Neo-Ottomanism: The Emergence and Utility of a New Narrative on Politics, Religion, Society, and History in Turkey

By
Daniel Andreas Hartmann

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of History

In partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisors:
Professor Tolga Esmer, PhD.
Professor Nadia Al-Bagdadi, Dr. Phil.

Budapest, Hungary
2013

Copyright in the text of this thesis rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part, may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.

Abstract:

The present thesis investigates the popular and scholarly appraisal of the label *Neo-Ottomanism* for its implicit and explicit references to Turkey's Ottoman History and proposes that it should be defined as a transformational narrative rooted in historical rhetoric. The thesis posits that with the inauguration of a period dubbed in scholarly literature as the Third Turkish Republic after the military coup of 1980, there developed social and political dynamics that have the potential to transform parts of Turkish society. The analytical framework of *alternative modernities* is used in conjunction with *invented traditions* to theoretically frame these transformational dynamics and highlight their permeation into all strata of Turkish society, as *Neo-Ottomanism* becomes a *narrative of legitimation*. The thesis also claims that rather than being part of a politically motivated neo-imperialist agenda, the transformations inherent to *Neo-Ottomanism* are the consequence of internal and external changes in the political landscape of Turkey and the surrounding region, but also wilful transformations originating domestically.

These changes are grasped in their social and political aspect in the two research chapters. Following a theoretical appraisal of the label, the first of these will highlight some of the contemporary political developments that are subsumed under a discussion of *Neo-Ottomanism*. This is followed by a more detailed analysis of the intellectual and religious components of *Neo-Ottomanism* via an examination of the *Fetullah Gülen Movement*, one of the primary beneficiaries of the *Neo-Ottomanist* narrative. The thesis concludes that rather than being indicative of quasi-imperial intentions or the reinvigoration of an Ottoman imperial past, *Neo-Ottomanism* is in fact a transformational narrative rooted in historical factors.

3

Acknowledgements/Dedications

This thesis would in reality require me to acknowledge such a great number of people who have shown their interest and offered their help along the way that it would require a separate thesis to do justice to them all. I will therefore limit myself to a few that have been instrumental in its coming about – first and foremost of course both my supervisors, Professors Al-Bagdadi and Esmer, without whose help this work could surely not have been realised. The role of my mother and father, as well as the extensive clan of strangely interconnected relatives should not be underestimated and it would have been arduous indeed to write this thesis at all without Éva's CheeseChicken or Deathcat's constant attacks on my physical and mental health. Thank you all! On a more serious note, my Turkish instructor Eszter Lénart deserves praise also for her tireless patience in the last two years, as does Erzsébet Magyar for her instruction in French, which, although of less importance, was helpful. All translations into English are my own, although I could not have done it without the help of my Turkish friends and a little Kurdish family now living somewhere in Istanbul – and last but not least, great kudos goes to my Soviet connection for the constant reminders of the need for justification. Of everything.

Introduction: Fashioning Narratives

> Turkey has come to an age when it needs to review its biography and rewrite it. Since the grand narrative, whose prisoner Turkey was, has been torn apart, Turkey is looking for a new tale. This is a search that has been triggered by a *complete transformation*. Political power, intellectual aura and capital change hands and become elements in the new global power games between the new actors. After the revolutions of 1989 and September 11 the supra-narratives that were framing histories entered a crisis and lost their hegemonic power.[1]

The above quote, taken from an article entitled *Yeni Osmanlıcılık Yanılması* [The Neo-Ottoman Illusion] by history professor Abdülhamit Kırmızı in the semi-scholarly political observers' magazine *Altüst Dergisi* [The World-Turned-Upside-Down Magazine], encapsulates some of the broad themes that will be the subject of the following thesis. Domestic and external transformations define Turkey's contemporary political position and self-perception. Some of these are related to long-term historical processes – such as the renegotiation and redefinition of Turkish 'identity' – but have their roots, as well as influence, in contemporary political and social watersheds. Two of the latter are mentioned in the above quote and will receive attention in the following thesis. The first is the political sea change following the events of 1989 and the implosion of the Soviet Union. Another is the watershed represented by September 11 and the following reconfiguration of the political and security environment of the region. A third, domestically important event is the military coup of 1980; Turkey experienced a particularly volatile political period in the 1970s, and partly as a reaction to this the military establishment engineered the abolition of the government in 1980. This subject will recur in Chapter 1.

In the last decade the prominence of Turkey in the international public eye has increased exponentially. A wealth of scholarly publications has attended this newfound

---

[1] "Türkiye özgeçmişini gözden geçirip yeniden yazacağı bir yaşa geldi. Mahpusu olduğu büyük anlatı yırtıldığı için, kendisine yeni bir hikâye arıyor. Bu topyekûn bir dönüşümün tetiklediği bir arayış. Siyasal iktidarın, entelektüel auranın, sermayenin el değiştirmesi, taze unsurların güç oyunlarına dahil olması ve elbette küresel düzlemde yaşanan dönüşüm: 1989 devrimlerinden ve 11 Eylül vakasından sonra tarihleri çerçeveleyen üst anlatılar bunalıma girdi, hegemonik güçlerini kaybetmeye başladı." Abdulhamıt Kırmızı, "Yeni Osmanlıcılık Yanılması [The Neo-Ottoman Illusion]," in *Altüst Dergisi* [The-World-Turned-Upside-down Magazine] (online edition) (Dec. 2011), p. 2, italics mine.

prominence and it has drawn positive as well as negative critiques and observations from politicians and commentators. The appearance of Turkey in the international political limelight is due in large part to the current administration's inroads into regional politics but also to its – now frustrated – EU-accession aspirations.[2] Concurrently with this frustration, Turkey has reconfigured its foreign relations in the region, most notably in an Eastern direction, rather than seeking ever-closer ties to the West and the European Union. This has been attended by significant internal political and social transformation. Contemporary scholars and observers sometimes interpret this as a reversal of a stringent course that Turkey had pursued throughout the preceding years of the Republic.[3] Indeed, when viewed against the background that EU-Membership represented the nominal culmination of the decades-old *Kemalist* project,[4] this argument attains plausibility.

As a reaction to, and an engagement with, these socio-political developments, there has emerged a label with historical connotations: *Neo-Ottomanism*. The origins of the term are difficult to ascertain, and this question will return in Chapter 1, but a few words of clarification are in order here. The Turkish term, *Yeni Osmanlıcılık* – literally *Neo-Ottomanism* – has certain artificial connotations. For example, the aforementioned Abdülhamıt Kırmızı describes it as an illusion [*yanılması*], a fad, in his erudite text.[5] Similarly, in an article by Nicolas Danforth there is outrage at the use of the term to denote whatever the immediate context of its use suggests.[6] The hypothesis of the present thesis on the origin of the term itself is exemplified in the following narrative: that it originates, much

---

[2] Fatma Müge Göçek relates the tensile relationship between contemporary and historical Turkey as having "started to impede Turkey's chances of joining the European Union." Fatma Müge Göçek, "Through a Glass Darkly: Consequences of a Politicised Past in Contemporary Turkey," in *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Vol. 617: *The Politics of History in Comparative Perspective*, May 2008), p. 88.

[3] Tarık Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?" in *Turkish Studies* (Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2008), passim.

[4] Birol A. Yesilada, "Turkey's Candidacy for EU-Membership," in *Middle East Journal* (Vol. 56, No. 1, Winter 2002), p. 94.

[5] Kırmızı, "Yeni Osmanlıcılık Yanılması [The Neo-Ottoman Illusion]," passim.

[6] Nicolas Danforth, "Shut Up about Neo-Ottomanism Already," in *Dissent Magazine* (online edition) (March 25, 2011), passim.

more than by design, from external observations of Turkey's newfound *regionalism*.[7] *Regionalism* here should be understood as an encompassing project of renegotiating Turkey's socio-political position vis-à-vis its neighbours. Because the impetus for the renegotiation of such a position comes primarily from within Turkey, the focus of the following thesis is the domestic transformation of Turkey.

Thus the present thesis is an endeavour to contextualise and define the salient features of the label *Neo-Ottomanism* – juxtaposed with the aforementioned *regionalism* and its domestic consequences – and explicate how such a historical label is imbued with content *a posteriori* and thus fashioned into a narrative. It is also an evidence-based journey attempting to substantiate the initial definition of *Neo-Ottomanism* as a transformational project rooted primarily in Turkey's (historical) identity and political position. The realisation of this project stems from social and political crises that must be seen in their historical context; because of this, the transformation of Turkey described in this thesis has the potential to affect the wider Middle East region. Turkey's model function as an 'Islamic Democracy' in the context of the Arab Spring signifies this. It is significant to note that this project is not one affecting only Turkish elites but permeates throughout Turkish society.

The controversy surrounding the use of *Neo-Ottomanism* arises in part from the inability to find an adequate definition or paradigmatic content of the label. Indeed, it is the purpose of the following thesis to outline some instances where the term entered political and social debate and highlight why an attempt to impose constancy on something as context-specific as *Neo-Ottomanism* is imperfect. In fact a contention of the present thesis is that the term's adaptability is the main reason why it has prevailed and is appropriated domestically despite its significant shortcomings as an explanatory paradigm or even as an accurate descriptive category. It is, more accurately, a *narrative*.

---

[7] Understood as an encompassing process "linked to virtually all aspects of the nation's foreign and domestic affairs" in the sense of Kyle T. Evered, "Regionalism in the Middle East and the Case of Turkey," in *Geographical Review* (Vol. 95, No. 3, *New Geographies of the Middle East*, Jul. 2005), passim.

While some scholars have initially suggested that *Neo-Ottomanism* may coalesce into a fixed political state ideology,[8] the issue is more complex than that and this thesis seeks explicitly to discredit such hypotheses via a differentiated perspective of various domestic transformations of Turkey. Claims of ideological substitution are based on the perceived departure from Kemalist republican principles such as non-antagonistic foreign relations or economic protectionism, both of which contrast the developments described in the following chapters. While these will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2, it should be noted − and this will recur in the conclusion of the thesis − that, while there is an undeniable ideological content to *Neo-Ottomanism*, it is improbable, if not impossible, that aspects of it will replace the state ideology of the Turkish Republic. It has been noted that *Kemalism* itself, although an established and accepted scholarly and popular term denoting the political principles and ideology of the Turkish Republic, is itself amorphous and adaptable.[9] Thus, although individual aspects of *Neo-Ottomanism* will be discussed as having far-reaching consequences throughout the following text, the constraints of official Turkish state ideology limit the extent to which *Neo-Ottomanism* may transform Turkey.

Components of *Neo-Ottomanism* are profound in their historical links and context, chronologically going beyond the watersheds mentioned by Kırmızı, especially in the popular parlance of external observers. Form this angle, for example, the Ottoman Empire (and Turkey's relationship with it) has become a namesake for accusations of political agitation and a tool of consequent discreditation. This took on catch-phrase-like proportions as recently Texas representative Louie Gohmert accused President Obama of jump-starting "a new Ottoman Empire" with his Middle East policies and his stance toward Turkey.[10] This

---

[8] Mustafa Aydın, "Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After: Turkish Foreign Policy at the Threshold of the 21st Century," in Mustafa Aydın/Tareq Y. Ismael (eds.), *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century. A Changing Role in World Politics* (Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate 2003), passim.

[9] Nicholas Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP," in *Turkish Policy Quarterly* (Vol. 7, No. 3, Fall 2008), passim.

[10] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJK7QE9YdfQ, last accessed 4. March 2013.

cannot be taken seriously, especially because of the geographically sweeping comments of Gohmert; but it illustrates how the Ottoman Empire has come back into the arena of contemporary political discussion, even in minor political debates. It reflects the transforming relationship Turkey and its region have with this particular imperial past. While controversy surrounding the position of the Ottoman Empire as the antecedent of modern Turkey is nothing new for the Turkish Republic, which has in one way or another been engaged in the difficult task of adequately coming to political and historiographical terms with its Ottoman past,[11] it is significant that the issue has expanded beyond the domestic Turkish and scholarly spheres.

The purpose of this thesis is not to hypothesise on the inception of *Neo-Ottomanism*, although this will be the point of departure in the following chapter, because it is not instrumentally important for contemporary use where the label originated. This will become clear in the context of the various appropriations of the term itself and the debate associated with it. The label has historical connotations depending on who appropriates it and the background onto which it is projected, thus legitimising the present via historical analogy. For example, in the context of the *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi's* [Justice and Development Party] foreign policy activism the label can come to denote aggressive Turkish expansionism or a more innocuous mobilisation of capital on the basis of perceived historical and cultural ties.

The label may also be employed by foreign policy pundits who seek to advance their own agenda or see their interests threatened and thus seek to discredit Turkey's foreign policy. Turkish politicians or actors otherwise involved in foreign policy emphasise common ties in order to further their own policies. This ambiguity will be explored in Chapter 2, which deals with the incumbent administration's foreign policy. Thus, the *Neo-*

---

[11] Alan Mikhail/Christine Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and The Imperial Turn," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (Vol. 54. No. 4, 2012), passim.

Ottoman label is *not* about the Ottoman Empire, although its content is retrospectively made out to be. It is about the use of history and the political expedience of historical narrative.

Thus, an important contention of this thesis is also that aspects of *Neo-Ottomanism*, regardless of the specific context of its use, are important tools to those wielding the term. The label comes to denote a *narrative of legitimation* imbuing the claims of those appropriating it with rhetorical and political legitimacy. At an initial level, the label, by appropriating controversial historical connotations, works at an emotively. This controversy has partly been generated over the decades of the Republican period, when the Ottoman Empire represented the converse of the Turkish Republic and its heritage was vehemently rejected. The utility of aspects of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative will become apparent in Chapter 3, which develops the hypothesis that the *Gülen Movement*, as Turkey's largest and most wealthy religious movement, appropriates positive religious connotations evoked by an imagined religious community of formerly Ottoman Muslims in order to pursue concrete political and economic agendas. Indeed, the *cui bono* question of the *Neo-Ottoman* discourse is the most lucrative and interesting one to pursue.

It is also necessary to assert that *Neo-Ottomanism* also has non-contextual contents deriving from the terminology itself. The prefix *Neo-* denotes that the operative word *Ottomanism* has an established meaning with particular historical and content-specific references. The prefix also asserts that these have remained constant in some measure and that in fact *Neo-Ottomanism* is an 'updated,' contemporary version of an established historical phenomenon.

This is imprecise for a number of reasons. The first is that *Ottomanism*, far from being conceived as a concerted ideology or established *ex ante*, is deduced from

interpretations of self-image on the part of the Ottoman Empire during the *Tanzimat* era.[12] It is initially derived from statements in the constitution of 1876 that refer to subjects of the Ottoman Empire as "*Osmanlu* [sic]."[13] With the legal dissolution of institutionalised social differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire this may indeed have initially been a terminological quirk, although it coalesced into an ideology towards the end of the 19th century and the term was filled with meaning *a posteriori*.

This theoretical feature it shares with *Neo-Ottomanism*. It is indubitably with regard to the dissemination of various nationalisms and emancipation movements that the term developed and was incorporated into the constitution, as the Ottoman administration sought an ideological counterweight to the *nationalisms* of its peripheries. However, its valence as a cohesive ideological framework is thrown into question by the indefinite suspension of the constitution by Adbülhamid II. Thus *Ottomanism* does not refer to any concrete historical paradigm, but is more accurately a label used to describe domestic Ottoman phenomena retrospectively in engagement with external factors; this is another second epistemological feature it shares with *Neo-Ottomanism*.

Another important reason for the elusiveness of *Neo-Ottomanism* is its historical reference point. As pointed out above, regarding *Ottomanism* monolithically or as clearly defined is problematic at best and therefore insufficient as a reference point for *Neo-Ottomanism*. As will become clear in the following chapters, *Neo-Ottomanism* is about *perceptions* of the Ottoman Empire rather than historical fact. In that regard it engages implicitly with the imperial polity itself but also – in terms of context – with narratives of the Ottoman polity that were formed during the Late Ottoman and Republican Periods. For example, the image conjured up by using *Neo-Ottomanism* as a negative context – such as

---

[12] Heidemarie Doganalp-Votzi/Claudia Römer, *Herrschaft und Staat: Politische Terminologie des Osmanischen Reiches der Tanzimatzeit* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2008), p. 189-192.
[13] Ibid.

implying imperial Turkish aspirations – corresponds to the Kemalist interpretation and evaluation of the Ottoman heritage.

Emphasizing cultural, religious, and social ties forged among pre-national polities during the Ottoman period by virtue of a shared imperial administration engages with the Ottoman Empire as a positive model. This is, for example, important in regard to the perception that several separate distinct cultural and political entities, which were formerly ruled collectively by the Ottoman Empire, are historically connected. This feature emphasises notions of peaceful coexistence and tolerance – however, the tenacity of Ottoman rule was precarious on the fringes of its geographical expansion throughout its formal existence, contradicting these perceptions. Much less could the Ottoman administration be seen as guarantor of such coexistence and tolerance.

The argument that the label denotes a collection of developments and transformations rather than a fixed ideology is supported by identifying the various traits and strands of argumentation that are part of *Neo-Ottomanism* and contextualising them historically. As will be discussed in the context of the theoretical framework of *alternative modernities* and *invented traditions*, which posits practices of modernity as transformational processes against a normative notion of the 'modern' and 'progress,' Chapter 1 will identify one of the distinct features of *Neo-Ottomanism* as its Islamic and non-western component as well as its ability to permeate into social and political discourse as a tool of political legitimation. A number of components of *Neo-Ottomanism* can be identified as rooted in the 1980s rather than the Ottoman Empire. An important contention of this thesis is thus that *Neo-Ottomanism* as a whole has its roots in important socio-political developments of the last two decades rather than long-term historical heritage.

Chapter 2 deals with recent foreign policy forays of Turkey into the surrounding region. It is argued that rather than signalling aspirations to expand aggressively its sphere

of influence, as suggested by *Neo-Ottomanism*, these forays and advances are primarily consequences of concrete political reorganisation which has occurred since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and, more recently, as a consequence of September 11 and the US-led invasion of Iraq. They are also, prominently, associated with the role of Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey's Foreign Minister. His role will be evaluated critically. *Neo-Ottomanism* is not refuted or discredited, as it is by the appropriation of this label that concrete policies are branded and legitimised. This appeals to a perceived cohesion on the basis of cultural and historical ties and ultimately contributes to political and financial mobilisation.

Chapter 3, as mentioned above, picks up the argument that the Islamic component of *Neo-Ottomanism* became a useful vehicle to disseminate notions of social transformation as well as political participation and economic action. In this interpretation, the *Ottoman Empire* is perceived as a morally integrated Islamic polity worthy of emulation beyond the borders of contemporary republican Turkey. In terms of the *cui bono* question, the *Fetullah Gülen Movement* can be seen as one of the main profiteers of *Neo-Ottomanism*. This can be argued by examining in detail some of its educational activities, which profit from perceptions of cultural, religious, and historical cohesion.

In order to draw these arguments together, it is proposed that *Neo-Ottomanism* should be seen as a label denoting a *narrative of legitimation* and the rebranding of Turkish identity in a national and supranational (regional) sense. The referent of the narrative itself is contextual, although the overall purpose of ascribing to it can be explained by referring to the framework of *alternative modernities* and *invented traditions* in their explanatory components of the need for such narratives for purposes of legitimation. *Modernities* should be understood as projects of social and political transformation – with the attendant political and aspects, although the concrete political aspects of *Neo-Ottomanism* can and should be separated from its intellectual components.

One of the problems of Eisenstadt's original framework was its lack of sufficient differentiation between the two functionally different concepts of *modernity* and *modernisation*, in which the former is understood as the intellectual underpinning of the latter. Indeed, the shortcoming of structural and functional differentiation was to prompt the evolution of Eisenstadt's original theory.[14] This indicates that the tension between a normative understanding of 'what it means to be modern' and social reality cannot be resolved by abstraction and comparison of the individual constitutive elements of modernising programmes.[15] Accordingly, to avoid the normative implication of the term 'modern,' this thesis will relate Turkey's 'transformation' and regard *Neo-Ottomanism* as a *transformational project* wherever possible in order to reflect "a story of continual constitution and reconstitution."[16] This reconstitution is also presented as an intrinsically *Turkish* story. That said, this thesis does not claim that the transformation of Turkey is beyond comparison and subsequent judgement – indeed, the contested origins of the *Neo-Ottoman* label indicate that *internal* transformation may well take on externally originating terminology.

The accounts of these transformations will be augmented, in order to explicate the relationship between the separate components, by referring to the dynamics of *invented traditions* as proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger in their book *The Invention of Tradition*. It is thus proposed that the historical connotations of *Neo-Ottomanism*, by referring to an imperial polity of exceptional longevity and durability, imbue the propagated transformations with scope and legitimacy. This can be equated to the *invention of a political tradition* in Turkey. *Neo-Ottomanism* is also, significantly, an explicitly non-secular and non-western project – an alternative to western normativity – therefore it can be

---

[14] Gerhard Preyer, "Introduction," in *Protosociology. An international Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* (Vol. 25, 2007: *Shmuel Eisenstadt: A Paradigma of Social and Cultural Evolution*), passim.
[15] Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," in Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick/London 2002), p. 1-2.
[16] Ibid., p. 2.

thought of as an *alternative modernity*. This thesis states that, seen through the theoretical lens laid out in Chapter 1, *Neo-Ottomanism* is an encompassing label comprising political transformations (Chapter 2) and the intellectual formulation of these (Chapter 3). It should also be noted that the use of the term *modern* throughout this thesis is not in opposition to *archaic* and does not denote teleology, but is used merely as an indicator of differentiation between interpretations of Turkish politics.

Neo-Ottomanism can be described in the parameters Eric Hobsbawm established in his analyses of so-called invented traditions: "'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices…which seek to inculcate certain norms of behaviour [with legitimacy] by repetition…"[17] More than anything else, the label refers to a set of parameters, perceptions, and a *Weltanschauung* that is invented, although rooted in perceptions of the past – thus the repetition of practices subsumed under the label is also posited as historic.

The case of *Neo-Ottomanism* is an exceptional example of the how all three categories of invented traditions identified by Hobsbawm may overlap. These are traditions that are invented with the purpose of

> a)…establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behaviour,[18]

and, as will become clear in the following chapters, these features of invented traditions are especially poignant in the case of *Neo-Ottomanism* and give insight into the proverbial *cui bono* question that is crucial to understanding this complex and elusive label.

To belabour a metaphor and recap: *Neo-Ottomanism* is only about the Ottoman Empire in as much as that the Ottomans had their fingers in many political and social pies

---

[17] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in Eric Hobsbawm/Terrence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge/NY: Cambridge University Press 1992), p. 1 and passim.
[18] Hobsbawm, "Introduction," p. 9.

16

throughout the territories under nominal Ottoman control. Contemporary discourse on *Neo-Ottomanism* appeals to the prints left in these pies. However, because of the historical distance and distortion between the Third Republic (post-1980) and the Ottoman Empire, it is unclear whether these prints exist at all. This is established in political exchanges rooted in the present and legitimised by *Neo-Ottomanism*. Thus *Neo-Ottomanism* is the label of a narrative fashioned on historical connotations. This narrative is rooted firmly in the present rather than the past. This is due to the political expedience of history and the volatility of the Turkish relationship with its Ottoman past.

17

Chapter 1: *Neo-Ottomanism* as a Narrative of Turkish Transformation

The following chapter will map out the theoretical caveats of the argumentations that follow. These will revolve around the idea that the label of *Neo-Ottomanism* introduced previously is a complex and dynamic commentary on contemporary Turkish society and politics. This commentary takes on relevance in accordance with the particular interlocutors making it. *Neo-Ottomanism* denotes a *narrative of legitimation* in which historical perceptions and connotations are employed to establish leverage by different groups for reasons that are in each case specific to the issue of debate. Thus, *Neo-Ottomanism* is also about *symbols* and their appropriation in order to achieve specific outcomes or establish plausibility for particular policies; it is this part of the label that can be adequately explained by referring to the framework of *invented traditions*.

1.1: The contested Origins of the *Neo-Ottoman* Label

As a point of departure, *Neo-Ottomanism* is understood as an *initially* externally imposed label. As Turkish historian Kemal Karpat points out, the earliest documented use of the term itself can be traced back to the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, when Greek agitators used it to refer to the alleged aggressive expansionism of the Turkish Republic.[19] Karpat claims that the term referred to the strong ideational role Turkey played for Muslims living beyond its contemporary borders; thus the labelling of expansionist policies of the Turkish Republic as *Neo-Ottomanism* already in the 1970s referred to legitimation on the basis of religious and historical connotations. This is significant because the religious components of *Neo-*

---

[19] Kemal Karpat, "The Civil Rights of the Muslims of the Balkans," in his *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History. Selected Articles and Essays* (Brill: Leiden/Boston/Cologne 2002), p. 524.

Ottomanism are especially important in asserting historical and cultural continuity between a perception of the Ottoman past and a Turkish present.

Indeed, it seems that much contemporary debate revolves around the implication of 'cultural irredentism' as Turkey seeks to re-engage in regions that were once part of the Ottoman Empire. For example, in an engagement with this, Kırmızı identifies its use as an insinuation and writes that it is pejorative, labelling Turkish foreign policy as "dreams of conquest."[20] Yet this engagement itself, on the basis of perceived networks of cultural and religious cohesion, is also a process of *inventing a shared tradition*. This is significant because it underscores that *Neo-Ottomanism* is at its core about such inventions that legitimate the policies accompanying them.

The aforementioned use of *Neo-Ottomanism* as a negative label already suggests that it serves the purpose of epistemological commentary; however, the content of the commentary is derived from the interpretation of *contextual symbols* rather than the referents of the label itself; this is another example of how *Neo-Ottomanism* resembles an *invented tradition*. In this particular case, the negative connotations of Ottoman imperial expansion and the attendant narratives of the 'Ottoman Yoke' or a generalised 'catastrophe theory'[21] were meant to imbue the resistance movement against the Turkish occupation with rhetorical legitimacy and simultaneously 'invent' a tradition of aggressive irredentism for the Turkish Republic based on selective appropriation of Ottoman history. The 'meaning' of Ottoman expansion was derived from present-day Turkish aggression and select narratives rather than historical consensus.

Thus *Neo-Ottomanism* was and has remained discursive rather than paradigmatic. For this reason it is necessary and analytically lucrative to grasp individual elements and

---

[20] "Gerek *fetih rüyaları* görenler…" in Kırmızı, "Yeni Osmanlıcılık Yanılması [The Neo-Ottoman Illusion]," p. 2, italics mine.

[21] The Bulgarian case is summed up in Machiel Kiel, "The Nature of the Turkish Conquest and its impact on the Balkans: Destroyer or Bringer of Culture?" in his *Art and Society in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period* (Van Gorcum: Maastricht/Assen 1985), p. 33-35.

connotations of it and embed these into a theoretical framework rather than establish a fixed meaning. The origins and contents of the label thus fluctuate. This is reflected in contemporary literature and scholarship, which have considerable problems clarifying these problems and instead opt to use the label as a contextual insinuation. It neither describes a concerted political ideology, as has been argued,[22] nor a particular historical period, as is suggested by its reference to the Ottoman Empire.

Because of the isolated use of the term in reference to periods before the 1980s, it is inconclusive to speculate upon its origins being before this period. The term has been used in scholarship of the 1990s and 2000s to retrospectively describe a wide range of phenomena. Jenny White, writing on the politics of Turkey in the 1980s, locates the (re-) emergence of the label in the political consequences of the military coup of 1980 and the years between 1980-1983, when martial law was implemented.[23] Indeed, the 1980s can be seen as the gestation period of the ideas associated with contemporary *Neo-Ottomanism*, as, regardless of the origins suggested by Karpat, it has been used to describe *internal* Turkish developments from the 1980s onward.

This historical context is also important because the political climate following the years of martial law encouraged narratives framing political and social dissent to emerge removed from high politics. Similarly to Islam, which came onto the political scene as a means of political emancipation,[24] tendencies that were later to be subsumed under *Neo-Ottomanism* initially materialised against a background of highly political rhetoric. It was not until the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [Justice and Development Party] was voted into

---

[22] Ömer Taspinar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies. Between *Neo-Ottomanism* and *Kemalism*," in *Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Middle East Center*, No. 10, Sep 2008, passim.

[23] Jenny White, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey," in Reşit Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey. Volume 4: Turkey in the Modern World* (Cambridge/NY: Cambridge University Press 2008), p. 357-376. Poignantly, White refers to *Neo-Ottomanism* as a "set of ideas," rather than a concerted ideology. Ibid, p. 371.

[24] Ibid., passim.

government in 2002 that the label became part and parcel of popular and political parlance, significantly connoting *internal* Turkish developments.

1.1.1: The Search for Narratives of Legitimation and Transformation outside Politics

Mehmet Fevzi Bilgin points out that the constitution of 1982 has significant deficiencies in terms of political legitimacy.[25] This indicates an incentive for political and social opposition, but herein also lies one of the answers to the *cui bono* question connected to *Neo-Ottomanism*. The constitution of 1982 effectively marginalised legitimate expression of political dissent and reserved power in the hands of a small elite made up mostly of statist institutions and the military.[26] This minimised civil participation in the governance of Turkey. In order to express dissent, the grievances of non-state groups had to be clad in alternative *narratives of legitimation* – like, for example, religion – in order to achieve valence in the political arena.

A romantic, idealised version of the Ottoman past offered such a narrative to political and social movements and commentators. Commentary on perceived ills of society and politics was clad in rhetoric that struck a chord among the Turkish public without being politically explicit. Thus, political grievances and demands were glossed over with a veneer of invented nostalgia in order to appeal to a wide audience who may otherwise be deterred by the constraints of high politics. For example, the at that time oppositional *Refah Partisi* [Welfare Party], which recruited its electorate partly from the economically disadvantaged, proposed tax transformations and a more egalitarian form of taxation based on the perceptions of the *millet* system as a means of financial demarcation and multi-ethnic organisation.[27]

---

[25] Mehmet Fevzi Bilgin, "Constitution, Legitimacy, and Democracy in Turkey," in Saïd Amir Arjomad (ed), *Constitutional Politics in the Middle East. With Special Reference to Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan* (Hart Publishing: Oxford/Portland 2008), p. 141-145.
[26] Ibid., p. 145-146.
[27] White, "Islam and Politics," p. 371.

This perception was based on the idea that the *millet system*, the origins and political valence of which are highly controversial, served a similar purpose successfully in the Ottoman Empire. There is no concrete historical evidence to suggest that this was the case; even the tenuous contention that the *millet* was the precursor to the religious and ethnic *nation-state* – especially in the Balkans – is contested. Although the term itself does appear in Ottoman texts, its exact meaning varies according to context.[28] Although there is general consensus that it was taken to denote non-Muslim segments of the Ottoman population, it cannot be understood as a *terminus technicus* for cultural stratification without qualification. During the *Tanzimat* period, boundaries between ethnic, cultural, and religious communities became increasingly blurred,[29] and the *millet* as an organisational principle of the Ottoman Empire is consistent neither in chronology nor in application.

Indeed, the call for inclusion, pluralism and a less hierarchical, less centralised system of governance was to become situated at the centre of the *Neo-Ottoman* discourse as it emerged as an autonomous concept. Whether or not Ottoman society corresponded to the idealised perception perpetuated by the historical reference was not an issue. Rather the contemporary socio-political situation was at centre stage. In the case of the demands of the *Refah Partisi*, clothing their criticism of the contemporary political system in nostalgic narrative was intended to make the history-sensitive Turkish public more receptive to this particular issue. Forthwith, such historical comparison was a useful narrative for transporting political demands and issues; it became a *narrative of legitimation*.

Several of the domestic epistemological issues conjoined in the contemporary discussion on *Neo-Ottomanism* developed in the 1980s. In addition, the end of the Cold War brought with it a sense of ideational crisis and the need for Turkey to make a "geo-

---

[28] Doganalp-Votzi, *Herrschaft und Staat*, p. 209-211.
[29] M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press: Princeton/Oxford 2008), p. 74-76.

cultural"[30] choice. Together with the end of the bipolar era – during which Turkey had

adhered to dominant westernisation processes under its formal adherence to NATO – the

domestic experience of political violence in the 1970s, and finally the military crackdown of

the early 1980s, the project of transformation based on the western (European) blueprint

was increasingly called into question.[31] Thus, in the 1990s, there emerged fertile ground for

the articulation of transformational projects that would take full advantage of the strategic

possibilities and ideational necessities of the post-1989 regional political order.

Turkey in the 1990s became a society in transition as actors competed for valence in

the political arena by appropriating *narratives of legitimation* and appealing emotively to

their audiences. While the altered political environment no doubt contributed to

transformations in the realm of Turkish foreign policy, the last decade of the 20th century

was defined in Turkey by what Keyder has described as a social *malaise*. Decades of

unquestioned equation of modernity with Western ideals had effectively marginalised

anything intrinsically Turkish: the project of Western modernity "permitted local culture no

greater space than the folkloric; it accepted no adulteration of modernity with a qualifying

adjective such as Islamic or Turkish."[32]

Thus, on its way into the new millennium Turkey became an arena of social

contestation. To describe these complex dynamics, Eisenstadt's initial theoretical

formulation of 'multiple modernities' – as opposed to a normative project of social and

intellectual transformation – is one useful framework of analysis. Because modernisation is

fundamentally a project of political reconstitution and the negotiation between marginalised

actors and a political 'centre,'[33] Eisenstadt's concept captures some of the contents of the

narratives of legitimation that emerged in the wake of the 1980s in Turkey. As has been

---

[30] Çağlar Keyder, "Whiter the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s," in Sibel Bozdoğan/Reşat Kasaba (eds.), *Rethinking National Identity in Turkey* (University of Washington Press: Seattle/London 1997), p. 37.
[31] Ibid., p. 46-49.
[32] Ibid., p. 37.
[33] Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," p. 5-6.

mentioned, these narratives provided a vehicle of expression for political and social dissatisfaction as 'alternatives' to official political channels.

While the characterisation of the Third Turkish Republic as being subject to transformational dynamics that can be described in terms of 'the modern' may be counter-intuitive, this is an adequate description. *Modernisation* should be understood as *transformation* rather than *progress*. The changes described throughout this thesis can be understood as an *alternative modernity*; they are consequences of the social *malaise* lamented by Keyder and an alternative to Westernisation processes dominant in the Turkish Republic before the 1980s. Thus, modernity entails a re-working of such elusive categories as *identity* and collective cohesion.[34] The end of the bipolar world order had profound consequences for the constitution of Turkish self-image, but also opened opportunity spaces for processes such as foreign policy initiatives.

The broader dynamic of ideational crises as the result of social reconstitution is described originally by Weber, who argues that the inception of modernity is precisely at the point that "the unquestioned legitimacy of a…preordained social order began its decline."[35] The fundamental transformation of the traditionally accepted political order opens spaces for contestation and socio-political expression. In Turkey, the political transformations of the 1980s had such an effect by softening up the established political order; for example, the questionable political legitimacy of the 1982 constitution and the controversial political legacy left by the years of martial law provided incentives for political contestation.

The development of *narratives of legitimation* such as *Neo-Ottomanism* is a consequence of this. These opportunity spaces become the loci in which civic actors vie for

---

[34] Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," p. 6-7.
[35] Paraphrased by James D. Faubian in ibid., p. 4.

political participation by appropriating *narratives of legitimation*; the relative inexperience of the Turkish public with a liberal political system increased the valence of such narratives.

1.1.2: The Transformation of Narratives of Hegemony

Ahmet Davutoğlu, who will be of interest later in this thesis in his function as Foreign Minister of Turkey, formulated several arguments in the late 1990s that are important in understanding the ideational components of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative, for example ina lengthy article Davutoğlu published in the Turkish Journal *Diwan* [Council]. While the original article was based on the arguments made in publications that have been largely discredited – such as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*[36] – it has been explicitly connected to the current work of Davutoğlu.[37]

Much of what the Foreign Minister argues for in *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth] implicitly echoes the arguments he set out in this article, entitled "Civilizational Self-Perception." Davutoğlu attributes the contestations of identity and the socio-political turmoil of Turkey – in essence the *malaise* recounted by Keyder – to the inability of the Turkish nation to maintain a strong link between its own, intrinsic 'life-world'[38] and an idiosyncratic social order. The tension between these two aspects of the Turkish Republic can be traced to the uncritical reception of western-oriented teleological transformation processes. While this was a necessary step for the transformation from the rump of the Ottoman Empire to the Republic, Turkey had failed to make the next step, which was to progress from its western orientation onto a self-determined path of development.[39]

---

[36] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (Simon & Schuster: NY 1996).

[37] Ayşegül Taşkapu, "A key Text to Understanding the mindset of the Architect of the new Foreign Policy: Civilizational Self-Perception," in *Turkish Review* (November 2010, online edition). Online version: http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=223065, last accessed 17. July 2013.

[38] Davutoğlu juggles freely with the term coined by Husserl. Ibid., passim.

[39] Ibid.

As a solution to this problem, Davutoğlu suggests that occidental civilisation go through a process of self-criticism in order to let go of its hegemonic claims and 'allow' those polities attached to it contribute to its evolution.[40] Tellingly, throughout the article, Davutoğlu equates 'occidental civilisation' with *Europe* and sees *Turkey* as the viable representative of its supposed counterweight, 'oriental civilisation.' This may indicate why, in his speech delivered on the occasion of Europe Day in 2009, the Foreign Minister calls for the European Union to embrace the notion of cultural plurality more explicitly, foregoing notions of

> [an] "egocentric illusion" as conceptualized eloquently in the "Study of History" of Toynbee [and] a monolithic cultural understanding… [and recognise] a Europe that is cognizant of the idea that the history of civilizations is indeed a history of borrowing from one another as underscored in "The Grammar of Civilizations" of Braudel.[41]

Davutoğlu sees the crux of Turkish development in the ability of the Republic to pursue its own historical path relatively independently of its western orientation. While reading the passages of his speech as a critique of the European Union and an echo of the frustration arising from ascension negotiations underway since 2005 – this will recur later in the thesis – Davutoğlu argues for what, in his terms, may be called *Turkish civilisational self-perception*.

Neo-Ottomanism may be understood as a narrative with the potential to contribute to the transformation of such a self-perception. By providing an (invented) template counteracting the accepted narrative of western civilisational hegemony, the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative provides a role model for the Turkish republic. This role model is built on a romantic notion of the Ottoman Empire as a self-confident political entity with an Islamic identity on a par with its European and international counterparts. It is significant that

---

[40] Taşkapu, "Civilizational Self-Perception," passim.
[41] Ahmet Davutoğlu, speech delivered on the occasion of Europe Day, 8. May 2009. Online version: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-h_e_-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu-to-eu-ambassadors-on-the-occasion-of-europe-day_-8-may-2009_-ankara.en.mfa, last accessed 17. July 2013.

Davutoğlu explicitly cites the wrongful equation of 19th-Centuy History with *European History* as the inception of this narrative of western civilisational hegemony.[42] In contrast to this, Turkey aspires to regain aspects of the neglected Ottoman *civilisation*. What Davutoğlu argues for is that the Turkish Republic perceive itself on the basis of its cultural and political heritage not relegated to western civilisation, but rather as an equal. This can only be achieved by critically embracing the various embattled historical and religious aspects of the Ottoman heritage in order to transform Turkey's self-perception. These aspects will be discussed below.

1.2: Islam and the Turkish Politics of Engagement

Much contemporary scholarly literature and journalism engages with the question whether the overt incorporation of religion into Turkish socio-political discourse reflects an 'Islamisation' of Turkey. In fact it is difficult to answer this question definitively, mainly because the notion of *Political Islam* has been distorted by the events of 2001. Graham Fuller observes that the events of September 11 and the following War on Terror lamentably encouraged a reductionist view of Political Islam, equating it to militant fundamentalism.[43]

As a counterweight to this, the following section proposes that the question of the role of Islam in *Turkish* politics can be approached by utilising elements of the approach of a *politics of engagement* put forward by political sociologist Berna Turam. This approach, by adopting the notion of a *civil society* in close engagement with the state,[44] allows a more differentiated analysis of the role of Islam in Turkish society and politics than a viewpoint presupposing Islam's unalterable opposition to the secular state. In order to theoretically

---

[42] Taşkapu, "Civilizational Self-Perception."
[43] Graham E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan 2003), p. xi-xii.
[44] Berna Turam, "The Politics of Engagement between Islam and the Secular State: Ambivalences of 'Civil Society,'" in *The British Journal of Sociology* (Vol. 55, No. 2, 2004), p. 259-262.

underpin the content of Chapter 3, it is necessary to review the role of religion in Turkey from the viewpoint of its relationship to politics.

A civil society removed from high state politics would, for example, constitute the religious establishment; however, this is not the case, as will become clear throughout the following chapters. In the case of *Neo-Ottomanism*, religion can clearly be seen to become part of a *narrative of legitimation* that is co-opted variously. Thus any notion of civil society has to overcome the problem of what lies outside of the state. It can be argued that *Neo-Ottomanism* is an example of a *politics of engagement*, for it is by appropriating this *narrative of legitimation* that the horizontal ties of communities are strengthened. This prevents the formulation of vertical tensions inside the political system and thereby counteracts the formation of a *western* understanding of civil society.[45] Understanding how this is possible requires an examination of how this particular *narrative of legitimation* works and an engagement with the implicit question of whether or not there is a civil society in Turkey.

1.2.1: Narratives of Legitimation without the Turkish State

An example of a *narrative of socio-political legitimation* without the state, described by social anthropologist Jenny White, is religion. Islam acquired increasing valence as a vehicle for political expression as domestic critique of the political system was marginalised in the years of military rule between 1980 and 1983.[46] Recently, social and political groups affiliated with Islam have acquired importance in the context of Turkish foreign policy; this will be discussed in Chapter 2. The role of religion as a vehicle of political and social expression can be subsumed under a discussion of *Neo-Ottomanism*. For this reason, religion in Turkey will not be afforded separate treatment but be shown as an integral part of

---

[45] Turam, "The Politics of Engagement," p. 263.
[46] White, "Islam and Politics," passim.

Neo-Ottomanism and therefore the dynamic of this particular *narrative of legitimation* in the context of Turkey's transformation.

That said, Islam assumes special importance in Eisenstadt's theoretical framework of *multiple modernities* and *narratives of legitimation* in Turkey. Accordingly, a distinguishing feature between alternative practices of modernity is identified in their ability to permeate the strata of society and transform them.[47] Islam played the role of a means of political mobilisation from the 1980s onwards because of its inclusiveness and ability to imbue collective agency to groups.[48] Turkish identity is predicated on a role of Islam in which the secularism of the Turkish state can best be described as *laicist*, a stance that developed in the First Republic and effectively marginalised Islam to an ideational, individual position in favour of a more secular political nationalism. This allowed the establishment of a centralised state tradition,[49] but marginalised large parts of society, thereby hindering the development of a civil society in contradistinction to the state.

Further, a working definition of 'civil society' is difficult in the context of the present study because this term is also contextual and depends on the concurrent definition of the 'state.' As Berna Turam has pointed out, an understanding that posits civil society as a platform for criticism of the state is problematic because this is a definition informed primarily by a western secular understanding of the nation-state.[50] Max Weber posits that, while it is impossible to tell what the "'essence' of religion is, [because analyses deal with] the conditions and consequences of a certain type of social action," this type of social action is still distinct in its addressee and therefore not in itself political.[51] Such a sociological

[47] Nilüfer Göle, "Snapshots of Islamic Modernities," in Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick/London 2002), p. 91-93.
[48] Ibid., p, 113.
[49] Ayşe Kadioğlu, "The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of official Identitiy," in Sylvia Kedourie (ed.), *Turkey. Identity, Democracy, Politics* (Frank Cass: London/Portland 1998), p. 177-182.
[50] Turam, "The Politics of Engagement," p. 260.
[51] Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr 1980), p. 245 and 245-260.

perspective presumes that religious social organisation is separable from other organising principles – namely, secular national politics.

Non-western political organisational principles do not conform to the Weberian definition of religion. Religion is not clearly separable from politics in non-western political systems. It is therefore particularly difficult to transpose western understandings of the terms onto a Muslim – or Turkish – case. If this were possible, religious discourse would be relegated to the realm of civil society and the separation of religion and politics informing the aforementioned definition of civil society would be neatly maintained. However, religious *narratives of legitimation* can be variously appropriated by both what may constitute 'civil society' and its alleged antecedent, the political establishment.

The Turkish case highlights this more variegated understanding. This is due to the fundamental connection between Islam and politics,[52] but also the versatility of Islam and its ability to be utilised as a *narrative of legitimation* for the promotion of overtly political goals in religious rhetoric. Thus it is also inevitable that the religious components of *Neo-Ottomanism* play a role in both social debate and high politics. This point is emphasised in both Chapters 2 and 3 and a reason why it is so difficult to come to a definitive, generalising conclusion as to what exactly constitutes *Neo-Ottomanism*. Because it is a quasi-historical narrative with religious elements, both the socio-political establishment and counter-establishment movements or tendencies can appropriate it. In this regard, it can be compared to Political Islam; yet, *Neo-Ottomanism* is fused with elements of Turkish nationalism as well as Turkish identity rather than emphasising explicitly *religious* components only, such as an Islamic legal system.

---

[52] Although the relationship is intricate due to the development of Islam as a means of political organisation, it is by no means fixed in the contemporary political climate; however, issues of Islam nigh always impinge on political ones. Dietrich Jung, "Islam and Politics: A Fixed Relationship?" in *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* (Vol. 16, No. 1, Spring 2007), passim.

The close relationship between Islam and politics is apparent even in the questionable historical reference of *Neo-Ottomanism*. The narrative the label denotes rests primarily on perceptions of historical events and their selective appropriation. The relationship between *Neo-Ottomanism* and Islam will be explored in more detail below, but it should be noted that, in terms of historical reference, the appropriation of the Ottoman Empire in an exclusively *Turkish* narrative as an inclusive multicultural polity hinges on its perception as an *Islamic* entity. This is problematic at best and based more on the explicit politics and religious rhetoric of the Hamidian era than historical fact.[53] In the 19th century, Islam acquired importance as a *narrative of legitimation* that the dynasty adopted in the face of declining traditional means of legitimation, such as military success. In this sense, the role of Islam should be seen already in the Ottoman Empire in the context of a *practice of modernity*, as the reconstitution of the political made it necessary to adopt methods of legitimation other than those of the preceding centuries.[54]

Naturally, there are significant differences between the role of religion in the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century and Turkey in the 20th century. In the Hamidian era Islam served primarily the purpose of the legitimation for the Sultan and the state – as far the latter term can be applied. This became so ingrained as a pillar of legitimation for the imperial regime that, when Atatürk pursued the founding of the Republic of Turkey, the radical secularism he propagated was as much the development of a new nationalist ideology as a conscious attempt to intellectually discredit the imperial regime. Indeed, the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 institutionalised this relegation of Islam to secular national politics.

In the period of primary interest to the present thesis, throughout the 1980s up to the 2000s, Islam has achieved valence in the context of counter-establishment movements but

---

[53] Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream* (Basic Books: NY 2005), p. 488-525.
[54] Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," p. 5-6.

also more benign expressions of political opinion and, as will be seen in Chapter 2, even as a tool of intellectual legitimation for the AKP. The role of Islam in Turkey as the territorial successor to the Ottoman Empire is thus best understood as being part of a *narrative of legitimation* that works by virtue of whoever appropriates it.

1.2.1: Is there a 'Turkish Islam'?

Neo-Ottomanism is an articulation of a practice of modernity and transformation particular to Turkey because of its cultural, religious, and historical specificity. It subsumes a number of currents of which the resurgence of Islam is one. While the religious-cultural and political components will be explored in more detail in the following chapters, it is important to put forward a hypothesis as to why the call for political and social transformation, such as that put forward by the various Islamist-rooted parties of the 1980s,[55] evolved into a discourse with explicitly historical connotations as opposed to staying rooted in religious rhetoric. After all, Islam can and is understood by contemporary Islamist movements as being aimed not just at religious and political mobilisation but socio-political transformation.[56]

These historical connotations are in fact intricately connected to the contention that *Neo-Ottomanism* can and should be understood as a transformational project. It is poignant that the label implicitly, by virtue of the word *Ottomanism*, references the latter period of the Ottoman Empire. However, its political and religious connotations do not necessarily coincide, depending on by whom and to what purpose the label is used. As pointed out above, the operative term *Ottomanism* refers to a malleable concept nevertheless established in prevalent scholarship. The chronology of this particular reference is in fact of significance and connects socio-political transformation to an increasingly political role of Islam in the Ottoman Empire.

---

[55] White, "Islam and Politics," passim.
[56] Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*, p. 13-46.

In the late 19th century, and especially in the Hamidian era,[57] religious legitimation took on an increasingly important political role.[58] While the Sultan had traditionally retained the title of Caliph, it was in the Hamidian era that both titles and both authorities were explicitly connected in a political project. Abdülhamid II pursued a distinct ideological agenda that was in no small part influenced by the *pan-* projects of the time,[59] all of which rested on precarious ideological assumptions. It is also notable that this specifically Ottoman political project, based on religious rhetoric, developed in accordance with the experience of colonialism – indeed, the Ottomans had reacted to the challenge of perceived European supremacy on the basis of the western *mission civilisatrice* by appropriating colonial discourses in their specific political and social framework.[60]

The assumption that the Ottoman Sultan was not only *Ottoman* Caliph but quite explicitly the leader of *all Muslims* must be seen in concordance with the aspirations of the Ottoman Empire's imperial rivals as well as what has been dubbed the *Eastern Question.*[61] One of the implicit features of propagating an Ottoman Caliphate with a responsibility to a world-encompassing *Ummah* is emphasising the superior status of the Ottoman Muslim community in relation to other communities without the Ottoman Empire. In this way, the Ottoman ideological project of religious primacy was an intricately political one and must be evaluated in relation to outside events.

The notion of a hierarchy of Muslim communities has resurfaced in the contemporary context of *Neo-Ottomanism* and is an important part of the political developments of the last decade because the narrative of cohesion inherent to *Neo-*

---

[57] Named after the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909).

[58] Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, p. 492-501.

[59] Russia's *pan-Slavism*, for example. Ibid., p. 492.

[60] For an overview of this project, see Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," in *The American Historical Review* (Vol. 107, No. 3, June 2002), passim.

[61] This term refers to the alleged plans of the Great Powers to dismember the Ottoman Empire. Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, p. 323, 445, 489. Interestingly, much of the 'internal colonialism' the led to the characterization of the Ottoman Empire as the 'Sick man of Europe' was based on religion. For example, the Russian Empire assumed the right to be the protector of the Orthodox community within the Empire and used this argument to justify its meddling in the internal politics of the Empire.

Ottomanism is based on historical-religious connotations. It has gained prominence in the context of the recent Arab Spring, against the background of which the function of Turkey as a 'role model' of the fusion of religious identity and democratic politics for nations with a significant Islamic component to their identity must be analysed.[62]

Indeed, it can be argued that Turkey's increasingly explicit incorporation of religion into its political economy is connected to recent political developments in the Middle East, as the political valence of religion has increased concurrently in most of the Middle East region. Religious rhetoric has become a means of political mobilisation as both the political establishment and counter-establishment movements vie for dominance. In this regard, the *narrative of legitimation* offered by *Neo-Ottomanism* is of particular use in Turkish politics. The selective appropriation of elements of this discourse is the subject of Chapter 2. In the context of *Neo-Ottomanism* and in regard to the elements of contemporary religious rhetoric outlined above, the *Neo-Ottomanist* narrative holds that there is a specifically *Turkish* Islam, especially in relation to the political role Turkey aspires to in its region.

1.3: The Transformation of Turkey

In the context of modernisation, political events of the early 1990s may provide some indication as to why the question of a continuous transformation of Turkey, from the late Ottoman Empire to the Third Republic, emerged. However, the historical connotations of the modernisation discourse are equally critical to understanding *Neo-Ottomanism*. The chronological reference outlined above also has a component relating it directly to competing ideas of modernisation: the *Tanzimat* period. The following section examines the historical perspective of Turkish transformation.

---

[62] Katerina Delacoura, "The Arab Uprisings Two Years On: Ideology, Sectarianism, and the Changing Balance of Power in the Middle East," in *Insight Turkey* (Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 2013), p. 85-87.

1.3.1: A Continuity of Transformation

It would be impossible to do the plethora of scholarship on the particular period of the Ottoman Empire that is the *Tanzimat* justice in the space of a few short paragraphs. Suffice to say that the *Tanzimat* period was one of an encompassing modernisation project aimed at the transformation of Ottoman society and politics in the 19th century. The need for this transformation arose from diverse developments both within and without the Ottoman Empire and, much like the transformation that can be observed today, was the culmination of *longue-durée* developments rather than a concerted single reform package.[63]

Importantly, referring to the *Tanzimat* period as on of competing modernisations is a testament to the predicament the Ottoman Empire found itself in in relation to its neighbours, rather than a normative statement. More than any teleological notion or *progress*, the *Tanzimat*, especially after 1856, was a period in which competing projects of political adherence conflicted in the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte was faced with the problem of declining political and military independence and thus had to balance between competing templates of socio-political development, each of which would bring it closer to one or another of the Great Powers. The *Eastern Question* revolved around precisely this problem.

Thus, similarly to the Ottoman case, political developments have significantly influenced the need for Turkey to review not just its domestic makeup, but also its relationship with the world around it. While the nature of the political pressure Ankara is exposed to has indubitably changed, its essence has not; Chapter 2 will discuss that external incentives still revolve around *economic opportunity* and *security*. This can be demonstrated by underscoring, for example, the role of the most important international political watershed of the 1980s. In the last decade of the Cold War, Turkey's relationship with the

---

[63] Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, p. 423.

opposing superpowers followed a distinct pattern. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 effectively decided the question of Turkish neutrality in the Cold War and drove Turkey forcefully into the Western camp in terms of security and political adherence.[64]

One effect of this adherence was to channel political and social debates to a certain extent. Despite the prominence of counter-establishment movements that ascribed to an explicitly political Islam, Turkey's political position dictated the issues that would be addressed in such frameworks. Political Islam thus became a vehicle for the articulation of domestic issues in a relatively stable foreign policy environment. After the end of the Cold War, this changed. *Neo-Ottomanism* is the articulation of transformations in a profoundly changed political environment – it combines, comments on, and transforms domestic and foreign circumstances by way of (a)historical reference and selective appropriation. Indeed, in this manner it fulfils one of the most important criteria of Eisenstadt's original framework of *alternative modernities*: their ability to transform and engage with unprecedented developments.[65]

A further theoretical point must be made in the context of *alternative modernities* and the role of *Neo-Ottomanism* as the articulation of a transformational project. The following is a feature of *alternative modernities* generally and will become apparent in the context of *Neo-Ottomanism*. The versatility of these projects is predicated on their heterogeneity and ability to accommodate competing perceptions of what it means to be 'modern,' while this is generally not associated with a normative notion of *progress*. This is in part due to the development of *alternative* modernities as a reaction to and an

[64] William Hale, "Turkey," in Yezid Sayigh/Avi Shlaim (eds), *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1997), p. 267-270.

[65] An observation originally implied by Göle in her analysis of Islamic Modernities and eloquently formulated in Eisenstadt, "Alternative Modernities," p. 24.

engagement with a normative western-oriented modernity that posited European political and social development as the teleological endpoint of human development.[66]

Understanding *Neo-Ottomanism* as a particularly *Turkish Modernity* also sheds light on why the phenomenon has been described as a political ideology.[67] It is precisely the articulation of modernisations and transformations other than the normatively western-oriented ones that has contributed to the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative in the regard that it is juxtaposed as an alternative to *Kemalism*.[68] This perception rests on the differences of content in these competing narratives – such as the explicit marginalisation of Islam in *Kemalism* and the perception of an opposition between progress and religion.[69] However, there is good reason to understand *Kemalism* also as a conglomerate of ideas and worldviews rather than a fixed ideology;[70] in that sense, it may also be understood as a *narrative*. If *Kemalism* is understood as the articulation of a western-oriented Turkish modernisation project, it becomes clear that the perception of either it or *Neo-Ottomanism* as political ideologies is excessively statist and cannot account for their various caveats.

This argument is underscored by the need to interpret both *Kemalism* and *Neo-Ottomanism* contextually and in light of their relationship with the past.[71] This will be an important aspect of the discussion of *Neo-Ottomanism* forwarded in this thesis and is illustrated by positing that *Neo-Ottomanism* can be seen as a transformation project that can be compared to historical reform periods such as the *Tanzimat*. The historical precedents of the 19th-century projects seeking to transform the Ottoman polity into a viable political entity in the face of larger, global transformations suggest that there is a larger 'tradition' of transformation at work in the political space of contemporary Turkey. Like *Neo-*

---

[66] Eisenstadt, "Alternative Modernities," p. 15 and Keyder, "Whither the Project of Modernity? p. 37-46.
[67] For example in Aydın, "Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After," passim.
[68] Taşpinar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies," p. 14-17.ş
[69] Metin Heper, *Historical Dictionary of Turkey* (Scarecrow Press: Metuchen/London 1994), p. 204-205.
[70] Nicolas Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism," passim.
[71] Fatma Müge Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey. Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era* (I.B. Tauris: NY 2011), p. 2-6.

Ottomanism, the *Tanzimat*, later the *Committee of Union and Progress* and finally the *Kemalist* transformations shared some basic tenets: competition over political participation and social transformation as well as changing external circumstances and relationships with rival and peer political entities.[72]

1.3.2: Academic Developments and Transformation as an Expression of Modernity

There is also an important academic development that must be mentioned as feeding into the discourse of *Neo-Ottomanism* and an interest in empires in general. In a recent article, Alan Mikhail and Christine Philliou identify what they dubbed the 'imperial turn' in social and historical sciences.[73] Renewed scholarly interest in imperial formations derives in part from what could be conceived of as a "post-national order"[74] and what Wendy Brown in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* described as a relative decline of the valence of national political demarcation.[75] Thus, the search for structural historical analogies to the study of political organisation without the nation-state has turned the academic spotlight upon the various imperial polities of history.

This is especially problematic in the Ottoman case because the hybrid nature of the Empire defies its use as a normative category.[76] It is the perception that the Ottoman Empire's success depended on its flexibility and pragmatism,[77] that provides an insight into why it has become an object of interest not just in academia but also for Turkey by virtue of *Neo-Ottomanism*; thus, as a *narrative of legitimation* is remains flexible enough to be filled with content *ex post facto* by the group or actor appropriating it. That said, it is important once again to re-iterate that the term, despite its explicit historical connotations, does not

---

[72] Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey*, p. 1-11.
[73] Mikhail/ Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and The Imperial Turn," passim.
[74] Ibid., p. 721
[75] Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Zone Books: NY 2010), passim.
[76] Mikail/Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn," p. 724.
[77] Ibid., p. 726.

necessarily refer to the Ottoman Empire but rather a specific interpretation of it – and sometimes the selective rejection of elements of that interpretation.

To further illustrate how some of the issues at stake in *Neo-Ottomanism* are rooted in perceptions of Ottoman history but derive their interest from particular contemporary problems, it is instructive to consider Karen Barkey's hypothesis that the diversity of the Ottoman Empire and the management of that diversity allowed its political survival.[78] Especially the debate on radical political Islam as an exclusive ideology following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in September 2001 has contributed to the contrasting construction of the Ottoman Empire as a benevolent, inclusive, nevertheless assertively *Islamic* political entity worthy of emulation.[79] Whether or not this romantic ideal of the Ottoman Empire holds up to closer historical scrutiny is irrelevant. Narratives such as *Neo-Ottomanism* appropriate selective aspects of history and develop them in relation to contemporary politics.

Finally, there is value in seeing *narratives of legitimation* as transformational projects and expressions of modernity because this offers an answer to the accusations and arguments forwarded blatantly and somewhat unjustly in such publications as Lewis' *What Went Wrong?* The very presence of these alternative practices of modernity in transformational projects of a specifically Muslim permutation shows that there is significant engagement with, and contradiction of, perceptions of inferiority. However, contrary to what Lewis implies,[80] the political and social turmoil with their attendant conflicts result more from a regional specificity than an inherent anti-modernism of Islam. Thus, *Neo-Ottomanism* is also a form of non-western engagement with the transformations

---

[78] Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference. The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge/NY 2008), passim.

[79] Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," in *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* (Vol. 19, No. 1/2, The New Sociological Imagination II, Dec. 2005), passim.

[80] Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (Weidenfiel & Nicolson: London 2002), p. 151-160. The subtitle of the work is significant in the context of the argument forwarded above.

inherent to modernity and, by virtue of its Islamic component, underscores that political movements with Islamic connotations cannot be understood as primarily and solely oppositional.[81]

In terms of mechanics of appropriation of *narratives of legitimation*, on an individual level it is useful to refer to what De Certeau called *tactics* and *strategies*,[82] in order to conceptualise how such discourses can permeate to the individual level and therefore be applicable even to such abstract notions as personal and collective identity. The differentiation between De Certeau's two concepts is only applicable to the present analysis in a limited manner, mainly because it refers to different planes of everyday life. Nevertheless, these two concepts offer insight into the mechanisms as well as the motivation behind the appropriation of *Neo-Ottomanism* beyond the realm of high politics. *Tactics* and *strategies* describe the use of individual aspects of *narratives of legitimacy* in order to further specific ends, reinforce particular arguments, or capitalise on assumptions. In the case of the individual, this may be as mundane as *crafting a personal narrative* as to the origin or a particular prejudice, norm, behaviour, or resolving dilemmas of identity. An individual or a group may do this. Either way, the appropriation works by imbuing actions with legitimacy and references. This is similar to *invented traditions*, which seek to create legitimacy by virtue of repetition.[83] Crafting sub-narratives along a main strand thus becomes an intricate part of *Neo-Ottomanism* and its various implementations. It thus becomes a narrative of identity as much as of society and politics.

Observations made by Eisenstadt in an essay entitled "Some Observations on the Dynamics of Traditions" may indicate a further complexity of the *Neo-Ottoman* conundrum and how it is related to the individual in the context of collective identities. Accordingly, it

---

[81] Anna Secor, "Islamist Politics: Anti-systemic or Post-Modern Movements?" in *Geopolitics* (Vol. 6, No. 3, 2001), p. 117 and passim.
[82] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press: LA/London/Berkeley), p. xviii-xx.
[83] Hobsbawm, "Introduction," p. 1-3.

can be argued that *narratives of legitimation* such as *Neo-Ottomanism* seek to craft certain assumptions about social order and thereby make tangible the relationship between social order and its individual constituents. Eisenstadt observes that the quest for social order is a basic, yet "egotistical," orientation of the individual.[84] *Narratives of legitimation*, then, are engrained value judgements meant to surmount individual egotism, in order to allow different groups' quests for social order to overlap or legitimate a particular social order. This is the essence of the *cui bono* question of such narratives. The following chapters will analyse this question via a selection of the appropriations of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative.

1.4: A Note on the Use of Sources

In terms of sources, the main arguments of the thesis will be put forward in two parts, following the contention that the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative can and must be analysed via two distinct categories: *practices of modernisation/transformation* and *modernity*, the latter being understood as the intellectual component of the former. The two following chapters will deal with these in analytically separate ways, although the separation is to a certain extent artificial. *Neo-Ottomanism* draws its strengths from historical connotations, allowing an especially close relationship between the aforementioned aspects. Their interaction is in part what makes the concept so difficult to grasp.

Generally, secondary literature has proven most valuable for the analysis of the following thesis in the sense that it has been analytically lucrative to review literature as a point of departure for further investigation. This approach simplified the search for the appropriate primary sources because of the questions that arose from the literature itself. However, it should also be remembered that even secondary analyses can and should be

---

[84] Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Some Observations on the Dynamics of Traditions," in his *Comparative Civilizations & Multiple Modernities. Volume One. A Collection of Essays by S. N. Eisenstadt* (Brill: Leiden/Boston 2003), p. 135.

treated as sources in a project seeking to reconstruct the development of a *narrative of legitimation*. This is because, quite simply, while sources are never impartial, neither is secondary literature. Thus the line between primary, secondary sources, and literature is blurred. In order to rectify this problem, it has been helpful to proceed from the questions to the literature and then the sources. Further, a significant methodological problem arises from the way in which the term *Neo-Ottomanism* meanders through a highly diverse array of sources and literature – indeed, the present thesis will retrace this trajectory using the proverbial *cui bono* question as a guide and taking individual issues or policies as points of departure.

Neo-Ottomanism is most prominently connected to the foreign policy of Turkey. By extension, this political focus encompasses both the domestic and foreign political sphere in Turkey. Chapter 2 will therefore take recent developments in the foreign relations of Turkey as a point of departure and from there develop arguments linking domestic politics to these using primarily recent media publications. The connection between Turkey's foreign policy forays and *Neo-Ottomanism* becomes apparent when considering that the narrative encompasses transformations that encompass the entirety of society, even if it initially entails a transformation of infrastructural elements of a society. In fact, one of the most important features – and indeed measure – of such transformational projects is its level of permeation of society and politics. This chapter will also refer to scholarly accounts and commentary on political developments and supplement scholarly accounts with primary sources, such as the policy treatise of the incumbent Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkeys International Position]. This book contains significant elements of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative and has profoundly influenced the transformation of Turkish foreign policy.

The *modernity*-related aspects of *Neo-Ottomanism* will be developed in Chapter 3 in the context of the Gülen Movement. In order to situate this movement vis-à-vis *Neo-Ottomanism* a number of scholarly publications will be consulted; in order to adequately describe the relationship between the Gülen Movement and *Neo-Ottomanism*, a small number of primary sources will be consulted. In this case, the primary sources will be drawn from the writings of Fetullah Gülen as the spiritual and worldly leader of the organisation and from movement's own publications and its websites.

Fetullah Gülen's writing has become an object of scholarly interest in itself. These statements revolve around the ideological foundations of the movement and will grapple with the *cui bono* question in the widest sense, allowing analysis of the means of appropriation and rhetorical techniques connecting the *Gülen Movement* to *Neo-Ottomanism*. This will be supplemented by an exemplary look at one of the educational institutions affiliated with the movement; these are important in perpetuating and implementing the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative.

The research chapters reflect the contention that since the 1980s, a transformational project has developed in Turkey and has the intellectual formulation of a proto-*Neo-Ottoman* narrative and elements into an institutionalised project in the period of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [Justice and Development Party] administration. The former development is reflected in the writings of Fetullah Gülen, while the latter is explicated by the formulation of a quasi-doctrine by Ahmet Davutoğlu. Thus, the development of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative is concurrent with the events described in the present thesis.

Chapter 2: AKP Politics and Turkey's Transformation

The following chapter reviews some of the major themes of Turkish foreign and domestic policy since the *Adalet ve Kalınma Partisi* [Justice and Development Party] won the general elections of 2002. Examining, where appropriate, references to the Ottoman Empire will show that it is against this background that the label of *Neo-Ottomanism* has been applied to AKP politics. But more than a reinvigoration of a glorious imperial past it is the departure from the stance of strict ideational and political discontinuity with the Ottoman Empire, a rapprochement with Islam, as well as Turkey's unprecedented foreign policy offensives that have become associated with the term. This chapter argues that the foreign policy developments of Turkey, under the auspices of the incumbent Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, have significantly influenced the use of the *Neo-Ottomanist* label. It is also argued that the developments enumerated below are part of a larger Turkish *transformation*. While the claim that Turkey is transforming is neither new nor original in itself, it is agued that the following political developments *do* make the current transformations unprecedented, as Turkey's external relations have significant bearing on its internal socio-political makeup.

It should be noted again that, while a number of publications find it useful to refer to the socio-political climate of these developments as *modernity*,[85] this particular term is misleading in the sense that it implies some sort of teleology. The term *modernity* is understood in the literature primarily to denote the development of the Turkish political system from an authoritarian to an increasingly democratic one, which was possible after the end of martial law in 1983. To reflect this, the term is

---

[85] For example, the title of the cited book edited by Kasaba and Bozdoğan is, significantly, 'Rethinking *Modernity* and National Identity."

avoided throughout this thesis wherever possible, as it is more useful to speak of *transformation*, mostly for reasons of objectivity. However, *modernity* retains its applicability to the Turkish case in the sense of a relationship between external developments perceived as progressive and domestic transformations. This is largely the understanding forwarded by Eisenstadt.

Since the end of military dictatorship in 1983 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey has been engaged in transformation. The first event entered Turkey into an age of unprecedented political uncertainty and plurality, complicated by the initial 'supervisions' imposed of the fledgling democratic system by the military junta.[86] This entailed ideational developments, which will be the subject of the next Chapter, while the second opened up political opportunity spaces. These have primarily been realised in the period under scrutiny in the following chapter and have contributed significantly to the current transformation of Turkey.

2.1: Turkish Foreign Policy Forays

Developments in Turkey's foreign relations, but also in the interaction between domestic political actors and the resurgence of Islam – while manifestations of socio-political transformations – do not signal a fundamental reworking of Turkey's international political position. There is no undue fascination with the Ottoman past; there are, however, aspirations to economic, political, and cultural hegemony. They are also consequence of concrete geopolitical changes as well as Turkey's reorientation within the international political system and the newfound ideational narrative of *Neo-Ottomanism*. This narrative, by rehabilitating the romanticised image of Turkey's glorious Ottoman past, seeks to lend

---

[86] Reşat Kasaba, "Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities," in Sibel Bozdoğan/Reşat Kasaba (eds.), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (University of Washington Press: Seattle/London 1997), passim.

rhetorical and ideological legitimacy to the developments described below. Domestic factors, the influence of individual policymakers, the end of the Cold War, and the War on Terror are the primary impetus for these developments, not an alleged *Neo-Ottoman* ideology based on neo-imperial ambitions.

Apart from the aforementioned utility of the Neo-Ottoman narrative, another, and no less important, reason for the labelling of the following dynamics as *Neo-Ottoman* is the stark departure from political isolationism and radical denial of continuity with the Ottoman past previously prevalent in the political and social discourse of Turkey. In how far this has influenced the appearance of *Neo-Ottomanism* in association with Turkish foreign policy can be shown by analysing the debate and the alleged presence of the Ottoman past via examples. Using this approach also highlights the limits of Turkey's alleged *ideational transformation* to reflect AKP governance. In this sense, for example, Atatürk's maxim of 'peace at home, peace in the world' has been re-interpreted by the foreign ministry as 'zero problems with our neighbours.'[87] This contradicts that Turkey is pursuing a neo-imperialist agenda and subsequently rejecting the secular heritage of the Kemalist state, as claimed by alarmist interpretations of *Neo-Ottomanism*.

2.1.1: Contentions as to a *Neo-Ottoman* Agenda and the Role of Ahmet Davutoğlu

An example illustrates the subject matter in question. In the 2011 article in *Altüst Dergisi* [The World-Turned-Upside-Down Magazine], Abdülhamıt Kırmızı, a professor of history at Şehir University in Istanbul writes that while the altered policies of Turkey under the AKP administration may give an alarming impression, such alarmism stems from wilful or involuntary revision of the past:

> ...it is wrong to present this trend [of Turkey's increasing prominence on the international stage] stemming from efficient foreign policy and confident politics of the last years as Neo-

---

[87] An official missive of the foreign ministry explicitly links the heritage of Atatürk to the current policies of Turkey. Foreign Ministry of Turkey missive, "Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbours," http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa, last viewed 25. July 2013.

> Ottomanism. Those who label this as dreams of conquest and those who parody these new politics as a deviation from the norm are revisionists. Both share the same illusion.[88]

The above reference to a 'norm,' which is allegedly being deviated from, would underscore the continuity implied by the foreign ministry missive linking Atatürk's principles to the new foreign policy doctrine of Turkey mentioned earlier. Simultaneously, the statement seeks to dispel the alarmism of an alleged neo-imperialist agenda.

Later in the text, Kırmızı states that "Ottomanism, which has now acquired the label of 'new,' was [originally] the name of an ideology developed during the Tanzimat era which aimed at embracing all subjects whether they were Muslim or not."[89] Thus is can be seen that, very early on, discussions of AKP foreign policy are conflated with the issue of the role of Islam and the Ottoman Empire in Turkish politics.

The author implicitly acknowledges *Neo-Ottomanism* as a narrative of politics and sees it as a reference to the Ottoman past. However, the 'trend' referred to stems primarily from focused foreign policy and domestic politics rooted in the present; thus the historical part of the narrative is discredited as revisionism. This encapsulates well the multifarious issues surrounding the discussion of *Neo-Ottomanism*. It is presupposed that it can be understood at face value. This is a similar problematic Nicolas Danforth addresses when he writes that:

> As it is currently used, 'neo-Ottomanism' implicitly links political Islam and Ottoman nostalgia to some vaguely defined anti-American, anti-European, pro-Muslim, or generally Middle East-oriented foreign policy. In doing so, the term misrepresents history in order to misunderstand the present. …[90]

---

[88] "Ancak son yıllarda daha etkin bir dış politika güdülmesinden kaynaklanan ivmeyi Yeni-Osmanlıcılık olarak adlandırmak tam bir yanılsamadır. Gerek fetih rüyaları görenler, gerek niyet okuma merasimleriyle yeni politikaları eksen kayması olarak yaftalayanlar aynı yanılsamanın iki yüzünü paylaşıyor." Kırmızı, "Yeni Osmanlıcılık Yanılması [The Neo-Ottoman Illusion]," p. 2.

[89] "Önüne 'yeni' takısı eklenen "Osmanlıcılık" kelimesinin kendisi bile Tanzimat'la gelişen, müslim-gayrımüslim bütün tebayı kucaklamak isteyen bir ideolojinin adıydı." Ibid.

[90] Danforth, "Shut Up about Neo-Ottomanism Already," p. 1.

The author correctly points out that the term is retrospectively filled with meaning according to the prevalent trends of thought at the time. This type of popular manifestation of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative does not allow for an understanding of it, because of its varying appropriations and denials, all of which are contextual. There are a number of components at work in the interaction of foreign and domestic politics amounting to *social* – as opposed to *ideological* – transformation. This stems partly from altered global politics.

By taking the recent foreign policy activism of the AKP as a point of departure, *Neo-Ottomanism* is shown to be a narrative based on historical rhetoric containing issues relevant to contemporary popular culture and socio-politics. These two are intricately connected in the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative and romanticised in order to take on characteristics that legitimate the policies it incorporates. The incumbent Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, has been associated with the debate,[91] mainly on the basis of claims asserting that he is the primary 'architect' of Turkey's new foreign policy activism.

In 2010, *The Economist* ran an article entitled 'The Davutoğlu Effect;' it accurately sums up the connection between Davutoğlu, Turkish Foreign Policy, and the *Neo-Ottomanist* narrative.[92] The personal conviction of the newly appointed foreign minister that "Turkey made a mistake by ignoring its backyard for so long"[93] certainly seems to have shaped the direction of Turkey's diplomatic offensives. The article also importantly – perhaps crucially – hints why the label of *neo-Ottomanism* has been applied to Davutoğlu's overarching foreign policy structure: Turkish foreign policy advances prominently involve regions that were at some point part of the Ottoman Empire. The article explicitly makes the historical connection between the imperial polity and the Turkish Republic by naming these

---

[91] Taspinar: "Turkey's Middle East Policies," p. 14-17.
[92] "The Davutoğlu Effect. All Change for Foreign Policy," in *The Economist* (Oct. 2010), online version: http://www.economist.com/node/17276420, last accessed 25 July 2013.
[93] Ibid.

regions Turkey's "old stomping ground."[94] It would seem, then, that the label has been largely applied due to the unprecedented diplomatic rapprochement of Turkey with the former geographic expanses of the Ottoman Empire. However, these rapprochements are largely the consequence of political and economic expedience rather than imperial ambitions.

Before Davutoğlu became foreign minister in 2009, he was appointed chief foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister. In these positions his theoretical oulook, developed throughout a number of articles in the late 1990s and his 2001 book *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position] was able to exert considerable influence on AKP foreign policy and governance. Ahmet Davutoğlu has an MA degree in Public Administration and a PhD in International Relations from Boğaziçi University and has held a number of academic positions before his appointment as advisor to the Prime Minister in 2002.[95] At the time of writing *Stratejik Derinlik*, he was a visiting lecturer at the Military and War Academies of Turkey, as well as the head of the Department of International Relations at Beykent University in Istanbul, a position he retained until 2004.[96]

The connection between the historical contents of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative and foreign policy is explicit in Ahmet Davutoğlu's 2001 book *Stratejik Derinlik* in which he developed an intellectual foundation that saw Turkey asserting itself more prominently in the international arena. On the basis of historical argumentation, it would seem that the treatise argues for Turkey to address its international position on the basis of what may be called a strategic vision centred on Turkey. It argues for an increased self-assertiveness of the Turkish Republic in the international system, for example on the basis of a stable

---

[94] "The Davutoğlu Effect."
[95] "CV of Ahmet Davutoğlu," on the Turkish Foreign Ministry Website. http://www.mfa.gov.tr/ahmet-davutoglu.en.mfa, last accessed 28. July 2013.
[96] Ibid.

economy and, in particular, a resolution of the tensions between Turkish secular identity, its culture, and its history – both Republican and Ottoman.[97] A re-evaluation of Turkey's international position was made necessary also by two distinct developments. Davutoğlu had previously argued, in an article entitled "The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World (Dis)Order," published in 1997, that the first of these was to be found in the post-Cold War political order and the regional opportunities it brought about.[98]

Simultaneously, Davutoğlu published a lengthy article in the Turkish-language journal *Divan* [Council] entitled "Civilizational Self-Perception," which has been the subject of renewed interest because it is intricately connected to the foreign policy architecture he argues for in *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth] on a theoretical level.[99] The lengthy article argues that "the major factor enabling the foundation and rise of a civilization and its resistance to potential foreign domination is self-perception which ensures the emergence of a civilizational prototype."[100] The factors mentioned in "The Clash of Interests," concrete political developments, and a psychological approach to analysing and appraising an actor's position within a given political environment are reflected in *Stratejik Derinlik*:

> Turkey's international position in the coming century and the strategic and tactical objectives arising from this position will be determined *not only in the course of international relations*. Hence the *theoretical framework* underlying the transformation of

---

[97] The relationship between these hypotheses and the foreign policy of Turkey became an issue of debate prominently *after* Davutoğlu's appointment as Foreign Minister. See, for example, Mehmet Yılmaz, "Conceptual Framework of Turkish Foreign Policy in the AK Party Era," in *Turkish Review* (15. October 2010), online version: http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=223001&columnistId=0, last accessed 28. July 2013.

[98] Davutoğlu terms the processes that the breakup of the Cold War world order entailed the loss of "strategic stability." Ahmet Davutoğlu, "The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World (Dis)Order," in *Perceptions. Journal of International Affairs* (Vol. 2, No. 4, Dec. 97/Feb. 98, Online Edition), p. 5.

[99] Taşkapu, "Civilizational Self-Perception."

[100] Quoted in ibid. The original Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Medeniyetlerin Ben-idrakı [Civilisational Self Perception]," in *Divan Dergisi* [Council Magazine], (No. 1, 1997), is reproduced in an online version at http://www.anlayis.net/makaleGoster.aspx?dergiid=33&makaleid=4811, in *Anlayış Dergisi* [Understanding Magazine], last accessed 28. July 2013.

society must be addressed. From this viewpoint *historical, geographical, cultural, political, economic and dependency parameters* can be analysed in a broad perspective.[101]

Davutoğlu explicitly acknowledges the role of external developments in evaluating Turkey's international position, but argues that these necessitate deeper transformations. The 'theoretical framework' he addresses is the 'civilisational self-perception' he explicated in his 1997 article "Civilizational Self-Perception." This is apparent when considering that the social transformations he addresses in the abovementioned quote constitute key elements of forming self-perception.

While it is in many ways plausible that there is something akin to a 'Davutoğlu-Doctrine'[102] guiding Turkish foreign and domestic policy it is wrong to assume that this is primarily connected to Turkey's changed relationship to its Ottoman past, as is suggested by labelling the Foreign Minister a *Neo-Ottomanist* and ascribing to the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative.[103] Davutoğlu does not argue on the basis of an Ottoman past as a means to justify exerting regional influence in the present. Rather the Ottoman Empire represents an integrative yet diversified society of the type made necessary by present-day international politics − this might well be what in his words would be a 'civilisational prototype.' However, even this image of the Ottoman Empire does not take primacy in the policy framework of the foreign minister. Rather, it is the aforementioned development and transformation of Turkey's self-perception that is at the forefront of an alleged 'Davutoğlu-Doctrine.'

---

[101] "Türkiye'nin gelecek yüzyıldaki uluslararası konumu ve bu konumun getireceği stratejik ve taktik hedeflerin tesbiti konusu sadece uluslararası ilişkilerin seyrini değil, toplumun çok yünlü dönüşümünü de incelemeyi gerekli kılan teorik bir çerçevede ele alınmak zorundadır. Bu açıdan tarih, coğrafya, kültür, sisayet, ekonomi ve güvenlik parametreleri geniş bir perspektif içinde tahlil edilmedir." Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik. Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth. Turkey's International Position] (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları 2001), p. 65.

[102] A term borrowed from Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "The Davutoğlu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy," in *Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy Middle Eastern Studies Programme (ELIAMEP)*, Working Paper No. 8/2010, April 2010.

[103] "The Davutolu Effect." The theoretical relationship between foreign policy in a post-Cold War environment and imperial polities has been dubbed the 'imperial turn' and is reviewed in the theoretical chapter of this thesis. Mikhail/Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and The Imperial Turn," p. 721-745.

While it may thus be argued that the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative is not a boon to the Foreign Minister himself, it is interesting to note that the Foreign Ministry counts itself as being "founded on the well-established traditions and legacy of *Ottoman* diplomacy."[104] Further, the online presence of the Ministry recounts the successful use of diplomatic relations by the Ottoman Empire as being instrumental to its territorial longevity, beginning with the establishment of the first permanent Ottoman embassy in London in 1793. The historical role of diplomacy in the Ottoman Empire is afforded a full three paragraphs in the self-representation of the Foreign Ministry, pacing it firmly in an historical tradition dating beyond Republican Turkey. This contradistinction is an interesting example of how elements of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative are appropriated wherever expedient; in this particular case its historical components were used in a specific context in a *narrative of legitimation*. Such appropriation is highly selective.

2.1.2: Examples of Alleged 'Ottoman' Components of *Neo-Ottomanism*

There are a number of problems with a romanticised interpretation of the Ottoman Empire as the ideal of a multicultural polity with assertive diplomatic relations worthy of emulation. This reductionist view sees the Ottoman Empire as a template polity in which there were universal principles of organisation regulating the peaceful coexistence of diverse populations and allowing for self-assertive relations with outside actors. The use of Ottoman realities as a template for contemporary domestic or foreign political organisation is flawed.

The relationship between population groups and the Ottoman administration was a negotiated enterprise that in no way represented the political system of the 20th and 21st centuries. Yet, romantic notions of Ottoman political realities have been reinvigorated in contemporary debate. Recently, as a consequence of the resurgence of Islamic rhetoric in

---

[104] "Brief History of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the republic of Turkey," missive on the Foreign Ministry website, http://www.anlayis.net/makaleGoster.aspx?dergiid=33&makaleid=4811, last accessed 28. July 2013, emphasis mine.

Turkish politics, the *millet* system has become the subject of renewed interest. For example, M. Hakan Yavuz, a professor of political science at the University of Utah researching Islamic transnational networks and the role of Islam in nation-building and nationalism views the *millet* as an institution in which

> Each religious group…was organized as a corporate communal legal entity under its own religious leadership. This system helped institutionalize a 'tolerable' minority status for different religious groups.[105]

The *Neo-Ottoman* label fuses romantic elements of Ottoman-Muslim identity with contemporary institutional politics in a *narrative of legitimation*. The above quote highlights how contemporary political problems of Turkey – such as its multiculturalism and minority groups – encourage the search for historical templates. The millet system and its role in Ottoman society are among the most contested subjects of Ottoman Studies.[106] The word can be found in a number of sources, including the *Gülhane* edict of 1839 that ushered in the *Tazimat* reforms of the 19th century. However, its meaning remains contextual and ambiguous, especially in the aforementioned *Tanzimat* era that is of primary importance in the social stratification of the Late Ottoman Empire. The 19th-century *Gülhane* edict does not allow for a definitive evaluation of the *millet's* organisational or explanatory value – uncontested is only the conclusion that, because the *Tanzimat* reforms were aimed as a whole at rapprochement with disaffected population groups of the Empire, *millet* refers to non-Muslims.[107]

While Davutoğlu asserts the connection between Turkey's geopolitical position and what he terms its 'historical heritage,'[108] there is no suggestion that this historical heritage refers exclusively to *Ottoman* history, unlike, for example, the abovementioned text on the website of the Foreign Ministry. Throughout Davutoğlu's work, the references to Turkey's

---

[105] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2003), p. 40.
[106] Doganalp-Votzi/Römer, *Herrschaft und Staat*, p. 210, footnote 16.
[107] Doganalp-Votzi/Römer, *Herrschaft und Staat*, p. 209-218.
[108] "Tarihi Miras ve Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu" [Historical Heritage and Turkey's International Position], the title of his book's third chapter, exemplifies this. Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth], p. 65.

Ottoman past serve instead to contrast the diminished role of the Republican polity of the 20th century to the far greater (and more ambiguous) role of the late Ottoman one in the context of guidelines for contemporary politics.

The romantic and contextual image of Ottoman diplomacy in the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative serves the purpose of providing a contrast to the republican-era isolationism of Turkey and the historical antecedent of the AKP's new foreign policy activism. Davutoğlu states that this arises from the need for Turkey to realise its position in a *multipolar* environment:

> The disintegration of the bipolar structure of the international system, which was a main feature during the Cold War period, the external parameters defining political, economic and security issues [of Turkey] have undergone significant changes. The emerging international system and the relationship between new *centres of power* make it necessary to reinterpret Turkey's position in the international system.[109]

The connection between Turkey's history and its present-day foreign policy is more nuanced than seeing Turkey as a "regional superpower."[110] It is undeniable that significant inroads have been made to increase Turkey's international prominence since the AKP took power and especially since Davutoğlu advanced from Chief Foreign Policy Advisor to Foreign Minister in 2009. The discrepancy between Turkish foreign policy in previous eras and the current one has influenced the negative connotations of the *Neo-Ottoman* label. However, this is more alarmism than analysis: in a 2008 article the prospective Foreign Minister continued his argumentation of seeing Turkish foreign relations in a pragmatic rather than paradigmatic light by citing yet another watershed: 11. September 2001.[111]

---

[109] "Soğuk Savaş döneminde uluslararası sistemin temel özelliği olan iki kutuplu yapının dağılması ile birlikte uluslararası konumu belirleyen siyasi, ekonomik ve güvenlikle ilgili dış parametler önemli değişiklikler geçirmiş bulunmaktadır. Uluslararası sistem ve hukukta ortaya çıkan ve küresel güç merkezleri arasındaki kuvvet kaymalarını aksettiren yeni unsurlar Türkiye'nin konumunu yeniden yorumlamak zorunluluğu doğuran yeni bir uluslararası siyasi konjonktür ortaya çıkarmıştır." Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth], p. 74.

[110] Ömer Taspinar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies," p. 15.

[111] Ahmet Davutoğlu: "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," in: *Insight Turkey* (Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2008), p. 78.

Ahmet Davutoğlu has been perhaps the single most important influence on Turkish foreign policy in the AKP era, but *Neo-Ottomanism* cannot be traced back to his work. While Davutoğlu's writing shows sensitivity to major historical events of recent international politics, contradicting accusations of a neo-imperialist ideology, the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative of a romantic historical legacy is convenient in terms of ideational legitimacy. There are significant continuities in the issues facing the AKP in the realm of foreign policy between the preceding republican eras and the current one. The following section will examine some of these issues and how they have been framed in the altered international system emerging from the end of the Cold War and September 11, 2001.

2.2: A Departure from Previous Foreign Policy as Pragmatist Rationale

Since 2002, Turkey has increasingly been pursuing rapprochement of its geographical region,[112] and sought closer ties to neighbours from whom it was previously estranged. This includes the Middle East,[113] as well as the Caucasus regions.[114] Simultaneously, Turkey's relationship with the EU as the primary institutional representative of the European community, and by extension the West, has been characterized by an initial success followed by frustration. Ascension negotiations for Turkey to become a member to the EU began in 2005, but the process tapered off considerably in the following two years.[115] There followed a diversification of foreign policy that is apparent especially when contrasted to the previously prevalent isolationist foreign policy relations of the Turkish Republic. The counterbalancing of Turkey's Western orientation has been received as an indicator of

---

[112] Aydın, "Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After," p. 3-24 and passim.
[113] Stephen F. Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East," in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 4, Jul.-Aug. 2007, p. 103-114.
[114] Stephen F. Larrabee, "Turkey's New Geopolitics," in *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* (Vol. 52, No. 2, March 2010), p. 167-171.
[115] Philip Robins "Turkish Foreign Policy Since 2002: Between a 'Post-Islamist' Government and a Kemalist State," in *International Affairs* (Vol. 82, No. 1, 2007), p. 291.

waning interest in the West.[116] This is not precisely true, as the following section will enumerate.

2.2.1: Themes of Turkish Foreign Policy Diversification

In the context of this diversification there has emerged a debate revolving around the suggestion that a veritable 'paradigm shift'[117] has taken place. How exactly this shift has become manifest is unclear but it has been suggested that it is in part necessitated by the changing geopolitical position of Turkey, especially in contrast to the global bipolarity that dominated its foreign policy rationale in the Cold War.[118]

The activism of Turkish foreign and domestic policy has been dominated by two overarching themes arising from the re-ordering of the regional political landscape by two tangible events and the ensuing processes. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union created opportunities to develop economic and political networks with the newly independent Caucasus and Central Asian Republics.[119] It is interesting to note that this development fostered an environment in which religion became an overarching means of mobilising people as well as resources to economic ends. Religion, and more specifically Islam, and its political-economic expedience are an integral part of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative.

The role of this politicised Islam received negative attention because of the political agitation of radical groups in Central Asia in the 1990s. The British-Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid has written extensively on this economic opportunism in the context of political mobilisation and the emergence of militant Islamist movements. While *Neo-Ottomanism* is not a radical political movement by any means, it is in the 1990s and 2000s

---

[116] Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy," p. 3-20.
[117] A term borrowed from Ahmet Sözen: "A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges," in: *Turkish Studies* (Vol. 11, No. 1, March 2010), p. 103-123.
[118] Aydın, "Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After," op. cit.
[119] A term borrowed from Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban, The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond* (London: I.B. Tauris 2010), passim.

when the utility of religion as a means of economic mobilisation was generally realised in the region of the former Soviet Union. The pluralisation of politically independent interlocutors was an important economic incentive for Turkey to seek a diversification of its economic networks in the region. Thus one of the themes guiding Turkish policy under the AKP government is *economic opportunity*.[120]

The second overarching theme dominating Turkish politics under scrutiny here is *regional and national security*. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 and the ensuing NATO invasion of Afghanistan were the beginning of new military activism in the Far East and Central Asia. NATO presence in the region of the former Soviet Union complicated the foreign relations of Turkey somewhat. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was of greater importance still because it impinged directly on Turkey's relationship with the *Kurdistan Regional Government* and Turkey's war on the Kurdish terrorist threat emanating from northern Iraq.

These two themes have had direct and indirect impact on Turkish politics under the AKP administration; they will be explored in further detail below and it will be shown that *pragmatism* is the most important determinant of AKP politics. The discourse of *Neo-Ottomanism* as a serious ideological re-orientation of Turkey is thus discredited. Before we can explore the aforementioned themes in more detail it is necessary to refer to policymakers' alleged agenda.

2.2.2: Turkey's Regional Role: *Cui Bono?*

While there *is* a discernible agenda behind the AKP's political activism it cannot be understood through an ideological lens or reduced to neo-imperialism. It is derived from concrete necessities identified by the leading foreign policy architect Ahmet Davutoğlu as early as 1997. The period until 2002 can be seen as the period of gestation for the political

---

[120] For a general introduction to these dynamics see Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, passim.

activism of the AKP, elements of which are presently subsumed in the narrative of *Neo-Ottomanism*. Before taking up his position as Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu formulated the intellectual basis of AKP politics by utilising the political and intellectual rhetoric of the time.

In a 1997 article published in the journal *Perceptions*, Davutoğlu argues for the need to fill the ideational and cultural vacuum left by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Soviet Communism.[121] This is steeped in the questionable cultural rhetoric of Huntington and Fukuyama – however, what is important is not whether Davutoğlu adheres to the models forwarded in *The Clash of Civilizations* or *The End of History* but the implicit affirmation of political opportunity afforded by geopolitical changes.

The article describes Turkey's *political economy* as having evolved from being characterised by the relationship between external factors and Turkish domestic affairs as having become *self-referential*. While there is no theoretical discussion of the terminology itself – perhaps due to Davutoğlu's own education in International Relations – it seems that the current Foreign Minister argues that a shift in Turkey's foreign policy mechanisms of legitimation has taken place as a consequence of the end of the bipolar system and the evolution of a multipolar one.[122] This *self-referential* quality is reflected in the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative; a perceived Ottoman heritage is interpreted in an exclusively positive light and claimed as *Turkish* history; contemporary issues are explained and commented by reference to intrinsically *Turkish* historical phenomenon. The primacy of the Turkey's Ottoman history and its conflation with its *Islamic* heritage is apparent also in Davutoğlu's dwelling upon the 'Muslim World'[123] a major factor in this multipolar system, especially in the

---

[121] Davutoğlu: "The Clash of Interests," p. 2.
[122] Ibid., passim.
[123] The term first appears in ibid., p. 8.

context of control over resources.[124] This also foreshadows the role Islam is to lay in AKP political rhetoric and illustrates the utility of Islam as a means of political mobilisation.

In his 2001 treatise *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth], Davutoğlu retains some of these themes, especially the need to adapt to a changed geopolitical environment. The component of Davutoğlu's *Strategic Depth* − comprising geographical and historical 'depth'[125] – that has been interpreted to advocate a return to imperial politics must be seen in the context of the aforementioned *self-referential quality* of Turkish political economy. When the historical valence of Turkey is cited as justification for political activism this does not advocate the return to a real or imagined Ottoman imperialism. Instead the valence of history for Turkey is meant to invite reflection on the country's position in international politics after being freed from the ideological straightjacket of the Cold War, which defined − in broad strokes − the foreign policy of the Turkish Republic until the end of the Soviet Union.

In a 2008 article Davutoğlu reiterates his claims as well as the need for Turkey to evolve a proactive foreign policy.[126] The possibility of developing networks of influence increasing Turkey's regional role stems from the *combination* of Turkey's geographically advantageous position, for example as an energy corridor, and her historical role as a "center [sic] of attraction."[127] It is worthy of note that Davutoğlu here refers to the "successful nation-building process [of Turkey] in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire."[128] This rhetorically connects Ottoman and Turkish history to the history of the Ottoman Empire's former sphere of influence. A further justification for developing Turkey's foreign relations and perhaps the single most important impetus for these is the year 2023 when

---

[124] Davutoğlu, "The Clash of Interests,"p. 8-12.
[125] Grigoriadis, "The Davutoğlu Doctrine," p. 4.
[126] Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision," p. 77-96 and passim.
[127] Ibid., p. 79.
[128] Ibid.

Turkey will celebrate its 100th anniversary,[129] a date that makes a direct connection to the beginning of the Republican era but emphasises it as an event of continuity rather than rupture.

The above texts by Ahmet Davutoğlu demonstrate the pragmatist rationale underlying the AKP's foreign policy. While there is a discernible political agenda informing the outward-facing political activism of Turkey in its region and beyond, this agenda is an inward-facing one – it is *pragmatism* rather than foreign policy *doctrine*. It is also equally connected to the Republic and the Ottoman Empire, although the attention that the latter has received is, in light of the Turkish Republic's controversial stance to its imperial history, unprecedented and gives rise to the negative connotations of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative.

2.3: Muslim Components of *Neo-Ottomanism* in AKP Politics

An important aspect of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative is the resurgence of Islam and its role in Turkish politics. This will also be the subject of the next chapter, which deals with the ideational dimension of this religious resurgence in the context of the *Gülen Movement*, and plays an important part in formulating the content of Turkish socio-political transformation. Non-Turkish interpretations of *Neo-Ottomanism* contrast this prevalence of Islamic rhetoric in contemporary politics and the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative with the perception of a strictly secular Turkish state and posit it as dangerous. This viewpoint is influenced by the experience of radical political Islam in the past two decades and its utility as an emancipatory tool of political mobilisation. This section argues that this alarmism discounts the lengthy 'tradition' of Islamist parties in Turkish politics and that religion has been a part of Turkish politics in the *Neo-Ottoman* context since at least the 1980s.

---

[129] Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision," p. 96.

It should be noted at the outset that the negative connotations adhering to the label of *Islamism* stem to a great extent from indefinite terminology in a political context. Philip Robins writes of "post-Islamism"[130] in order to forgo the negative associations of this term in the context of AKP politics. This signals differentiation from the brand of Political Islam that eventually evolved into radical Islamist movements like the Taliban or Al-Qaeda. However, the dissociation is artificial; the political Islam now at the forefront of Turkish politics shares a common origin with the emancipatory political Islam of the late Cold War period. Acknowledging this in light of its peaceful development from the 1980s to the present discredits the conflation between the ideational components of *Neo-Ottomanism* and political Islam as cause for undue concern or even a connecting element to an imagined neo-imperialism.

Jenny White traces this role of Islam in Turkish politics back to at least the military coup of 1980.[131] Although religion always played a role in Turkish Republican politics, Islam emerged as a means of political mobilisation as a consequence of the military takeover and the years of martial law that followed. While it evolved as an alternative discourse of political legitimation it never acquired the momentum required to coalesce into a radical or militant movement, mainly due to its limited domestic reach. In this respect the readiness of the government to integrate Islam it into official politics after the *Anatavan Paritisi* [Motherland Party] of Turgut Özal won the elections of 1983 was even more important.[132] Thus, while the dissemination of religious rhetoric as a component of Turkish politics in the late 1980s was significant, coupled with the open economic policies of the administration, any radicalising momentum that had gathered was tempered.[133] The crucial elements that had led to the militancy of Islamist movements throughout the region – most

---

[130] Robins, "Turkish Foreign Policy since 2002," passim.
[131] White, "Islam and Politics," p. 357-380, passim.
[132] Ibid., p. 365-370.
[133] White, "Islam and Politics," p. 367.

prominently the *Mujahideen* of Afghanistan – and the main antagonist of these movements, the Soviet Union, disintegrated at the beginning of the 1990s.

A continuity of political Islam in Turkish politics can be traced through the 1990s at the personnel level as various parties rose and fell under the auspices of individuals that openly endorsed religion as a part of politics,[134] and religious rhetoric has become a staple part of AKP politics. This can be seen as a consequence of the aforementioned continuity in personnel but also as a matter of expedience. The politicisation of religion in a narrative of political legitimation has paid the AKP dividends for example in negotiations with the Gulf Co-operation Council in the context of regional security.[135] Thus, in the context of the AKP administration, Islam serves the purpose of political mobilisation. The reason its resurgence has coincided with the AKP ascendency is a dynamic one; as Graham Fuller points out "Islamists have quite concrete domestic agendas."[136] Islam was not at the forefront of AKP politics immediately following the change of government; the prominence of religion in Turkish politics was a gradual process that reflects the knowledge of its political use on the part of the AKP.

The differentiated use of religious rhetoric also reflects that it was only in recent years that the AKP has become secure enough politically to bring debate on Islamic and religious identity to the forefront of public debate. While the Turkish brand of political Islam arose from the need to find alternatives to strictly secular rule, the period of the 1990s and the early years of AKP rule show that political expedience is the primary motivation behind the use of religious rhetoric by the current administration.

Further, in the 1990s the influx of Islam into Turkish society was institutionalised as a means of mobilising economic capital, a lesson taken from the open economic policies of

---

[134] White, "Islam and Politics," p. 370-380.
[135] Leonore G. Martin, "Turkey and Gulf Cooperation Council Security," in *Turkish Studies* (Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2009), p. 82.
[136] Graham Fuller, "The Future of Political Islam," in *Foreign Affairs* (Vol. 81, No. 2, Mar.-Apr. 2002), p. 54.

the 1980s. In 1990 the *Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen* (MÜSİAD) was founded. This association of economic actors explicitly referred to Islam as a cohesive structure and identity.[137] This was aimed at Central and Eastern Anatolia where the association originated in local businesses and pursued its primary interests. However, the potential supra-national character of using Islam as a means of mobilisation is not discounted in the organisation's own publications.[138] The 1990s can thus be seen as the gestation period of an "economic Islam,"[139] but only the AKP era has allowed it to come to the foreground of politics by integrating it into the *political economy* of Turkey, as Davutoğlu had argued in his 1997 article.

2.4: Economic Components of *Neo-Ottomanism* in AKP Politics

An important component of the ongoing political success of the AKP is its economic diversification policy abroad that entails domestic economic integration. The impact of the economic crises of 2000/1 is discussed in the following section, because it is against this background of economic and political turmoil that the AKP were able to mobilise large segments of the electorate towards their initial victory. The economic activism of the AKP era is in part due to processes of financial globalisation and the party's own capitalisation on the failings of competing political parties at the end of the 1990s. Important from a historical perspective is the possibility of economic diversification arising from the demise of the Soviet Bloc as well as incentives stemming from Turkey's frustrated relationship to the West.

The financial crisis of late 2000 and early 2001 served as a tangible watershed attesting to the failure of the coalition governments of the 1990s. This worked to discredit

---

[137] E. Fuat Keyman/Berrin Koyuncu, "Globalization, Alternative Modernities and the Political Economy of Turkey," in *Review of International Political Economy* (Vol. 12, No. 1, Feb 2005), p. 117.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid., p. 118.

them in the political climate preceding the election of 2002.[140] The economic crisis brought

to the fore the deficit of political legitimacy of a state based on a particular form of clientele

governance; [141] the negative effects of "Turkey's premature exposure to financial

globalisation"[142] were only tempered by the involvement of the IMF and the stabilisation of

domestic financial markets by the influx of foreign capital. This turned out to be detrimental

for the political parties of a Turkey sensitive to foreign involvement, especially in the form

of financial hegemony.

The crisis also exposed the vulnerability of the Turkish domestic economy and its

sensitivity to external factors such as the financial crises in Russia and Asia as well as the

inability of the severely fractured political system that followed the 1997 coup to undertake

the necessary fiscal measures required for stabilisation.[143] In light of these failures, the

involvement of the IMF and subsequently the EU was integrated into the electoral program

of the AKP. Indeed, in the period immediately following the elections of 2002 until the

formal opening of ascension negotiations with the EU in 2005 the AKP persisted with their

deep commitment to a program of "Europeanisation."[144]

One of the consequences of this programme was the strengthening of the domestic

role of business-based civil organisations and a re-ordering of the Turkish domestic

economy. This contributed to the political legitimacy of AKP while not being directly

associated with the political sphere. [145] Simultaneously, rhetorics of Europeanisation were

co-opted by economic organisations in order to strengthen their position and contribute to

the Turkish economy. For example, the *Association of Turkish Industrialists and*

---

[140] E. Fuat Keyman/Ziya Öniş, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World* (Islanbul: Bilgi University Press 2007), p. 181.
[141] Keyman/Koyuncu, "Globalization," p. 107.
[142] Ibid., p. 106.
[143] While the table in Keyman/Öniş, "Turkish Politics," p. 106 provides as an instructive overview, internal political problems are perused on p. 110-111.
[144] Ziya Öniş/Şunhaz Yılmaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey During the AKP Era," in *Turkish Studies* (Vol. 1, No. 1, March 2009), p. 7.
[145] Keyman/Öniş, "Turkish Politics," p. 40-41.

Businessmen (TÜSİAD), originally founded in 1971, lobbied for the full EU membership of Turkey on the basis of increasing economic ties after 2002.[146]

The loss of enthusiasm for EU integration in the years following 2005 cannot be traced back to single event.[147] Suffice to say that in addition to the scepticism espoused by prominent EU members such as France and Germany as to whether Turkey would be able to fulfil the requirements of full membership, there were important internal Turkish factors as well. From the point of view of foreign policy the most important among these has been the widening of the AKP electoral base, especially in the Anatolian parts of Turkey by appealing to religious sentiments. This development is connected to the increasing tension with the EU because of the clear limitations imposed on parties with close religious ties by member guidelines.[148] Thus, the AKP administration saw one of its tools of legitimation in potential jeopardy by its commitment to Europeanisation and consequently departed gradually from its arguments for integration.

This frustration and the consequent search for economic networks in the region of the former Soviet Bloc was foreshadowed by Davutoğlu when he posited that economic and political connections to the East would work as leverage over the EU.[149] This has been an important impetus for Turkey to diversify its economy by actively seeking political connections to formerly estranged neighbours; in some cases this has taken the form of economic co-operation and can be framed in the context of increasing energy demands by the West. Turkey's geographical location affords it an advantageous position in facilitating the flow of resources from producers to consumers. Davutoğlu formulates this as Turkey being a "central country."[150]

---

[146] Keyman/Koyuncu, "Globalization," p. 113-116.
[147] Öniş/Yılmaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism," p. 13-16.
[148] Ibid., p. 15.
[149] Ibid., p. 9 and Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik* [Strategic Depth], p. 551-553.
[150] Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision," p. 78.

Ahmed Rashid described the co-option of "pipeline politics"[151] in order to further domestic political goals as a "New Great Game."[152] This is a useful term to trace the connection between economic and political mobilisation that has developed since the disintegration of the bipolar system of the Cold War. The case of Turkey explicates how the manipulation and co-option of economic and energy networks serves a domestic political agenda. The EU's search for energy corridors to secure the flow of fossil fuels to Europe has afforded Turkey the leverage alluded to by Davutoğlu. For example, the Gazprom-affair in 2005, in which Russia cut off gas supplies to the Ukraine and potentially endangered EU energy supplies, led the EU to seek alternative providers, [153] and Turkey was considered as a contender. This provided important incentives for Turkey to seek diversification of its energy networks on its own part. Such economic ventures contributed to the legitimation of the administration.

Turkey's activism in the Middle East and its relationship with the former Soviet Bloc is neither an indication of disassociation from the West nor a consequence of the Islamisation of Turkish politics.[154] It is a consequence of the variegated nature of the foreign policy of the AKP but also a reaction to opportunities and pragmatism stemming from larger geopolitical processes.[155] It is thus wrong to construe the prominence of the Middle East on the Turkish political agenda in an alarmist interpretation of *Neo-Ottomanism* or neo-imperialism; it is *pragmatism* and largely a consequence of the political watersheds mentioned in the foregone section.

---

[151] Öniş/Yılmaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism," p. 10.
[152] Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 143-182.
[153] Ali Tekin/Paul A. Williams, "EU-Russian Relations and Turkey's Role as an Energy Corridor (Discussion Article), in *Europe-Asia Studies* (Vol. 61, No. 2, March 2009), p. 337-338.
[154] Larabee, "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East," p. 103.
[155] Ibid.

2.5: Security-Based Components of *Neo-Ottomanism* in AKP Politics

Turkey's security environment has changed substantially in the course of the past two decades. With the end of the Cold War the United States' relationship with the Middle East changed dramatically. Concurrently with this, the status of Turkey as an accessory to foreign interest groups in the Middle East waned and the increasing independence of Turkey in security matters is evident in contemporary political literature.[156] From the perspective of Turkey, the security environment of the post-World Trade Center attacks and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 constitute more important turning points than the end of the Cold War.[157] The following section will review some of the most important ways in which Turkey's security environment has changed in the past decades and describe Turkey's foreign policy as a consequence of these concrete changes.

Following the decision not to allow the US to stage combat missions into Iraq from Turkish soil in 2003, Turkey has increasingly sought to mend relations to previously estranged neighbours, perhaps to counterbalance its reliance on the United States as its main foreign ally. This is in part due to the symbolic value of the aforementioned decision; it created pro-Turkish sympathy among the Arab States in the region.[158] In the case of Syria, for example, mutual interests guided the rapprochement. Both countries had a vested interest in containing Kurdish Nationalism, especially after the loss of the relative stability provided along Turkey's southern border by the controversial regime of Saddam Hussein.[159] The recent Civil War in Syria has caused estrangement from the regime of Bashar Al-Assad and open support of the resistance movement. Although this shift is also due to a host of other factors – and is further complicated by the alleged recent shelling of Turkish national territory from Syria – it illustrates that Turkey is not following a constant, even ideological,

---

[156] Although much of this is generalizing and simplistic, for example Stephen Kinzer: *Reset Middle East. Old Friends and New Alliances: Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, Iran*, London/NY: I.B. Tauris 2010.
[157] Larabee, "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East," p. 103-104.
[158] Öniş/Yılmaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asiamism," p. 10.
[159] Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East," p. 105-106.

line with its foreign security policies but instead reacting to crises and shifting allegiances as they emerge. This is reflective of the "rhythmic diplomacy"[160] argued for by the Foreign Minister.

A similar rationale has guided Turkish rapprochement with Iran. The shared threat emanating from separatist groups within both countries has encouraged diplomatic ties.[161] However, the relationship with Iran has led to an increase in controversy over Iran's nuclear program. Turkey is increasingly balancing between facilitating dialogue and striking an assertive pose in terms of foreign policy. In 2007, Turkey hosted dialogues between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also the Palestinian and Israeli presidents.[162] In 2010, relations with Israel declined in the wake of Gaza Freedom Flotilla raid. Again, Turkey was adapting to crises as they emerged.

The context of security also shows how the extension of official Turkish politics to include Islam and religious rhetoric is a pragmatic, rather than an ideological, choice. The affirmation of Islam as a political factor has allowed it to be used as a cohesive element – pointed out above – and also allowed the threat emanating from radical Islamists to be formulated as a distinct part of the Turkish domestic security agenda.[163] This inclusion also enables Turkey to partake in the extended debate on radical Islamist terrorism and formulate its own terrorist problems in the context of a wider, global, security debate. In a 2005 study Andrew Mango related how the declaration of the War on Terror in 2003 has allowed Turkey to curry sympathy for its own fight against the PKK and separatist terrorists in the West.[164]

---

[160] Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision," p. 82.
[161] Larrabee, "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East," p. 107-108.
[162] Öniş/Yılmaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asiamism," p. 19.
[163] Martin, "Turkey and Gulf Cooperation Council Security," p. 80.
[164] Andrew Mango, *Turkey and the War on Terror. For Forty Years We Fought Alone* (Routledge: London/NY 2005), passim.

The incorporation of Islam into the wider political agenda of Turkey can be interpreted as specifically related to the War on Terror. In a 2007 article, political science and international relations scholars Bulent Aras and Şule Toktaş argue that the accommodation of Islamic pluralism into the politics of Turkey also significantly mitigates the threat emanating from Islamic fundamentalism.[165] This also supports the idea that the incorporation and engagement with Islam, which is an integral part of the Turkish transformation project in the context of *Neo-Ottomanism*, is a pragmatic, rather than ideological, choice.

The above formulation of terrorism in the wider context of a global War on Terror must be scrutinized in the context of Turkish national self-perception. In a study from 2008, Michelangelo Guida has posited that there is a close relationship between the perception of threats and Turkish politics.[166] The idea that Turkey is under constant foreign threat to its territorial integrity – the *Sevrès-Syndrome* – is an important aspect arguing for continuities between the pre-AKP agendas and that of the present administration. This continuity speaks against ideological elements posited by alarmist interpretations of *Neo-Ottomanism*.

2.6: Concluding Remarks: Turkey's Transformation

Turkish foreign policy activism is a consequence of Turkey's reaction to its political environment. Changes and processes such as those following the disintegration of the Cold War political order and the World Trade Center attacks of 2001, but also the War on Terror, have effected geopolitical changes that have influenced Turkey's decision-making and foreign policy. Changes in Turkey's political economy in order to accommodate these processes reflect *pragmatism* rather than the development of doctrine. This in itself

---

[165] Bulent Aras/Şule Toktaş, "Al-Qaida, 'War on Terror' and Turkey," in *Third World Quarterly* (Vol. 28, No. 5, 2007), p. 1042-1047.
[166] Michelangelo Guida, "The Sevrès Syndrome and '*Komplo*' Theories in the Islamist and Secular Press," in *Turkish Studies* (Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2008), p. 37.

represents significant continuity with foregone administrations and politics in the sense that with the end of a static global political system, Turkey has reacted by practicing *real-time politics* rather than allowing its policies to be dictated by constancy.[167]

From the political point of view the contention that *Neo-Ottomanism* entails doctrinal revisionism cannot be held. Returning to a theme mentioned at the beginning of this review of Turkey's politics under the AKP administration, this chapter has viewed the developments in Turkey's domestic and foreign politics not as a departure from previously established practices, but rather as a part of an extensive *transformation*. The ideational content of this transformation, described in the next chapter with the example of the *Gülen Movement*, contributes significantly to the processes outlined in this chapter. For example, the expanding Muslim middle class fostered and encouraged by the *Gülen Movement* is one of the great profiteers of recent AKP foreign policy activism – MÜSİAD and TÜSİAD are both affiliated with the core ideological tenets of the *Gülen Movement* described in the following chapter.[168] At the same time, *Gülen Movement* members makes up a significant part of the AKP's electorate.

The processes and policies described here should be understood explicitly in the context of a restructuring of Turkey's external political and economic networks and relations. They signify a gradual transformation of Turkey's internal socio-political structure. This does not mean that Turkey is engaging in a substitution of its state ideology – although the ideational contents of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative are an important part of contemporary Turkish politics.

CEU eTD Collection

---

[167] Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy," p. 94-95.
[168] Keyman/Koyuncu, "Globalization," passim.

Chapter 3: The *Gülen Movement* and *Neo-Ottomanism*

As was discussed in the previous chapters, a salient feature of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative is its Islamic component and its conflation of Turkish national identity with the romantic notion of an Ottoman Islamic polity. The following chapter will develop the idea that Islam, in the context of *Neo-Ottomanism*, should be seen not just as a historical reference or faith but also as a *narrative of social and political transformation* – it is a *political Islam*. Islam is an especially useful vehicle of transformation and development because of its ability not only to permeate into all strata of society – especially in Turkey, where it has always occupied a definitive position in identity-building – but also because it fosters transnational connections. These traits are successfully recognised and exploited by the *Fetullah Gülen Movement*, a transnational community utilising the cohesive qualities of a particular interpretation of Islam. This movement will serve as an example of the dynamic uses Islam is being put to in contemporary Turkey.

Following a characterisation of the movement itself, it is argued that while the *Gülen Movement* itself cannot be dubbed *Neo-Ottoman* without qualification, its agenda revolves around objectives similar to those outlined in Chapter 2 for the AKP administration. The movement is concerned with preserving power and pursuing the interests of its members; thus is can be seen as a domestic profiteer of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative, although its objectives are not necessarily framed within Turkish politics but rather economics. It makes use of the components of a perceived *Ottoman Islamic identity* of *Neo-Ottomanism* as a *narrative of legitimation* to situate itself in the international arena and maintain power structures without dominant political or national frameworks.

The absence of these frameworks is simultaneously the main difference and the link between the *Gülen Movement* and *Neo-Ottomanism*, precisely because the latter has a *supra-national* reference point. Ottoman and Islamic references are explicit in both cases. The AKP's appropriation of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative represents first its political side and its religious connotations, while the *Gülen Movement* reverses this hierarchy. Both cases revolve around historical interpretations rather than fact or consensus. The following chapter will grasp the aforementioned religious aspects of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative in a *trans-national* arena and highlight its potential of economic mobilisation.

Throughout this chapter, several writings of Fetullah Gülen himself will be consulted where they pertain to the chronological focus of the thesis. Because it is the contention of this chapter that the development of the *Gülen Movement* in the 1990s and the exile of its leader to the United States at the end of the decade demonstrate the maturation of a religious-social component of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative of legitimation, these essays are drawn from the final decade of the 20th Century and earlier definitive writings. In addition, to illustrate the claims made pertaining to the educational mission of the *Gülen Movement*, *Fatih University* [169] will be examined in exemplary fashion. Its own vision statement indicates some of the objectives pursued not only by the educational institutions affiliated with the *Gülen Movement*, but also the scope of the movement itself:

> Aiming at theoretical and practical education, research and development, Fatih University envisions being a sample university with its activities based on a *global approach* while remaining attentive to *local perspectives*.[170]

Two distinct features of the *Gülen Movement* and its activities are reflected in the vision statement of the University. Its 'global approach' – thus the trans-national aspirations of the movement's economic and educational activities – and a 'local perspective.' The

---

[169] The name, which translates as 'conquest,' suggests, is also the epithet associated with the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror. Mehmed the Conqueror led the Ottomans to conquer Constantinople in 1453.
[170] "Vision and Mission Statement," on the Fatih University website. http://www.fatih.edu.tr/?vizyon, last accessed 7. August 2013, italics mine.

latter is an indication of the roots of the *Gülen Movement* and its position as a *domestic profiteer* of the resurgence of Islamic values in Turkish politics and *Neo-Ottomanism.*

3.1: The Role of Religion in Turkey

In order to expand on the idea of Islam as a trans-national means of mobilising capital, it is necessary to revisit briefly the role of religion in the politics of Republican Turkey and the consequent use of it as a vehicle by the *Gülen Movement*. While Fetullah Gülen currently resides in exile, the movement has its origins and roots in Turkey and was greatly influenced by the political climate of the 1980s as well as the *laicist* stance of the state towards religion. A chronological look and the development of the *Gülen Movement* in the periodisation of this thesis – 1983 to the present – will highlight the role of religion in a *narrative of legitimation* that can be appropriated to serve particular purposes. Religion has continually served the purpose of mobilising resources. It is of no coincidence, in this sense, that the *Gülen Movement* has its origins in Turkey; the lesson of utilising religion as a means of political and economic expansion carries over into the activities of the movement itself.

Islam is a particularly sensitive subject in Turkey. This is mainly due to the *Kemalist* modernisation project that propagated secularism as a safeguard of modernisation – the latter was meant not as a normative sense, but rather a project of political transformation and nation building at odds with religion. The strong ethnic nationalism and forced economic development of the First Republic precluded the inclusion of religion as a political factor; in fact, religion was seen as a brake to development because of its associations with the failed Ottoman Empire. When it was founded in 1923 the modern Turkish Republic promoted a particular brand of secularism, which, rather than striving for a strict separation of religion and state, rather sought to subordinate religion to politics for

73

the aforementioned reason.[171] The establishment of this hierarchy allowed the Turkish political elite to develop an interpretation of 'orthodox Islam' that reserved religious expression for the private sphere,[172] and against which all other national religious expression would be measured.

While this regulation of religion focused primarily on practices rather than faith, both aspects impinged on one another. The privatisation of religion and the separation of faith from practice allowed for the development of a particular kind of *Turkish Islam* that was decidedly secular in its expression.[173] The purpose of this was to create a level playing field in the arena of politics where religious expression would not be a potential threat to the political status quo.[174] Thus, Turkish secularism represents *laicism*. Significantly, rather than signalling a distance between religion and politics in Turkey – as would be implied by the use of the term *secular – laicism* is a significant engagement with religion on the part of the political establishment. It also expresses sensitivity towards the ability of religion to be utilised as a means of political and social mobilisation.

Consequently, throughout Republican history, religion remained on the agenda of the political establishment. The tensile relationship between the state and the religious establishment was to remain a definitive feature of Turkish society. It is precisely this perception that the Turkish state impinges on the ideational expression of piety-minded Muslims that the *Gülen Movement* tapped into when establishing itself as a social movement. It is important to remember that the marginalisation of religious expression by the Turkish government in the 1980s should not be equated with the banishment of religion

[171] Kim Shively, "Taming Islam: Studying Religion in Secular Turkey," in *Anthropological Quarterly* (Vol. 81, No. 3, Summer 2008), passim.

[172] Ibid., p. 683-688.

[173] In an apt characterisation of the fusion of secular politics and Islamic identity in Turkey, Jenny White coins the term Muslim Nationalism in her book *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton University Press: Princeton/Oxford 2013).

[174] Shively, "Taming Islam," p. 686.

from social and political discourse; simply that the practice and expression of religion was reserved to the private sphere.

3.2: Brief Historical Overview of the *Gülen Movement*

Before delving in a little more detail into the concrete developments defining the political and social trajectory of the *Gülen Movement* during the 1980s and 1990s, it is necessary to review briefly the structure of the movement itself. Because the focus of this chapter is the educational infrastructure of the movement as a means of facilitating transnational activities, the makeup of said infrastructure is of interest as well as the overarching organisation of the movement itself. This overview may also grant a preliminary insight into why the organisation of the movement incorporates an adherence to 'traditional' or 'conservative' values.[175] The content and educational activities themselves will recur as an item of interest later in the chapter; they are the operative elements of the dissemination of a new self-perception of *identity* and they constitute elements of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative.

3.2.1: Structure of the *Gülen Movement*

Although the focus of this chapter is the *Gülen Movement's* role as a social and political actor after the coup of 1980, the roots of this community extend beyond the 1980s and the public socio-political arena. Initially, the community formed against the background of the aforementioned marginalisation of religious practice in Turkey. These groups were not a *novum* of Turkish society; an example of a similar group would be that formed around Said Nursi. A religious scholar and teacher of Fetullah Gülen, like-minded individuals around him sought to preserve the spiritual traditions of Islam and simultaneously bridge the

---

[175] Because both these terms are problematic when used in a normative sense, it should be pointed out that in the context of this chapter, both 'conservative' and 'traditional' refers to value systems based on an interpretation of Islamic ethics.

problematic gap between science, reason, and faith.[176] This gap had developed in the *laicist* climate of the First Republic as a consequence of the equation of *modernisation* with *secularism* and the marginalisation of religion and religious practice. Gülen's teachings are also ostensibly concerned with reconciling the seemingly oppositional categories of Islam and democracy, religion and science.

The *Gülen Movement* consists of groups of like-minded individuals – it is a community with little in the way of formalities and relies on the common interests and efforts of its members not only for weekly engagements but also to organise a hierarchy within individual groupings. These are usually local and organised according to the mobility of their respective members. Individual traits such as employment and family status are important in determining not only the members' position within the community – thus promoting a basic hierarchy – but also in determining the extent and nature of the contributions individual members make, be they of a financial nature, in kind, or consist of lobbying in order to increase the extent of the group.[177]

One of the most controversial aspects of the organisation of the movement is its strict separation based on gender. Although this may be due to practical considerations,[178] the maintenance of gender segregation is an important part of preserving a traditional Islamic understanding of gender roles. In some cases the maintenance of such traditional Islamic values were cited as a form of empowerment, for example because it allows women the freedom of religious expression where it is otherwise forbidden. This may be, for example, the wearing of a headscarf while teaching at Gülen-affiliated institutions as opposed to a Turkish public one,[179] where law dictates that no head cover may be worn.

[176] Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement. A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Heidelberg/London/NY: Springer 2010), p. 47.
[177] Ibid., p. 49-50.
[178] Ibid., p. 50.
[179] Ibid.

The *Gülen Movement* relies primarily on donations for its financial resources. There is even significant competition between individual donors as to the amount of their contribution,[180] which suggests that the contributions of individual members relate to their position within the community and their relationship with other members. Similarly to direct investments made by entrepreneurial members, larger donations may be requested from members when particular services or projects require the raising of funds. Such projects may include, for example, the foundation of schools – mostly from the more enterprising of the movement's members – but also revolve around important Islamic traditions such as *Ramadan*.[181]

This is an important aspect when considering that the movement promotes Muslim piety in practice – indeed, this seems to be one of the most important reciprocal effects of making financial contributions: to be seen as being a pious Muslim by supporting Muslim practices in the sense of the *Gülen Movement's* interpretation of Islam. Through the use of competitive elements such as those mentioned above, as well as the notion of accumulating moral and spiritual capital by making contributions to the movement, the community acquires and maintains a hierarchy based not only on gender but also a particular form of *class*. The structure of the movement and especially the position of its leader as the infallible overseer of a snowball organisation,[182] have earned it the accusations of having sect-like conditions and arch-conservative ideals.[183]

In the 1980s, many of these traits were still in their infancy, and Gülen was the self-appointed leader of a grassroots movement that defined itself against the background of emergent political and social pluralism in Turkey. In these historical conditions the

---

[180] Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement*, p 56-58.
[181] Ibid., p. 54-59.
[182] For example, Fetullah Gülen himself is not aware oft he exact number of schools and institutions carrying his name, especially those abroad. Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement*, p. 97.
[183] Maximilian Popp, "Der Pate [The Godfather]," in *Der Spiegel* [The Mirror] (No. 32, 2012). Online edition: http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-87649490.html, last accessed 14. May 2013.

movement retained some of its core tenets such as the preservation of what its members saw as expressive freedoms, curtailed by the Turkish administration. It is also during this time that the *Gülen Movement* began its skilful political manoeuvring to increase and retain a prominent position in the Turkish domestic and international political arena.

3.2.2: The 1980s and the *Gülen Movement*

In the formative years of the *Gülen Movement*, between 1966 and 1983, religious education became the focal point of the community. Educational activities were to become the most important aspect of the movement itself. It was not until the end of the period of martial law that followed the 1980 coup that the movement expanded into the public sphere and became a truly transnational actor. It is important to consider briefly, before expanding on how the political developments of the 1980s contributed to the expansion of the movement and its connection to *Neo-Ottomanism*, the inception of the particular doctrines expounded by Fetullah Gülen and the members of the movement.

The origins of the *Gülen Movement* in Eastern Anatolia are significant. Its leader originates from an area of exceptional ethnic diversity: Gülen comes from a village in the vicinity of Erzurum in Eastern Anatolia. This location puts his origins at a geographical and historical crossroads – here, especially in the 19th century, migration and displacement produced a veritable *mélange* of communities, ethnic and religious groups, all vying to preserve their identities and thus seeking exclusive ways of defining communities.[184]

One of the effects of this was to strengthen the role of religious identity in forming the basis of delineating a particular group – especially in the climate of displacement following the wars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This history of communal conflict and the importance of religion for social demarcation produced a specific form of

---

[184] Specifically, the disastrous war between the Ottoman and the Russian Empires in 1877/78 brought a great number of religious and ethnic immigrants from areas of the former Ottoman Empire into the geographic sphere of modern Turkey. Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 180-181.

social religious identity, in which religion remained an important marker but was nevertheless subordinated to politics and the state.[185] This is important when considering that the interpretation of Islam by the *Gülen Movement* is geared specifically toward social mobilisation and effecting socio-political transformation.

In the 1980s, as was discussed briefly in the theoretical chapter, major political and social changes swept Turkish society. Because the *Gülen Movement* had up to this point avoided explicit political participation and because of the *laicist* stance it took towards religion – as outlined above – it was not threatened by the state-defined political pluralism of the early 1980s. Conversely, it gained greatly from the privatisation of education and the open economic policies of Turgut Özal,[186] which allowed Fetullah Gülen to mobilise financial and social capital in order to expand his network of influence and the movement to invest in educational institutions. For example, much of the support for his transformational projects came from the aspiring middle class of Anatolia that profited from the open financial policies of the 1980s.[187] The *Gülen Movement* gained from political circumstances by mobilising support of its cause via social and religious networks and taking advantage of the economic and democratic conditions of the Third Republic.[188]

3.2.3: The Political Climate of the 1990s and the *Gülen Movement*

The economic and political reforms of the 1980s were indubitably crucial in the expansion of the *Gülen Movement* onto the public sphere because they allowed the movement to gain financial, social, and political support in the aspiring middle class. In the 1990s the organisation started to institutionalise its influence. The political climate was indicative of the developments and social transformations that allowed the *Gülen Movement* to

---

[185] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p 181.
[186] Ibid., p. 183.
[187] Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement*, p. 23-32.
[188] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 183-185.

increasingly gain import as a social and political actor in Turkey. Its activities are at once instigator and consequence of these developments.

In June 1997, military leaders effected the resignation of the elected government of Turkey. The *Refah Partisi* [Welfare Party] had used its religious credentials to mobilise support for itself in the foregone municipal elections and had now provoked the National Security Council's ire and an investigation into its political activities by hosting a rally in Sincan. At this rally anti-Zionist sentiments were expressed and this led to the National Security Council issuing a statement that, while not attacking the government directly, allowed the National Security Council to undertake 'supervision' of Prime Minister Erbakan's government.[189] This supervision led to significant curtailment of the coalition government and eventually to its resignation.

This 'soft coup,' which led to the imprisonment of *Refah Partisi* leaders – some of whom later formed the *Fazilet Partisi* [Virtue Party], from which emerged the founding members of the AKP – was instigated because the military saw secularism and *laicism* threatened by the increasing prominence of religious actors in national politics. Several faith communities were banned; economic groups like TÜSİAD saw the curtailment of their activities until they issued statements in support of the military agenda, which was to limit the influence of Islamic political, economic, and social groups.[190] These events, while not pertaining directly to the *Gülen Movement*, give an indication of how religion is politicised in Turkey and how radically a particular interpretation of secularism is guarded by the military.

Following the phase of expansion into the public sphere in the 1980s with the support of an emergent middle class, the *Gülen Movement* made increasing inroads into Turkish society. It is somewhat ironic that, during the course of the 1990s, Fetullah Gülen

---

[189] Muhammed Çetin, *The Gülen Movement. Civic Service Without Borders* (NY: Blue Dome Press 2010), p. 47-50.
[190] Ibid., p. 48-49.

distanced himself from the *Refah Partisi* [Welfare Party], thus rejecting overtly political Islam and gaining credit with the secular-liberal political elite of Turkey.[191] This is part of a number of tactical decisions made in order to gain political credibility. Fetullah Gülen's meetings with religious leaders in the latter half of the 1990s, which included the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church and Pope John Paul II,[192] should be seen as concerted moves to promote the alleged agenda of religious pluralism and cosmopolitanism of the *Gülen Movement*. However, it is clear from the movement's proximity to the political elite that the domestic politics of Turkey informs its long-term objectives. The following section will sketch out how, in the course of the 1990s, these objectives crystallised against the background of the *Gülen Movement's* trans-national influence.

The 1990s were an important period for the *Gülen Movement* because it was during this period that the movement took full advantage of the new opportunities in the Turkish media landscape to disseminate its ideas. For example, its proximity to the political establishment allowed the *Gülen Movement* to purchase the daily *Zaman* [Time], which by 2002 had become the fifth largest newspaper in Turkey,[193] and was purchased with the express purpose of communicating the ideas of Fetullah Gülen to a wider reading public.[194] While this is the most prominent example of the movement's use of the media, there are many more examples – such as the English-language bimonthly *The Fountain*. Significant is also the *Gülen Movement's* financial support and economic networking. This aspect of the movement is intricately connected to its educational programme.

The political manoeuvring of the early 1990s allowed the positioning of the movement as economically and politically autonomous. In this respect, the mobilisation of financial assets was one of the most important developments of the 1990s. Just like in the

---

[191] Filiz Başkan, "The Fetullah Gülen Community: Contribution or Barrier to the Consolidation of Democracy in Turkey?" in *Middle Eastern Studies* (Vol. 41, No. 6, Nov. 2005), p. 850.
[192] Ibid., p. 850.
[193] Yavuz, Islamic Political Identity, p. 190-191.
[194] Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement*, p. 87-88.

1980s, the *Gülen Movement* appealed to the private sector and individual businessmen as well as influential investors in order to build its financial infrastructure. The movement relies substantially on donations and alms, not unlike a *vakıf*.[195] By offering inconsistent electoral support to political parties the movement also benefited economically from endowments by these parties. It was thus that, in the middle of the 1990s, the *Gülen Movement* achieved controversial financial success by mobilising independent economic resources.

The *Gülen Movement* now maintains a financial network based mostly on private investors and middle-class businessmen who profit from its infrastructure. For example, investment is encouraged in the sectors of education and civil engineering. This way, the *Gülen Movement* portrays itself as an actor of social transformation and civic development by fostering a network of educational and business institutions. Since 1996 the movement has founded a number of corporations that support activities outside Turkey, notably in regions with significant Muslim populations, mainly in the Balkans and the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia.[196] By supporting social and communal infrastructures and activities abroad, the movement also profits from the reciprocity of the host nations.

However, this strengthening of the *Gülen Movement's* position was to have repercussions. By the end of the 1990s its activities had provoked the ire of the Turkish government, not least because of the support offered to the parties ousted in the 1997 soft coup. In a concerted state-led media attack on Fetullah Gülen, the government initiated a prosecution campaign against the movement. As a result of this, Fetullah Gülen went into exile in the United States.[197]

---

[195] Pious foundation, which in the Ottoman Empire sometimes served as a financial repository for political purposes. Tahrir Heyeti (ed), *Türkçe/Osmanlıca-İngilizce Redhouse Sözlüğü* [Redhouse Turkish/Ottoman-English Dictionary] (Istanbul: Redhouse 1997), p. 1216.
[196] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 191.
[197] Ibid., p. 202-204.

3.3: Educational Activities and Content of the *Gülen Movement*

The *Gülen Movement's* educational activities connect it to *Neo-Ottomanism*, specifically its religious component and its conflation of Turkish society and politics with an Ottoman Islamic identity. The *Gülen Movement* is a profiteer as well as a proponent of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative. But the *Gülen Movement's* educational activities and economic networks are not about 'islamising' Turkey or transforming it into an Islamic state. The *Gülen Movement* pursues more practical goals that differ from Turkish politics, yet stop short of coming into open conflict with them. The differentiated use of religion by the movement does not run contrary to the *Kemalist* project or self-interpretation of the state,[198] but is rather a consequence of the social and economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s,[199] economic globalisation, and the identity-related *malaise* lamented by Keyder.[200]

However, before examining how the teachings of Fetullah Gülen relate to a specific interpretation of Turkey's Ottoman past, it is instructive to review the content of these teachings. The objective of the movement is the fostering and dissemination of a particular interpretation of Turkish-Ottoman identity via the oft-cited *Altın Nesil* [Golden Generation][201] and to reap the economic benefits of this. This generation, self-confident, enlightened, and inspired by a strong sense of Islamic ethics, is to be fostered in the diverse educational institutions affiliated with the movement. Here, one of Fetullah Gülen's earliest essays on the purpose and aspirations of the Gülen institutions will be reviewed. In addition, several secondary publications will be consulted in order to portray the structure of these educational institutions as they pertain to this chapter.

---

[198] In Chapter 2, it was clear that the Foreign Ministry, for example, sees itself as standing the traditions of Atatürk and *Kemalist* politics, despite significant departures from these tenets.

[199] Yavuz, "Islamic Political Identity," p. 179-205.

[200] Keyder, "Whiter the Project of Modernity?" passim.

[201] While it is difficult to say what the ultimate *movens* of the *Gülen Movement* is, Aydın Özipek has correctly proposed that one of the primarily motivations of education be the *Gülen Movement* is to "increase its share in the power struggle." Aydın Özipek, *"Cultivating" a Generation through Education: The Case of the Gülen Movement* (CEU MA Thesis: Budapest 2009), p. 36.

Fetullah Gülen's thoughts on the movement's educational activities are transcendental from a spiritual point of view. They seek to connect elements of Islamic faith with the practicalities of business life and serve the purpose of preparing students for the material world and instilling universal ethical values in them.[202] These values are inherently linked to "the light of the Qu'ran;"[203] Gülen sees the basis of ethical education in religious instruction, although he distances himself from dogmatic interpretations of the scripture. Educational institutions are charged with the task of instilling virtues in pupils on the basis of the interpretation of religious texts. These virtues find expression in the generous donations and dedication to the movement practiced by alumni of the Gülen-affiliated educational institutions. Sociological analyses of the phenomenon of the extraordinary generosity with which members of the *Gülen Movement* contribute financially and in kind conclude that it is precisely the fusion of generalised Islamic and cultural values that promotes this behaviour.[204]

The promotion of self-referential religious and cultural values is the purpose of Gülen-inspired educational institutions. However, not all members of the movement attend such institutions or have done so in the past. The financial support coming from members with no direct affiliation with Gülen-affiliated educational institutions that highlights the movement's appeal to specifically Turkish cultural values,[205] is significant. One explanation for this is the Gülen movement's function as an arena of ideational expression. It appears plausible that the expression of these values appeals to the need for expression of religious-cultural identity in individual members.[206]

---

[202] Fetullah Gülen, "Our System of Education," originally published 1979. Online version: http://en.fgulen.com/towards-the-lost-paradise/578-our-system-of-education, last accessed 14.May 2013.
[203] Ibid. It is significant that Gülen does not refer literally to any specific part of the Qur'an but rather to a general interpretation of its message.
[204] Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement*, p. 65-70.
[205] Ibid., p. 70-80.
[206] And, in a lesser degree, the need for expression of national *Turkish* identity.

With around 300 privately funded elementary schools and colleges throughout Turkey and the Central Asia in 1999,[207] the *Gülen Movement* had established a substantial educational network throughout Turkey and the surrounding region by the end of the 1990s. These foundations are often platforms from which investment opportunities are sought by private investors.[208] Interestingly, while a good amount of the curriculum revolves around what might be considered secular content, such as natural sciences, engineering, or language instruction, Islamic influence on the curriculum is visible mostly in the structure of curricula. While there are courses in Islam, Islamic values are integrated into the makeup of the institutions themselves. For example, the strict gender segregation of these institutions may be interpreted as upholding 'traditional' – ie. conservative – Muslim values, especially when contrasted to the liberal social pyramid of Turkish society as a whole.[209]

Graduates of the Gülen-institutions regularly achieve results significantly higher than their counterparts of other educational institutions.[210] Scholars have voiced concerns about the hierarchical nature of the education offered by these institutions and have hypothesised that, rather than contributing to the formation of a civil society in Turkey, the education offered by these institutions is more akin to indoctrination.[211] These conclusions are based on the observation of the segregation of the institutions themselves and the elitist terminology of the movement as well as the sometimes militant-sounding writings or labels dreamed up by its leader. [212] For example, the so-called *Golden Generation* is an appropriation of Muslim symbolism in order to appeal to the ideational qualities of Islamic-Ottoman consciousness in Turkey and abroad. The term refers to an imagined 'golden age'

---

[207] Hakan Yavuz, "Towards and Islamic Liberalism? The Nurcu Movement and Fetullah Gülen," in *Middle East Journal* (Vol. 53, No. 4, Autumn 1999), p. 597-599.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid., p. 598-599 and Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 192-197.
[210] Özipek, *"Cultivating" a Generation*, p. 39-42.
[211] For example Başkan, "The Fetullah Gülen Community," passim and Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 193-194.
[212] For example, Fetullah Gülen, "The Awaited Generation," in *The Fountain* (Issue 9, January-March 1995). Online version: http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/The-Awaited-Generation, last accessed 10. May 2013.

– in the context of *Neo-Ottomanism* it is the Reign of Suleiman the magnificent, which is commonly held to represent the 'Golden Age' of the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman Islam. Such rhetoric often rings elitist and encourages misinterpretation.

3.3.1: *Fatih University* as an Exemplary Gülen-affiliated Institution

A critical look at *Fatih University*, one of the privately funded higher educational institutions affiliated with the *Gülen Movement* will illustrate some of the claims made above. The following section therefore looks at the self-representation of the institution and examines it in light of some of the points made. While the Islamic values, ethical codes and economic orientation of the education offered is not indicated, a critical reading of some of the university's promotional material will indicate the contents of the curricula of the Gülen-affiliated institutions. *Fatih University* is one of the most prestigious universities of Turkey; it is for this reason that it may be considered as exemplary and its academic program indicative of a larger agenda pursued by the Gülen-inspired institutions' financial backers and boards. Having said that, *Fatih University* is not a school of elitist nationalism; in fact this would restrict the appeal of the institution and the trans-national character reflected in its curricula.

For the purposes of this brief analysis, courses and subjects as well as the curricula of the graduate program – MA and Doctoral degrees – will be of interest, because it is these degrees that usually signal students' completion of an academic career and allow them to pursue employment. The selection of courses in these degrees reflects some of the aspects of the *Gülen Movement* alluded to above, while also offering a wide selection of scientific degrees. The courses themselves touch upon some of the broader themes subsumed in the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative, in its content and the associations of the label: a geographical focus on regions formerly part of the Ottoman Empire and a focus on conservative family values and Turkish identity politics as well as ethics in a trans-national context.

86

It is worthy of note that in the five different graduate schools of *Fatih University* –

Social Sciences, *Science and Engineering*, *BioNano Technology*, *Biomedical Engineering*,

and *Health Sciences* – courses are offered in English as well as Turkish.[213] The *Graduate*

School of Social Sciences offers by far the greatest selection of courses, with courses

focusing on issues associated directly with Turkey on a legal or national level in Turkish,

while courses with interests transcending the national focus – such as Balkan Studies – are

offered exclusively in English. This is reflective of how the education offered at this

institution sees its field of applicability supra-nationally, while at the same time maintaining

a strong ideational focus on Turkey. This focus is not geographical; while *Modern Turkic*

Dialects and Literatures and *Educational Administration, Supervision, Planning and*

Economics are offered only in Turkish, *Economics* and *Geography* can be taken in English

or Turkish.[214] The other schools offer their programs overwhelmingly in English – the

Institute for BioNano Technology exclusively so.[215] The coupling of language to specific

subjects is a simple and effective tool in very broadly controlling the recruitment of alumni

– the language of one's degree precludes one from certain areas of employment, at least in

that particular field. This is also an effective way of mentally attaching the content of

particular courses to culture and a preselected area of applicability. Thus, courses in Turkish

presume that the contents of these courses is applicable primarily to Turkish-speakers and

those speaking a derivative of Turkish, while courses in English naturally engage with the

Anglo-Saxon world.

The abovementioned features are true for graduate education in general – a degree in

English Literature is of interest primarily to the English speakers. However, *Fatih*

University also offers instruction in two languages simultaneously. Courses offered in

---

[213] Information taken from the University Website: http://www.fatih.edu.tr/?ylisans, last accessed 12. August 2013.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.

Turkish and English focusing on the same subjects indicate that issues pertain to both Turkey and the wider English-speaking world. For example, in the Master's Program in *International Relations*, the curriculum focuses on "Current Issues in Turkish Foreign Policy" in the second semester. [216] Interestingly, while this particular course and its curriculum are identical in both English and Turkish, only the English degree requires the student to write a thesis. This may add to the transferability of the English degree with a tangible subject matter as reference.

The history programme, which is available at both the MA and the Doctorate levels, is emblematic in its curriculum of a Gülen-institution. The MA curriculum contains the mandatory course "History of Ottoman Social and Administrative Institutions"[217] in the first semester. The MA programme begins not with an overview of Turkish historiography or general contents of a history degree – although a course on research methodology is offered simultaneously – but the study of a specific subject connecting directly to the Ottoman-Muslim-Turkish narratives discussed in the context of Gülen's writing. Further, while history courses on the Ottomans are available only in English, both *Basic Islamic Sciences* and *Islamic Studies* can only be studied in Turkish only.[218] This implies that while the subjects of Islam and religion are the realm of Turkish speakers, it is the more secular ones, such as history, that deserve the attention of a wider, English-speaking audience. It echoes the notion of the superiority of Turkish and Ottoman Islam vis-à-vis other Muslims communities, as described by Fetullah Gülen in some of his articles.

Because the selection of degrees is not identical in either language, it can be deduced that the language of a degree reflects an appropriation of that particular subject. Thus many courses relating to Turkish self-perception – such as those on Islam and religion – are taught

---

[216] http://sbe.fatih.edu.tr/?yukseklisans,71 and http://sbe.fatih.edu.tr/?yukseklisans,426, last accessed 12. August 2013.

[217] http://sbe.fatih.edu.tr/?yukseklisans,79, last accessed 12. August 2013.

[218] http://sbe.fatih.edu.tr/?yukseklisans,302, and http://sbe.fatih.edu.tr/?yukseklisans,412, last accessed 12. August 2013.

in Turkish, while those in English have broader appeal. Yet, even in these the Turkey-centred self-image of the institution is apparent; a degree in history begins with the study of a specific part of Ottoman society, which is evidently recognised as pertaining to Turkey. While this could also be read as a genuine academic commitment to previously neglected historiography, it is apparent that there is an agenda behind the specificity of the course. This agenda may well be to contrast contemporary governance to a narrative of Ottoman administration in order explore the model function of the latter. This would be concurrent with the fascination expressed for an interpretation of Ottoman history by the movement's leader.

Fatih University is an exemplary educational institution affiliated with the *Gülen Movement* – it shows that those institutions funded by the movement preselect their content and structure according to the ideational and ideological content of the movement. Simultaneously, institutions such as *Fatih University* express the ideas of the movement: a Turkey-centred approach to education with trans-national appeal. It can even be hazarded that the focus on *Turkic* subjects studies the 'transferability' of Turkish culture beyond the Republic. Similarly, there is clear commentary upon which subjects the institution deems 'worthy of export' – by virtue of their alumni – and which serve the interests of the *Gülen Movement*.

3.4: The *Gülen Movement* and *Neo-Ottomanism*

The *Neo-Ottoman* narrative shares many features with the education offered at Gülen-affiliated institutions such as *Fatih University*. Most prominent among these is perhaps the aforementioned Turkey-centred self-image. The connection is also apparent in the shared interest and dissemination of a form of Turkish Islam that is supposedly derived from its Ottoman antecedents, but fused with Turkish ideational elements. Because of this infusion

of religion into the *Gülen*-affiliated educational institutions, it is possible on a case-by-case basis to pinpoint exactly how Muslim values have impacted them.

The covert infusion of Islamic rhetoric into *Gülen*-affiliated education is a hallmark of Fetullah Gülen's own teachings and a feature that allows him to avoid labels such as 'Islamist' or even 'fundamentalist.' Islam, rather than being static, is conceived of as a system of moral guidelines.[219] Rather than following a strict system of rules, the core of Gülen-inspired Islam is formed by communal service. The form this communal service takes is disseminated in the education of the Gülen-affiliated institutions as well as a historically and politically sensitive *Türkiye Müslümanlığı* [Islam of Turkey].[220] This term encapsulates quite accurately the striving of the Gülen community and the referent, if not the objective, of its activities: the Turkish nation, and Turkish identity.[221]

Thus, rather than focusing on Islam as a system of religious belief, the *Gülen Movement* propagates a vision of *Ottoman-Muslim Civilisation* as a more encompassing structural network of relationships. This is related to aspects of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative and echoes some of the claims made by Davutoğlu in his article "Civilizational Self-Perception," discussed in the previous chapter. *Neo-Ottomanism* is an interpretation of contemporary socio-politics on the basis of historical narrative. This also means repositioning Islam and religion within Turkish society. Ultimately, the negotiation of this position benefits domestic actors and posits them in advantageous positions vis-à-vis each other and their non-Turkish counterparts. This is also fused with a particular interpretation of Turkish history. In the context of the *Gülen Movement*, this particular interpretation of history is as much a culturally specific as a religiously encompassing one that conflates Ottoman and Turkish Republican history with contemporary politics.

---

[219] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 192.
[220] Ibid., p. 195.
[221] *Islam of Turkey* should be understood in conjunction with, but not as a synonym of, Jenny White's *Muslim Nationalism*.

An aspect of *Neo-Ottomanism* that is common to both the political – represented by AKP politics – and social – represented by the *Gülen Movement* – aspects of the narrative is the repositioning of Turkish identity, and therefore the nation, on the basis of historical-political analogy and interpretation. Fetullah Gülen's teachings, and the educational programmes built on their basis, draw upon historical analogy in order to foster an image of Turkish Muslim identity fused with inclusive nationalist elements. These relate to the role of ethnic and religious groups within an imagined supranational Turkic community, as was apparent in the focus on educational subjects that reach beyond the scope of Turkey. This is possible, first of all, by the inclusion of Turkey's Ottoman past as an integral piece of simultaneously *Islamic* and *Turkic* history in the constructed historical continuum of Turkish nationhood. Gülen argues that the "self" of Turkishness is "embodied within Islam and the Ottoman past."[222]

From the outset, the equation of Ottoman and Turkish Republican History is controversial, but Fetullah Gülen, already in his writings of the 1980s, explicitly argued that the selective appropriation of history is permissible for the holistic (re-)construction of the self, rooted in contemporary circumstances, although he avoids the term *Neo-Ottomanism*.[223] Although it may be too harsh to dub Gülen a "Turko-Ottoman nationalist,"[224] the referent of the *Gülen Movement's* activities is Turkey or a political image of contemporary Turkey constructed by the selective appropriation of history. This ecclecticism is apparent in the way Gülen conflates different periods of Ottoman history with the image of the Ottoman Empire as a Turkish-Islamic one. For example, by contrasting the role of the Arab tribes in the revolts of the Late Ottoman Period to that of the Ottoman-Turkish Muslims, and

---

[222] Fetullah Gülen, quoted in Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 196.
[223] Fetullah Gülen, "Öze Dönmek [Return to the Soul]," in *Sızıntı* [Leak] (Vol. 7, No. 80, September 1985). Online version: http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/130/3/, accessed 8 May 2013.
[224] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 196.

equating this period with the Muslim identity of the Turkish Republic,[225] Gülen appropriates a specific image of the Ottoman Empire and simultaneously implies a hierarchy between Ottoman-Turkish and Arab Muslims.

This interpretation feeds into the contemporary self-image of Turkey in several ways. It distinguishes Turkish Islam from that of the surrounding Muslim countries, which is in keeping with the contemporary self-perception of Turkey fostered most prominently by the AKP after the Arab Spring. This image sees Turkey explicitly 'returning' to a position of primacy in the Muslim world as a model of the fusion of democracy and Islam.[226] This perception of a prime position in the political hierarchy of the Muslim world is contained in the message of the *Gülen Movement's* missionary and educational activities. The 'historical legacy' Turkey must live up to is most explicit in the poetry of Fetullah Gülen when he fosters the romantic image of the Ottoman Empire as a benevolent leader of the Muslim world on the basis of the ethno-religious identity of modern Turks as the bearers of an orthodox Islam.[227] Gülen bases this notion on the exceptional role played by the Ottoman Empire in forming the Turkish state tradition and its importance in defining the Turkish national and religious consciousness.[228]

This interpretation of Turkey's Ottoman past is one that is specific to the historical component of *Neo-Ottomanism*. The re-evaluation of the Ottoman past is projected onto a background of contemporary concerns with the political, social and symbolic position of Turkish society, and Turkey in general, vis-à-vis its counterparts in the international arena. It underscores romanticisation and the appropriation of competing strands inherent to the

---

[225] Interview with Fetullah Gülen by Nevaal Sevindi, *Yeni Yüzyıl* [New Century] (July 19-28, 1997), referenced in Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 196.
[226] This has led to the perception of a 'Turkish model' for the political reordering of the Middle East. See, for example, Peter Kenyon, "The Turkish Model: Can it be Replicated?" on *npr* (Jan 6, 2012), online version: http://www.npr.org/2012/01/06/144751851/the-turkish-model-can-it-be-replicated, last accessed 25 May 2012.
[227] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 190.
[228] Fetullah Gülen, "Düşünce ve Aksiyon Insanı [Human Thought and Action]," in *Yeni Ümit* [New Hope] (No. 26, October-December 1994). Online version: http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/633/3/, last accessed 10. May 2013.

Neo-Ottoman narrative. This particular historical narrative can be understood as the culturally specific relationship between the Republic of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. The relationship is changing from the strict *Kemalist* stance of the Ottoman polity as a negative trope towards a more positive, pro-Ottoman, and romantic interpretation of it. Neither position is objective and both are informed by contemporary political and social circumstance rather than historical consensus.

3.5: The *Gülen Movement* as a (Turkish) Transformation Project

The *Gülen Movement* is illustrative of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative and appropriates primarily its Islamic component. While the overarching objective of this appropriation is increasing the legitimacy of the Fetullah Gülen community in the political and economic arenas, the *Gülen Movement* narrates a shared Turco-Ottoman-Muslim identity in order to reach out to economic actors trans-nationally, while keeping the Turkish domestic arena its primary focus of interest. In order to put the mobilisation of capital into the perspective of *Neo-Ottomanism* as a Turkish transformation project it is necessary to reflect briefly on the agenda of the *Gülen Movement*.

The article by political scientist Filiz Başkan raises the question of the democratic credentials of the *Gülen Movement*. Certainly, the historical development of the movement raises some valid doubts as to its firm commitment to cosmopolitanism in the sense of an inclusive liberal democracy, especially in light of the movement's position vis-à-vis political opposition movements.[229] Although Gülen himself strongly affirms democracy,[230] it is apparent from his earlier works of the 1990s that his understanding of 'democracy' is fused with, even dominated by, strong Turkish nationalist elements. Gülens' nationalism is

[229] Başkan, "The Fetullah Gülen Community," *passim*.
[230] Fetullah Gülen in an interview by Nuriye Akman in *Sabah Gazetesi* [Morning Newspaper], 27. January 1995, quoted in Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 200.

93

also fused with a strong sense of religious identity – this makes it simultaneously Turkey-centred and supra-national in the sense that it acknowledges the role of Turks living outside the Turkish nation-state as being constitutive of Turkish community without endorsing irredentism. For example, in an interview, Gülen pleads for the education of Turks living in northern Iraq as a protection measure against assimilation by the Kurdish majority.[231] An institution was to be set up for this purpose with the help of the *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı* [National Intelligence Organisation], the Turkish Intelligence Service. This reflects Gülen's own adherence to the strong state tradition of Turkey and the military as the guardian of 'secular' values such as nationalism.

These incidents suggest what Başkan concludes in her article; that it seems unlikely that the *Gülen Movement* pursues genuine democratic objectives.[232] Especially the internal organization of the community, its hierarchical nature, and its demand of absolute obedience to the word of its leader – although Gülen refrains from concrete policy suggestions – calls its democratic credentials into question.[233] The movement's objectives revolve around building and maintaining an *imagined community* on mutual values – a community around Fetullah Gülen himself and the core membership of the *Gülen Movement.* The educational infrastructure of the movement allows its values to be disseminated and is invariably established in nations with significant Turkish minority populations and in which the movement and Turkey pursue economic and political objectives.[234] Moreover, the reason Gülen-affiliated educational institutions are established fruitfully abroad is that they reflect a sensitivity on the part of the movement to the host country's own stance towards religious

---

[231] The question revolved around the building of a school in the North Iraqi town of Erbil. Fetullah Gülen in an interview by Oral Çalışlar in *Aktüel Para* [Contemporary Economics], 15. September 1996, quoted in Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity*, p. 199.

[232] Başkan, "The Fetullah Gülen Community," passim.

[233] Ibid., p. 857-858.

[234] Bayram Balcı, *Missionaires de L'Islam en Asie Centrale* [Missionaries of Islam in Central Asia] (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose 2003), p. 53-67.

education.[235] By ostensibly fusing the moral framework of Islam with secular educational contents, these institutions appeal to a universally accepted – if diverse and nebulous in terms of content – notion of progress and transformation while retaining conservative ideational values.

This is especially important in the context of the newly independent Republics of Central Asia, where the implosion of the Soviet Union opened up an unexpected space for entrepreneurship fused with religious rhetoric and values. The Islamic component of the *Gülen Movement* appeals to the emotive experience of the suppression of religion by the Soviet Union and its consequent resurgence as a marker of identity as well as a framework of moral and spiritual guidance in the Gorbachev era.[236]

It is especially to outside observers that the *Gülen Movement*, with the incorporation of Islam into its educational activities, appears as a project of religious transformation. This is indirectly linked to normative notion of 'progress' and should be understood in conjunction with the communal and developmental activities of Gülen-affiliated organisations and institutions. The *Gülen Movement's* dedication to democratic ideals and cosmopolitanism is questionable, but it should also not be see as threatening secular political values as it falls short or religious fundamentalism. The movement is an organisation geared towards trans-national entrepreneurship, utilising the emergent opportunity space of Islam as a vehicle for political and economic mobilisation through the appropriation of narratives such as *Neo-Ottomanism*.

The question as to who profits from the processes outlined here is crucial in determining the movement's position in the larger discussion of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative and its valence as a *Turkish* project of transformation. In his characterisation of the 'Golden Generation' Gülen sees them as the "successors to the mission of the master of the

---

[235] Balcı, *Missionaires de L'Islam* p. 67-85.
[236] Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley/LA/London: University of California Press 2007), p. 116-139.

prophets,"[237] which must be understood in conjunction with the notion of a primacy of Turks within Islamic civilisation based on historical interpretation. In this light, it becomes apparent that Gülen sees the role of the economic and educational networks fostered by his religious-historical teachings as serving the aggrandisement of Turkey's role vis-à-vis its international counterparts. Coupled to this is the gradual transformation of Turkish identity and self-perception that is a consequence of the increasing salience of religion and the changing position of Ottoman history in Turkish national consciousness.

---

[237] Gülen, "The Awaited Generation."

Conclusion: *Neo-Ottomanism* and the Transformation of Turkey

This thesis has endeavoured to show that, while Turkey has always been in transition of one form or another, the period starting in 1983 – dubbed the Third Republic in literature – is of contemporary interest because it is during this period that pervasive transformations occurred with regard to Turkey's relationship with its own history and (self-) perception. These changes are carried into contemporary era and continue to influence Turkey's politics. These are subsumed in a narrative that has become labelled *Neo-Ottomanism*; the term came into common use in connection with the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [Justice and Development Party] administration and especially the incumbent Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu.

A historical perspective on these processes has revealed that their inception and content goes beyond the AKP administration at least to the momentous domestic and international changes of the 1980s. Moreover, it is apparent that the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative is not purely about the Ottomans and that it is not an invention of Turkish politics – instead it is a narrative encompassing politics, religion, society, and history. It seeks to explain and transform all of these areas, connecting elements of them within and amongst themselves and potentially carrying Turkish domestic socio-politics beyond the borders of the Turkish Republic. In this way, it is of distinct utility not only to the AKP administration, but also social movements such as the *Gülen Movement*.

The AKP administration profits form *Neo-Ottomanism* in several ways. These are apparent in the diversification of Turkish foreign policy, which was described at length. It is also these offensives that have sparked much of the controversy of *Neo-Ottomanism* being a neo-imperialist plan by the AKP to 'resurrect' the Ottoman Empire by aggressively expanding its economic and political influence. Although it is unlikely that the political

97

forays of the AKP would at some point entail irredentism, it is also apparent that the alarmism that has arisen over the term stems to an extent from the perceived break with the foreign policy guidelines of the Cold War era, which saw Turkey keeping largely to itself in a volatile international environment.

Another development encouraging the reading of *Neo-Ottomanism* as a neo-imperial 'master plan' are some recent domestic developments in Turkey that were pointedly avoided in this thesis. However, it is necessary to mention them because they further encourage the use of terminology familiar from Ottoman history to describe Turkish contemporary politics.[238] This use of the label is journalistic; while that does not discount its utility – and it has been of journalistic domestic use in Turkey as well – the interest of this thesis lay in analysing the emergence of the narrative itself and its content. How and why the Ottoman Empire has become an object of romantic interest in Turkey was perhaps best explained by the articles of the Ahmet Davutoğlu, who sees the Turkish Republic as the heir to the Ottoman Empire and the Ottomans as a 'civilisational prototype' to be emulated in the post-Cold War international climate. This is apparent when tracing the development of his thoughts from the 1990s to the 2000s; with the electoral victory of the AKP in 2001 and his appointment as Foreign Minister in 2009 this intellectual framework was institutionalised.

Davutoğlu cannot be credited with the 'invention' of *Neo-Ottomanism*. It is a narrative that developed organically on the domestic political stage of Turkey in the 1980s, subsuming a number of religious, political, and social transformations. It played into the hands of the AKP and Turkish Foreign policy by providing a controversial model on which to project Turkey's political aspirations and social transformation after the coup of 1980. That the Turkish political elite is conscious of this controversy is illustrated by the

---

[238] Gezi Park, but also the Ergenekon affair and several other developments have even led to the AKP being dubbed "the new Ottomans." This is a deliberate play on the negative connotations of the Ottomans with their supposedly despotic rule and similar images that were forged in the 19th century. See the BBC documentary by Allan Little, "Turkey: the New Ottomans," http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b037wr8t/episodes/guide, last accessed 14. August 2013.

conflation of Republican and Ottoman history in the self-representation of the Foreign Ministry, which placed Ottoman diplomatic traditions alongside the guiding principle of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: "Peace at home, peace in the world." This short representation seeks to deflate the contradiction between contemporary Turkish politics and that of foregone administrations that has given rise to accusations of neo-imperialism.

The *Neo-Ottoman* narrative, with its implications of historical, religious, political, and social continuity is convenient and of utility not only to the AKP. As was demonstrated, the *Gülen Movement*, a trans-national educational and business network as well as a domestic social movement, is benefiting from the infusion of religion and romanticised Ottoman history into Turkish politics. The writings of the movement's founder, Fetullah Gülen, demonstrate that there is significant engagement with Ottoman history and religious rhetoric and that Gülen sees the movement as the heir to Ottoman-Muslim-Turkish tradition. This stance, owed significantly to the origins of Gülen, has been transposed into the ideology of the movement. Because of the ambiguous stance the movement takes toward religion and the *laicism* of the Turkish Republic, this has frequently brought it into conflict with the administration. This is especially true because its emphasis of Turkey's Ottoman-Muslim heritage did not conform to the stance of the administration of the 1990s.

When the AKP incorporated elements of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative into some areas of politics such as Foreign Policy, this created an opportunity for the *Gülen Movement*. Its own position on religion and history is now less in conflict official Turkish politics; this has led to a relative strengthening of the *Gülen Movement's* domestic position. Moreover, the partiality of *Neo-Ottomanism* to the foreign policy of Turkey is a boon, as the movement pursues trans-national goals itself and it can present itself as a pro-Turkish community.[239]

---

[239] The political influence the *Gülen Movement* has gained in Turkey is reflected in the weight it is given in discussions affecting exclusively Turkish politics, such as the recent controversy over the initiation of peace talks with the PKK. Mustafa Akyol, "Is the *Gülen Movement* against Peace with the PKK?" in *Al Monitor*

One of the features of the movement is its dissemination and use of religion as a tool of community-building, fused with elements of romantic Ottoman historical narrative and *Turkic* nationalism. The latter was featured in Fetullah Gülen's articles that emphasised ethnic and linguistic heritage as opposed to linguistic *Turkish* nationalism. Thus the transnational character of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative is the most important feature defining its appeal and versatility.

The extent of the transformation of Turkey was illuminated by putting the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi's* administration and the *Gülen Movement* into socio-historical perspective. The two research chapters reflect that the effects of *Neo-Ottomanism* can be seen in two distinct areas, politics and society. As was apparent from the numerous overlaps between the two subject areas, the two areas influence one another in a narrative based on the romantic interpretation of history. Features of the Turkish Republic are called into question and its political system transformed on the basis of historical legitimation of contemporary politics. Turkish society and its relationship with its neighbours are being transformed by the religious and political baggage the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative brings with it. The main beneficiaries of this are social movements like the *Gülen Movement*. These pursue goals connected to Turkish national politics and trans-national networking. This also benefits from the historical credentials of *Neo-Ottomanism*.

This encompassing transformation entails a re-negotiation of the troubled relationship Turkey has with its Ottoman history. A consequence of this re-negotiation is the challenging of elements of Turkish self-perception and a rebranding of Turkish identity. While an extensive discussion as to what is being substituted for what would go beyond the scope of this thesis, suffice to say that it is precisely this change, manifest in Turkey's

foreign policy diversification and the proliferation of religion in society and politics that has caused misunderstandings and accusations of neo-imperialism on the part of outside observers. Recent developments on the subject of political protest should also not be discounted, and although they may be internally motivated, they have thrown an unfavourable light on the Erdoğan administration, further encouraging accusations of despotism.

Neo-Ottomanism is first and foremost about the history if the Turkish Republic because it was during this period that the particular image of the Ottoman Empire that is selectively appropriated and romanticised in contemporary Turkish politics was formed. Evaluating the developments outlined here is a difficult endeavour and a preoccupation of scholarship. For example, whether these changes constitute a move towards 'civil society' and even democracy is extensively discussed by Turam.[240] However, such discussions are flawed by their normativity. These flaws go back to Ernest Gellner, who was one of the most prominent theorists of a fundamental opposition between a western understanding of 'civil society' and the organisational structure of societies with predominantly Muslim populations. In his polemic 1996 work he argued that because of the tension between Muslim 'high culture,' based on a doctrinal faith and secular political organisation, western rule of law could not be implemented successfully in Muslim societies.[241] This is based on a Khaldunian understanding of what qualifies as the highest authority in a political system.[242]

The problem with making accurate evaluations thus lies in the yardstick. Neither the AKP nor the *Gülen Movement* can be understood by positing their similarity to western counterparts. An examination of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative has demonstrated that western secular understandings of society and politics are of limited applicability in Turkey. The

---

[240] Berna Turam, *Between Islam and the State. The Politics of Engagement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2007), p. 151-154.
[241] Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty. Civil Society and its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1994), p. 28.
[242] Ibid.

contested relationship between religion and politics, which is being renegotiated via the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative, in Turkey is expressed in the constant ideological clashes between the militantly pro-*laicist* establishment and organisations with religious credentials of one sort or another. These clashes in themselves have a history that goes beyond the chronological scope of this thesis; but it is in the period of the Third Republic that these clashes become less asymmetric, as religious rhetoric made inroads into Turkish society. How sensitive the re-negotiation of this relationship was is demonstrated by the conflict between the *Gülen Movement* and the Turkish government, culminating in the exile of Gülen himself; the coup of 1997 and the legal procedures against the *Refah Partisi* [Welfare Party]. The Third Republic is also the time in which unexpected opportunity spaces for political and social contestation appeared by virtue of domestic, and later global, political transformations.

Events of the late 1990s and 2000s throw a veil over the transformation of Turkey that may be interpreted as authoritarianism. Political opposition is difficult in Turkey and eventually silenced; for example, this is one interpretation of the motivations of uncovering the alleged *Balyoz* plot.[243] Turkey's socio-political transformation deeply affects the number and types of actors on the political stage. This can be attributed to what Turam terms a *politics of engagement*, where, rather than seeking confrontation with actors outside of the political establishment, institutions seek rather to engage in dialogue with social and political forces. Without narratives of legitimation this would not be possible. With the appropriation of the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative, these *politics of engagement* have become tangible and institutionalised as discourse.

---

[243] An alleged coup planned by the secular establishment and the military to discredit the AKP administration by provoking a military crisis in the Aegean. Legal proceedings against those implicated in the plot began in 2010; the plot is said to have been hatched as early as 2001 and the verdict has since led to the imprisonment of leading military officials.

Finally, the *Neo-Ottoman* transformation of Turkey, whatever its concrete policies or content may be, does not engender a radical break with the past or a complete revision of the Turkish nation. There is significant merit to positing a continuity of transformation and adaptation on the part of the Turkish Republic since the end of the Ottoman Empire, perhaps even the late 17th Century and the *Tanzimat*. There are significant continuities and overlapping watershed events that triggered the current developments in Turkey socio-politics and its relationship with history. This latest transformation must be understood as an adaptive social and political project that is encouraged by internal reformatory impulses and external factors. In Turkey's case it was the domestic climate of the 1980s and the end of the Cold War, as well as September 11 that prompted the encompassing developmental project that is subsumed under the *Neo-Ottoman* narrative. Whether it will develop into a political ideology – as has been contested variously throughout this thesis – remains to be seen, but it is indisputable that Turkey is responding to challenges that have complex origins, rather than there being a neo-imperialist agenda designed by the AKP or domestic movements.

Bibliography

Sources

Akyol, Mustafa, "Is the *Gülen Movement* Against Peace with the PKK?" in *Al Monitor Turkey Pulse* (22. May 2013, online edition), http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/gulen-movement-peace-process-pkk.html, last accessed 15. August 2013.

Balcı, Kerim, "Philosophical Depth: A Scholarly Talk with the Turkish Foreign Minister," in *Turkish Review* (online edition, November 2010). Online version: http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=223051, last viewed 21 June 2013.

Barkey, Karen, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," in *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 1/2, *The New Sociological Imagination II*, Dec. 2005, p. 5-19.

Başkan, Filiz, "The Fetullah Gülen Community: Contribution or Barrier to the Consolidation of Democracy in Turkey?" in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 41, No 6., Nov. 2005, p. 849-861.

"Brief History of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey," missive on the Foreign Ministry website, http://www.anlayis.net/makaleGoster.aspx?dergiid=33&makaleid=4811, last accessed 28. July 2013.

Chatterjee, Ipsita, "Globalization and the Production of Difference: A Case Study of the Neoliberal Production of Hindu Nationalism in India," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2010, p. 621-632.

Ceglowski, Janet, "Has Globalization created a Borderless World?" in Patrick O'Meara/Howard D. Mehlinger/Matthew Krain (eds), *Globalization and the Challenges of a New Century. A Reader*, Bloomingtion/Indiana: Indiana University Press 2000, p. 101-109.

"CV of Ahmet Davutoğlu," Turkish Foreign Ministry Website, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/ahmet-davutoglu.en.mfa, last accessed 28. July 2013.

Danforth, Nicolas, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP," in *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Fall 2008, p. 83-95.

_____, "Shut Up about Neo-Ottomanism Already," in *Dissent Magazine* (online edition), March 25. 2011.

Davutoğlu, Ahmet: "The Clash of Interests: An Explanation of the World (Dis)Order," in *Perceptions. Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Dec. 1997/Feb. 1998, Online Edition.

_____, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007," in *Insight*

Turkey (Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2008), p. 77-96.

_____, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* [Strategic Depth: Turkeys International Position], Küre Yayınları: Istanbul 2001.

_____, speech delivered on the occasion of Europe Day, 8. May 2009. Online version: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-h_e_-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu-to-eu-ambassadors-on-the-occasion-of-europe-day_-8-may-2009_-ankara.en.mfa, last accessed 17. July 2013.

_____, "Medeniyetlerin Ben-Idrakı [Civilisational Self-Perception]," in *Divan Dergisi*, [Council Magazine], online version reproduced at http://www.anlayis.net/makaleGoster.aspx?dergiid=33&makaleid=4811, in *Anlayış Dergisi* [Understanding Magazine] last accessed 28. July 2013.

Delacoura, Katerina, "The Arab Uprisings Two Years On: Ideology, Sectarianism, and the Changing Balance of Power in the Middle East," in *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 2013, p. 75-89.

Demir, Ömer/Acar, Mustafa/Toprak, Metin, "Anatolian Tigers of Islamic Capital: Prospects and Challenges," in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6, Nov. 2004, p. 166-188.

Evered, Kyle T., "Regionalism in the Middle East and the Case of Turkey," in *Geographical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 3, *New Geographies of the Middle East*, Jul. 2005, p. 436-477.

Fatih University Website, http://www.fatih.edu.tr, last accessed 12. August 2013.

Foreign Ministry of Turkey missive, "Policy of Zero Problems with our Neighbours," http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa, last viewed 25. July 2013.

Göçek, Fatma Müge, "Through a Glass Darkly: Consequences of a Politicized Past in Contemporary Turkey," in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 617: *The Politics of History in Comparative Perspective*, May 2008, p. 88-106.

Guida, Michelangelo, "The Sevrès Syndrome and "Komplo" Theories in the Islamist and Secular Press," in *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2008, p. 37-52.

Gülen, Fetullah, "Our System of Education," Originally Published 1979, online version: http://en.fgulen.com/towards-the-lost-paradise/578-our-system-of-education, last accessed 14. May 2013.

_____, "Öze Dönmek [Return to the Soul]," *Sızıntı* [Leak], Vol. 7, No. 80, September 1985. Online version: http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/130/3/, last accessed 8 May 2013.

_____, "Düşünce ve Aksiyon Insanı [Human Thought and Action]," in *Yeni Ümit* [New Hope], No. 26, October-December 1994. Online version: http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/633/3/, last accessed 10. May 2013

_____, "The Awaited Generation," in *The Fountain*, Issue 9, January-March 1995. Online version: http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/The-Awaited-Generation, last accessed 10. May 2013.

Ismael, Tareq Y./Aydin, Mustafa (eds.), *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century. A Changing Role in World Politics*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2003.

Jung, Dietrich, "Islam and Politics: A Fixed Relationship?" in *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Spring 2007, p. 19-35.

Kadioğlu, Ayşe: "The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of official Identitiy," in Sylvia Kedourie (ed.), *Turkey. Identity, Democracy, Politics*, Frank Cass: London/Portland 1998, p. 177-193.

Kenyon, Peter, "The Turkish Model: Can it be Replicated?" on *npr* (Jan 6, 2012), Online version: http://www.npr.org/2012/01/06/144751851/the-turkish-model-can-it-be-replicated, last accessed 25 May 2013.

Keyman, E. Fuat/Koyuncu, Berrin, "Globalization, Alternative Modernities and the Political Economy of Turkey," in *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Feb. 2005, p. 105-128.

Kırmızı, Abdulhamıt, "Yeni Osmanlıcılık Yanılması [The Neo-Ottoman Illusion]," in: *Altüst Dergisi* [The World Turned Upside-Down Magazine] (online edition), Dec. 2011.

"The Davutoğlu Effect: All Change for Foreign Policy," in *The Economist* (Oct. 2010), online version: http://www.economist.com/node/17276420, last viewed 25. July 2013.

Larrabee, Stephen F., "Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East," in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 4, Jul.-Aug. 2007, p. 103-114.

Larrabee, Stephen F., "Turkey's New Geopolitics," in *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 52, No. 2, March 2010, p. 157-180.

Little, Allan, "Turkey: the New Ottomans," http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b037wr8t/episodes/guide, last accessed 14. August 2013.

Makdisi, Ussama, "Ottoman Orientalism," in The American Historical Review, Vol. 107, No. 3, June 2002, p. 768-796.

Martin, Leonore G., "Introduction: Turkey as a Trans-Regional Actor," in *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2009, p. 3-6.

_____, "Turkey and Gulf Cooperation Council Security," in *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2009, p. 75-93.

Mikhail, Alan/Philliou, Christine, "The Ottoman Empire and The Imperial Turn," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 54. No. 4, 2012, p. 721-745.

Oğuzluö, Tarık, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?" in *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 2008, p. 3-20.

Öniş, Ziya & Yılmaz, Şuhnaz, "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism during the AKP Era," in *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, March 2009, p. 7-24.

Popp, Maximilian, "Der Pate [The Godfather]," in *Der Spiegel* [The Mirror] (No. 32, 2012). Online edition: http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-87649490.html, last accessed 14. May 2013.

Preyer, Gerhard, "Introduction," in *Protosociology. An international Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* (Vol. 25, 2007: *Shmuel Eisenstadt: A Paradigma of Social and Cultural Evolution*), p. 1-20.

Robins, Philip, "Turkish Foreign Policy since 2002: Between a 'Post-Islamist' Government and a Kemalist State," in *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 1, 2007, p. 289-304.

Secor, Anna, "Islamist Politics: Anti-systemic or Post-Modern Movements?" in *Geopolitics*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2001, p. 117-134.

Shively, Kim, "Taming Islam: Studying Religion in Secular Turkey," in *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 3, Summer 2008, p. 683-711.

Sözen, Ahmet, "A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign Policy: Transition and Challenges," in *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, March 2010, p. 103-123.

Taspinar, Ömer, "Turkey's Middle East Policies. Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," in *Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Middle East Center*, No. 10, Sep 2008.

Taşkapu, Ayşegül, "A Key Text to Understanding the Mindset of the Architect of the New Foreign Policy: Civilizational Self-Perception," in *Turkish Review* (Nov. 2010, Online Edition). Online version: http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=223065, last accessed 17. July 2013.

Tekin, Ali/ Williams, Paul A., "EU-Russian Relations and Turkey's Role as an Energy Corridor (Discussion Article), in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 2, March 2009, p. 337-356.

"Vision and Mission Statement," on the Fatih University Website. http://www.fatih.edu.tr/?vizyon, last accessed 7. August 2013.

Williams, Paul A. & Tekin, Ali, "EU-Russian Relations and Turkey's Role as an Energy Corridor (Discussion Article)," in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 2, March 2009, p. 337-356.

Yavuz, Hakan, "Towards an Islamic Liberalism? The Nurcu Movement and Fetullah Gülen," in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Autumn 1999, p. 684-605.

Yesilada, Birol A., "Turkey's Candidacy for EU Membership," in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1, Winter 2002, p. 94-111.

Yılmaz, Mehmet, "Conceptual Framework of Turkish Foreign Policy in AK Party Era," in *Turkish Review*, 15. October 2010, online version: http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=223001&columnistId=0, last accessed 28. July 2013.

Secondary Literature

Aydın, Mustafa, "Twenty Years Before, Twenty Years After: Turkish Foreign Policy at the Threshold of the 21st Century," in Mustafa Aydın/Tareq Y. Ismael (eds.), *Turkey's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century. A Changing Role in World Politics*, Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate 2003, p. 3-24.

Balcı, Bayram, *Missionaires de L'Islam en Asie Centrale* [Missionaries of Islam in Central Asia], Maisonneuve & Larose: Paris 2003.

Barkey, Karen, *Empire of Difference. The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge/NY 2008.

Bilgin, Mehmet Fevzi, "Constitution, Legitimacy, and Democracy in Turkey," in Saïd Amir Arjomad (ed), *Constitutional Politics in the Middle East. With Special Reference to Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan*, Oxford/Portland: Hart Publishing 2008, p. 123-146.

Brown, Wendy, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, NY: Zone Books 2010.

Çetin, Muhammed, *The Gülen Movement. Civic Service Without Borders*, Blue Dome Press: NY 2010.

De Certeau, Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press: LA/London/Berkeley 1984.

Doganalp-Votzi, Heidemarie/Römer, Claudia, *Herrschaft und Staat: Politische Terminologie des Osmanischen Reiches der Tanzimatzeit*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften: Wien 2008.

Ebaugh, Helen Rose, *The Gülen Movement. A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam*, Springer: Heidelberg/London/NY 2010.

Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., "Some Observations on the Dynamics of Traditions," in his *Comparative Civilizations & Multiple Modernities. Volume One. A Collection of Essays by S. N. Eisenstadt*, Brill: Leiden/Boston 2003, p. 135-163.

Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., "Multiple Modernities," in Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities*, Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick/London 2002, p.1-29.

Finkel, Caroline, *Osman's Dream*, Basic Books: NY 2005.

Fuller, Graham, *The Future of Political Islam*, Palgrave Macmillan: NY 2003.

Gellner, Ernest, *Conditions of Liberty. Civil Society and its Rivals*, Hamish Hamilton: London 1994.

Göçek, Fatma Müge, *The Transformation of Turkey. Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era*, I.B. Tauris: NY 2011.

Göle, Nilüfer, "Snapshots of Islamic Modernities," in Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities*, Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick/London 2002, p. 91-117.

Hale, William, "Turkey," in: Yezid Sayigh/Avi Shlaim (eds), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Clarendon Press: Oxford 1997, p. 250-278.

Hanioğlu, M. Şükrü, *A Brief History of the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton University Press: Princeton/Oxford 2008.

Heper, Metin, *Historical Dictionary of Turkey*, Scarecrow Press: Metuchen/London 1994.

Heyeti, Tahrir (ed), *Türkçe/Osmanlıca-İngilizce Redhouse Sözlüğü* [Redhouse Turkish/Ottoman-English Dictionary], Redhouse: Istanbul 1997.

Hobsbawm, Eric/Ranger, Terrence (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge/NY 1992.

Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, Simon & Schuster: NY 1996.

Karpat, Kemal, "The Civil Rights of the Muslims of the Balkans," in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History. Selected Articles and Essays*, Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill 2002, p. 522-543.

Kasaba, Reşat, "Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities," in Reşat Kasaba/Sibel Bozdoğan (eds.), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, University of Washington Press: Seattle/London 1997, p, 15-36.

Keyder, Çağlar, "Whiter the Project of Modernity? Turkey in the 1990s," in Sibel Bozdoğan/Reşat Kasaba (eds.), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, University of Washington Press: Seattle/London 1997, p. 37-51.

Keyman, E. Fuat/Öniş, Ziya, *Turkish Politics in a Changing World*, Bilgi University Press: Istanbul 2007.

Khalid, Adeeb, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia*, California University Press: Berkeley/LA/London 2007.

Kiel, Machiel, "The Nature of the Turkish Conquest and its impact on the Balkans: Destroyer of Bringer of Culture?" in his *Art and Society in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period*, Van Gorcum: Maastricht/Assen 1985, p. 33-90.

Kinzer, Stephen, *Reset Middle East. Old Friends and New Alliances: Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, Iran*, I.B. Tauris: London/NY 2010.

Lewis, Bernard, *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London 2002.

Mango, Andrew, *Turkey and the War on Terror. For Forty Years We Fought Alone*, Routledge: London/NY 2005.

Özipek, Aydın, *"Cultivating" a Generation through Education: The Case of the Gülen Movement*, CEU MA Thesis: Budapest 2009.

Rashid, Ahmed, *Taliban. The Power or Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond*, I.B. Tauris: London 2010.

Roberts, Geoffrey (ed)., *The History and Narrative Reader*, London: Routledge 2001.

Weber, Max, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Mohr: Türbingen 1980.

White, Jenny, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey," in Reşit Kasaba (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey. Volume 4: Turkey in the Modern World*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge/NY 2008, p. 357-380.

White, Jenny, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks*, Princeton University Press: Princeton/Oxford 2013.

Yavuz, Hakan, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2003.