

Review Essay

**The Politics of Contemporary Capitalism in Turkey
(and the Politics of its Interlocutors)****Cemal Burak Tansel**

Ayşe Buğra and Osman Savaşkan, *New Capitalism in Turkey: The Relationship between Politics, Religion and Business*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2014. 224 pp. £70.00 hardback.

E. Fuat Keyman and Şebnem Gümüşçü, *Democracy, Identity and Foreign Policy in Turkey: Hegemony through Transformation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 216 pp. £58.00 hardback.

İsmet Akça, Ahmet Bekmen and Barış Alp Özden (eds), *Turkey Re-framed: Constituting Neoliberal Hegemony*. London: Pluto, 2014. 304 pp. £25.00 paperback.

INTRODUCTION

On 27 May 2013, Jeffrey Sachs published an online article praising Turkey's 'remarkable' achievements under the leadership of the ruling Justice and Development Party (henceforth, AKP) by reciting accolades for the government's macroeconomic policy and its 'smart diplomacy' in a 'complicated neighbourhood'. Sachs reiterated a statement which, having been repeated by Turkish government officials *ad nauseam*, now carries the certitude of an article of faith: under the AKP leadership 'the economy has grown rapidly, inequality is declining, and innovation is on the rise'.¹ Sachs's

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1. J. Sachs, 'Why Turkey is Thriving', *Project Syndicate* 27 May 2013: <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/inside-the-turkish-economic-miracle-by-jeffrey-d--sachs>. See, for example, a recent instance of the same proclamation by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: 'Foreign Trade Capacity of \$1 Trillion is an Achievable Goal for Turkey', *Daily Sabah* 25

assessment is based on a set of benchmarks — ranging from the strengthening of a liberalized competitive economy to the expansion of democratization initiatives — that have been utilized extensively by a broad range of actors to evaluate the AKP rule in the last decade. The party itself has risen on a platform that champions these standards, presenting itself (and being presented by those sympathetic to its policies) as ‘a globalist, market-oriented, pro-Western, and populist political party’ (Dağı, 2008: 30).

This, in turn, has led many observers to portray its initial electoral victory as a step towards ‘the normalization of Turkey’s century-old Westernization adventure’ (İnsel, 2003: 306). The successive AKP governments have followed what Sachs labels ‘prudent monetary and fiscal policies’, earning the approval of international economic and political institutions, while the government’s campaign against military tutelage has effectively disarmed the political influence of the army, the *bête noire* of Turkish democratization.² As the AKP ‘[appeared] to have chosen change over status quo, effective governing over populism, and democratization over nationalism and isolations’ (Keyman and Koyuncu, 2005: 125), Turkey’s future seemed bright, its own pastures had never been greener.

A day after Sachs’s piece went online, the first spark of what would turn into the biggest popular uprising in the country’s recent history was lit as a group of protesters occupied the Gezi Park in Taksim Square. The government’s violent response to the protests, combined with the AKP’s staunch rejection of the demands for greater rights and freedoms as well as the explosive effects of contradictions unleashed by a decade-long intensified push towards neoliberalism transformed Gezi into a nationwide phenomenon. Yet Gezi was neither an anomaly in a perfectly functioning system of (neo)liberal governance, nor a transient display of discontent by a ‘new middle class’ (cf. Yörük and Yüksel, 2014: 113). While the protests fulfilled the crucial function of refocusing the public debate on the questions of citizenship, democratic participation, social and political rights, inequality and the socio-economic and environmental costs of neoliberalism, these issues did not appear out of thin air in the last two years; nor are they likely to disappear in the foreseeable future. Today, for broad segments of the Turkish public and the international community, the AKP regime stands for an authoritarian rule relying ever more heavily on the arbitrary exercise of the state’s coercive, administrative and judicial apparatuses to maintain itself, while its ‘economic miracle’ has left in its place an increasingly fragile

October 2014: <http://www.dailysabah.com/economy/2014/10/25/foreign-trade-capacity-of-1-trillion-is-an-achievable-goal-for-turkey>.

2. Illustrative of the extent to which the AKP’s economic outlook was shared by the EU, Olli Rehn, the then European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Euro, declared in 2012 that ‘Turkey’s economy has undergone a miracle over the past ten years’. See ‘Turkish Economy a Miracle, Says EU Vice President Rehn’, *Hürriyet Daily News* 17 May 2012: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-economy-a-miracle-says-eu-vice-president-rehn.aspx?pageID=238&nID=20933&NewsCatID=344>

economy riddled with issues of precarious employment, chronic unemployment, inequality and indebtedness. Understanding the labyrinthine politics of contemporary capitalism in Turkey thus requires comprehensive interrogations that maintain a critical outlook and reach beyond the myopia of the last decade. Fortunately, that is exactly what the three books under review in this article claim to offer us.

NEW CAPITALISM, THE SAME OLD CAPITALIST STATE?

To what extent does the AKP government represent a transformative shift in the country's post-coup neoliberal consensus? Are the new major players in the economy (viz. the much-vaunted 'Islamic bourgeoisie'), large-scale privatization efforts and restructuring of the state's administrative capacities merely variations on the existing theme of neoliberal capitalism, or should they be perceived as the harbingers of a new constellation of structural transformations spearheaded by the AKP? Firmly grounded in a historical institutionalist approach imbued with Polanyian motifs, *New Capitalism in Turkey* asserts that these questions could only be adequately answered with 'an analysis of the interface between the domestic factors . . . and the international ones that define the constraints and the opportunities presented by the characteristic features that capitalism manifests on a world scale' (p. 175). Accordingly, Ayşe Buğra and Osman Savaşkan trace the tectonic realignments in Turkish economic governance in the last decade by contextualizing them as part of 'the global changes that began in the 1970s and led to the emergence of a new form of capitalism' (p. 1). The major components of this 'new form' on a global scale include 'financial liberalization, labor market de-regulation and widespread commercialization of agriculture and social services' (p. 8), and as such, they broadly correspond to the set of practices and processes that have been analysed under the rubric of neoliberalism — a term rarely used by the authors. The analytical focus is fixed on the state's enduring pivotal role in organizing the economy, the relationship between the political actors and the major business associations and the widely discussed, though scarcely substantiated, influence of religion on shaping the ideological and political parameters of the main actors of Turkey's 'new capitalism'. The book tackles these issues in admirable depth and clarity, and provides a carefully curated collection of sources which detail the motivations and mechanisms that have propelled the processes of neoliberalization under the AKP's reign.

The well-documented analysis in the book effectively deconstructs two popular assumptions about the contours of the existing neoliberal regime in Turkey, namely the arguments that (i) the AKP-promoted rise of civil society actors resulted in the 'retreat of the state', curbing both the state's unproductive involvement in the economy and its non-democratic impulses; and that (ii) there now exists a vicious struggle between the 'secular'

İstanbul-based bourgeoisie and a rapidly growing 'Islamic' or 'conservative' bourgeoisie spiralling out from the Anatolian periphery. The second argument contends that this contestation between the 'secular' Praetorian guards of Turkish capitalism and its 'Islamic' grassroots counterpart is epitomized by the overall orientation of closely knit business associations such as TÜSİAD (Turkish Industry and Business Association) and MÜSİAD (Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen) and that the conflict between the two fractions of the bourgeoisie effectively represents the broader secular–Islamist divide in society.

Equating neoliberalism with the 'retreat of the state' has long lost its dominant position in the literature but Buğra and Savaşkan are not simply flogging a dead horse. Through dissecting both the discourses and practices revolving around the issues of state regulation/deregulation and involvement in the economy, the authors methodically reveal that the state can restructure its regulatory capacity in ways that deliberately promote neoliberal policies, by *actively* removing the obstacles before capital accumulation and prioritizing the interests of (certain) bourgeois fractions. The empirical demonstration of this argument constitutes some of the most exciting parts of the book, as the authors comprehensively unpack the mechanisms with which the AKP government has systematically dismantled, reconfigured and consolidated a plethora of administrative and judicial apparatuses in line with a broader neoliberal policy. From the centralization and pacification of independent regulatory agencies to the remodelling of the housing development administration as a de facto private competitor in a booming construction sector, the book reveals that the state has, time and again, utilized its executive, legislative and coercive functions to abolish the barriers to capital accumulation regardless of the social, economic and environmental cost.

On the contestations of the bourgeois fractions and their relationship with the AKP regime, the book once again offers a picture that goes well beyond the above-mentioned representation of diametrically opposed 'secular' and 'Islamic' bourgeoisies. The authors proclaim that the 'political cleavages within the Turkish business community are impossible to reduce to a simple dichotomy between the conservative provincial Muslim bourgeoisie situated in the constituency of political Islam and the secularist business elite established in the old industrial centers' (p. 151). They further warn the reader 'against the tendency to make a generalization about the provincial business community as consisting of only conservative Muslims who differ in their cultural outlook from the İstanbul-based large entrepreneurs' (p. 127). While the analysis reveals that religion constitutes 'a network resource' (p. 17) and a thoroughly neoliberalized Islamic discourse plays 'a non-negligible role in legitimizing money-making activities and assuaging the resentment of disadvantaged segments of the population' (p. 135), the axes on which the bourgeois fractions compete are shaped by their historically constituted sectoral orientations, the extent to which they are incorporated into regional and global production/commercial chains and the thorny issue of securing

easy access to the state through political linkages. Contrary to the popular perception of the ‘Islamic bourgeoisie’ as a class of locally based, independent entrepreneurs, Buğra and Savaşkan maintain that ‘the pivotal ventures in the new entrepreneurs’ career paths occurred outside their hometowns, and local industrial experience or capital accumulation played only a scant role in the process’ (p. 90). What the authors observe is that the development trajectory of these businesses has been shaped largely by their interaction with the central government. Accordingly, the associations of the ‘Islamic bourgeoisie’ became the nexus through which these businesses ‘mutually benefit[ed] from government support’ (p. 137). The businesses that have grown rapidly through public–private partnerships and lucrative tenders distributed by ‘the central government or local administrative branches of the central government’ (p. 90) in turn ‘used economic resources . . . to support the ruling political party’ (p. 12). The authors conclude their analysis with a damning indictment of the AKP regime which deserves to be quoted in full:

The ‘actually existing capitalism’ in Turkey has a regulatory framework that has been continuously modified to open more space for arbitrary government intervention in support of politically privileged entrepreneurs. It has at times involved the use of punitive tax inspections against the opponents of the regime in rather alarming ways. Environmental concerns, sensitivity to labor rights and attempts to create ‘decent work’ opportunities do not appear among the policy priorities. Neither are respect for human rights and freedom of expression characteristic features of the prevailing political regime. (p. 173)

The analysis offered in *New Capitalism* is a key reminder that local actors interpret and, in turn, shape neoliberal policies in accordance with their own circumstances, rather than adopting policy templates directly through the global transmissions of an omnipresent neoliberal agency comprising international institutions, think tanks and intellectuals (cf. Mirowski, 2013). The book also successfully sidesteps some of the shortcomings associated with historical institutionalist approaches such as the tendency to neglect ‘the indispensable role played by agents of change who act within the broader remit of structurally embedded institutions’ (Regilme, 2014: 286). Yet the authors’ rejection of monolithic accounts of neoliberalism, which they largely affiliate with Marxist studies (p. 24, n.6), comes at the cost of de-emphasizing the structural tendencies of the capitalist mode of production and the capitalist state. Buğra and Savaşkan articulate their contention with Marxist approaches on the grounds of the latter’s ‘homogeneous’ conceptualization of capital and its tendency to downplay the ‘non-economic determinants’ of class (p. 4). It is difficult to agree with this portrayal of the extant Marxist literature, not only because the lineage of Marxist social theory is replete with mediations on the role of ‘non-economic determinants’ of class but, more poignantly, avowedly Marxist approaches in IR/IPE have long affirmed that ‘*culture is integral to the trajectories of national political economies*’ (Bruff, 2008: 32, original emphasis; Morton, 2007). Entering a critical dialogue with the voluminous Marxist literature on neoliberalism could have provided avenues for the authors to enrich their analysis by directly taking into account

how a host of structural processes, from the increased commodification of labour and reproduction to financialization, have defined the AKP-led neoliberalism.

Such an engagement could also have clarified and focused the theoretical lenses with which the authors examine state–society interaction. A fleeting passage in the book reminds us that, due to the impact of neoliberalism on ‘[blurring the boundaries] between the public and the private or between the governmental and the non-governmental . . . the new system of capitalist governance does not easily lend itself to models of interaction between different social actors situated in distinct institutional realms of the state, the market and civil society’ (p. 9). This statement reveals a striking evolution and a growing tension in Buğra’s thinking from her influential monograph *State and Business in Modern Turkey* (1994), where the analysis was shaped by a Weberian conceptual framework that demarcated distinct and externally related spheres of the state and civil society, precisely a ‘model of interaction’ that the author now seems reluctant to defend. In *State and Business*, Buğra’s detailed exploration of the effects of the ‘uncertainty inducing character of state intervention in Turkey’ and ‘the market-shaping role of the state’ (1994: 70, 187) led her to position the Turkish state both as a crucial actor in determining the trajectory of economic development and the archetypal representative of a ‘state tradition’ which arbitrarily impeded capital accumulation through politically motivated interferences. Buğra’s methodological rejection of the ways in which ‘the general theories’ à la ‘mainstream economic theory’ and ‘Marxian analyses’ defined ‘the notions of “interest,” “class,” and “state”’ (1994: 2), her affinities with the ‘state tradition’ thesis and her adoption of Polanyi’s ‘disembodied’ conception of the market (Dale, 2012: 9) veiled the state’s role in maintaining accumulation regimes *despite* its seemingly erratic interventions on behalf of or against the interests of the bourgeoisie.

In *New Capitalism*, Buğra and Savaşkan turn the argument on its head and reveal that the policies and practices with which the existing accumulation regime is reproduced in Turkey *rely on* the type of state interventions that Buğra had previously conceived as the root causes of ‘the highly unstable business environment’ and ‘the fundamental uncertainty characterizing the social and political context of entrepreneurship’ (1994: 28–9). One may speculate that the changing function of the state’s involvement signals precisely the novelty of ‘new capitalism’, hence no real divergence between the core arguments in *State and Business* and *New Capitalism*. But this position can only be defended if the “blurring of boundaries” between . . . the governmental and the non-governmental’ (p. 9) as well as the state’s fundamental role in preserving the circuits of capital accumulation are accepted as novel products of neoliberalism — an argument that effectively masks the crucial aspects of the historical role played by the *capitalist state* in Turkey.

WHEN THEORY TAKES A WRONG TURN...

Democracy, Identity and Foreign Policy in Turkey attempts to provide a comprehensive balance sheet of the AKP's twelve-year reign — or what the authors call 'the AKP experience' — by examining the sources and impact of the party's electoral success as well as the determinants of its economic programme and foreign policy. In its bid to locate the 'AKP experience' within a global-historical continuum, shaped by both the country's own historical specificities and an overarching international system, the book advances the 'concept' of *transformation* as a 'a key/central concept in understanding modern Turkey' (p. 11). What the authors mean by the 'concept' of transformation is a rather convoluted abstraction which proves to be the book's analytical Achilles' heel. On the one hand, its usage in the book corresponds to the term's colloquial locution, not unlike the way in which Buğra and Savaşkan carefully refer to the '[e]conomic and political transformations ushered in by neo-liberal globalization' (p. 111); that is, the word 'transformation' signifies processual radical change. The instances of this usage manifest in parts where the authors repeatedly make reference to 'domestic transformations', 'significant changes and transformations', etc. (pp. 25, 15).

On the other hand, the authors' rendering of the *concept* is different from this conventional definition. What Keyman and Gümüşçü mean by 'transformation' is 'Transformation with a capital T' — here 'transformation' does not qualify the scope of change a subject has undergone (as in its conventional usage), but *transformation itself* becomes a distinct subject which, based on the authors' discussion, emerges as a 'complex process' operating at a systemic level with far-reaching structural capacities (p. 94).³ According to the authors, Transformation 'involves three dimensions': it (i) 'entails change as well as continuity in economic, social, and political realms' and *determines* 'the parameters of politics and its cognitive and institutional framework'; (ii) *determines* the winners of political struggles' and *functions* as a selection mechanism which poses challenges/risks and provides opportunities/potential to contenders of power'; (iii) is by no means a facilitator of democratization as 'its relation to democratization is nonlinear and ambiguous' (pp. 11–12, emphasis added). Furthermore, Transformation is 'accompanied' by four processes, namely those of modernization, democratization, globalization, and Europeanization (p. 2). The authors claim that these four processes are 'involved' in the 'ongoing, multidimensional, multiplex, and complex . . . process of transformation [with capital T]' (p. 16), yet it is not explained how they interact with and/or are shaped by the ultimately more general process of Transformation that the authors want us to regard as a 'key' concept to understand contemporary Turkey.

3. To distinguish these two usages in the rest of the review, I will refer to the 'concept' as 'Transformation' or 'with a capital T'.

The analytical promise of adopting this framework is unclear at best and counterproductive at worst. The authors' account elusively maintains that Turkey, since its republican incarnation in 1923, 'has been undergoing transformation [with capital T] that involves the processes of modernization, democratization, globalization, and Europeanization' (p. 2). The AKP emerges as the 'product' of the 'complex' Transformation and its political rise is explained in relation to 'its ability to effectively govern these processes [of modernization, democratization, globalization, and Europeanization]' (pp. 163, 29). In turn, the authors argue that the party pioneered another set of transformations (not with capital T), as it is maintained that 'the AKP has carried out substantial transformation accompanying these four processes since 2002' (p. 2). Put simply, the reader is confronted by a cyclical account of structure–agency where the structure (Transformation) is argued to have *produced* a certain political actor (the AKP) which, in turn, has 'mobilized' and 'exploited the opportunities' provided by the elements of the same structure, respectively the 'processes' of modernization, democratization, globalization and Europeanization (p. 3). The chain of causality embedded in the argument is not only difficult to follow, but is also shot with contradictions as the authors flippantly switch between two essentially different renderings of the 'concept' of transformation.

While in the exposition of their conceptual parameters the authors argue that Transformation has the capacity to *determine* 'the winners of political struggles' (p. 11–12), they simultaneously suggest that a self-made electoral success 'allowed the AKP to carry out an extensive transformation in Turkey in the last decade' (p. 3). It is not clear whether the two uses of 'transformation' in these clauses correspond to the same phenomenon, though the fact that the latter 'transformation' is presented as a process concocted by the AKP leads us to assume that it is not the structuring process captured by the 'concept' of Transformation. Even if we overlook the categorical tension and the inconsistencies in the ways in which the book's main concept is utilized, we are left with an underdeveloped conceptual scaffold which fails to *theorize* and *explain* the relationship between these four different processes, the current shape of Turkish politics and the general 'complex' process (i.e. Transformation) which is projected as an autogenerative structure capable of 'determining the parameters of politics and its cognitive and institutional framework' (p. 11).

The lack of conceptual clarity further diminishes the analytical strength of the study. Aside from brief isolated references to certain characteristics of the four processes, nowhere in the book do the authors offer detailed discussions of the fundamental terms on which they base their analysis, hence the onus of piecing together the conceptual puzzle falls on the reader. 'Globalization', for example, is discussed in several instances with the 'financial' prefix. The most detailed explanation provided states that the process 'led to the "expansion of capitalist relations, industrialization, urbanization and individuation," which strengthened the popular component of bifurcated

modernization program in Turkey vis-à-vis the institutional component, led by the secular state elite' (p. 31). Despite its central place in the book, the term 'modernization' inexplicably receives no clarification or critical scrutiny, which, in the absence of such reflection, resonates with the *démodé* Rostowian modernization scheme. Similarly, there is no discussion of the way in which the authors deploy the term 'hegemony'. Do Keyman and Gümüşçü subscribe to a Gramscian rendering of the concept, that is, 'the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent' (Gramsci, 1971: 80n.49, Q19§24)? Do they simply use the term to mean 'dominance'? The reader has to conduct their own inquiry to answer these questions as the book fails to give content to one of its key concepts. Against the background of this hollow conceptual framework, the reader is confronted with a barrage of seemingly interlinked categories which results in the formulation of perplexing statements, such as that 'since the 1980s, and especially since the 1990s, the process of modernization involved globalization, and acted as modernization with democratization and globalization' (p. 16).

The empirical demonstration of Turkey's twin transformations (T: the structuring 'complex process' of Transformation; t: the conjunctural one triggered by the AKP) represents further problems. The authors claim to 'offer a critical reading of the modern history of Turkey with a special focus on the last decade' (p. 1), yet peculiarly, their analysis remains wedded to a set of historical narratives and conceptual frameworks that have long constituted some of the most *uncritical* accounts in Turkish historiography and relevant disciplinary approaches in the social sciences. The narrative that underpins the book's historical compass is that of the emergence of Turkey as a 'rupture' from the Ottoman past and the 'strong state' it had inherited from its imperial predecessor. This narrative of rupture is captured fully in the authors' speculation that '[a] quick glance at the process of "the making of modern Turkey" reveals the *fact* that the declaration of the republic of Turkey as an independent nation-state in 1923 has brought about a rupture with the Ottoman past' (p. 12, emphasis added; also pp. 150–51). What the authors consider a 'fact' constitutes one of the most contested topics in Ottoman–Turkish historiography and a great deal of 'critical' scholarship has stressed not the *break*, but the *continuity* with the Ottoman past (Üngör, 2011; Zürcher, 1993). Notwithstanding this focus on the novelty of 'political dynamics' that emerged with 'modern' Turkey (p. 11), the authors comfortably resort to the argument that the republican state adopted the 'strong-state tradition' from the empire, within which the state is positioned as 'the dominant and sovereign actor taking its place at the center of politics, polity, and public policy' (p. 15). At the heart of the 'state tradition' thesis lies the claim that the 'strong' state in Turkey stands in contradistinction to a 'weak' civil society and '[operates] almost completely independently from society' (p. 18; Heper and Keyman, 1998: 259). As critics of the 'strong state' tradition have demonstrated, the demarcation of

the state as an institutional site of policy making, distinct from and indifferent to the configuration of social forces is an ahistorical, theoretical dead-end (Dinler, 2003; Yalman, 2009), yet its corrosive effects manifest repeatedly throughout this book.

The fundamental difficulty stemming from this orientation is the insistence on analysing ‘economy’, ‘politics’ and ‘society’ as independent realms of social reality. The authors, accordingly, present a sterile conception of ‘civil society’, perceived as a ‘third space . . . outside the political society and the economic society’ (p. 150), a sphere of ‘associational life *independent* of the state and the vital area for democratization’ (p. 155, emphasis added). The authors’ ‘critical’ reading adopts a perspective which fatally misconceives ‘the symbiotic relationship between the government . . . and civil society’ (Buttigieg, 2005: 37; Morton, 2013: 134–43). What is more striking is that this conception utterly fails to account for the extant relationship between the ‘state’ and ‘civil society’ in Turkey. As *New Capitalism* forcefully demonstrates, some of the most important actors that comprise the sphere of ‘associational life’ in Turkey today have either gained their position due to their favourable interaction with the state or adopted a political stance that is perfectly compatible with the state’s so-called “‘pervasive role in virtually all aspects of Turkish life’” (p. 15).

The framework collapses once again when Keyman and Gümüşçü turn their attention to the analysis of the AKP’s economic performance. The authors’ repeated emphasis on the ‘impressive growth rate’ (p. 91) achieved under the AKP’s reign results in a positive portrayal of neoliberalism; ‘entrenchment of neoliberalism’ is, in fact, regarded as an ‘achievement’ of the party (p. 38). It is correct that despite an uneven post-crisis performance, the AKP’s decade in power has been marked by high average annual GDP growth rates (especially up to 2007 and during 2010–11). Yet as Maurice Godelier has put emphatically, ‘the appearance of facts does not reveal their essence’ (1986: 128). The authors’ purely ‘economic’ appreciation of neoliberalism obscures the ‘essence’ of neoliberalization as manifested in its socio-economic and environmental costs. In a series of controversial claims Keyman and Gümüşçü tell us that ‘the AKP government has taken steps to institutionalize the priority of society over the state . . . in the economic sphere’ (p. 39). They urge us to consider how, thanks to these reforms, ‘Turkey [has not only] remained relatively unaffected by the financial and economic crisis, but its economic performance . . . has been impressive’ (p. 38–9), highlighting that ‘many Arab states have come to regard [Turkey] . . . under the AKP’s neoliberal economic policy as a source of awe and inspiration’ (p. 91). What the authors do not tell us is that the ‘institutionalization’ of ‘society over the state’ in the economy has amounted to — as Buğra and Savaşkan uncover in *New Capitalism* — the prioritization of pro-government businesses and the utilization of the state’s regulatory/taxative capacities against potential adversaries, and that Turkey’s ‘impressive’ economic performance amidst the crisis could only be facilitated through

massive capital inflows, privatizing major state assets, expanding the scope of financialization through consumer credits and assaulting the rights and conditions of the working classes. The corollary of this orientation is to divorce the 'economic' from the 'political'. While the authors present a mild critique of the 'AKP's swings between democratic reform and authoritarian retreat' (p. 4), the last decade's neoliberalization is portrayed as a success story.

With a severely inadequate theoretical framework riddled with underdeveloped concepts and the resultant lack of a substantial (or dare I say, *critical*) exploration that connects the threads between the AKP's authoritarian bent, the socio-economic ramifications of its relentless neoliberalism and the increasing decrepitude of a once 'model' foreign policy, the book offers us a sanitized account which is only capable of detecting the shifts in the party's explicitly ambivalent relationship to democracy. It is no surprise that these deficiencies force the authors to conclude the book with an auto-critical statement that '[t]he multiple crises within and outside have eroded the image of the AKP as the best party to govern Turkey in a globalized world' (p. 167), a direct negation of the affirmation made in an earlier chapter that 'the AKP showed that it is the most appropriate political force which can successfully govern complex transformations of Turkey' (p. 43).

NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY AND THE AUTHORITARIAN STATE FORM

Turkey Reframed presents a substantial corrective to the 'bad theory' that paralyses Keyman and Gümüşçü's book and complements *New Capitalism* with a host of critical contributions that further disentangle the dynamics of the AKP-led neoliberalization.⁴ This edited collection furnishes a remarkable degree of coherence across chapters, all of which are sustained by a set of shared conceptual markers. While the individual contributions focus on a wide range of issues, from the contradictions of the 'zero problems' foreign policy to the 'marginalisation of women's rights' (Öztan, p. 180), the overall effort aims to conceptualize and expose the components of the AKP's 'neoliberal authoritarian regime' (Akça, Bekmen and Özden, p. 3). In contrast to the dearth of theoretical clarification in Keyman and Gümüşçü's book, a succinct introduction and two lengthy historical/conceptual chapters written by the members of the editorial collective effectively unpack the theoretical parameters of the subsequent analyses in *Turkey Reframed*. The editorial presentation of this framework places emphasis on the 'ontologically intrinsic relationship between the state, politics and classes' and follows a Gramscian conception of 'hegemony', understood as 'the

4. I employ this designation in the spirit of Max Horkheimer who described theoretical activity devoid of praxis — '[t]heory that wishes to be sufficient unto itself' — as 'bad theory' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1956/2010: 52).

organisation of different class-based and class-related . . . societal powers under the political, intellectual and moral leadership of one class (or fraction)’ (Akça, Bekmen and Özden, pp. 3–4). Preconditions of a ‘successful’ hegemonic project are identified as the leading class’s (class fraction’s) ability to absorb ‘the needs and demands of other capital fractions’ and to invoke ‘a considerable level of popular consent’ (Bekmen, p. 61). The existing relationship between neoliberalism and the Turkish state is conceptualized through the prism of ‘authoritarian statism’ which, in Nicos Poulantzas’s formulation as adopted by the authors, represents ‘intensified state control over every sphere of social life *combined with* radical decline of the institutions of political democracy’ (Poulantzas, 1978/2014: 203–4, original emphasis).⁵

The analyses of the socio-economic, political and ideological elements that comprise the AKP’s contested hegemony in this book are closely aligned to the account we find in *New Capitalism*. Many of the structural reforms and processes examined by the contributors of *Turkey Reframed* directly map onto and correspond with the detailed investigation in *New Capitalism*. Both books (i) focus on the instrumental role of the state in safeguarding and advancing the circuits of accumulation through, *inter alia*, privatizations, state tenders and welfare reforms; (ii) trace the constitutive role of the construction sector, or more broadly of ‘the re-production of space’ (Çavuşoğlu and Strutz, p. 141), in the existing accumulation regime; and (iii) tease out the organic relationship between the AKP’s political ascendancy and ‘the formation of a mainstream conservative media’ (Aydın, p. 123). Similarly, both studies eschew the application of one-size-fits-all formulae associated with neoliberalism and maintain that the processes of neoliberalization in Turkey have materialized ‘gradually’ (Doğan, p. 189) through negotiations between class forces and political actors, as well as being shaped by the conjuncture of the world economy.

A similar degree of synchronicity between *Turkey Reframed* and Keyman and Gümüşçü’s main arguments does not exist; in fact, the contributors’ positions in the former almost uniformly clash with the latter’s analysis. An important area of contention between the two is that of methodology: while Keyman and Gümüşçü proudly display their allegiance to the ‘state tradition’ thesis and construct an inquiry that recognizes the ‘political’, ‘economic’ and ‘civil’ societies as distinct fields, *Turkey Reframed* — from its editorial introduction to the individual chapters — is composed of a series of relentless attacks on what the editors label the ‘state-centric’ approaches (see, variously, Akça, Bekmen and Özden, pp. 2–4; Akça, p. 13; Birdal, p. 95; Aydın, p. 126). This methodological divergence fundamentally influences the ways in which the two books interrogate the so-called ‘AKP experience’. For example, the positive assessment of neoliberal economic management offered

5. See also Bruff (2014) on ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’ for an important reformulation of the tendencies Poulantzas had so acutely identified.

by Keyman and Gümüşçü indiscriminately reproduces the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rhetoric that the crisis of 2007–08 'pass[ed] at a tangent to Turkey'.⁶ In *Turkey Reframed* the discussion of the same subject unveils the grave repercussions of the crisis for broad segments of both casualized, non-/de-unionized workers and organized labour which collectively faced a decline in real wages despite historically high rates of productivity (Öngel, p. 211). Similarly, Keyman and Gümüşçü proclaim that 'Turkey's burgeoning secular democracy, maturing rule of law, and struggle to improve human rights encourage many in the awakening Arab countries to visit this country and examine these institutions on site' (p. 77). However, in *Turkey Reframed* (just as in *New Capitalism*), we find detailed accounts of how the very same institutions have been reshuffled and used to marginalize dissent and manufacture the 'consent of Turkey's poor informal proletariat for the rising neoliberal power of the emerging bourgeoisies' (Yörük, p. 240). *Turkey Reframed* presents a coherent, well-structured collection of contributions which not only provides a comprehensive analysis of the multiplex dimensions of AKP-led neoliberalization, but also reveals the deficiencies of the 'state tradition' thesis and the broader set of assumptions favoured by Keyman and Gümüşçü.

CONCLUSION

All three books discussed in this review essay attempt to make sense of Turkey's last decade by analysing the perceived or real changes in the structures of Turkish capitalism, the socio-economic and political triggers behind the AKP's successive electoral victories, and a broader set of international factors that underpinned these processes. Despite the outlined differences in their methodological orientations and implicitly signalled recipes for political action, *New Capitalism* and *Turkey Reframed* consistently and successfully challenge the 'hegemonic' position that perceives the AKP as an agent of democratization and the purveyor of a strong, liberalized economy. Keyman and Gümüşçü, on the other hand, not only fail to account for the existing configuration of authoritarian neoliberalism in Turkey, but also camouflage the fundamentally interdependent relationship between the erosion of the party's hegemonic project and its increasing disassociation from democratic principles and procedures. It is important to note that this discrepancy between the overall assessments of Keyman and Gümüşçü and the other two books does not stem exclusively from a methodological departure, but speaks to a much broader normative question about the politics of theorizing and knowledge production. For, as we observe in the shortcomings of Keyman and Gümüşçü, the critique of political economy cannot

6. For Erdoğan's comment, see D. Strauss, 'Politics Plays Big Part in Reply to Crisis', *Financial Times* 8 June 2009: <http://on.ft.com/1cEaV6N>

limit itself to nomothetical compartmentalization of the social sciences by carving out self-contained areas of inquiry (e.g. ‘the state’, ‘economy’, etc.) independent from their historical context and dismissive of the constitutive linkages and socially constructed interactions forged between them. Doing so not only damages commitments to the production of ‘critical’ accounts, but it also, intentionally or inadvertently, serves to legitimize the existing order of things. Within the context of Turkish capitalism, such a timid ‘critique’ of political economy amounts to the mere recognition of what Sachs called the ‘remarkable’ achievements of neoliberalism while the analyses of both the concrete processes that facilitated this ‘success’ and the deleterious consequences of neoliberalization are pushed to the margins of inquiry. In contrast, the critique of political economy, today more than ever, has to be shaped by ‘*ruthless criticism of all that exists*, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be’ (Marx, 1843/1975: 142, original emphasis). Only through a comprehensive critique that does not shy away from targeting different forms of domination and exploitation (regardless of their categorization as ‘economic’, ‘political’, etc.) can we hope to fully unveil the mechanisms of contemporary capitalism and, more importantly, devise better alternatives to the existing hegemony of neoliberal governance.

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Cemal Burak Tansel (e-mail: burak.tansel@nottingham.ac.uk) is a PhD Candidate and Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ) in the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, UK. His research focuses on the historical sociology of state formation and capitalist development in the Middle East, International Relations Theory and International Political Economy. He has published articles in the *European Journal of International Relations*, *Journal of International Relations and Development* and *Felsefelogos*. His reviews have appeared in, among others, *Review of Radical Political Economics*, *Capital & Class* and *Geographica Helvetica*.