

Bilge Yesil, **Media in New Turkey: The Origins of an Authoritarian Neoliberal State**, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016, 230 pp., \$79.69 (hardcover), \$27.92 (paperback).

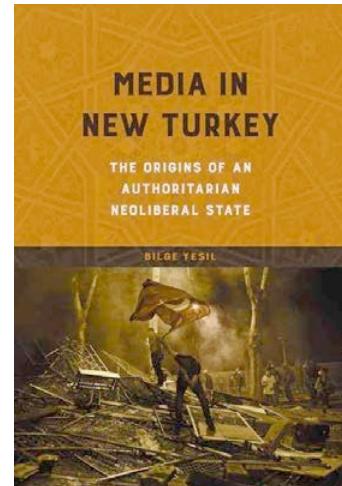
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Backed by the Western media, Turkey was portrayed in the 2000s as a model for Middle Eastern countries with its Muslim outlook, support for it becoming an EU member, democratic consolidation, and integrity with global capitalism. Undergoing a simultaneous neoliberalization and a broader cultural conservatism under the country's governing party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Turkish "model" has collapsed as authoritarianism has increased.

Offering a comprehensive understanding of the connections between Turkish politics and media, **Media in New Turkey: The Origins of an Authoritarian Neoliberal State** explores the historical and contemporary developments of "Turkey's political economic, social, and cultural terrains through the lens of the country's media system" (p. 2). Systematically analyzing domestic and international dynamics, as well as commonalities with other media systems around the world, author Bilge Yeşil argues that today's troubled Turkish media system is not only a result of AKP policies but a product of "changes and continuities since the 1980s, especially with regard to media ownership structures, nation-client relations, policy-making and regulatory frameworks, and the sway of a statist, nationalist ethos" (p. 3).



Focusing on the challenges to Kemalist ideology in the 1980s and 1990s, the first three of the book's six chapters explore the state's attempt to maintain hegemony over society, politics, and culture as Turkey opened itself to world markets and foreign influence. Through a comparative historical perspective, this section provides valuable background information that enables a better understanding of the contemporary media system. Chapter 1 goes back to the post-World War I, foundation of the Turkish Republic, which, according to Kemalist ideals, aimed at severing all ties to its Ottoman past and introduced a statist, nationalist, and secularist mood to the Turkish public sphere and media culture that lasted until the 1980s. Backed by the military, the statist model was based on a nation-building project that muted multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious voices. The state promoted a Turkish national identity that it imposed on the economy, media, and culture, along with a particular mode of secularism called laicism, which aimed at eradicating Islam—a threat to the country's new Western identity—from public life. The state ideology showed itself in radio and TV broadcasting, which followed strict new press laws intended to foster Westernization. The consistency between the media news and the state ideology also indicated the strong patron-client relationships that the military elite had shaped in the media sector. However, in the late 1970s, "Muslim nationalism" rose for pragmatic purposes: The military used political Islam as a marker of Turkishness to counter leftist radicalism and Kurdish nationalism. Offering a detailed introduction to the early media system in Turkey, Yeşil analyzes the era marked by the 1980 coup and the

political, economic, and structural changes caused by the imposed secularization and Westernization attempts.

Yeşil explains these significant changes in chapter 2, mapping the connections between Turkish and other national contexts regarding marketization and democratization. Focusing on how the Turkish media system was affected by the military coup, the growing neoliberal forces, the entrance of transnational capital and culture into the country, and the commercialization of broadcasting and investments in telecommunications, the author elucidates how economic liberalism, entrepreneurial spirit, individualism, and free-market ideology prevailed in the 1980s. During this decade, the newsprint market, held by families with journalistic heritage since the 1950s, was taken over by major tycoons who used newspapers to establish relations with politicians. The military coup in 1980 led to the closure of many leftist newspapers; the imprisonment of journalists, editors, and publishers; the censorship of media; and the weakening of press unions. The new constitution established Turkish as the state's official language and restricted freedom of speech and press. Thus, this chapter helps the reader to understand how print ventures were integrated into conglomerates during political and economic crises and how clientelism was established as the dominant mode of operation. Liberalization of telecommunications and commercialization of broadcasting placed the press systems and leftist media industries into the hands of these conglomerates, which depended on government subsidies and licenses—causing partisanship to increase but editors' and journalists' powers to decline.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the state's heavy hand and the national-security paradigm dominated media commercialization in Turkey, allowing "both state-run and commercial outlets to portray phenomena such as the Kurdish conflict and the rise of political Islam as threats to national unity and state survival" (p. 50). Chapter 3 considers the 1990s as a period of state suppression over the Kurdish and Islamic actors while further exploring the alliances in the media-military-state triangle. Yeşil underlines the role of media in sustaining the nationalist, secularist ethos during the state's containment of Kurdish ethnic nationalism and political Islam. The military-bureaucratic elite and the media proprietors made political-economic pacts against the threats that the global, neoliberal currents of the 1990s—including commercial media, civil society organizations, Islamist networks, and Kurdish activists—posed to Kemalist ideology. The military attempted to control news on Turkish-Kurdish armed conflict distributing military-issued press releases to journalists and not letting them enter into Kurdish provinces. This situation was followed by the military's criminalization of (pro-)Kurdish expressions and suppression of Kurdish satellite broadcasting under the Anti-Terror Law (1991). As a result, nationalist discourse prevailed in mainstream media, portraying the Kurdish issue as an extension of terrorism. Yeşil claims that this decade is marked by repressive state policies portraying the Kurds as a threat to nationalism and the Islamists as a threat to the secularist order. Despite these efforts to undermine Islam, the economic power of the Muslim entrepreneurs in Anatolia grew and the Islamist parties rose to power during the 1990s. These developments led to fear among the military elite and eventually to the 1997 "postmodern coup," underlining the military's role as the guardian of the state ideology.

The second half of the book concentrates on the period from 2000 to 2015, in which military tutelage weakened and political Islam firmly established itself in the public sphere, consolidating the changes/continuities in Turkey's political-economic structures and media landscape under the AKP.

Examining the AKP's rise to power with a neoliberal and pro-EU approach, chapter 4 analyzes the forceful re-emergence of anti-Western currents together with the suppression of the Kurdish media, prosecution of writers, and nationalist trends. The author discusses "the tensions between globalization and statist dynamics as well as the AKP's consolidation of the authoritarian neoliberal order" (p. 72). Yeşil depicts the changing and continuing dynamics during the AKP rule, starting with how the AKP came to power with the promise of change in the political order with new laws, reform packages, and a neoliberal approach, then how it later adopted the authoritarian statist model it had criticized. This process was not only affected by government policies but also by the global political and economic dynamics like U.S. policy in the Middle East after September 11; an incident involving the hooding of Turkish soldiers by U.S. armed forces; the revisionist discourse on the Armenian genocide and subsequent assassination of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink; and the entry of foreign capital into the Turkish media industry. Thus, the fears in nationalist circles about the Turkish state's decline paved the way for the growth of anti-EU and anti-Christian sentiments, resulting in negative nationalist coverage of minority (i.e., Armenian and Kurdish) journalists by mainstream media which blamed them about creating discrimination and not respecting national sensitivities.

Chapter 5 describes the rise of AKP-friendly media conglomerates, partisanship, and limitations to press freedoms, along with the decline in public trust of the military. It gives useful background information on the evolving relationship between the AKP and the Gülen religious movement. Exploring the remaking of the media field between the years 2005–2013, Yeşil analyzes the AKP's growing power, state politics, and the articulation of neoliberalism with Islam-sensitive elements that brought together a new elite class: the Islamic bourgeoisie. Islam appeared as a "network resource" building trust in economic transactions; politically supported capital was accumulated via AKP intervention; and commercial media was utilized for political-economic gains, normalizing the media partisanship and polarization that followed the entry of the pro-AKP media proprietors into the market. This atmosphere gave way to alliances between Gülen-affiliated outlets, antimilitary circles, Islamists, and liberal intellectuals, resulting in the Ergenekon and Balyoz operations against the Turkish armed forces. Both operations eroded the military's authority. Four thousand cases had been opened against journalists between 2008 and 2010, blaming them to report on the investigation violating secrecy of an ongoing trial or charging them having connections to Ergenekon, which led to their imprisonment without trial (p. 99). The KCK operations also led to the imprisonment of dozens of Kurdish journalists and the further decline of press freedoms. Yeşil claims that the arrests of the journalists following the Ergenekon, Balyoz, and KCK operations and the "AKP's strategic use of economic carrots and sticks all played a part in reshaping the media arena in Turkey between 2005 and 2013" (p. 105).

Chapter 6 concentrates on two major events in 2010s: the Gezi Park protests and the government corruption scandal, which were followed by new state restrictions on Internet and social media access. Discussing the possibilities and limits of online communications, this chapter provides an understanding of the contemporary media system as well as of the challenges and suppressions it faces. It shows how online mobilization has become the only communication alternative at times of crisis. Providing statistics on social media usage during the Gezi events—including the number of tweets per day, police brutality records, and the number of people arrested, injured, or detained—it helps the reader to understand the atmosphere in the country. The mainstream media chose not to cover the Gezi events or

the corruption scandal due to the existing patron-client relationships between AKP and media conglomerates. Stricter legal measures were then taken to eliminate the potential threats to the existing government, resulting in the restriction of online media sites, imposition of media blackouts, and surveillance of online and offline private data. Defining the national tensions between the secularists and the Islamists as well as the Gülen-AKP media wars, the final chapter provides background information on the recent coup attempt.

Exploring the rise and the fall of the Turkish model and its democratic shortcomings, the book reveals the continuation of Turkey's long-standing authoritarian, neoliberal trajectories. Insightful interviews with fired/detained journalists, case studies, and comparisons with other countries enrich the study. From a historical point of view, the book successfully underlines the centralized authoritarian character of the state. Yeşil's book shows that understanding Turkey's media system and the relationship between media and democracy depends on a critical evaluation of the country's political, economic, and cultural history. It serves as an essential guide for scholars and students investigating recent concerns and/or the rooted tensions in the media-politics-culture triangle.