another key HEI, University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE), which has come under attack with a top-down governmental appointment of a new board of directors in August 2020 (BBC, 2020).

Conclusion

In this article we aimed to position the unfolding governmental attacks against academics and university communities within the global, structural transformations of higher education systems. With a critical and historical perspective, we problematised the dominant narratives that reproduce an ivory tower conception of academia and academic freedom. To this end we adopted a multiple-case study approach focusing on Turkey and Hungary. In both societies, HE transformations came along with and further facilitated the broader restructuring of capital and labour while assuming distinctive forms within the historical specificity of the 1980s under a military coup in Turkey and the post-socialist 'transition' of the 1990s in Hungary. While we could detect a shared characteristic of internalisation of neoliberal forms in, what Ivancheva and Syndicus (2019: 3) call, a 'self-peripheralising' fashion in both HE contexts, the legacy

of these distinctive trajectories and positioning of each country within global hierarchies of capitalism made a lasting impact on the manifestation forms of the latest wave of repression.

The full mobilisation of both judicial and repressive arms of the state alongside the disciplining mechanisms of university administrations against individual academics who took a stance against the rights violations of citizens in Kurdish provinces is a case in point in Turkey. It has led to a large-scale exodus of academic workers from the country and impacted on the continuation and quality of teaching and research. A more subtle, yet decisive, shift from 'rule of law' to 'ruling by law' (Majtényi et. al., 2019) has been prevalent in Hungary where HE institutions have come under attack instead. This, in turn, made the vulnerabilities and concerns of academic workers working in these institutions rather invisible.

The aforementioned dynamics have affected the prospects, manifestations, and limitations of resistance significantly. In both cases, academic labour-focused struggles existed prior to the onset of the overt attacks under scrutiny and flourished outside traditional trade union structures given the weakened structural and representational strength of the latter. These mobilisations have evolved by building on the experiences of previous struggles while introducing novel interventions within the particular material conditions that they have found themselves in. Due to the nature of attacks targeting academics individually and collectively in Turkey, academic labour concerns have been relatively more visible. Nevertheless the overtly violent character of repression and expulsion has understandably kept it on the forefront of resistance and solidarity agendas within and outside Turkey. In the Hungarian context, while the changes in the HE law in the early 2010s prompted teachers' organising and struggles over their employment conditions and pay, the focus of attacks on the HEIs in the latter part of the decade introduced challenges in linking academic labour and freedom issues. Nevertheless, novel unionisation and union revitalisation efforts have still developed by the end of the 2010s.

In the current context, the charges against Academics for Peace were dropped in 2019 and more recently Lex CEU was deemed unlawful by the EU's highest court (Zalan, 2020) after the damage on university communities in both contexts have already been done. Future reverberations of these developments will likely persist in the period ahead (Vatansever, 2020: 48-9; 86). This highlights the importance of organising struggles beyond reactive responses to repressive political attacks towards more active engagements with alternatives to the rule of capital in the organisation of higher education (Szadkowski and Krzeski, 2019: 472-3).

As the crisis of global capitalism deepens, it would be naïve to think that higher education will be exempt from the mounting pressures and sharpening contradictions within societies. Assessing and responding to these developments effectively requires a (self-) critical gaze into the institutions, actors and practices of academic knowledge production. Without this endeavour, it is highly likely that not only in Hungary and Turkey but across the globe, the university communities will fall short of challenging both the neoliberal capitalist enclosures of the university and the exponentially repressive state strategies targeting academia today.

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Notes

[1] <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/314> accessed on 30/8/2020.

[2] Additionally a new set of hostile laws was adopted over the course of 2018 which primarily targeted the operation and funding of non-governmental organisations working in the field of migration through criminalisation and taxation of their activities. Scholars have recently conceived these legislative practices to be part and parcel of a broader strategy of governing via the creation of an atmosphere of (legal) ambiguity to intimidate citizens and repress dissent (Majtényi et. al., 2019: 173-4, 182). Referring to 'a potential liability for a 25 per cent tax' in the law on the basis of its tax advisors' warning, Central European University took the decision to suspend its Open Learning Initiatives which had provided access and BA and MA level preparatory programmes for refugee and asylum seeker students based in Hungary and EEA since 2016 as well as a Horizon 2020 research project on migration hosted by the university (Zubascu, 2018).

[3] Dubbed as the 'Slave Law' in popular dictum, the new legislation aimed 'to demand up to 400 hours of overtime work from workers (previously capped 250 hours a year)' and delay compensation up to three years (Gagyí and Gerocs, 2019). The law additionally aimed to exclude the unions in negotiations and individualise the process which prompted strong public opposition against it.

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