

Feminist and Gender Studies Scholars in Exile: A Critical Reflection on Neoliberal and Eurocentric Academia in Germany

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ABSTRACT: *The year 2015 was a turning point in the history of migration to Europe due to the so-called migration crisis that emerged under the influence of wars, war-like conflicts, and anti-democratic authoritarian regimes in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. These historical phenomena led to unprecedented threats to human rights, including academic freedom and freedom of expression, which resulted in the fleeing of scholars to countries in the Global North and the West, with their liberal regimes. The forced migration besetting intellectuals also included representatives of feminist and gender studies, who were targeted by authoritarian regimes due to the latter's symptomatic anti-gender policies and discourses. In the general context of forced intellectual migration from the Global South and the East to the Global North and the West, this paper focuses on scholars in the field of feminist and queer studies fleeing from Turkey to Germany after 2015. Special emphasis is placed on their experiences of both risk and inclusion at German universities following the scholarships awarded by academic-humanitarianism actors. The aim of the paper is to shed light on gendered and epistemic inequalities that are experienced by scholars in the wake of the neoliberal higher education system.*

KEYWORDS: *authoritarianism, neoliberalism, higher education, gender studies, exile, Turkey, Germany*

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Introduction

Works in the field of exile studies have generally focused on the experiences of scholars forced to flee Nazi Germany, mainly to the United States (Hagemann and Milberg 2017; Löhr 2014). However, investigations of recent forced intellectual migration and contemporary exiled scholars remain scarce (Hagemann/Milberg 2017; Lässig 2016; Löhr 2014). Some studies on the contemporary forced migration of scholars have reviewed secondhand sources on the issue, while others have only involved very focused samples on a small scale. With the aim of contributing to the slowly developing literature on this issue, on the forced migration of feminist and gender studies scholars from Turkey to Germany, the

present article offers insights into the experiences of these exiled scholars within the latter's higher education system.

It draws mainly on the findings of the research project »In-formal Opportunities and Restrictions of German Universities Reflected in Experiences of Exiled Scholars« (Yasemin Karakaşoğlu and Betül Yazar; funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, 2019 – 2021). Within this context, we conducted 22 narrative interviews with exiled scholars and ten expert interviews with actors who supported them either in professional and/or humanitarian terms as mentors, and with directors of Welcome Center units at universities and of Scholars at Risk programs or initiatives. For sampling, we used snowball- and theoretical sampling to include informants who were diverse in terms of sex, country of origin, and scientific discipline.

In the framework of this article, we only analyze seven selected interviews with feminist and/or gender studies scholars from Turkey and the respective field notes. This special focus is because the empirical data yielded some findings shedding light on the specific experiences and observations of this subsample concerning their critical perspectives as scholars of feminist, women, and gender studies. Based on their academic expertise, these scholars have a politically engaged profile, with a critical outlook not only on the constantly intensifying anti-gender policies under the rule of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government in the period after 2015 in Turkey (Dag et al. 2021)—not least, as fostered by their personal experiences—but also on the neoliberal, paternalist, and Eurocentric/orientalist epistemic and institutional barriers inscribed in the German higher education system. Information collected from expert interviews was used as supportive data regarding various technical and procedural issues related to how scholarships and supporting practices work. For anonymization, we have removed any personal identifiers, both direct and indirect, that may lead to an individual being recognized; we also replace interviewees' real names with pseudonyms.

In examining our data, we mainly used narrative analysis (Barkhuizen 2016), but as supported by certain aspects of discourse analysis too (Hamann et al. 2019; Jäger 2001). In the approach to the university as a field in which positions must be (re)found, we relied on Cassirer's (2000) relational perspective on Bourdieu's field theory. Cassirer's understanding of the field as a relational concept, characterized by a »totality of lines of force« (Cassirer 2000, 20; cited in Hilgers and Mangez 2015, 2–3), shifts the research focus to a relational space-time that no longer designates an individual entity but rather a system of relations concerning the peculiarities of the higher education system. Here, one can state that relevant actors are not passive objects of the external forces deriving from the field but are rather subjects capable of orienting themselves actively, either toward the conservation or the subversion of the distribution of capital, »depending on their trajectory and the position, they occupy in the field, and by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in the capital« (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 108–9). Particularly actors who have newly entered the field and have different reference systems or habitus—those who experience some loss of capital during their transition from one context to another because of migration change—might or might not bring new dynamics here. Researchers must examine their impacts by analyzing not only consistencies and resonances but also tensions, suspensions, and disruptions in and between the rules of the field and the knowledge practices of these scholars.

Within this framework, we first provide a short overview of the political and ideological motivations spurring the authoritarian power bloc's practices in Turkey in the face of the gender-equality politics of feminist activists and academics. This is followed by a summary of the AKP's attacks on scholars and universities due to their political positions. Here,

we briefly examine the question of how these attacks have affected scholars and gender studies units in the academic field in Turkey. To understand exiled scholars' perspectives on their encounters in the German higher education system, it is reasonable, first, to have an overview of the general political conditions and higher education policy existing in Turkey. These were not only decisive for their status as exiled scholars but also contributed to their sensitivity in terms of subsequent critical perspectives on the higher education system in Germany too. Second, in the empirical part of our article, we examine the immigration processes of feminist / gender studies scholars to Germany, where they found academic support. This has led them to not only innovative subjective positions but also new types of problems and risks. Our framing argument is that the migration and replacement stories of these scholars, which are influenced by academic humanitarian-support mechanisms, reflect some further risks that cannot be confined to the sociopolitical contexts of their home country—they are also attributable to the structures, logics, and practices dominant in the higher education system of the host one too.

The AKP's Anti-Gender Equality Politics and Higher Education Policies: Recent Attacks on Academic Feminism and Gender Studies

The ruling AKP came to power in 2002 with a program linking Islamic conservatism to neoliberal forms of governmentality in Turkey, being a response to the political and economic crises of the late 1990s (Tuğal 2012; Yazar 2020). The AKP's political project, often entitled »conservative democracy,« lasted almost a decade and allowed Islamist conservatives and neoconservatives to widen their power—both within the state apparatus and society. The AKP also pursued sui generis gender politics, which would foster neoliberal and neoconservative thought as a new mode of governance (Yazar 2018, 2020). Based on this project, and under the burden of the European Union membership process, through the end of the first decade of the new millennium the AKP would enact several successful liberal reforms. Examples are amendments to labor law that further integrated gender equity into the legislative structure; certain poverty-alleviation policies (such as direct financial aid to lower-class women); and nationwide campaigns to bridge the gap in schooling between boys and girls as well as to support women's representation in the labor market and civil society. By using the instrument of the Council of Higher Education, which oversees and confirms the establishment of any research entity at Turkish universities, the AKP implemented its gender-equality-oriented policies in the field of higher education and made use of the constantly growing number of Women's and Gender Studies Centers (WGSCs) to politically influence teaching and research on gender issues (Dağ et al. 2021).

Parallel to this development, and in line with its earlier neoliberal-neoconservative feminist approach, the establishment of such WGSCs was also fostered. In an empirical study of the latter in Turkey, Dağ et al. (2021) showed that the number of such centers located in the country's universities increased from just one in 1995 to nearly 100 by 2017. They concluded that, until the 2010s, the institutional landscape of WGSCs and their gender-equality-oriented approach had been influenced by international networks and processes—such as Turkey signing international agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Istanbul Convention, as well as the country's political negotiations over EU accession.

However, at the end of the first decade of the new millennium, faced with the fallout from the global economic crisis and with the dismantlement of the liberal power bloc on which

its conservative-democracy project was based, the AKP and its leader, President Tayyip Erdoğan, henceforth adopted an authoritarian and illiberal position to remain in power. This process was accompanied by a 180 degree turn on gender-equality politics, as framed by a »conservative justice and right discourse«¹ Based on the notions of biological-divine difference and justice between the sexes, this standpoint ultimately served the process of what Kandiyoti (2016) called »masculinist restoration.« In the post-2010 period, the AKP's domestic and international politics began to be reframed by its religious-nationalist project and discourse of justice (instead of gender equality). As a result, the general political framework and the academic atmosphere within the country's universities changed hereafter.²

Shifting the emphasis to »sexual difference« and »justice between the sexes« rather than »gender hierarchy« and »equality« was the AKP's main adopted strategy in changing its earlier liberal policies and adapting them now to conservative-religious norms (Yazar 2020; see also, Dağ et al. 2021). This saw the gradual disappearance of women as the subjects of public policies, as exemplified by the replacement of the Ministry of State for Women and Family with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011 (Yazar 2020). The change in the foundations of the AKP's politics from neoliberal to illiberal can be seen in the destructive and hostile approach of its political elite to Kemalist, feminist, and queer milieus, as taking place mainly at universities and within nongovernmental organizations (Binder et al. 2021). WGSCs that were historically affiliated with socialist, radical, and liberal feminist views and positions were now not only marginalized by pro-government WGSCs and government-operated NGOs (Diner 2018) but also, particularly in the AKP's second period of rule, faced unlawful government attacks—including against oppositional scholarly voices, activists, and their institutions.

In January 2016, an initiative called the »Academics for Peace« (BAK) petition was raised and signed by many national and international scholars. The petition called for an end to the war on civilians in the country's Kurdish regions and a return to the peace process. Among the petition's signatories were a high number of scholars engaged in women's and gender studies. The failed coup attempt of July 2016 was promptly followed by the government's declaration of a »State of Emergency,« which was used to ban, dismiss, put on trial, and even imprison thousands of education personnel. It affected more than 60,000 higher education scholars, administrators, and students. Scholars, students, and certain types of critical academic knowledge concerning issues like the Armenian genocide, the rights of Kurdish people and of LGBTQI+ individuals, as well as gender equality were attacked by government forces and mafia groups.³ Some courses on the rights of LGBTQI+ individuals and movements were canceled, and the representatives of these programs were dismissed or forced to retire.⁴ Moreover, governmental decrees were put in place to dismiss and ban further scholars from holding positions both within academia and the civil service (Aydın et al. 2021; Baser et al. 2017).

This process revealed its gender politics most starkly in the eventual cancellation of the Istanbul Convention in March 2021. The government claimed the latter was forced on Turkey by Western colonial powers to dismantle the country's family life, traditional society, and social unity. Protesting feminists, queer academics, and activists were blamed for trying to hinder the AKP's native and national-political project of transforming Turkey into a regional power.

Authoritarian Attacks, Forced Migration of Scholars to Germany and Their Encounter with Different Types of Risk due to Dominant Neoliberal Higher Education Policies

The post-2015 period in Germany and the emergence of »academic humanitarianism« as a regime governing the forced migration of scholars to Germany

The year 2015 was crucial in the history of Turkey and Germany due to the developments that occurred after the exodus then of nearly one million Syrian refugees from their native country.⁵ Focusing on the reported sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015 and the heated public discussion sparked by these events, Boulila and Carri (2017) explored the political climate ensuing in the aftermath—as also affecting German academia. They pointed to the intersectional workings of racism and anti-feminism in the dominant societal discourse. That same year had brought two contradictory political tendencies to the fore at once. On the one hand, a German »Willkommenskultur« had been symbolized by neighbors and volunteers providing supplies such as water and shelter to these unexpected immigrants. On the other, while »the media and politicians across the spectrum lauded Germany's newfound altruism (and the covert privatization of state services), the country battled with an increasing visibility of the extreme Right« (Boulila/Carri 2017, 287).

During the same period, the forced migration to Germany of scholars due to political pressures in their home countries received timely support from the host country's government and scholars. Their practices were eventually coordinated by leading organizations like the Philipp Schwartz Initiative of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Einstein Foundation, and Academy in Exile, and led to the emergence of a new hybrid field that we call »academic humanitarianism«—which included also initiatives organized by exiled scholars such as Off-University (Yarar/Karakaşoğlu 2022b). As an ensemble of various humanitarian-academic practices and actors, it has emerged as a regime governing this problem at the intersection of humanitarianism and higher education, with the aim of giving such support to these scholars in continuing their academic work.

All academic-humanitarian actors' practices are framed by inclusive-exclusionary forces. These have emerged together with discourses on »migration society« (Mecheril 2004) and on diversity, inclusiveness, and internationalization in German higher education (Hahn and Teichler 2005; Karakaşoğlu 2016),⁶ as well as with the expansion of international academic-humanitarian and rescue networks (Stoerber et al. 2020). This context led to Germany appearing to be an important migration destination for exiled scholars, as informants also proved by their statements given in interviews (see also, Yarar/Karakaşoğlu 2022a).

However, there are also constraining-exclusionary forces operating in the same field under the impact of the hegemonic neoliberal policies exported to Germany mainly from the Anglo-American context. These policies range from power dynamics embedded in humanitarian regimes (see Donini 2010; De Lahir 2016)⁷ to epistemological hierarchies in knowledge-production processes (academic Eurocentrism and Orientalism; see Said 1993; Spivak 1999) and the market-oriented policies effective in higher education. Therefore, we speak here of »inclusive exclusion.« Here we will focus on the experiences of exiled scholars with respect to their encounter with German Universities and academic institutions.

»Anglo-American hegemony«, that forms the changes in the higher education system in Germany since the 1980s (Ash 2006), had not only widened the gap between epistemological geographies but also weakened the connection between research and teaching. The dominance of the Anglo-American knowledge-production system and of Eurocentrism has

led to exiled scholars being marginalized as knowledge subjects coming from the Global South and East to the Global North and West.

Furthermore, German higher education functions based on a mixed financing system, with the state's financial assistance here having decreased in the last few decades. This neoliberal process and configuration are what shape the trajectories of exiled scholars, leading them to research positions rather than teaching ones. Having been financed mainly by the public budget in being defined as a societal good and public responsibility, teaching involves various unquestioned structural restrictions when it comes to universities in Germany (Ash 2008; Kleimann 2019). As a social responsibility of the state, teaching is to be fulfilled mainly by scholars who work as civil servants in permanent positions, while teaching based on short-term contracts is very low-paid work. It is also a field of epistemic identity and requires a very high level of German. For all these reasons, exiled scholars have real difficulty entering the teaching part of the system as they have no access to permanent positions already extremely limited in number.

However, the design of the research arena within German higher education is somehow different, relying mainly on third-party funding and the precarious labor force of postdoctoral researchers.⁸ This means research enjoys greater financial resources, and more positions are available therein—ones that are relatively easier to access for exiled scholars too. Here the latter work precariously (based on limited contracts) in postdoc positions no matter what their earlier titles were. They conduct their main research duties sometimes in tandem with making some modest contributions to the teaching curriculum. But even these research-based postdoc positions are limited and very competitive. The situation has even become so despite both state and private funds dramatically decreasing due to the present economic crisis in Germany and abroad.

The abovementioned neoliberal policies have been applied together with the implementation also of new (public) management and quality measures promoting institutional and individual competition to expand academic output and generate further third-party funding for research. The process has been based on »state funding allocations on comparative performance as one way of setting an incentive for competitive practice amongst universities« (Orr et al. 2007, 4). These neoliberal forces (Brown 2011a, 2011b; Pritchard 2011) are of particular interest to us here because they also form a frame for all kinds of support measures for scholars at risk. They foster the emergence of entrepreneurial universities, the transformation of scholars/universities into competitive actors in the global marketplace of academia (Deem 2001; Teichler 2015), a hierarchical differentiation through the notion of »excellence« (Ricken 2009), a rising dependency on third party-funded projects, precarious working conditions, and the marginalization of certain types of knowledge and disciplines in academia (Dougherty/Natow 2019).

Within this general context, one can ask about the positions of female scholars and Gender Studies as a discipline in German academia, topics central to our analysis of the experiences of scholars in exile in Germany. Abels stated that, within the EU, Germany is known for its low number of female professors; the Social Sciences are no exception in this regard:

In contrast to many other countries, the German system is typified by the low number of permanent positions at universities below the level of full professorships. Academics pursuing either a Habilitation [professorial exam] or a junior professorship can, by law, only be employed at a university for six years with fixed-termed contracts. After this, they must win a permanent position, finance themselves through grants, or else leave academia. The inclusion in academic networks—traditionally »old boys'

networks« with only a few [token] women—plays an important role in the risky game of »winning« a chair. (2016, 325 – 326)

However, Abels also added that despite the precarious nature of a professorial career and the lower-ranking positions that women tend to be awarded, they have still been steadily entering academia and are today better represented at all its hierarchical stages, including professorships, than they were a decade earlier. This is partly due to state and federal policies of »positive discrimination« (Abels 2016, 326), running in parallel to the increased number of scholars working in Gender Studies from the early 1990s. A number of factors have supported the stronger institutionalization and further development of Gender Studies as a field of scholarly inquiry in Germany: namely an increase in female faculty members, growth in the number and range of publications, and the equal-opportunity policies adopted by the German Political Science Association (Brandt/Sabisch 2017).⁹

While these factors might have created a positive environment for the epistemological and scientific appreciation of Gender Studies, it is less clear whether they were enough for gender mainstreaming within the Social Sciences in Germany. Abels (2016, 323) argued that gender studies had been barely integrated into Political Science programs in Germany and very few of the latter included gender-focused topics as a compulsory component thereof. In our material, all these inclusive and exclusionary forces are reflected in and have a great impact on the migration experiences of exiled scholars in Germany, as well as in their inclusive exclusion in universities and programs as scholars who are feminist or have an interest in gender studies (along with other topics).

Migration of Turkish scholars to Germany

Analyzing the experiences of these scholars shows that solidarity networks among academics in Turkey and Germany have been a crucial resource in their migration processes. In our interview material, all informants mentioned the importance of these network connections with feminist/queer scholars in Germany for and during their exile. Through our expert interviews with professors holding permanent positions at German universities, we noticed that these feminist or queer scholars (mainly working together with exiled peers as their mentors) have intersectional perspectives and focus not only on gender but also on migration issues. The high number of risk-scholarship programs and well-organized support practices in place have also played a role in this process. In response to this flow of scholars from Syria in 2015, Germany started to work on establishing organizations that would welcome these well-educated newcomers.

In our interviews, scholars noted their different paths to Germany. The use of informal academic-support networks is the most common aspect in their respective migration stories, leading them to short-term teaching positions, research contracts, or scholarships. In the following quote from an interview with a feminist Social Science scholar, we see how her migration decision and trajectory to Germany took shape:

The [Turkish] university administration had immediately taken a negative attitude toward the peace signatories. Disciplinary investigations and so on, all this started right away [...]. Meanwhile, we were continuing to conduct our lessons. [...] But I started thinking I might lose my job. [...] Of course, Germany was one of the possibilities. Because most of our foreign colleagues who were active on our list of peace scholars¹⁰ were from Germany. [...] At that time, they invited me to their conference.

[...] It was the third or fourth day of the conference [...] the decree had been issued in the evening [...] then, out of nowhere, I was stuck here. I've been here ever since. (Interview with G. Güngör, Associate Professor of a Social Science discipline, in her late 40s, October 18, 2019)

After this moment and through the same network, she found a Visiting Professor position that required her to deliver some undergraduate courses. She got this short-term contract, which was part of an official gender-mainstreaming program for supporting female scholars in their academic careers, with the support of a German colleague who ensured that she was awarded a place on the list of applicants at short notice. Among other European countries, she decided to make her way to Germany because of the strong academic network there: »I relied on the fact that there was more networking here. I didn't go anywhere else but decided to try it here. And indeed, as I said [...] they really reacted very quickly. And I was immediately able to find a contract that allowed me to stay here« (Interview with G. Güngör).

Others came through special at-risk scholarships, many of whom took a long time to decide to leave the country despite the many threats faced. After losing her international travel rights and her job due to a government decree, another associate professor was still not sure whether to leave the country or stay until she received a scholarship offer from an academic-humanitarian initiative in Germany:

I mean, frankly, I still didn't have much of an intention to leave. But *the whole established order was falling apart* [...]. Not sure what I can replace it with. As opposed to all these uncertainties [...] there is *a scholarship* [offered to me] here [in Germany]. I said »okay« and then I came here. (Interview with M. Teken, Associated Professor of a Social Science discipline, in her early 40s, March 10, 2020)

For Lässig (2016), despite these strong international support networks—and unlike what was the case for scholars in the 1930s who found refuge mainly in the US—today's exiled scholars are welcomed for humanitarian rather than academic reasons. Özdemir (2018) examined the experiences of politically exiled scholars from Turkey who have received temporary postdoctoral fellowships in European institutions of higher education through »academics at risk« organizations. Publicly welcomed in their European host lands as »victims« of and »refugees« from autocratic countries, Özdemir argued that these academics have the potential to be marginalized by an anonymizing victim-savior discourse, which is perfused with the moral sentiments of pity and compassion rather than an acknowledgment of the rich academic capital of those concerned. Our empirical analysis supports these arguments.

Our interviewees stressed that unlike networks of feminist and queer scholars in Germany, the scholarships and special programs in question focus not on scholars' disciplines but only on the accreditation of risk and on the strength of their applications (in terms of collaboration between candidates and their host-institution mentors). The Academy in Exile program is an exception in this respect, as it also addresses civic engagement as a reason for there being a threat to well-being and thus creates migration opportunities for scholars of gender and queer studies whose academic activities are closely linked to activist identities. On the program's website,¹¹ accordingly, it is stated that »Academy in Exile offers scholars who are threatened in their home countries because of their academic or civic engagement for human rights, peace, and democracy the opportunity to resume their research abroad« (Academy in Exile 2022).

Experiences of exiled scholars with German universities and their inclusive exclusion

As long as these programs offer mostly immediate and short-term opportunities, they appear to fall short of providing sustainable solutions for the upholding of academic status in Germany. However, this is mainly due to the strong barriers that exist in the German higher education system. One such barrier experienced by interlocutors in our sample is their different and unequal positioning based on being from the Global South and East, where »lower« academic standards are assumed to be in place. Together with the label »at-risk scholars,« as used in administrative processes and support practices, this might turn into a marker of their multiple forms of marginalization—both as a so-called special group of refugees and/or as scholars from the Global South and East. Mutluer, who works on this issue, positions herself as a scholar at risk, as part of a special refugee group, or as being situated among non-European intellectuals; however, she distinguishes herself from what she calls »real refugees.« Although this distinction between »real refugees« and »special refugees« appears to be a default strategy against the Western discourse perceiving all so-called real refugees as a homogenous whole without any cultural capital, it has the danger of suggesting new hierarchies within the „Other«. Mutluer explicates in her statement how she positions both herself and her reclaiming of her cultural capital back from the authorities:

That's why the task of boosting European self-confidence as a secular and civilized saviour of humanity is assigned not to the real refugees who run for their lives from the war-torn regions of the world to reach Europe in millions, only to find out that they are unwelcome. Instead, the role of rebuilding that familiar/superior sense of a Europeanness, which offers relief to a »special« group of non-European intellectuals, is given to that special community that is relieved. In this sense, I am part of what can be called a group of special refugees, who are chosen by the western gaze as its ideal victims. Moreover, this »victim-saviour« imagery conceals the complex motives of western actors engaged in the war in Syria to pursue their own economic and political agenda. (2017, no page)

Scholars like Mutluer resent being reduced to an object of humanitarian aid and stress their professional identity by using the term »scholar in exile«—or, more recently, »exiled scholar« (Mutluer 2020). This is an example of various strategies through which these scholars position themselves in the field. It also highlights what kind of—sometimes confrontational—strategies some of them employ in struggles over the positions that are provided or denied to them.

P. Sengül (Assistant Professor of a Social Science discipline, in her early 40s), meanwhile, positioned herself critically against being put in the categories of »refugee scholar« or »scholar at risk,« which she perceives as externally constructed labels deemphasizing the academic aspects of your subjecthood in the German academic context. Instead, she stressed the importance of subjective self-efficacy: »I think it's more about how you perceive and perform yourself, rather than how others construct something for you.« Rather than being categorized as a »refugee« or »scholar at risk,« she prefers to be called an »international« or »non-German« academic:

For example, in the context of a publication, they might ask me: »Would you like to write a review based on your own experience as a refugee academic, an academic at risk?« I say: »No, that offer doesn't appeal to me, or I do not have such an agenda

or such a situation that I want to express, I do not look from there, I do not establish myself there.» (Interview with P. Sengül, April 22, 2020)

Sengül repositions herself as an »international scholar« even if so doing may have its disadvantages for her in terms of access to relevant support measures. Thus, she tries to escape the indecisive and highly ambivalent subject position of »scholar at risk.« The latter refers simultaneously to two distinct qualities: that of »being at risk« (like other refugees) and that of »being a scholar/academic« (like all international scholars). Thus, those who enter the system through at-risk scholarships oscillate between these two extreme positions: of being an international scholar with esteemed academic capital and of experiencing the pity felt for those refugee scholars who need to be rescued from extreme threats. The following quote from a conversation with a professor of a Social Science discipline in her 50s provides insight into this state of limbo and the indecisiveness coming with it:

In evaluating my article for publication in their conference book, a junior German scholar addressed me from above and asked how it is possible to use such a term like »Islamist feminist.« My article touched on this political position partly in the context of my analysis of Turkish politics. I told her that »there are also Christian feminists in Europe and elsewhere. There is a large literature on this issue.« Of course, I was polite in my response. I knew such issues are very sensitive and controversial, wherever you are, but she was so directly negative in her comments on my work. I wonder if this would have been the case if she would be responding to a German professor. (Field notes, July 1, 2019)

Replicating the colonial-power dynamic of a black woman vis-à-vis her white sister, this example offers insight into the outcomes of epistemological clashes and hierarchies between various geographies of knowledge. These lead exiled scholars to perceive their (subordinated) positions relative to native professors in the field. They also give a sense of the symbolic violence that potentially occurs between feminist and queer scholars along the lines of ethnonationalism differences.

While addressing the structural and epistemological limitations that prevent them from being fully included in the host country's universities, several scholars were open to solidarity with German colleagues based on the mutually experienced systemic problems at hand. Sengül stated that she considers exiled academics like herself to be more fortunate than some German colleagues, as the former are afforded time to progress their research based on at-risk scholarships, applying for extensions thereto, or on new ones altogether. On the other hand, she refers to the problem shared with native scholars in being part of the »precarious workforce« in German higher education. In this competition, however, exiled scholars hold a less advantageous position due to language barriers, as well as to them being from a non-European country. As the precarious workforce's nature only increases the degree of competition over the limited permanent positions available, exiled scholars feel more pressure to accept temporary postdocs despite the higher academic positions already achieved in their home countries.

As set out in more detail elsewhere (Yarar/Karakaşoğlu 2022b), our general conclusion is that, among exiled scholars, it is junior academics—particularly those from popular scientific disciplines, with no family ties, but with international academic experience and networks, proficiency in English or German, and a strong research history—who feel the most confident about their futures within this highly precarious system. However, many exiled

scholars' academic and social capitals do not match this ideal profile drawn by market- and third-party funding-oriented academia in Germany. Furthermore, despite having all these social and academic capitals in hand, one may not be able to take further steps in academia simply because they do not work with a powerful professor in an internationally well-established university or as part of a third-party funding-oriented and experienced team.

In this respect, both exiled scholars and representatives of supporting institutions mentioned that working in the »right« place and with a »well-established professor« were the most important factors in being able to develop genuine long-term prospects within the German higher education system. This was expressed in the interviews with the term »luck.« Teken stated how »lucky« she was to meet her mentor, who strongly supported her all the way through her exile after arriving in Germany. She was also quite hopeful that they would oversee a joint research project together in the future. Güngör pointed out the strong position of professors in the German higher education system meanwhile:

In Germany, the Germans are also advancing through the network [...]. It all depends on the professors. Everyone says this openly. You need to find a good professor as soon as possible. [...] The system runs on this rule. It works entirely through patriarchal relations because 70 percent of the professors are male. (Interview with G. Güngör, October 18, 2019)

Although being a female scholar does not appear to be a negative factor in their struggle for capital and for positioning at first glance, there are subtle gendered mechanisms at work in parallel with the continued underrepresentation of women, particularly in senior positions, in German higher education. In the case of exiled female scholars, such subtle mechanisms can only be perceived through an intersectional analysis considering various factors in relational terms. The gendered nature of the system, as already explored above with reference to Abels's work, might be hitting these female scholars harder due not only to their gender but also their countries of origin. Gender-mainstreaming measures and policies, which support Germany's young female scholars in their academic-career paths, do not seem to also encompass their exiled peers—mainly due to the latter's age and career level. This leads exiled scholars to find these measures more symbolic than effective. Only two of our interviewees benefited from such policies during their stay in Germany.

As scholars with profound expertise in Gender Studies, along with other disciplinary affiliations, many of our informants shared their experiences of being asked to give courses while not being able to conduct research on their core field of interest. Those who enjoyed success in their job applications and found postdoc positions in research projects appear to be not only young, with strong academic networks, and in possession of advanced English-/German-language skills but also from an Area Studies background (particularly if they expand their expertise on Turkey to a comparative, regional scale). Also, those working on popular subjects aligned with their own biographical experience, like migration. Gender Studies scholars feel, then, implicitly forced by the academic marketplace into pursuing these niche orientations.

Another factor that seems to distinguish these feminist scholars from their German counterparts is the identification of the former as activists. Two interviewees stressed that the dichotomy between politics and academia in Germany seems to be sharper than in Turkey. As a Social Sciences scholar, Güngör has a deep sense of how—in her very own discipline, indeed—this binary is a constitutive part of academic culture in Germany:

Liberalism has such weight. They keep saying what you're saying is too political. And I say: »What you are saying is also analysis from a liberal perspective, if it is not political, why is my feminist perspective political? And even if it is political, politics is not a bad thing.« (Interview with G. Güngör, October 18, 2019)

The clash of different academic habitus in this sense eventually resulted in her alienation and loss of motivation to continue with academic work. Güngör concludes that under these circumstances she can work »not in the name of some political ideals anymore but only for money now.« Compared with Women's Studies and Gender Studies being highly politicized academic fields in Turkey, as shown in the previous section, our interview partners characterized Germany—according to their experiences with colleagues—as having generally depoliticized such realms, especially when it comes to the critical use of concepts like »fascism,« »racism,« or »neoliberalism.«

Conclusion

Fleeing from the risks produced by a Turkish regime with autocratic tendencies, these scholars immigrate to Germany with the expectation of continuing their academic work in safety. Our analysis showed that academics of both non-European backgrounds and those arriving in Germany as at-risk, refugee, or exiled scholars from Social Science disciplines (and with a focus on women's and gender studies) face structural and epistemological barriers. These were encountered even if those we talked to were able to make use of the strong international solidarity networks existing among feminist/queer scholars. In other words, their flight cannot be considered an escape from hell to heaven.

While the context of Turkey is framed by the dominant authoritarian AKP regime that emerged in response to the crisis of neoliberalism, we argued that Germany's own milieu is underscored by another aspect of neoliberal thought: namely higher education policies fostering precarious working conditions. Despite the great efforts of various actors to support exiled scholars and provide them with a safe academic space, the latter felt that they have little chance to establish themselves professionally. Only some of them consider their academic inclusion possible through working in temporary positions and niche areas within the academic marketplace.

The interplay or even contradiction between the meritocratic and humanitarian logics of the German higher education system in terms of including exiled scholars hinders their recognition as, in fact, knowledge subjects who can strongly contribute to that domain. This is related to historically rooted epistemological hierarchies between geographies of knowledge and science, literally between universities of the Global North and the Global South. These dynamics influence eye-level academic relationships between exiled scholars and their counterparts in the German higher education system in all Social Science areas, including women's, gender, or queer studies. Existing structural problems, as reflected in the gendered hierarchies of universities, show the cumulative impact here: namely very limited options for exiled scholars to find a new academic »home« in the German milieu. Consequently, even if there is a strong will to offer temporary support, the higher education system as a field of relations between forces and positions (Cassirer 2000) cannot overcome its own shortcomings. As such, it is unable to compensate for the problem of status devaluation or loss caused by the process of forced migration.

Notes

- 1 One of the authors of this article has previously defined the AKP's gendered discourses and policies in its second period of rule as being »neoconservative feminism« (Yarar 2020). In the present case, however, she revises her earlier point, and so replaces here »neoconservative feminism« with the concept of »conservative justice and right discourse« to emphasize the AKP's political shift to an anti-gender equality stance.
- 2 See also, Kandiyoti (2010).
- 3 See: <https://www.diken.com.tr/yeni-akit-nefret-sacmaya-doyamadi-kahpe-diplomali-sapkin-lar-atin-bunlari/> (last accessed March 18, 2022).
- 4 See: KAOS GL (2017, 14.06.): Queer Siyasetin Imkânları Bugün Queer Teori'de. <https://kaosgl.org/haber/queer-siyasetin-imknlari-bugun-queer-teorirsquode>, (last accessed on March 18, 2022) and https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fachbereiche/fb12/fb12/Interkulturelle_Bildung/Dag/Research_Project_Report_2019.pdf (last accessed March 18, 2022).
- 5 See: Christoph Hasselbach, »Syrian refugees find a safe haven in Germany,« DW, March 15, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/syrian-refugees-find-a-safe-haven-in-germany/a-56872099> (last accessed November 24, 2022).
- 6 Noting that educational migration has gained importance over the last ten years in Germany, Neusel (2017) stated that this trend is also confirmed by the growing cross-border mobility of students and lecturers at universities, with a strong increase in the number of foreign academics now employed.
- 7 Donini (2010) noted that although humanitarianism historically emerged in confrontation with power, it has now been transformed into a form of the latter. De Lahir (2016) agreed with this analysis.
- 8 A recently published International Labour Organization report asserted that the precarity of academic research careers is a widespread phenomenon across OECD countries and across different research systems. The situation has become even worse for the research »precariat« (a term defined with respect to postdocs holding fixed-term positions based on limited contracts, often short-term or part-time in nature) under the impact of COVID-19. Field- and lab work, research projects, as well as academic recruitment processes have been canceled or postponed, and many businesses and foundations are reducing their investment in research. Although precarity is not a new phenomenon, due to the current pandemic it has become more severe and thus is in need of tackling (»Reducing the Precarity of Academic Research Careers,« OECD Science, Technology, and Industry, Policy Papers, May 2021, No. 113).
- 9 See: https://www.gender.hu-berlin.de/de/links/links_renamed (last accessed March 18, 2022).
- 10 Here she means the international-supporters email list that was compiled as part of the BAK initiative in Turkey.
- 11 See: <https://www.academy-in-exile.eu/> (last accessed March 6, 2022).

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