



AN EVALUATION OF PH.D. DISSERTATIONS ON  
TERRORISM STUDIES IN TURKEY

TÜRKİYE'DE TERÖRİZM ÇALIŞMALARI  
KAPSAMINDA HAZIRLANAN DOKTORA TEZLERİNE  
İLİŞKİN BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to reveal the main trends, resources and theoretical foundations in the doctoral dissertations written on terrorism in Turkey from the 1980s to the present day. By mapping the terrorism studies conducted in Turkey in doctoral dissertations, it is not only attempted to find out where they are located in mainstream terrorism studies, but also it is tried to determine what the fundamental deficiencies are. To this end, we tried to uncover which researchers and publications are cited most frequently, and which are not, by the doctoral researchers in the scope of our research. Thus, it is hoped that it will eventually lead to the elimination of these deficiencies.

**Keywords:** Terrorism Studies, Ph.D. Dissertations, Turkey.

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**ÖZ**

**Türkiye’de doktora düzeyinde yapılan terörizm çalışmalarını haritalandırmayı amaçlayan bu araştırma, veri setinde yer alan çalışmaları analiz ederek 1980’lerden günümüze kadar geçen sürede temel trendlerin, öncelikli yararlanılan kaynakların ve kuramsal temellerin neler olduğunu ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır. Böylece, doktora düzeyi terörizm araştırmalarının ana akım terörizm çalışmalarının neresinde konumlandıklarının yanı sıra temel eksiklerinin neler olduğu da belirlenmeye çalışılmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, çalışmada, hangi araştırmacılardan ve eserlerden en sık yararlanıldığı ve hangilerinden yararlanılmadığı ortaya çıkarılmaya çalışılmıştır. Böylece nihai olarak bu eksiklerin giderilmesi için yol gösterici olması umulmaktadır.**

**Anahtar Kelimeler: Terörizm Çalışmaları, Doktora Tezleri, Türkiye.**

Ph.D. dissertations on terrorism studies in Turkey can be traced back to the 1980s, but such studies increased dramatically during the 1990s and reached a peak in the 2000s as such studies in the global literature proliferated in the wake of the 9/11 terrorism incident in the USA. This study analyses Ph.D. studies on terrorism in Turkey in order to comprehend the extent to which they contribute to the field and where Turkey is located in the theoretical paradigm of terrorism studies. To accomplish this task, we tracked the databases of the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education, and found 67 Ph.D. theses with a title containing the word “terror,” and the theme of the dissertation related directly to terrorism.<sup>3</sup> We analyzed 34 Ph.D. dissertations to which we were allowed access in the database. The rest had neither an electronic copy nor authorization for free access.<sup>4</sup>

One of the first Ph.D. dissertations on terrorism archived in the National Thesis Centre is “Terrorist Acts Committed against Foreign Government Officials and Problems Arising in Terms of International Law.” This work was

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<sup>3</sup> See National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education, <http://tez.yok.gov.tr/>.

<sup>4</sup> A major limitation of this study is the lack of a database in which citation data for the studies published in Turkey can be obtained. For this reason, this study has not been able to conduct a comprehensive research, including books and articles on terrorism in Turkish, as originally planned. For an important research done in this context, see Reid and Chen, 2007.

written in 1987 by Prof. Dr. Sertaç Hami Başeren<sup>5</sup>, an Ankara University professor and former advisor to the Turkish Armed Forces. The theme of his dissertation covers terror attacks on foreign civil servants. Since this first study, only three more dissertations were written until the 1990s. From the 1990s to the 2000s, the themes of the dissertations were overwhelmingly related to terrorist organizations and terror attacks that posed a threat to Turkey's national security. This tendency essentially reflects a problem-solving effort towards the national security concerns. Because only a decade after the 1980 military coup, parliamentary politics have become unmanageable, and the whole country has experienced socio-political conflicts that turned into a threat to all sections of society and politics during the interlude between 1991 and 2002. This interlude begins with the emergence of coalition governments' era following the October 20, 1991 general election and ends with the political majority of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the general election held on 3 November 2002. There were only three general elections during this interlude but six different coalition governments were formed and political instability led to these years being a period of constant political crises. During these years, the Kurdish issue, the Alevi problem, political Islam, and a post-modern coup (February 28, 1997) have shaped the politics of violence in the face of uncertainty and incompetence in the parliamentary politics. Given the fact that political violence has gained quite a visibility throughout these years, it is understandable that issues such as terrorist attacks against foreign state representatives, separatist terrorism, left-wing terrorism, terrorism-media links, and "external powers' strategic objectives on Turkey" have been primarily researched.

However, after the 9/11 terror attacks, in tandem with other terrorism studies<sup>6</sup> all over the world, dissertations in Turkey have been written on the themes of "international terrorism" and "global terrorism," which enlarged the geographical scope of the studies. The first dissertation written in this context is the one titled "The Relationship between the Mass Media & the State on Terrorism: A Case Study of Terrorist Attack to the World Trade Center" of Önder Aytaç.<sup>7</sup> This thematic expansion occurring due to global developments in 2000s led Turkish scholars to work on the issue of terrorism comprehensively, by taking into account the different aspects of the phenomenon. State sponsored

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<sup>5</sup> Prof. Başeren takes first place, supervising 10 out of 67 dissertations on terrorism studies. In addition, he served on the jury of five theses he was not supervising. The scholar in second place conducted just two supervisions.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the impact of the 9/11 attacks on terrorism studies, see Silke, 2009: 34-48; Ranstorp, 2009: 13-33. Also, for an important scientometric analysis made in this regard, see Magnone, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> See Önder Aytaç "The Relationship between the mass media & the state on terrorism: A case study of terrorist attack to the World Trade Center" [Terör üzerinde medya ile devlet arasındaki ilişki: Dünya Ticaret Merkezi'ne yapılan terörist saldırı örnekleme], (PhD diss., Orta Doğu Teknik University, 2002).

terrorism, suicide bombing, ethnic separatist terrorism, globalization of terrorism, radical Islamist terrorism, biological terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) terrorism are some of the topics studied in this context.

There are mainly three trends in terrorism studies in Turkey. The first trend is that doctoral theses, evaluated within the scope of terrorism studies, have emerged primarily to deal with left-wing terrorism and separatist terrorism problems that Turkey has faced. This mainly refers to the period from the date of the first doctoral dissertation in Turkey on terrorism to the time of the interruption in 2001 due to the global conditions. The political actions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) are the primary themes of this period, and it is evaluated under the topic of left-wing and separatist terrorism. Although not as much as the first one, the right-left conflicts of the '70s and ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia)'s attacks to Turkish diplomats have also been studied. The second trend is the legal dimension in evaluating terrorism and depicting security strategies in the struggle against terrorism. Thus, this category of dissertations comprises the interaction and balance between human rights, criminal law, and counter-terrorism policies. In other words, some themes come into prominence such as using counter force, the balance between human rights and the struggle against terrorism, and the role of international organizations and conventions in the struggle against terrorism. The last trend emerged strongly during the 2000s and groups such as Al Qaeda, Hamas, ETA, and PIRA gained visibility in Ph.D. dissertations. Different terrorist organizations around the world began to be analyzed in Ph.D. level studies and thus it was possible to make comparisons among the various experiences of terrorism and counterterrorism. However, the PKK remains the most studied case in the dissertations. Although the subjects differ among these studies, they have common essentials that should be criticized under three fundamental points.

The first point is that scholars use mainly secondary resources, and, unfortunately, they remain "armchair researchers." This armchair approach has led many scholars to rely on government's official statements and the news, which both possibly contain manipulative information. The government representatives are usually cautious in their proclamations to the press. They know that the press will scrutinize them.<sup>8</sup> An important problem emphasized in this context is that, the dissertations do not give sufficient place to theoretical discussions, and they are very descriptive. This derives from the fact that there are only few academics in Turkey who try to develop a theoretical framework of

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion on knowledge-power relations, see Burke, 2008, 37-49.

security studies<sup>9</sup>, and, unfortunately, there is almost no one working on the development of the epistemological side of terrorism studies in Turkey requiring civility in this sphere. Therefore, we did not come across any coherent theoretical discussions in the dissertations. For example, the theoretical framework of many dissertations is disconnected from the case part. Katman's dissertation<sup>10</sup> is a good example. The first section evaluates political violence and addresses some theories. However, the case study part is disconnected from the theoretical framework and analyzes the case from a historical perspective. They are more case oriented and far behind the current epistemological discussions in terrorism studies.<sup>11</sup>

Although the studies use important international references, they are not able to locate the place of their dissertation appropriately in the literature. For example, while one of the dissertations uses a prominent name of Critical Terrorism Studies, Prof. Richard Jackson, as a reference, paradoxically, the author's perspective is patterned mainly on mainstream terrorism studies.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, many of the dissertations refrain from providing a definition of terrorism in that they cannot develop a coherent epistemological perspective in their theses. Although the scholars use core terrorism researchers<sup>13</sup> (Chart 1 and Chart 2)<sup>14</sup> as references in order to display a pluralistic perspective in their

<sup>9</sup> Şatana and Özpek (2010), examining the development of security studies in Turkey, show that Turkish researchers predominantly tend to focus on area studies rather than theoretical studies. Similar to the findings of our research, Şatana and Özpek (2010) point out that although Turkish researchers have been engaged in critical studies especially after the 2000s, these researches have been carried out by a more problem-solving method. This trend largely reflects the general attitudes of the academic circle in Turkey. Aydın, Hisarlıoğlu and Yazgan (2016), based on the research they carried out in 2014, reveal that the International Relations academicians in Turkey primarily focus on Turkish Foreign Policy and area studies. The results of the research also indicate that Turkish academicians are largely unconcerned with the theory production and, unfortunately, remain in a position to provide local data and experience for theory-testing.

<sup>10</sup> See Filiz Katman, " Hamas: Bir Terörist Örgütün Siyasal Partileşmesi" [Hamas: Politicization of a Terrorist Organization], (PhD diss., Kara Harp Okulu, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> The epistemological challenge created by critical approaches to mainstream terrorism studies has not received much attention in the Turkish literature. This challenge is the subject of great debates within Terrorism Studies, but has not attracted much attention in Turkey. This fact is closely related to the Turkish researchers' interest in avoiding theoretical debates. For an important study bearing this critical challenge, see Jackson, Breen Smyth and Gunning, 2009. For a critical review in Turkish, see Bodur Ün and Timur, 2016: 567-571.

<sup>12</sup> Scholars who received the most references are Paul Wilkinson, Walter Laqueur, Bruce Hoffman, Martha Crenshaw, Brian M. Jenkins, Alex P. Schmid, David C. Rapoport, Yonah Alexander, Ted Robert Gurr and Jerold M. Post. As seen, they are mainstream terrorism studies scholars. The only exception to this mainstream hegemony is the libertarian socialist Noam Chomsky. Except him, the visibility of key figures in Critical Terrorism Studies is relatively weak.

<sup>13</sup> These names to a great extent are similar with 42 names of Reid and Chen's (2007) study.

<sup>14</sup> In the chart one, except Abdullah Öcalan the imprisoned leader of the PKK, a great majority of Turkish scholars are connected with either Turkish military academy or Turkish police academy. In the chart 2, except Emre Kongar, all scholars have directly or indirectly connections with state security institutions or think tanks closing to the state.

definitions of terrorism, they refrain from providing their own definitions and hesitate to locate their study in any of the definitions that core researchers locate in their studies. All the theoretical framework patterns of studies on mainstream terrorism are similar to each other in terms of their conceptualization. An exception is Zeynep Kaya’s dissertation <sup>15</sup>, which gives place to Critical Terrorism Studies, particularly Richard Jackson’s critique of mainstream terrorism studies. <sup>16</sup> However, she takes this part as a section and it is disconnected from the whole dissertation. Overall, she grounded her dissertation on mainstream terrorism studies through her perspective on Al Qaida.

**Chart.1:** The First 20 Names Getting the Most Citations

	<b>Author</b>	<b>No. of publications</b>	<b>Citations</b>
1	Abdullah Öcalan	60	76
2	Paul Wilkinson	22	41
3	Walter Laqueur	14	39
4	Bruce Hoffman	14	36
5	İhsan Bal	20	36
6	Martha Crenshaw	15	32
7	Sertaç Hami Başeren	10	32
8	Noam Chomsky	22	29
9	Brian M. Jenkins	16	27
10	Sedat Laçiner	22	26
11	Karl Marx	20	24
12	Doğu Ergil	10	23
13	Alex P. Schmid	10	22
14	Ercan Çitlioğlu	9	23
15	Necati Alkan	10	22
16	Emin Demirel	8	21

<sup>15</sup> See Zeynep Kaya, “Terörizmin Küreselleşmesi: El Kaide Örneği” [Globalization of Terrorism: The Al Qaeda], (PhD diss., Kara Harp Okulu, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> This is the only doctoral dissertation referring to Jackson’s criticism on the mainstream terrorism studies. The author, Zeynep Kaya, refers to Richard Jackson (2007)’s article titled “The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies” and devotes a separate sub-heading to Critical Terrorism Studies. However, it seems that these critics have not been taken into account in terms of the overall course of the study.

17	Sulhi Dönmezer	11	21
18	Nihat Ali Özcan	8	20
19	Vladimir İlyiç Lenin	18	20
20	David C. Rapoport	9	19

**Chart.2:** The Most Reference Given: First Ten Sources

Citations	Publications
16	Hoffman, Bruce. <i>Inside Terrorism</i> . New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
12	Taşdemir, Fatma. <i>Uluslararası Terörizm Karşı Devletlerin Kuvvete Başvurma Hakkı</i> [Right to Use of Force By States Against
9	Schmid, Alex P. and Albert J. Jongman. <i>Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature</i> . New
9	Caşın, Mesut Hakkı. <i>Uluslararası Terörizm</i> [International Terrorism]. Ankara: Nobel, 2008.
9	Kongar, Emre. <i>Küresel Terör ve Türkiye</i> [Global Terrorism and Turkey]. İstanbul: Remzi, 2002.
8	Laqueur, Walter. <i>Terrorism</i> . US: Little, Brown and Company, 1977.
8	Demirel, Emin. <i>Terör</i> [Terror]. İstanbul: IQ, 2001
8	Özcan, Nihat Ali. <i>PKK (Kürdistan İşçi Partisi) Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntemi</i> [PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party): Its History, Ideology
8	Wardlaw, Grand. <i>Political Terrorism, Theory, Tactics and Countermeasures</i> . London: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
8	Beşe, Ertan. <i>Terörizm, Avrupa Birliği ve İnsan Hakları</i> [Terrorism, the European Union and Human Rights]. Ankara: Seçkin, 2002.

The second problem derives from the security sphere that monopolizes terrorism studies and prevents ordinary scholars from carrying out extensive research. We hardly came across any anthropological and sociological Ph.D.

dissertations analyzing the internal dynamics of the concept; i.e., social physiology or social movement studies that prevent scholars from looking at the subject from the inside. The exception is Necati Alkan's dissertation "The Women in a Terrorist Organization in Turkey: A Sociological Perspective," which is patterned on a sociological perspective and features semi-structured interviews with 20 PKK militants.<sup>17</sup> However, the author, a scholar in a police academy, looks at the subject from a mainstream terrorism perspective, giving an inscription to the state in its struggle against terrorism. Therefore, the dissertations classify terrorism as a deviant act rather a subject that should be understood in terms of its psycho, sociological, and political dynamics.

Thus, when we look at the literature, prominent dissertations are produced by scholars from the state security forces such as policemen, soldiers, etc. Seventeen of the dissertations were executed in the Turkish Military Academy and the Police Academy.<sup>18</sup> Besides, many security officials have written their dissertations in civil universities.<sup>19</sup> As seen in Charts 1 and 2, their studies also dominate the literature, and the Ph.D. dissertations we evaluate primarily address epistemological perspectives, mainly studies on the PKK. Although they use a wide range of datasets, their perspective is solely a positivistic one; in other words, their studies are classical terrorism studies with regard to the socialization process of these scholars. They generally perceive themselves as agents of the state rather than civil scholars. This also stems from the immaturity of security studies in Turkey, which have not merged profoundly with anthropology, philosophy, and sociology, and uses Western-oriented theoretical frameworks, rather than finding local theories peculiar to Turkey.

The third point concerns academic freedom in Turkey: scholars cannot go beyond hegemonic discourses and ideas in an academy due to the anxiety of the state security apparatus. As a result, terrorism studies are engaged with statist and nationalist scholars who perceive themselves as agents of the state. For example, Engin Avcı's dissertation, "Justification of Radical Islamist Terrorism: Turkish Hizbullah Case" is one of the good examples of this case. Although the author evaluates terrorism and Islamist terrorism profoundly, his dissertation falls short in specifically analyzing socio-economic and political conditions

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<sup>17</sup> See Necati Alkan, "Türkiye'de Bir Terör Örgütünde Sosyolojik Açıdan Kadınlar" [From the Sociological Perspective Women in A Terrorist Organization in Turkey], (PhD diss., Ankara University, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> The theses executed in these institutions, which are part of the security device in Turkey, are prepared either under the Defense Science or Security Science Institute. However, only 10 of the dissertations were held in the Department of International Relations.

<sup>19</sup> Among civil universities, it is seen that most of the doctoral theses on terrorism are prepared at Ankara University. After Ankara University which is ranked first with 14 doctoral theses, İstanbul University is the second with 10. Other universities are in the lower rank with 5 or less theses on terrorism.



specifically creating Islamist terrorism in general, and Turkish Hezbollah in particular. Rather, the dissertation focuses on the terrorism strategies of Hezbollah.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, terrorism studies in Turkey contribute to the literature in the context of the cases, particularly the PKK and Turkish Hezbollah subjects. From the theoretical point of view, the literature in Turkey has a strong deficiency in connecting theoretical discussion with the cases. This stems from the fact that there has been almost no effort in the production of theory and epistemology in terrorism studies. In other words, the researchers address Western-oriented theories and are often not able to link them with local cases. In this vein, the studies are patterned on mainstream terrorism studies, and none of the dissertations was executed from a critical perspective. This is roughly due to two reasons: limits on academic freedom in Turkey and the monopolization of terrorism studies by the state security apparatus. Limits on academic freedom, especially the factors such as privacy decisions, legal blocking and the difficulty of receiving official data, restrict “civil” scholars working on terrorism to carry out documentary and field research. In this regard, the structural advantage that scholars from state security apparatus (military or police staff writing a dissertation on terrorism) have in accessing official data and documents or the field itself offers the fundamental constituent to facilitating monopolization in this area. This prevents civil scholars from developing the field and making important contributions to it.

These two problems cause another problem: scholars mainly use secondary resources. These lead many scholars to rely on media news covering the government’s official statements, and such news is often likely to contain manipulative information. As a result of all these factors restricting the possibility of critical thinking on terrorism studies, the Ph.D. dissertations on terrorism studies in Turkey, unfortunately, remained largely positivistic and mainstream. In our dataset, we came across only one sociological Ph.D. dissertation directly related to the concept of terrorism. However, this dissertation grounded its perspective on mainstream terrorism studies, which are very positivistic, narrating the dynamics of terrorism for the state, rather than deconstructing both the state’s and the PKK’s discourses and power relations in order to understand the dynamics that create separatist terrorism.

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<sup>20</sup> See Engin Avcı, “Radikal İslamcı Terörizmin Meşru Gösterilmesi: Türkiye Hizbullahı Örneği” [Justification of the Radical Islamist Terrorism: Turkish Hizbullah Case], (PhD diss., Ankara University, 2011).

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