

# Charity State: Neoliberalism, Political Islam, and Class Relations in Turkey

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**ABSTRACT:** Beginning with the suppression of the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party – AKP) aimed to counteract and oppress social and political opposition. The proponents of a hegemonic liberal-conservative approach considered this process as the AKP’s authoritarian turn, and explained it with reference to the tutelary regime borrowed from either the Republican state or neoliberalism on a global scale. Nevertheless, the liberal-conservative approach could not adequately identify the AKP’s attempt at transition to the exceptional form of state already beginning in 2010. This article borrows its theoretical and conceptual framework from Marxism. It argues that the AKP’s attempt was a result of and a response to the hegemonic crisis of the charity state as a particular sociohistorical form of an authoritarian neoliberal state in Turkey. The AKP’s aim to transform and reconsolidate the charity state remained in conformity with its goal to maintain bourgeois class domination under the tutelage of religion.

**KEYWORDS:** class; neoliberalism; political Islam; state; Turkey

## Introduction

In June 2013, the *Gezi Park* protests broke out with the participation of hundreds of thousands of people, spread to other major cities, and continued until mid-September 2013. The protests were suppressed with the use of widespread and systematic abusive force by the police, which resulted in the deaths of eleven people and thousands of injured. Beginning in 2013, the deterioration of the relationship between *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party – AKP) government and its *de facto* ruling coalition partner the Gülen congregation, the branch of *Nurcu* congregation named after its founder Fethullah Gülen, resulted in a power struggle that took place at and aimed to capture the state apparatus. The last curtain of this power struggle brought about a failed coup attempt followed by a purge and the detention of thousands of people. In the meantime, following the election in November 2015, President Recep Tayyip

Erdoğan eliminated the Assembly and began to rule the country. The question of system of government was resolved with the constitutional referendum in April 2017, through which presidentialism gained its *de jure* characteristic. Crowned with the prolonged state of emergency declared in July 2016, executive power under the President’s control was able to broaden and deepen its competences to its limits. The majority of proponents of the liberal-conservative approach, who praised the AKP as the pioneer of democratisation in the 2000s (İnsel 2003; Özbudun 2006; Yavuz 2005), argued that the AKP turned to authoritarian politics beginning in 2013 (İnsel 2016; Özbudun 2015). It should be noted that a significant minority remained silent in the face of the AKP’s apparent authoritarianism (Heper 2013; Yavuz and Koç 2016).

The liberal-conservative approach can be regarded as the convergence of proponents of a liberal under-

standing of the state as a product of a social contract, and the conservative understanding of morality as useful and necessary for individuals and society. The liberal-conservative approach explained the process of Republican modernisation with Mardin's (1973) conceptualisation of centre-periphery dichotomy and state tradition (Heper 1985; Karpat 2004). The state tradition can be defined as the centre (the modern ruling elite)'s absolute control over the periphery (civil society). The liberal-conservative approach considered moderate political Islam/Islamism as an alternative interpretation of modernity that could reconcile with democracy (Göle 1997). In this sense, the moderate Islamist movements referred to those that did not challenge and even cooperate with particularly the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA) (Amin 2009, 75–78), the perceived representatives of liberal democracy and economic growth.

In this sense, the liberal-conservative approach often portrayed the AKP as a “conservative party with strong Islamist credentials” (Kalaycıoğlu 2010), and a “centre-right party where top leadership comes from Islamic roots” (Özbudun 2014), which could foster democratisation through a dialogue with the EU and the USA (Kuru 2007; Turan 2007). In the face of the deteriorated relationship between the AKP and the West as well as the AKP's increasing resort to coercion, Öniş (2015) described the AKP's ‘authoritarian turn’ as a new mode of illiberal democracy where the AKP captured the centre in order to reinforce tutelary regime under its authority. Grigoriadis (2018) confined himself to describing the AKP's rule as populist majoritarian. Esen and Gümüşçü (2016), and Özbudun (2015) went a step further and considered it as competitive authoritarian, which can be characterized by the abuse of formal democratic institutions in a civilian regime.

The liberal-conservative approach could not adequately understand the internal and dynamic (dialectical) relationship between the form of state and regime, and domestic and international class relations. In this sense, it could not adequately examine the sociohistorical context of the AKP's *authoritarian turn* since it could neither understand neoliberalism as a particular phase of capitalism nor the dialectical relationship between the capitalist state and various social classes. On the contrary, the liberal-conservative

approach rather understood authoritarianism as an internal characteristic of the state, which was conceptualized in ahistorical and transcendental terms. Indeed, the state was conceptualized as a political entity that was external to society and above class-interests, and that could aspire after certain goals and interests on its own merits. The liberal-conservative approach eventually portrayed the AKP's authoritarianism as an imprint of the Republican state tradition. Therefore, it remained inadequate to analyze the relationship between the AKP's consolidation of hegemony and its crisis, and its apparent *authoritarian turn*. It should be noted that a significant minority of proponents of the liberal-conservative approach accepted the rise of authoritarianism in the neoliberal era. Indeed, Somer (2016) broadened Öniş's analysis by exploring new characteristics of the AKP's authoritarianism *vis-à-vis* neoliberalism, and Akkoyunlu and Öktem (2016, 470) actually signalled the possibility that the AKP's authoritarianism could backslide into ‘the state of exception’ where the distinction between legislative, executive and judicial powers became obsolete following the declaration of state of emergency in July 2016. Nevertheless, the notion of state of exception could not adequately reveal the place and role of the capitalist state *vis-à-vis* relations between the dominant and subordinate classes and among the fractions of dominant classes.

This article aims to offer a consistent and coherent perspective that is critical of the liberal-conservative approach, and that examines the dialectical relationship among the state, neoliberalism, political Islam, and authoritarianism in its sociohistorical context. Therefore, it borrows its theoretical and conceptual framework from the Marxist approach in order to examine the consolidation and crisis of the authoritarian form of the state under the AKP government in the neoliberal era. It acknowledges the diversity of Marxist approaches to Turkey. Certain proponents of Marxism borrowed from the modernist approach, particularly the positivist emphasis on reason. The modernist-left understood the rise of political Islam in a society, whose majority remained Muslim, as a threat to freedom of conscience, the very basic principle of liberal democracy. Therefore, it considered the AKP's conservatism as an inherently authoritarian element to be implemented, often in alliance with religious brotherhoods and the

Islamist bourgeoisie (Kongar 2012). Certain other proponents of Marxism borrowed from Liberalism and its conceptualisation of the duality between civil society and state. The liberal-left stream considered the free market economy as a means to moderate political Islam. In other words, it regarded the process of neoliberalism, particularly through the AKP's relations with the USA and the EU, as a progressive transition to domesticate the AKP's Islamism (Tuğal 2009).

Despite their opposing arguments, both streams could not adequately examine the dialectical relationship between capitalist social relations of exploitation and domination, and political Islam as an ideology. In this sense, both could not adequately understand the neoliberal form of state and its Islamist political regime, and its relations with the dominant and subordinate classes. In precise terms, both explained the AKP's authoritarian turn with contradictory tendencies inherent in political Islam rather than capitalism. Both gave tacit consent to if not supported the alliance between the AKP and *secular* pro-EU fractions of the bourgeoisie since both attributed to the bourgeoisie an ontologically progressive and democratising role. Therefore, both streams reproduced the understanding of state as an entity external to society. Consequently, both could not adequately understand the authoritarian transformation of state apparatus in accordance with the process of capital accumulation in the neoliberal era, and the merger between the neoliberal transition and Islamisation to the detriment of the subordinate classes. Even worse, both streams could not adequately comprehend the rise of fascist tendencies beginning with the declaration of state of emergency in July 2016.

On the contrary, this article accepts a dialectical relationship between capitalist social and economic relations, and political and ideological forms. In this sense, it aims to explore authoritarian and exceptional forms of state and political regime under the AKP government in accordance with class relations. This article accepts Marx's (1973) emphasis on diverse sociohistorical forms in various societies in different epochs of development of capitalist relations. It borrows from approaches to uneven and combined development (Allinson and Anievas 2009; Trotsky 1957, 2008), in order to discuss how the interaction of unequal spatiotemporal diffusion of capital result

in a particular sociohistorical formation, including the form of state, and its political and ideological forms, in Turkey. This article acknowledges the diversity of Marxist approaches to the capitalist state (see Clarke 1991). Nevertheless, it argues that Poulantzas' (1969, 1978, 1979, 2000) conceptualisation of the capitalist state as the concentration of class struggle, and his distinction between normal and exceptional forms of states and political regimes offer a comprehensive analysis on various forms of authoritarianism in different sociohistorical formations.

Consequently, this article locates the authoritarian form of state in Turkey in the nexus of the merge between neoliberalism and Islamism. In this sense, it approaches to the authoritarian state under the AKP government as a particular sociohistorical form pertaining to the neoliberal era (Akça 2014; Bedirhanoglu 2013; Ercan and Oğuz 2015), whose socio-economic formation was conditioned with Turkey's late-arrival at capitalism (Ercan 2002; Oğuz 2008; Savran 2001). It further explores the dialectical relationship between the transition from authoritarian state to exceptional state and class relations (Oğuz 2016). In this way, this article aims to significantly contribute to the literature by revealing the concrete characteristics of neoliberal-Islamist state apparatus represented by the AKP, and the role of the state *vis-à-vis* the struggle between the dominant and subordinate classes as well as among the fractions of dominant classes. In this way, this article aims to contribute to the literature by exploring the moments and practices as well as vulnerabilities of transition to the fascist regime in Turkey so that it could trigger an academic debate regarding the organisation of social opposition to challenge the exceptional state and the AKP's attempt at capturing it.

This article is divided into three sections. In the first section, the article explores the consolidation of an authoritarian form of state with respect to the merge between neoliberalism and Islamism under the AKP beginning in 2010. In the second section, it examines the beginning of the transition to an exceptional state, particularly fascist state, as a response to the crisis of the neoliberal-Islamism beginning in 2015. In the third section, it concludes that the future crisis of exceptional state has already been developing in the womb of the AKP's very present attempt at institutionalisation of the exceptional state.

### Consolidation of the Neoliberal Transition Under the Tutelage of Religion

The capitalist state can be regarded as a “specific material condensation of a relationship of forces among classes and class fractions” (Poulantzas 2000, 129). The form of state, which can be regarded as the manifestation of different relations between the dominant and subordinate classes, and among the fractions of dominant classes in diverse spatiotemporal contexts, can be utilized to explore the relationships among different phases of capitalism, class relations, and the capitalist state (Poulantzas 1969). The form of state can be examined “concretely only in [its] combination with forms of [political] regime” (Poulantzas 1978, 317), which refers to the nature of legitimate political authority, and its rules and norms. The normal form of state can be further distinguished from the exceptional form of state (Poulantzas 1978, 290–295). The former corresponds to particular sociohistorical conjunctures where the bourgeois hegemony remains relatively stable (Jessop 2008, 129–130). Hegemony can be regarded as the organisation of different social classes under the political, intellectual and moral leadership of a particular class. Since hegemony requires coercion and consent, it articulates various ideological and political practices, and economic (re)distributive mechanisms (Jessop 1983). The authoritarian form of state, which remains a type of a normal state, encompasses institutionalized mechanisms for national-popular representation within the bourgeois democratic framework (Poulantzas 1978, 294–295). Neoliberalism emerged as a result of and response to the crisis of capital accumulation in the late-1970s, which was based on a social compromise between capital and workers. Neoliberalism aimed to resolve the crisis with worldwide expansionism through an increase in marketization, deregulation, and precarisation of the labour force in order to restore the rule of capital to the detriment of subordinate classes. In this sense, neoliberalism can be regarded as the latest phase of capitalism which foresaw the control over and suppression of any potential opposing social force to maintain the undisturbed mobility of capital (Harvey 2007). Therefore, the neoliberal state can be considered as an authoritarian form of state (Boukalas 2014, 124–125), which consists of the declined democratic institutions, the curtailment of formal liberties,

and the intensified state control over socio-economic life through the strengthening of executive power (Poulantzas 2000, 203–204).

The world capitalist system is characterized with uneven and combined development, the principle which underlines the contradictory tendencies inherent in the process of capital accumulation. Such contradictions “develop some parts of world economy while hampering and throwing back the development of others” (Trotsky 1957, 20). This uneven development occurs between countries and regions as well as within them. The confrontation and later harmonisation of domestic and international class relations could enable countries that arrived late at capitalism to leap forward. Nevertheless, such a leap could suffer from the destabilising impact of spatiotemporal pressure, and the same class relations could paradoxically encourage the persistence of traditions. The combined development “draw[s] together ... the different stages of the journey” resulting in “an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms” (Trotsky 2008, 5). The development of capitalist relations in late-arriving countries is in accordance with the opportunities and “contradictions of capitalism in general and of late capitalist development in particular,” and “the historical specificities of ... social formation” (Oğuz 2008, 1). Therefore, it represents a complex and contradictory combination of “backwardness” and “leaps forward in development” (Linden 2007, 145–146).

Religion can be considered as a pristine form of structuration of social relations and social consciousness that negotiates with capitalism (Marx 1975, 297). This article focuses on the ideological use of religion. In this sense, religion mediates the reality of capitalist relations of exploitation, domination, and competition, and turns it ‘upside-down’ (Marx and Engels 1998, 41). On the one hand, religion aims to curtail the ability of subordinate classes to control material relations (Ollman 1996, 223). Indeed, the Islamic doctrine offers an imagined path for spiritual salvation by teaching submission to Allah and obedience through fatalism (Kıray 2006, 242–244). In this way, it rejects the rights and freedoms of the subordinate classes to create their own present and future (Amin 2009, 71–86). On the other hand, by offering “a set of *reasons* for such material conditions” (Eagleton 2007,

209), it represents and reproduces material interests of both dominant and subordinate classes. In other words, it acts as “the heart of a heartless world” (Marx 1992, 244), and mobilizes the subordinate classes under the hegemony of dominant classes. Nevertheless, religion veils capitalist relations, and hampers the formation of class-consciousness and radicalisation of subordinate classes through estrangement in the realm of consciousness (Siegel 2005, 44). This article particularly examines the instrumentalisation of Islam by the dominant classes and their representative political parties to maintain and consolidate the capitalist social order. In this sense, Islamism – political Islam – can be defined as a religio-political framework that “provide[s] political responses to today’s social challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition” (Denoeux 2002, 61).<sup>1</sup>

This article considers Turkey as a country that arrived late at capitalism. Therefore, it can be characterized with a complex and contradictory combination of archaic/religious and modern/contemporary relations and forms in social structure and state apparatus under the domination of capitalist social organisation (Laclau 1971, 33). Turkey’s hierarchical integration with the world capitalist system was in accordance with the confrontation and harmonisation of interests of domestic and foreign capital, where foreign productive capital remained significant to determine the domestic pattern of capital accumulation to a great extent (Ercan 2002, 24). In this sense, domestic capital developed organic but dependent relations with foreign capital, and such relations bastardized domestic capital in the form of subordinate/subcontractor of foreign capital (Öztürk 2011). The hegemony of Western and Gulf capital over domestic capital moderated and promoted the rise of political Islam in Turkey, since Islam was considered as a bulwark against socialist movements that challenged the capitalist system as well as radical Islamist movements that challenged Western hegemony. Indeed, beginning in the 1970s, in accordance with the USA’s ‘green belt’ project that aimed to contain the socialist/left-wing movements with a buffer zone of Islamic countries (Uzgel 2009, 36–37), Turkey

developed close relations with Islamic Arab countries. Beginning with the neoliberal transition in the 1980s, Islamic symbols and references were increasingly articulated in the state’s ideology. The fusion of interests of domestic and Western and Gulf capital further contributed to the rise of the Islamist bourgeoisie (Doğan 2013, 291). The Islamist bourgeoisie refers to certain fractions of bourgeoisie that use Islam as a system of norms and values to regulate relations between labour and capital, and intra-capital relations (Hoşgör 2015). It should be noted that both the Islamist and Westernist bourgeoisie, which developed organic and dependent relations with Western capital and paid lip service to the constitutional principle of secularism (Öztürk 2011, 109), supported the Islamisation of state ideology.

The international unevenness was spatially reproduced in urban and rural areas, and within urban areas. In urban areas, workers were significantly suppressed with deindustrialisation, decrease in incomes, and curtailment of labour rights despite their organized resistance against the neoliberal restructuring to a certain extent (Atılgan 2012, 351–360). Furthermore, the Islamist trade unions, which were inclined to negotiate with the bourgeoisie rather than undertaking radical practices, were strengthened (Buğra 2002). In rural areas, while smallholders were turned into agricultural workers in their own lands through contract farming, large masses of peasants were expelled from their lands as a result of privatisation of agricultural state-owned enterprises, purge of agricultural cooperatives, and seizing of lands. The majority of peasants and smallholders were forced to migrate to urban areas and become a precarious labour force, often subcontracted by especially the Islamist bourgeoisie (Gürel 2015, 337–340). Such migration further resulted in an increase in unproductive labour in urban areas, which maintained relations with rural areas in the form of seasonal agricultural worker (Boratav 2014, 72). This unproductive labour was often mobilized with Islamism due to the lack of class-consciousness and organisation (White 2002, 233–234). It should be noted that the international unevenness was already represented with the domestic socioeconomic formation regarding the continued social significance of Islam to a certain extent, particularly in rural areas. Most significantly, while the right-wing and centrist

<sup>1</sup> This paper focuses on Islamism/political Islam based on the Sunni sect/interpretation.

political parties established clientelist relations with various religious brotherhoods, certain sheikhs and disciples of religious brotherhoods already emerged as the Islamist bourgeoisie (Savran 2015, 54–58), and thus, reinforced their economic domination over the subordinate classes through an ideological control. The neoliberal restructuring of class relations to the detriment of subordinate classes in urban and rural areas already required the strengthening of political Islam to veil class antagonisms and suppress the subordinate classes. Therefore, the subordinate classes in rural and urban areas remained increasingly vulnerable to the influence of political Islam.

In accordance with the complex and contradictory combination of backward and contemporary elements in socioeconomic formation, the authoritarian neoliberal state took the form of a charity state in Turkey (Çelik 2010; Hoşgör and Çoban 2009; Köse and Bahçe 2013; Özden, Bekmen and Akça 2018). Neoliberalism portrayed a dichotomy between the market and the state, and presumed efficiency of the former and inefficiency of the latter (Saad-Filho 2003, 7). Therefore, it outlawed any state intervention in the economy in favour of the subordinate classes. Consequently, the charity state was equipped with populist redistribution mechanisms in the face of the withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provisions, the curtailment of social security and labour rights, and the rise of unemployment and poverty. Populism, in the classical sense, regarded society as one coherent – classless – unity comprising of diverse but unified groups. In the neoliberal era, populism further constituted charity as the basis of dominant classes to restore their hierarchical relationship *vis-à-vis* the subordinate classes (Yıldırım 2013). Moreover, charity aimed to exclude the subordinate classes from democratic mechanisms by depoliticising the masses and isolating state benefits from civil rights. In other words, charity aimed to transform the subordinate classes into consumer masses who lacked class-consciousness and would submit to the neoliberal economic programmes without any opposition. In addition, charity aimed to reproduce Turkey's hierarchical integration with the world capitalist system and its dependence on significantly Western and Gulf capital by denying unequal diffusion of capital in the international sphere. In short, the char-

ity state aimed to regulate relations among fractions of capital, particularly Westernist and Islamist fractions, and suppress the subordinate classes. With this aim, it drew its legitimacy from religion, particularly Islam, as opposed to law-based social compromise (Hoşgör and Çoban 2009, 3). Therefore, the neoliberal transition was merged with Islamisation of political regime.

In the 2000s, the AKP managed to reorganise relations among bourgeois fractions, including the Islamist and Westernist fractions, under the hegemony of productive capital by utilising rentier mechanisms and coercing the subordinate classes through privatisation, subcontracting, and de-unionisation (Çelik 2015). Most significantly, while favouring and maintaining control over the small- and medium-size Islamist bourgeoisie through bidding at the local government levels, the AKP favoured the big-scale Westernist and Islamist bourgeoisie through privatisation and bidding at the state level (Angın and Bedirhanoglu 2012). In the meantime, the organic but dependent relations with foreign capital contributed to the strengthening of the big-scale Westernist and Islamist bourgeoisie to absorb most of the potential of inward-oriented capital accumulation, and sought to increase profit through internationalisation. By the 2010s, the Islamist capital already penetrated the Middle East and Central Asia with references to common Islamic norms and values (Cengiz 2016).

Since the accumulation of productive capital increased the mass of surplus product in the national economy, the AKP nevertheless obtained consent of the subordinate classes by benefiting from economic expansion and utilising populist and coercive redistribution mechanisms. It particularly utilized the Social Aid and Solidarity Promotion Fund (*Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Teşvik Fonu*) as a means to provide coercive charity (Çelik 2010, 69). In this way, the AKP maintained its hegemony that merged neoliberalism, Islamism, and populism (Akça 2014, 14). The AKP claimed to represent a mixture of religious conservatism and conservative modernity. On the contrary, this article argues that the AKP understood conservatism in relation to piety to reinterpret the relationship between modernity and its systematized critique based on reason, and religion in favour of the latter. The AKP's discourse on piety aimed to religionise the political regime in

order to replace the modern understanding of sovereign nation with the model of community of believers (*ümme*) that would submit to the executive power, the representative of capital. Indeed, the AKP understood democracy as a legitimate political system as long as it remained compatible with Islam regarding its recognition of different religious identities and depoliticized masses turning up at the ballot box (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 15 March 2003).

The AKP consolidated the charity state in order to foster Islamisation of the state apparatus and social structure. This process aimed to maintain bourgeois class domination and decisively defeat the subordinate classes under the cloak of sanctity. The AKP articulated and diffused piety through state institutions. Most significantly, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), which already developed objective capitalist interests through *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı* (Turkey Diyanet Foundation) beginning in the 1970s, was economically, politically, and socially favoured to enhance its mission to diffuse piety (Peköz 2009, 228–239). In addition, the education system was Islamized in order to bring up ‘pious youth’ (Altinkurt and Aysel 2016). In the meantime, the AKP presented religious brotherhoods as civil-society organisations to respond to social needs in the face of the neoliberal state’s withdrawal from relations of distribution. Religious brotherhoods, which accumulated wealth through charitable foundations (*vakıf*) supported by the Islamist bourgeoisie, the state agencies, and the municipalities, articulated piety as a code of morality, as a ‘way of life’ (Criss 2010, 45), in order to religionise social reproduction. They undertook charity practices, such as cash and in-kind donations in the urban and rural areas (Çelik 2010, 74–79). Significantly in the field of education, the religious brotherhoods opened private schools, preparatory schools, dormitories, and provided funds to low-income families (Peköz 2009, 99–100). Religious brotherhoods aimed to curb the formation of class-consciousness and radicalisation of the working class. This aim became significant during the child abuse scandal that took place at dormitories run by *Ensar Vakfı* (Ensar Foundation), which maintained its close relations with the AKP. Indeed, while the Minister of Family and Social Policies supported the reputation of the foundation against allegations (Sarfati 2017, 404),

the Ministry of Education enhanced its relations with the Foundation (Toker 2017).

### Transition to Fascism as a Response to the Crisis of Neoliberalism

It is already argued that the capitalist system is characterized with contradictions inherent in the process of capital accumulation. Hegemonic crisis refers to an organic crisis of capital accumulation that poses a threat to capitalist relations. If hegemonic crisis cannot be resolved through normal democratic channels where class struggle takes place, the crisis can be resolved through the institutionalisation of exceptional means. The exceptional state can be indeed regarded as a response to a hegemonic crisis in which the electoral principle – but not plebiscites/referenda – and the plural party system are suspended, the rule of law is suspended to amend the constitution and administration, and the ideological state apparatuses are subordinated to the repressive state apparatuses and the dominant classes (Jessop 2008, 129–130). Since the exceptional state further increases its relative autonomy from the bourgeois fractions (Oğuz 2016, 90), the hierarchies among, and fundamental functions of, the state apparatuses are transformed to enhance the relative autonomy of the repressive state apparatuses. In this sense, fascism can be regarded as an exceptional form of state and of regime “at the extreme ‘limit’ of the capitalist state” (Poulantzas 1979, 57), which is determined by a particular conjuncture of class struggle. In the fascist state, the fascist political party relatively dominates as the ideological apparatus, and the political police relatively dominates as the repressive state apparatus. The ideological role of religious institutions also becomes significant. The fascist state can be characterized by the continuous mobilisation of masses and the support for paramilitary forces by the state. It can further be characterized with the articulation of a particular ideology that is anti-intellectual, obscurantist, and racist, and that addresses power-fetishism of the petty-bourgeoisie, constructs cult of personality, glorifies violence, and grants special functions for family and education (Poulantzas 1979, 253–256).

Beginning in the 2010s, Turkey’s Sunni sectarian position during the Arab Spring and its aftermath followed with the rise in oil prices signalled the possibility

of a decline in exports (Cengiz 2016, 396–397). The belated impact of the economic crisis of 2008 already hit Turkey with a decline in exports and economic growth rate, and an increase in unemployment (Yeldan and Ünüvar 2016, 14, 18). In response, the AKP began to lean on and favour Gulf capital and certain fractions of the Islamist bourgeoisie, which developed organic and dependent relations with mainly Gulf capital particularly in the fields of real estate, construction, and finance as well as through the subterranean economy (Aykut and Yıldırım 2016, 150–151). It should be noted that Western capital and the Westernist bourgeoisie retained their dominant role in the national economy. Therefore, the AKP continued to favour the Westernist bourgeoisie and Western capital as a part of bargaining for social and political leverage through privatisations, precarisation of labour force, and various incentives ranging from tax cuts and deregulation to the broadening of credits (Güngen and Akçay 2016, 33–35). The AKP's failure to unify various fractions of bourgeoisie under the hegemony of one corresponded with its failure to obtain consent of the subordinate classes due to the peak of unequal distribution of wealth and an incremental increase in the rates of unemployment (Timur 2014, 47). The AKP's hegemonic crisis became more clearly visible with the Gezi Park protests against the deepening of neoliberalism and its corresponding authoritarianism (Ercan and Oğuz 2015, 114–116).

This article argues that the AKP undertook the process of transition to the exceptional form of state beginning in 2010 as a result of, and a response to, its hegemonic crisis. Indeed, in 2010, the constitutional amendment, which restructured fundamental rights and freedoms, judicial power, and the national economy, passed in the Assembly. However, the constitutional amendment contributed to the dismantling of the rule of law, curtailing of labour rights, and empowering of executive power to the detriment of judicial power in an attempt to simultaneously favour domestic and foreign capital, and maintain political stability and security of the AKP government. Most significantly, it narrowed the power of the judiciary to annul decisions of privatisation on the basis of public good (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, 6 May 2010). The enactment of 2010 constitutional amendments

following a referendum further marked the beginning of the plebiscitary era where the AKP discredited the social and political opposition by portraying their proponents as coup-plotters (Ciddi 2011). Beginning with the general election in June 2015, the AKP in effect suspended the functioning of the Parliament owing to its majority. In July 2016, the power struggle between the AKP and its *de facto* ruling coalition partner *Gülen* congregation resulted in a failed coup attempt in July 2016 undertaken by the latter (Azeri 2016). During the interim regime, which began with the AKP's declaration of state of emergency followed with its ruling by decrees (İnsan Hakları Ortak Platformu, 2017), the system of presidentialism was enacted in April 2017 again following a referendum (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016). Following the failed coup attempt, the AKP articulated a myth of revival merged with populism, where Erdoğan's cult of personality played the most crucial role to maintain the continuous mobilisation of masses and address power-fetishism of artisans and shopkeepers.

In the meantime, the AKP increased its relative autonomy *vis-à-vis* the fractions of capital through the Wealth Fund (*Varlık Fonu*), where treasury shares in Turkish Airlines and state-owned enterprises ranging from major banks and postal service to petroleum and mining companies were transferred with the aim of creating a discretionary fund for the use of executive power (Akçay 2017). In this way, the AKP was enabled to utilise the Fund as a trump card to obtain consent of and coerce various fractions of foreign and domestic capital. Furthermore, the radicalisation of subordinate classes remained limited to certain fields of industry following the crushing of TEKEL (a tobacco, salt and alcoholic beverages company) strike in 2010. The visibility of social opposition in the public sphere also remained limited with the suppressing of the Gezi Park protests by police, and with the bomb attacks particularly in Ankara and Istanbul in 2015. The political opposition further constrained the social opposition by supporting the AKP's myth of revival articulated following the failed coup attempt despite the AKP's attempt at discrediting the political opposition (Meclis Araştırma Komisyonu, 2017).

Beginning in 2015, in the face of limited social and political opposition, the AKP fostered the insti-



tutionalisation of a fascist form of state within the framework of neoliberal-Islamism. In other words, the AKP aimed to transform and reconsolidate the charity state as a particular form of fascist state. Indeed, the AKP defined this fascist state as ‘new Turkey’ (AKP 2012). Police and intelligence, and religious institutions emerged as the most important repressive and ideological state apparatuses respectively. Police were granted extraordinary competences ranging from arbitrary search and questioning to the broadened use of arms. While competences of intelligence were similarly broadened, the supervisory role of President over intelligence was enhanced (Decree no. 694, 2017). Police were further granted an ideological role with the introduction of night watchmen, which rather functioned as moral police (Şahin 2017). In the meantime, the AKP supported paramilitary forces, most significantly *Osmanlı Ocakları* (Ottoman Hearths), *Esedullah Timi* (Esedullah task force), and SADAT (International Defence Consulting) (Oğuz 2016, 111–112). These paramilitary forces were constituted with Islamist fractions, and they undertook various acts of violence by giving references to Islam (Scott 2016). At the time of writing, the AKP introduced immunity to civilians alongside officials on duty regarding their activities to “thwart the failed coup attempt of July 2016 and its subsequent insurrections” (Decree no. 696, 2017). In this way, the AKP paved the way for the legitimisation of suppression of any social opposition by the paramilitary forces.

The Islamisation of family and school was prioritized in conformity with neoliberalism and populism through an enhanced set of institutions and practices (Parlak 2016, 549). The Directorate of Religious Affairs, whose budget exceeded the budget of Ministry of Education in 2017 (Bütçe ve Mali Kontrol Genel Müdürlüğü, 2017), played one of the most crucial roles by enhancing the number, scope, and content of fatwas to the detriment of subordinate classes. Most significantly, in 2011, when workers resisted against the dismissal of union members, the Düzce office of mufti gave a sermon that portrayed any attempt to decrease profit as sinful. Similarly, in 2014, the Istanbul office of mufti claimed that occupational health and safety measures would discredit God (Güranlı 2016). Moreover, the Directorate institutionalized pious

practices in the public sphere as Islamist alternatives to secular and Republican practices. Particularly, the Directorate institutionalized nationwide celebrations of the Prophet Mohammad’s birth that coincided with celebrations of the establishment of Turkish Grand National Assembly (Karatepe 2012). In the meantime, the Directorate was granted immunity under the cloak of sanctity. Significantly, the Directorate did not assume any legal responsibility regarding the killing of schoolchildren in a fire at a boarding course on the Quran in Diyarbakır in 2017 (Güranlı 2016). Similarly, such a cloak of sanctity enabled the AKP to avoid any political responsibility. Most significantly, the AKP often excused the increasing number of work accidents, which arguably turned into corporate manslaughter with the death of almost two thousand workers in 2016 (İşçi Sağlığı ve İş Güvenliği Meclisi, 2017), with references to dispositional characteristics and God’s will while employing an increasing number of imams to appease any social upheaval in accident scenes (Türkiye Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği, 2014).

Moreover, the Islamisation of education was entrenched with commodification and marketization of education with populist elements (Yücesan-Özdemir and Özdemir 2012). The Islamisation of education was reinforced with the mushrooming of the *imam-hatip* (prayer leader and preacher) schools through either the opening of new ones or the transformation of increasing number of state schools into the *imam-hatip* schools. It was further reinforced with the broadening of religious instruction with the inclusion of religious courses, namely *Reading the Quran* and *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, which remained elective on paper but mandatory in reality in the state schools (Hürriyet, 2015). In the meantime, religious brotherhoods, most significantly the *Süleymancı* order, *Menzil* order, *İsmailağa* congregation, Ensar Foundation and *İlim Yayma Cemiyeti* (Society to Disseminate Science) that maintained organic relations with the *Nakşibendi* order, and *Türkiye Gençlik ve Eğitime Hizmet Vakfı* (Service for Youth and Education Foundation of Turkey – TÜRGEV) that maintained organic relations with Erdoğan’s family, were supported through either official cooperation with the Ministry of Education or staffing of the Ministry with their disciples (Bildircin

2017). In particular, the cooperation between religious brotherhoods and their organic Islamist bourgeoisie, and the Ministry regarding an extensive set of issues ranging from cultural courses and sporting events to social projects, contributed to the accumulation of capital while such cooperation often targeted working-class families in urban and rural areas. Similar to the Directorate of Religious Affairs, religious brotherhoods were granted immunity under the cloak of sanctity. Most significantly, in Adana in 2016, a fire killed schoolgirls in a dormitory which belonged to the *Süleymançı* order. While the dormitory management explained the fire with reference to God's discretion, the Ministry of Education continued close relations with the *Süleymançı* order (Bildircin 2017).

### Conclusion: Against the Reconsolidation of the Charity State

This article has argued that the year of 2010 paradoxically indicated the consolidation and crisis of the charity state, which stood on the pillars of neoliberalism, Islamism, and populism under the AKP. Therefore, beginning in 2010, the AKP facilitated the transition from the authoritarian neoliberal state to the exceptional form of state by transforming and reinforcing the charity state. Beginning in 2015, the AKP facilitated the transition to a fascist form of state. In this ongoing process, the Islamisation of state apparatus and social structure aimed to preserve the bourgeois class domination while providing a cloak of sanctity to the AKP, repressive and ideological state apparatuses, and the paramilitary forces as well as various bourgeois fractions. However, the exceptional state cannot secure flexible regulation of class relations and organic circulation of hegemony, since the transition to the exceptional state involves a series of political crises and ruptures, and the exceptional state heavily resorts to coercion rather than consent (Jessop 2008, 130–131). In this sense, the exceptional state remains significantly vulnerable to the radicalisation of subordinate classes and social opposition. In other words, if the subordinate classes and social opposition is organized to exploit moments of political crises, reactionary elements of the exceptional state could be eliminated to enhance a future transition to the normal form of democratic state. Furthermore, political Islam has already been

collapsing in the Middle East as it has revealed its reactionary characteristic significantly by taking an anti-revolutionary position during and following the Arab Spring and committing dreadful crimes in Syria (Azeri 2017, 594). In Turkey, despite the suspension of the right to strike under a state of emergency, the industrial action undertaken by the metal workers' unions representing more than one hundred and thirty thousand workers demonstrated one of the most significant recent attempts to challenge the reconstitution of neoliberal-Islamism. Therefore, this article has aimed to contribute to the literature by exploring the moments and practices as well as vulnerabilities of transition to the fascist regime in Turkey so that it could further foster an academic debate regarding the organisation of social opposition to challenge the AKP's attempt at capturing and reinforcing the charity state.

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