

## Theorizing the Field, Fielding the Theory

### Narrating Politics in Strait Times

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#### ABSTRACT

This article speaks to three distinct—but related—sites of encounter with the political: The first site concerns the field research with feminist academics that has spanned to more than four years, which I conducted in different countries. It is still in the making. The second site relates to contemporary political theory, and the lack of attention to theorizing politics in crisis times and/or regime transitions, displayed either by the rush to model the existing government here-and-now or by sheer silence, putting at risk the capacity to "remember and communicate the political experience" (Wiessberg, 1997, p. 21). The third site is about bringing in micro-politics of everyday life into political theory. In this manuscript, I try to point at a means of doing so—through everyday conversation. I consider these sites as signifying the loss of meaning in the political (both in terms of political practices and reading these practices) in times of crisis, accompanying the increase in the frequency and degree of violence in institutional politics, and in everyday social interactions.<sup>2</sup> Here, I try to explore the possibilities for a politically engaged theorizing that prioritizes (historical) meaning over (speedy and assembly-line) model-making in explaining the political here-and-now. In so doing, I refer to bringing in everyday politics as storied in the accounts of citizens-as-actors. I argue that political theory offers the medium for turning the stories of political actors into narrations for shedding light on the structure that ties seemingly incidental, and thus divided moments in transition. My argument is that in contemporary versions of crisis—the crisis of neoliberal capitalism—everyday life offers one a space to connect her/his concerns with the politics of theorizing and the theoretical-as-embedded in the political experience.

#### KEYWORDS

*Feminist autoethnography, feminist academics, neoliberal university*



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## THEORIZING THE FIELD, FIELDING THE THEORY: NARRATING POLITICS IN STRAIT TIMES

### Introduction

*...writing is then meant to unite at a single stroke the reality of the acts and the ideality of the ends. This is why power, or the shadow cast by power, always ends in creating an axiological writing, in which the distance which usually separates fact from value disappears within the very space of the word, which is given at once as description and as judgment. The word becomes an alibi, that is, an elsewhere and a justification. This ... is even truer of the political [modes of writing]..., in which the alibi ... is at the same time intimidation and glorification: for it is power or conflict which produce the purest types of writing. (Barthes, 1968, p. 20)*

Human history has hosted periods when writing turns out to be a seemingly futile endeavour. This is so especially when the violence in reality is more evident, and when the facts speak for themselves, defying the mediation of words. And words seem to be pushed to the back stage since they either fail to reflect the brutality of reality and/or they are silenced by the *authorship of reel politics*. This manuscript originates from within such times. My basic concern is to interrogate the state of the academic writing in political science discipline, and to explore the possibilities for alternative forms of writing. In so doing, I insist on the power of writing as a form of resistance. My main argument is that academic writing as an aspect of resistance requires a re-consideration of the relation between theory and the field. Here, I dare to refer to *the fielding of political theory* by prioritizing the value of meaning for theoretical works in making sense of the world-as-such.

To this background, the article speaks to three distinct—but related—sites of encounter with the political: The first site concerns the field research with feminist academics that has spanned to more than four years, which I conducted in different countries. It is still in the making. The second site relates to contemporary political theory, and the lack of attention to theorizing politics in crisis times and/or regime transitions, displayed either by the rush to model the existing government here-and-now or by sheer silence, putting at risk the capacity to "remember and communicate the political experience" (Wiessberg, 1997, p. 21). The third site is about bringing in micro-politics of everyday life into political theory. In this manuscript, I try to point at a means of doing so—through everyday conversation. I consider these sites as signifying the loss of meaning in the political (both in terms of political practices and reading these practices) in times of crisis, accompanying the increase in the frequency and degree of violence in institutional politics, and in everyday social interactions.<sup>2</sup> Here, I try to explore the possibilities for a politically engaged theorizing that prioritizes (historical) meaning over (speedy and assembly-line) model- making in explaining the political here-and-now. In so doing, I refer to bringing in everyday politics as storied in the accounts of citizens-as-actors. I argue that political theory offers the medium for turning the stories of political actors into narrations for shedding light on the structure that ties seemingly incidental, and thus divided moments in transition.

The manuscript unfolds as follows: First, I try to offer a brief outline of the research that lies in the background to this manuscript. By this I aim to contextualize the above-mentioned sites as interrelated aspects of my argument for a politically engaged theorizing. I offer the basics of the sites, and try to see how they might be intertwined in one's experience with politics-as-such. This part also outlines the socio-political dynamics that frame contemporary academic spaces. In the second part, I move onto a discussion of contemporary crisis in politics—in the form of regime transition—that calls for theorizing as a means for making sense of the world. Here, I take issue with a specific example of regime transition—Turkey. Finally, I discuss the relevance of everyday life for reclaiming the political in times of crisis. Here, I try to move beyond structure – agency dichotomy with reference to narration. The three parts are intertwined with a view to a methodological argument related to exploring the structural features of arbitrariness in politics on the basis of everyday life politics. My argument is that in contemporary versions of crisis—the crisis of neoliberal capitalism—everyday life offers one a space to connect her/his concerns with the politics of theorizing and the theoretical-as-embedded in the political experience.

### Academe as the Field – The Neoliberal Effect?

*I am happy to be named. But it is just that then I would answer differently. So be careful whatever your preferences. (April 20)*

It is no secret that the universities worldwide have been going through a transformation process. This I would identify with neoliberalization that started in the late 1970s. For some time, I have been trying to understand the implications of this transformation process for the universities as institutions of higher education, as sites of knowledge production, as workplaces where we as academics define the jobs that we are presumed to perform. Initially, I focused on the way universities are structured in accordance with neoliberal policy preferences. What happened to the students; how studentship is re-formulated so as to conform to neoliberal socio-cultural patterns; how academic success is re-defined; what are the contours of ideal academic identity—particularly in social sciences—and the basic features of the calling to academe (Coşar and Ergül 2015; Ergül and Coşar 2004/2005). Then I turned to problematize the ways, manners, means, mediums that informed the academics' responses to the neoliberal re-structuration on university campuses, and particularly in knowledge production processes (Ergül and Coşar 2017). That is how I came to conduct field research, first, with academics who were directly involved in the re-structuration process as assembly-line workers (2014-2015).<sup>3</sup> In that study, none of the participants wanted to be cited with their real names. This field has eventually developed to include feminist academics' encounters with, and interventions into the neoliberal knowledge production processes, as well as their compromises to related administrative instructions. I started this part of the research in the USA (Spring - Summer 2016), and continued in Canada (Fall – Winter 2016). In these two countries I interviewed with 26 feminist academics, majority of whom were critical of the implications of neoliberal policy preferences. None of the participants, except for one emerging feminist scholar whose work is on critical university studies, preferred to be cited with their real names.

In this specific field preference for unanimity has multiple meanings. The most derivative, the least manifest meaning can be explored in relation to the distinction between the public and private spaces of one's engagement with the world. Aside from the security concerns

that might lead the interviewees of a research process to opt for anonymity and the researchers to maintain anonymity for their field participants, the interviewees' tending towards unanimity might be read as a twist in their engagement with the public through their positions in the knowledge production processes. This preference risks rendering their public appearances private. The fact that I was interviewing in a supposedly secure space, and that the interviewees were supposed to be relatively less vulnerable in case their identities were exposed, that they were relatively settled in their comfort zones,<sup>4</sup> did not relieve them of the sense of vulnerability in publicizing their everyday academic experiences with their real names. At first sight, I considered this as a matter of course in field research. I had already been using pseudonyms in quoting from the people whom I met when on the field. However, as I progressed on this field, as the field started to speak for and of itself this turned out to be a topic of interest to explore, and to re-situate myself as well as the course of the research.<sup>5</sup> As an academic, interviewing academics from different ranks certainly involved a form of power exchange. But this was not only about the asymmetrical relation between the researcher and the researched, conventionally putting the former into a relatively powerful position vis-à-vis the latter, which risks the validity and reliability of the (re-)production and circulation of knowledge-as-such. More importantly, the asymmetry also risks the prioritization of ethical concerns promoted by rights-based approaches to knowledge production. This is the case especially when the researcher relies on feminist epistemology on the field, and thus, she is there not to gather data but for situating herself in diverse planes of knowledge production processes as means for co-acting through the micro-politics of everyday life (On feminist research ethics see Harding, 2014; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hawkesworth, 1989). This can also be considered in terms of visiting the academics in their workplaces.<sup>6</sup> Observing and participating as a visitor in their everyday academic activities, the researcher can access the spatial basics of the situatedness of academic knowledge production.<sup>7</sup>

I did not aim at arriving a comparative analysis of the neoliberal academe on the basis of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 26 feminist academics in North America. Nor did I plan to juxtapose the developments at the institutional level with the voices from the interviews to substantiate my already established structuralist reading of the state of the universities. I was merely trying to explore the existing and potential feminist interventions to the neoliberalization process. This required to have the feminist academics talk about their dispositions in the neoliberal universities—and, above all, read the existing university settings in terms of the changes and continuities in the knowledge production regimes. This was not merely about defining what neoliberalism is. It was more about talking through the neoliberal experience, searching for its marks in our daily academic practices, reflecting on our state of being in the midst of this epochal transformation process,<sup>8</sup> and acting upon it. It did not turn out to be as such.<sup>9</sup>

The reference to neoliberalism, always as a prefix, occupied a significant place in every interview—sometimes synonymous with marketization or with corporatization or with commodification of academic life or of knowledge, or with a view to academics, adjusting to the identity of flexible individuals/investors/entrepreneurs:

*So, we kind of marketed ourselves as the public alternative to a private liberal arts school. (June 1b)*

*So, I'm in women's studies; we are very brandable. And I think ... that there is a notion that is becoming quite brandable is to say "we push*

*women to be leaders", "we break the glass ceiling", "we have corporate heads from our ...". (June 1a)*

*I can say ... I've been completely flexible for the university. I have worked, I have taught anthropology, English, and lots of women and gender studies courses, and American studies, queer studies, and objects in everyday life and the individual and community... whatever was needed. Because I needed to be supported as a graduate student in a public university, and so worked for the Dean of Graduate Studies... went to Davos World Universities Forum to represent the university ... I was flexible to do what was necessary. I learned a lot from it. (April 27)*

*OK, so the president of the university is trying to do this kind of merger, right? Andy Card [Andrew Hill Card] is getting an honorary degree... The university is signing contracts with Coca Cola and Amazon that racks local business, and local independent bookstores etc. The Pioneer Institute is telling us that we can't have classes that are under 12 students any more. These are the things that are all related to one another, and I don't know what it's gonna take to get movement that can really resist. (May 4)*

*... and at that time [mid-1970s], when I started working for ... the students were working class students... many, first generation in their families. That's no longer true. And we have seen it over the past 40 years. This is an outrage, you know. ... This is a state university and ... the percentage of funds that the university gets from the state has gone down. (July 11)*

*I was in one of the higher layer committees in the university. And the university was kind of absolutely denying... You know, "we are not racists, we are open to everybody." So, some discussion about how I find, you know, the university to be a very unsafe place, because it is a very colonial kind of place. It's not just sexist but it's very colonial. A white woman colleague of mine... in women's studies department ... She stops me and says: "I guess at some point I really wanna talk to you. What did you mean with this place is sexist and racist? You know, this place is a very comfortable place." I say, "precisely, it's a very comfortable place for you. ... it's an over-determined one that could be read as me, talking about my personal subjugation as a woman of color. And I'm addressing this as structural issue ... (Kay)*

The quotations might be multiplied, collaging with each other; not necessarily overlapping but showing different facets of a dynamic knowledge production regime. There is no standard to the form that this mode of knowledge production takes. It changes across regions and countries, as it appears in different echoes—both in terms of tone and in terms of the horizon it extends—in the conversations of individual feminist academics. Differences of interpretation persist. Market mentality, flexibility, individualization, asocialization, securitization, precarization of the academe seem to be the topics that come up in all accounts—though in relation to specific experiences that are not necessarily identical.

Using pseudonyms for the vulnerable subjects due to the socio-political and historical dynamics that render the identification of the subjects risky does not deprive them from their positions as agents and/or actors. Feminist epistemologies have long been guiding the researchers for ways to sustain the subjectivities without deciphering the personhoods of the participants as the co-authors of the research. They have also been teaching them to maintain their own agency in collaboration with the agencies of the interviewees and/or the inhabitants of the field, thus offering the grounds for co-making the

fields in question.<sup>10</sup> But when the interviewees in question turn out to be researchers themselves, with experiences in and on field research with vulnerable subjects, vulnerabilities might turn out to be more personal than contextual, leaving the researcher with minimal means to keep her focus in remembering and thinking on the related accounts. This was one of the main reasons that I eventually tended towards narration as a form of turning accounts by the feminist academics into first stories and thereon to points of departure for theoretical explorations. Another reason was of course the impossibility of anonymizing the interviewees in my research, regardless of using pseudonyms—many of whom are well-known, and/or established feminist scholars with international reputation. Their accounts involved hints about their past and present contributions to feminist academic achievements in maleist university spaces, especially regarding the recognition of women's, gender and sexuality studies as sufficiently academic. The third reason was that the field has been where I define myself, and more than that through time the socio-political dynamics that directly affected universities led to the risk of turning myself into the field—i.e., to evade the risk of sufficing with auto-ethnography.<sup>11</sup> At one point the option for auto-ethnographic analysis becomes overly inviting, dangerously attractive for the researcher who stays on the brink of impasse between the agents' accounts extending from disinterest to the subject of everyday academic life to impatient enthusiasm (five out of 12 in the US, two out of 14 in Canada) due to the ever increasing pace of time on the one hand, and their silent disapproval of neoliberal knowledge regimes.

This seeming contradiction between the preference of relatively secure subjects to stay anonymous versus the researcher's tending towards involving auto-ethnographic account can be approached with a view to the neoliberal order of things in the academe—the charming call for personalizing any experience, de-politicizing scholarly conversations, and fragmenting the scholarly knowledge beyond specialization so as to leave no room for capturing a working picture of the political totality. Briefly, during the interviews the invitation to a feminist conversation did not appeal to all the interviewees (except for five – out of 12 – in the USA, one out of 14 in Canada). They were more interested in hearing the questions and responding in a certain time slot. They had courses to lecture, executive meetings to attend, students to mentor and/or listen to, services to perform, e- mails to respond to, research projects to draft—all calculated as fragments of work in varying degrees:

*So, I have my ... days. But I divide my days ... administration, teaching, and writing and research. And total. I don't spend more than 40 hours. So, I'm very much mindful of schedule. (May 18)*

The interview was then processed into one cell in the work-charts. We were converging in defining the problems—job insecurity for the emerging and non-tenured academics, almost forceful individualization in keeping pace with requirements for tenure, promotion, and ever-increasing tuition fee for students leading them to full-time jobs simultaneous with full-time schooling:

*So these working class kids. And we saw it happened. They would come to school when the tuition went up and they would be working full-time jobs; and going to school full-time. And these 20 year-olds look like 30. They were exhausted all the time. (July 11)*

We were departing in terms of engaging in feminist conversation. In some cases, we were not conversing at all. Aside from the time factor, the deficiencies in the style the researcher approaches the interviewees, her use of the language as the medium that facilitates

and/or hinders the dialogue to turn into conversation can be noted as possible reasons behind this conversational deficit. "What remains is the language", remarks Arendt in her correspondence with Jaspers on identity (Cited in Wiessberg, 1997, p. 35). My position as a visitor—to the feminist academics' lives preferably in their offices, and sometimes in cafés was not the usual one: The privileged visiting the un(der)privileged sites to give voice (feminist as tourist), to hear and carry the voice (feminist as explorer), to learn and work together with the real actors of the field (comparative feminist studies) (Mohanty, 2003, 518-524). My research also involved a search for rights-based concerns in the academic workplaces; but I was not visiting a field inhabited by the Two-Thirds of the world (Mohanty, 2003). On the other hand, I have been staying in-between the One-Third and Two-Third of worlds, thus fitting perfectly into a visiting position. This is a position that does not necessarily bring in the asymmetrical relation between the researcher and the researched, putting the former on a more powerful footing. There was more an unconventional push to situate North America into a site of Area Studies to be spectated from within the South.

In this respect, the narration of the field would be in-between, suiting well to the situatedness of academics' encounters in neoliberal universities. The identity in-between, marking the disposition of the researcher in relation to the interviewees, also offers the grounds to weave individual accounts into narration to ensure they are remembered and communicated beyond their empirical individualities. Such narration might also speak to the possibility of decreasing the burden of individualization on work in the academe, re-connecting work to political theory (Weeks, 2011).<sup>12</sup> In this frame, narration can be considered to locate the individual stories of the interviewees into the scope of political theory. Beyond a mere methodological preference to understand the neoliberal reality, which generally exposes itself in fragments, narration—due to its unifying effect among the fragments—might also be considered in relation to a critical political stance that reads neoliberalism as a general rationality, as the regime of self-evident truths imposing themselves on rulers of all persuasions as the sole framework for understanding human conduct (Dardot & Laval, 2017, p. 150). As such it bears the potential to politicize theory.

### Storylines of Recent History: Writing in Fragments, Accounts, Chronicles

*You live your life as a project. I mean this is related to the neoliberalization of the academia. You ask, 'what does help me to move forward in this ... network?' Well, meet this person, meet that person, hold them in reserve. For example, conventional congresses, Facebook. Use all these, all the means you have for this. (May 31)*

*I read, I listen. No, nothing changes. Who says that human beings change, that epochs change, s/he is lying. Everything stays the same. It was the same in our days. There was bloodshed; people were dying; screams were reaching up to the sky. People were drowning in revenge and hatred. Just like today. (Uzun, 1998, p. 489) (my translation)<sup>16</sup>*

Turkey's political space has always had its pre-determined enemies; usual suspects; threats to the unity of Turkey as a country, and/or to the existence of the nation and/or the state. These have changed in accordance with the political dynamics, sometimes limited to one group, other times

adding one or more to the list of the suspects. Throughout the history of the Republic two groups have consistently been enlisted as such; socialists and communists, and the Kurdish political organizations. It was the 1980 coup d'état that brought in the expansion of this list throughout all social and political groups, deemed to be in opposition to the military establishment—to the military interim regime of 1980 - 1983. Following the transition to civilian regime in 1983, and the rather selective repression by centre-right governments of 1990s—Kurdish political organizations continued to be main suspects. The military interim regime set the structural requisites for neoliberalization. In the following decades, except for short liberal interludes the governments continued with the rather traditionalized repressive measures in their approach to the usual suspects.

Most recently, under the AKP governments the list of the usual suspects changed frequently, starting with the Kemalist circles which sympathized with the Turkish Armed Forces' powerful hand in civilian politics, extending to leftists and feminists, Kurdish political organizations, and finally, culminating in social and political opposition as such.<sup>17</sup> In all these cases the AKP's tactics were outside the legal parameters. Most manifest examples of this have been detentions and imprisonments before the investigation files are finalized. The arbitrariness is due to the arbitrary stretching of boundaries of the laws; the systematic factor is selecting and marginalizing the to-be pacified (potential) opposition. Thus, the opposition that has less social and/or mass support was first targeted. The second tactic to marginalize the opposition was criminalizing it on the basis of national security—i.e., on the basis of terrorism. By the eruption of Gezi Resistance in 2013 the AKP did not need to look for less mass support to marginalize the opposition. It had more or less institutionalized its power-basis—i.e., developing from a party in power without power, to a powerful party-government both in material and electoral terms. A vast social opposition, composed of diverse and multiple platforms could be targeted and criminalized within the scope of Anti-Terror Law. 2013 and afterwards, thus marks the latest stage in Turkey's regime transition that dates back to 1980 military coup d'état, and that has taken its final turn under the AKP's rule. This four decade-long transformation has always been pursued in fragments, except for the total rule of the military interim regime (1980 – 1983), and except for the personalistic rule of Erdoğan since 2014.

Times of transition, when tuned by terror in one of its forms that uses fear as an intermediary in social and political regulations might also be defined with a view to tightness.<sup>18</sup> I think that tight times is the term that approximates to what has recently been experienced in the rise of authoritarian regimes with personalistic credentials. Times are tight for a couple of reasons. First, politics pursued in fragments needs and necessitates narrow spaces, in time shrinking the public into private and/or personal sizes. Second, fragmented politics of rights violations tends to push opposition into divided and narrowed spaces of opposition. Third, the knowledge regimes of this transition process also work in fragments, mostly relying on models explaining parts for particular periods, leaving the totality to history—as something in the making, without the past and the future. The knowledge of politics in such settings turn out to be mostly an analysis of the here-and-now. Academic knowledge production of the political, thus risks turning into an anti-political endeavour—so long as the political is meant to be about the citizens' relation to the world of interests that are of common and/or shared concern. This is because politics is limited to governing, governing is reduced to administration, and administration is personalized into a certain—most of the times idiosyncratic—head of the ruling mechanism.

However, so long as the terror does not assume a totalitarian body there are trials to make sense of this transition—not necessarily through modelling, and/or explanation—but to interpret the fragmented happenings in a certain relationality, thus bringing in the political to the understanding of the political space—i.e. what Arendt depicts as "trying to be at home in the world" (1994a, p. 308) Cavarero (2002, 515) underlines the need to politicize [political] theory to reinstitute thinking into the political space:

In Arendtian terms, politics does not consist of forms that put subjects in order by subjecting them to a norm and excluding those who do not belong—insofar as they constitute the figure of the other, the stranger, the alien—within this normalization. Politics is a relational space—from which no one is excluded because uniqueness is a substance without qualities—that opens when unique existents communicate themselves reciprocally to one another with words and deeds, and closes when this reciprocal communication ceases.

While terror as an instrument that targets politics at all levels, it is through the micro-politics of everyday life that one might find the spaces for preserving, insisting on, and resisting through the political against anti-politics. Political theory that prioritizes the knowledge of politics, unfolding in these spaces rely on narration—weaving the (life-)stories, stories that we tell each other, to communicate and start something anew. Narration helps us to free the stories from their individual and/or personal and/or communal boundaries and carry them into the shared spaces. Thus Ricoeur (1983, p. 67) reads:

The connection between action and story is one of the striking themes of the whole treatise in *The Human Condition*. ... It is only jointly that the disclosure of the who and the web of human relationships engenders a process from which the unique life story of any newcomer may emerge. ... The life-story proceeds as a compromise from the encounter between the events initiated by man [sic.] as the agent of action and the interplay of circumstances induced by the web of human relationships. The result is a story in which everyone is the hero without being the author.

If as Barthes notes "...that each regime has its own writing..." then those moments that host the deathbed of the old, and cradle of the new host the emergence of multiple political modes of writing. It helps the human mind to escape from the dangers of the wind of thinking—the traps awaiting the thinking ego—by offering path to communication, and eventually to speech. It is in this respect that Arendt (1968b, p. ix) tends to write to capture the light that some men and women would spread even in the most hopeless times. But she also writes through the everyday lives of certain other agents to capture the possible answers to her personal questions related to her everyday existence, which are inevitably political. Hence, her narration of Rahel Varnhagen's letters can also be interpreted as an attempt to address her own Jewish identity, her denial to appear in the public sphere through this identity, and the calls she receives both in fascist and liberal contexts to appear in public with that identity—another instance of "... running for shelter from a wind too strong..." (Arendt, 1978, p. 174).

To continue with the metaphor, if storm gets stronger in times of transition, language is there to orient us to divest our thinking capacities into communicating with the other selves. Although Arendt

does not credit political theory for either nurturing the micro-politics of hope, or communicating with the others, the turn towards certain narrative forms in contemporary political theory suggests that the search for such hope and for alternative forms of communication has already entered into the discipline. Politicizing theory exemplifies one such search, bringing in (auto-)ethnography into the discipline is another.<sup>19</sup> I believe it would not be inapt to search for support from other disciplines when political theory tends to be restricted to modelling, separating explanation and meaning, and prioritizing the former over the latter.<sup>20</sup>

To put it differently, when the theoretical realm is divorced from the relational inputs of spectating, reflecting, communicating as the basis for one's—in this case the theoretician's—relation to the world—political theory loses its power to make sense of human political existence.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the connection between the academics' political stances in the neoliberal knowledge production regimes and their agency in the universities as neoliberal workplaces is easily ignored. The connection between the academics-as-entrepreneurs investing in and on themselves and marketing thereof and the quantification of anything that is related to work-as-such on the one hand, and the mechanization of production by ever frequent, ever increasing, yet never sufficient publications is willingly by-passed. The connection between the fragile comfort zones enclosed by the office spaces, though becoming narrower, and the way academics relate to the knowledge production processes are excluded due to the deepening problem of scarcity of time. And lastly, the connection between all of the above, on the one hand, and the ways academics organize and act—or they fail to do so—against authoritarian policies that aim at the appropriation of academic knowledge for the sake of sustaining global capital flows, on the other hand, is set aside. Thus note, two different interviewees on the precarization that faces—and perhaps equalizes—academics at different ranks in the neoliberal academic qualification scale:

*...If you are in the instructor position you are just a teacher, right? You are not expected to do research, and the problem is that ... There are people out there, there are academics out there who, you, know, do, just wanna do the teaching. They are really fabulous teachers, they are not that interested in research—like, I think that those people exist. And so if those people are the ones who end up with the instructor position, then fabulous. They are probably gifted teachers; that's where they wanna be. Great. But that's not what happens. The job market is so awful that people who get the instructor positions are, you know, brilliant academics who should be in regular tenure-track jobs. But there aren't just any jobs, so they end up in instructor positions; and their research profile, like, ... it's gone, because they can't... And so like, you know, we could have benefitted in all sorts of ways from this great researcher, but unfortunately, you know, they are stuck in this position. (emphasis mine) (November 16)*

*...So there is more mission at the undergrad, but also at the grad level to be done. You know, I'm seeing over the years about who turns into contract instructor and kind of doesn't get ... frankly, they shouldn't be looking for academic jobs. ... It's not that they aren't... Yes, they're really strong researchers, so they'll apply to research jobs. But they ... if you think about ... among the Ph.D students, some of them you can only hope. They will never be a professor. Because they, like, the research skills; they, like, personality ... you know... It's the maturity, that's not there. So part of the problem is that we have been admitting more Ph.D students and the selection of has been happening at that*

*level. So the solution is not to give everybody in that pool a tenure-track job. (emphasis mine) (October 14)*

## Tentative Conclusion

*Patience, patience, because the great movements of history have always begun in those small parenthesis that we call 'in the meantime.'* (Berger 2019)

In this manuscript, I try to address a well-known question that is deeply entrenched in modern ways of knowing the politics: how do we address the debilitating indeterminacy and inconclusiveness of politics in the general sense that endanger the political as a form of relationality among human beings as agents, and as an essential site of human everyday existence? I frame the question and my search for answers with a view to a multi-dimensional scale: Micro-politics of everyday life, academic knowledge production regimes, neoliberal order of things.

I try to offer a narrative platform for a variety of theoretical stances in conversation with each other: I present my field research in and through the neoliberal academia, and mainly the interviews that I conducted with feminist academics. I add my readings on thinking and acting as the priorities to counter anti-politics in contemporary world. I try to locate the two inquiries into a critical interpretation of neoliberal authoritarianism that involves fascistic experiments in times of crisis. This, I try to do through narration. The overall—and somewhat hidden—argument that lies behind the manuscript is that in times of crisis, prone to or actually bear sheer violence, micro-politics of everyday life offers a convenient venue for re-claiming politics, which in the final analysis asks for a theoretical intervention. Such intervention can be opted by exploring the possibilities to work political theory as a medium to turn everyday life-stories into narrations that represent and speak to the commons-as- public.

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## Notes

- This article is a revised version of the lecture I brought in Cornell University Political Theory Workshop in 2018. I would like to thank the workshop participants for their constructive criticisms.
- 2 By violence I do not refer merely to physical violence. I consider structural violence, signifying multiple forms of violence—physical, psychological, socio-economic, reproducing each other.
- 3 This was actually the case, though, in post-Fordist times.
- 4 Here, I am not bypassing the job insecurity of the tenure-track assistant professors. Among the 26 interviewees three were in such position. One of them preferred to share her real name.
- 5 This was—and still is—a research through which I have been trying to explore the subjectivities of academics, the way we have been related to the neoliberal transformation process in the academe, and the way this relation unfolds in everyday academic life.
- 6 Visiting is a key aspect of Arendt's methodological notes on reading and thinking through human experience in the form of narration. One meets it in her narration of Rahel Varnhagen's life, also in her reflections on men [sic.] in dark times. It helps her to handle the dichotomy between neutral distancing and compassionate side-taking in observing the reality—i.e., the problem of representation. As Lisa Disch (1994: 199) succinctly puts, "To visit, ... you must travel to a new location, leave behind what is familiar, and resist the temptation to make yourself at home where you are not."
- 7 Feminist epistemological interventions in natural and social sciences have long been discussing the ways to integrate everyday experiences into knowledge production processes. The main idea is that everyday experiences are already embedded in knowledge production regimes. The point is to reveal the reproduction and justification of inequalities, exploitation, and violence through scientific claims. (See Haraway 1988; Longino 1987; Harding 1986; Hartstock 1983.)
- 8 Nurtured on critical feminist ethnography, inevitably hosting auto-ethnographic extensions, the research also turned out to be one where the researcher stepped into the field, at times becoming the field of herself.
- 9 This is not unusual in ethnographic research, where the field is processual; where one tempts integrate everyday life aspect into the research. Everyday life aspect refers to both the everyday practices of the participants as well as the researcher's everyday experiences on the field. The field also invites the researcher to re-visits.
- 10 A remarkable example is the "group interview" organized by Heidi Hartman (Hartman, Bravo, Bunch, Hartsock, Spalter-Roth, Williams 1996). The interview offers a multi-dimensional insight into feminist ways of knowing: it starts with the personal experiences of feminist thinkers-as- activists, which in turn attests to the fact that those experiences are never just personal. It moves onto the discussion of the multiple meanings of feminist thinking and activism, the medium of relation between the two. Shulamitz Reinharz (1983) offers a related discussion on experiential analysis, emphasizing collaboration,

subjecthood of both the researcher and the researched in the research process, and the importance of relationality in interrogating the experience with reality rather than definitive summaries of facts.

11 I do not categorically exclude auto-ethnography as a means for narration. However, this does not mean that I endorse it as the only means. Auto-ethnography steps into the field when the field repeats itself, when the researcher feels the urge to take a step back from the margins of the field and a turning herself as a part of the field. Auto-ethnographic tendencies certainly carry the risks of self-immersed accounts (cf. Atkinson 2017: 108) and/or falling into the trap of adding up the accounts of the empirical individuals (Wacquant 2011) and/or universalizing the epistemic individual (Bourdieu 1988: 21-35). But if conducted collaboratively, where the self is always checked out of the center auto-ethnography helps reveal "the richness and complexity of everyday life" (Foley 2010: 475). Part of this collaboration relates to the researcher's turn from within the field to address the readers; it helps the researcher to invite the readers to a "deeper form of judgement" regarding the knowledge production in the field (Dauphnee 2010: 813).

12 Weeks (2011: 4) relates the exclusion of work from political theory [in the United States] to "work's subordination to property rights, its reification, and its individualization ... [and] the decline of work-based activism..." Earlier, Wendy Brown (2002: 563) notes the disappearance of capitalism from political theory.

13 The meeting was organized by a civil society organization, Küçük Millet Meclisleri (Small National Assemblies) that aimed at constituting a platform of citizens for regular checks on the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. The small national assemblies can be perceived as modelling the logic of shadow cabinets. I am not disclosing the name of the social scientist since I was there as a member of a feminist organization.

14 As Atkinson (2017: 14) notes, "Even though its surface appearance may seem messy, everyday life is ordered".

15 I shall emphasize that story-telling to consent to reality in order to feel at home on this world is disrupted in fascistic times.

16 Mehmed Uzun (1953 – 2007). Kurdish novelist. His book, Ronî Mîna Evîne, Tarî Mîna Mirinê was translated into Turkish by Muhsin Kızılkaya: Aşk Gibi Aydınlık, Ölüm Gibi Karanlık (Bright as Love, Dark as Death). Mehmed Uzun lived in exile between 1976 and 2006. He passed away in Diyarbakır (Amed) in 2007. He was among the usual suspects of the Turkish state.

17 Here, I am not listing the Gülen community, which has also taken its share of the AKP government's hostility. Gülen community had been a long-time ally of the AKP governments, until the infamous 2013 corruption files were leaked to the mass media. This is because the Gülen community has never represented a social and/or political opposition to the governments under the AKP's regime. It has been more a partner to the government—through civil and military bureaucracy. See Coşar and Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2016.

18 I approach the term "terror" on the basis of Arendt's reading: "... as a means of frightening people into submission." Arendt focuses on totalitarian terror, defining this version with reference to three features: absence of the enemies of the regime; ceaseless fear and violence; subsumption of laws of the totalitarian regime to terror (Arendt, 1994b, pp. 299 – 300).

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