ABSTRACT

In the neoliberal media autocracy of Turkey, mass media are propaganda tools rather than the public watchdogs. The coup attempt in 2016 gave the government additional power to institutionalise this regime. Critical journalists have become the enemies of the state and suffered from threats from various sources. This attack on critical journalism is increasing alongside the deepening of the democracy crises, positioning journalists as victims. This study argues that bridging the fields of journalism safety and victimology would benefit journalists. Therefore, a critical analysis of reports on journalism safety, opponent journalists’ social media posts, and related news was performed in order to discuss the possibility and advantages of bridging this gap to help journalists deal with victimisation. The findings demonstrate the acceptance of journalists as a new subject for victims’ rights might activate new mechanisms of protection for them. This means searching for new rights can contribute to their physical, mental, and moral recovery.
INTRODUCTION

Since its foundation, Turkey has always suffered from the tensions between political system and civic rights, and the ties between democracy and journalism were never strong enough to generate a sustainable liberal-pluralist set of media norms as in the West. Therefore, journalism could not fulfil its role as a “watchdog,” which liberal democracies expect (Sözeri & Kurban, 2012). In most studies on Turkish media, regarding Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) work on comparing media systems’ relation with politics, despite several differences, Turkey can be classified as a “polarized pluralist model” (Bek, 2010; Özçetin & Baybars-Hawks, 2018). It is a media system dominated by state intervention and ideological biases, and by a low level of professionalism and comment-oriented journalism. However, since the beginning of the 20th century, the fluctuating democracy adventure has followed a very dark path. Particularly, since the very beginning of their time in power in 2002; AK Parti (AKP) implements policies that change the institutional structure of the country and which dramatically affect the media system (Akser and Baybars-Hawks, 2012, p. 306). The conditions have been severed by the recent witch-hunt following the failed coup of July 15, 2016, and the subsequent societal collapse triggered by the administration of the state of emergency. Along with fundamental rights, freedom of expression has been stamped out. Now, ironically, only pro-government constituents’ and government organisations’ rights to insult, target and slander opponent politicians, academics and journalists are strictly protected concerning constitutional liberty (The Media and Law Studies Association, 2019). The rest may be prosecuted, beaten, arrested and spend years in prison.

Today, Turkey’s name appears among countries where constitutional democracy is side-lined and run by autocrats. For example, Turkey ranks 109th out of 126 countries assessed in the 2019 Rule of Law index of the World Justice Project (World Justice Project, 2019). The report highlights the lack of control mechanisms over the government and the problems regarding fundamental rights. Moreover, Turkey ranks 123rd among 126 countries on the constraint on government powers scale and 122nd on the Fundamental Rights scale.

In this respect, Akser and Baybars-Hawks call the partisan media order, in which the close relations between the ruling party and commercial mass media around their common interests are produced, as “neoliberal media autocracy” (2012, p. 320-321). Consequently, commercial mass media is intertwined with power through material and immaterial ties (Media Ownership Monitor, 2016; Sözeri, 2015). The failed coup attempt in July 15, 2016 gave additional and immense power to the government to institutionalise and strengthen this order. As part of the state of emergency measures, along with many news organisations deemed as the media pillar of the coup plotters, many opponent news agencies, TV channels, radio stations, newspapers and magazines were shut down, several journalists imprisoned and hundreds of others dismissed (Article 19, 2016; Akser, 2018).

Critical journalism in the post-2016 period is carried out by a few economically weak TV channels, Turkish pages of international news agencies (mainly the BBC and DW) on social media, entrepreneurial journalism activities run by mostly unemployed ex-professionals through their social media accounts, three to five low circulation newspapers from the left-socialist tradition and the individual efforts of activist citizen journalists. Additionally, it is appropriate to mention Fox TV, a Turkish subsidiary of an international monopoly, which remained in the centre-right opposition. It is impossible to mention neutral and objective professional journalism based on factual truth, as the liberal press theory (Allan, 2004; Curran, 1991: 22-23) suggests, of the balancing and supervisory functions in democracies and the related constitutional rights in Turkey. Individuals who do justice to journalism in Turkey are deemed