

Accumulation through Borrowing: Capital and Social Transformation in the Neoliberal Era in Turkey*

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of debt policies on capital accumulation and social transformation in the neoliberal period in Turkey. In the post-1980 period, neoliberal policies reinforced the dominance of financial capital while making debt mechanisms one of the main instruments of social control. Especially with the liberalization of capital movements in 1989, financial capital accumulation and debt strategies gained a new dimension. The politics of debt in Turkey has been shaped by the state's transfer of resources to finance capital through domestic borrowing, the marketization of public services and the inclusion of households in the financial system. This study argues that the neoliberal debt regime is not only an economic strategy, but also plays a central role in the construction of social control and disciplinary mechanisms. While ensuring the sustainability of capital accumulation, this regime reorganized the power relations between social classes in favor of finance capital.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Debt, Finance Capital, Capital Accumulation, Politics of Debt in Turkey.

1. Introduction

The global expansion of neoliberal policies since the 1970s has led to radical transformations in capitalist relations of production and capital accumulation processes. In this process of transformation, financialization and debt mechanisms have become the fundamental dynamics of capital accumulation, while social reproduction processes have been reshaped around these mechanisms. The politics of indebtedness has become not only an economic strategy, but has also come to play a central role in the construction

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of social control and disciplinary mechanisms. In this context, analyzing the functions and effects of debt practices in the neoliberal period is critical to understanding the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on an approach that considers the social and economic dimensions of debt relations together. Nietzsche's analysis of the "creditor-debtor" relationship in the context of power and authority and Marx's analysis of national debt and finance capital enable us to understand both the capital accumulation and social control dimensions of debt mechanisms. Harvey's concept of accumulation through dispossession and Lazzarato's critical analysis of the 'indebted subject' provide a nuanced theoretical framework for comprehending the transformative dynamics of debt practices within the neoliberal economic paradigm.

Studies on the politics of indebtedness in the literature generally address the issue either through macroeconomic indicators or from the perspective of household indebtedness at the microeconomic level. This study, on the other hand, aims to provide a political economy analysis of debt mechanisms by addressing both the capital accumulation and social control dimensions together.

Turkish experience offers an important case example of analysis of neoliberal transformation. The structural transformation created by the post-1989 financial liberalization process, the transformation of public borrowing into the main dynamic of financial capital accumulation and the deep penetration of debt mechanisms into social life stand out as the distinctive features of this period. The rise of financial capital, the formation of rentier economy and the transformation of debt relations into an instrument of social control make the Turkish experience a distinctive example of neoliberal transformation. So, this work aims to look at the roles played by debt mechanisms in neoliberal transformation by specifically focusing on Turkish case.

Methodologically, the study combines political economy analysis, historical comparison and critical discourse analysis. In this framework, through the evaluation of both primary sources (official documents, statistical data) and secondary sources (academic literature), the development and effects of debt mechanisms are analyzed in a multidimensional manner.

The study consists of four main sections. The first section discusses the relationship between neoliberal policies and the politics of debt at the theoretical level. The second section analyzes the processes of discipline and capital accumulation through borrowing. The third section analyzes the development of debt mechanisms in the post-1980 neoliberal transformation process in Turkey. The last section evaluates the main findings of the study and presents a general discussion.

2. Neoliberal Policies and the Politics of Debt

In its historical process and development, it is possible to speak of three types of liberalism. These are known as "classical liberalism", "compromise liberalism" (Keynes economics/welfare state capitalism) and "neoliberalism". The basic logic of classical liberalism is individualism, individual rights and freedoms, private property and a free market system without state intervention. Neoliberalism means the re-emergence of free market capitalism and free foreign trade, which were the elements of classical liberalism, the dominant economic understanding of the 18th and 19th centuries (Akalin, 2009: 11-17). In this context, neoliberalism can be characterized as the last phase of capitalism, the main feature of which focuses on increasing the profits of the capitalist class and consolidating its power. This transformation is also a product of the conflict between financial institutions and classes. This process of reconstruction is a hybrid social identity phenomenon that can be called "finance" and brings together the capitalist class and the upper reaches of its financial institutions. In this respect, this social order can be considered as a second hegemony system similar to the financial hegemony structure of the previous period (Dumenil and Levy, 2009: 51).

Neoliberalism appears as a system that reinforces the dominance of financial capital and opens up new fields of action for it. Within this system, financial capital has created its own autonomous sphere by becoming independent from production processes and has become the main dynamic of capital accumulation. Neoliberal policies, on the one hand, facilitated capital movements through the liberalization and deepening of financial markets, and on the other provided the necessary institutional and legal infrastructure for the diversification and expansion of financial instruments.

The emergence of finance capital involves creating opportunities where capitalists can raise capital with capital without any intervention in the process of value addition. Accumulation is carried out by productive means as well as, and increasingly, by non-productive means. Financial capital accumulation, one of the non-productive forms of accumulation, has continued unabated from the last decades of the 20th century to the present day (O'Flynn, 2009: 143-144). Financial capital accumulation based on financial liberalization is the process of capital appreciation through financial instruments (stocks, bonds, etc.) and financial institutions (banks, insurance companies, mutual funds, etc.). Capital derives its profits from financial transactions. It works on speculation and rent instead of the real sector. Profits are derived from financial returns such as interest, dividends, commissions, etc. (Mishkin and Serletis, 2004: 7). Marx ([1894]1981: 525) defined this capital, which is created through speculation as opposed to real capital, as "fictitious capital".

The financial capital accumulation strategy, on the other hand, refers to the orientation of capital towards financial investments that provide fictitious capital rather than productive investments, focusing on earning profits from these investments. Instruments such as the issuance of stocks and bonds, as well as the development of banking and insurance are the main veins that feed this market. In addition to rent-seeking through state borrowing, an important part of the strategy is the extension of finance to large segments of society, i.e. financial inclusion. Instruments such as private pensions, public offerings, mortgage loans, home loans, car loans and consumer loans ensure inclusion. This generates interest and commission income. The state also supports this process through various instruments. Indeed, the state plays a central and pervasive role throughout the entire financialization process. (Güngen, 2021: 69). The state tries to attract short-term capital by issuing high-interest domestic debt securities (GDDS - Government Domestic Debt Securities). Tax regulations are made to encourage the financial sector. Macro policies such as interest rates and exchange rates feed financial returns. Institutional infrastructure and regulations are developed for financial institutions. A favorable environment is created for international capital to flow into this field. Therefore, financialization becomes a process that is nourished and spread through both state policies and the dynamics of capital itself.

In order to better understand the current dominance of financial capital accumulation and the systematic structure of debt politics, it is necessary to look at the historical background of this process. Especially the Keynesian policies and welfare state practices that took shape after the Great Depression of 1929 constitute an important historical cross-section on the road to the neoliberal era. The economic and social devastation caused by the Great Depression laid the foundations of Keynesian economic theory. The central argument of this theory is that capitalism will continually produce structural problems within its own dynamics, which, without intervention, will lead to periodic depressions and permanent poverty. Keynesian analysis suggested that aggregate demand would be systemically inadequate in capitalist economies, and that the economy would enter a spiral of slow growth, high unemployment and idle capacity (Mahmud, 2012: 471). The policy response developed in the post-depression period built a compromise model between capital and labor. National fiscal and monetary policies were adjusted to target full employment and the welfare state emerged in this process. Capitalism's chronic aggregate demand problem was attempted to be solved by increasing the purchasing power of the working classes and full employment policies. The result was a prolonged period of growth, rising wages and mass consumption, often characterized as the "golden age" of capitalism (Marglin, 1992). However, in the early 1970s, this model reached a tipping point.

Social demands for the expansion of economic and social rights, the cost of imperial wars and the declining balance of payments have turned into a serious structural crisis for the

wealthy classes. The fall in the rate of profit and the decline in the income share of the capitalist class led to a contraction of historic proportions in the bond markets. The Bank for International Settlements declared that the period was in a "real dollar crisis" (Mahmud, 2012: 471). Thus, the capitalist class sought a radical break with the welfare state capitalism model and the neoliberal counter-revolution aimed at breaking the organized power of the working class was launched in this process. The capital accumulation crisis of welfare state capitalism in the 1970s and the accompanying economic stagnation accelerated the search for a new paradigm in dominant economic policies.

Neoliberalism, for which an intellectual infrastructure was created until the 1970s, was presented as a program of social reform. Market principles were presented as general principles of social organization. It was based on the argument that socio-political life should be determined not by parties, trade unions or social institutions, but by market principles. According to the neoliberal approach, in order to solve economic crises and change the structure of individuals as dependent on the state, lazy and parasitic, markets need to be freed from state monopolies, collective bargaining pressures and especially political regulation. Thus, it was argued that if market freedom is ensured, the level of freedom, growth and welfare will increase (Demir, 2011: 3).

In the early 1970s, when neoliberal financial liberalization policies were just beginning to take shape, the global transformation of the modern credit system reached a critical threshold. The American credit card industry underwent a significant transformation in this process. The credit card industry's biggest political victory was the removal of legal restrictions on interest rate regulation. Contrary to the emancipatory potential promised by technological and financial infrastructure, this development built a tighter mechanism of debt slavery on a global scale. Global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been structured to secure the rights of creditors rather than protect debtors, while the basic principle of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and associated economic associations has been "man must pay his debts". In this system, laborers, especially in developing countries, were forced to work to pay off interest-bearing loans, while new technologies and global economic structures made debt mechanisms even more complex and oppressive. Thus, the post-1971 global financial system built a structure that perpetuated and deepened debt slavery; instead of the promised emancipation, it created a more sophisticated mechanism of exploitation (Graeber, 2011: 368).

According to Brand (2011: 78), the implementation of neoliberal policies focuses first on the disintegration of the fordist class consensus, then on the prominence of the financial accumulation process, and finally on changes to regulate the contradictions and crises created by neoliberal policies. In the post-World War II period, the Fordist consensus,

which was the order of expansion of intensive capital accumulation, gave rise to various structures, such as bureaucratic parties and trade unions, as well as the state, which handled capitalist processes and social structure in the form of a centralized administration. According to Demir (2011: 3), with the effect of post-war social and class organizations, the inter-class consensus system came to the fore in directing the economy. Fordism gained importance by enabling continuous economic growth and distribution policies that would affect all social segments. Fordism also increased the consumption power of the working class by improving the working conditions of workers and increasing their wages. The role of the state became the stabilizing factor in the Fordist system, stabilizing the accumulation regime.

The accumulation crisis of capitalism and the desire of capital to take steps to increase its profitability prepared the end of Fordism. The fordist accumulation crisis pushed capital into new searches. It can be said that the first stage of the basic elements of neoliberal thought was based on this search. Neoliberal thought has put forward concrete demands such as neutralizing unions and thus limiting strikes, lowering the minimum wage, liberalization of the market, deregulation, limiting the powers of parliament, reducing the power of the bureaucracy over public institutions, privatization, low tax regulation for companies, increasing the tax burden on wage earners, reducing social cultural and public expenditures. The main purpose of these demands is to adjust the balance of power between capital and labor in favor of capital (Demir, 2011: 4). The radical use of monetary policy and breaking the power of organized labor are among the elements that started the neoliberal era. These systemic changes decisively transformed the basis of aggregate demand from full employment to consumer debt. The financialization of the economy operationalized this historic change. Neoliberalism did not displace the state, but reshaped it, transforming the "nation-state" into a "market-state" (Mahmud, 2012: 471).

According to George (2009: 44), at the international level, neoliberals have concentrated all their efforts on three main points. These are the free movement of goods and services, the free movement of capital and the freedom of investment. According to Steger and Roy (2010: 14), the basic elements of neoliberalism consist of three elements: deregulation, liberalization and privatization. According to Kozanoğlu et al. (2015, 67-91), neoliberalism has 10 basic economic policies. These economic policies are also the policies that constitute the basic elements of neoliberalism. These policies consist of privatization, deregulation, liberal foreign trade regime, independent central bank, free capital movements, two-cornered exchange rate regime, privatized foreign debts, corporate reserve policy, primary surplus and finally compliance with Maastricht targets. Here, it will be sufficient to consider three main directions among these basic elements. These are deregulation, liberalization and privatization.

Deregulation, in its literal sense, refers to the removal of established rules, (financial) liberalization, and the systematic reduction of regulatory frameworks. As a function, it refers to the necessity of changing the interventionist structure of the state in order to narrow its decision-making space on economic life. In the most general sense, it means that governments remove barriers to corporate activity (Black et al., 2009: 38). Deregulation is often undertaken to promote economic growth and greater reliance on market forces. However, deregulation can sometimes affect the quality and safety of services, as well as reduce workers' rights and protections. According to Kozanođlu et al. (2015: 72), deregulation has resulted in curtailing trade union rights, reducing job security by giving employers maximum ease in hiring and firing, removing restrictions on working hours, and weakening standards on worker health and safety. In this context, the deregulation process facilitated individuals' access to credit through the removal of controls in financial markets and led to the proliferation of consumer loans and credit cards. While this encouraged individuals to borrow to meet their consumption needs, it strengthened social control mechanisms through the obligation to repay debt and became one of the main pillars of neoliberal capital accumulation strategies¹.

Closely intertwined with deregulation, liberalization emerged as a key concept through the "Washington Consensus"², referring to the removal of restrictions on foreign trade and capital movements while facilitating the liberalization of business relations (Black et al., 2009: 85). This aims to give the private sector more freedom and flexibility. However, it carries with it the risk of reducing the government's supervision and control over economic activity. Liberalization is often implemented to promote economic growth and greater reliance on market forces. According to this neoliberal approach, economic growth and global prosperity are projected to increase.

Privatization involves reducing the share of state-owned economic enterprises and transferring them to the private sector in the belief that they will be used more effectively. The main idea of this policy is to increase production and lead to rapid growth (Black et al., 2009: 117). Neoliberal privatization, which expresses the superiority of the market over the state, private property over public and social property, basically aims to put areas that were previously excluded from profit-oriented production at the service of capital accumulation. The first important step of this policy was taken by Margaret Thatcher in Britain, starting with the privatization of British Telecom.

¹ See: Jessop, 1999; 2010.

² In general terms, the 10 policy recommendations of the neoliberal approach put forward by the consensus of the IMF and the World Bank are as follows: 1. fiscal discipline 2. reorganization and redirection of public expenditures to areas that generate high revenues 3. tax reform 4. financial liberalization 5. uniform and competitive exchange rate 6. trade liberalization 7. openness to foreign direct investment 8. privatization 9. deregulation 10. securing property rights (Williamson, 2004; Rodrik, 2006: 978).

Privatizations started with the sale of state-owned industrial enterprises and turned public services such as water, electricity, transportation, communication, natural gas distribution; social services such as health, education, social security, social housing; institutions such as research laboratories, universities, public lands and even prisons into profit areas (Kozanoğlu et al., 2015: 67). This situation has forced individuals to use loans and debts to access these services, and especially housing and education loans have led to a permanent and systematic increase in individual indebtedness. The provision of public services by the private sector has put price increases and the cost of services on the shoulders of individuals, making households more dependent on debt relations through banks and financial institutions. Thus, privatization has not only supported the capital accumulation process, but also increased the cost of social reproduction of individuals and ensured the intertwining of debt politics and neoliberal forms of control.

Through the Washington Consensus and structural adjustment programs, neoliberal policies radically transformed the regulatory role of the state in the economy and built social indebtedness as a systemic tool. Deregulation, liberalization and privatization policies have strengthened the social control of capital by pushing individuals into compulsory debt through the liquidation of social security systems, the marketization of public services and the liberalization of financial markets. The removal of legal and structural barriers to financialization has been a critical component of this process. While the expansion and diversification of financial markets enabled the spread of credit mechanisms, it also placed debt instruments at the center of social life. The privatization of public services, the contraction of social security systems and the state's reduction in social welfare expenditures have forced individuals to borrow to cover the costs of daily life. Thus, borrowing, supported by the dynamics of financialization, has become the basic mechanism of social control and the reproduction of capital accumulation.

3. Discipline and Capital Accumulation through Debt

In his work "*The Genealogy of Morality*" ([1887] 1999), Nietzsche presented a unique perspective by analyzing the primitive economy through the relationship of "creditor-debtor" instead of the relationship of "exchange-exchange". According to Nietzsche (1999: 67-72), debt relations are not only a material obligation but also a complex expression of power relations. Power hierarchies are always present in relations between people, and debt is a means of reinforcing these power relations. Nietzsche argues that the debtor is made dependent by the creditor and experiences a kind of loss of power over the creditor. The debtor falls into a kind of submission to the creditor and loses independence from the creditor. This creates a kind of power relationship and the debtor is controlled by the creditor. On the other hand, Nietzsche argued that finding a solution in the relationship between debtor and creditor does not mean balancing or eliminating power altogether. While the debtor strives to find a solution, he actually maintains the

power relationship with the creditor. For the solution is merely another masking or modification of power so that the debtor continues to be controlled by the creditor. Therefore, Nietzsche states that debt is only an illusion and a means of perpetuating power.

According to Marx ([1894]2024: 533), "the only part of the so-called national wealth that is truly included in collective property in a modern nation is the national debt". That is, the only thing that a capitalist nation can collectively own or share is public debt. Marx wanted to make it clear that this kind of collective bonding would become an instrument of oppression and appropriation. In today's world, too, many people go into debt in order to survive. Debt has become an inevitable part of social life. It is not easy to live without debt. For example, students take out loans, wage earners take out long-term loans for a house or a car, or go into constant debt through credit cards. The debt repayment scheme, which extends to all segments of society, plays an important role in meeting social needs. However, debt has become an instrument of control. Because in the face of lenders, who are the power source of the banking system, borrowing individuals are forced to limit their behavior and actions in order to repay their debts. This situation leaves individuals alone with feelings of guilt and responsibility, leading them to further internalize power relations (Demirtaş, 2018: 45).

Gürgen has argued that one of the main management strategies of the neoliberal state is the construction and deepening of debt markets. On the one hand, this strategy ostensibly offers laborers the possibility of becoming members of the money society. On the other hand, it calls them to be subject to the social power symbolized by money and imposes discipline. In this strategy, tensions are expelled from the sphere of production and exported to the sphere of exchange and circulation. The success of the neoliberal state can be read as the success of this export movement (Gürgen, 2021: 62).

In the neoliberal state, the options and possibilities of individuals who borrow to survive and try to repay this debt are quite limited. According to Demirtaş (2018: 45-46), the debtor has to keep his/her behavior and actions under control within the limits of the framework defined by the debt. Therefore, debt confiscates not only material wealth but, more importantly, people's preferences and possibilities. Individuals are accustomed to leading a lifestyle that is conducive to paying their debts. They adopt a life of debt and are controlled by debt; debt imposes certain choices on people. As an example, when a person graduates from university with debt, instead of taking the time to improve themselves, they may be forced to get a job immediately. In order not to lose his job, he may give up other things he wants to do. Or when he or she buys a house with a long-term loan, he or she may find himself or herself burdened with a debt that will take ten or twenty years to repay. The person may think they are in control of their own life, but in fact their life is completely out of their control. Therefore, debt is closely related to

time and duration. According to Çalıcı (2015: 132), "laborers have had to sacrifice their entire life span in order to survive. For wage earners, selling life span allows control and debt to spread in everyday life." Thus, debt mortgages not only the present but also the future. According to Lazzarato (2012: 56), debt builds a bridge between the present and the future: It mortgages future behavior, wages and incomes. Each individual's debt affects their future behavior, wages and income. The indebted individual is forced to sell his or her entire life time in order to survive. In this context, the indebted individual mortgages future behavior, wages and incomes.

In the neoliberal state, exploitation is largely debt-based. According to Negri and Hardt (2013: 21), there is a generalized debt situation where the 99 percent of the population is subordinated to the 1 percent through various forms of debt, including labor and monetary debts. When we look at the Eurozone today, we see that 92% of the money in circulation corresponds to debt. Debt is used as a means of maintaining and controlling exploitation, which leads to the emergence of a new group of oppressed poor. These new poor include not only the unemployed or part-time workers, but also regular wage earners and the impoverished middle class. Their poverty is based on chains of debt. The current pattern of indebtedness operates on a different scale and on a larger axis than its predecessors. Today it is not only the "national debt" and industrial or commercial loans that are under pressure, but also new international credit flows and other deep-seated debts of households (Dienst, 2015: 40).

According to Çalıcı (2015: 194), debt functions as an effective device of control over the vast majority and strongly influences them. Debt determines the limits of the debtor by determining the capacities of the subject. Lazzarato (2014: 1042) argues that in the neoliberal state, debt is recognized as an effective mechanism of control and seizure of power and, therefore, neoliberalism will not free people from debt, but rather burden them with more debt. However, one can get to a point where it is no longer possible to borrow but is dragged into paying an endless debt. Debt is fed by the constant repetition of the act of consumption and reaches an unlimited scope through the circulation of money. Therefore, under capitalism, debt is unpayable, unredeemable and infinite. The neoliberal system makes people and society live under a never-ending burden of debt. Debt increases poverty, suppresses individuality and collectivity, and takes away their power and possibilities. Neoliberalism is one of the most effective tools to produce economic man (*homo economicus*) (Demirtaş, 2018: 46).

The state is needed as an actor that oversees the relationship between debtor and creditor. This is where the state's surveillance and intervention becomes important. This is related to the role of the state in capital accumulation; the state has to constantly create the conditions for capital accumulation. By regulating the debt and credit process, the state tries to provide the conditions for future income flows. Financial risks are socialized

based on the idea that this will disrupt capital accumulation when the possibility of fulfilling the conditions for debt repayment disappears (Güngen, 2021: 64-66). The increase in the number of people who think that they will not be able to share in the wealth created and be a part of it will also create a political crisis. The debtor who thinks that paying his debt will not be beneficial may give up paying his debt. The "mortgage" crisis in the United States was caused by tens of thousands of borrowers defaulting on their debts (Güngen, 2021: 66).

Güngen calls the policy making that facilitates and encourages borrowing for the purpose of financial inclusion of more people, and at the same time copes with the contradictions of the borrowing process through the same vision, the politics of debt. Today, what can be called the politics of debt means the surveillance, regulation and management of the relationship between borrower and lender. Debt politics is presented as if it ignores elements such as social classes, organizations or collective structures and does not take into account their role in debt relations. However, the management of debt is never a singular and vertical relationship between the individual and the state. Developing policies to ensure that debt relations are sustained and sustainable is a key element. The transformations and tensions created by this management and regulation activity at the level of the state and social classes can be described with the term "debt politics" (Güngen, 2021: 99).

As a result, borrowing, which is a vital tool for capital accumulation of the capital class in a neoliberal state, can be defined as the process by which a person, institution or state borrows money to finance economic activities, make investments or meet expenditures, and repays this debt using future income or returns. This process perpetuates the process of accumulation under the name of financialization through loans and interest rates, creating a fictitious capital. By encouraging people to borrow, governments and financial institutions aim to increase consumption, stimulate the economy and ensure capital accumulation. However, debt can also be seen as a capital accumulation strategy in the sense of using future income streams in the present. Debt policies and regulations can increase income inequality while aiming to remain under a permanent debt burden. This process involves a process of dispossession as well as the appropriation of the capital that people can acquire in the future.

4. The Politics of Borrowing and Transformation in Turkey

In the post-1980 neoliberal transformation process in Turkey, the politics of debt played an important role in reshaping the social and economic structure. This process enabled individuals, households and public institutions to establish a deeper connection with the market through debt relations, and was supported by policies such as financial

liberalization, marketization of public services and contraction of social safety nets. The proliferation of borrowing practices has affected not only individual consumption patterns but also power relations between social classes. In this context, the politics of borrowing went beyond economic necessities and emerged as a multidimensional transformation tool linked to crisis management processes and the dynamics of neoliberal transformation.

The period that began after the 1980 military coup was a period of transformation in which significant changes were made in the structure and functioning of the state. The first stage of this process started with the January 24, 1980 decisions. These decisions paved the way for the implementation of neoliberal policies. The military coup regime, which was in contact with international organizations and prepared the ground for neoliberal policies, took important steps in the structuring of the neoliberal authoritarian state³ with the 1982 constitution. The process that started after the military coup in 1980 differed from previous periods. The 1980 military coup is an important political, economic and social turning point in the history of Turkey. This coup was the product of the crisis environment that emerged at the end of the 1970s as a result of the accumulation crisis of the import-substitution industrialization model and increasing political instability. The coup paved the way for Turkey's transition to an open, market-oriented, neoliberal economic model and triggered the institutional and ideological restructuring of the state and politics. In this process, neoliberalism became the dominant ideology and the state apparatus, capital accumulation, political and social life underwent a major transformation.

The inward-oriented/import-substitution model of accumulation, which had been effective since the mid-1950s and formalized after 1960, faced crises towards the end of the 1970s and came to an end in 1980. The main symptom of the crisis phases of accumulation strategies is seen in the contraction of the gross domestic product and the decline in the rate of profit of big capital. According to Boratav (2005: 91), the accumulation crisis experienced before September 12 was not only related to the reaction to wage movements, but the reason why this period was seen as a nightmare was that the authority of capital over workers was destroyed. According to Ercan (1998: 28-29), there was actually a profitability crisis. In this phase, the profitability crisis took the form of state fiscal deficit and balance of payments deficit. As of the late 1970s, with the deepening crisis of capitalism, capital did not want to transfer more resources to the state under the name of taxes. When the state found it difficult to collect taxes from capital in order to sustain its own existence, it resorted to borrowing the revenues it had previously obtained through taxes. Thus, with the allegations of Ponzi schemes or rent creation that

³ See: Poulantzas, 1978; 1982.

emerged in Turkey during this period, the state resorted to borrowing by using the bond and treasury bill markets and the crisis deepened.

In this period, when the import-substitution industrialization model was blocked and the search for new policies began, the Turkish economy faced serious problems. By the late 1970s, the import-substitution model of industrialization faced significant economic bottlenecks in Turkey. While investments increased rapidly, savings did not rise at the same rate and a resource deficit emerged. Real interest rates, which turned negative as a result of accelerating inflation, had a negative impact on savings, while the continuous stimulation of consumption in the domestic market-oriented industry also reduced the propensity to save. Despite the increasing need for external financing, external resources were difficult to obtain as investments were not directed towards foreign currency earning activities. These problems led the model to be characterized as "inward-oriented, externally dependent". By the 1980s, the import-substitution industrialization model was abandoned and new economic policies were sought. The reasons for these searches include the stagflation experienced worldwide after the 1973 Oil Crisis, the blockage of Keynesian policies and the inability of the IMF to fulfill its functions (Şiriner and Dođru, 2008: 152-153). In this context, the neoliberal policies adopted in the post-1980 period emerged as a response to the crisis of the import substitution model and initiated a new phase in Turkey's economic restructuring.

According to Bařkaya (2006: 318), in previous periods of structural crises, instruments such as Nazism, New Deal, fascism and war were used to create a favorable environment to reduce real wages. In the neoliberal period, however, increasing exploitation rates and capital accumulation became possible through the neutralization of trade unions, which is an indicator of authoritarian statism. Thus, while emphasizing coercive disciplinary measures, the working class's power was broken and pushed back. At the same time, workers' organizations had to be neutralized in order to cut welfare state expenditures. While attacking trade unions and welfare state expenditures, capital has sought to provide a legitimate environment with the recommendations of the WB (World Bank) and IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the theoretical arguments of neoliberalism. According to the neoliberal approach, the existence of labor organizations prevents the functioning of the free market by creating a monopoly in the labor market. Therefore, according to Sönmez (1992: 124), the neutralization of trade unions was deemed necessary for the stable implementation of the program. Thus, the coup regime banned strikes, collective bargaining and union activities until 1984. In addition, military methods such as the suspension of union activities, the prosecution of DİSK (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions) executives, the ban on strikes and the shift of the wage determination process to the High Arbitration Board instead of collective bargaining were supported by the anti-labor provisions of the 1982 Constitution and a series of legal regulations aimed at weakening workers' rights.

Throughout the 1980s, with the transition to neoliberal policies, the export boom and wage pressures brought new opportunities for big capital fractions and Anatolian capitalists. The ANAP governments represented bourgeois unity and gave the impression of a maturing class character of the state. In fact, depending on the ideological rhetoric, the background of the ruling cadres and their policy orientations, the ANAP government received great support from large sections of the business world for a while and was characterized as "our government" (Boratav, 2005: 92). As Bülent Eczacıbaşı stated in an interview, "There seems to be a real situation that the private sector has reached a certain power in Turkey" (Ercan, 1998: 8). Halit Narin, President of TİSK, emphasized the awareness of this support and power by stating, "For 20 years, workers laughed and we cried, now it is our turn to laugh" (Ozan, 2021: 20). Therefore, in the period after the 1980 coup, the state came to be seen as an apparatus that would look after the long-term interests of capital.

For the capitalist class supported/fostered by the state, a favorable ground was created through public investments and many steps were taken to strengthen capital accumulation. However, when capital accumulation reached certain levels, it led to demands for changes in the structure of the state. Until the neoliberal period, different capital groups such as productive capital, finance capital, trade capital, large and small capital have tried to promote their own interests (Oğuz, 2008: 105-106). With the transition to a neoliberal economy, factors such as the financial liberalization process, increasing international integration and the concentration of capital have affected the Turkish economy and caused it to be shaped around a few monopolized large capital groups, especially in certain strategic sectors. Consequently, the factional division has shifted from industry, commerce and finance to the forefront with distinctions such as big-small, Istanbul-Anadolu, domestic market-oriented- international market-oriented capitals. While TÜSİAD (Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association) represented the large and conglomerated Istanbul capital, TOBB (Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey) represented the so-called small and medium capital.

In general, in the second half of the 1980s, although domestic investments were expected to increase with regulations such as reducing taxes on capital, tax amnesty and cheap loans, investments declined. Instead of taxing capital, the state adopted an approach of giving incentives and borrowing more. Therefore, due to these reasons, the state started to incur excessive debt (Başkaya, 2006: 328).

During the economic recession of 1987-88 and the subsequent recession after 1989, the struggle of the working class took on a new dimension. This was the first time in the neoliberal process that the bourgeoisie encountered such a degree of class tension and resorted to the harsher means of the authoritarian state in response. The new

accumulation strategy in line with the preferences of the hegemonic capitalist faction was implemented through a technocratic redesign, this time without resorting to direct force. The "Decision No. 32 liberalizing capital movements" taken by the powerful executive in 1989 with urgency and insistence offered a new accumulation strategy to the historical bloc of capital and became the most important neoliberal regulation that would be valid in all accumulation strategies until today (Karahanoğulları, Türk, 2018: 417). The Decree No. 32, which was one of the important steps taken in Turkey's process of opening up to the outside world, led to the full convertibility of the TL (Keyder, 1998: 130). According to Ekzen (2009: 122), the liberalization of capital movements brought by this decision would be insufficient to solve the problems created by domestic borrowing, and Turkey would learn the risks of financial liberalization in international markets in an expensive way with the crisis in 1994.

First, the free market economy on which the model is based and the export-oriented growth approach based on the suppression of labor costs have deepened social inequalities. Inequality in income distribution increased significantly during this period. While the living standards of the working class and low-income earners declined, the earnings of capital owners rose rapidly. Second, the model was insufficient in creating employment and unemployment rates rose. The employment created by industrialization was not enough to absorb those who migrated from rural areas to the cities. Both unemployment and the informal sector expanded. An important point to be mentioned at this point is the importance of a new class structure that has emerged, the precariat class of precarious workers. With neoliberalism, precarity has become a major problem in the world due to reasons such as the withdrawal of the state from the field of economic activities to a large extent, the restructuring of work-life on the basis of flexibility, the decline of the welfare state, and the importance of private capital on a global scale (Standing, 2011). Third, productivity and technology levels in export-oriented sectors have remained low. Competitiveness has been based on cheap labor. Therefore, a sustainable industrialization could not be achieved. Fourth, the reduction of public investments and privatizations negatively affected social welfare. While the quality of public services declined, transparency and accountability in privatizations remained weak. As a result, the export-led growth ideal has increased income inequality and unemployment in Turkey, and failed to ensure sustainable industrialization and technological development. This model, which prioritizes capital accumulation over social benefit, has caused enough destruction for the working people.

With the transition to neoliberalism in Turkey, the state apparatus, which had initially adopted the export-oriented industrialization model but became indebted in the crisis environment in 1989, initiated the financial liberalization process as a new solution strategy that would last throughout the 1990s in order to both overcome the crisis and open a new space for capital, paving the way for financial accumulation and speculative

growth strategy. This strategy led to full financial liberalization by allowing the use of foreign currencies in the local market with the "Decree No. 32" and thus, the basic accumulation strategy of finance-centered accumulation was adopted (Yeldan, 2008: 127; CBRT, 1989). Thus, capital movements were systematically and financially liberalized and this liberalization became a turning point. Restructuring was carried out in banking, insurance, stock exchange, etc., and a favorable ground was created for the deepening of finance.

According to Sönmez (2009: 41), this process consists of two dimensions: internal and external financial liberalization. While internal financial liberalization focuses on the development and deepening of financial markets, external financial liberalization aims at the complete removal of barriers in the foreign exchange regime and capital movements. According to expectations, if financial repression is broken and deepening is achieved through internal financial liberalization, deregulation of interest rates, capital gains and lower taxes on high income brackets will increase the volume of savings and provide the necessary resources for investments. On the other hand, external financial liberalization will remove barriers to foreign capital and accelerate economic growth. In Turkey, following "Decree No. 28" in 1983 and "Decree No. 30" in 1984, "Decree No. 32" in 1989 liberalized all foreign exchange transactions and capital movements. Following the additional amendments made to Decree No. 32 in 1990 and the acceptance of the Turkish lira as convertible by the IMF, the deficiencies in the liberalization regulations under Decree No. 32 were eliminated and liberalization was fully achieved with the "Communiqué No. 91-3215" in June 1991.

The main features of the financial accumulation model are as follows: (1) growth is heavily dependent on short-term capital flows, (2) economic activities are driven by financial speculation and rents, and accordingly, distribution is increasingly adjusted in favor of rentiers, (3) the financial sector is disconnected from the real sector, (4) chronic imbalances in public finances, (5) economic policies are dependent on short-term capital inflows and deformation in this context. As a result, the growth strategy shifted from an open model to one based on short-term capital flows and financial speculation. Economic activities were increasingly shaped according to the interests of the rentier sector, the financial sector became disconnected from the real sector and chronic imbalances emerged in public finances. Economic policies became dependent on this new accumulation model and were deformed (Sönmez, 2009: 42).

According to Ođuz (2008: 105-106), in this new stage of accumulation based on the inflow of international money capital, a rentier-type economy (rentier capital) emerged, characterized by speculative financial interests. Banks belonging to large conglomerates made huge profits through short-term capital flows. The inter-factional conflict was between those who owned large conglomerates and small and medium Anatolian

companies. This was carried out by TÜSİAD and TOBB. According to Sönmez (2009: 42), in this period, big capital and financial rent were excluded from taxation or taxed at low rates, while tax evasion reached great heights. Increasing budget/public sector deficits were tried to be financed with high-yielding Government Domestic Debt Securities (GDDS), but this aggravated the interest burden.

The decision taken in 1989 to fully convert the Turkish lira led to deep political instability and economic crises in the country. Inadequate regulation of the financial system and macroeconomic instability led to a fragile structure of development. Growth was mainly based on speculative and short-term capital flows. In the same period, crises around the world based on neoliberal reforms led to increases in unemployment and poverty.

With neoliberalization, financial liberalization, deepening and inclusion policies implemented with different programs around the world have had significant effects on both class dynamics and state practices. According to Fine (2010: 8), an important difference that distinguishes today's financialization from previous periods stems from the fact that the working class lives under the burden of increasing debt globally and that credit has spread to individual and social reproduction processes. In parallel with neoliberalization, the indebtedness of households around the world through loans has become a global policy with the "dot.com crisis" in 2001 and the global crisis in 2008. It has become a daily reality of capitalist relations of production that laborers prefer to borrow instead of finding a job and saving in order to survive (Karacimen, 2015: 753). Gungen (2018: 335), on the other hand, emphasized that financial inclusion policies have become common in recent years as an indicator of capital's ongoing appetite for exploitation of labor through debt. Bedirhanoglu (2021: 197) also stated that financialization has caused significant historical changes in labor-capital relations and the conditions of capitalist exploitation, while at the same time strengthening the capitalist form of the state.

By the 2000s, the second generation of structural reforms implemented under the supervision of the IMF and the WB in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis integrated Turkey more tightly into finance-oriented global capitalism. As Bedirhanoglu (2009: 46) emphasizes, this process, shaped within the framework of the Post-Washington Consensus, redefined the role of the state to remedy market failures and regulate financial markets. In this period, the AKP government developed a new accumulation strategy by transforming the debt mechanism into an instrument of welfare (Bozkurt-Gungen, 2018: 233-234). Structural reforms, especially in the regulation and supervision of financial institutions, expanded finance capital's room for maneuver while institutionalizing debt mechanisms.

This strategy became more evident especially after the 2008 global financial crisis. With the deepening of financialization, both household indebtedness was increased and individuals were turned into financial consumers. According to Akçay (2019: 48), increasing the consumption capacity of the unorganized and informal segment of labor by indebting them has contributed to the construction of their political consent. Because while there was no significant increase in the real wages of this class, precarious working conditions became entrenched. In this period, the widespread use of credit cards, consumer loans and housing loans accelerated the integration of large segments of society into the financial system.

In the post-2008 crisis period, the construction sector has become one of the main mechanisms of accumulation through debt. Through the expanding powers of TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey) and urban transformation projects, indebtedness has become a prominent trend for both households seeking to own a house and companies operating in the construction sector (Yeşilbag, 2016: 610). As Geniş (2020: 12-13) notes, the neoliberal restructuring of cities and urban life has deepened marketization and financialization, especially in the provision of collective services such as education, health and housing. This process, as Bedirhanoglu (2021: 200) points out, appears as a strategy to overcome political and class challenges through the expansion of financialization.

This new phase of the politics of indebtedness opened new channels for capital accumulation while strengthening the mechanisms of social control. As Güngen (2018: 19) notes, indebtedness has increased the domination of capital over labor by putting pressure on the working class. In the flexible labor regime that was constructed, the working class was atomized and politically pacified by debt discipline. As Standing (2011) points out, the manifestation of the precariat phenomenon in Turkey has been the normalization of precarity and flexibility through debt mechanisms. This process has reinforced the dominance of finance capital and made debt mechanisms a critical tool in sustaining neoliberal hegemony.

Hence, Harvey's (2003: 150) observation that the finance-centered accumulation process is one of the main strategies of expanding accumulations through dispossession gains importance. According to Harvey, this strategy is based on a process in which finance capital and credit institutions supported by state powers play an important role. According to Harvey's (2017: 227) definition of modern capitalism, increasing debts and creating debt slavery is realized through instruments such as bonds and loans, in addition to manipulations of financial structures. Moreover, post-neoliberalization dispossession marks a period of reduced public control through the privatization of many institutions, from education to health care, from the social security system to universities. This process transforms finance capital into a global power through the

expansion of international trade and capital markets, making dispossession a process of concentration of global economic and financial power. Similar trends were observed in Turkey in the 1990s, and the privatization of public assets and services accelerated with the strengthening of finance capital and the increase in international capital movements. Therefore, it can be seen that policies of dispossession gained significant weight in Turkey during these years.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the effects of debt policy on capital accumulation and social transformation in the neoliberal era are analyzed through the case of Turkey. At the theoretical level, the dual character of borrowing is revealed: On the one hand, it is a mechanism that ensures the sustainability of capital accumulation, and on the other hand, it is a disciplinary tool that strengthens social control. Nietzsche's analysis of debt relations in the context of power and domination and Marx's analysis of national debt and finance capital have provided the theoretical basis for understanding this dual character.

The transformation of debt policy in the historical process is analyzed from the 1980s to the present day. The process, which started with financial liberalization and deregulation policies, entered a new phase with the liberalization of capital movements in 1989, and gained a different dimension in the 2000s with the deepening of financialization and the spread of household indebtedness. When this transformation is evaluated within the framework of Harvey's concept of accumulation through dispossession, it is seen that debt has become one of the basic mechanisms of neoliberal capital accumulation.

The Turkish experience reveals the unique character of this process. The post-1980 neoliberal transformation started with the export-oriented industrialization model and then evolved into a new accumulation strategy with financial liberalization. In this process, while the state institutionalized borrowing mechanisms, it also paved the way for the strengthening of finance capital through its own borrowing. In the 2000s, borrowing strategies were developed especially through the construction sector, and through TOKİ and urban transformation projects, both capital accumulation was sustained and social consent was generated.

The findings of the study show that the politics of debt is not only an economic strategy, but also a project of social transformation that restructures class relations. As Lazzarato's analysis of "the production of indebted human beings" points out, debt mechanisms have turned into a disciplinary tool that shapes individuals' behavior and future expectations. In Turkey, this process has become particularly evident as financialization has deepened and borrowing has become an indispensable part of everyday life.

The politics of debt has also led to significant transformations in labor-capital relations. The proliferation of the precariat and the normalization of precarious working conditions on the one hand, and the atomization of the working class through debt discipline on the other, have played a critical role in sustaining neoliberal hegemony. In this context, as Gungen emphasizes, debt strategies have become an effective tool for managing class conflicts by transferring tensions in the sphere of production to the financial sphere.

In conclusion, in the neoliberal era, the politics of debt emerges as a multidimensional dynamic of transformation that strengthens social control while ensuring the sustainability of capital accumulation. On the one hand, this process reinforces the dominance of finance capital, and on the other, it constructs a new social order through debt relations that permeate every aspect of social life. While the case of Turkey allows us to understand the specific dynamics and contradictions of this transformation, it also reveals the contemporary character of the politics of debt. Hence, the central role of debt mechanisms in terms of both capital accumulation and social control is of critical importance in the analysis of contemporary capitalism.

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