

# **Psychology as Labour, Criticism and Solidarity - An account of the critical psychology experience from Turkey**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to narrate and transfer the experience accumulated through an activist psychologist movement in Turkey: Psychologists for Social Solidarity (TODAP). To achieve this, in the first part, the beginnings and the roots of TODAP will be explained on especially how it relates to the history of critical psychology in Turkey. In the following parts, 3 axes of work areas claimed by TODAP (Axes of *critical psychology, labor, and social solidarity*) will be explored in detail. Throughout this exploration, there will be special emphasis on possible criticisms of the process and reflections on future practices.

*Keywords:* Turkey, labour, solidarity, psychologists, critical psychology

## **Encounters and Possibilities: The Tradition of Critical Psychology in Turkey**

When the first critical psychology symposium took place in Turkey back in 2008, it enabled psychologists and psychology students who approach psychology with a critical framework to meet. It was a moment of encounter for a lot of people in this regard and new potentialities developed. Some of the people who met and had the chance to talk in this symposium later founded an association, named “Association of Psychologists for Social Solidarity”; in Turkish, “Toplumsal Dayanışma İçin Psikologlar Derneği”, abbreviated as TODAP (and in this article, this association hereafter will be called TODAP).

In order to emphasize the peculiarity and the importance of the first critical psychology symposium, it is important to historically contextualize this meeting by pointing out that the roots of psychology in Turkey date back to 1915, when Georg Anschütz was appointed by

Istanbul University (Batur, 2005).<sup>1</sup> However, it should be stated that the first critical psychology symposium did not signal the start of activism by psychologists; instead, it was the culmination of efforts by critical psychologists in Turkey. The term “critical psychology” was not unknown to readers in Turkey. Before the first critical psychology symposium there existed a history of activism within the community of psychologists. The e-mail group “Marxist psychology” enabled psychologists from different cities and even countries to meet and thus to start new projects.

Prior to this, at the end of the 90’s and the start of the new millennium, there had been an e-mail group called “Critical Psychology and Anti-psychiatry” as well as a website providing articles within a critical framework. This website included articles written by psychiatrists, psychologists and philosophers from Turkey, articles on Vygotsky, Althusser, as well as translations of critical psychology texts.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, it should be noted that there have been psychologists and intellectuals contemplating topics like critical psychology and history. The start of the new century signaled a new era for psychologists in Turkey, as their working conditions got worse day by day. First of all, job opportunities became limited. Legislation about retirement houses and dialysis centers changed and these institutions did not have to hire psychologists any more. Psychologists’ dominant position in the market of special education and rehabilitation was also constricted. In addition, as “private” universities started to offer psychology degrees, the competition between the new graduates increased and this resulted in favoring employers. More specifically, in kindergartens, day care centers, special education, and rehabilitation centers, psychologists’ salaries were reduced and limited. A substantial number of psychologists had to work as subcontracted employees. At the same time, as the competition increased, the market started to demand more from psychologists. Psychologists who embraced these expectations started to pay for continuing education and certifications, mostly from their limited salary. In addition, psychologists started to voice the difficulties they confronted at work. A common issue was that no job definition was provided for the work a psychologist was hired to do: She or he is expected to fulfill the duties issued by his or her superior. These insecure and precarious working conditions and unequal educational situation stem from the lack of an independent occupational law for psychologists in Turkey. The Turkish Psychological Association (TPA) has been working on this issue since 1974, applying the method of maintaining relations with the government, and therefore, refusing to take a stand on any political issue (Türk Psikologlar Derneği, 2008). The occupational law, among other occupational problems such as precarious employment and undefined job descriptions, continue to be important issues that psychologists, and therefore TODAP, will have to deal with in the future.

In order to provide a better description of the political atmosphere of psychology in Turkey we will briefly discuss the TPA’s history here. Founded in 1976, TPA is the largest organization in Turkey, in terms of number of members. An important number of academics serve in the governing body (Türk Psikologlar Derneği, 2008).<sup>3</sup> Following 9/11, TPA sent a

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<sup>1</sup> The Turkish reader can find a thoughtful discussion on the roots of psychology in Turkey at <http://www.elestirelpsikoloji.org/eleps/eleps/kokenmitosu.html#dn01>

<sup>2</sup> The Turkish reader can read these articles from <http://www.elestirelpsikoloji.org/eleps/eleps.html>

<sup>3</sup> The Turkish reader can find a lot of useful information about TPA at <http://www.psikolog.org.tr/medya/belgeler/1-tpd-meslek-yasasi-calismalari-kitapcik.pdf>. For the international reader, it should be noted that TPA provides educations and certifications for psychologists, which have been criticized for having high prices. TPA also made important projects, 2 of them were for psychological wellness of earthquake survivors which took place in 1999. Another one was an attempt to develop a personality scale for the Turkish army.

letter of sympathy to the American Psychological Association (APA), which created some controversy within its membership. Even though this may be seen to encapsulate the political tone of TPA, it should be noted that there have always been different attitudes among members about political issues. For example, when a group of psychologists in the Istanbul branch of TPA wanted to join a demonstration against Israeli aggression towards Lebanon under the banner of TPA in 2006, a crisis erupted in the association. The request to demonstrate was rejected by the central governing body in Ankara. Following this, some members in Istanbul started a “Platform of Psychologists”, which also included psychologists who were not members of the association. However, the activities of the platform remained mostly online; some internet petitions were prepared and there were discussions on an electronic mailing list. In a short time, it turned out that there were different and even contradictory political orientations with different aims within the platform. It became quite difficult for the platform to act and in time became passive.

In March 2008, the first issue of *Eleştirel Psikoloji Bülteni* (Bulletin of Critical Psychology) was published. It should be noted that a critical vein in the history of psychology in Turkey had existed before (see Batur & Aslıtürk, 2006). The first critical psychology symposium back in 2008 included sociologists, psychology scholars and practitioners as well as psychology students as speakers and attendants. The audience consisted of individuals from different cities all around Turkey as well as people who came from abroad. The discussions were lively and it was not that difficult to identify a desire and a will for critical psychology. The first symposium had another effect on the academic circuit. Following the symposium, the national congress of psychology was going to take place. One of the invited people was Stephen Behnke, who at that time was the head of the Ethics Department of American Psychological Association. During his tenure, which was the immediate post 9/11 era, APA rejected a proposal which would prohibit psychologists from participating in interrogations.<sup>4</sup> He defended the act by claiming that psychologists should be there to stop ethical violations (Behnke, 2008; for a reply see Soldz, 2008). Behnke was invited to conduct a workshop on ethics and psychologists who participated in the congress informed him that they would be protesting against him and the workshop. The next day, the workshop was moved to a different location and the registrations were closed; the Turkish Psychological Association claimed that the workshop was full.

A petition campaign was initiated against the conduct (the participation of Behnke, the sudden change of location, and the unavailability of the workshop) and around 300 psychologists and psychology students signed it. In the following months, TPA sent an open letter to Behnke regarding the criticisms directed to his ideas and the attitude of APA and asked for a reply. In addition, the governing body of TPA founded a committee to research the issue and write a report on it. The report explicitly criticized Behnke’s remarks and APA’s attitude on the issue and suggested that TPA should write an open letter to Behnke. After the release of the report, with the moderation of some psychologists in TPA, a “psycho-political positioning declaration” was attempted. It was intended that the declaration would include answers about the positioning of psychology and psychologists for important problems like the Kurdish issue, militarism, etc. These attempts triggered a lot of discussion, but the actions taken did not result in any change.

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<sup>4</sup> The reader can find discussions on the issue at [http://www.democracynow.org/2007/8/20/apa\\_members\\_hold\\_fiery\\_town\\_hall](http://www.democracynow.org/2007/8/20/apa_members_hold_fiery_town_hall) and <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93644103>

Having been informed about the ethics congress and prospective visit of Stephen Behnke, the first critical psychology symposium took place in October 2008. Some psychologists and psychology students who wanted to develop collective understandings regarding what transpired and who had a critical attitude regarding psychology started to meet regularly. They had not been members of the e-mail groups or organizations mentioned above. They formulated an e-mail group called “eleps” (an abbreviation for the Turkish word for critical psychology), which was a communication platform for people who had an interest in critical psychology.

The group started its activities with a press declaration to show support for the resistance of the workers in YORSAN, which was a company that laid off workers who became members of the labour union. The workers were blamed for “causing unrest for children in the nearby schools” by the local governor, whereas the group, with the authorization of “critical psychologists and psychology students”, stated that witnessing a demand for rights was not at all problematic for children, whereas witnessing state violence is. Another declaration was aimed at the new regulations regarding the security law, which had increased the rights and decreased the responsibilities of the police (Eleştirel Psikologlar ve Psikoloji Öğrencileri, 2008).

The group also started a blog in order to share and spread views, experiences, and news. It was considered that “Eleştirel Psikoloji Bülteni” (Turkish for “The Bulletin of Critical Psychology”) could be too scholarly for them to contribute to, hence the blog was intended to provide a less scholar space. The need for a fast and easy way of sharing thoughts resulted in the emergence of the blog, which is still active at [www.eleps.info](http://www.eleps.info).

Approximately a month later, some other members of the e-mail group “eleps” started to meet in Ankara. There were some activities by the members of this group, including activities on children’s rights, anti-homophobia and so on. Other activities by both groups included organizing talks on topics such as the relationship between militarism and the children in Turkey, psychopolitics in the Turkish context, and problems in special education.

As the groups went on with their activities, they discussed and contemplated their conceptualizations of psychology and critical psychology. How to act in the professional psychology community in Turkey was another matter of discussion. The groups were forthcoming in admitting their confusion on such topics and advocated for the development of a framework and hence, decided to meet in İstanbul in July 2009. There they came up with some “principles” which they thought might be useful for defining their work and further activism<sup>5</sup>.

These principles were sent to the e-mail group eleps for discussion. However, the groups found themselves embroiled in a discussion about representation and its relationship to other groups. The main question was about the relationship of the e-mail group eleps and the people who had been meeting regularly for a year. Later, there were questions of representation in the İstanbul and Ankara groups around whether the meetings and the decisions made by them bound only those involved in the meetings or in fact represented a decision of the e-mail group. With these questions in mind, and thinking that an association would be more capable of supporting the struggle of occupational rights of psychologists, they decided to start an initiative for the development of an association, which would later be TODAP (Toplumsal Dayanışma İçin Psikologlar Derneği – Association of Psychologists for Social Solidarity).

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<sup>5</sup> These principles will be presented in more detail in “*The Building Blocks: Critical Psychology Axis*” section.

The framework of TODAP is organized into three areas of work. First, TODAP has a concern for critically appraising psychology; that is, that the praxis of psychology should be political and that, through critical reflexivity, questions should be consistently raised regarding the political aspects of psychological work. This concern constitutes the “critical psychology axis” of the organization. A second focus area for TODAP is the struggle for occupational rights for and working conditions of psychologists, also known as the “labour axis”. Last but definitely not least, TODAP’s “social solidarity axis” aims to become engaged with contemporary agendas in Turkey, to relate to existing resistances and struggles, mostly by emphasizing the psychological side of relations of power and production. With this brief historical background and contextual overview in mind, the aim of this article is to attempt to transfer the TODAP experience in Turkey; to tell its story and discuss what has been learned up to this point. To achieve this, the progress in each of the three axes will be assessed individually; and an overall discussion will be presented at the end.

### **The Building Blocks: Critical Psychology Axis**

As stated before, after the first Critical Psychology Symposium some critical psychologists and psychology students started to meet regularly and these meetings led to the formation of the group ‘Critical Psychologists and Psychology Students’. The group prepared a declaration regarding its principles and foundations in order to guide their work and cooperation. Since this declaration gives a perspective about the theoretical perspective that was later adopted by TODAP, it will be summarized here, followed by an evaluation of the efforts that were exerted thenceforth. The group’s principles and assumptions included:

- Psychology is political and historical. Critical psychologists taking this fact as their starting point aim to create a liberating psychology theory and praxis, on the basis of equality and human rights and against every kind of discrimination.
- Critical psychologists emphasize the problems that mental health professionals confront in their work, and that directly result from psychology praxis, and try to solve them.
- Critical psychologists support human rights movements and regard human rights as the basis of psychosocial wellbeing.
- Critical psychologists claim that traditional psychology, with its emphasis on scientific neutrality and universality, disregards social inequalities and contributes to their reproduction. In an attempt to unravel these facts, critical psychologists produce theory and practice from an interdisciplinary perspective while at the same time admitting the political nature of the knowledge produced by social sciences.
- Critical psychologists try to incorporate the historical and cultural context into their theory and praxis.

Initially all members agreed upon general claims of critical psychology such as the social irrelevance of the knowledge produced by mainstream psychology (Teo, 2009), its incorrect claim about being neutral and universally valid (Danziger, 1999), and its concordance with the dominant ideology and its individualistic emphasis (Parker, 1999). Most of the members thought that psychology in Turkey was imported from the West and in terms of theory was nothing more than an unsuccessful imitation of Western mainstream psychology. With such as a critical stance, members have written articles and attended several symposiums and meetings with topics such as:

- Psychologization of subjectivity and politics: A re-evaluation of Millgram experiment

- Psychology's position towards homosexuality
- Psychology and nationalist reflexes
- Rethinking the relationship of psychology and politics
- Psychology and economic crisis
- Individual armament and the role of psychological testing for gun licensing
- Mobbing in the context of power relations
- The politics of psychology, as offered by Vamik Volkan<sup>6</sup>

A year had passed, and the time for the second Critical Psychology Symposium had arrived. The invitation text for the second symposium, presented below, reflects the 'climate' of the time. As the reader will notice, there is a call for a new alternative organization for critical psychologists in Turkey. Consequently, following this symposium, TODAP would be officially founded.

*"Critical psychology has important contributions to make regarding social change and contributes to critical knowledge with its radical and alternative principles of practice. The difficulty in doing critical psychology within the mainstream psychology organizational principles has been experienced by psychologists who tried to provide alternative knowledge for years ... In recent years, among psychologists in Turkey there is a resistance against mainstream knowledge and its organization models and principles. Now voices rising from psychology question psychology and the role of psychologists in social life and think that for psychologists it is a social and vocational responsibility to be against torture, violation of human rights, to be against discrimination based on ethnic and cultural identity, gender, sexual orientation, religious and political beliefs, age and disability. These voices summon psychologists to advocate for the oppressed groups and to empower these groups in developing voice."*

In this second symposium the topics of the sessions were as follows:

- What can be understood from being critical?
- On feminist methodology and psychology
- Psychology as a tool for social transformation;
- Social Psychology and Marxism, Is a Marxist social psychology possible?
- From theory to practice: Exploitation of labour and violation of workers' rights
- Jouissance as a political factor
- From South Africa to Turkey: Psychologists who violate human rights
- Critical Psychology Permanently at the Crossroads: Servant of Power and Tool for Emancipation

The symposium marked TODAP's official establishment as an association and continuation of its efforts along the same lines as before. Since then there have been various attempts to reconsider the relationship between psychology and ideology and to create awareness for psychologists working in the field. As TODAP initiated actions and interactions with psychologists within and outside its organization reach, the fact that the group is comprised of psychologists who have diverse understandings of critical psychology emerged as a problem. However, the very same fact also provided a dynamic, dialectical and reflexive position on what can be done within the field.

It is also important to recognize that TODAP has managed to provide a platform for critical psychologists and the above mentioned critical efforts (articles, seminars, symposiums) did

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<sup>6</sup> He is a psychoanalyst and political psychologist, who was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize, and the article denounced his role in assisting the oppressive practices of the government.

not remain only at a theoretical level. Instead, as a result of the specific political context in Turkey, TODAP started to function like a union, struggling for psychologists' occupational rights and like an NGO providing alternative psychological services for leftist organizations<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, the fact that TODAP is not a part of larger intellectual and political movement impelled it to take a stance that is more integrated with the institutions of mainstream psychology and their agendas (i.e. TPA). Instead of trying to restructure the discipline in general, TODAP organized its endeavours around the political agendas of Turkey (i.e. YORSAN Workers, TEKEL resistance). As a result, TODAP's praxis increasingly became reactive and eventually risked becoming marginalized. This posed an obstacle for the development of a unified theoretical perspective that would be more relevant for Turkey and that could also provide a model for a liberating praxis to be used in the pursuit of social justice.

One of the main reasons of TODAP's theoretical dispersion is the dreadful situation of psychological services in Turkey. According to March 2011 data from the Ministry of Health (T.C. Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2011), there are only 1370 psychologists working in the mental health field in the entire country. This means that there is only 1,85 psychologists to provide services for every 100000 individuals. This forces TODAP to struggle for increased public mental health services. At the same time, TODAP members are fully aware that the tools provided by mainstream psychology (such as individual psychotherapy) are far from being sufficient or emancipatory. This dilemma forces critical psychologists to reshape their demeanours and direct their efforts to create a liberating theory and praxis which would incorporate the historical and cultural context in Turkey and to struggle for its expansion. Members of TODAP are fully aware of the fact that this necessitates both a restructuring of TODAP and the restructuring of psychology as a discipline in Turkey. By being more independent of the mainstream institutions and their agenda, TODAP hopes to overcome the risk of being marginalized and exceeds the limits of the narrow space that is offered to critical psychologists all over the world.

### **Struggle over Occupational Rights: Labour Axis**

Even though the roots of the organization were founded on rather theoretical motivations, the need to act upon the unjust practices in Turkey's psychology arena emerged very quickly when the small group that came together through eleps began its regular meetings. Because most of the members consisted of recent graduates or undergraduates, topics such as job security, employment, and the quality of education were frequently discussed in the meetings. As everyone shared their stories and the stories of the people around them, what used to be commonsense knowledge of problems concerning practicing psychologists as well as students began to appear as a more concrete issue that needed to be addressed. This would eventually lead to the foundation of the labour axis within TODAP.

Concerns focused especially around the lack of an occupational law, and the group members began to pioneer and participate in many practices that aim to create awareness within the community and facilitate action for change. On April 2009, The Psychiatric Association of Turkey released a report which portrayed psychologists as a threat to public health, and asked everyone to refrain from contacting them (Candansavar et.al., 2005). With the signature *Critical Psychologists and Psychology Students*, a short open letter was published. The letter criticized the insistence of doing work within the 'psy-complex' professions which adhere

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<sup>7</sup> As will be discussed in the following sections.

exclusively on a medical model. The letter also took a position against the market-based rivalry between psychiatry and psychology<sup>8</sup>. Later that year, The Psychiatric Association applied to the Ministry of Health and asked for private counseling centers in Mersin, one of the largest cities in Turkey, to be shut immediately because they were run by people who were incapable of being graduates of faculties of medicine (this is, unfortunately, the exact translation of what the letter says). With the same signature, a text that called for a common protest in Istanbul was circulated in different e-mail groups, but this initiative failed to receive much support.

Before 2009 ended, what was *Critical Psychologists and Psychology Students* was transformed into a legal association, *Psychologists for Social Solidarity* (TODAP). Hoping that a legal title would generate more trust and result in enhanced support, TODAP members carried on with their efforts in promoting the rights of psychologists and psychology students. One such effort, for example, was the protests against collective redundancy of psychologists in Istanbul Municipality. In Istanbul there are many “Woman and Family Health Centers” founded by the municipality to offer free-of-charge health services to residents. These centers employ a significant number of subcontracted psychologists – a common method of employment with consequences previously explained. In 2010, psychologists working on these centers decided to protest the frequent delays in the payment of their salaries with a slowdown strike. As a result, 55 of the total 72 psychologists were laid off, one of which was a member of TODAP. In cooperation with different occupational platforms and unions, TODAP participated in a street protest to stand up against subcontracting<sup>9</sup>. The protest, once again, did not receive much support from psychologists.

In the months that followed, practices of the labour axis continued on a range of areas including protesting the high registration fees of the National Psychology Congress with the argument that information should be free of charge, and collecting data for the “Violation of Rights Survey” which is aimed at painting a clearer picture of the problems psychologists come across in their working environments. None of these practices generated support on a large scale. However, supporter and membership of TODAP slowly but steadily began to grow<sup>10</sup>. By the end of 2010, TODAP was recognized by most psychologists, including the agenda it supports and how it was established. Thus, even though people seemed to be in support of TODAP’s activities, for some reason, they were not participating in them. But then, at the end of 2010, something really interesting happened.

A sudden rise of activity took place in the e-mail group used by thousands of psychologists in Turkey for announcement purposes: psy-l. Apparently, the consequences of the Psychiatric Association of Turkey’s appeal to the Ministry of Health, described above, had spread to private psychological counseling centers in Istanbul, and a few centers were shut down. Psychologists were displaying great outrage about this situation, and called upon both TPA and TODAP for immediate action. Many psychologists who did not show support for any of the previous street protests were now declaring a great need for them.

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<sup>8</sup> Turkish reader can find the letter on <http://eleps.info/?p=544>

<sup>9</sup> For Turkish news covering this protest, please see:

[http://www.birgun.net/worker\\_index.php?news\\_code=1267441576&year=2010&month=03&day=01](http://www.birgun.net/worker_index.php?news_code=1267441576&year=2010&month=03&day=01)

<http://bianet.org/biamag/saglik/120462-psikologlar-meslek-ve-saglik-hakki-icin-direniyor>

<sup>10</sup> An interesting indicator of the supporters may be the Facebook page, which currently has over 2000 members (see <http://www.facebook.com/pages/TODAP-Toplumsal-Dayan%C4%B1%C5%9Fma-i%C3%A7in-Psikologlar/102241296492273>)

In the face of such a change of times, TODAP decided to take on the role of the much needed facilitator of the process by organizing a meeting to discuss what could be done. The meeting received great interest and was more crowded than expected. After several hours of discussion, participants of the meeting agreed to come together on a common platform; and the organization committee members of this platform were selected. Of the 15 members, only 3 were from TODAP, and the majority of the rest consisted of founders of the counseling centers that had been shut down. The name of the platform was the “Occupation Right”, and it moved quickly to organize a large-scale protest. The organization process was very tiresome for TODAP members. Because TODAP was the only psychological organization with experience of street protests, other members of the platform relied on TODAP members to make the necessary arrangements. On the other hand, suggestions from TODAP members for the press release texts or the slogans to be used during protests were usually rejected for “sounding too political”. Later on, when the protest took place with a maximum of 60 people, members of the platform directed their outrage at TODAP; and argued that many of their colleagues decided not to participate because TODAP’s name was notorious for being “too political.”

Explaining this emphasis on what may be called “the political as a negative stance” requires a quick parentheses to look at Turkey’s recent history. In the past 50 years, there have been 3 (1960, 1971, 1980) military interventions in Turkey. The last of these, the coup d’état of 1980, took place following the increase of violence between different political fractions. Due to the belief that these conflicts could not be resolved by democratic means, the military concluded that an intervention was the only way to restore peace. During the military rule, an estimate of 650000 people were taken into custody, hundreds of them lost their lives because of torture, and just as many others were forced to flee the country (Demirel, 2005). Furthermore, the new military government prepared a constitution which significantly restricted freedom of speech and political participation<sup>11</sup> (Kilic, 2010). What can be considered as a massive collective trauma for the citizens of Turkey still echoes in people’s fear towards what is considered “political”, and is also clearly apparent in the psychology arena. Therefore, TODAP’s emphasis on psychology as a *political* entity is sometimes a major problem for psychologists who want to stay clear of “such things”.

A few months later, in 2011, the amendment to add a general definition of “Clinical Psychologist” to Law of Medicine was discussed and accepted in the Parliament of Turkey. According to this definition, a clinical psychologist was someone who has 4 years of education in either Psychology or Psychological Counseling and Guidance as well as a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology; *or* has graduated from any major and completed a PhD in Clinical Psychology. When this amendment was passed by parliament, TPA announced to celebrate the result. A significant percentage of psychologists, however, were once again outraged, because the amendment allowed non-psychology graduates to have the right to become clinical psychologists. TODAP initiated an online petition that voiced such concerns and others, and handed the signatures to the largest opposing political party, the Republican People’s Party, for they were the only ones who had the right to oppose this recently passed bill. Unfortunately, the Republican People’s Party did not live up to their promise to follow the process through.

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<sup>11</sup> This constitution remained valid until recent attempts to change it was initiated by the Justice and Development Party Government.

The online petition can be considered the last solid activity of the labour axis. There may be several reasons for this decline in activities. First of all, due to numerous efforts that do not result in much, there has been a significant loss of motivation among the members. Second, after a heated year of many developments in the occupational struggle, it can also be argued that the zeitgeist brings a need to step back and wait until the time comes to act once again. Lastly, there may be a sense of necessity amongst members to reflect and discuss upon the process thus far; and to make decisions on what roads are to be taken from here on.

### **Contributing to Social Struggle: Social Solidarity Axis**

One of the main acts that members of TODAP engaged in alongside a large group of psychologists within and outside its own ranks was the support given to TEKEL workers' resistance- which was the biggest protest staged in Turkey in the last 30 years. As a recently privatized company, TEKEL is the biggest producer of tobacco and alcoholic beverages in Turkey with factories all over the country. When the company was privatized and the government announced the closure of many factories, the governing AKP (Justice and Development Party), a right wing conservative party with a neoliberal economic agenda, forced 10,000 workers to take part-time positions with lower salary and benefits with a temporary contract under the name 4/C. This motivated thousands of workers to protest against the contract in the very heart of Turkey's capital city Ankara, from 15th December 2009 to 26th May 2010. The protest began with only a few resistance tents but eventually grew to form a tent commune on the streets of the city. As the protest grew, TODAP first published a press release titled: *"Rage against capitalism, support for TEKEL protests"*, the main point of which was that, while psychology as a discipline typically connoted anger as a negative emotion, as being destructive for example, there were also cases where anger could be productive and necessary, and that it is normal to feel angry when you are unemployed and when you live under precarious conditions. In his book *Psychology for Peace Activists*, Adams (1987) asserts that anger may be a form of expression for people that have no other resort for social change. He does not merely complain that anger is ignored as a positive force and is actively discouraged and treated as a pathology and disease; he adds that the true economic and political roots of the phenomenon are hardly discussed. Therefore, he sees the task of the new psychology as not to "authorize" anger, but to harness it as a skill in a way that it is used constructively rather than destructively. In line with this, the originating point of TODAP had been to declare its support for the workers' anger first, as this was usually not expected from psychologists.

Along with press releases and standing on guard with the workers overnight, TODAP took part in the demonstrations in Ankara on 4th February 2010, the general strike day in support of TEKEL workers, holding a banner that read *"Psychologists stand with their fellows-in-class"*. Members had discussed in TODAP group meetings and on its mailing list the precarious status of psychologists in Turkey, and had agreed on the title of the banner, thus acknowledging that psychologists, along with other white-collar workers, formed part of the new working class. The high rate of unemployment, the low wages and, as an inevitable consequence of these two conditions, the insecure status of psychologists were posing serious problems and psychologists were becoming increasingly aware of these conditions. This, in fact, was the main reason for many psychologists to join TODAP in the first place, as TODAP's labour axis was more active and visible to the psychologists. However, at the second critical psychology symposium, TODAP was subject to criticism by some academic critical psychologists regarding both its way of supporting the protests and its chosen banner

title. It was claimed that TODAP was rather a marginal group of psychologists. The main criticism levelled against TODAP was that TODAP's support of the protesters was not grounded in theory. The second criticism addressed the equating of psychologists with the working class. It was partially true that TODAP lacked a critical psychology theory in its support due to its inexperience on such interventions, but rather had a perspective on how to act there as psychologists. Rather than psychologizing and pathologizing the situation of the workers, as most of the other psychologist groups did, by framing the condition of the workers in terms of trauma, TODAP sought to empower them by declaring its support and by defending their rage and resistance. This could not be explained as merely a traumatic condition as the workers here were not just being "exposed to", but on contrary, were actively participating as subjects, which was evident in the workers' speeches and overall atmosphere during the resistance. Throughout the period of resistance, TODAP visited the workers in Ankara twice with over twenty members, talked to but mostly listened to the workers, as they were eager to voice their problems and concerns about the resistance. As the government was being tough on the workers in the media, trying to discourage them and drive them to desperation, the support that the workers got from all over the country gave them the courage to extend the struggle for six months. The whole experience of TODAP with the TEKEL workers was documented in a report which was later to be published in some Turkish magazines.

A second area of work in TODAP's solidarity axis was its cooperation with LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) groups against homophobia, homophobic speech, and acts of discrimination against LGBT people. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not covered in the civil rights law of Turkey, and deviations from classic orientations are not well tolerated socially. Not only are LGBT members often subject to hate speech, some psychologists also try to exploit Turkey's socially conservative tendency by using their position to assert the archaic notion that homosexuality is a disease and offer therapies to fix it. Besides the workshops that TODAP organized that dealt with the issue of homophobia and informed people about LGBT rights, protest demonstrations were also held with other LGBT groups against these institutions of psychologists that exacerbate homophobic predispositions and attitudes.

Third, TODAP has taken action in the area of antimilitarism. In solidarity with the Kurdish conscientious objectivist Halil Savda, TODAP tried to point out the role of psychiatry and psychology in the continuity of the military oppression and various human rights violations that the military institutions are responsible of as well as the militarization of daily life. Similar to other countries, mental health services as practiced within the military bodies have also been contributing to the denial of the consequences of militarization and its effects on the people (the victims of military action as well as the soldiers being exposed to violence and threatening situations). TODAP issued a press release in line with the support for Halil Savda on the day of his trial highlighting these points and foregrounding militarism as a threat to humanity.

To sum up, apart from organized participation in social and political struggles, TODAP was successful in serving as a platform for those psychologists who tries to speak out and act with and for the oppressed. Psychologists under the TODAP umbrella often contributed to various instances of social struggle; not always on behalf of the association, but also on the grounds that TODAP has provided. Nevertheless, a crucial problem of TODAP in its solidarity axis is its need for a critical framework for community interventions.

## Discussion

The TODAP experience has provided a pioneering example of an occupation based way of organizing and struggle, as well as a platform for discussing and “doing” critical psychology. In an attempt to bring these two crucial practices together, in line with the fundamental principle of participating with the oppressed, poor and discriminated, the questions of consistency and coherence between the different axes of activities inevitably arose –both within and outside the group.

One of the main critiques of TODAP's line of work in the area of occupational struggle has often addressed the consistency of its alleged commitment to critical psychology. It was true that the actions taken in the labour axis suffered from a lack of clear limits to the role of psychologists. Parallel with this, TODAP's advocacy for an occupational law and its speaking out against the causes of unemployment and/or underemployment of psychologists has often been interpreted as a compromise in that it positions conventional psychology in the role of victim and so merely validates the role of psychologists. TODAP members who are in favour of this semi-syndicate line defended this position by pointing out that the role of psychologists in the reproduction of the oppressive systems is not definitive or unchangeable, and that critical psychology can be introduced in questioning and addressing the inevitable change of the field as mental health services are spreading to disadvantaged populations more than had been the case in the past.

Interestingly, another critique that TODAP activists have encountered from within and from outsiders, from time to time, is that it lacks attention and prominence in the daily problems of psychologists working in the field and falls short in organising a reaction to the violations of psychologists' rights in their working life. In recent years especially TODAP has proven its role in advocacy against the poor working conditions of psychologists, but has not always managed to organize and campaign adequately and effectively. A very prominent critique regarding all axes, but especially the labour axis, was directed at TODAP's reluctance to directly target TPD for its dominant policies, which enable the marketization of psychology education and also the dramatic decreases in the income level of psychologists, especially those who earn their living selling their labour. Views within the TODAP membership reflected the general dichotomy among psychologists regarding the TPD. This has given rise to an inconclusive discussion in TODAP between those who claim that the problem with TPD is limited to bad management and those who consider TPD as the dominant and absolute source of oppression and exploitation within the field. Neither one nor the other side of position gained supremacy, which left TODAP with an unprincipled and amorphous attitude towards this important issue. Even more unfortunate was that people in TODAP – and in the circle – from both sides of the debate distanced themselves from the actions, some accusing TODAP for being cowed, whilst others accused it of being too aggressive.

Another factor that constituted a setback in TODAP's activities in the labour axis was structural. From the beginning TODAP was composed of activists among whom the majority had the right “cultural capital” to be high earning psychologist. For a long time TODAP activities lacked the voice of the students, psychologists working in cities other than metropolises and, more importantly, those colleagues in the Kurdish region. This definitely limited the plurality and also reliability of TODAP's struggle and demands in the labour field. Fortunately, there has lately been interest in TODAP coming from students as well as from psychologists who live in the Kurdish region. Students from the Kurdish region have been following TODAP's work and organized activities as TODAP members. These activities

slowed down at one point, but recently they have started meetings again. New psychology students from different cities have also initiated activities. Since TODAP was found by a group of people mostly based in Istanbul, where the majority of people have always been, it branched out to other cities like İzmir (in the Aegean region), Mersin (in the south coast) and Diyarbakır (in the Eastern part of Turkey) only in its third year of existence. Maybe it would be worthwhile to note that the majority in the TODAP circle consist of people who study and work at the same time, which makes it rather difficult for them, in terms of time constraints, to organize together, which in turn leads to the slowing down of activities and inertia from time to time. Besides time constraints, economic issues also pose an obstacle for TODAP members to gather and act together. While it is hard for students to travel long distances for commissions, there are also times that TODAP falls short in providing people with travel expenses or creating events to get together; but the people in TODAP have recently been pushing for some other sources of money (e.g. translation) which would at least ease the mobility issues. The third critical psychology symposium is going to take place in Diyarbakır. These symposiums are usually the biggest opportunities for TODAP members to come together, but this particular setting also has a symbolic value. It makes it possible for TODAP to demonstrate its partiality with peace and the brotherhood of peoples. Diyarbakır is one of the most important cities of the Kurdish region, both in terms of its opposition potential and, parallel to this, the state sponsored violence and atrocities it has been subjected to for many years. Like the whole region and all Kurdish people, the psychologists in this city have been deliberately ignored or neglected by academic agendas for a long time. In 2009 the psychologists of this city wanted to open a branch office of TPD in Diyarbakır, which was not only declined but also precluded by the board through unjustifiable legislative change. As TODAP had shown solidarity with the psychologists of Diyarbakır at that time it also intends to display its commitment to solidarity with Kurdish people.

An engagement with the social solidarity axis is interpreted as the essence of TODAP's line of work by many people. The axis provides the guidelines that should facilitate each and every decision, word and action of TODAP. As TODAP endeavoured to take sides in various social conflicts, some critiques of its political conviction created controversy for psychologists within and outside of the movement; and TODAP has often been criticized for being “too political”.

To conclude, it might be a good idea to return to the basic question that have triggered this article: What did we learn from the TODAP experience and what is it teaching us now? A team of psychologists from TODAP have translated the recently published Turkish version of “Critical Psychology: An Introduction” by Dennis Fox, Isaac Prilleltensky and Stephanie Austin (2009; 2012). Throughout the translation process, TODAP members had an opportunity to contrast their own contemplations on critical psychology with those of the prominent thinkers in the area. In this regard, the possibility of critical psychology and the possibilities critical psychology enables is still a question of discussion for a lot of members of TODAP. The translation work also directed the members to review their understanding of producing and sharing knowledge. The book will be expensive in the Turkish context, and as a result the question of validity emerged: Is the translation of such a book on critical psychology the best way to contribute to the development of critical psychology locally? What does such an act make possible and what are its problems? What should be our role in the transmission of knowledge? As an answer, which is basically temporary since reflections on the issue persist, the plan for now is to organize seminars on the book with contributions from scholars and professionals from different areas. The summary of the translation process can be considered as a small-scale representation of the overall TODAP experience. With

each task or idea, the group reshapes itself; and with each question answered, new ones emerge. Therefore, it is a never-ending interactive process of struggle to find a common ground in challenging contexts as they present themselves. There is an attempt to represent each point of view within TODAP in such a way as to develop the organization and its practices. Yet, this requires a great effort; and it is not always easy to accomplish. The goal of being an organization that embraces and responds to diverse needs and ideas of psychologists and psychology students empower TODAP in numerous ways, but it also creates many of its main challenges. Therefore, questions regarding organizational structure, theoretical framework, and means of practice remain fundamental to the future of TODAP.

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