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Review of Silent Violence: Neoliberalism, Islamist Politics and the AKP Years in Turkey. Edited by Simten Coşar & Gamze Yücesan-Özdemir. Ottawa: Red Quill Press, 2012

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Edited by Simten Coşar and Gamze Yücesan-Özdemir: *Silent Violence: Neoliberalism, Islamist Politics and the AKP Years in Turkey*. (Ottawa: Red Quill Press, 2012).

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For those who have followed with curiosity the ascendancy of a political party in Turkey that combines Islamic allegiances with globally oriented capitalist tendencies, this 2012 anthology provides a range of insights. The “Justice and Development” Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP), in power since 2002, has re-introduced religion into national politics and commandeered a growing economy. This anthology, *Silent Violence: Neoliberalism, Islamist Politics and the AKP Years in Turkey*, positions itself as an alternative, critical reading of the changes that the Party has wrought for Turkey, giving an account of the conditions across the sectors that have been left behind. The political scientists and international relations scholars who contributed to this anthology are, with one exception, on academic faculties in the capital city of Ankara, and thus at the doorway of Turkey’s national political scene. This book helps illuminate how a party with pro-Islamic principles became wedded to western economic systems, and the historical and geopolitical context in which this story is unfolding. The combination of the book’s stark title and its accompanying cover graphic, a broken light bulb languishing in a red liquid suggesting freshly spilled blood (the bulb is the party’s symbol), makes it clear that the pages do not contain a pretty picture. And since this book was published, Turkey has witnessed an intense power grab by this party and its previous prime minister and now president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; a failed coup attempt in 2016; and a spate of bombings, driving away tourism and ravishing the economy.

What has happened since 2002? Yes, Turkey began its rise as an economic tiger. The AKP party opened the country to global markets and has been amenable to some level of legal and judicial changes required by the European Union accession *acquis*. While the party is deliberately attempting to move Turkey in the opposite direction of Kemalism (the secularist “modern” model that Atatürk and the Young Turks built), several of these authors note that AKP is a more moderate outgrowth of its predecessor anti-Western movement, the National Outlook Movement (*Millî Görüş Hareketi*). There are some occasional debates between the volume’s authors, such as whether it is more accurate to say that AKP represents a move within political Islam toward neoliberalism rather than an outgrowth of this antecedent movement.

The authors are on the same page regarding the general theme, however: The cost of this rapid economic development, they argue forcefully, has been the gradual erosion of social rights for Turkish citizens. Among those losses have been chipped-away pension plans, assaults on collective bargaining rights, and new versions of patriarchal expectations for women. The irony is that these are supports most needed by the working and lower classes that form some of the party’s central bases. Other ironies include the fact that the economic policies are mostly in lockstep with IMF, World Bank, and EU requirements to conform to neoliberal, nonstatist practices in the global economy, which undermine the lives of those who need the human-rights protections that EU and international treaties simultaneously attempt to enforce. Therefore, this book could also

be read as an indictment of Western social directions that are pulling the acceding member countries into their tailwinds on their flight toward aggressive capitalist privatization.

The title certainly sums up the book's main argument: that behind the noise of a booming economic powerhouse with increasing relevance for the Middle East, Europe, and the larger globe, is the hidden secret of the assault on those in the economic margins. Where, the authors ask, is evidence of an expanded democratic system if the notion of equality is absent? And yet, the impact of the title may obscure the fact that there are more nuanced passages and arguments of this book, which does outline a story of complexities and contradictions within the party's ideas and practices: there were the very beginnings of openings toward more rights and incorporation of Kurds, for example. (These openings began to unravel violently in 2015 and continue as of this writing.)

Although the theme of the impact of neoliberal economic policies on Turkey is the organizing principle of the book, each chapter uniquely contributes to one or more subthemes, providing historical backgrounds and/or current data. Galip Yalman opens the book with an analysis of the political discourse of the AKP, which intentionally attempts to transform the "center," or the state, in part by diminishing its power over Turkish life. This discourse is a new blend of (economic) liberalism and value conservatism. Ali Murat Özdemir gives a historical tour of the constitutional changes and the role of the Constitutional Court of Turkey in the unfolding of a market-friendly state, with a detailed reading of the wording of relevant articles of the constitution. In the past, this court had ruled to support social rights, but the AKP has been transforming the court both by replacing its members and proposing a new structure. Özdemir identifies the gaps in the constitution that signal noncompliance with labor and collective bargaining rights and social security protection that the EU and ILO require—in contrast to the speed with which other Turkish laws have changed in line with EU norms. Increasingly, case law has further eroded workers' organizing rights.

Simten Coşar explores the marriage of nationalist "Turkishness" and Islam in the current government's iteration; without positioning itself as manifesting a Muslim political ideology, it nevertheless emphasizes the Muslim heart of Turkish identity. As Coşar puts it, the party has been "tactfully synthesizing its conservative nationalist policy preferences with liberal tunes" (pp. 70-71). For example, it privileges the Islamic practice of private charity over state social support to provide the society's social assistance, consistent with neoliberal dismantling of welfare states elsewhere. Social assistance, therefore, is not construed as a "right." In her chapter, Berna Yılmaz details the expansive growth of MÜSİAD, a voluntary association of Muslim business owners that has both bolstered the growth of AKP and benefited from its policies, and its philosophy. Both MÜSİAD and TÜSİAD, the secular business association, share the agendas of strengthening civil society and instilling a rule of law. Yılmaz demonstrates that TÜSİAD, however, parts ways with MÜSİAD because it favors strengthening worker and minority rights.

Gamze Yücesan-Özdemir recounts the recent history of neoliberal requirements that the IMF and World Bank imposed on Turkey, which included structural adjustments to address poverty. This author offers striking statistics that follow various employment measures across the recent decades: for example, while the number of unpaid workers has fallen, the number of informally employed workers has simultaneously risen—primarily

in the service sectors. The latter work for lower wages, face employment instability, are not unionized, and are without employer-sponsored benefits. Further, with Nalan Soyarik-Şentürk's contribution, we get a glimpse at how these current policies can be traced across Turkey's historical developments from Kemalism through the 1980 *coup* to the AKP's ascent to power. Kemalist notions of citizenship, for example, had strong overtones of a Puritan work ethic and Taylorist principles, constructing a new middle class. By the 1980s, the spaces within civil society that favored identity-based social movements such as the LGBT, women's, and Kurdish movements simultaneously resulted in the formation of Islamic identity groups. Soyarik-Şentürk details the mixed record on minority rights that have unfolded under the AKP.

Metin Yeğenoğlu and Simten Coşar narrate the recent developments in the arena of women's rights, from lifting the headscarf bans in universities to new feminist movements. Again, historical context is important: the top-down opening for women's rights under the secular Turkish republic neither established open public spaces for feminist organizing nor challenged the idealized sphere of the home for women as participants in building the republic. Under the AKP party, the family sphere remains the central domain for the woman, and school textbooks even outline the exact hours of the day she is to perform certain household duties in order to accommodate her full-time employment. Parallel to other cultures in neoliberal economies, the party blames feminism for destroying the family, and its assaults on public social assistance precisely target those (single-parent or otherwise nontraditional) family forms. The erosion of social rights hits women particularly, as they are lower on the social-class ladder due to the types of jobs to which they have access.

Birgül Demirtaş moves the reader into the arena of foreign policy, with useful background on Turkey's relations with neighboring countries that were once part of the Ottoman Empire. Today's AKP approach, Demirtaş argues, is a mix of neo-Ottomanism, imbuing Turkey with a self-identified independence in negotiating its foreign relations; neoliberalism, giving private commercial interests the upper hand in politics; and pragmatism, allowing its previously neutral position on Middle East policy to be swayed by following U.S. policy. Among the details that Demirtaş offers are the growing relationships with business interests such as Turkish Airlines, whose new routes mirror new political partnerships, including new Turkish embassies in sub-Saharan Africa. There is also a useful discussion of intertwining official relationships with Israel, Palestine, and the PKK, and very recent interventions in the Balkan nations, including the independence of Kosovo.

The chapter by Filiz Zabcı returns to a discussion of the relationships between the AKP and global neoliberal institutions. The Country Assistance Strategies of the World Bank, for example, first prepared in 1990, recommended expanded privatization and other reforms, such as a reduction of the deficits incurred in the retirement assistance system. The AKP has largely implemented such policies, and Zabcı draws out the implications for eroding public social assistance as well as the dependency relationship that gets established in these arrangements. Finally, Zuhul Yeşilyurt-Gündüz describes the neoliberal love affair between the EU and the AKP, pointing out the broader continent's own internal social issues such as continued poverty. This author underscores the contradictions within the EU's own mandates: Turkey is instructed both to increase social rights and to follow the market friendliness of IMF rules. Among the expenses for

the health and well-being of the Turkish populace are the growing deaths from silicosis disease in factories where blue jeans are whitened for fashion, little support for public education facilities, and comparatively low expenditures for health care.

Across these chapters, the term “neoliberal” seems to jump off the page, in part because it constitutes a frame for this book and a thread across the chapters—and is used with frequency. It also appears to jump off the page because this reader was curious how it was used by the various authors, and whether it was consistently defined, given its general pejorative use by the left to critique laissez-faire economic policies bolstered by governments and enriching transnational corporations. In chapter 5, Yücesan-Özdemir defines it to encompass the broad economic, political and cultural aspects of a philosophy of liberal individualism and free markets. Chapter 10 goes into detail about the economic philosophy’s development in contrast to Keynesianism. Perhaps the introduction could have helped steer the reader through these definitions, and the frequency of its use reduced once the reader is clear about this common frame.

If this reader were to re-organize the book, she would make the chapter 3 the first chapter after the introduction, as it relays the historical developments that led Turkey to this point in time. Through that history, one understands more clearly the ascendancy and popularity of the party. Chapters 9 and 10 also provide some important historical background of IMF structural adjustment requirements that set the economic path into which AKP falls lock-step, which might useful earlier in the book. This reordering might strengthen the book’s value as a primer to the outsider. The book could also use an index, as well as a list of acronyms. Some repetition across authors could also be reduced, particularly when they are emphasizing the same point about the erosion of social rights. And there is variation in the smoothness of the English across the chapters; at least two could use another edit to eliminate some awkward wording that probably works better in the Turkish language.

I do recommend this book as a solid research source, particularly for those who live outside of the Turkish context. It is largely current, with recent statistics and developments such as the Eurocrisis. For those who assume from the title that this book is one long rant from a particular ideological perspective, I recommend a careful read to see its complexities and nuances. I presume that the authors are already writing the next chapter for this book in their heads, based on events that are now unfolding, from the 2013 mass protests against the AKP party across Turkish cities, the party’s approach to the Syrian refugee crisis, the Syrian civil war, and new military attacks on Kurds. These events are coupled with further erosion of rights for the Turkish people, as the government has closed universities, fired or jailed professors, and imprisoned journalists. The authors likely have much to offer in contextualizing these and other recent developments through the lenses that they have built in this volume.