

Managed Dissent and the Limits of Academic Freedom in Migration Societies

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This paper examines the relationship between academic freedom, education, and authoritarian tendencies within migration societies. Rather than approaching academic freedom as a normative ideal under external threat, it considers how its conditions are already shaped by earlier processes of socialization and schooling. From this perspective, universities appear less as sites where free thinking emerges than as institutions in which previously formed dispositions are reorganized and stabilized.

Drawing on Foucauldian approaches to discipline and governmentality, the paper suggests that “critical thinking” may function not only as a pedagogical ideal but also as a mode of governance. Within educational contexts, critique is encouraged, yet often within implicitly structured boundaries that render it compatible with existing institutional and epistemic orders. This form of managed or “contained” critique becomes particularly visible in migration societies, where questions of racism and inequality are increasingly addressed, yet frequently in ways that do not fundamentally disrupt dominant frameworks.

The paper further explores how educational processes may contribute not only to forms of compliance, but also to affective orientations toward authority, stability, and order. In this sense, authoritarian tendencies can be understood as partially produced within, rather than external to, educational environments.

Using Turkey as an analytically intensified case, the paper reflects on how explicit authoritarian interventions in education may illuminate more subtle dynamics present in other contexts, including European academia.

Finally, the paper addresses a central tension: the possibility of articulating critique within academic institutions is often taken as evidence of their openness. However, this contribution suggests that such critique is unevenly distributed and frequently linked to conditions of institutional precarity. The presence of critique, therefore, may indicate not only freedom, but also the capacity of academic systems to absorb and regulate dissent.

Short Bio:

Meral Apak is a lecturer and researcher in Gender Studies and Educational Science based in Berlin. Her work focuses on the intersections of education, power, and subject formation, with particular attention to academic freedom, authoritarianism, and migration societies. Combining critical social theory with psycho-social perspectives, she explores how educational processes shape not only knowledge but also affect, desire, and modes of belonging.