



Academy in Exile

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ABSTRACT

Autoethnographic visual narration on academy in exile.

KEYWORDS

Kurdish identity, working class, opposition in Turkey, academy, exile



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ACADEMY IN EXILE

The short film (4:46 min) by Dr. Gülden Özcan was produced as part of the CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) Digital Storytelling project.

It can be viewed on YouTube through this link (<https://youtu.be/UwyeMR2G9EY>).

In January 2016, I joined over 2000 academics who signed the peace declaration demanding the Turkish government stop violence towards civilians in Kurdish provinces. The government responded with coordinated attacks towards all signatories: my friends, colleagues, and professors in Turkey—people I admire dearly—have faced disciplinary investigations, police interrogations, detentions, mobbing, dismissal from duty, revoked passports, forced resignation and retirement. Just because of signing an online petition. Just because of asking for peace. But this wasn't the first time in Turkey's history that the demand for peace would be persecuted.

I was born in 1983 right at the end of a 3-year military regime. I grew up hearing stories of my parents burying and burning banned books; relatives fleeing the country; people confined for singing a song or reading a poem out loud. I grew up wondering what would be so dangerous about words: spoken, written, enchanted words. As a girl with Kurdish background from a working-class family, growing up in the capitol city of Turkey in early 1990s, I was politicized at an early age. The conflict between Turkish armed forces and the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party] was at its peak. Nightly news reported the number of terrorists killed and soldiers martyred. Union and other civil societal movements were reemerging, banned for over a decade. I loved it when my dad brought home fancy notepads and pens after long union meetings. Turkish capital was meeting with global capital, enjoying privatization. I loved it when we had burgers at the new private cafeteria at my mom's workplace instead of the regular dining hall where they serve free food for all employees.

That would put me in prison. Özgül was going to be an actor; she was going to play in progressive theatres. That would put her in prison. Pinar was going to be a pop singer and become rich. She said, "When you end up in prison, I will hire good lawyers and rescue you!" I would tell her, "Didn't you read these books? Don't you get it? You wouldn't be able to help us with your lawyers. Deniz Gezmiş and his friends had great lawyers, but they were still executed. You could only help us escape the prison in the way Yılmaz Güney's friends helped him escape." Experience of Academics for Peace triggered these memories from my childhood. I am in self-exile now, along with many other academics from Turkey. This was the future I had projected at the age of 12 for myself and for others who insist on telling the truth. Although I don't think I am in exile because of my writings. It was just a signature.

Gulden Ozcan

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