Turkey's Communicative Authoritarianism

Abstract

Communications are assemblages of infrastructures, materialities and meanings. As such they are integral to the making and intersecting of the material, institutional and discursive undercurrents of neoliberal authoritarian governmentality regimes. However, the existing political communication largely focuses on the discursive dimensions of communications, and disregards how communications partake in the governing of populations through economic, material and institutional practices. By focusing on Turkey's case, here I move beyond this approach and examine the role of communications in the development of neoliberal capital accumulation, authoritarian welfare politics, political repression and the production of popular support. This analysis focuses on information society plans, e-governance and digitisation, liberalisation, de/re-regulation, and the restructuring of ownership and control of communication networks between 2002 and 2016.

Introduction

Communications are assemblages of infrastructures, materialities and meanings. As such they are integral to the making and integrating of the material, institutional and discursive pillars of neoliberal authoritarian governmentality regimes. However, the majority of current research that interrogate the role of communications in the making and enduring authoritarian regimes focus largely on how messages and meanings are articulated, controlled and disseminated across media circuits under authoritarian rule. Concepts such as 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way, 2002), 'electoral autocracy' (Schedler, 2002), or 'illiberal democracy' (Zakaria, 1997) are used by scholars to define the co-existence of proliferated and extended media environment, and the weakening of law, and the restrictions of freedoms and rights in hybrid regimes. While the majority of these works focus on the coercive practices of the authoritarian governments in terms of controlling information and discrediting political dissent, some examine the legitimating forces of communicative practices in these hybrid regimes largely in relation to the conceptualisation of populism as a strategy, discourse, and style that appeals to people through media (Bennett and Naim, 2015; Deibert and Rohozinski, 2010; MacKinnin, 2011; Guriev and Treisman, 2015: Valcke *et al*, 2016: Moffitt, 2016; Muddle 2004; Mazzoleni, 2003). Cultural and political theories of capitalist modes of communications show that the proliferation of the means of communications combined with the abundance and accelerated flow of mediates messages not only foreclose the possibilities of political deliberation but also independent political judgment and exchange (Dean 2005). Digitised and proliferated commercial networks feed into the discursive regimes of right-wing populism, ultra-right nationalism, authoritarian capitalism and post-truth communication (Fuchs, 2018; Waisbord, 2018). Research into the forms of mediated populism in neoliberal Southern contexts also reveals the ways in which proliferated and commercialised networks introduce new logics of political mediation and enable 'distinctive projects of "people-making" with contingent political outcomes that cannot easily be classified as participatory,

democratising, or resistant' (Chakravartty and Roy, 2015: 314). Thus, the existing literature provided us with an analytical tool to place the role of communications –as messages and contents –in neoliberal authoritarian and populist politics. However, it has provided few clues about the ways in which networks of communications play a vital and integrative role of the economic, material and institutional practices of neoliberal authoritarianism. That is to say, the transformative processes in which networks of communications are integrated into the new political economy of neoliberal authoritarian and populism in welfare projects, developmentalism as well as discursivity of authoritarian populism in the changing contexts of the South remain to be explored.

This article seeks to contribute to this field by providing a comprehensive historical analysis of the transformation of the communicative sector in Turkey under the neoliberal and Islamist authoritarian rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the last 16 years. I argue that Erdoğan's administration has developed an integrated governance of communications in which digitisation, liberalisation, and de/re-regulation processes of information and media networks have played a vital and integrative role in neoliberal capital accumulation, exclusionary and Islamist welfare projects, political repression and the production of popular support. By drawing relevant arguments from critical studies of neoliberal governmentality regimes and political economy of neoliberal populism, I look at information society plans, e-governance projects, liberalisation and proliferation policies of telecommunication services, as well as Erdoğan's mediated discourses as resources for my comprehensive and historical analysis.

In the following, I will first present a conceptual framework for my analysis of the role of communications in the neoliberal authoritarian governmentality practices. Then, I will provide a historical analysis of Turkey's communicative authoritarianism, by focusing on the period between 2002 to 2016. This period starts from the first electoral victory of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) to the implementation of the de-facto presidential system under the emergency rule after the failed coup attempt in 2016.[1] The historical analysis will be based on a periodisation of two distinct sequences of events: 2002-2007 and 2008-2016. I consider the first period as the most comprehensive neoliberal restructuration process of the communicative landscape in the history of Turkey. In this time, the AKP administration claimed to democratise the communications and media systems in line with the requirements of the EU accession program. This process, the AKP claimed, liberated the communication sector from the old forms of state authoritarianism that were based on military-bureaucratic tutelage, and secularist and elitist state tyranny. Whilst 2002-2007 was the launching period for the institution of the legal, technical and political-economic infrastructure of communicative authoritarianism, the latter has been a period in which networks of communicative authoritarianism have been significantly integrated. In this way, communicative networks have come to be governed relationally and contextually in concert with the neoliberal agenda, and have been incorporated into the practices and discourses of the hegemonic politics of neoliberal and Islamist authoritarianism.

Neoliberal Authoritarianism

Critiques of neoliberalism as an authoritarian governmentality regime allow us to consider neoliberalism as a political rationality, and a kind of practice or manner of doing things that

organises the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship (Brown, 2006; Dean, 2002). Considering neoliberal authoritarianism as a form of governmentality regime also enables us to see the internal dynamics of neoliberal authoritarianism that governs through employing techniques of individual and mutual empowerment, participation, self-help and community care as well as mentalities and devices of coercion and political repression (ibid). Under neoliberal rule, the state is not only reconfigured as the facilitator of the market economy, it is also defined as the institutional power that manages and regulates the socio-economic and political landscape through political and social conflict (Bruff, 2014). While oppositional groups that resist the curtailment of democracy are marginalised and criminalised by way of punitive penal codes, large segments of society are exposed to the conditions of precarity, and forced to seek the possibilities of welfare assistance in governmentally contrived markets (Dean, 2002). Particularly in the context of developing countries, such governmentality regime, which is often led by populist leaders, implements a political economic model that ensures capital accumulation through political repression (Schering, 2018; Magyar, 2016). It uses neoliberal reform programs such as privatisation of public lands and services to form a clientelist class out of transnational and national business groups. It also redesigns welfare programs to reward supporters and to punish opponents (Somer, 2016; Boratav, 2016). Governmental projects that are largely subcontracted to cleintelistic market forces, such as infrastructure development, securitisation, empowerment and social assistance, become the key practices that substitute for the welfare state, and bring active support for populist leaders from the welfare dependent population. The new political economic model of neoliberal developmentalism and populist welfare politics is also translated into cultural politics in the discourses of populist governments that claim to bring development and freedom for the working classes, ethnic and cultural minorities who have historically been excluded from the mainstream of development and modernity (see Speed, 2005).

In Turkey, the majority of the vote for the AKP's neoliberal and Islamist authoritarian regime comes from the 32+ age groups as well as from the informal and formal working class with low degrees of schooling who come from rural background and define themselves as culturally conservative and religiously Sunni Muslim (KONDA, 2014). In the last 16 years, Erdoğan's administration has developed a neoliberal developmentalist programme that 'created benefits and charity rather than citizenship rights and impersonal policies' (Somer, 2016: 490). This programme enabled the Islamic bourgeoisie to become the main proprietor of the material advantages in sectors that are prioritised by the neoliberal government such as construction, infrastructure development, housing and energy. This Islamic bourgeoisie has also become the owners of significant media and information capital in this process. In contrast, the welfare benefits and gains were largely distributed among the informal and formal working class party supporters (Eder, 2010; Yildirim, 2009). This new model of state and society relationship is often presented through discourses that position the state as the benevolent patron that meets the needs of the 'real people' of Muslim Turkey. The Islamic discourse plays a crucial role in assuaging the resentment of disadvantaged segments of population. The religious neoliberal leader presents himself as the sole representative of those who are historically excluded from the mainstream of development, who are morally superior, and ethically pure good Muslims.

In the following section, I will be seeking to trace the ways in which networks of communications are integrated into the making and endurance of neoliberal authoritarianism in Turkey. I consider communications as networks of infrastructures, media companies and state institutions as well as ties that connect economic, social and political networks together with the flow of messages that circulate across media circuits (Barney, 2013). When framed in such broad terms, it opens up more possibilities to explore the ways in which communications are both integrated within itself and also integrate governmentality practices of neoliberal authoritarianism. Scholars of the political economy of communications have shown that communication networks have historically been the locus of capitalist development and created new structures of global exchange where previously unseen forms of exploitation, oppression and inequalities have emerged at both interstate and intrastate level (Schiller, 2000). Similarly, the historical research on communication technologies from the lens of political economy demonstrates the ways in which networks play an integrative role in the co-constitution of economic, institutional, material and cultural undercurrents of any historical epoch within modern capitalism (see Sussmann, 2016). Thus, the main question that I am seeking to answer in this article: how have new forms of neoliberal communications in the context of Turkey shaped and co-constituted the authoritarian welfares, developmentalist programmes and the hegemonic bloc of Islamic patrons and clients? The exploration of these dynamics will give us an analysis of how communications are integral to the material, institutional and discursive undercurrents of authoritarian governmentality regime that not only functions through coercion but also through consent.

The Neoliberal Economy and Its Values
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP came to power in 2002, and introduced themselves as conservative Muslim democrats, as well as being open to neoliberal global trade, and with a vision of becoming part of the European Union. The symbol of the party was a light bulb, signifying innovation and technological development and enlightenment, and the party's name suggested development on the basis of social justice. Social justice was framed in the 2002 manifesto as the empowerment of the populations who could not benefit from the development projects of the secularist and statist, and often corrupt, regimes of the past (AKP, 2002). The first period of the AKP administration was structured by the policies and practices of neoliberal restructuring and the EU negotiation processes, and by the liberal discourses.

E-transformation

In 2003, the AKP adopted an *Industrial Policy for Turke*y that ensured the 'transition of the industrial structure from consumer goods, raw material and intensive goods towards information and technology intensive goods and increasing market share by creating new technologies' (DPT, 2003: 46). While this policy was introducing atypical forms of employment, such as 'temporary employment relations', 'partial work', and 'subcontracting', it was also implementing an action plan for the governance of the labour force and population through the appropriation of information and communications technologies. The digitization or e-transformation of governance was advocated in this context as a development that would bring the necessary efficiency and flexibility to public governance, whilst also harmonizing public governance with the standards of EU (DPT,

2003). In 2003, the AKP administration founded, the Information Society Department (BTD) under the State Planning Organization (DPT), charged it with the task of coordinating the information society strategy policies at the highest level. One of the first projects completed in this period was MERNIS – a database of information on the entire population. MERNIS is meant to 'regulate the productive capacities of the Turkish population from birth to death', and in this database all information about individuals, including their social media interactions, bank transactions, purchases, health and education records and movements, are connected to identification numbers (Topal, 2005: 85). The database allowed the state to watch all citizens to determine who is 'abnormal', 'dangerous', 'sick', and 'criminal', as well as who would be more effective in the sites of production. The project was essentially launched and completed in relation to the e-Europe+ project, and did not fully become integrated into the state governance in this launching period of the AKP. This was because politicians and bureaucrats had not yet seen any short term political advantages in the MERNIS system (ibid).

Liberalization and de/re-liberalization processes

Within the scope of neoliberal restructuration programs and information society strategies, the AKP planned to minimise the state's direct involvement in communications markets. This plan included the liberalization of highly profitable telecommunications, as well as the repackaging and reselling of information and media companies that were owned by bankrupt conglomerates. In 2004, 55 percent of Türk Telekom, which had a state monopoly on wired telephone connections and related infrastructure, was sold to the Saudi firm Oger. In this process, the Telecommunications Authority – which was founded in 1998 – was given the authority to regulate the telecommunications market and to promote competition between information and communications technology companies. While the task of development and management of terrestrial telecommunication infrastructure was transferred to privatising companies, such as Türk Telekom, and to potential actors in the telecommunication market, extraterrestrial communicative activities and research went under the main responsibility of the state-run satellite company, TÜRKSAT in 2004. TÜRKSAT was also in charge of developing infrastructure for e-governance, as well as of providing all sorts of satellite communications and cable broadcasting services.

Following the 2001 economic crisis, which was considered to be an outcome of mismanagement in the banking sector, the AKP government passed legislation in 2003 that allowed the state authority, the Saving Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) to initiate legal processes that seize and resell bankrupt conglomerates and their assets, including media outlets to other buyers. The first and exemplary case of the expropriation of the information and media outlets by the TMSF was the case of Uzan – the holding company that owned Imar Bank, Telsim (one of the first two companies in mobile market, with 7 million subscribers in 2004), Star TV and Star Daily, among other media outlets, and had been investigated by former governments for the mismanagement of their assets and for unpaid debts to companies like Motorola (Akser and Baybars, 2012). From this first instant onwards, the AKP administration has used this legislation and the TMSF as the institutional body to restructure the information and media sector. While the expropriation of media outlets and the reselling processes of the TMSF has been the major tool to change the ownership structure of the communications industries, loans from state-banks, and control

of the selection processes in auctions of corporate interests have become the main apparatuses to determine the new owners of the information and media outlets.

Within the framework of EU harmonisation policies, the AKP administration lifted the ban on Kurdish language education and broadcasting in 2002, and introduced the first Kurdish language television programme on the state-run television channel, TRT, in 2004. A year later, Erdoğan would declare the 'Kurdish opening' of his administration, and state that 'Kurds are first-class citizens of this country. Their problem is our problem' (*Yeni Şafak* , August 13, 2005). Through legislative changes in 2002 and in 2005 in the broadcasting sector, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) became the constitutional authority for the regulation and supervision of radio and television and on-demand media services. These legislative changes ensured that the influence of the National Security Council (MGK) on the selection of board members would be rescinded, and that board members would be selected from among the representatives of all political parties in the parliament. Reforms also relaxed the limits on foreign ownership of media enterprises, and gave the RTÜK authority to sanction media outlets for programmes that were claimed to offend familial and traditional values (Sümer, 2007). As typical example of the AKP reform packages, the amendments that implement 'liberal values' (the political rights of Kurds), conservative Islamic values (family) and neoliberal reforms (the transnational capital in the mediascape) into governmentality practices are gathered together, and presented as necessary steps for the liberalisation and democratisation of the communicative sphere.

From 2002 onwards, Erdoğan would address Turkish citizens via monthly television programmes, 'Addressing the Nation' (*Ulusa Sesleniş*), aired on the state-run television channels of TRT, in which he explained the achievements of his government and his party in bringing democracy, freedom, wealth and prosperity to the country.

The making of 'New Turkey'

Following the AKP's second electoral victory in 2007, the transformation of the communicative sphere became even more forceful than in the first period. The changing geopolitics of the neoliberal agenda (the global economic recession managed largely through the flow of foreign capital (Kazgan, 2013)), the rise of pan-Ottomanist, and Islamist politics, and grassroots resistance (notably the Gezi Park events) against authoritarianism, worked to re-shape governance practices, and also policies in the communications sector. The first massive protest against the AKP administration was initiated by secularist segments of society in 2007, making manifest their considerable anxiety in the face of the success of the Islamist/neoliberal government. In 2013, a protest against the neoliberal urban renewal plan that aimed to replace the Gezi public park with a complex of shopping mall and military barracks turned into a national revolt against neoliberalisation, authoritarianism, and Islamisation. During the AKP administration, the biggest investment of entrepreneurial interests was in urban and infrastructure construction, as well as pan-Ottomanist projects, intended to revitalise the former glory of the Ottoman Empire across the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans (Taymaz and Voyvoda, 2012). A corruption scandal in 2013 showed the network of crime among the pro-AKP Islamic businesses, Islamic NGOs, and the AKP bureaucracy and government, including Erdoğan and his close family. All these

developments shaped the practices and policies of coercion and legitimation that would evolve in the second term to which I refer.

Citizen-focused public services

In 2006, the AKP administration adopted the first long-term information society plan. The plan listed a total of 111 action items structured around seven main themes: social transformation; ICT adoption by businesses; citizen-focused service transformation; modernisation in public administration; a globally competitive IT sector; a competitive, widespread and affordable telecommunications infrastructure and services; and the improvement of research and development and innovation (DPT, 2006). The plan imagined a major social transformation enabled by information and communications technologies, in which state institutions, businesses and individuals would employ digital technologies, and thereby, collectively institute the digital entrepreneurial society (Topak, 2010). As such, it was in concert with the requirements of the neoliberal governmentality regime. The state, in collaboration with market forces, would also foster the digital empowerment of individuals and help them begin their own businesses and to reach out to consumers by way of supporting their skills in the use of mobile and digital technologies (DPT, 2006). On the other hand, the plan envisioned an integrated governmentality practice for the empowerment of electoral support groups largely comprised by the informal and disorganised working class, those most vulnerable to the increasing dire consequences of neoliberal restructuring and economic recession. The plan launched major e-governance systems, including integrated social assistance programs for economically marginalised groups – e-health, and e-education services that would benefit, not only those who have the means to afford privatised health and education systems, but especially those who cannot. This plan became the guideline for the AKP administration to integrate the apparatuses of the information society into the political advantages especially after their second term in the office.

Since the mid 1990s, Islamist parties (predecessors of the AKP) have developed a faith-based welfare system in which they distribute aid-in-kind or cash to potential and actuals voters through municipalities that they run (Tuğal, 2017). In 2004, the AKP administration institutionalised these programs at national level, and founded the General Directorate of Social Assistance. The funding for the social assistance programs comes from various sources, including RTÜK, extra-budgetary funds, and charity funds (Bozkurt, 2013). During the AKP period, the charities, and NGOs have had remarkable funding support and have been granted considerable autonomy – most of them are associated with Islamic philanthropy in and outside of Turkey, and are linked to networks of business that have investments in the urban regeneration, construction and media fields (see Atalay, 2016 for a comprehensive study).The 2006 Information Society Plan introduced a project titled 'Integrated Social Assistance Programs', which required a digital infrastructure that would restore the data of beneficiaries, such as their incomes, pensions, work contracts, bank details, crime record etc. This network, called SOYBIS, was completed in 2009, and the management of social assistance programs was allocated to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. By 2011, SOYBIS did not only allow citizens to make an online application for aid, but also enabled all partnering institutions, including state institutions such as the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Work and Social Security, as well as NGOs and charities that

are active in the distribution of aid, and municipalities to use the database (ASDEB, 2017). Using this system, local municipalities, which have largely been run by AKP politicians, began to distribute the charity funding collected from private firms subcontracted to provide certain services undertaken by the local municipalities, often through lucrative infrastructure and real estate deals (Eder, 2010; Yildirim, 2009). Distribution of aid often coincides with Islamic holidays and festive periods, and residents of municipalities not run by the AKP invariably fail to benefit from these social assistance programs (Bozkurt, 2013). SOYBIS was repeatedly lauded by state authorities as the best example of citizen-focused e-governance infrastructure for the efficiency it provided to all stakeholders, including citizens, state institutions, and philanthropic NGOs (ASDEB, 2017).

Another major project that was developed and completed under the scope of information society planning was the completion of digitised health service. The e-health project, whose objectives were to ensure the standardisation of data used in the healthcare, to create the health records for citizens, data analysis support for managers, to accelerate the flow of information among stakeholders, and to save resources and increase efficiency in the healthcare system, was completed in 2009 (Doğaç et al, 2014). The e-health system was shaped in concert with the 2006 and 2008 legislative changes in the social insurance and universal health insurance systems. The legislative reforms actually worsened the conditions for the working class, by raising the retirement age, lengthening the pension contribution period, and reducing retirement, disability and survivor benefits and pensions. However, they also introduced a standardization of the right to health care, which enabled all insured individuals to receive services from all hospitals – private and public (Coşar and Yeğenoglu, 2009). The possibility for patients to get treatment in any hospital was presented as the implementation of the principle of equality in the structure of the health service between those who could afford to benefit from private healthcare and those who could not. Digitisation of data, and the inclusion of all medical institutions in the e-health system, enabled the mobility of patients, the access to their data across private and public hospitals, and the centralized management of the highly-dispersed funds, under the control of the Ministry of Health. It has also provided a new rationale for the control of the performance of doctors and hospitals, directly shaping funding for both institutions, and medical personnel. Although it was clear that the stored data was being sold to big data companies by the Ministry of Health (ABD, 2013), the reforms in the health system, for which the digitisation practices constituted the infrastructure, remained highly appreciated by AKP supporters (*Milliyet,* 2015).

The digitisation of public governance in education was one of the major projects of the AKP information society plans. This was so particularly in the FATIH (Movement of Enhancing Opportunities and Improving Technology) project, which aimed to integrate the use of ICTs in public education, to introduce digital content into the curriculum, and to extend the digital infrastructure to educational institutions in provincial areas. Just like all 'technology for development' projects implemented in the South through the alliance of the populist governments and transnational information conglomerates, the FATIH project was an outcome of a technocentric approach, aiming to stimulate the use of digital technologies in the classroom (Akçaoğlu et al, 2015). The title of the project – FATIH – was a direct reference to the Ottoman Sultan who conquered Constantinople and made it the capital city of the Islamic world – Istanbul – in the 15th century. Erdoğan presented this project as the

revolutionary infrastructure for the upbringing of new generations, who will 'use new technologies not as the ends but as means for the development of national culture and science by being strictly loyal to [Turkish] history, tradition, culture, beliefs and value systems' (Fatih Project, 2015). The objectives of the FATIH project remained largely unrealised – between 2012 and 2016, only some 700 thousand tablets were given to students and teachers in 81 cities of Turkey, and the digitisation of the curriculum was never finalised. Education is an area where the AKP has not been successful in satisfying the demands of its supporters. According to a poll, AKP supporters ranked education as one of the most significant problems of Turkey – after terror, the economy, and unemployment (Metropol, 2017).

Regulation

While the digitisation processes have provided a new rationale for the AKP administration to implement a centralised, flexible and efficient supporter-focused public services, the extension and diversification of the online and offline mediascape has also provided a means for the administration to enforce coercive practices of information control. From 2007 onwards, the administration deployed increasingly authoritarian measures to control and manage the online communication, and confine the networked public sphere (including the first, second and third generation controlling strategies categorised by Ronald Deibert and Rafal Rohozinski from the internet filtering and blocking to the legal restrictions, content removal, shutdown of websites, and computer-network attacks to the warrantless surveillance, and to state sponsored information campaigns aiming to silence oppositional groups and individuals) (Yeşil et al, 2017).The increasingly coercive regulatory mechanism has been mostly legitimised on the basis of protection of family and familial values, and national security and unity against the rising threats coming out of technology (the Internet), humans (traitors and terrorists), and organisations (internal and external enemies of the Turkish state, parliamentary democracy and nation).

From 2005 onwards, state institutions such as the Ministry of Family and Social Policy began to publish research reports defining and describing Turkish family structures, as well as the impact of online and broadcasting media on family values (Aile Bakanlığı, 2017). With the slogan of 'safe Internet', the administration passed legislation in 2007 and 2011 that made sure that online communicative practices are closely monitored by such authorities as the Information and Communications Presidency (BTK) (Akgül and Kırlıdoğ, 2015). While these laws made Turkey the first country in the OSCE in which the state is directly involved in the implementation of a generalised monitoring system, the laws were legitimised on the basis of protecting minors and families from the misuse of the Internet (Uçkan, 2012).

From 2006 onwards, the restructuration of counter-terrorism laws enabled the administration to penalise online content that fell outside the scope of the Internet Law, and to use personal data and communications to pursue criminal investigations, and persecute suspects, when the alleged crimes are related to terrorism or sympathy for terrorism. Consequently, starting from 2008, hundreds of journalists, and media personnel, civilian and military bureaucracy, and dissident subjects and civil rights activist groups, especially those who are associated with the Kurdish movement and rights were put on trial, or arrested with the evidences collected through wiretapping, and/or digital

surveillance. The major counter-terrorism cases of this period included the Ergenekon (an alleged criminal network of secularist and ultranationalist military officers, journalists, academics and civil society organizations that were united to unseat the AKP government), Sledgehammer (an alleged clandestine network of military officers that have plotted the overthrow of the government) trials on the one hand, and the KCK (the alleged urban and civil organization of the PKK –the guerilla organization of the Kurdish movement) on the other. The first two cases were largely legitimised through discourses of democratisation processes that required the eradication of the historical influence of military forces on the civilian political realm, and the clandestine organizations that were historically deep seated in the state apparatuses (see Yeşil, 2016). Accordingly, the trial and imprisonment of the journalists and media personnel through these cases were defended by Erdoğan with claims that those behind the bars were not journalists, but the media representatives of the conspiracy against the civilian government (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012). The KCK trials on the other hand, were justified in a political climate in which the policies of Kurdish opening such as opening Kurdish TV, language courses, and homecoming of the PKK guerillas had instigated national hysteria among the nationalist segments of the society, especially among the AKP supporters (Yeğen, 2011). These three counter-terrorism cases were especially important to see how the AKP administration created the amalgamated forces of law and technology to silence, and criminalise the oppositional voices, and to neutralise the key critical institutions of the state apparatus such as the secularist military and civilian bureaucracy (Çelik, 2013).

Following the Gezi uprising in June 2013 (in which protestors incorporated social media into their mobilisation and internationalisation of the revolt) and the massive corruption scandal in December 2013 (in which the social media functioned as the main platform for the publicisation of the leaked transcripts and audio files of wiretapped conversations revealing the network of corruption between Erdoğan, his close family, cabinet members, and the pro-AKP businessmen), the AKP administration imposed further coercive control mechanisms for digital communications. The Internet Law was amended to allow the state to block what it regarded as troublesome URLs, and to keep records of Internet traffic for up to two years. Web hosting providers can now also be blocked, even if they are abroad and change their domain name. Social network platforms such as Twitter and Facebook came to be defined as hosting providers, and are required to obtain a certificate to operate in Turkey (Freedom House, 2014). In addition to this, the Law on State Intelligence Services and the National Intelligence Organisation was amended to expand the surveillance of online users, and 'obtain data from public institutions, financial institutions and entities with or without a legal character'(cited in Yeşil et al, 2017: 8). These legislative changes not only made sure that political dissent was silenced before it reached publicity, but also criminalised the leaking and publication of secret information – most notably on such matters as government corruption and misconduct.

Networks of Ownership

In parallel with repressive and punitive measures that aimed to silence dissident individuals and oppositional media outlets, the ownership structure of the media changed dramatically in this period. In addition to the legal and technical mechanisms founded in the first period where the law, the state authorities such as TMSF, and the RTUK functioned to re-shape the

ownership structure of the mediascape, the administration has adopted another strategy to persecute and 'tame' media outlets through taxes and fines, advertisement cuts, and punishments for serving the interests of terrorism. Prominent 'secularist' media conglomerates such as Doğan Holding (owner of CNN-Turk and partner of German Axel-Springer group), which had the largest share of media ownership and advertising spending, was subjected to a massive $2.5 billion fine that radically changed the status of the corporation from a market leader to a financially fragile player in the media sector in 2009. Official statistics on shares of state advertising (paid for by local, regional, and national government) are not published, but the reports published by entities that are critical of the government demonstrate that the critical media outlets receive almost no state advertising funds (Media Ownership Monitor Turkey, 2016).

 Whilst the biggest media mogul (such as Doğan Holding) was being damaged through tax fines and advertisement cuts, the ownership structure of the media was also being subjected to transformation – in pursuit of the creation of a pro-AKP (what came to be known as 'pool' media). In return for privileges given to national and transnational companies in the construction, housing, energy and transportation infrastructure sectors, pro-AKP and Islamic business groups were invited to acquire shares in the media industries, mostly by buying expropriated media outlets through the TMSF, and by using bank loans with low interest rates from the state banks. The reselling in 2008 of the major media outlets, ATV and Sabah, to the Çalık Group, whose executive board has familial ties with Erdoğan (Erdoğan has referred to it as 'our Çalık' (*Sözcü*, April 12, 2013) has set an example for other pro-AKP and Islamic companies that have business interests in the markets that the AKP administration has opened up. After Çalık took over these two media outlets, it extended its business activities to urban regeneration and housing projects, energy systems in Iraq, and to the telecommunications sector in Albania (*Sözcü*, 2013; Çalık, 2017).

In the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring, Erdoğan's administration renewed its international policy with an accentuated emphasis on pan-Ottomanist politics, with Erdoğan having ambitions to be the leader for all Muslim communities in the post-Ottoman world. In 2011, he declared that 'the AKP is not just Turkey's party, but a world party, from Mogadishu to Sarajevo, from Damascus to Skopje, from Sanaa to Bishkek, from Abu Dhabi to Islamabad, from Gaza to Benghazi', adding that 'where there is a victim, the AKP is on their side' (Seibert, 2011). This pan-Ottomanist opening also resonated in the restructuration of the political economy of the national media scene, connecting Islamic business networks with interests in the construction and energy sectors in the Middle East and the North Africa with the networks of pro-AKP national conglomerates. For example, the Kalyon Group, which entered the national media sector only in 2013, rapidly achieved ownership of 12 percent of audience share in the television sector and 15 percent of newspaper readership by 2016 (Media Ownership Monitor Turkey, 2016). The top executives of the corporation were claimed to be involved in massive corruption, and are part of the networks of NGOs such as Nun Education and Culture Association, founded by members of the Erdoğan family (*Sözcü*, 2016). The holding company has investments in the construction and energy sectors in Qatar, Russia, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, as well as Turkey (Media Ownership Monitor Turkey, 2016). The Kalyon Group was also subcontracted to build the third international airport in Istanbul, the Metrobus system, a

new stadium for Istanbul, and the military barracks in Taksim Gezi Park, which eventually gave rise to a historic revolt in 2013.

Another example can be given from foreign investment in the national communication sector coming largely from Qatar. The economic and political relationship between Qatar and Turkey became closer after the Arab Spring, when major authorities, including the AKP and the owners of Aljazeera, supported the post-coup government of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Kraidy, 2014). Notably, the Qatar-based BeIN Media Group purchased the major pay-television firm Digitürk after the TMSF expropriated all firms belonged to Çukurova Holding, which was one of the biggest investors in communication technologies before the AKP period. BeIN Media owns the rights to broadcast popular soccer matches and is preparing to purchase additional television and radio channels (BeIn Media, 2017). As of 2016, 70 percent of newspapers and 80 percent of national television channels belong to pro-AKP or AKP-affiliated groups, and constitute the political economic infrastructure for the control of information (Media Ownership Monitor Turkey, 2016).

Extraterrestrial sovereignty

While terrestrial communications are governed through policies of restructuration of ownership and regulations that control the communicative sphere by way of neoliberal Islamic media moguls and institutions that favour this clientelist class (and punish others), extraterrestrial communications are largely left to the direct governance of state institutions in pursuit of a proactive national sovereignty policies in the airspace sector. With the launching of the Türksat 3A satellite, communication services and direct TV broadcasts reached Europe, and Central Asia in 2008; and with the development of the Türksat 4A and 4B satellites in 2011, the reach has included North Africa and Middle East (TÜRKSAT, 2017). In the cause of pan-Ottomanist politics, TRT, the state-run television channel, now broadcasts in forty-one languages (including languages spoken in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans), has fully adopted new developments in the broadcasting sector, and has entered into converged markets such as hybrid TV and IPTV. Turkish investment in the satellite market is not limited to TÜRKSAT media satellites. Throughout the 2000s, Turkey developed an aggressive strategy with regard to aerospace technologies, and by 2016 it had invested $1 billion in satellite production (*Space Daily*, January, 10, 2016). At the expense of generating international tensions and controversies, as was the case with Israel in 2015 over a satellite that would allow Turkey to visualise an area that included Israel/Palestine, Turkey continues to claim sovereignty in extraterrestrial space, and is seeking to implement direct communication links with 91 percent of the world population through its own satellites by 2023 (Gürcan, 2016). Aerospace technologies, as technologies of information, intelligence and the military, are especially instrumental to the AKP government's plans to lead the region, and also to monitor and suppress the Kurdish political movement.

The integration of telecommunications into national security measures became even more forceful in 2013 when the AKP introduced the ULAK project, which gave responsibility for the administration and establishment of the infrastructure for 4G mobile technologies to the SSM (Undersecretariat for Defence Industries). The mobile phone market is the biggest digital sector in Turkey in terms of the size of the consumer market, with 96.9 percent of

households having at least one smartphone (TÜIK, 2016), and the profits are shared between local and the transnational companies. In consortium with companies such as the military defense and communications company ASELSAN, the SSM has announced plans to establish a technological infrastructure in which the use of local technologies will become a condition for all companies to operate in the Turkish 4G mobile market.

Politics of Speech

As Erdoğan's authoritarian politics have increasingly relied on governance through social and political conflict, the dominant discourses circulated through highly controlled communicative circuits are shaped to deepen and instrumentalise societal divisions. In parallel to structural transformations in the economic, social and political realm, the discourses of "new Turkey" were inserted into popular and national media circuits. The new Turkey was envisioned as a society in which historically disadvantaged groups might be politically and economically empowered. As such, the new Turkey was intended to be, not only a more prosperous and equal society, but also democratised, and liberated from the old forms of secularist and modernist state tyranny.

In contrast to the conception of the nation as *ulus*, as it was conceived in the secularist and modernist Turkish Republic, the new nation of the new Turkey was increasingly defined as *millet* – an Arabic term that defined the Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire who were historically considered to be the superior citizens of the multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic empire. The title of Erdoğan's monthly television broadcasts to the people was accordingly changed from *Addressing the Nation (Ulusa Sesleniş)* to *Serving the Millet (Millete Hizmet Yolunda)* in 2013. As the *millet* has been fetishised as the real people of new Turkey, and their will was defined as the only legitimate base for his governmental decisions and practices, Erdoğan was asking his critics, "we are the millet, who are you?". By presenting himself as the only representative of the millet, he promises to bring the means of power to the service of the *millet* (who reside inside and outside Turkey) through his aggressive discourse in the international political landscape and through the development projects, his troops of companies inside and outside of Turkey. In a traditional meeting with the village leaders at his massive palace, Erdoğan complained, "You build tunnels that go under the sea, the biggest airports in the world and even unmanned airspace vehicles, then, they criticise you". He continued, "Of course, they are jealous", and in relation to the criticisms, claiming freedom and liberty for oppositional voices, he stated, "Bridge is liberty, tunnel is liberty, airport is liberty. Liberty is the pleasure of living this life humanly" (*Bianet*, January 19, 2017).

As a radical populist of the South, Erdogan makes it clear that social and democratic rights can easily be sacrificed for the sake of economic growth, technical and technological development. Variations of this speech have been produced, reproduced and circulated through various outlets of pro-AKP media organizations. Experts and journalists on the screens of pro-AKP media, as well as social media trolls who were revealed to be connected to the AKP bureaucrats, have undertaken the task of rationalizing, supporting and circulating the discourse of Erdoğan and discrediting oppositional voices, journalists and civil right activists (Bulut and Yörük, 2017). In this narrative, the opposition is often associated with treason, terror and international conspiracies that threaten national security, while development is based on the social, economic and cultural empowerment of the *millet* and

strong leadership that would ideally bring back the imagined former glory of Ottoman Empire.

Concluding remarks on Turkey's communicative authoritarianism

Turkey's communicative authoritarianism offers a highly instructive lesson for us to understand the crucial role of communications in the making and endurance of neoliberal authoritarian governmentality regimes. Under communicative authoritarianism, networks are not simply appropriated into the neoliberal authoritarian regime, instead they play a crucial role in the making and intersecting of the material, institutional and discursive pillars of hegemonic neoliberal and Islamic politics.

The first crucial lesson is concerned with the ways in which the neoliberal restructuring of communications enable authoritarian governments to implement the authoritarian political economy of capital accumulation and welfare politics on the one hand, and the political repression of the oppositional forces and the production of political support on the other. Liberalisation, de/re-regulation, nationalisation and transnationalisation of the communicative sphere under the AKP administration have effectively enabled the pro-AKP market forces to accumulate capital and power in communicative field. In contrast, all other market forces are penalised and/or marginalised through technical and legal instruments of state power. Digital technologies and digitisation processes are harnessed to suppress oppositional groups and to produce efficient, centralised systems for the distribution of rents, whose major beneficiaries are both the pro-AKP business elite and the pro-AKP working class. The extension of communication infrastructures and the proliferation of information conglomerates owned and controlled by the pro-AKP forces has given rise to a concentration of communicative power that almost exclusively allows only supporter groups to speak, act and communicate freely. These processes have also brought into existence networks across and beyond the territory of Turkey that can serve a range of political objectives, including pan-Ottomanism, colonial repression of Kurdish populations, projects of cultural imperialism and the proliferation of Islamist populism.

The second lesson is concerned with the integrated governance of communications in neoliberal authoritarian systems. Communications are assemblages of infrastructures, institutional bodies and practices, as well as messages and contents. As such, they are governed relationally and contextually in concert with the neoliberal agenda and have been fully incorporated into the material, institutional and discursive pillars of hegemonic politics. The co-optation of the Islamist elite, the restructuring of media ownership and control, and the production of legitimising discourses and practices do not only occur in the communicative field but are also integrated through communicative ties. My research shows how state power, Islamic businesses, Islamic NGOs, regulatory institutions and supporter groups are interconnected in the communicative sphere, so as to produce and reproduce the neoliberal and Islamist authoritarian regime. Under communicative authoritarianism, all these agents take a participatory role in the institution of authoritarian rule by way of communications and within the networks that are generated and tied by communications.

These lessons are crucial to understand how communications play a key role in the development and endurance of neoliberal authoritarian governmentality regimes in the developing contexts. Furthermore, the lessons identify how communications help to manage populations not only through toxic discourses and the suppression of speech but also through the economic and political empowerment of supporter groups, the co-optation of clientele business elite, and institutional power that radicalises the political and social conflict.

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[1] After the 2016 failed coup attempt, which was allegedly plotted by the underground religious movement led by Fethullah Gülen, the country has begun to be governed through

emergency rule decrees. Under emergency state rule, 51.3 per cent voted for the constitutional referendum that granted sweeping political powers to an elected president in 2017.