

ALUM AWARDS NIGHT 2018

Dr. Evren Balta (Ph.D. 2007) received our Distinguished Alum Award. Until 2017, Dr. Balta was Associate Prof. of Political Science and International Relations at Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi of Istanbul, Turkey. She is now a faculty member in the Department of International Relations, Özyeğin Üniversitesi. Dr. Balta received the award for her outstanding work on political violence, security, and citizenship. Dr. Balta's acceptance speech can be viewed in its entirety here on the Program's YouTube channel. Excerpts from an updated version of her speech are reproduced below.

THE GLOBAL RISE OF PERSONALISED RULE

"Despite what Ph.D. students may often believe, being a graduate student in political science is not only about spending our most valuable decade in the library reading and writing. It is also about losing the privilege of being oblivious to the most pressing questions of our times and the right to ignorance. This is a privilege that I proudly and willingly lost, thanks to the education that I received here. ...I also learned a lot from my peers. I had the most outstanding cohort here at the GC that one can ever wish for. We developed an amazing



solidarity with each other. We still read each other's manuscripts, pass on grant and project announcements, and get involved in each other's work.

"My dissertation, which I defended in 2007, was a comparative study of Russia and Turkey. Since then, both countries have developed increasingly similar regime types in which the tools of the bureaucracy and the power of the state are used to implement the will of the leader. I wish this development was only an academically appealing topic to me, but it never was just that: like so many others, it has shaped my life tremendously. As Arundhati Roy complained in a recent interview, most of the time we academics turn major crises into academic issues or subjects for our Ph.Ds. But this is also the substance of our lives, part and parcel of what we experience and breathe. And I believe we always need to keep this in mind.

"In the announcement for tonight, I was cited as a faculty member of Yıldız Technical University of Istanbul, Turkey. I used to be. I had to resign my post in the summer of 2017 after the university administration decided that I could not use my Fulbright scholarship and travel abroad because I had signed a petition supporting the burial rights of one of my students, who was designated a "terrorist" by the state. ...What happened to me registers as peanuts compared to what others have gone through in Turkey. In 2016, almost 2,000 academics signed a petition criticizing the Turkish state's use of violence against its own citizens. ...Nearly 500 academics were stripped of their positions mostly by emergency decrees only because they signed this petition. Many others have left the country due to fear of reprisals. ...In the department where I was working, 18 of my colleagues who signed this petition lost their jobs, again with an emergency decree. ...These emergency decrees are still operational. If your name is on the list, it not only means losing your current job but also total exclusion from Turkey's academic labor market and in fact the labor market as a whole. It also means losing your passport that is immediately revoked because you are on the list.

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“...Using emergency powers and vaguely worded anti-terrorism laws, the authorities have also suspended or dismissed more than 110,000 people from public-sector positions and arrested more than 60,000 others. ...This steep democratic decline did not just happen in the realm of civil rights, only affecting organizations of civil society. Last year, a constitutional referendum centralized power in the presidency while elected mayors were being replaced with government appointees. ...We are all political scientists. So, we all know the codebook of authoritarianism and the signs of democratic regression that are now being employed in full force in Turkey. In fact, centralization of power in the executive, politicization of the judiciary, attacks on independent media, the use of public office for private gain is happening in many parts of the world from Russia to India and even in the United States. What still puzzles me as a political scientist, however, is the speed and depth of Turkey’s transformation. This was a country with a vibrant civil society, dense international ties, a long experience with democracy and multi-party politics, a flourishing middle class and an economy that depends on international trade with no natural resources to sustain authoritarianism. ...So, this is my puzzle! What happened in just less than 8 years that such a thriving country has taken a shortcut to authoritarianism and has become the world’s fastest deteriorating democracy? ...Growing up in an intensely unstable and repressive country [Turkey], I became a political scientist to understand why. I thought if I could understand why all this was happening, I might feel more secure. However, after almost 25 years of immersion in political science, even though I partly understand why, I do not feel more secure. I only feel secure in rooms like this when we can talk and discuss freely without fear of reprisal; where we don’t have to choose sides by aligning ourselves one way or the other in great national conflicts; where we can avoid losing our critical edge and social and moral responsibilities. After 25 years of reading political science, I now know at least that I feel secure in the process of understanding. Although we are all potential scholars at risk, no power-holder can take this form of security from us.”

Professors Charles Tien and Peter Liberman received Faculty Citizenship Awards.

Professor Mark Ungar’s work supporting students was recognized with the Faculty Mentor Award.

Sumru Atuk (level III) received the Student Citizenship Award.

Tyler Olsen (M.A. 2017) received the Best M.A. Thesis Award for “Rescinding Rancière.”

Nicholas Micinski (level III) received the department Teaching Award and the Joseph Murphy Award for his paper “The Politics of Neighbors: Comparing Iraqi and Afghan Refugee Resettlements to the United States.”

Adam McMahon (Ph.D. 2018) and Elizabeth Stone (level II) received the Ivo Duchacek Award for their publications [“Unchained Succubus: A Queer New Institutional Analysis of U.S. Supreme Court Nomination Hearings”](#) and [“Is There ‘Hope for Every Addicted American?’ The New U.S. War on Drugs.”](#) respectively.



Sumru Atuk (level III)
Student Citizenship Award