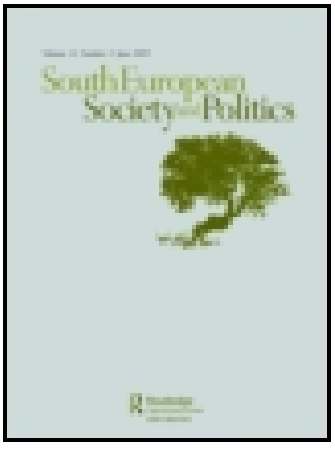

South European Society and Politics
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fses20

Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity

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Published online: 11 Dec 2014.

South European Society and Politics, 2014
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2014.979031

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity

Ayhan Kaya

Referring to the linkages between neoliberal social policies and religious forms of governmentality, this article analyses the Islamisation of Turkey under the rule of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) since 2002. It discusses the strategies, discourses, and policies deployed by the AKP to take control of the state, with a particular focus on the changing environment of social policies. The focus is on the growing importance of the family, faith-based voluntary organisations, charities, education, and Islam for AKP rule. It concludes with brief reference to the #Occupygezi movement, which was partly a response to the Islamisation pursued by the AKP government.

Keywords: AKP; Neoliberalism; Islamisation; Social Policy; Family; Charity; Turkey

This article scrutinises the Islamisation of Turkey with a special focus on the environment of social policies formulated and implemented by the neoliberal government of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) since the 2002 general election. The main research question of this paper is whether the strong emphasis on Islam is a result of the AKP's neoliberal stance, or an outcome of the revitalisation of religiosity in the contemporary world. The answer to be given to this question will include both dimensions. Hence, the main premise of this article is that the Islamisation of society and politics in Turkey under the AKP's rule can be explained both as a reaction to the growing stream of neoliberal governance and as an indispensible tool of neoliberalism.

The article is divided into three sections, analysing respectively the AKP's strategies, discourses, and policies in relation to the Islamisation of society and politics in Turkey. *Strategies* refer to the societal and political alliances set up by the AKP to consolidate its electoral power. In this regard, strategic alliances with the European Union (EU), liberal democrats in Turkey, and the Gülen movement will be delineated. *Discourses*

refer to the ideologies and paradigms utilised by the AKP in winning the hearts of the masses in and around Turkey. To this end, the neo-conservatism, neoliberalism, Islamism, victimisation, and anti-laicism of the AKP will be brought into focus in a way that complements the AKP's related attempts at lifting the headscarf ban, liberating the clergy schools (*Imam Hatip*), changing the elementary and secondary school structure, and revising the national curriculum in the educational sector. The article also discusses the AKP's *policies* on family and social provisioning with their visible emphasis on Islam and faith-based voluntary organisations. The article concludes by debating the societal resilience against the Islamisation of Turkish society and politics with particular reference to the *#Occupygezi* movement, or moment, which has had very strong political, societal, economic, and ethical implications for Turkey since June 2013.

Neoliberalism: The Power of Community

Neoliberalism is an ideology comprising elements of both the liberalism and conservatism of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, it essentialises the role of the individual in contemporary consumerist societies, and, on the other, it revitalises the power of family and community in the absence of a parental welfare state. The ensemble of legal and non-legal, pedagogical, cultural, religious, nationalist, and social discourses together produces what Michel Foucault (1979) understands as the signature of modern governmentality that is an art of governing. The neoliberal form of governmentality follows a two-way strategy to challenge the 'state dependency' generated by social welfare state politics: *technologies of agency* and *technologies of community*. The former engages citizens as freely acting individuals, who take decisions and manage their own risks. The latter, on the other hand, engages citizens as members of a collective identity, such as community or family, who rely upon the protective shield of that entity rather than that of the state (Larner 2000, p. 246). Accordingly, several scholars have repeatedly stated that the welfare state of the 1950s and onwards has been at stake since the 1970s, and that the post-social state has taken over in the Western world (Rose 1996; Larner 2000).

Heteronomous communities of all sorts, including religious and ethno-cultural communities, have become essential in the age of the post-social state, because, as Jonathan X. Inda (2006) rightfully claims, the post-social form of governmentality requires the fragmentation of the social into a multitude of communities, markets, and the new prudentialism. On the one hand, this implies that individuals are expected to take proper care of themselves within the framework of existing free market conditions: the social welfare state is no longer there to finance and to secure the well-being of the population, since prudent, responsible, self-managing, and ethical political subjects are in charge of taking over that role. This is what Inda (2006) calls the transition from *welfarism* to *prudentialism*. On the other hand, it means that extended families and communities of all kinds are encouraged to fill the gap resulting from the decline of the social welfare state (Rose 1996).

This kind of *prudentialism* can actually be considered a technology of governmentality that makes individuals responsible for their own risks of unemployment, health, poverty, security, crime, and so on. It can be seen as a practice producing individuals who are responsible for their own destiny with the assistance of a variety of private enterprises and independent experts that are indispensable actors in a free market economy. The World Bank's 'three-tier private pension system' is a good example of this kind of prudentialism. It proposes a three-pillar system based on a minimum package of publicly provided benefits, a package of privately provided benefits, and a voluntary package of benefits secured by individuals through their own generous contributions. This is also what the AKP government has introduced in Turkey since the 2006 social security reforms (Yücesan-Özdemir 2012, p. 128). To put it differently, the three-tier private pension system has so far provided the AKP with a very functional prudentialist technology of agency, which constitutes one of the main pillars of the neoliberal form of governmentality.

In addition to the prudentialist character of neoliberal ideology, there is the other side of the coin, i.e. the community. Extended families and communities of all kinds are encouraged to fill the gap resulting from the decline of the social welfare state. Universal welfare policies are no longer announced by the nation-states. We are witnessing a reconfiguration of welfare policies, which are no longer directed towards 'society', but towards 'communities' (Rose 1996, p. 331). In neoliberal ideology, objectives of equality and social justice are concerned no longer with material outcomes, but rather with opportunity structures. The primary role of social policy is not the distribution of resources to provide for people's needs, but to diminish risk, to *enable* people individually to manage risk, and to comfort people by means of family, religion, faith-based voluntary organisations engaged in social provisioning, and other forms of communities.

Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has given increasing importance to individual freedoms and a lesser role to state intervention in the economy. As the state redefined its new role in social welfare provision, voluntary associations moved from the periphery to the centre (Billis & Harris 1992). Similarly, the AKP's social security reforms contain neoliberal aspects in the sense that they underline the disciplining character of the market, the significance of self-sufficient active citizen through the three-tier private pension system as well as the importance of faith-based social provisioning organisations, Islamic values, and communal references (Yücesan-Özdemir 2012, p. 131; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu 2009, p. 37). In the following, rather than concentrating on the prudentialist and individualist aspects of AKP's neoliberal governmentality, I will focus on other aspects corresponding to religious, communal, voluntary, and charitable organisations becoming active in welfare provisioning. In what follows, I will reveal the ways in which AKP neoliberalism has so far utilised various strategies, discourses, and policies in order to consolidate its power, to regulate society's and politics' polarisation along the divide between Islamism and laicism, and to delegate some of its welfare liabilities to faith-based voluntary organisations.

Strategies: Setting up Political Alliances

Prior to 2002, the AKP based its electoral campaigns on the promise to end political corruption, to secure justice, and to provide the deprived masses with economic growth. Only two Islamic-based claims were raised by the AKP: to end the ban on headscarves and to equate religious and secular degrees by supporting the *Imam Hatip* (clergy) Schools (Yeşilada & Rubin 2011, p. 1; Pupcenoks 2012). The AKP gained an absolute majority of parliamentary seats in the 2002, 2007, and 2011 general elections, as well as in the 2004, 2009, and 2014 local elections. It became the first party since 1987 to win the majority of seats in the Turkish parliament. Furthermore, it was only the third Islamist party ever to become a part of the government in modern Turkey since the coalition government established by Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*) in 1973 with the Republican Peoples' Party (CHP), and then by Erbakan's Welfare Party between 1995 and 1997 with the True Path Party (DYP). Following the devastating financial–economic crisis in 2001, the AKP encountered very fertile soil for its conclusive victory in 2002. Party leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was transformed into a hero in the eyes of the conservative segments of Turkish society in 1998 when he was imprisoned for four months after reciting a religiously loaded poem invoking Muslims to resist the foreign invasion of Turkey during the Independence War of the early 1920s. Subaltern, conservative, and religious circles saw him as one of them, distanced from the military, oppressive state, bourgeoisie, and elitist Kemalist republicanism (Tuğal 2009, p. 176).

Taking over executive power through the electoral process in 2002, the AKP made a political and societal alliance with the EU, the Gülen movement, liberals, and its own electorate against the military tutelage that had banned its pro-Islamist predecessors in the preceding years. However, the party was unable to consolidate its power until the presidential elections of 2007, which ended the term of the distinctly secular President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer. The latter was an ally of the laicist army and had often refused to sign bills proposed by Parliament, where the AKP had enjoyed a majority since December 2002. President Sezer vetoed several AKP legislative proposals and openly warned the public against the threat of Islamisation (Bali 2013, p. 674). The new President was Abdullah Gül, formerly Erdoğan's ally in the progressive faction directed against the conservative leadership of the Welfare Party, originating from the National Outlook movement (Milli Görüş).[1] After the presidential election, the AKP started to practise a majoritarian conception of democracy and an electoral authoritarianism of a more markedly Islamic character (Özbudun 2014). The consolidation of the AKP's authoritarian rule was also made possible by its increasing electoral strength in both local and general elections in the years following the legal and political struggle against the military tutelage that had succeeded in bringing different groups together in a great societal and political alliance.[2]

Revitalising the conventional divide between laicism and Islam, the AKP adopted the ideology of so-called 'conservative democracy' in order to address a wider spectrum of people across the Sunni majority, no matter whether they were ethnically

Turkish, Kurdish, Laz, Circassian, or Arab, at the expense of Alevis and non-Muslims. After taking over both the executive and presidential power, the AKP started to penetrate the judiciary and bureaucracy by lowering the retirement age in order to place its adherents in key positions in security, higher education, and other key institutions such as the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) and the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA).

Another aspect of the AKP's subtle Islamisation is its political-economic and monetary policies coupled with green capital, black money, a shadow economy, the creation of new billionaires, increasing trade links with the Gulf region, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, and Iran (Kirişçi 2011), economic growth, anti-inflation measures, neo-Ottoman and Islamic aesthetics of numerous shopping malls, gated communities, new alcohol regulations, and the commodification of Islam as a marketing strategy incorporated into 'Brand Turkey' through Turkish Airlines and 'Ramadan in Istanbul'.[3] In the meantime, the AKP's actions have been concurrent with an increasing number of private Islamic initiatives: Islamic clothing and swimsuits are gaining a salient public visibility, especially women's headscarves, and subscriptions to religious publications have tripled in recent years (Çınar 2005; Pupcenoks 2012, p. 285).[4] Neoliberal monetary and economic policies as well as political and societal transformation instigated by the AKP have been widely represented by the Turkish media. Party control of the latter has been achieved either through Islamising the content of the public TV channels operating under the Turkish Radio Television Corporation (TRT), putting pressure on critical media by means of auditing mechanisms (for instance the Doğan Holding), ensuring that partisan entrepreneurs took over a number of newspapers and television channels (*Daily Sabah, Daily Yeni Safak, ATV*, etc.), or through the dailies and television channels of the Gülen movement (*Daily Zaman, Samanyolu* TV). The ways in which the AKP has manufactured consent have not been limited to the ideological venues of popular culture: scientific journals have also been published in order to disseminate the ideas and perspectives of the party (*Perceptions*, *Insight Turkey,* etc.). This process of manufacturing consent has been coupled with the formation of professional Islamic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense, who have dominated the public space by means of press and media since the 2007 elections, when the AKP consolidated its political power (Freedom House 2014).

The political and societal alliance between the AKP and the Gülen movement deserves to be scrutinised in greater detail. However, due to space constraints, this article will only touch on it briefly. Since going into exile in the United States in 1999, Fethullah Gülen has favoured the idea that the state should be transformed by an Islamist party to make Islam the dominant societal force. Gülen also emphasised that it was essential to train an elite with the intellectual capacity to govern the state and survive in the face of Western hegemony. He was also a firm believer in the idea that a transition of power could only be achieved with popular support in elections, which could only be acquired through responding appropriately to constituents' claims and expectations. Before allying with the AKP, the Gülen movement did not participate in the popular debates regarding the Islamisation of Turkish society, the headscarf issue,

and the *Imam Hatip* Schools for the training of preachers. This absence meant that secular circles ceased to regard the Gülen movement as a threat to their Europeanised lifestyles until the late 1990s (Seufert 2014).

Gülen's convictions were also largely consistent with the Turkish cultural and educational policies implemented in the aftermath of the 1980 military *coup d'état*. Over the course of time, aligning themselves with the state ideology, Gülen supporters came to represent a combination of national–religious sentiments and socio-moral conservatism, and became committed to the creation of a strong state, while simultaneously opposing the organisation of political Islam. Developing Gülen schools inside and outside Turkey (*Işık* Schools), establishing various foundation universities in different parts of the country, founding several different civil society organisations and business associations, such as the Foundation of Journalists and Writers (*Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı*) and the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), organising Turkish Language Olympics, launching charity-support networks, training its own professional intellectuals, aligning with the AKP, and integrating itself into various ministerial and bureaucratic ranks of the state, the Gülen movement has developed a kind of statist stance (Seufert 2014).

The alliance lasted until the AKP decided to align with the Kurds within the framework of the so-called 'peace process'[5] (Özbudun 2014, p. 6; Seufert 2014, p. 19). The Gezi movement, spontaneously organised in Istanbul in June 2013 by different societal groups in opposition to Prime Minister Erdoğan's condescending Islamist and conservative discourse, was the last straw for the Gülenists. Disapproving of the brutal actions of the Turkish police against the demonstrators, the movement terminated its alliance with the AKP. Probably the most conspicuous event of the end of the alliance was the famous 17 December 2013 prosecution of several AKP government ministers, their children, and others (Özbudun 2014; Özel 2014).[6] Since the termination of the alliance, the two groups have become engaged in an intense clash in order to sustain their power in different parts of the state, ranging from the judiciary to the security forces, causing tremendous political turmoil across the country (Özbudun 2014).

Discourses: Neo-Conservatism, Neoliberalism, Islamism, and Victimisation

It is important to draw attention to the earlier years of the AKP which brought the party to power in Turkey. The relationship between the former Kemalist regime and Islam was mainly a conflictual and contested one. Islamist parties had been shut down in the past, and governments including Islamist parties had been brought down by the Kemalist state. The state-centric Kemalist regime was confronted with the challenge of ethno-cultural and religious groups in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup. The military coup and the policies undertaken by the military government up until 1983 reveal that the military elite made a profound attempt to eradicate the sources of social strife emerging from the conflict between rightists and leftists, and between diverse ethno-cultural communities in the 1970s, and to rebuild social–political cohesion (Sakallioğlu 1996, pp. 245–246). To this end, the military elite in alliance with the

country's big business circles, the Islamist and Nationalist intellectuals of the Hearth of Intellectuals (*Aydınlar Ocağı*), and their colleagues in the universities, the press, and the media wholeheartedly began to pursue a project of restructuring the society to accommodate conservative and Islamist sources of culture in the homogeneous modern Turkish national identity.

Parallel to the inclusion of Islamist aspects in the national culture, the policy of economic liberalisation was regarded by the military elite and big business as a necessary means to structure a new social and economic order. Both the accommodation of the Islamist forces and economic liberalisation were expected to prevent polarisation and fragmentation among the political parties, supported by the diverse social forces competing for resources, and to shape the social order (Sakallioğlu 1996). With the left fully suppressed, demolished by imprisonment, torture, and even executions, a vacuum emerged in the Turkish polity. This could be offered on a golden platter to the Sufi orders, associations, and communities to fill with effectiveness. Islamisation was also presented as a method of dealing with the emerging consequences of *laissez-faire* capitalism, so that uneven income distribution could be effectively instilled in society as 'God's will', 'fate', and the like. Moreover, then Prime Minister Turgut Özal, who was backed by the military in the formation of the new conservative and economically liberal order, met the leaders of some Sufi orders for Friday prayers. In the meantime, mandatory religious instruction in primary and secondary schools was introduced by the military regime led by Kenan Evren (Sakallioğlu 1996, p. 244).

Conservative Democracy

Since its inception, the AKP has adopted a 'conservative democratic' ideology with an emphasis on secularism, social peace, social justice, the preservation of moral values and norms, pluralism, democracy, free market economy, civil society, and good governance (Bilge-Criss 2011). By using such a pragmatist discourse, the AKP aimed to mobilise socially and economically marginalised social classes (Yeğenoğlu 2011). Moreover, the AKP also became attractive to the liberal and secular bourgeoisie and the upper-middle and middle classes, who were disenchanted with the political system because of political and economic instability (Hale & Özbudun 2009, p. 37). The AKP immediately took the initiative to increase toleration of and respect for the freedom of religion and conscience, and the protection of religious rights, such as the right to practise religion in public and private space (AKP 2004). This kind of conservative multiculturalism celebrating cultural differences and local values has been complemented by an acceptance of the inevitability of political and economic reforms demanded by the process of globalisation and informed by universal values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, protection of minorities, and the free market (Houston 2006, p. 166).

The appeal of the AKP to the Turkish public also relies on the political discourse of the party underlining so-called 'conservative democracy' (*Muhafazakâr Demokrasi*),

which was introduced by the AKP elite in a written text in 2004 with a foreword by Tayyip Erdoğan (AKP 2004). Academically speaking, the text was weak, but it displayed very well the priorities of the AKP in its first period in power. It starts with a critique of the former regime using the following adjectives: 'despotic' (*buyurgan*), 'oppressive' (*baskıcı*), 'imposing' (*dayatmacı*), 'homogenising' (*tektipçi*), 'proclamation from above' (*tepeden inmeci*), and 'social engineering' (*toplum mühendisligi*). All these terms were references to the fact that the Kemalist project of modernisation was a form of top-down modernisation (Akdoğan 2004; AKP 2004; Şimşek 2013). In response to that, 'new conservatism' or 'conservative democracy' was not meant to be a preservation of culture, tradition, or religion as such. Rather, conservatism was phrased as a form of 'negative philosophy' directed against both the radicalism and the elitism of political projects of social engineering (AKP 2004, p. 26).

Islamism and Victimisation Discourse

Unlike its predecessors, conservative political parties like the Democrat Party (DP), Motherland Party (ANAP), and True Path Party (DYP), the AKP claims to represent excluded societal values, such as Islamic values, and to return these values to power. The aim is to create a perception of resemblance between the lifestyle of the nation and that of those occupying political power (Saraçoğlu 2011, p. 44). Rather than using an elitist jargon in their everyday language, the leaders of the AKP have always been very meticulous in using language that is also used by the masses. The use of slang by AKP leaders is very common. For instance, Tayyip Erdoğan and some ministers, such as Bülent Arınç and Egemen Bağış, have been very successful in creating a kind of solidarity with the masses by means of the everyday language that they have used. The lifestyle of the AKP leaders, especially Erdoğan, has always been appreciated by various groups of subordinate people, as they have found it akin to their own lifestyles. Cihan Tuğal eloquently describes this symbolic capital of Erdoğan as an instrument contributing to the hegemony of the AKP:

> Although the leader of the AKP, Erdoğan, had openly shunned Islamism and adopted neoliberalism, his past involvement as an Islamist, his everyday practices shared with the poor, and his origins in an urban poor neighbourhood enabled popular sectors to read non-neoliberal meanings into the party. Although he was the mayor of Istanbul, Erdoğan broke his fast in slums or shanties together with the poor. Right after he was elected mayor, he had his hair cut in the poor neighbourhoods where he grew up. Erdoğan became even more popular after he had spent time in jail due to an Islamist poem he had read at a rally before he shunned Islamism. Hence, the symbolic capital circulated by the Islamist movement (piety, suffering for the religious cause, shared origin and practices with the people, etc.) was still deployed by the AKP (Tuğal 2011, pp. 91–92).

Constituting the main cultural capital of the AKP elite, these common religious values have been instrumental in overcoming class differences between the AKP and their poor constituency. Appointing devout Muslims to ministries and the bureaucracy, the AKP aimed to create identification between the party and the nation (Saraçoğlu 2011, p. 44).

Furthermore, the AKP successfully employed a very strong political discourse of victimisation to mobilise the masses around its own political and societal agenda. Continuing the former Milli Görüş line, the party elite often represented Muslims as having been victimised by the Kemalist–laicist regime since the beginning of the Republic in the early 1920s. In this regard, laicism was always regarded and represented by pro-Islamist political parties, including the AKP, as anti-Islam and anti-religion. Freedom of religion has always been the main discursive tool of such political parties to sustain their power. Laicism has also been classified as 'anti' or 'hostile towards' religion by some scientific circles, who argue that the AKP has endorsed a secularism that entails freedom *of* religion, while the Kemalist-laicist model promoted one constituting freedom *from* religion (*inter alia*, Kuru 2009; Yavuz 2009). However, other scientific circles argue the opposite, and point out the way the Kemalist regime has institutionally supported, promoted, and financed a distinct interpretation of Sunni Islam through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) established in 1925 (Türkmen 2009; Hanioğlu 2012; Pinar 2013).

Education as a Venue for Struggle between Islamist and Laicist Powers

Education is certainly the most delicate sphere that the AKP and previous governments have utilised in order to indoctrinate the masses utilising certain discourses, rhetorics and ideologies. It is indeed very remarkable that there were only two top Islamic priorities of the AKP during the 2002 electoral campaign, which were promises to lift the ban on headscarves, and to equate religious and secular degrees, i.e. to bring to an end the discrimination against *Imam Hatip* students in the university entrance exam. During its first term (2002–2007), the AKP was not very eager to achieve these goals due to pressure from the secular establishment and the EU. However, the party's second major electoral victory in 2007, its acquittal by the Supreme Court from anti-secularism charges in 2008, its successes with enacting constitutional changes in 2010, and another electoral victory in 2011 encouraged the AKP to carry out those key electoral promises regarding the empowerment of Islam in Turkey.

The headscarf issue has been one of the tools with which pro-Islamist parties including the Welfare Party and the AKP have sought to win the public. The issue, focusing on the ban on university entry or public sector jobs for women wearing the headscarf, has always attracted considerable popular attention in Turkey. It has become a symbolic fault line epitomising the ongoing debate between secularists and Muslims, modernists and traditionalists, Europeans and Eurosceptics (Saktanber 2002; Göle 2003; Toprak & Çarkoğlu 2006). The AKP had made a few attempts in its first term (2002–07) to lift the headscarf ban. However, these attempts were rejected by secularist institutions such as the Constitutional Court. After the AKP's landslide victory in the 2007 elections, this issue returned with a stronger resonance. This time, the AKP decided to change Articles 10 and 42 of the Constitution to lift the ban, citing the rule of equality before the law in public services and the right to education for all (Saktanber & Çorbacıoğlu 2008; Cindoğlu 2010).

Immediately after the constitutional change, on 24 February 2007, the then newly elected head of YÖK (Board of Higher Education), Yusuf Ziya Özcan, made a statement to the universities, interpreting the constitutional changes. In his written statement, he said that the changes in the Constitution lifted the headscarf ban in Turkish universities (Kaya 2013, Chapter 5).[7] Some of the universities complied with his interpretation, but others preferred to wait for the judgement of the Constitutional Court. The Court decided to annul these amendments in June 2008, at a time when massive demonstrations were taking place against the lifting of the ban. The Constitutional Court was also on the verge of making a decision in another case which could have potentially led to the closing down of the AKP.[8] Following the headscarf regulation in higher education, in September 2013 the AKP government lifted the ban on headscarves in the civil service as part of wide-ranging reforms driven by the European integration process. However, the ban remains in place for judges, prosecutors, police, and military personnel.

The believers of Islam, situated on the other side of the polarised social and political milieu of contemporary Turkey, and especially Erdoğan and other leading AKP members, have often utilised headscarf rhetoric in order to mobilise the conservative masses around the government's policies. Among many other examples, Erdoğan's latest attempt to utilise the headscarf rhetoric in agitating his followers occurred during the #*Occupygezi* movement in June 2013. A young veiled woman out with her child was allegedly harassed by protestors for wearing a headscarf. The so-called physical attack was widely reported by the media, especially newspapers close to the government, such as *Yeni Safak*, *Sabah*, and *Haber Türk*. However, security camera footage subsequently revealed that no physical attack had taken place.[9]

The other set of Islamic claims explicitly put forward by the AKP since 2002 concerned the *Imam Hatip* Schools, which first opened in 1924 with 30 students, but closed down in 1931 after the number of students dropped to ten. After the reinstitution of *Imam Hatip* schools in the 1950s, *Imam Hatip* graduates were only permitted to continue their higher education in theology faculties. In 1974, *Imam Hatip* graduates were permitted to enter *any* university, subject to their performance in the central university examination. However, in 1999, the laws were changed once more, with the result that *Imam Hatip* students who wanted to enter faculties other than the faculty of theology would be penalised in the university entrance exams. This resulted in a substantial drop in enrolment in *Imam Hatip* schools (Shively 2008, pp. 701–702; Çakmak 2009; Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu 2009). As a consequence, the Board of Higher Education in Ankara decided that *Imam Hatip* students would be subject to a lower coefficient at the central examinations, which had aimed to limit the scope of undergraduate schools available to *Imam Hatip* graduates. This was an informed attempt to reduce the popularity of these schools by giving them a competitive disadvantage in access to higher education. In 2004, the AKP government proposed a draft bill in parliament to remove this coefficient. Although the bill was accepted in Parliament, President Sezer vetoed the law. However, the AKP managed to have the coefficient removed on August 2009 by a majority decision of the Board of Higher Education.

The AKP has not only lifted the headscarf ban in higher education and popularised the *Imam Hatip* Schools, but also Islamised the national curriculum through the addition of certain optional courses at secondary school level, and with the transformation of the school textbooks on *Religious Culture and Morality* in 2007 and 2008 (Türkmen 2009). In 2012, a new regulation was introduced increasing compulsory education from eight to 12 years (Law No. 6287). Previously, compulsory primary education had been implemented on a 5 + 3 years model introduced in 1997, the year of the so-called 28 February semi-military coup against the growing strength of the pro-Islamist Welfare Party. At that time, although the laicist and militarist state portrayed the legal change as an attempt to extend compulsory education (previously five years) to match other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, it was claimed that the rationale of the reform was to prevent the increasing popularity of the *Imam Hatip* Schools promoted by the Welfare Party government. By then, *Imam Hatip* schools were recruiting students after the fifth grade. The aim of the new law was to prevent families from sending their children immediately after primary school, with the expectation that a child who went through an eight-year secular education would be less likely to go on to an *Imam Hatip* School. Hence the 1997 law closed down the first three-year section of *Imam Hatip* schools (secondary level, years 6 to 8) while allowing the last four-year section to remain open (high school level, years 9 to 12).

Similarly, the AKP's new Law No. 6287 introduced 4 + 4 + 4 years' compulsory education, again framed by the government as an attempt to catch up with the compulsory education level of other OECD countries. Compared with OECD standards, the main challenges were reported to be low enrolment rates, regional disparities regarding access to education, poor or insufficient infrastructure, outdated and in some parts politically contested curricula, and the need for improvement in teachers' skills. In April 2012, together with the extension of compulsory education from eight to 12 years, a new structure was introduced (four years of primary school plus four years of secondary school, then four years of high school). The amended Education Law allows families the flexibility to choose among different types of secondary schools, including general and vocational schools and religious Imam Hatip schools (Karakaş et al. 2014). However, secular families and various civil society organisations, such as the Education Reform Initiative (ERG), the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen Association (TÜSIAD), and the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey (KAGIDER), have a different perspective. They maintain the new law is an attempt to Islamise primary education through the growing number of Islamic-based optional courses (ERG 2013). Also in 2012, two optional courses for years 6 to 8, Civic Education (*Vatandaşlık ve Demokrasi Eğitimi*) and Agriculture (*Tarım*), were removed from the curriculum while three religion-based courses were introduced: Quran (*Kur'an-ı Kerim*), Prophet Muhammad's Life (*Hz. Muhammed'in Hayatı*), and Fundamentals of Religion (*Temel Dinî Bilgiler*).

Türkmen (2009) examines the changes made in the curriculum of the courses on religious culture and morality between 1995 and 2007–08. Referring to changes such

as the Islamisation of the human rights concept, religionisation of education, the exposition of marriage as not only a precondition for establishing a family but also a remedy for adultery, and the presentation of Atatürk as someone who saw secularism as the basis for living the real Islam, she concludes that the new curriculum is designed to re-Islamise Turkish society in a neoliberal fashion. For instance, the term 'tolerance' was specifically mentioned in the textbooks of religious culture and morality courses with reference to the *Medina Covenant*, formulated by Prophet Muhammad to regulate relationships with non-Muslims, and Muhammad's 'tolerant attitude' towards the Christians of Yemen (Türkmen 2009, p. 91). Furthermore, in September 2010, the Ministry of National Education released a public statement in the first week of school year 2010–11 to underline the need for 'education in values'. According to this, education on values such as citizenship, hospitality, solidarity, and tolerance aims to empower individual students to face everyday challenges posed by the processes of globalisation (MEB, Ministry of National Education 2010).

In November 2012, Erdoğan sparked a storm of debate after he promised to end mixed-sex student residences, not only dormitories but also private student residences and flats. Erdoğan said that he was responding to neighbourhood complaints about male and female university students living in close proximity. In Turkey, many people, including the then Prime Minister, disapprove of mixed-gender living situations as counter to Islamic beliefs and laws. It is reported that during a closed-door meeting, Erdoğan said that 'this is against our conservative, democratic character … We witnessed this in the province of Denizli, an inland town in the Aegean Region. The insufficiency of dormitories causes problems. Male and female university students are living in the same accommodations. This is not being checked.'[10] He was strongly accused by secular groups of trying to police people's private lives.

Policies on Family and Social Provisioning

The Islamisation of society and politics in Turkey is visible not only in strategies and discourses utilised by the AKP, but also in neoliberal social provisioning policies partly delegating welfare provision to faith-based voluntary associations, underlining the importance of three-generational family structure, and encouraging charitable work. Historically speaking, the Turkish state and the private sector assumed a larger share of responsibility for a few formal aspects of social welfare, such as old-age pensions, housing, and health care in particular, reversing decades of an implicit *laissez-faire* policy that rested on the age-old family and informal provision of those services and a more narrow corporatist type of welfare provision (Buğra & Keyder 2006; Buğra 2007; Buğra & Candaş 2011; Duben 2013). In its 12 years in power, the AKP has designed economic policies favouring the first- and second-generation bourgeoisie. Some of the policies created by the AKP in this framework are as follows: extending the welfare services provided by the state, legalising flexible labour, favouring a return to the family, and subcontracting welfare provision duties to the private sector. The AKP government has extended the level of free medical services for the poor, monthly

payments to poor and single women, and financial support to the families of those with disabilities (Buğra & Candaş 2011). While extending the formal welfare services, the AKP has also chosen to delegate its welfare liabilities to various religiously motivated associations, which function as liaison organisations between different areas of Islamic civil society such as education, law, business, and social provisioning associations (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu 2009; Göçmen 2014a).[11]

The expansion of charities cannot be explained only as a manifestation of neoliberalism; it is also an increasing manifestation of religiosity in the world as a whole (Casanova 1994; Habermas 2006). Along the same lines, Coleman (2003) and Carlson-Thies (2001) argue that the rise of the number of faith-based organisations is a result of the return of religion to public space. According to both authors, today's faith-based organisations are indispensable parts of welfare provisioning, as in the period prior to the extension of state welfare provisions after World War II. In her comparative study, İpek Göçmen (2014b) very eloquently reveals the ways in which the role of faith-based organisations has escalated over the last three decades or so in four European countries. She concludes that the British and Swedish states have intentionally delegated some of their welfare services to such organisations, while Germany and France have preferred to support both secular and faith-based organisations in social provisioning. Hence, one can also argue that the growth of faith-based organisations involved in social provisioning is both a response to the prudentialist idea of a neoliberal state and an instrument used by the neoliberal state in welfare provisioning (Billis & Harris 1992; Inda 2006).

Social assistance programmes incompatible with social citizenship rights have been formulated without entailing universal benefits for all citizens regardless of their financial condition. The AKP has partly utilised social assistance programmes mostly supplied by Islamic-oriented charity groups and philanthrophic associations as a substitute for welfare state functions. Hence a new 'welfare governance' based on mostly non-transparent government–charity partnerships mobilising entrepreneurial capacities of the poor (Buğra & Candaş 2011, p. 522; Tuğal 2012) has supplemented the formal welfare system. The charitable work of voluntary associations has increased extensively during the AKP era. Financing charitable work in support of the party in power by making contractors contribute to foundations, associations, and other institutions has been widely practised in Turkey and has become particularly extensive under the AKP, thanks to the numerous construction activities that are particularly amenable to extraction of resources from the private sector (Eder 2010).

Islamic motives dominating the activities and services of these charity organisations have brought the AKP the support not only of established sections of the working class but also of marginalised strata as well as housewives, migrants, farmers, and the unemployed (Bozkurt 2013). In a similar way to other religions, Islam has also operated as the hearth of a hearthless world for subaltern groups residing in the outskirts of urban spaces such as Istanbul, who were badly affected by the 2001 economic crisis. In this respect, Islam became highly instrumental for the AKP in comforting those suburban groups in the age of neoliberalism, positioning the state

somewhere far from the redistributive justice of the welfare schemes (Tuğal 2009, p. 107).

Family and Social Policies

The family has been ideologically very significant for the AKP. The nation has been portrayed as a happy extended family, in which everyone lives in harmony with others, respects traditions, and resolves problems within the family (Saraçoğlu 2011, p. 41). This portrayal of the nation as a big family sharing the same values hides class inequalities in the neoliberal era and other social conflicts such as the Kurdish and Alevi problems. Hence, family has become a significant aspect of the AKP's hegemony (Bozkurt 2013, p. 382). The party's 2003 Government Programme states,

> The major philosophical and political concern of our conservative identity is to keep intact and healthy the social organism of the family that is capable of protecting the individual … The family is the foundation of society. Societal solidarity, happiness and peace depend on the family. In spite of all the negative experiences and economic hardships we have been through, if we as a society are still intact, we owe it to our strong family structure. (AKP 2003a, 2003b, pp. 2, 17).

Family as well as religion and community are key instruments of the AKP's conservative ideology to protect the individual from the harmful consequences of neoliberal policies that the party has promoted (Saraçoğlu 2011; Şen 2011). The family is not only portrayed as an instrument that will resolve the damage wrought by neoliberalism; it is also used as a metaphor to refer to an ideal nation based on organic coherence.

Erdoğan has often used a very particular family rhetoric that posits the upper-middle classes, specifically the secularist elites and the established bourgeoisie, as 'the other' of the idealised family. It is this secularist and laicist group of people, according to Erdoğan, who have chosen in the name of modernity to neglect their duties towards the extended three-generational family (Yazıcı 2012, p. 114). Such a rhetoric essentialising the extended family became even stronger in the summer of 2003, when the heat wave in Western Europe caused the death of thousands of elderly people, who were mostly living alone, away from the care of their children. It was reiterated not only by Erdoğan but also by other Turks residing in Turkey and abroad (Kaya & Kentel 2005). Erdoğan's emphasis on the three-generational family was complemented by the statement that he made in 2008 to underline his ideal of 'a family with three children'. On many occasions, including public speeches, wedding ceremonies, and press conferences, he called on families – particularly addressing women – to have a minimum of three children. Referring to the demographic problem Turkey is likely to face in the next couple of decades, Erdoğan has used every opportunity to remind women of their reproductive capacity as a remedy to the problem of an ageing population.

The AKP leadership perceives the family as the best instrument to meet the needs of the elderly, the disabled, and children, and resolve the problem of social care. Such a

discourse is directly related to the state's declining responsibility in social care. The neoliberal state of the AKP has a vested interest in portraying 'the strong Turkish family' as a 'problem-solver' in the sense of resolving what would otherwise be a 'burden' on the state. Hence, the state's primary role is increasingly confined to a specific interpretation of protecting and strengthening the family (Yazıcı 2012, p. 116). Yazıcı (2012) rightly states that the leading AKP elite is inclined to reduce 'social policy' to 'family policy'. This emphasis on 'the family' is strategically important for the AKP elite, as it is an instrument to underline 'our' differences from 'the West' while, simultaneously, it is presented as a model to claim the effectiveness and timeliness of the social policy reforms undertaken by the AKP government. This family-centred social policy has become even more explicit in the party programme over the course of time. The 2012 party programme states that 'younger generations will be encouraged to take care of and live together with elderly parents, and for children in need of protection, return to the family and foster family services will be prioritised' (AKP 2012). The AKP's approach to women also deserves particular attention: it tends to see family and marriage as the natural course for women. This approach is visible in Erdoğan's statements about women and abortion as well as in the decreasing rate of female employment in Turkey (KEIG, Women's Solidarity Foundation 2013). Erdoğan has stated that birth control is a conspiracy to weaken Turkey and that abortion amounts to murder (Somer 2012, p. 17). Although the government failed to amend the legislation on abortion in 2011, it strove to assert control over women's bodies with laws passed via statutory decrees. The then prime minister warned doctors about C-sections and abortion, and insisted on natural childbirth. Nowadays, hospitals, in particular state hospitals, provide almost no abortion services, or abortions are carried out without anaesthesia as a means of punishment (Akkaya 2013).

Charity as a Remedy for Socio-economic Inequalities

Finally, one of the key features of the AKP's populist neoliberal ideology is the growing importance of social assistance programmes as a substitute for welfare state policies. Since 2002, the central government's share in funds spent on social assistance to the poor has declined. On the other hand, municipalities have assumed greater responsibility in distributing social assistance (Eder 2010, p. 178; Yücesan-Özdemir 2012, p. 143). Actually, since the Welfare Party won the 1994 local elections, pro-Islamist municipalities have exhibited a people-friendly attitude, organising soup kitchens for the poor, building giant food tents for *iftar* meals during the month of Ramadan, and providing in-kind assistance for the poor (Navaro-Yashin 2002). One could argue that municipalities have always been instrumental in distributing social justice, even before the AKP began its rise to power. However, the AKP's reliance on municipal activities to secure social assistance for poor population segments is mainly a function of increasing urbanisation, creating further surplus value to be partly allocated to municipalities in the form of either tax or endowments. The benefits and

services provided by municipalities have been based on charity, not on legal grounds (Grütjen 2008).

Obviously, the AKP does not aim to build a modern welfare state to provide the citizens of Turkey with justice and equality. Since coming to power in 2002, it has not developed redistributive income or taxation policies. On the contrary, it has mostly taken palliative steps to resolve some structural problems, such as income inequality, unemployment, and poverty. These measures have taken the form of organising charity work, distributing coal in winter, helping the poor in kind, and occasionally supplying food in the poorest neighbourhoods (Delibaş 2009, p. 98). It was decided by the State Planning Office, which became the Ministry of Development in 2011, to create a Committee to develop poverty alleviation policies. Social assistance and solidarity activities are regulated by the Directorate General of Social Assistance, which operates under the Ministry of Family and Social Policies established in 2011. Actually, social assistance activities were first regulated by the ANAP Government in 1986 through a special fund called the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund (Law No. 3294),[12] transformed in 2004 into the Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity operating under the Prime Minister's office. The Directorate became a part of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in 2011. Despite this ongoing process of forming state-based institutions at both central and local levels, very little of the funding for social services actually comes directly from the central state and municipalities; most comes from those who contribute to the 'charity funds' of municipalities (Eder 2010, p. 178).

However, it seems that charity has become a substitute for bribery. For instance, a typical arrangement could be generous donations to the municipality charity fund, or a private foundation established by those close to the government, in return for a profitable infrastructure and construction bid (Eder 2010, p. 178).[13] Similarly to the ways in which other neoliberal states act, the Turkish state has also promoted the establishment of charity groups and philanthrophic associations to take over some state functions. By doing so, the state is subcontracting its welfare provision duties to the private sector, families, faith-based voluntary organisations, and charities (Eder 2010, p. 181; Bozkurt 2013). This simultaneous neoliberal restructuring of the social security system and the increasing number of social assistance programmes have become characteristic of the AKP's neoliberalism.

Conclusion

This article argues that the neoliberal technologies of agency and community have so far provided the AKP government with a set of strategies, discourses, tools, and policies to transform society and politics in Turkey. It is claimed that the AKP was initially successful in establishing political alliances with liberal, conservative, and Islamist forces, as well as with the EU, in consolidating its power. The AKP leadership was also effective in consolidating its power by means of generating various discourses such as neo-conservatism, neoliberalism, Islamism, and victimisation. In addition to

the strategies and discourses utilised by the AKP, society and politics were also Islamised by means of neoliberal social provisioning policies, partly delegating welfare provisions to faith-based voluntary associations, underlining the importance of a three-generational family structure, and encouraging charitable work.

The Islamisation of society and politics in Turkey has been portrayed in this article partly as an outcome of the revitalisation of religiosity in the age of globalisation, and partly as a result of the growing stream of neoliberal forms of governmentality highlighting the power of the individual, family, charity, faith-based organisations, community, and Islam. Hence, religious revivalism and the strong emphasis put by the AKP government on family, faith-based organisations, and charitable work have been explained as a remedy of the neoliberal state to supplement formal welfare provisions. It has also been claimed that the AKP's social reforms have mainly focused on unsuccessful attempts to criminalise adultery, and its more successful attempts to lift the headscarf ban, to reinforce familial values, to revitalise conservative values, and to Islamise public space through debates on building mosques, converting some churches to mosques, separating male and female student dormitories and private student housing, and helping the poor on the basis of Islamic references, but not through a rights-based approach.

There has been a subtle Islamisation of society and politics in everyday life through the debates on the headscarf issue, Imam Hatip schools, faith communities and Alevism, the rise of an Islamic bourgeoisie with its roots in Anatolian culture, the emergence of consumerist lifestyles, not only among the secular segments of the Turkish society but also among Islamists, and, finally, the weakening of the legitimacy of the Turkish military as 'the guardian of national unity and the laicist order'. These are all very important aspects of the ways in which Turkish society and politics have been radically transformed since 2002 under the joint influence of Islam and neoliberalism. This influence became more visible after 2007, when the AKP started to demonstrate a majoritarian conception of democracy and an electoral authoritarianism under the leadership of Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Gül.

The AKP still attracts almost half the voters. In the presidential elections of August 2014, Erdoğan won an absolute majority in the first round and became the new president, replacing Gül. For some, the attraction of the AKP springs from their *faith-based* approach towards Erdoğan, even perceiving him as the 'last Prophet'; for others, what primarily matters is the *profit-based* local politics of the AKP, continuing the process of capital accumulation which dates back to the early days of AKP rule. Whatever the motives of AKP voters are, it is clear that Turkish society has become even more polarised along societal and political divides of secularism and Islamism. Turkish democracy is on the verge of creating new societal and political alliances to come to terms with the growing impact of Islamisation. In fact, such alliances have been experienced on different occasions. An example was the nomination of a joint candidate for the 2014 presidential election by the two main opposition parties.

Another critical moment, partly meant to be the formation of a societal alliance against the neoliberal governance and Islamisation rhetoric of the AKP rule, was the

#Occupygezi movement. The movement – or rather the *moment* – took place in Istanbul and the rest of Turkey in June 2013, and lasted around three weeks. Similar to predecessors such as Tahrir Square, Occupy Wall Street, and Indignado movements in Europe, the *#Occupygezi* protests provided some segments of the Turkish society with a prefigurative form of politics, symbolising a rejection in all walks of life of Erdoğan's vanguardism and engineering of the lifeworlds of Turkish citizens. The latter include his investment in neoliberal social policies essentialising community and family, to raise 'religious and conservative youth', his call on mothers to bear at least three children, his direct intervention in the content of Turkish soap operas (for instance, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl [Magnificent Age]*), his direct order banning alcohol on university campuses, his intention to build mosques in Taksim Square and on Camlica Hill, his condescending pronouncements on the lives of individuals, and his increasingly authoritarian discourse based on Islamic references (Özbudun 2014, p. 3; Özel 2014). In other words, the *Occupygezi* movement was, in part, a social upheaval against the subtle Islamisation of Turkish society and politics.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of the journal for their invaluable remarks, suggestions, and criticisms. I am grateful to Susannah Verney and Senem Aydın-Düzgit for their constructive remarks and suggestions. I am also thankful to Carol LaMotte and Bianca Kaiser for their assistance in proofreading the article.

Notes

1. *Milli Görüş* (National Outlook) is the ideology of Islamist politics in Turkey since the establishment of the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*) in Turkey in 1970. After the Constitutional Court banned the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*), which was an off-spring of *Milli Görüş*, the movement divided into two groups: conservatives siding with Necmettin Erbakan, the founder of the movement, and progressives siding with Tayyip Erdoğan (Coşar 2012).
2. The *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* (Sledgehammer) trials have been important judiciary instruments for the AKP to challenge the legitimacy of the military among the public. For further information on the impact of the trials on Turkish politics see Seufert (2014).
3. For more information on the main tenets of the 'Brand Turkey' equipped with Islamic and neo-Ottoman characteristics, see the EU Communication Strategy prepared by the Secretariat General for European Union Affairs in Ankara in 2010 (http://www.abgs.gov.tr/abis/?l=2). Similarly, 2023 Vision of the AKP (http://www.akparti.org.tr/english), newly established Yunus Emre Institutes (http://yee.org.tr), and Ramadan in Istanbul (http://istanbuldaramazan.org) display Islamic and neo-Ottoman undertones in their content and coverage.
4. Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2007, p. 27) have claimed that the use of the headscarf in Turkey did not increase when compared with the year 1999. However, one could not deny the increasing popularity of Islamic clothing in the media and film and fashion industries.
5. The Kurdish–Turkish peace process is an ongoing process aiming to resolve the conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state, which has been continuing since 1984 and has resulted in more than 40,000 mortalities and great economic loss for Turkey. There was a unilateral ceasefire in 1999–2004. The latest ceasefire was mutually declared in 2013 and lasted until September 2014,

when it came into question due to the spillover effect of the Syrian Civil War and the AKP's reluctance to help the Kurds in Kobane, which was besieged by Islamic State forces.

6. Turkish police arrested the sons of three cabinet ministers and at least 34 others in orchestrated raids that appeared to represent the biggest assault on the authority of then prime minister Erdoğan since mass protests against his rule in the summer of 2013. Later, Erdoğan and his AKP government portrayed the detentions as a civilian coup organised by the Gülen movement against his power.
7. The replacement of the laicist–secularist president of the YÖK in 2007 also marked the beginning of a process of appointing conservative rectors to state universities, who were confirmed by President Gül.
8. For further information on the Constitutional Court decision banning the headscarf in public institutions, see http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2008/06/06/turkey19050.htm, accessed 15 May 2014.
9. 'Released Footage Shows No Physical Attack on Headscarf-Wearing Woman during Gezi Protests', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 14 February 2014, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/released-footage-shows-no-physical-attack-on-headscarf-wearing-woman-during-gezi-protests.aspx?pageID=238&nID=62479&NewsCatID=341, accessed 14 March 2014.
10. 'Female, Male Students Living Together Is Against Our Character: Turkish PM', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 4 November 2013, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/female-male-students-living-together-is-against-our-character-turkish-pm.aspx?pageID=238&nID=57343&NewsCatID=338, accessed 22 March 2014.
11. TGTV (*Türkiye Gönüllü Teşekküller Vakfı*, Turkish Foundation of Voluntary Associations), established in 2012 (http://www.tgtv.org/), and TÜRGEV (Türkiye Gençlik ve Eğitime Hizmet Vakfı, Foundation for Service to Youth and Education in Turkey), also established in 2012 (http://www.turgev.org/), are the two largest umbrella associations with Islamic sensitivities. For further discussion on TGTV see Göçmen (2014a).
12. For the history of the Directorate General of Social Assistance, see http://www.sosyalyardimlar.gov.tr/tr/11781/SYGM-Tarihce, accessed 3 March 2014.
13. One of the most infamous charity organisations is *Deniz Feneri* (Lighthouse, http://www.denizfeneri.org/), established in 2005. *Deniz Feneri* immediately became a widespread institution, not only in Turkey, but also abroad, especially in Western European countries where there are millions of Turkish-origin emigrants. In 2008, a legal case was opened in Germany against this religious-based charity, over claims of illegal financial transactions involving donated funds and fraud. See http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=9916248, accessed 6 March 2014. A more recent example of such charity organisations is TÜRGEV. In early 2014, some charges appeared in the media regarding the corruption allegations against TÜRGEV. See http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/Erdoğan-threatened-by-expanding-turkey-corruption-scandal-a-941138.html, accessed 5 March 2014.

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