BEING A DISSIDENT JOURNALIST IN TURKEY: OLD AND NEW CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the methods of suppression that critical journalists face in contemporary Turkey, as well as journalists' reactions to the increasing levels of suppression. With this aim, in-depth interviews were conducted with journalists working in one of the few remaining independent critical outlets in Turkey. The findings indicate that the new regime in Turkey employs both old and new tools of suppression in order to control the media and manipulate the information. As a result, major critical outlets are financially weakened, demoralized, and discredited, instead of being totally abolished. Trying to survive in an ever-dwindling space, critical journalists develop new strategies such as using more careful and moderate language, having legal consultations before publishing some stories, and verified information instead of opinion. The analysis also reveals the change in journalists' perception of their roles, motivations, and future visions in the face of the new authoritarian regime.

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To the loving memory of my father

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

On 5th of February 2014, a secretly recorded phone call[1] between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Fatih Saraç, the senior executive of HaberTürk[2] news channel, was leaked on social media[3]. The conversation took place in June 2013, a time when the Gezi Park protests[4] were still ongoing. On the tape, the then prime minister Erdoğan is heard reprimanding Saraç for quoting the second oppositional party leader Bahçeli in the news ticker and telling him to "do what needs to be done". Saraç replies with a frightened voice: "yes Sir, I see Sir, your wish is my command, I am doing it immediately". This scandalous tape is just a snapshot of the appalling state interference into the news media. Perhaps the most telling evidence of the level of fear and self-censorship in the mainstream media is the fact that another leading news channel, CNN Türk, was broadcasting a documentary about the life of penguins on the 3rd day of Gezi protests while tens of thousands of protestors were violently attacked by the police in the main square of Istanbul.[5]

The "New Turkey", as President Erdoğan prefers to refer to it, seems to have given birth to a new media regime. However, given the long history of undemocratic practices regarding the freedom of speech in Turkey, one needs to take a closer look to understand what exactly is new for the media in this new regime. Is the distress that journalists are experiencing today merely an aggravation of the suppression which has always been there? In this thesis, in line with the

[1] A few days after the leakage, Erdogan acknowledged the phone call. The editor-in-chief of HaberTürk, Fatih Altaylı, confirmed they frequently receive similar calls: http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-pm-acknowledges-phone-call-to-media-executive.aspx?pageID=238&nID=62368&NewsCatID=338

[2] A leading nationwide private news channel, belonging to Ciner Media Group.

[3] Leaked tapes were initially shared on YouTube, then disseminated through various social media channels (See: Yesil, 2016: 115-118).

[4] One of the biggest protest movements in the Turkish history. During Gezi Park protests, "3.5 million people participated in more than 4,700 events in Turkey's 80 province out of 81" (Yeşil 2016: 108)

[5] https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/09/turkey-mainstream-media-penguins-protests

literature on new authoritarianism, I argue that journalists in contemporary Turkey face new and softer forms of suppression in addition to a dramatic increase in the use of old ones, such as legal prosecutions, dismissals, and censorship. I also explore the strategies that dissent journalists have developed to make their survival possible, their changing roles, and their expectations from the future, both in relation to politics and digitalization.

In what follows, I will first present the context of my research, the puzzle that I aim to solve, and my research questions. Then, I will briefly describe my methodology, summarize my main findings and contribution, and explain the relevance of my research beyond Turkey.

With the Gezi protests and the leaked tapes of 2013, the authoritarian turn taken by the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, henceforth AKP) was finally acknowledged by the international community. However, as a growing body of literature points out, the democratic backsliding has been happening since the second term of the AKP (2007), as evident in Turkey's declining freedom of press, among other indicators.

Although the freedom of expression has never been unproblematic in Turkey, the annual reports of the Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, European Commission, and various other national and international monitoring NGOs have pointed to a continuous decline (with a few temporary intermissions) in the freedom of the media in Turkey since 2007. According to the Freedom House Report of 2017, Turkey is the second country which has experienced the most dramatic decline in political rights and civil liberties in the last 10 years (Puttington and Roylance, 2017: 10).

As part of this authoritarian turn, not only the public broadcast channels have been fully taken under control by the government. The mainstream commercial media have also been largely co-

opted or suppressed in the last years. Changing ownership patterns, growing numbers of arrested and fired journalists, increasing control of the Internet, hard and soft forms of censorship have left less and less space for independent and critical journalists in Turkey (Kaya and Çakmur, 2010; Kaymas, 2011; Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012; Yesil, 2014; Karlıdağ and Bulut, 2016). This authoritarian shift, which has gained further momentum after the failed coup attempt in July 2016, is changing the whole media landscape in Turkey (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016).

Using elections as a façade, the new authoritarian regimes often use less conspicuous and softer methods to control the media and manipulate the information, as well as strategically employing traditional repressive tools, such as prosecution of journalists and censorship (Guriev and Triesman, 2015; Somer, 2016). As a result, independent media is not abolished or totally repressed, but manipulated and instrumentalized (*ibid*). This seems to be the case in Turkey too, where critical media still exist and continue to produce critical reporting; yet it is confined to an ever dwindling space.

What remains puzzling in this context is how do critical journalists, who are exposed to all these old and new forms of pressures, have been able to survive in the new regime, which is neither democracy nor a duplicate of the country's old illiberal order. An intuitive answer and also the one that the literature exclusively elaborates on is the increasing tendency to self-censor. However, the continuing existence of critical reporting suggests that there might be other coping mechanisms that make their resistance and survival possible.

The research question that my thesis addresses is: *what are the new modes of suppression over the media in new authoritarian Turkey, and what strategies have journalists developed in the face of this suppression*? In particular, I explore what methods of suppression and intimidation do

critical journalists face other than being jailed or fired, how their newsmaking is impacted by the current political situation, what strategies they have develop to secure their survival, and how do they see the future amidst the ongoing purge.

To address these questions I conducted interviews with seven journalists from the daily Cumhuriyet, one of the few remaining independent critical newspapers in the Turkish press. Journalists working for a long-established outlet which has been under increasing pressure are in the best position to answer the question 'what has changed in the face of that much pressure?' and to explain what strategies they have developed as a reaction. To analyze the interviews, I drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase guide for thematic analysis. While coding the data set, I used both deductive and inductive methods. The most prevalent themes clustered around four broad categories: methods of suppression, journalists' perception of their role, strategies and motivations, vision of the future and digitalization.

My findings partly confirm and contribute to the literature on new authoritarianism in Turkey. They indicate that the Turkish state employs both traditional and non-traditional tools in order to suppress and control the media, and manipulate the dissemination of information. There are both quantitative and qualitative differences in the employment of political/judicial and financial tools, which can be considered among the traditional tools of suppression. Furthermore, online harassment and attacks on the reputation and the credibility of critical journalists are widely employed as less conspicuous tools of suppression. The initiators of this kind of harassment and attacks are government-hired social media trolls,[6] pro-government journalists, and sometimes ordinary citizens. Although they are mainly non-state actors, the state encourages them and

[6] Widely known as AK Trolls: https://www.dailydot.com/layer8/turkey-twitter-trolls/

benefits from their actions. As a result of these tactics, major critical outlets are financially weakened, demoralized, and discredited.

My research also highlights two important issues that have been largely neglected by the literature so far. One pertains to the way journalists' roles change in the face of the authoritarian shift, the other one points to their motivations for continuing their jobs under the current circumstances, and the strategies they have developed when doing it. As regards the former, my interviewees pointed to heroization of journalists. This means that the society attributes excessive roles to critical journalists since they are among the very few actors who venture to publicly criticize the government. On the latter, the most often mentioned strategy was careful language, which journalists differentiated from self-censorship, along with several others. Since the literature exclusively focuses on self-censorship as a coping mechanism, my findings add to the existing literature by addressing this gap. Furthermore, my research shows that the journalists see themselves as part of the resistance against the authoritarian rule, and are dedicated to continuing their job. They think that the internet, in spite of its various shortcomings, gives hope as a platform that is impossible to totally repress.

Considering the fact that new authoritarianisms are on the rise in the world (Levitsky and Way, 2002; Schedler, 2006; Guriev and Triesman, 2015; Diamond, 2015; Diamond, Platter, and Walker; 2016), it is important to understand the Turkish case, because it displays important similarities with other new authoritarian regimes, such as Russia and Hungary, as well as *sui generis* features (Guriev and Triesman, 2015; Somer, 2016). Looking at its relation to media is a useful way to understand how new authoritarianism functions, since "by its very nature, new authoritarianism is enabled by the manipulation of information and is constructed by information and communication technologies" (Somer, 2016: 498). New dictators choose to manipulate the

beliefs about the world via propaganda and disinformation rather than appealing to mass terror and sheer violence in order to stay in power (Guriev and Triesman, 2015; Oruçoğlu, 2015). Thus, they develop new tools to control and manipulate the information, without abolishing independent media (*ibid*). As my thesis shows, the story of Cumhuriyet journalists is in part a story of the regime change in Turkey, but this story is not necessarily peculiar to Turkey.

The Outline

In the first chapter, I give an overview of the discussions about the regime change in Turkey and its relation with and impact on the media. In doing so, I will briefly review the recent literature on changing ownership patterns, economic and political/judicial suppression of the media, soft and indirect tools of repression that have been recently adopted, and self-censorship. In the second chapter, I present my research design, including an explanation of why Cumhuriyet is an appropriate case for addressing my research question. The chapter presents the procedures of data collection via interviews, the methodology used to analyze the data, and clarifies some of the choices that I needed to make when conducting the analysis. It also highlights the empirical and theoretical limitations of my research. The third chapter discusses the findings of the analysis and links them with previous findings in the literature. The last part of the thesis presents a brief summary, discusses the broader implications of the findings and outlines possible avenues for further research.

Chapter 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I first give an overview of the discussions about the new authoritarian regime in the making in Turkey and its relation with and impact on the media. In the second section, I describe the media system in Turkey prior the second term of the ruling AKP. Then I briefly review the literature on changing ownership patterns in the last 10 years. In the following sections, I present the main findings and arguments of the recent studies about economic and political/judicial suppression of the media, the soft and indirect tools of repression that have been recently developed, and self-censorship.

1. 1. Regime Change in Turkey

Due to its illiberal statist tradition and the military tutelage that has never been fully absent from the politics until the recent era, Turkey has never been a full democratic regime despite several phases of democratization (Özbudun, 2015; Somer, 2016). The first term of the ruling AKP (2002-2007) was also one of these phases, marked by political and economic reforms aiming at further democratization as part of the EU membership process. However, starting with its second electoral victory (2007) and accelerating after the 2011 elections, the AKP took an authoritarian turn (Diamond, 2015; Özbudun, 2015; Akkoyunlu and Öktem, 2016; Yesil, 2016; Yılmaz, 2016). Although an extensive body of literature has documented a clear decline in freedoms and democratic backsliding, there is no consensus on the proper conceptualization of the current political changes. Furthermore, as Somer points out, there is "a disappointing lack of clarity in recent research even on the fundamental question of whether Turkey should still be considered a democracy based on minimum standards" (2016: 486).

Scholars concerned with the regime change in Turkey can be broadly divided into two camps. On the one hand, there are those who see the regime change as a failure of further democratic consolidation and a revival of the old illiberal political order in Turkey (Kalaycıoğlu, 2010; McLaren and Job, 2011; Cebeci, 2016). On the other hand, a growing body of literature talks about it in terms of the emergence of a new regime, a type of neo-authoritarianism. In the latter camp, White and Herzog compare Erdoğan's Turkey to Putin's Russia, and describe the current political regime of Turkey as 'electoral authoritarianism', in which "multi-party elections may take place (...) but liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness are violated to such a degree as to neutralize the democratic nature of such elections, effectively making them instruments of authoritarian rule" (2016: 554). Another study belonging to Guriev anf Triesman (2015) shows Turkey as an example of 'informational dictatorship'. According to their informational theory of the new authoritarianism, new dictators' power lie in their ability to convince the public that they are competent, rather than their ability of using force or ideology. Thus, new dictators use a combination of 'state propaganda', 'censoring *independent* media', 'co-opting the elite', and 'violence at times of uprisings'. What makes them *new* is that "such regimes simulate democracy, holding elections that they make sure to win, bribing and censoring the private press rather than abolishing it, and replacing ideology with an amorphous anti-Western resentment" (2). Furthermore, they combine old and new methods when implementing these tactics, such as in the case of censorship: "Besides blocking publication of specific articles or programs, it can include filtering the internet, hiring hackers to attack opposition websites, bribing the owners and journalists in 'independent' media to censor themselves, and prosecuting and imprisoning journalists who refuse" (5). Yesil (2016) calls the current political system 'neoliberal authoritarianism', emphasizing "the interpenetration of state and capital, and the

overlapping of patronage structures with market imperatives", which has been also reshaping the media system to a great extent.

Another conceptual framework that has started to be often used to describe the regime change in Turkey is that of the 'competitive authoritarianism' (e.g: Başkan, 2015; Özbudun, 2015; Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016). That means, "[Turkey] is not a full authoritarian regime; there is universal suffrage; the authority of elected officials are not restricted by unelected tutelary powers; and at least one of the following criteria are met: 1) unfair elections, 2) violation of civil liberties, and 3) uneven playing field" (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016: 1586). Esen and Gümüşçü stress the third component, which is made possible by several measures taken by the ruling AKP. The authors state that the playing field has been heavily tilted in favor of the AKP as a result of these measures, as evident by the elections of October 2015. Thus, the AKP can stay in power without appealing to outright repression and massive electoral fraud (1585). To support this argument, the authors look at three indicators: "politicized state institutions", "uneven access to resources", and "uneven access to media" (1587). The process of skewing the media field in favor of the AKP included the increase in the control exerted over the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), which eventually turned into a propaganda tool for the government, the creation of their own media bloc through co-opting or buying some of the major news outlets, and the repression of the rest of the media (1588-1590). The strategy of rewarding supporters and punishing enemies with state resources have become largely successful due to the high levels of cross-ownership in the Turkish media structure, as will be discussed at length in the next section (1590).

Taking insights from different perspectives, Somer (2016) argues that the current political regime of Turkey carries traces of both old and new authoritarianism. With regard to the latter, Turkey displays several generic features that also characterize other new authoritarian countries, although

some of them are in *sui generis* forms (Somer, 2016: 489). According to Somer, one of the main elements of the new authoritarianism in Turkey is the new methods of political communication (2016: 494). He observes that "the main focus of the new authoritarianism is not on suppressing and controlling the media and public opinion per se but on manipulating and instrumentalizing them." According to Somer, this comes with a change in the instruments employed by the state (494). New authoritarianism still employs judicial and economic tools to suppress the media, as old authoritarianism did, "but the main instruments of authoritarianism now appear to have become the media themselves" (495). Thus, the existence of a large pro-government media bloc is vital:

> "The pro-government media become instrumental in debilitating views and criticisms without necessarily censoring the government-critical media entirely. The former crowds out the truth-claims of the latter by employing an offensive strategy of aggressively and repetitively articulating counter truth claims even on factual matters, in ways reminiscent of "post-truth politics" elsewhere in the world (Davies 2016). Furthermore, critical journalists are accused of spreading lies and attacked on personal grounds by their pro-government counterparts." (495)

Somer argues that the restrictions imposed on the internet and social media, and the way that the government employs them also have elements of both old and new authoritarianism (495). In addition to hard censorship or 'first-generation' controls, such as denying access to certain webpages, the government largely employs second and third generation methods of control, such as "cyber-attacks, espionage, outsourcing of internet controls to private third parties, which can also be called 'delegated censorship' and the projection of ideas deemed favourable to the government through pro-government websites and users" (485). Yet the Cyberspace is not simply an object of suppression in Turkey. As in other neo-authoritarian countries, it is seen as a "valuable space to promote and reproduce the party's domination" (486). Somer concludes that

these observations support the argument that "by its very nature, new authoritarianism is enabled by the manipulation of information and is constructed by information and communication technologies" (498).

In short, many scholars describe the current regime in Turkey as a form of new authoritarianism in the making. This entails manipulation and instrumentalization of media instead of its mere suppression, and employment of hard and soft tools of suppression. As all of these works suggest, the changes in the media landscape and the state's relation to media are important parts of the regime change. The next section introduces and discusses these changes in detail.

1. 2. Media in Turkey

1.2.1. Media structure until the early 2000s

The first and biggest shift in media ownership in Turkey came in the mid-1980s, as the state-owned media become commercialized and privatized (Christensen, 2007). After a short-lived period of blossoming of the critical and investigative journalism, Turkish media started to be dominated by media conglomerates, and a hyper-commercialized oligopolistic media system emerged (Christensen, 2007; Kaymas, 2011; Kaya and Çakmur, 2011). Seeing it as a useful tool to gain financial benefits from the government, many businessmen rushed into the media sector (Christensen, 2007: 185). During the 1990s, these large media conglomerates, which also have investments in many other big sectors such as energy, construction, and banking,[7] bought most of the media outlets, which were previously family enterprises or had traditional journalist-owner

[7] For the current map of media owners and their other investments, see: https://graphcommons.com/graphs/77c1528d-3bef-4033-b41b-229bb1ce5a46?auto=true

structures (Kaymas, 2011: 47). Due to the clientelistic and patrimonial relationships between the media and politics, media barons became powerful actors influencing politics (Christensen, 2007; Kaya and Çakmur, 2011).

The biggest of these conglomerates is Doğan Holding. In the beginning of the 2000s, it owned many of the newspapers with the highest circulation (e.g: Hürriyet, Milliyet, Posta, Vatan, Gözcü) as well as some newspapers with lower circulation but high profile (e.g: Radikal), and many popular TV and radio channels (Christensen, 2007: 188-189). In 2004, newspapers belonging to Doğan Media were receiving two thirds of all newspaper advertisement revenues in the Turkish press (Chirstensen, 2007: 187). As a result, Doğan Holding enjoyed enormous political and economic power, along with a few other media giants.

As Doğan Media exemplifies, when it came to the 2000s, the Turkish press was highly commercialized and mostly dominated by media moguls. The privatization and commercialization of the news media did not end the high press-party parallelism in Turkey though (Çarkoğlu and Yavuz, 2010; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011). The press-party parallelism refers to the "degree to which the structure of the media system paralleled that of the party system" (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 27). In the first period of the AKP's rule, internal pluralism continued to decline while external pluralism was rising, increasing party-press parallelism (Çarkoğlu and Yavuz, 2010: 622). This means that media outlets are politically motivated and biased towards certain groups depending on their political position, but the overall picture of the media is "diverse, vibrant, and plural" (Yesil, 2014: 154). Strong political intervention and low professionalism are also among the characteristics of Turkey's media system (Yesil, 2014: 158). In other words, the media system in Turkey matches the characteristics of the polarized pluralist model in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) typology (Panayırcı et. al, 2016: 157). It is characterized

by clientelism, high political parallelism, weak professionalization, and strong state intervention. (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

1.2.2. Changing media ownership in the AKP era

As previously discussed, after an initial period of democratization and liberalization as part of the EU membership process, the AKP took an authoritarian turn and has sought ways to consolidate its power. The process of creating government-friendly capital through favoritism was accompanied by the creation of a large pro-government media bloc (Kaya and Çakmur, 2011: 532). The first significant development was the confiscation of Uzan and Ciner media groups, whose parent holdings were accused of infringing banking regulations in 2000 and 2001 economic crises, by the newly established Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012: 306). The media assets of these large conglomerates were handed over to more government-friendly companies, as "the AKP promoted its close business circles to benefit from this wave of restructuring and own media outlets on sale from 2005 onward" (ibid). The sales of Sabah (the newspaper which had the second largest circulation in the Turkish press until 2007) and ATV (a popular TV channel) to Çalık Holding which belongs to Berat Albayrak, Erdoğan's son-in-law, was especially significant (Kaymas, 2011: 56). Freedom House mentioned this incident in its 2015 country report[8]: "In one of the most flagrant examples of the use of economic leverage to shape media ownership, wiretap recordings leaked in 2013 indicated that the government dictated which holding companies would purchase the Sabah-ATV media group in exchange for a multibillion-dollar contract to build Istanbul's third airport."

[8] https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/turkey

The next and the biggest step in reshuffling the Turkish media was breaking the power of Doğan Holding through the extensive financial and political pressure put on Doğan Media, the biggest media conglomerate in Turkey. In 2009, after covering a corruption scandal by a charity organization[9] known for its close ties to the government, the Doğan Media Company was fined $3.8 billion of tax evasion and the imprisonment of the owner Aydın Doğan was demanded (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016: 1590). This was seen as a political decision by experts.[10] As a result of the increasing pressure, the company had to fire some of the prominent dissident columnists and sell two of its widely circulated newspapers (Milliyet and Vatan) to pro-government businessmen in 2011 (Kaymas, 2011: 55). The crackdown on Doğan Media was also a warning for other media bosses. As a result of these developments, as Akser and Baybars-Hawks argue, "the mainstream media in Turkey now operate under a new political economy of censorship in which big business and media conglomerates can only challenge the government and its repressive tactics toward the news media when their economic interests are threatened" (2012: 302).

Another tool that the government uses to take control of mainstream media is appointing pro-government managers, known as *kayyum* in Turkish, to TV stations and newspapers (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016: 1591). These managers have a say in every detail of the working of the outlets. Thus, those outlets are practically turned into propaganda bastions, without being sold to the allies of the AKP. If one adds to this picture the recent shutdown of the numerous Kurdish, leftist, and Gulenist newspapers as well as the popularity of some Islamist newspapers (e.g.: Yeni Şafak[11], Yeni Akit) which are voluntarily working like a mouthpiece of the government, the

[9] For a summary of the case, see: https://www.ataturktoday.com/RefBib/DenizFeneriLighthouseCaseSummary.htm
[10] You can see the European Commission's "Turkey Progress Report 2009", p. 18: http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/Tur_En_Realitons/Progress/turkey_progress_report_2009.pdf
[11] Yeni Şafak belongs to the Albayrak Group, which is owned by Erdoğan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak's family.

Turkish media landscape seems to be heavily skewed in favor of the ruling party (Kaya and Çakmur, 2011).

1.2.3. Economic pressure on critical media

One of the most important tools of the government to control the media is advertisements. Although using advertisements for this aim is not completely new in the history of media-politics relations in Turkey, a recent study by Servet Yanatma shows that the AKP "has systematically created its own strict (advertisement) regime stemming from its strong, long and centralized rule" (2016: 6). There are three sources of newspaper advertisements that are increasingly controlled by the state. The first one is official advertising and announcements allocated by the Press Bulletin Authority (Basın İlan Kurumu-BİK), which is largely under the influence of the government (Yanatma, 2016: 17). The other sources are advertisements coming from public firms and advertisements from private firms.

The BİK income is especially vital for the survival of small-scale and local outlets, which cannot receive private advertisements due to high market competition (Yanatma, 2016: 20). However, the BİK is authorized to sanction newspapers by claiming a "violation of media ethics", which is often used to punish critical newspapers (18). More importantly, the institution does not always distribute the advertisement revenue according the circulation rates as it is supposed to do (19). The change in the BİK advertisement that had been received by the daily Zaman, a newspaper known for its close ties to the Gulenist Organization,[12] is one of the most illustrative examples.

[12] A former ally of the AKP, the Gulenist Organization is held responsible by the government for the recent coup attempt on 15 July 2016 .

While its BİK income was 7.1 million $ in 2013, it dropped to 2.7 in 2014 (19). By the end of December 2013, it became apparent that the government was having a bitter relationship with the Gulenist Organization, its former ally. Zaman took a critical stance against the government at that time. This dramatic decrease in BİK revenue, not paired with a significant decrease in the daily's circulation, shows how this institution is used to discipline media outlets.

A recent amendment to BİK regulations promises to bring more troubles to small critical outlets. In order to be registered to BİK, newspapers must submit a list of employees who have press cards. According to the new amendment, if this list contains a name of a journalist who is charged with terrorism, the newspaper may be denied the BİK income (Karakas, 2016, 31-32). Considering the fact that the Anti-Terror Law is widely abused to silence critics (Yesil, 2014), this amendment can augment financial problems, especially for small Kurdish and leftist outlets which have a limited number of employees.

Yanatma's (2016) study shows that the BİK is not the only way of controlling media through advertisement distribution. Private advertisements coming from public and private firms are also distributed in a way that strips critical outlets of most of their income. Advertisement by public firms constitutes approximately 20% of all the advertisement income that the Turkish press receives (Yanatma, 2016: 31). Since 2013,[13] advertisement discrimination by public firms became much more overt. For instance, the share of Cumhuriyet in the space distribution of advertisements by public firms decreased by 75% from 2013 to 2014, and 50% from 2014 to 2015 (33). The figures presented by the same study also confirm that the government pressures private companies not to give advertisements to critical media outlets (40). The case of

[13] 2013 is the year that Gezi Park protests happened and massive corruption tapes were leaked to the public by the Gulenist Organization.

Cumhuriyet is illustrative again. From 2012 to 2015, its total advertising space declined by 38 percent. Another study based on interviews in relevant sectors confirms that when advertisers need to make a choice between a successful marketing strategy and not-offending authorities, they choose the latter (Karakas, 2016: 13). In other words, advertisement choices of the companies are not made according to the logic of the market when it comes to allocating advertisements to critical outlets.

In sum, as Yanatma's (2016) and Karakas's (2016) studies show, the ruling party uses its power over the Press Bulletin Authority and advertisement sector as a carrot and stick. Although this is not a totally novel method, the current levels of financial pressure are unprecedented in Turkish history, since no single party has ever enjoyed that much power over all spheres since Turkey moved to the multiparty system in 1946.

1.2.4. Political / judicial suppression of the media

It can be safely argued that media in Turkey has never been completely free of political pressure (Kaymas, 2011). Yet all the records show a continual increase in the restrictions applied to media freedom since 2007, reaching unprecedented levels. The methods of judicial/political suppression employed by the state include detention of journalists, shutting down media outlets, online banishment, and heavy fines. In discussing these methods I will use the term "judicial/political", since the judiciary has been increasingly politicized and instrumentalized for the repression of political dissents (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016; Yeşil, 2016).

Detention of journalists is a method of intimidation that has been increasingly used by the Turkish state since the second electoral victory of AKP in 2007. The first waves of arrests of the AKP era took place in 2008 as part of the Ergenekon investigation.[14] Following this investigation, many journalists, military officers and bureaucrats were charged with plotting against the government (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012: 308). These charges were based on phone tappings and some documents which were later proved to be fabricated (Ellis, 2016: 38). The journalists that were arrested during the Ergenekon trials were found innocent and acquited after months and years of imprisonment. However, the trials, together with the Sledgehemmer (Balyoz) trials, marked a turn in the history of Turkish politics as they were effective in breaking the power of the military and consolidating the AKP's power (Esen and Gümüşçü, 2016).

The second wave of arrests in the media was part of the so-called KCK[15] operations which began in 2009. The operations included investigations of the intellectuals, journalists and academics who were allegedly supporting the PKK.[16] In this process, 36 Kurdish journalists were arrested (Yesil, 2014: 163). Small waves of arrests continued throughout the whole period (2007-2017) and the biggest one came after the recent coup attempt in July 2016. By the end of December 2016, The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that the number of jailed journalists (i.e.: 259) in Turkey has reached the highest world record since 1990.[17] Currently,[18] over 160 journalists are jailed, many of them pending trial. Futhermore, since the failed coup attempt, 178

[14] Ergenekon trials are a series of trials which included military officials, journalists and intellectuals who were alleged to plot a coup against the AKP government (See: Aknur, M. (2013). Civil-military relations during the AK Party era: major developments and challenges. Insight Turkey, 15(4), 131.)
[15] KCK (the Union of Kurdistan Communities) is a body affiliated with the PKK.
[16] The Kurdistan Worker's Party; the seperatist organization which has been in an armed struggle against the Turkish state since 1980s. (See: Marcus, A. (2009). *Blood and Belief: the PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. NYU Press.)
[17] https://www.cpj.org/reports/2016/12/journalists-jailed-record-high-turkey-crackdown.php
[18] 162 journalists are in jail by 08.05.2017: http://tgs.org.tr/cezaevindeki-gazeteciler/

news outlets have been shut down by emergency decrees, increasing the number of disemployed journalists up to 10 thousands.[19]

The charges that the journalists face are "generally based on the provisions of the Press Law, the Penal Code, and the Anti-Terror Law" (Yesil, 2014: 159). In these laws, "crimes against the state", "terrorism" and "terrorist propaganda" are vaguely and broadly defined. This enables the criminalization of journalistic practices by the politicized judiciary. These laws have been amended several times during the AKP era, in addition to newly introduced restrictive regulations (such as 2011 Broadcasting Law[20]), which put an increasing judicial pressure on the journalists (Kaymas, 2011; Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012).

1.2.5. Other methods of intimidation

In addition to the repressive methods that have been discussed so far, the ruling party has several other methods for circumventing the critics. Accusing critics for being pawns of external enemies who want to "create chaos" and "divide the country", in a way resonating with the Sevres Syndrome,[21] Erdoğan and party members demonize all sorts of political critics, including journalists (Yesil, 2016). This includes "the creation of sided/biased media discourse" by which it is claimed that the media that is critical of the government is not objective (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012: 316). Government officials publicly condemn certain media outlets and journalists,

[19] http://bianet.org/bianet/medya/182569-basin-orgutleri-gazetecilerin-sorunu-calisamamak
[20] http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.6112.pdf
[21] Hans-Lukas Kieser explains it as follows: "The fear of conspiracies directed toward Turkey by international actors is often referred to as the 'Sevres Syndrome'. It is the belief that the international community, and in particular the Western world, aspire to revive the terms of the Sevres Treaty imposed on the Ottoman Empire after the end of the First World War and basically divide up Turkey into smaller ethnic states." (See: Kieser, H. L. (2006). *Turkey beyond nationalism: towards post-nationalist identities* (Vol. 8). IB Tauris.)

"leading them to be targeted online with abuse and harassment" (Ellis, 2016: 40). The government-hired social media trolls, also known as AK Trolls, serve to disseminate the defamatory messages against critical journalists and engage in online harassment (Yesil, 2016:115). Furthermore, as it has been also mentioned before, certain pro-government journalists employ a discourse similar to the government's, attack their colleagues on personal grounds, and accuse them of lying (Somer, 2016: 495). In spite of acknowledging the increase in the use of such methods, the literature has not engaged in analyzing the systematic use of them.

1.2.6. Self-censorship

While the dramatic decline in press freedom is usually discussed in relation to the number of jailed journalists, shutdown outlets, and banned news sites, high-levels of self-censorship constitutes another serious problem of the Turkish media. Yeşil argues that "the police and judicial interference, wiretapping, detentions and arrests, and the risk of financial reprisal from the government have intensified and normalized the self-imposition of control and discipline among Turkey's press corps" (2014: 168). Confirming her argument, a survey study conducted with journalists in 2013 shows the gravity of the situation: 91.4 % of the respondent journalists said they apply self-censorship, which is defined in the question as "regularly abstaining from making news about certain events that involve public interest" (Arsan, 2013: 454).

In sum, media in contemporary Turkey is under pressure at many levels. In addition to creating its own media bloc that rivals and dominates the existing media blocs, the AKP compelled (mainstream) media bosses to obey him through clientelistic relations between the media and

politics in Turkey, and its power over the advertisement sector. The few remaining independent and critical outlets struggle to survive under hard and soft methods of suppression.

Chapter 2: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents my research design. In what follows, I first explain why Cumhuriyet is the most appropriate case for addressing my research question. Then, I present the procedures of data collection via interviews, including an overview of interview questions and interviewee profiles. In the third section, I describe the methodology used to analyze the data and clarify some of the choices that I needed to make when conducting the analysis. Finally, I discuss the empirical and theoretical limitations of my research.

2.1. Case Selection

To answer my research question, I chose to interview journalists working in one particular outlet, namely Cumhuriyet. It is the most appropriate case for studying the repression of the independent and critical media in Turkey, as it has been one of the main targets of the state authorities in recent years. It is also a good case for understanding the survival of independent outlets, as it is one of the very few truly independent newspapers in the current media landscape in Turkey. In order to justify my choice, I give an overview of the history of Cumhuriyet, what it represents for Turkish history and society, and the recent crackdowns on the outlet.

Established in 1924, Cumhuriyet is the oldest up-market newspaper in the Turkish press. The newspaper was founded by Yaşar Nadi, a friend of Kemal Atatürk, with the mission of promoting the values of the newly founded state, the Republic of Turkey. Cumhuriyet, meaning 'Republic', is since then associated with Kemalist values, particularly secularism (Köktener, 2005: 68). Although its editorial policies have changed from time to time, depending on the political conjuncture, the newspaper has been regarded as one of the leading leftist newspapers since early

1960s (Köktener, 2005: 367). Although Cumhuriyet has never had a very large circulation, it has always been considered among the most reputable and trustworthy newspaper in the Turkish press according to public opinion polls[22] (Köktener, 2005: 369). Due to its influence that goes beyond its circulation, Cumhuriyet has always been a newspaper that is in the spotlight and often had a tense relation with the ruling governments (Kaya, 2010: 85). Some of its leading journalists were assassinated in the 1990s, including Uğur Mumcu,[23] whose death still remains mysterious. Being a flagship defender of secularism and giving voice to opposition, Cumhuriyet could not get along with the AKP governments whose members are mostly coming from an Islamist tradition (Özerkan, 2009: 41). Today, Cumhuriyet is mostly read by secular and center-left readers, who generally vote for the main opposition party CHP (Çarkoğlu & Yavuz, 2010: 9).

Until the 1990s, Cumhuriyet was a family-owned enterprise belonging to the journalist Yunus Nadi's family (Köktener, 2005: 291). During the 1990s, Cumhuriyet faced serious economic problems and went bankrupt amidst Turkish media being privatized and becoming dominated by media giants. In 1992, aiming at preventing a similar financial collapse in the future and securing its financial independence in a period in which many independent newspapers were bought by media conglomerates, Cumhuriyet journalists and the Nadi Family founded Cumhuriyet Foundation (Köktener, 2005: 291).In the next two decades, they continued taking steps in the direction of securing an independent survival of the newspaper, such as carrying out temporary construction projects in cooperation with the Cumhuriyet Readers Community (CUMOK)[24] (Köktener, 2005: 295-304).

[22] In his 2005 book, Köktener says it is *the most* reputable newspaper in Turkey.
[23] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-ugur-mumcu-1481231.html
[24] It is a civil association established by Cumhuriyet readers in 1995. It was a large and active community in the early 2000s. Although its branches in the main cities (İstanbul and Ankara) still continue their infrequent meetings, it is no

During the Ergenekon trials[25] of 2008, Cumhuriyet was targeted by the government and some of its journalists were detained. As previously discussed, this was the first wave of arrests in the AKP era. After being kept in jail for months and years, the journalists were acquitted. In 2015, starting with the arrest of the Ankara bureau chief Erdem Gül and the then chief editor Can Dündar over a report revealing the pictures of intelligence trucks carrying guns to Syrian rebels,[26] Cumhuriyet became once again a target of the government. The prosecutors asked the court to sentence Erdem Gül and Can Dündar to multiple life sentences over this single report[27]. Dündar had to leave the country after an assassination attempt targeting him a few months later.[28] Same year, Cumhuriyet received the 2015 Reporters Without Borders Prize for its "independent and courageous journalism." [29]

Cumhuriyet became a more direct target during the ongoing state of emergency. On 31st of October 2016, eighteen Cumhuriyet journalists and employees were detained by a down raid.[30] While few of them were released after police interrogation, many of them are still jailed pending trial. Later on, other journalists and employees of Cumhuriyet have also been jailed, including prominent investigative journalist Ahmet Şık. Currently,[31] thirteen of Cumhuriyet journalists and employees are jailed and many more face several trials. In addition to judicial suppression, Cumhuriyet is one of the newspapers that is experiencing an advertisement embargo (Yanatma,

more an active community (Köktener, 2005: 286).
http://www.ankaracumok.org/?pnum=5&pt=Cumok+Tarih%C3%A7e

[25] Ergenekon trials are a series of trials which included military officials, journalists and intellectuals who were alleged to plot a coup against the AKP government (See: Aknur, M. (2013). Civil-military relations during the AK Party era: major developments and challenges. Insight Turkey, 15(4), 131.)

[26] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/27/turkish-journalists-charged-over-claim-that-secret-services-armed-syrian-rebels

[27] The case is still ongoing. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jan/27/turkish-journalists-can-dundar-erdem-gul-face-multiple-life-sentences-erdogan

[28] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkish-journalist-survives-assassination-attempt-before-receiving-5-year-sentence-for-revealing-a7017816.html

[29] https://rsf.org/en/news/reporters-without-borders-tv5-monde-prize-ceremony

[30] http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-37819186

[31] By 07.06.17.

2016). Furthermore, Cumhuriyet headquarter and journalists were physically attacked in the recent years in several instances.[32]

In short, Cumhuriyet is one of the outlets which have been facing the highest levels of repression in the recent years in Turkey. Therefore, it is the most appropriate case for studying the methods of suppressing the independent and critical media in the AKP era. It is also important to understand what enables its survival and what means do the journalists employ for being able to continue their work, since it is one of the very few remaining independent newspapers, and what it represents for Turkish history and society is remarkable.

2.2. Data Collection

As previously discussed, the literature indicates high levels of judicial/political and economic pressure over the critical media in Turkey. Interviewing journalists is the best way to have a deeper understanding of the magnitude of this pressure and explore whether there are other forms of suppression that the literature has neglected, because they are the ones who experience it on a daily basis. Interviews help to understand how the high levels of suppression impact individual journalists and their newsmaking processes, their coping strategies, and their perception of their role in the country; as well as allowing the interviewees to raise other topics that have been ignored by the literature. Thus, I interviewed 7 journalists that are currently working for Cumhuriyet.

[32] Some examples: http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhuriyet-gazetesine-molotoflu-saldiri-8576308 and http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/video/cumhuriyet-gazetesine-silahli-saldiri-kamerada-40383305 and http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ahmet-sik-gezi-eyleminde-yaralandi-23405664

While arranging the interviews, I endeavored to choose journalists working in different positions (e.g: reporter, editor, columnists) and specialized on different topics, so that I have a broader understanding of the impact of the ongoing political situation on the news making in Cumhuriyet. I also aimed a sample that is balanced in terms of age and gender. After setting these criteria, I used convenience sampling, which is based on selection "according to ease of access" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003: 81). In other words, I interviewed those who volunteered to talk to me. I contacted 13 journalists; 8 of them rejected, mostly because of busy schedule. Out of 6 woman journalists, only one accepted to talk to me. The sample was diverse in terms of age, ranging from late 20s to 70s (for interviewee profiles, see: Appendix I).

For the interviews, I used a semi-standardized topic guide consisting of open-ended, broad questions (see: Appendix II). Following the proper communicative logic described by Berg, I started with easy and non-threatening questions and finished the interview with non-sensitive, cooling-down questions (2009: 113). After beginning with a generic question about their career as journalists, I asked some personalized throw-away questions to develop rapport between me and the interviewees and warm up the conversation for core questions (Berg 2009: 114). Those personalized throw-away questions are not included in the topic guide that is attached to the appendix, because those questions referred to some information that may reveal the identity of the interviewee (e.g.: if I know that there is an upcoming trial for the interviewee, I asked not-so-sensitive questions regarding the legal process). In cases when the answer was insufficient or the responses generated additional queries, I asked follow-up questions that probe more deeply (Mosley, 2013: 6).

To test and improve my topic guide, I first conducted 5 pilot interviews with journalists from other media outlets. The pilot interviews were conducted on Skype in February and March 2017.

They gave me a broader understanding of how journalists in different outlets are impacted by the current political situation and enabled me to develop my interviewing technique. The actual interviews took place in April 2017.

Considering research ethics, I followed "informed consent procedures" and informed my respondents that their names and any personal information that might reveal their identities will be kept secret, and asked their permission for recording their voices (Mosley, 2013: 16). All interviews were conducted face-to-face in their offices and recorded with a professional voice recording device. Since my method of analysis (i.e.: thematic analysis) does not require full or naturalized transcription, I transcribed all interviews in a simplified form (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 88). Also called denaturalized transcription, simplified transcription is "a verbatim depiction of speech" but it removes details such as process information, signs of emotion, and interjections (Oliver et. al, 2005: 1276).

2.3. Analyzing the Data

Since I am primarily interested in what is said, rather than how, to whom or for what purpose, I used thematic analysis in which "content is the exclusive focus" (Riessman 2008: 53-54). Braun and Clarke define it as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (2006: 79). Since I am interested in finding the patterns, I made a cross-case analysis rather than taking the interviews one-by-one in detail.

From familiarizing myself with the data (1st phase) to producing the report (6th phase), I followed Braun and Clarke's 6-phase guide to performing thematic analysis (2006: 87). I did initial coding

(2nd phase) manually on paper. While re-coding and grouping what belongs together (searching for themes, 3rd phase), I translated relevant extracts from original language (Turkish) into English. I needed to review and revise my themes more than once until I came up with the final thematic map (4th and 5th phases) that I used for my analysis (see: Appendix III). When writing up the analysis, I preferred focusing on some particular aspects rather than giving a rich description of the data set (see: Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83).

While coding the data set, I used both deductive and inductive methods. There were some themes driven by the questions I asked and I was specifically looking for. In other words, I started with deductive coding (Hennik, Hutter and Bailey, 2011: 219). Such themes included online harassment, digitalization, and future visions. However, most of the themes and subthemes that emerged during the analysis were data-driven (bottom-up / inductive). For example, heroization of journalism, attacks on the credibility and reputation of the outlet, and pro-government journalists' role in the suppression of critical media were all raised by the interviewees. I did coding at the semantic level, which means that "themes are identified within the *explicit* meanings of the data" (italics in original, Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84).

Considering the current political situation in the country and the fact that there are ongoing legal cases against some of my interviewees, I had to remove some personal stories and details from the analysis even when they were providing some striking evidence for my conclusions, in order to secure the safety of the journalists. Following Mosley's advice, I included very little information in the interviewee profiles attached to the appendix, because my informants are exposed to risk of prosecutions (2013: 16). Yet I tried to give enough information whenever it was necessary for a meaningful interpretation, without putting the interviewee at risk. In other words, I tried to strike a balance between research ethics (i.e.: confidentiality) and internal

validity throughout the analysis. I removed many anecdotes that strongly support my conclusions, considering that it might put the actors involved in those incidents in danger. I took only little extracts in these cases, when decontextualizing did not render it meaningless.

2.4. Limitations

This study is subject to a number of empirical and theoretical limitations. First, I have interviewed journalists only from one newspaper. Although Cumhuriyet is the most appropriate case to look at for the purposes of this study, the findings may not apply to all independent and critical outlets in Turkey. Cumhuriyet has its own peculiarities since it is a traditional and historically highly reputable newspaper. The attacks on the reputation and credibility, which emerged as a prevalent theme in my analysis, might not be that significant for a newly established or an already marginalized outlet. Second, I interviewed seven journalists working on various positions and having different lengths of experiences in the field. I mainly focused on patterns of consistency in my analysis, but there were several topics in which their opinions diverged. This suggests that a larger study could have helped to explore other themes that are significant for the purposes of this study. Third, since this is a sensitive topic, I cannot be sure whether they have shared all their opinions when answering my questions, though they were generally very communicative and sincere. Thus, some of the findings of this research require further investigation to reach concrete conclusion. For instance, a comparative content analysis of the news produced before and after the operations targeting Cumhuriyet might help to reveal the extent to which their journalistic language has changed, as the findings imply.

Furthermore, I mainly focused on the printed press, both in the literature review and in my empirical research, since newspapers have a vital role in the production[33] and dissemination of the news in Turkey (Yanatma, 2016: 11). However, the kinds of pressures that media workers in the broadcast sector and online news sites face, and the strategies they develop as a reaction, might be different than those of the journalists working in the press, at least in some aspects. Nevertheless, my study contributes to the literature on media in Turkey and media in new authoritarian countries. It also opens new avenues for further research, as it is discussed in the conclusion chapter.

[33] "Yavuz Semerci estimates that almost 70 percent of news in the Turkish media is produced by newspaper reporters." Furthermore, journalists are the ones who dominates political discussions on the TV, and online outlets borrow most of their news from the newspapers (Yanatma, 2016: 10).

Chapter 3: ANALYSIS

Most of my findings converge with the recent literature on media in Turkey and contribute to it by showing some new layers. I gathered the most often occurring themes under four titles. Accordingly, I will first discuss the methods of suppression and intimidation that Cumhuriyet journalists face in contemporary Turkey, especially since the declaration of the state of emergency, with a special emphasis on non-traditional methods. Secondly, I will discuss how they perceive their roles as journalists in the current political scene. Then, I will analyze how newsmaking has changed as a result of recent political developments, together with journalists' motivations for continuing this job, under the title 'strategies and motivations'. Finally, I will briefly analyze how they perceive the future of media, both in relation to politics and digitalization.

3.1. Old and New Methods of Suppression

Most journalists have mentioned that newsmaking in Turkey has never been an easy job, but the situation has been dramatically worsened in recent years, especially after the coup attempt and the declaration of the still ongoing state of emergency. A journalist who has had long years of experience in the field said: "I have always been under pressure, jailed for (…) years, witnessed coup d'états. I am a veteran press criminal. Yet we have never seen such levels of pressure. We haven't seen this much pressure in Turkish history." (#2, 8)[34]

They emphasized that Cumhuriyet is struggling to survive, not only because many of its leading journalists and administrators are jailed and some others are facing trials, but also because of the

[34] The number on the left indicates the number of the interview, and the number on the right indicates from which page of the transcripts the quotation is taken.

economic blockade that is imposed on the newspaper (#2, #3, #7). The second interviewee explained that private companies started to avoid giving advertisements to their newspapers fearing sanctions, and their advertisement income is reduced to one third. Furthermore, he said, they are discriminated in terms of execution of laws and financial auditing:

> "*The income coming from the Press Bulletin Authority is linked to your circulation. Now, this also negatively impacts the critical outlets, because others can cheat on the numbers. I will give you one example. When you look at the lists, (...)'s circulation seems to be around 135,000. Do you know how much it is in fact? Around 16-17,000. The rest is virtual. (....) If we had tried to do same trick, if we attempt it in the morning, they would catch us at noon, it would not even take one day. They are constantly inspecting us. The pro-government media, those outlets which turned into party organs can do whatever they want but we have to abide by every detail of every rule*." (#2, 12)

In a recently published study based on interviews with journalists and employees from relevant sectors, Karakaş argues that the numbers of circulation in the Turkish press are mostly inflated and there is no chance to know what the real numbers are in the current system (2016: 15). However, she does not differentiate between the pro-government and critical bloc. When her conclusion is interpreted in the light of the above quote, **selective inspections** seem to be another way of rendering critical outlets financially disadvantageous.

Unsurprisingly, one prevalent theme was **criminalization of news making**, which is mentioned by all interviewees except one (#4). The criminalization of journalism happens through association of newsmaking with acts of terrorism: "Since 2007-2008, the judiciary has started to associate journalistic practices with terrorism, which is the biggest trouble for the journalists in Turkey today" (#6, 42).Most of the jailed Cumhuriyet journalists are charged with 'promoting a terrorist organization without being a member of it'. At the same time, there is another ongoing legal case against Cumhuriyet Foundation with the claim of infraction of the Law of Foundations concerning the election of the board of directors. Some of the interviewees mentioned that the

authorities try to merge these two unrelated cases (#1, #2, #7) and presented this as evidence of the absurdity of terrorism claims, along with other striking examples. One journalist told that once they received a non-official letter from a state institution about a news story written on the physical conditions in state-owned student dormitories:

> "*By the way, there was a statement in the end of the letter. It said: 'We would like to remind you that terrorist organizations take advantage of the news items like these regarding the dormitories.' It was speaking softly but carrying a big stick."* (#1, 3)[35]

This example illustrates how authorities can relate any kind of criticism to "promoting terrorism". One interviewee mentioned that their 'editorial policy' has been shown as evidence of crime in an indictment in this process (#3, 18). In some cases, they do not even seem to feel the need to provide a logical explanation:

> "*Tragicomic indictments and accusations are raised. For instance, regarding the people against whom they cannot provide any accusatory evidence, charges are pressed because of the alleged claims of subliminal messages. This is what has been done against Kadri Gürsel*[36] *and Mehmet Altan. There is no crime but, as it totally contradicts the rule of law, accusations of* ***subliminally committing these crimes*** *are raised. Hence, when the indictment of Cumhuriyet is examined, it can be seen that it is completely set up. There is no line of accusations which can be understood in terms of cause and effect logic*." (#6, 43)

As it can also be inferred from the above quotes, interviewees mentioned 'politicized judicial institutions' and '**arbitrariness** of executions' which accompanied the criminalization of journalism:

[35] The interviewee explained the possible logic that may underlie this warning in that way: "FETO had so many dormitories and they were clearly way much more influential than the state institutions regarding accommodation issue in the cities where low-income population has been dense. Many of these dormitories were shut down [after the coup attempt]. I think their message was this: Your news may be interpreted as the inadequacy of the government which put these people in a position where their children are in desperate need for accommodation, which was previously provided by the Gulenist Organization." FETÖ is the abbrevation for the Fethullahst Terrorist Organization. The Gulenist Organization was given this name after some members of the army who are also members of the Gulenist Organization attempted a military coup in 15 July 2016. Originally, it was a religious and social organization which owned thousands of schools and dormitories in Turkey and abroad. Nevertheless, this is a quite far-fetched accusation.

[36] One of the jailed Cumhuriyet journalists.

> "*The state of emergency worsened the pressure on media to unprecedented levels, it is totally arbitrary now. [The prosecutors] are not even trying to meet formal requirements*." (#3, 18)

> "*There is arbitrariness in their attributes. (…) Well, if we were told that 15 people will be arrested from Cumhuriyet, and asked who would be arrested, we couldn't have come up with such a list. We would have a different list instead*." (#6, 46)

One of the significant findings is that the state is not the only source of suppression and intimidation. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they receive threat messages through several channels, sometimes serious **death threats**. One interviewee noted that the threats he receives increase when he attends TV shows and he has even received threat messages from JITEM[37] accounts which are held responsible for many unidentified political murders during the 1990s (#6, 46). However, the threat messages and calls mostly come from unknown citizens. For instance, one interviewee reported that he was stopped by two young men a few months ago when he was walking on the street and threatened with death (#2, 10) Although these messages seem to be mostly coming from 'ordinary citizens', they think that the state authorities encourage such actions:

> "*There are even those who call us and do it on the phone. There is such recklessness. Normally you would think 10 times before you call someone to threaten him with death, especially if it is the main building of a newspaper and if you are doing it overtly. Even if you are very angry, you would not do it because it is risky for your own safety. But there is this recklessness, because it is done against Cumhuriyet. [They see that] all the attacks against the opposition are exempted from punishment. Such threats and attacks happen all the time*." (#3, 17)

The threats directed at journalists come most often from social media. However, the journalists explained they usually do not take individual messages seriously, since they become part of daily routine as a result of rising polarization and tension in the society (#2, #3, #5, #6, #7). The

[37] An embodiment of "the deep state". (See: Söyler, Mehtap. (2011). Informal institutions, forms of state and democracy: the Turkish deep state. *Democratization*, 20(2), 310-334)

normalization of threats and insults on social media was a theme that was prevalent also in the pilot interviews. This finding indicates that a language of violence is dominant in the social media. It might also explain why many critical outlets (e.g: Cumhuriyet, Duvar, T24, Diken, sendika.org, soL) in Turkey do not allow user comments on their websites, while it is a very common practice elsewhere. Although it provides valuable opportunities to dissents for getting connected and organized, and it is seen as an alternative space for those whose are dismissed from the conventional media, the frequency of such attacks shows that social media can also be a hostile environment for dissidents in Turkey.

Even though the journalists seem to get used to living with daily threat messages, when the attacks become large scale and consistent, and take the form of a lynching campaign, it becomes life threatening: "*I know many people who were exposed to this violence. (...) A friend that I closely know had to leave the country. I mean, because of those lynching campaigns on social media and because of being shown as a target, he had to give up living here and settled in another country*" (#5, 38).

Emphasizing the role of the political discourse in increasing polarization, they explained that the attacks on social media contribute to the atmosphere of fear in the country, as well as further raising the tension and **demoralizing the journalists** (#2, #3, #6). They also mentioned social media trolls[38] that are allegedly paid by the government (#2, #6):

> *"A government which has become a party-state and able to feed its allies, using also the trolls – and, you know, those trolls are paid employees, they are doing their job. But who is behind all these is the government*." (#6, 47)

[38] A group known as AK Trolls, established after the Gezi protests in 2013. It has never been officially confirmed that they are paid by the government; the AKP calls them "social media volunteers": https://www.dailydot.com/layer8/turkey-twitter-trolls/

> "*The reason for this is extreme polarization. AKP fed this polarization since it came to power. It is both very widespread and vehement. (...) This naturally impacts the society and causes the aggression on social media. The guy just reads the first two lines of my article and starts to shout like 'we will hang you, you are traitors, your end is near!' And there are also those trolls who do it for money. A very mediocre team. (...) Trolls also serve to deepen this polarization*." (#2, 10-11)

In addition to trolls who are claimed to be paid by the government for harassing oppositional figures, many of them mentioned **pro-government journalists as instigators** of online harassment and lynching campaigns, using the term "hitman" (tetikçi) (#2, #6). They call them *hitman* because, according to one interviewee's observation, "90% of those who are shown as a target by these journalists are arrested" (#6, 46). Furthermore, these journalists launch defamation campaigns against critical journalists and outlets, attacking their credibility and reputation as well as accusing them with treason and promoting terrorism. Although none of the interviewees was directly asked, the **attacks on the credibility and reputation** was one of the most often raised themes throughout the interviews. Cumhuriyet journalists think that one of the reasons for attacks is to render the legal operations possible. Interviewee #6 explains it within the frame of **'enemy criminal law**', within which "any act of a person is treated like a crime, aiming to purge this person" (43). According to their narrative, Cumhuriyet as one of the few remaining independent newspapers with a good reputation is specifically targeted. Since it has a strong Kemalist[39] tradition dating back to the early years of the Republic, it is not so easy to affiliate it with terrorism and shut it down like small leftist newspapers, Kurdish outlets or those that had publicly known organic ties with the Gulenist Organization, which have already little or no credibility for a large segment of the society. Therefore, the government tries to manipulate public opinion, directly with their speeches or their 'limbs in press' or social media 'trolls'. This

[39] Kemalism is the founding ideology of the Republic of Turkey.

has an impact both on the public support that jailed Cumhuriyet journalists receive and the circulation of the newspaper, as well as on the emotional state of the journalists:

> "*Thanks to the profiles of journalists and personnel of Cumhuriyet, people were used to paying attention to what is said here as a place in which the intellectuals of the country express their opinions, even if they don't like it. This was giving prestige to us. Now we don't see such a respect or attention from those people*." (#1, 2)

> "*The only remaining independent newspaper, without an owner and without ties to any political party, is Cumhuriyet. That's why they declared us the archenemy. They try to take control of the newspaper through Cumhuriyet Foundation, and use every possible channel for that. The things that those journalists – I do not like calling them in that way, they are the hitmen of the government – say about us are very absurd. They target our reputation and profession*" (#2, 8-9)

> "*I can no more tell people with comfort that I am working for Cumhuriyet. Because there is now a [negative] perception about Cumhuriyet that the state has created. (…) Before, I could easily say that I work for Cumhuriyet*." (#5, 36)

> "*They imposed this idea: Cumhuriyet is taken over from Kemalists by supporters of PKK [40] and FETO[41]. This has nothing to do with reality, but they repeated it all the time. Maybe you have heard those post-truth debates; they created a perception through repeating the same story over and over again. Then an investigation began*." (#6, 43)

> "*Furthermore, political authorities declared us the enemy, showed us as a target. There is a need for outlets who will tell people what is going on, who will report the facts. But they position you as a political rival rather than a media outlet doing its job*." (#7, 54)

My findings in this section support Somer's (2016) argument that the current regime in Turkey displays features of both old and new authoritarianisms. Accordingly, the neo-authoritarian state in Turkey continues to extensively use traditional methods of judicial and economic suppression, but their aim does not seem to be to entirely repress the independent media. Rather, the AKP is empowering the pro-government media bloc that it has created in the last 10 years and weakening the independent critical media through various channels. Instead of simply being shut down, they

[40] Kurdistan Worker's Party; Kurdish separatist organization which has been in an armed struggle against the Turkish state since early 1980s: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdistan_Workers%27_Party
[41] Fethullahist Terrorist Organization; the organization that is held responsible for the recent coup attempt.

are financially weakened, demoralized, and discredited. Financial pressure comes in the form of advertisement embargo, as the literature has already recognized, and in the form of selective inspections, as my interviewees explained. In the process of demoralizing and discrediting, social media trolls and pro-government journalists play a significant role. Although some of the recent studies have started to recognize these two phenomena (Somer, 2016; Yesil, 2016), they have not yet been comprehensively studied but simply mentioned in a few lines. As my research also suggests, these non-traditional tools of suppression seems to be effective and they should be further investigated.

3.2. Journalists' Perception of Their Roles

How do journalists perceive their roles in the current political scene of Turkey, as the government and their colleagues in the pro-government media declare them internal enemies of the nation? Although this question was never directly asked, several themes were raised in relation to their roles and the public's expectations from them. Accordingly, not everyone sees them as enemies. On the contrary, their popularity is rising. Some of the interviewees expressed their discomfort with the rising **popularity** and being on the front scene all the time, as well as heroization and the excessive roles that the society imposes on them:

> "*We are trying not to be the news, but make the news. But it is very difficult nowadays.*" (#7, 55)

> "*You cannot ignore these [issues of vocational training and media economics] and talk about the heroic journalists... There is nothing as such. The society loads excessive roles on journalists all the time. No one is a Don Quixote, fighting on a horse against the windmills. It wouldn't be logical either*. "(#3, 22)

> "*Kemal Gözler, a constitutional legist in Turkey, said something that impressed me very much: 'courage is not a moral responsibility'. This is a controversial statement; but we cannot blame anyone for not being brave in such an atmosphere of fear. (...) Why should*

a journalist be a hero? Yet, when you look at the current popular figures in the country, they are mostly journalists. For instance, I saw a post that was circulating around, it was comparing İsmail Saymaz [a journalist] to Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ [a top model]. It's very interesting; we all know that İsmail is not that handsome But, you know, he shined out as a hero." (#6, 53)

One of the interviewees explained it further (#6). According to him, the reason of this '**heroization**' is the incompetence of the main opposition party, and the fact that all other segments of the society are silenced. The interviewee said "no one in CHP (Republican People's Party)[42] is as popular as Ahmet Şık[43] today" (54) and added that this popularity is not chosen by the journalists, but came as a result of the passivity of the oppositional politicians. He thinks that this is something unprecedented in Turkish history: "even the most prominent journalists were not like this, not even Uğur Mumcu.[44] He was very much loved and respected when he was alive, but he never became such a popular figure." (54) The narrative of the heroization of journalists seems to be another sign of the shrinking of political sphere in Turkey: oppositional politicians are either passive or pacified, people are afraid to go to the streets, and civil society is under tremendous pressure. Critical journalists seem to be the only ones whose voices are still heard by a wider public. As a result, when a journalist attends a TV show and publicly criticizes the government, he "shines as a hero".

3.3. Strategies and Motivations

What do journalists do in the face of such high levels of pressure? How do they protect themselves? How do they continue to do their job? At one extreme, they can be dauntlessly resisting and confronting the state without giving an inch. As the journalists' comments about

[42] The main opposition party
[43] One of the jailed Cumhuriyet journalists
[44] One of the most prominent investigative journalists in the recent Turkish history, assasinated in 1994: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U%C4%9Fur_Mumcu

heroization of journalism indicate, this is not exactly the case. At the other extreme, there is full self-censorship, which the literature on Turkey exclusively addresses. Arsan's study (2013) shows that self-censorship, defined as "regularly abstaining from making news about certain events that involve public interest", was extremely widespread among journalists in Turkey even before the state of emergency and recent crackdowns. However, my respondents emphasized that this is not the case for Cumhuriyet. Only one interviewee uttered that Cumhuriyet journalists also might have individually developed self-censorship, but he added that "it is not the editorial policy" (#6, 45). Most of them told me that they still make the news and do not hide the facts, but with great caution and much more careful language. Some examples are:

> "*If you ask what has changed in Cumhuriyet after all these, I can proudly say that self-censorship did not get a foot in our door. Yet we are choosing our words more carefully*." (#2, 8)
>
> "*But this is not self-censorship. I try to use the right words without hiding the truth.*" (#4, 29)
>
> "*We are just using a more temperate language*." (#5, 35)

'Using a careful language without giving up writing the critical stories' was a common strategy that was also mentioned during my pilot interviews with journalists from different outlets. The prevalence of this theme signals a change in the journalistic language in the (critical) media. This self-imposed control over the language is another point that requires further research to be able to elaborate on its meanings for the public discussion of politics.

Journalists also said that they are **proof-reading** their reports and articles to see "whether prosecutors can invent a crime out of it" (#2, 8). For that, they have a legal service unit and they consult lawyers before publishing some stories (#4, 30). This practice shows the striking levels of criminalization of news making: journalists are trying to look at the news they have produced

from the perspective of a prosecutor and scrutinize their own work to see whether a detail can be shown as evidence of crime or a reason for another lynching campaign.

Two journalists reported that they have also developed some **strategies to protect their readers and news sources** (i.e.: their interviewees). One journalists explained that not allowing user comments on their website serves to protect their readers, since "even if the comments are published after an editorial review, prosecutors can decontextualize a comment that you considered as safe, and show it as evidence of crime to arrest the person" (#3, 16-17). Another journalist declared that she is now sending the transcripts to the interviewees and they discuss each part before publishing it. Sometimes she even tries to persuade the other person to express some parts in a different way, so that it is not put in front of the person in an indictment (#4, 30). Although she acknowledges that this is not a usual journalistic practice and a journalist is not obliged to do that, she explains that she developed this strategy after a person she interviewed got horribly lynched on social media because of one single sentence she said during an interview: "Because of this one sentence, she lost her job, received death threats. She was afraid to leave her home. She had to camouflage herself for a long time. She is financially ruined now." (#4, 31)

Another strategy is to use verified, solid information rather than personal opinions, and to avoid insulting statesmen in their writings: "People send one tweet instead of ten tweets, are careful not to insult the statesmen, and express their reaction with facts instead of opinions. People are now trying to use **verified information** in their arguments on social media. This is also reflected in the news we write." (#5, 37) The strategy of presenting verified facts instead of personal opinions is particularly interesting, as journalism in Turkey is more commentary-oriented than fact- based (Bek, 2011). Furthermore, this is a common tactic against censorship among journalists in authoritarian countries, such as China (Tong, 2007; Xu, 2014). Yet it is neither further explained,

nor mentioned by any other interviewee. It is worth exploring in further studies, because such a strategy may signal a change in journalistic styles as Turkey's slide into authoritarianism accelerates.

In addition to the strategies that they have developed to cope with the judicial suppression and online lynching, Cumhuriyet journalists discussed their motivations for continuing to do their jobs. **Feeling of responsibility**, which comes from their role of "serving the public's right to access to information", makes them pursue the news that may cause trouble for them (#3, #6.) **Being part of the resistance and solidarity** against the authoritarian policies of the government seems to be another significant motivation:

> "*When there is an explosion somewhere, people gather together to feel safer. These pressures created a similar feeling of solidarity among journalists. (...) This feeling of fellowship enhanced solidarity and, as far as I could observe, this gives more power*." (#3, 20)
>
> "*This is an era in which our pages contribute to the solidarity more than ever. (...) I am glad that I can do this job at such a time. I feel like serving a purpose*." (#4, 27)
>
> "*I have just said that journalism is what is being tried and punished. That means, what I am defending [at these trials] is journalism. Continuing to do this job is risky and dangerous. You are going to ask why I am then doing this. I am seeing it like that: We have just had a referendum. 50% of the population objected to one man's rule and to the attitude that declares everyone a terrorist, and demanded a more democratic and deliberative governance. I, as a journalist, want to be part of this objection*." (#7, 58)

It is also mentioned that continuing this job requires **self-devotion,** since the financial reward is quite insufficient (#1, #2, #4), and they do not expect the political situation to get better soon. The second interviewee explained that the responsibilities that Cumhuriyet journalists carry has increased very much due to the arrests of key journalists in the outlet, and Cumhuriyet can survive thanks to self-devoted employees:

> "*All the work is now left on the shoulders of a few experienced people who are not in jail and of our young journalists. Employees of Cumhuriyet work for very low salaries, very low indeed. Those young people here work very hard with great self-devotion to keep it running*." (#2, 11)

In short, my interviewees have developed some strategies to protect themselves, their readers and news sources from prosecution. The fact that they feel the need to follow these strategies demonstrates the extreme level of criminalization of newsmaking. They differentiated these strategies from self-censorship, since they think these measures do not prevent them from writing critical news stories. They consider themselves as part of the resistance and solidarity against the authoritarian rule in the country, and feel responsible to pursue the news even when they know it might cause trouble for them. This motivates them to continue their jobs with great self-devotion.

3.4. Vision of Future and Digitalization

Although all my respondents (except #1) have a pessimistic vision of the future, many said that they are still **trying to be hopeful**, and provided different reasons for that. One interviewee said that she feels obliged to feel hopeful, despite her pessimistic vision of the future, because this is the only way for her to be able to continue (#4, 32). Another journalist referred to the famous saying by Gramsci, "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will", and said that they are trying not to lose their hope and demonstrate their will to continue to do this job (#6, 49). One journalist remarked that things will normalize at one point and "journalism will recover its wounds" (#3, 24). Although he does not expect it to happen soon, he believes that it is inevitable to follow the direction that humanity takes, drawing a progressive understanding of history and describing the current situation as a fissure (#3, 23). Some also pointed out that journalism is not something that can vanish, no matter how much pressure it is under (#1, 7; #4, 29).

One of the most often repeated statements, albeit different wordings, was "**we will find a way**". Recognizing the very high costs of opening a new outlet in the print media, most of the respondents depicted the internet as an alternative in case of closure. They mentioned both some advantages and disadvantages of going fully online. Some think that print will and should survive, while others believe that digitalization is inevitable.

"**Internet as an alternative**" came as a narrative when they were talking about the future of the media, or what they would do if Cumhuriyet was also shut down or taken over by the government. The most often raised justifications for this claim are that it is cheaper and easier to restart, and it is impossible to repress entirely:

> "*In the worst case, even if they appoint a trustee, we would not change our stance. We would publish it under another name, like 'Real Cumhuriyet' or 'Original Cumhuriyet'. If it does not work, we can move to the internet and continue online. They cannot shut down the whole internet.*" (#2, 9)

> "*But this is not true for the internet; you do not need millions of dollars of investment. You can even do it in your own blog; you can produce content at zero cost at WordPress. (...) The website can also be shut down. (...) But the essence of it will not change no matter where you do it; you can write it on a stone, you can communicate with smoke, you can attend TV shows. Some of us will find a channel and continue to tell the truth*." (#2, 15-16)

> "*They can also shut down this newspaper, though I hope that it will never happen. This is also true for my colleagues. We would not stop producing news or writing. If you are a journalist, you would not stop. If the print is shut down, yes, it is very difficult to open it again, because it is very costly. But you can move to the internet. Former Radikal journalists opened Duvar, for example. If Duvar is shut down, you can open Muvar. The Internet is good for less costly and more independent news making. (...) Everyone who is able to produce (news) will continue to produce wherever they can do it. And it is very difficult to totally prevent it on the internet*." (#4, 34)

> *"[The internet] provides an alternative. You can say that it can also be shut down. Yes, but still, you cannot shut down the whole internet."* (#7, 61)

The journalists mostly talked about online journalism as a faster, easier, and cheaper alternative, which is more difficult to fully control. One journalist explained it with **the legal gap** in the current body of law concerning online media: "There is almost never a legal gap in any issue in Turkey. On the contrary, in most cases there are excessive regulations; they just do not implement them. Interestingly, there is still no legislative regulation concerning the online journalism[45] in Turkey." (#3, 13) According to him, this "state of lawlessness" makes online journalism disadvantageous compared to print journalism, because they are deprived of an important source of advertisement and announcement income coming from the Press Bulletin Authority (BİK). However, this legal gap also gives them a larger space of maneuver, as in the case of Sendika.org, which opens with a new name each time it is shut down.[46] In other words, "this legal gap works both in favor of and against journalists." (#3, 15)

Another advantage of online media, according to the same interviewee, is that it is viable for a more independent advertisement model. "**Google advertisement modelling**", through which neither the webpage nor the advertiser chooses each other, provides the outlets independence from the capital as well (#3, 25). This independence is vital for an outlet to be able to serve the public, he explained, since they are also responsible for monitoring the practices of the companies that can act against the public good. Furthermore, "it also provides an escape-way to the advertisers in the face of political pressure: they can defend themselves by saying that they do not give advertisements to us but to Google, and Google allocates it based on cookies and some algorithms" (#3, 26). This can be a vital financial source, considering that "there is a strict advertisement embargo on dissent newspapers, such as Cumhuriyet" (#3, 25). However, the

[45] Turkey has an "Internet law" since 2007. What is meant by the interviewee is that there is no law regarding online journalism, which defines its rights, privileges, and duties as in the case of press and broadcast.
[46] It is sendika41.org by 19.05.17, meaning that the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) has denied access to their website 42 times so far.

interviewee added, the advertisement prices for online news media are still very low in Turkey, compared to Western countries, but the amelioration of this situation may make survival easier for independent online news outlets (#3, 25). As more and more journalists who lose their jobs in the press start to work for small news sites, and an increasing part of the population uses internet to access the news (Yesil, 2016), advertisement models that protect both sides can offer a glimmer of hope for independent journalism in not fully authoritarian regimes such as Turkey.

However, journalists also mentioned several **problems of online journalism** that are also often discussed in the new media literature (e.g: Alejandro, 2010; McChesney, 2012; Curran, 2016). The most often raised themes were its vulnerability to manipulation, difficulty with verification of sources, copy-paste journalism, lack of original content, and lower quality. More importantly, most of them raised the issues of **credibility and prestige**, and said that print media is regarded as much more credible and prestigious in the eyes of the public. Some of its journalists think that going completely online should be the last resort in the case of Cumhuriyet, since its traditions cannot be maintained if they stop printing:

> "*I do not think that Cumhuriyet can pursue its mission on the internet. (...) Cumhuriyet has a spirit, an identity and an influence on people way beyond its circulation. And it owns this impact partially to its personnel. If we totally get digital, we have to say goodbye to many of them*." (#1, 6)

> "*There are huge differences between the credibility and accessibility of a newspaper and a newspage. Cumhuriyet is the oldest newspaper in the Turkish press. Having no print version would cause it to lose many things*." (#6, 49)

The internet seems to be a sphere where survival after closures is easier, but it is less prestigious, less credible, and less influential in the eyes of the public, according to the journalists. The perceived influence and prestige might be another reason that explains the tremendous levels of pressure on the press in contrast to relatively lower levels of pressure on online journalism.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I explored the new challenges encountered by critical journalists, the impact of the ongoing crackdown on their news making, the strategies and motivations that enable their survival, their perception of their roles, and their visions regarding the future of this profession in Turkey. In what follows, I will summarize the main findings of this research and its contribution to the literature, and raise some questions for further discussion.

Seeing the changes in the Turkish media landscape as part of the regime change, I first reviewed the discussion in the literature about the *new* regime in Turkey. Despite significant nuances, many scholars agree upon the fact that the regime in contemporary Turkey constitutes a form of authoritarianism (e.g.: electoral authoritarianism, competitive authoritarianism, informational dictatorship). Another point of agreement among these scholars is that the state's relation to media is a vital aspect of the regime change. Indeed, as I have summarized in the second section of the literature review, the process of reshuffling of the media coincides with the authoritarian turn in the AKP politics. Since 2007, the government has created its own media bloc through handing over several newspapers with high circulation and popular TV channels to its allies in the business sector. In the meantime, through exploiting already existing clientelistic relationships between the media and the politics, and employing several political and financial tactics, the mainstream media has been dragged into "a new political economy of censorship" (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012: 302). As it has been apparent to the public during the Gezi protests, mainstream media today operates under tremendous levels of self-censorship, and venture to surpass certain limits of criticism only when their bosses' financial interests conflict

with the government's interests. The rest, a few independent and critical outlets, continue with critical reporting, but face several forms of pressure.

A vast body of literature documents legal and political pressure that has been annually increasing in the last 10 years. Confirming existing literature on this topic, my findings illustrate the levels that the criminalization of news making reached. As I have repeatedly emphasized, prosecution of journalists has always been a tool of suppression used by the state. However, what my analysis points out is that not only the quantity of these prosecutions reached unprecedented levels, but also their quality has been changed. Before, there were some particular "taboo issues", such as the Kurdish issue, army, and religion, that journalists were used to abstain from due to fear of prosecution (Arsan, 2013; Yesil, 2014). While this statist reflex continues to exist, albeit for different issues (Arsan, 2013), anything that might harm the image of the party and its leader or signal their incompetence in any issue can be subject to punishment in contemporary Turkey. My inquiry aiming at exploring this topic in more depth reveals that even a critical report about the conditions in state-owned student dormitories can be related to "promoting terrorism", or journalists can be detained with the claims of subliminally committing crimes against the state. Furthermore, as some very recent studies show, a new newspaper advertisement regime has also been established under the AKP rule which deprives critical outlets of an important part of their income. In my interviews, selective inspections, which mean strictly auditing critical outlets while others are eased off, came as another method of rendering critical outlets financially disadvantageous.

Two significant themes that have started to be acknowledged only by very recent studies were often raised by the interviewees: social media trolls and pro-government journalists' roles as new soft tools of suppressing the critics and manipulating the information. 'Attacks on the outlet's and

individual journalists' credibility and reputation' was one of the most prominent themes throughout the analysis and they seem to be effective in demoralizing and discrediting critical media workers. Remarkably, these kind of attacks do not always directly come from the state institutions, but they are often encouraged by the state itself. Through these soft methods, the government is able to circumvent the critics and prevent the dissemination of critical ideas or facts that might impact the public opinion. The frequent employment of these tools confirms Somer's argument about the rise of new authoritarianism in Turkey, which is based on manipulation and instrumentalization of media and public opinion rather than their mere suppression and control (Somer, 2016: 494). Furthermore, the findings in the section *Old and New Methods of Suppression* signal the normalization of a language of violence, as interviewees often mentioned that threats and insults they receive have become something ordinary and part of daily routine, though it really becomes life-threatening when aggressors get organized. This also supports the argument that the polarization and tension in society has reached alarming rates (Erdoğan, 2016).

A significant contribution of my thesis comes from the findings that highlight the journalists' reactions to the increasing pressure. The literature indicates extremely high levels of self-censorship, but the case of Cumhuriyet shows that there are other strategies that journalists have recently developed. Instead of giving up critical reporting, they explained that they are now using a more careful and moderate language and proof-read their stories before publishing to see whether it might allow inventing a crime out of it or not. They do not consider it to be self-censorship, since they still publish the reports that they believe to be true and serve the public, but employ a not-so-sharp language. The prevalence of this theme during my pilot and actual interviews signal a change in the journalistic language. However, it requires further research to

reach a general conclusion. Other strategies include not allowing user comments on the website (with the aim of protecting the readers), reviewing interview transcripts with the interviewee before publishing (with the aim of protecting the interviewee), and using more verified information in their news.

As a result of the ever increasing pressure on political dissents in every sphere, journalists who dare to speak up against the government stand out as heroes in the eyes of people whose ideas are demonized, marginalized or ignored. Although most of my interviewees mentioned their discomfort with this heroization, they are pleased and motivated by being part of the resistance against the authoritarian rule. Despite their pessimistic vision of the future, they believe they "will find a way" to continue to do their job. In this narrative, they see the internet as a space where total repression is impossible and survival after closure is easier. Yet there are several problems of online journalism that should be overcome to be a real substitute. In addition to some problems that are often discussed in the new media literature, such as verification of news sources, easy manipulation, copy-paste journalism, and lower quality (see: McChesney 2012, Curran, 2016), Cumhuriyet journalists mentioned lower prestige and credibility as the main problems. On the other hand, it has its own advantages, such as enabling a new advertisement model (Google advertisement modelling) that might emancipate journalists from corporate pressure as well as advertisers from political pressure. However, online advertisement prices are still very low in Turkey and critical online outlets are also deprived of private advertisement contracts. Nevertheless, the findings of the last section of my analysis may also provide some insights for non-governmental actors which might help them in their survival.

In short, the Turkish state employs both traditional and non-traditional tools of suppressing and controlling the media, and manipulating the dissemination of information. Instead of simply

being shut down, major critical outlets are financially weakened, demoralized and discredited. There can be two reasons for that: the state is trying to reach a point at which shutting down will be much easier or a point after which it is no more necessary to shut it down. In either case, not shutting down major critical outlets, such as Sözcü and Cumhuriyet, also empowers its claim to be a democracy which is now reduced to regularly held elections. Thus, the story of Cumhuriyet journalists is in a way a story of journalists struggling against new authoritarianisms, which take its legitimacy from its claim to democracy and enabled by the manipulation of information (Guriev and Triesman, 2015; White and Herzog, 2016; Somer, 2016).

Further Discussion

As I have briefly mentioned before, the journalists' comments about the current atmosphere of fear and the threats they receive on a daily basis indicate the normalization of a language of violence, as well as confirming rising polarization and tension in the society. Social media is a sphere where this polarization and tension can be observed and further studied, since verbal violence seems to be widely practiced on social sites. This remains to be a topic which should be explored in depth.

Another issue that is also raised in one of the interviews that I have cited in the analysis chapter is "post-truth" that deserves further discussion in relation to what is happening in the Turkish media. Cumhuriyet, a flagbearer secular newspaper which has always been openly critical of the Gulenist Organization (a religious organization), is now accused of supporting it. Ahmet Şık, one of its prominent investigative journalists who spent years in jail based on fabricated documents because of uncovering that the Gulenist Organization has been leaking to the security forces, is

now in jail with the allegation of supporting the same organization (now called Gulenist Terror Organization / FETO). How can such an absurd claim be normalized and accepted by the public? How can politics be so dramatically detached from the reality? The journalists' testimonies partially answer the question, as Somer's (2016) study also does, yet this is a topic that should be further discussed in order to have a deeper understanding of the functioning of current politics in Turkey.

Furthermore, the findings of my study signal to some potential changes in the journalistic language and styles in the critical bloc of Turkish media. The extent and significance of this change for the public discussion of politics need to be explored and contemplated. Finally, regarding the changes in the news making processes, another big question that can be pursued is 'how does digital transformation accompany authoritarian shift in its impact on journalism?', since these two processes, the authoritarian shift and digital transformation, are happening at the same time in the Turkish context.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Profiles of the Journalists

#1: Editor, more than 10 years of experience

#2: Columnist, more than 40 years of experience

#3: Editor (Website), more than 10 years of experience

#4: Reporter, less than 10 years of experience

#5: Employee at the News Center, more than 10 years of experience

#6: Reporter, more than 10 years of experience

#7: Reporter, more than 20 years of experience

Appendix 2: The Topic Guide

1. Could you please briefly talk about your career as a journalist?

2. (A personalized, not-so-sensitive throw-away question based on publicly available information about the person or the previous answer. The aim of asking these questions is to warm up the conversation for more sensitive questions. Examples are not provided to secure anonymity.)

3. How have the state of emergency and operations against Cumhuriyet that have been ongoing since the last summer affected you?
→If the person mentions that his/her colleagues are threatened: Do you also feel threatened?
→How is your newsmaking process impacted?
→What has changed in the outlet in general?

4. How does the current political and economic situation impact the quality of the news produced in the Turkish news media?

5. What do you think about online harassment targeting journalists?
→ If the person does not mention his/her personal experience: Have you ever experienced an organized lynching campaign on social media?
→How does it impact you?

6. Have you ever thought about what would you do if the government shuts down Cumhuriyet or appoints a trustee (*kayyum*)?
→(If the person does not mention the possibility of going online) What about continuing online?

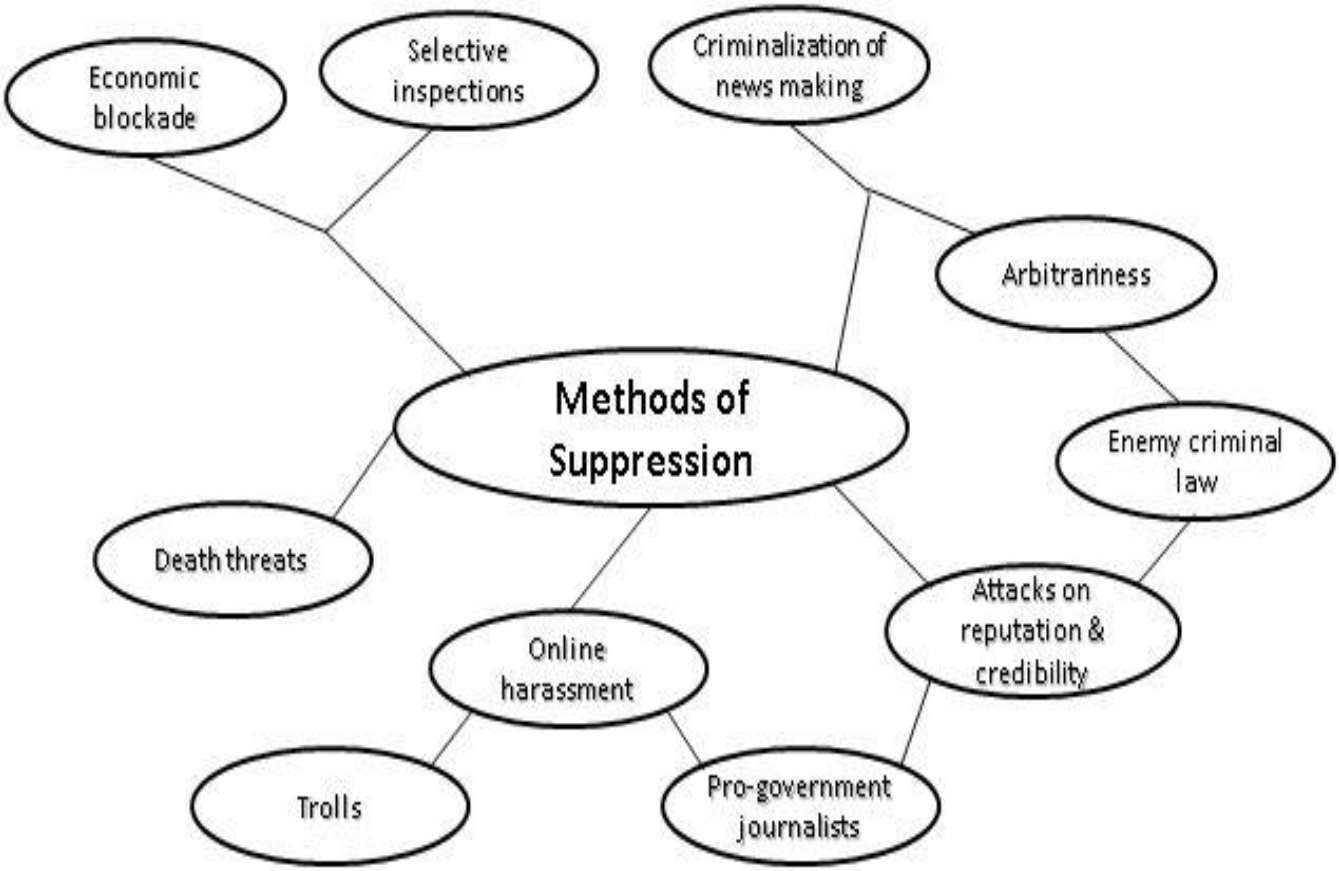
7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of online journalism in the face of political and financial pressures?

8. In many parts of the world, news media is going online. How is the trend in Turkey?
→ What do you think about the future of print media in Turkey?

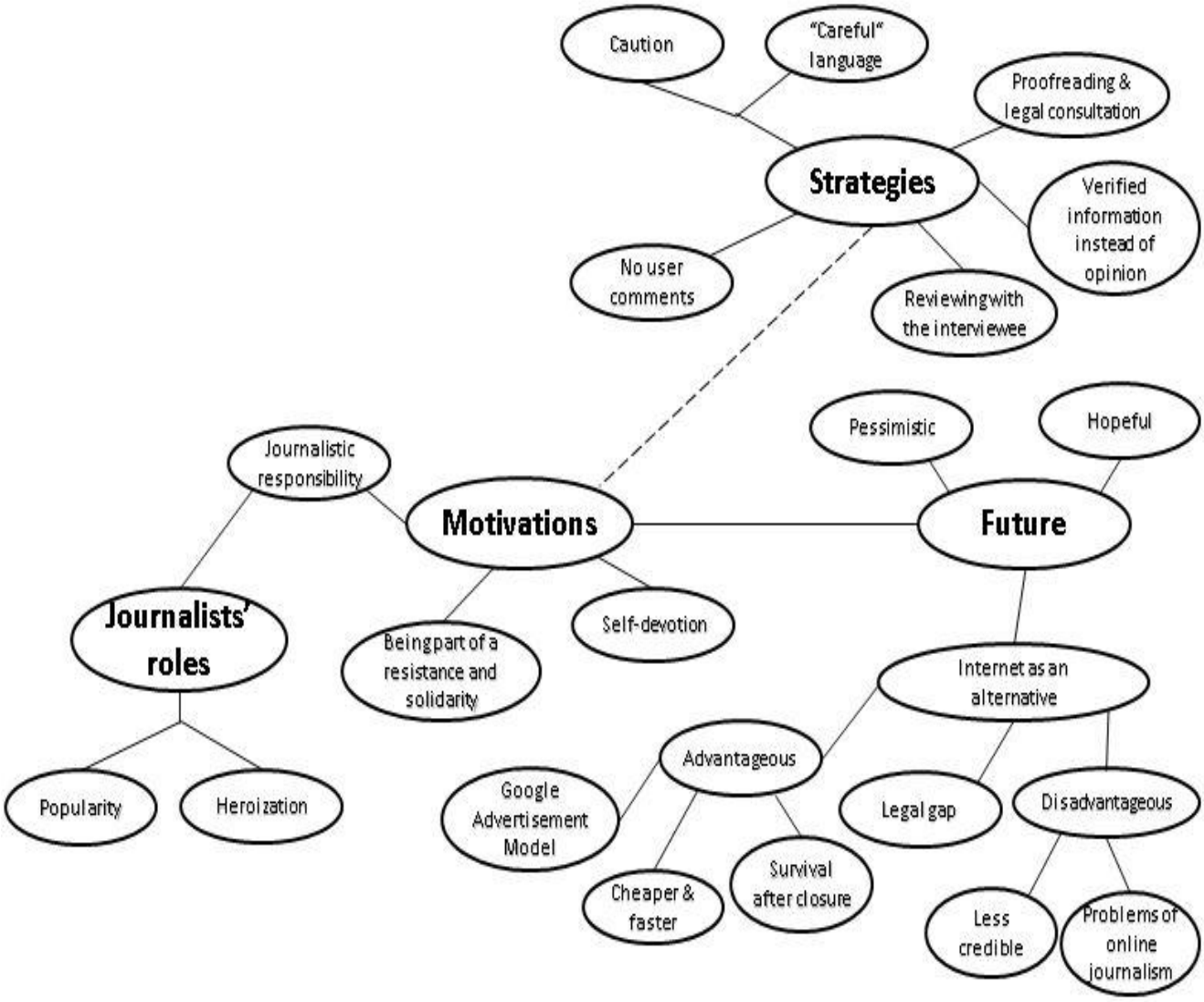
9. What do you think about the future of journalism in Turkey?

10. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Thematic Map (I)



Appendix 3: Thematic Map (II)



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