

11. Turkey: How to deal with threats to journalism?

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Journalism has always been an unsafe practice in modern Turkey. However, ties between the political system and democracy have been severed by the recent witch-hunt following the most recent failed coup, in 2016, and the subsequent societal collapse triggered by the administration of the state of emergency. In fact, mass and commercial journalism culture, whose foundations were built upon the post- World War II efforts to create a democratization trend and the transition to the multi-party system, were never strong enough to generate a sustainable liberal-pluralist set of media norms as in the West. Instead, a media system that serves the needs of political and economic power elites was both established and entrenched (Adaklı, 2006; Kaya, 2009).

Particularly, in the aftermath of 1990s politics and business have started to overlap in league with international neoliberal regulations, which manifested themselves as privatization and de-regularization in Turkey's media sphere. Moreover, journalism was weakened under the auspices of an army of columnists who fought and continue to fight for the business interests of a few media moguls (Adaklı, 2010; Kaya, 2009). Despite such unpleasant conditions, it is possible to mention a handful of journalists in the mainstream Turkish media who remain committed to upholding professional norms. However, the main bearers of a journalism culture that prioritizes truth and transparency over ambiguous norms of objectivity and impartiality are found elsewhere, in alternative media (Çoban & Ataman, 2015).

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The relationship between media and democracy in Turkey may be studied in light of a situation where alternative media and journalistic practices take centre stage. A recent evidence is the widespread loss of trust in commercial mainstream media strengthened by its continuous avoidance and inappropriate coverage during the 2013 Gezi Resistance, in Istanbul, in which Turkey's most important political square was occupied by hundreds of thousands of citizens. The resistance was covered only by independent, alternative media and activist citizen journalists.

Under the dominance of a news media that has completely renounced the requirements of a professional journalism ideology, citizens have started to choose alternative outlets for their informational needs (Banko & Babaoğlu, 2013; Özkırımlı, 2014). Although, these outlets might seem far from professional at first sight, insignificant in terms of access, and unsuccessful from a business perspective, they have sided with citizen rights and democracy in pursuit of truth.

In short, the liquidation of commercial big media through suppression and acquisition, the emergence of the pro-government ultra-partisan and propagandist news media as the only remaining mass media, brought an end to professional journalism. Very few options were left for the small number of columnists and experienced correspondents who remain committed to professionalism. Today, in order to continue to make news, they either set up their own web-based, micro, personal media initiatives or join forces with activists of resilient alternative media.

Within the few years following the Gezi Resistance, the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) government has rapidly instrumentalised all state institutions by taking advantage of its parliamentary majority. Taking full control of the judiciary system, government has enacted anti-democratic and repressive laws as well as instigating conflict and violence; in a word, it has transformed Turkey into a police state. After completing the large-scale occupation of the last relatively autonomous areas left by pro-government commercial big media, AKP has shifted the weight of its attack, now targeting independent and alternative media by using the pretext of the failed coup d'état. For instance, recently, the best-selling Kemalist, nationalist opposition daily newspaper *Sözcü* and the Fox TV, Disney-owned nationalist popular TV channel, which did not sympathise with the government, has been under heavy attack. In addition to TV channels, magazines

and newspapers and the news agency associated with the alleged Islamic network of the coup, many progressive-socialist media outlets and the ones representing the Kurdish political movement have also been closed by state decrees. In fact, soon after the government came into power in 2002, many media outlets were sold to pro-government business people by active involvement of a public institution (Savings Deposit and Insurance Fund of Turkey/TMSF) in the media sector. Therefore, these were the first steps in what are today's ultra-partisan pro-government media roots.

Despite the current journalistic darkness, the aim of our study is to critically evaluate and present relatively successful tactics and strategies used by resilient and persistent journalists against threats and attacks to our profession in Turkey by drawing on concepts and theories of alternative journalism. The data we harnessed here are in-depth interviews and participant observations taken from our previous research on alternative media and citizen journalism, our years of experience in the alternative and activist media field and through relevant news and national and international media and democracy reports. Also, we would like to address and invite fellow researchers and practitioners to abandon orthodox perspectives and to think critically, reflecting on the extent to which these strategies and tactics can be considered sustainable and improvable at the intersection of normative and critical journalistic theories.

Constructing a democratic front in journalism

The current journalistic norms dominating the Western World are renewed expressions of classical liberal principles. These have changed over time for many reasons, including the failure to produce an objective, impartial and pluralistic public information and discussion environment (Kovach & Rosantiel, 2001; Siebert et al., 1956). In contrast, in the decisiveness of commercial concerns, it is possible to claim that a journalism practice, which comes to operate under an elitist right-wing media industry, has burgeoned. This is an industry in which there is a lack of in-depth discussion of serious issues of public concern, and where the voices of marginalized and oppressed people are hardly heard. The idea of a free market of ideas loses its validity and is replaced by a journalism driven by sensation, conflict and entertainment.

On the other hand, the concept of “alternative journalism”, which extends to the periods of radical enlightenment and revolutionary bourgeois presses of the 18th century, “may be understood as a radical challenge to the professionalized and institutionalized practices of the mainstream media” (Atton & Hamilton, 2008: 135). Although it is a relatively recent term used in tandem with the political and social movements of the 1960s, it points at a modern extension of a comprehensive critique of global capitalism and the hierarchical, commercial, professional bourgeois journalism it has created since the second half of the 19th century (2008: 9–21). Today, alternative media is a sort of rights-based advocacy and activist practice replacing the so-called professional ideology of journalism.

Forde (2011) sees alternative journalism as a form of political act. For Downing, radical media, and hence radical journalism, is a tool of political and social change for political activists and movements (2001). In fact, one can speak of a number of non-mainstream media and journalism theories and practices which share certain characteristics yet differ in terms of the names, such as “alternative, radical, grassroots, citizen” which have been attributed to them. Despite these differences, Bailey and colleagues (2008) use “alternative” as an umbrella term and gather varied initiatives in a wide spectrum dedicated to democratization of communications under this concept (Op. cit., 2008).

Harcup (2013) tries to describe the qualities and operations of alternative journalism by linking it with its radical political past. Alternative journalism is a counter-hegemonic journalism practice that aims to turn the dominant discourse upside down. It takes those who have no voice, ordinary people, as legitimate sources of news and highlight their stories. It transforms some traditional codes and forms, primarily objectivity and impartiality. The language used speaks to its audience without a patronizing tone and does not alienate them. It tries to integrate readers into news production processes by enabling them with the opportunity to become content producers and even journalists. Furthermore, alternative journalism tries to eradicate the boundaries and hierarchies between the audience and the journalist. It is a progressive, participatory, anti-capitalist practice that is committed to actively changing the world rather than describing it (Harcup, 2013: 162–164).

The crisis of democracy in the world today has rendered this function of alternative journalism even more vital, particularly in countries where professional journalism has been destroyed along with both democracy and mainstream media. It is valid not only for countries like Turkey (Sözeri, 2015), but also for the West (Gillmor, 2015). In this study, we critically analyze some of the responses generated against the major threats experienced in the current climate. The theoretical lens used is provided by an alternative and networked journalism approach; one that emphasizes the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms; one that is open for active participation and values negotiation and compromise; one that is free of national boundaries and based on networked societal relationships (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011; Harcup, 2013; Lievrouw, 2011; Russell, 2011). Our main aim is to contribute to the struggle for democratic media and related literature under threatening conditions and generate a critical position in journalistic studies.

Coping with the threats

For all member countries in the United Nations, media freedom is binding according to the doctrine of freedom of expression (Freedom House, 2017). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) accentuated this principle. The two major institutions, which perform measurements on a global scale are the French-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the USA-based Freedom House (FH). Despite their ideological differences concerning the role of governments, both institutions design their reports on the basis of Western liberal values and the ideology of a hundred years of professional journalism, which in turn has emerged from the same philosophical, political and cultural roots (Burgess, 2010). Nevertheless, studies reveal that these two major bodies are the most reliable and consistent tools for providing a comparative understanding of the relationship between the media and democracy in a given country (Price et al., 2011). Several recent developments in the field also point at the updating of the reports in view of new threats and requirements (Karlekar & Radsch, 2012). In the context of Turkey, for instance, RSF reports attacks against Turkish journalists in recent years and FH has begun to evaluate media ownership within the framework of political interest relations and draws the attention to the media concentration.

“Who threatens the Press” figure demonstrates the most significant threats to press freedom in the summary of FH’s 2017 report (Dunham, 2017). Media owners, judges, violent groups, heads of state, trolls and security forces feature as threats. Table 1 is based on these threats, which are extremely consistent in the context of Turkey. It also demonstrates our findings of how journalists have tried to deal with each of these threats.

We work with the threat categories of Freedom House, as well as defence strategies and tactics (Table 1) and develop them in our analysis of the current situation in Turkey. The first column, which holds the title of solidarity networks, includes the defence line, which is established with reference to fundamental rights and freedoms against all threats. The second column comprises different types of both defensive and offensive activist moves designed in response to the type of threat.

Table 1.

Threats	Strategies & Tactics
heads of state: launching verbal attacks and lawsuits	Lobbying & campaigning against authoritarian leaders Borderless & cross-border journalism Anonymity
trolls: abusing and threatening online	Digital security and safety precautions
security forces: harassing, arresting and beating	Hostile environment training Counter-surveillance tactics Psychological support Legal help
violent groups: threatening attacks and death	Hostile environment training Self-defence training Health & Life Insurance Psychological support Legal help
judges: delivering draconian sentences	Media freedom campaigns Legal help
media owners: controlling the editorial line and job security	Establishing alternative & activist (new) media outlets Activist citizen journalism Borderless journalism

Solidarity networks

International and national journalism organizations, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, political parties and grassroots movements advocating fundamental rights and freedoms are de facto components of online and offline solidarity networks. They play integral roles in creating public pressure by organizing national and international campaigns for the defence of journalists attacked, threatened, tortured, detained, and convicted as a result of their journalistic activity. They also have a role in the follow-up of legal processes and legal support as well as in providing financial and psychological support in case of need. There are, of course, cases where solidarity is considered a crime and even attempts are made to prevent it.

One recent example is the solidarity campaign initiated on May 3, 2016 – World Press Freedom Day – in support of the Kurdish political movement’s daily newspaper *Özgür Gündem* facing lawsuits against almost every issue. Dozens of intellectuals supported the “On-duty Chief Editor Campaign”, which continued for three months and brought national and international acclaim (Yeşil Gazete, 2016). However, some of these intellectuals were sentenced to prison on the grounds of making propaganda for a “terrorist organization”, by virtue of publishing their statements. Nevertheless, solidarity has been rebuilt, and new campaigns have emerged, including supporters who are accused of using their fundamental rights and freedoms (BÍA, 2016). Furthermore, solidarity networks serve as a shield to preserve the mental health of journalists, to develop methods for coping with violence and for eliminating economic problems.

Surviving autocracy

After the state of emergency measures were launched following the coup attempt in 2016, the president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and numerous government officials targeted media organizations, particularly the journalists who maintain independent and critical positions, charging them with treachery and terrorism. It appears that the discursive violence used against independent and opposing journalists as a strategic tool has a dual purpose. On the one hand, the government sharpens its ideological base and mobilizes militant sections of its supporters against groups that are coded as enemies. On the other hand, it constantly

pressures and threatens those media organizations and journalists, which the state considers oppositional, and does so by means of its security forces and courts.

Despite these attacks, journalists and media organizations struggle and continue to pursue journalism practices. Against the attacks of autocrats, journalists use several methods to protect themselves: doing advocacy activities, carrying out counter-campaigns that target people who are the sources of the threat. Many international journalism organizations are actively involved in such campaigns both broadcast the pressures and threats, and to prevent them from developing.

However, in cases requiring urgent intervention, the volume of campaign and lobby activities in Turkey have increased. The news about Turkish intelligence's weapon shipment to jihadist Syrian groups in 2015 was published by Can Dündar, editor-in-chief of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, then occupying centre-left opposition, and by his colleague Erdem Gül. This caused the President of Turkey to target the journalists as terrorists and spies. His verbal outburst ("They will pay for this") was followed by investigations of accusations for obtaining state secrets for espionage purposes, seeking to violently overthrow the Turkish government, and aiding an armed terrorist organization. This led to the arrest of the two journalists, whereupon the world's leading freedom of expression organizations conducted a well-coordinated and effective campaign calling on the Turkish government to release the journalists and respect press freedom. The pressure resulted in the release of the journalists by the ruling of Supreme Court after a period of three months. Shortly thereafter, Dündar survived an apparent attempt on his life outside of the courthouse in which he was convicted of revealing state secrets and sentenced to nearly six years in prison. Worrying about his safety and the threat of this prison sentence, he fled the country. Today, Can Dündar lives in Germany and continues his journalistic practices through the Internet platform #Özgürüz (Wearefree). The Turkish government has issued an Interpol "red notice" demanding his apprehension.

In addition to international support campaigns, another way to fend off the attacks of the autocrats is "borderless journalism", a counter-hegemonic, transnational and horizontally interactive and collaborative rights-based news activism (Çoban & Ataman, 2018). Borderless jour-

nalism includes the transporting of media outlets such as #Özgürüz to safe zones and covers participatory news production practices with the support of international solidarity networks. It is an attempt to create and produce media capable of protecting journalists in risky areas and creating and producing news, which makes production and sharing possible with an unrestricted approach. #Özgürüz, and the organization called *Correctiv*, which defines itself as a non-profit, independent, investigative newsroom for German-speaking areas, both define their role as the joint will (at the tip of a pen) “to defend democracy, press freedom and the right of the public to know, with colleagues who come from other parts of Europe” (#Özgürüz, 2018). Also, Artı Gerçek TV, which continues the same pro-Kurdish news agenda of IMC TV (the TV channel which was closed by decree) has established itself in Germany to reduce the effects of a possible attack, although it carries on its news production activities in Turkey. The number of such news organizations is likely to increase in the near future.

Another means of self-protection from the attacks of the autocrats is to remain anonymous. In countries such as Turkey where threats and attacks have become the norm, some international agencies have decided not to reveal the identities of their correspondents.¹ Many freelance journalists in Turkey conduct their news broadcast with pseudonyms as they find the environment risky (Luxon, 2018). In a similar way, some alternative media and citizen journalism platforms keep the names of their citizen journalists confidential and try to prevent them from being targeted. Data obtained from the interviews with some alternative media (for example *Dokuz8Haber*, a rights-based citizen news agency; *Ötekilerin Postası*, a pro-Kurdish citizen news network; and *Sendika.org*, a socialist news portal) show that facing the risk of threat or attack, they also opt for confidentiality and that any trace of information that could expose their correspondents’ identities is excised from the news.

How to tackle state-sponsored trolling?

State-sponsored trolling is claimed to be used by governments as “targeted online hate and harassment campaigns to intimidate and silence individuals critical of the state” (Nyst & Monaco 2018: 1). Trolling has been a particularly threatening and intimidating activity that autocratic countries often apply to target journalists, especially highly visible

voices of dissent who criticize the government and its anti-democratic actions. However, in more sophisticated trolling cases, the government disguises its work through pro-government journalists' targeted attacks in their newspaper columns or through their social media accounts as well as coordinated attacks by militant social media celebrities. In order to increase the effect, bots and automated agents are deployed. Threats of killing, rape, accusations of treason and espionage are major methods in this war of words. Methods such as producing false information about the targets, deliberately extracting phrases from their original context and using them in different contexts, and hence different meanings, creating fake photos, hacking the target's accounts with spy software, exposing private messages are also used. The main aims are to suppress and silence the targeted individuals.

In a similar vein, a social media army of trolls has been established by the ruling party as it acts with the support and management of the government (Sözeri, 2015). This army aims at creating resistance against the success of the opponents' success on social media in the aftermath of 2013 Occupy Gezi movement (Saka, 2018). In recent years, numerous journalists, academics and activists have been targeted by t and subjected to the threats and forms of intimidation as mentioned above (Bulut & Yörük, 2017; Hyong & Es, 2017; Nyst & Manoco, 2018: 35–37).

Troll attacks on journalists using their fundamental rights and freedoms are rebuffed by way of networked solidarity, which includes journalists, journalism organizations and rights-based activist citizen networks. Against fake photos and news, disclosing the identity and lies of the attackers is deployed in order to be able to make a criminal complaint and also to reverse the effect of social media lynch that start after troll attacks. According to our observations, Turkish journalists use certain means in the "Verification Handbook" published by European Journalism Centre in 2013 (Silverman, 2013), although the ability of journalists to use validation tools is limited. Against the spy software used by the trolls to seize the social media accounts of journalists, the best protection is to take digital security precautions. In certain cases, where the necessary precautions are not taken and the account is seized, it is possible to close the account through spamming by solidarity networks or to return the account to its owner by reporting the situation to social media platform managers.²

Exposing (in)security forces

The police-inflicted verbal and physical violence (along with that perpetrated by other security forces of governments) is one of the biggest threats faced by journalists in many countries as well as in Turkey (Carlsson & Pöythäri, 2016). Recent research by Sarikakis and colleagues (2017) indicates a steady increase in the attacks between 2000 and 2016. 2016 was the worst year and the majority of attacks were police-inflicted. In the same report, Turkey and Russia ranked highest concerning such attacks.

A range of reports³ give information pertaining to attacks by the state security forces as the main perpetrator. According to these sources, police-based violence has been on the rise since 2016. Due to impunity and failure of legal efforts against the attacks of the state forces, it can be said that police violence is one of the most efficient forms of suppression of journalists. Journalists' defence against legally imposed attacks include immediate news exposure of the attack in social media through professional solidarity, followed by denunciation of crimes accompanied by reports of assault from medical institutions. Generally, denunciations of governorships, provincial police directorates, riot police chiefs and individual police officers are publicized by syndicates, journalist organizations by way of press briefings with the aim of keeping police violence on the agenda (BİA, 2018a; ÇGD, 2018; TGS, 2014; TGC, 2018).

Journalists try to avoid the aggressiveness of security forces in two different ways. First, a professional defence that indirectly refers to constitutional freedom by rendering journalistic identity visible in public, through helmets, masks and bullet-proof vests. Second is, in a sense, the opposite: trying to avoid police violence by means of counter-surveillance tactics (Ataman & Çoban, 2018). Among these, we can cite wearing dark-coloured clothing, not carrying any professional equipment, picking the most appropriate locations for personal security in the news field, mingling with the common bystanders, standing among the activists, choosing the back-angle of the police for taking pictures, or moving together with the other journalists. If exposed to violence, journalist may apply self-defence strategies to maintain body integrity.

Measures taken against digital surveillance also reduce the risk of attack. Yet, the state unit named Cybercrimes Unit follows the social

media constantly and keeps strict control of opposition accounts in Turkey. Moreover, social media posts of independent and dissident journalists are often reported to the police by hyper-partisan pro-government media and the militant staff of the government itself (Başaran, 2017). Not only do the police know the blacklisted journalists by name, they also harass and threaten them (Clark & Grech, 2017). One response to this, is to separate personal accounts from the accounts where they share news, and even to anonymize these news-oriented accounts, though this method is used by only a few journalists. It includes not sharing photos and information that will indicate their exact location in areas of armed conflict and sometimes in very sensitive situations. Since the police may confiscate devices such as smartphones, tablets and digital memories, encrypting these devices is a way to make them safer. In recent years, non-governmental organizations and alternative media initiatives have organized digital security trainings to increase the awareness of journalists about risks and to improve their security skills (Ataman & Çoban, 2018).

Trauma caused by threats, pressures and attacks of security forces are also a serious threat to journalism in Turkey (Clark & Grech, 2017: 13). Although journalists are generally reported to be resistant to traumatic events, independent and alternative media employees who are more exposed to frequent and intense violence by the police are likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and alcohol and substance abuse (Smith et al., 2015). A report prepared by Council of Europe lists these risks in detail (Clark & Grech, 2017). Specific studies in Turkey indicate signs of psychological problems (Ataman & Çoban, 2017; TGS, 2016). In order to prevent journalists from experiencing such problems and to find solutions to them, non-governmental organizations such as Human Rights Foundation of Turkey and Turkish Psychologists Association have prepared free support programs.

To ensure continued journalistic activity, it is vital that journalists receive compensation for health expenses in case of injury resulting from attacks and compensation for damages to health in periods of unemployment as a result of the injuries – that is, compensation in addition to life insurance. However, there is no social insurance coverage for freelance or citizen journalists. In case of health problems or deaths of journalists working under precarious conditions, campaigns

are organized by solidarity networks for these individuals and their families. This results in modest amounts of support for a limited period.

Self-defence against government-organized mobs

Aggressive gangs in Turkey usually feed on the threatening rhetoric of the government, inspired by the disproportionate violence of its armed forces. In fact, most of these groups are affiliated with the government either openly or discreetly. Dissident journalists and academics who are threatened and intimidated online by AK-Trolls are also exposed to the verbal and physical violence of paramilitary groups intertwined with mafia-like organizations (BIA, 2018a; Meriç, 2017). The fact that the attackers are never caught and that the people who are captured are rather “rewarded” with low punishments encourage criminals and creates an atmosphere of impunity.

International solidarity networks try to meet these attacks and expose such impunity. The person who was involved in an armed attack against Dündar in front of the courthouse as he was awaiting the court’s decision, was released after six months of imprisonment and was awarded with a “10-month” sentence (BIA, 2018b). Although Dündar was supported through national and international campaigns, he emigrated to Germany for reasons of safety.

In addition to rights-based campaigns, journalists also need to acquire basic knowledge and skills about professional and private protection. An international example is CPJ offering self-defense training to Ghanaian journalists threatened by gangs claiming to act in the name of the government of Ghana (YesiYesi Ghana, 2015). Self-defence trainings for women journalists who report in conflict areas have become integrated into the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma’s safety training (Davidson, 2017). Similar demands are raised in Turkey by dissident journalists, though there is no self-defence training institution for journalists yet (İnceoglu, 2015).

“Prison break”

In Turkey, the judiciary has become a part of the political process more than ever before. The courts are used by the government as a tool to scare and discipline. Human Rights Watch (HRW) claimed that explicit government pressure on courts and prosecution offices associate

journalists with terrorism by showing articles and news as evidence, even when such news items fail to include any call for violence (HRW, 2018). Journalists usually spend the trial period in jail. In recent “Media Monitoring Reports” of BIA, it can be seen that the current sum of the length of prison sentences for journalists totals almost hundred years; today Turkey is the biggest prison for journalists in the world with over hundred journalists behind bars (BIA, 2018a). In addition, Turkey, according to World Justice Project’s “2017–2018 Rule of Law” index, ranked 101st among 113 countries, having lost two points compared to the year before. As stated in the report, the judicial control mechanisms over the government start to disappear.

Journalists targeted by the government-led judiciary rely primarily on national and international professional solidarity campaigns. Some campaigns such as #JournalismIsNotACrime and #FreeTurkeyJournalists– can become part of a broader network of rights-based global solidarity. Similar campaigns are carried out for individual journalists, too (See #FreeDeniz, #FreeCanDundar, #FreeAhmetŞik). As well, major bar associations offer free legal support. Furthermore, MLSA (Media and Law Studies Association) seeks to take cases to the European Court of Human Rights in cooperation with other international institutions such as London-based Media Legal Defense Initiative (MLDI).

A networked, alternative and virtual oasis

In Turkey, the large-scale changes in media ownership that took place between 2002–2017 indicate that mainstream media have gradually changed hands, being sold to the conglomerates following the dictates of the government (Adaklı, 2010; Ataman & Çoban, 2018; Kurban & Sözeri, 2012; Sarikakis et al., 2017; Yeşil, 2018). Ideological sovereignty has created a solid uniform structure in the Turkish media. Although one can historically hardly speak of a Turkish mainstream journalism totally independent from the government, the present situation imposes unconditional allegiance to government interests. All kinds of political, economic and legal pressures are utilized with the aim of bringing dissident journalists to their knees. One recent example of this can be seen in the acquisition of Doğan Media – the biggest media holding company – by a pro-government company Demirören Holding, after years of intimidation. This process has also culminated

in the unemployment of hundreds of journalists. Furthermore, the attack on independent and alternative media organizations escalated with the 2013 Gezi Resistance and reached a peak in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt. Most of them were closed as their possessions were confiscated (Freedom of the Press 2017; RSF-2018 World Press Freedom Index).

As traditional media become significantly dysfunctional, the virtual world has become a journalistic oasis. Experienced and professional journalists have been building small news media initiatives as individuals or collectives through websites and social media platforms. Several of these have opted for crowd-funding. The most well-known collective examples such as Ruşen Çakır's Medyascope and Can Dündar's #Özgürüz, are benefiting from both international funds and crowd-funding facilities (Erduran et al., 2018: 23–26). Today, different forms of solutions are being sought for unemployment and precarity, which is a result of the invasion of the news media environment by the government media. Unions, foundations and associations provide various scholarships and funds to unemployed journalists, using international funding. Globally broadcasting organizations such as BBC-Turkish and Deutsche Welle-Turkish have shown solidarity by giving unemployed journalists full-time and part-time jobs.

Those alternative media platforms which have shifted their activities into new media as a result of suppression continue to serve as networked and polyphonic lines of resistance in the face of uniformity and government media monopoly. There are many examples to cite here: www.sendika63.org, which persists in journalistic activities after having been denied access for 62 times by The Information and Communication Technologies Unit of the Ministry of Communication; Germany-based Artı Tv/Artı Gerçek which has been founded abroad after being closed on the grounds of emergency state decree; Birgün and Evrensel, which try to use the power of social media and the internet despite their low circulation; and Jinnews, which continues to broadcast following the closing of Jinha, composed of Kurdish women journalists.

Conclusion

Zizek (2013) has contended that the marriage between democracy and capitalism is over. States that can implement the smoothest neoliberal

policies required by corporate globalization are those, as in Turkey, which are governed by the autocrats, where executive power puts pressure on the jurisdiction and legislation, where the fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular freedom of expression, are restricted. It is impossible to claim that journalism can continue to be the “fourth estate” or a “watchdog” in such countries, even though in these countries the constitution and the laws of the media and communication guarantee freedom, on paper. To carry out a disturbing journalistic activity that exposes the dirty laundry of the ruling elites who are accustomed to seeing their jobs conducted behind closed doors is a sufficient reason to be targeted by such powers. Just recently, Pelin Ünker, who as a member of The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists worked on Paradise Papers which reveals offshore activities of some of the world’s leading leaders. She has been sentenced to prison for her investigative piece on the companies of then Turkey’s Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and his sons. Even though the Prime Minister accepted the existence of offshore activities of the companies in question, the fact that Ünker has been sentenced for the crime of defamation and insult remains a uniquely unjust and unseemly action (Brennan, 2019).

In the face of power instilled through autocrat-ridden polarization, fear, violence and hatred, pursuing a rights-based and socially responsible journalism activity remains a courageous path. Indeed, even though Ünker claims that “doing journalism is not a matter of courage but of public duty, relatively shorter jail time sentences and cash fines are not the sole threats that the journalist is exposed to” (Ünker, 2019). We have started by citing examples of how journalists can continue their activity faced with threats from the government elites and others attached to them by visible and invisible strings. On the other hand, we have also witnessed that in countries such as Turkey, where democracy has completely collapsed, journalism is not an activity that can be sustained in the commercial big media. In such an environment, where an activist journalism emerges only from the strengths of liberal norms and where the resisting force of alternative journalism is the only apparent viable option, the question which remains is this: is such journalism sustainable?

We have seen that the global solidarity networks, with their struggle for rights and liberty, constitute a primary source of nutrition. Also,

we can claim that journalists are relatively successful in producing responses to close threats by combining some of the traditional defense strategies and tactics with the power of new media technologies. However, an analysis pertaining to what extent this struggle is successful and sustainable requires careful scrutiny of the transnational connections of alternative initiatives, of financial structuring, staff characteristics, organizational communication as well as analyses of the news they produce and the relationship between the audience and the reader. Then we would be able to confidently detect whether or not such alternative ways of gathering and writing news in dangerous zones like Turkey are sustainable.

Notes

1. For instance, The New York Times has decided to hide the correspondent's name after its reporter, Don Nissenbaum was taken into custody for a few days in Turkey (TurkeyPurge, 2017).
2. Journalists Union of Turkey (TGS), Independent Communication Network (BİA), Dokuz8Haber and other institutions provide digital security trainings to journalists to raise awareness and to help them acquire the necessary skills. "Journalist Security Guide" by CPJ and the online education materials provided by "dijitalguvenlik.org" are used in these trainings.
3. Periodical reports of BİA, Contemporary Journalists Association (ÇGD) and Turkish Journalists Association (TGC), Freedom House (FH, 2018), Reporters Without Borders (RSF, 2018) and CPJ's "Turkey Crackdown Chronicle" (2018).

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