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Spatial Constructions of Homeland in Turkish National Identity: Exclusion and Inclusion of Europe

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the geographical, historical, and cultural spatializations of Turkish national identity by political elites in the post-2000 era. Considering the close link between the formation of national identity and the spatial constructions of homeland, the paper shows that Turkish national identity since the foundation of the Republic has been constructed through different supranational visions, navigating through different civilizational ingredients. We show that the Kemalists' Western-oriented or Eurocentric geopolitical discourses, which perceive Turkey as a "bridge country", have been transformed in the post-Cold War era into a more ambitious geopolitical discourse of a "central country", which aims to broaden Turkey's "identity space" through its Ottoman heritage. In line with this transformation, in the 2000s, the Turkish homeland was imagined as the "cradle of civilizations", but the national identity did not develop as a counter-hegemonic measure against the West (Europe). The post-2010 era – with a pronounced emphasis on Islamic culture and Ottoman geopolitical space – constitutes a departure from the previous years' spatial and identity constructions of Turkey, in the sense that the political elites' perception of national identity has never gone beyond the national frontiers to this extent, and the West (Europe) has never been so trivialized in terms of progress and civilization.

Keywords: Space, Turkish Homeland, Anatolia, Supranationalism, Blue Anatolianism

Introduction

Although the word "space" basically refers to a geographical context, it is closely related to power and limitation, because the social construction of space is a political process that can be defined in terms of controlling a certain area of a group.[1] By establishing power on a certain physical-human geography, one of the most effective means available to the modern state in controlling such space is the construction of national identity. Accordingly, the "inside" and

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1   Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

"outside" of Turkish national identity has been defined according to the axes of narratives of national history and geography,[2] which has been changed in the direction of the cultural – especially religious – orientation of the Turkish political elites. Considering that the space, as a means of a nation building process, is a "fictional phenomenon",[3] just like collective memory and time, this study perceives the space – in the context of its relationship with politics – as a dynamic and changeable phenomenon rather than a static one, and examines the different spatial constructions used in the service of Turkish foreign policy.

Due to Turkey's uncertain geographical home, Turkish policymakers used different spatializations, building on various ingredients of different supranational visions,[4] using geography, history, and culture interchangeably. This was a continuity from the Ottoman polity which comprised of Turkic nomads in Anatolia, between the times of the Byzantine and Mongol empires, later expanded to the Balkans in the 14th century. Therefore, the Ottoman state elites used "an eclectic mix of elements" from these state traditions to legitimize its rule over various subjects,[5] such as relying on various meanings (translations) of the words "civilisation, empire, democracy, and citizenship" to address European and non-European audiences.[6] This practice was adopted in the transformation from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish nation-state so as to legitimize and reconfigure social relations.[7]

Although the founding Kemalist elites argued that Turkey was not a continuity of the Ottoman Empire in terms of culture and politics by imagining a Turkish identity and geography limited to the national frontiers, the construction of a Turkish national identity, both in this era and later, have had traces of the pan-Turkic (Turanism), pan-Islamist (Islamism), and Euro-centric (Blue Anatolianism), supranational imaginations that emerged from the legitimizing practices of the Ottoman and Turkish state elites to configure social relations both with its subjects and the outside world. These supranational imaginations – with which Turkish nationalism is linked – have included different narratives of the inclusion and exclusion of Europe, and therefore the various spatializations of Europe, sometimes referring to geography, and at other times to civilization, history, culture, and values, which have been designed to ensure that Turkey is not inferior to the West/Europe. The so-called "paradox of Turkish nationalism" regarding the West, which is seen both as an enemy and the ideal category,[8] can be considered to be the result of these – contrary – supranational imaginations, existing together within the national identity. The hybridity of Turkish national identity between Eastern and

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2   Sezgi Durgun, *Memalik-i Şahade'den Vatan'a*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2016, p. 15.

3   Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke University, 1991.

4   "Supranationalism" refers to the political imaginary that exists above nations and this can be either religious or ethno-secular in nature.

5   Cemal Kafadar. *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995 cited in Einar Wigen, *State of Translation: Turkey in Interlingual Relations*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 2018, p. 19.

6   Wigen, *State of Translation*, p. 19.

7   Ibid., p. 5.

8   Ayşe Kadıoğlu, "The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32, No 2, 1996, p. 177-193.

Western or Islamic and secular is referred to in the academic literature with concepts such as "crossroads"[9] and the "liminal".[10]

To turn this plurality into a political gain, the Turkish political elites throughout the Republic's history typically used words such as "bridge" and "gate" to refer to Turkey's geopolitical location. From the 2000s, however, it can be observed that the geographical imagination in Turkish foreign policy discourse has changed considerably. With the 2000s, starting with former Foreign Minister İsmail Cem (1997-2002), extensive reference was made to Turkey as a "central country" and "world state" in relation to the civilizations that define modern Turkey. This pattern remained in place after the election of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AK Party) government in 2002. Yet, in the proceeding years of the AK Party government, particularly after 2011, relations with the world in general and neighboring countries in particular began to be established through regional alliances and common Islamic culture. In this context, the AK Party government repositioned Turkey in the world, and transformed the rhetoric of a "bridge country" into one of a "central country" with a neo-Ottomanist vision. In this new vision, the concept of a "central country" was used to prescribe the ways in which relationships with lands that were formerly under Ottoman influence could be re-established. Yet, in both periods, the political elites relied on concepts of history, civilization, and culture, but attached to them different meanings and geographical reference points to serve preferred foreign policy options.

The relationship between national identity and Turkish foreign policy has been widely discussed in academic literature in relation to culture.[11] The impact of Turkey's interactions with Europe on Turkey's hybrid identity, both as European and Asian, and Western and Islamic, is also widely debated.[12] Yet these studies did not make explicit links with the spatial approaches, and did not focus on how East and West are discursively constructed and spatialized by political elites in the service of Turkish foreign policy. Kösebalaban's study is relevant in this context, as he problematized national identity as a contested space. Defining Turkey and Japan as "torn identities", Kösebalaban shows that contesting sub-national identities with distinct readings of national interests and security shape foreign policy outputs.[13] We contribute to this literature by going beyond the East-West debacle, to explore how discursive space is used by Turkish political elites to construct the national identity through Turkish supranational identities that offer different definitions of East and West, Europe and Asia, in navigating between cultural, civilizational, and historical ingredients. By stemming from this official reposition of Turkey, or the shift in the country's geographical rhetoric, we aim not only to cover the unique characteristics of the spatialization of homeland in the post-2000 period and

9   Lerna Yanık, "Atlantik Paktı'ndan NATO'ya: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde Türkiye'nin Konumu ve Uluslararası Rolü Tartışmalarından Bir Kesit", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 9, No 34, 2012, p. 83.

10 Bahar Rumelili and Rahime Suleymanoglu-Kurum, "Brand Turkey: Liminal Identity and its Limits", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 22, No 3, 2017, p. 549-570.

11 Yücel Bozdaglioglu, *Turkish Foreign Policy and Turkish Identity: A Constructivist Approach*, 1st ed., London, Routledge, 2003; Yücel Bozdaglioglu "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10, No 1, 2008.

12 Bahar Rumelili, "Turkey: Identity, Foreign Policy, and Socialization in a Post-Enlargement Europe", *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 33, No 2, 2011.

13 Hasan Kösebalaban, "Torn Identities and Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey and Japan", *Insight Turkey* , Vol. 10, No 1, 2008

its distinguishing features from early official national identity discourses, but also to reveal Europe's place in this spatial construction.

We draw a picture of the spatial construction of homeland from the date of Turkey's establishment to the end of the 20th century, in relation to the political elites' imagination of national identity, then we focus on specific examples which demonstrate the perception of space in the discourse of Turkish policymakers since 2000. In order to unpack the discursive constructions of space around Turkish supranational identities, we rely on primary and secondary data. For the primary data, we rely on government programs, the proceedings of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, and published interviews and speeches of the governmental elites since 2000; for the secondary data, we use academic publications, news stories reported online, and actual policies and policy justifications reflected in media outlets. When using secondary data, we paid the utmost attention to ensure that the data sources were representative of the governmental elites' perceptions. Due to space limitations, our direct quotations and presented data include illustrative samples of the analysed data, which allows us to capture previously missing interpretations of these texts[14]. Our analysis reveals that in the post-2000 era, supranational imaginations – which have always played a role in spatializing the Turkish homeland throughout the history of the Turkish Republic – have navigated their way to the political core, and the supranational imagination, which is linked to the national space and identity, has been transformed from a Blue Anatolian narrative to a neo-Ottoman vision in the post-2011 period.

The Relationship between Space and National Identity and the Spatial Constructions of Turkish Homeland

Browning argues that nation states seek recognition by constructing identities that present their distinctive characteristics and uniqueness.[15] Modernity imposes different ways of relating identity to otherness,[16] such as the spatialization of identity with culture, values, and the arts, and the traditions of a nation arising from its history. In this respect, the culture of a particular place or region becomes an element of national identity, and may incorporate the intangible qualities of a nation together with the music, folklore, language, and handicrafts which represent the identity of a place, and which are therefore linked to national identity.[17] If national identity is defined in terms of a historical territory, common historical myths and memoirs, common culture and economy, and common legal rights and duties,[18] this would provide the country with considerable room for maneuver regarding its foreign policy endeavours.

14   Garry T. Henry, *Practical Sampling*, London, Sage, 1990.

15   Christopher S. Browning, "Nation Branding, National Self-Esteem, and the Constitution of Subjectivity in Late Modernity", *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 11, No 2, 2015.

16   Ibid, p. 196.

17   Nicole Mitsche et al., "Intangibles: Enhancing Access to Cities' Cultural Heritage through Interpretation", *International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research*, Vol. 7, No 1, 2018, p. 6.

18   Anthony D. Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory: the Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism", *International Affairs*, Vol. 72, No 3, July 1996.

In the modern nation state, political actors gain legitimacy to the extent that they control the geographical context and transform it socially. Hence, in the modern era, space has ceased to mean just a geographical location, and has become one of the foundations of group and individual belongings.[19] Henri Lefebvre conceptualises space in the modern sense not only as the grounds of political structure but the political and social itself.[20] According to this view, politics is carried out through space, because the social construction of space itself is a political process. In this political process, the state constructs "physical and discursive space".[21] The concept of discursive space is constantly being redefined, but refers to cases in which geography is romanticized.[22] Hakli, who discusses the concepts of discursive space through the case of Finland, argues that geographical context and spatiality, through which national identities are negotiated, are cultural, linguistic and political constructs[23].

The spatial construction of the Turkish homeland has been closely linked with the perceptions of national identity held by the Turkish political elites in different eras, and therefore constitutes a typical example of the dynamic character of discursive space. Wigen's "*State of Translation*" offers critical insights into the construction of discursive space as it elaborates how different concepts - "civilization", "empire", "citizenship" and "democracy" - to describe state-citizen relations were creatively reinterpreted (translated) and used by the Ottoman and later Turkish state elites to legitimize political acts and regulate relations of the state with its subjects and the outside world, particularly Europe and the West.[24] As nation-building in Turkey began, underscored by the trauma of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire[25], the spatial policy of the new Turkish Republic was based on "saving the state from disintegration".[26] As a result of this perception of threat and danger, the founding Kemalist elites rejected the local Islamic identity, which they saw as the reason for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and tried to reach the standards of "contemporary civilization", which are identified with the West. Therefore, the Kemalist elites declared war on the traditional or Islam-oriented Ottoman regime,[27] and aimed to convert this Islamic political culture into a Western secular culture[28] through various cultural and political reforms.

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19 Durgun, *Memalik-i Şahade'den Vatan'a*, p. 22.

20 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson Smith, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991; Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*, London, Continuum, 2004.

21 Joost Jongerden, "Crafting Space Making People: The Spatial Design or Nation in Modern Turkey", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 2009.

22 Jouni Hakli, "Cultures of Demarcation: Territory and National Identity in Finland", G. H. Herb ve D.H. Kaplan (eds.), *Nested Identities*, Landham, Rowman & Littlefield, 1999, p. 123-149.

23 Ibid.

24 Wigen, *State of Translation*.

25 After the military defeats of the Balkan wars, the geographic and population balance changed, and since 1913, the Ottoman Empire lost 83% of its lands in Europe and 69% of the population (Ayhan Aktar, "Conversion of a 'Country' into a Fatherland': The Case of Turkification Examined, 1922-1932", Ayhan Aktar (ed.) *Nationalism in the Troubled Triangle*, Palgrave, 2010.)

26 Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri 1898-1908*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2008; Umut Can Adisonmez and Recep Onursal, "'Strong, but Anxious State': The Fantasmatic Narratives on Ontological Insecurity and Anxiety in Turkey", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 19, No 73, 2022, p. 61-75.

27 Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, London, Routledge, 1997.

28 Ali Kazancıgil and Ergun Özbudun, *Atatürk, Founder of a Modern State*, London, C. Hurst, 1981; Çağlar Keyder, "The Dilemma of Cultural Identity on the Margins of Europe", *Review*, Vol. 16, No 1, 1993, p. 19-33.

On the other hand, the exclusion of non-Muslims from the national identity through various policies, and the assimilation of the Muslim population itself from different ethnic communities[29] indicates that Islam – despite the secularization policies – played a role in both the nation-building and "spatialization of the nation". As Aktürk argues, the Turkish nation has not been imagined as a part of the European family of nations, but as an Ottoman, pan-Islamist, and pan-Turkic supranational vision, that occupies center stage in the national identity discourse.[30] However, it is important to note that these visions were more cultural than geopolitical, as they did not foresee any expansionist actions, and the discussion was more one of how to define the Turkish nation within the borders of the Anatolian lands, which is the only land that was left to Turkey from the Ottoman era.

The most Eurocentric policy was implemented between 1939 and 1946, under İnönü's rule, when the National Education Ministry was headed by Hasan Ali Yücel, under the influence of the Blue Anatolians, who put Anatolia at the center of all civilizations. They attribute the real ownership of all values, especially those that Western civilization is based on, to the Anatolian people.[31] Representing the Westernist and secularist side of Kemalism, the Blueists have defined a Europe-centered discursive space, and put forward a cultural continuity thesis based on ancient civilizations passing through Anatolia, therefore perceiving Anatolia as the source of all kinds of values and civilizations, especially Western civilization.[32] Yet, Europe-centered cultural policies such as the introduction of compulsory courses of Latin and ancient Greek in high schools, were reacted against by Turkish conservatives by emphasizing Ottoman-Islamist themes in culture and education.[33]

From 1950, pan-Islamist and pan-Turkic supranational visions started to become visible in the official ideology, and alternative perspectives on Kemalist (official) nationalism produced differing images of the homeland in Anatolia. In contrast to the period before the 1950s era, Islam and the Ottoman heritage have started to become important political concerns that have laid the groundwork for the emergence of a Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Still, Turkey had perceived itself to be part of the West for many years – at least regarding foreign policy matters, such as NATO membership.[34]

The ending of the Cold War provided Turkey with opportunities to play an active role in various regions, starting with post-Soviet Turkic space, which required Turkey to embrace its Eastern identity. During this period, Turkish Eurasianism (*Avrasyacılık*) and neo-Ottomanism have appeared as new supranational visions that occupy Turkey's political core instead of the 1930's romanticization of Central Asia as the root source of "Turkishness". While Turkish Eurasianism was a left-leaning Kemalist ideology, presented as anti-Western and pro-Russian

29 Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve "Türkleştirme" Politikaları*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2000.

30 Sener Aktürk, "Incompatible Visions of Supra-Nationalism: National Identity in Turkey and the European Union", *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 48, No 2, 2007.

31 Barış Karacasu, "Cevat Şakir Kabaağaçlı", Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekingil (eds.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Modernleşme ve Batıcılık*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2007.

32 Halikarnas Balıkçısı, *Arşipel*, Ankara, Bilgi, 1995.

33 Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2013, p.80.

34 Müge Kınacıoğlu and Aylin G. Gürzel, "Turkey's Contribution to NATO's Role in Post-Cold War Security Governance: The Use of Force and Security Identity Formation", *Global Governance*, No 19, 2013, p. 590.

geopolitical discourse,[35] neo-Ottomanism was an ambitious geopolitical perspective that constructed Turkey as the emerging great power, and critiqued Turkey's current nation state form for being monocultural and closed.

However, it is important to note that this first wave of neo-Ottomanism, in the 1990s, did not imagine the Ottoman cultural identity as counter-hegemonic, but rather as part of a globalizing Western world.[36] On the other hand, it is also argued that neo-Ottomanism includes a strong anti-Western sentiment attributing to the Western powers the responsibility "for the glorious empire's demise",[37] which would be the case particularly in the post-2011 era. As Wigen argues, the Soviet Union's disappearance contributed to the weakening of Turkey's Western identity in the sense that communism was no longer a unifying enemy, while the Western democracy has become a counter concept to Islamism since the 9/11 attacks.[38] During the current religious-conservative AK Party government, the considerations towards Western civilization detailed below should be considered within this "post-Cold War effect".

Geographic and Cultural Spatialization of Turkish National Identity since the Early 2000s

Since 2000, the Turkish political elites, with reference to history, have made use of both the Ottoman period and, subsequently, the ancient civilizations that previously lived in Anatolia and their contributions to the Turkish and European identities. In this section, we show that spatialization of the Turkish homeland has evolved from the Kemalist era to incorporate Blue Anatolian narratives since the 2000s, but have gradually shifted towards Islamic, and neo-Ottoman narratives since 2011. As there has been a significant shift in the construction of national identity and space from the discourse of civilization to culture since 2011, this section will be divided into two periods, namely 2000-2010 and post-2011.

Emphasis of Civilization (2000-2010): Incorporation of Blue Anatolian Narratives

During the coalition period of the 1990s, Turkey's hybrid national identity between West and East was initially instrumentalized by İsmail Cem (Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2002) by justifying Turkey's Europeanness via three elements: territorial, cultural, and civilizational. Territoriality in Cem's discourse manifested itself with reference to Turkey having territory in Europe, referring to Thrace (compared to the Republic of Cyprus,[39] which was accepted as a member of the European Union) and Turkey's unique geographical location, which, according to Cem, made Turkey both Western and European and Eastern and Asian, thus conceptualized

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35 Emel Akçali and Mehmet Perinçek, "Kemalist Eurasianism: An Emerging Geopolitical Discourse in Turkey", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 14, No 3, 2009.

36 Yilmaz Çolak, "Ottomanism vs. Kemalism: Collective Memory and Cultural Pluralism in 1990s Turkey", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No 4, 2006, p. 593.

37 Igor Torbakov, "Neo-Ottomanism versus Neo-Eurasianism?: Nationalism and Symbolic Geography in Postimperial Turkey and Russia", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No 2, 2017, p. 137.

38 Wigen, *State of Translation*, p. 234-235.

39 Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, and officially refers it as the Greek Cypriot Administration.

as Eurasian.[40] Culturally, Cem often pointed out the 700 years of Ottoman rule in Europe, where this period shaped European culture and values, to underline the idea that Turkey was culturally European.[41] To stress this point, Cem argued that Turkey should overcome the artificial divides between "secular-Islamic" in its domestic policy, and "East-West", and "Europe-Asia" in its foreign policy. As for civilization, Cem underlined the co-existence of civilizations. Even though Cem's statements were often labelled as neo-Ottomanist, his perception of national identity and homeland had commonality with Blue Anatolian narratives, in the sense that the Turkish people and Turkish lands were considered the carriers of various cultures and civilizations, including European ones, as summarized in the following statement:

> "Today's Republic should be the representative and carrier of all cultures born in this geography throughout history. (…) Neither are the Ionian, Trojan, Byzantine and Seljuk civilizations our foreigners, nor are the Ottoman civilizations foreign to the Republic of Turkey. In fact, all civilizations that have existed in our history and geography have shaped our contemporary society together."[42]

During his ministry, Cem tried to break the mould of the "traditional" Turkish foreign policy, which he accused of being static and sterile, and that he found to be stuck with the parameters determined by the Cold War for when he tried to use "Turkey's advantages arising from its cultural and historical heritage". The initial years of the AK Party adopted an identical discourse which conceptualized Turkey as having been Western since the 20th century due to its involvement in Western political and administrative structures, and its nationalist and secular lifestyles. With that being said, the AK Party also underlined the fact that Turkey was also Eastern geographically, as most of its territory is in the East, the majority of its populace are Muslim, and there is a lot of cultural similarity with Middle Eastern countries. This identity construction is used to justify Turkey's initiation of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, together with Spain, under the auspices of the UN.

As indicated in Hakli's concept of discursive space, geography is romanticized[43] by the AK Party's political elites with diverse definitions of national identity. In doing so, the AK Party elites went further than its predecessors, who had romanticized the geography not as Eurasian but Afro-Eurasia, which justified the policy of opening up to Africa and the declaration that 2005 was the year of Africa. This is to say that the AK Party adopted a wide discursive space for national identity and homeland by making reference to a "great history" which encompassed different civilizations that had lived in Anatolia. For instance, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism was involved in various activities to demonstrate the plurality of Turkish culture, through organizing exhibitions. One of those exhibitions was held at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2005, to introduce Turkish culture between 600 and 1500 A.D. Hence, Turkish culture is defined alongside civilizations such as the Hittites, Phrygians, Lydians, Ionians, Urartians, Persians, Romans, and Byzantines. Hence, the AK Party elites adopted not only spatial

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40 İsmail Cem, *Türkiye Avrupa Avrasya: Birinci Cilt: Strateji Yunanistan Kıbrıs*, İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2004, p. 43.

41 İsmail Cem, Foreign Minister, Debating the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Budget for 2002. Ankara, Proceedings of Planning and Budgetary Commission, 22 November. 2001.

42 İsmail Cem, *Türkiye Avrupa*.

43 Hakli, "Cultures of Demarcation".

elements to define homeland, but also claimed that European civilizations actually originated in Anatolia. The concept of "contemporary civilization", which is often identified with Europe, is increasingly challenged. Instead, the AK Party elites' discursive space highlighted Anatolia as the "cradle of civilizations". When referring to this concept, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made reference not only to Islamic civilization but to other historical artefacts such as monasteries and churches. Such discursive spaces constructed by the AK Party elites are similar to the Blue Anatolians' narratives – albeit not in a Eurocentric way – in defining homeland in terms of civilization, and arguing that Anatolia is the center of all civilizations.

This is most visible of the AK Party's branding initiatives. The AK Party initiated the construction of a logo involving eight figures that Turks had used throughout their history, such as their carpets, architecture, and handicrafts. These initiatives highlighted Turkey's history, civilizational culture, arts and potential, among other things. All of these spatial elements were consistently employed in Turkey's promotional video, as prepared by the Saffron Advertisement Agency, which presented Turkey as "the hub of ideas and cultures for 10,000 years", "both Western and Eastern", "the heart of world history", "home to Mesopotamia; the Ottoman Empire; foreign traders; and Kemal Atatürk…"[44] As can be seen, this discourse is different from the Eurocentric approach adopted by the Blueists who defined a Europe-centered discursive space. While AK Party elites still strongly underlined the civilizations passing through Anatolia, and defining it as the source of all kinds of values and civilization, they refrained from giving credit to Europe, and adopted a terminology to justify foreign policy interventions in a wider geography, of which Europe was only a part. This discursive space allowed the AK Party elites to define the Turkish identity as representing a "Mediterranean, Black Sea, Caspian, Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern, Balkan, Middle Eastern and Caucasian country",[45] in the words of the then Turkish Foreign Minister, Ali Babacan.

Blue Anatolian narratives, defining Europe in Anatolia, were visible in the AK Party's discourse in 2010, when Istanbul was selected as the European Cultural Capital (ECC). During the launch of Istanbul as the ECC on 16 December 2010, the following two statements were made that clearly spatialize Europe in Istanbul.

"Istanbul is a city of Europe. Istanbul with its history, culture, civilization and people, is a city that has its face turned to Europe. As much as this city has appropriated European culture, European culture is shaped by Istanbul (Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan)"[46]

"In Istanbul, as the capital of many cultures and Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, the idea of coexistence and diversity is at the heart of what makes the city a unique centre of European and world culture (Minister for EU Affairs, Egemen Bağış)"[47]

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44   Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum, "Brand Turkey".

45   Ali Babacan, Foreign Minister. *Proceeding of the Turkish Grand National Assembly*. 23rd Period, 3rd Executive Year, 35th Gathering, (2008, 12 23).

46   İstanbul Resmen 'Avrupa Kültür Başkenti", Sabah, 16 December 2010, https://www.sabah.com.tr/yasam/bugun_bu_ yollara_dikkat-1226405 (Accessed 15 January 2023).

47   Roma, Bizans ve Osmanlı İmparatorluklarının Başkenti İstanbul artık Avrupa Kültür Başkenti", https://www. egemenbagis.com/roma-bizans-ve-osmanli-imparatorluklarinin-baskenti-istanbul-artik-avrupa-kultur-baskenti (Accessed 15 January 2023).

The political elites continuously underlined the fact that leaving Istanbul outside its borders would mean that Europe was rejecting a large part of its cultural and historical heritage.[48] They presented Istanbul as a bridge linking Europe (geographically), at the crossroads of European civilizations for centuries, and a "living example of the meeting of civilizations". While these statements clearly spatialized Europe in Istanbul, events organized as part of Istanbul being the ECC went further and spatialized Europe in Anatolia. These events presented pure Anatolian culture, music, and shows, linking them to European and Balkan ones. For instance, "Dance from Seven Regions to Seven Hills" presented dance figures from seven regions of Turkey, the "Music of Istanbul Architecture", which organized concerts in Istanbul's historical buildings forming the silhouette of Istanbul, the "Balkan Music Festival", and "European Literature in Turkey", among others. These were a few of the many events designed to illustrate the contribution of Turkish culture to the European one, so spatializing Europe in Anatolia, and Turkey in line with the Blue Anatolian narratives.

Discursive spatialization of the Turkish homeland around Blue Anatolian narratives served the AK Party elites' strategic goals, and recognition of its pro-European position. Yet extensive reliance on civilization, culture, and heritage also allowed the AK Party elites to define civilization in a vague manner, initially referring to the civilizations that lived in Anatolia that contributed to the making of Europe, but at other times to Islamic civilization, Muslim people, or the cultures of the Middle East, which would particularly be the case in Turkey's post-2011 era.

Emphasis on Culture (Post-2011): Departing from Blue Anatolian Narratives to Islamic Civilization

After coming to power for the third time in the 2011 elections, the AK Party political elites, who overcame the legitimacy crisis they had experienced in previous periods, started to spatialize the Turkish homeland with an overemphasis on culture and Islamic modernity. While the concept of "civilization" continued to be used from time to time, the associated reference point was "Turkish civilization" or "Islamic civilization", rather than European. Similar to the well-established practice of the Ottoman and Turkish state elites' reliance on different translations of foreign words from Eastern and Western languages[49], the concept of civilization is creatively re-interpreted by the AK Party elites to refer to Islamic culture and modernity.

In this era, embracing the Eastern dimension of Turkish identity enhanced the visibility of alternative civilizational focal points, while also prompting the political elites to increasingly resort to a nationalist tone, drawing on the greatness of the Turkish state and national identity. These are clearly visible in the political elites' discourse in the post-2011 period, underlining Turkey as a "global player", "not a borrower from the IMF but a lender to it", which emerged

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48   Egemen Bağış, 2010; cited Bahar Rumelili and Didem Çakmaklı, "Culture in EU-Turkey Relations", J. Batora and M. Mokre (eds.), *Culture in the EU's External Relations: Bridging the Divide?*, Surrey, UK, Ashgate, 2011.

49   Wigen, *State of Translation*.

parallel to debates on the shift of axis, Islamization, and Middle Easternization[50] and neo-Ottomanism or neo-Eurasianism.[51]. Therefore, the academic literature described this period as the de-Europeanization of Turkish foreign policy,[52] marking Turkey's retrenchment from the EU.[53] We observe the emergence of a non-Eurocentric or even an anti-Westernist or Islamic types of identity that indicate a new national identity construction.

Celebrations of the conquest of Istanbul can be considered one of the strategies of this new national identity construction. In contrast with the efforts of the Kemalist founding elites to highlight Ankara, which is "specific to the Republic" in terms of its lack of historical meaning, and to trivialize Istanbul in terms of symbolizing cosmopolitanism and Islam, the conquest of Istanbul was celebrated with magnificent ceremonies during the AK Party period. This situation, besides showing that the celebrations of the conquest became a symbol of a discourse that is against the Kemalist national identity imagination, also reveals how the space gained in meaning in line with imaginings of the national identity. In the messages he delivered every year on 29th of May, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during both his prime ministry and presidency, framed the conquest celebrations with great visual feasts as "preserving the heritage of our ancestors". Speaking in 2019, while expressing the fact that in 1453, the Ottoman ruler Mehmet the Conqueror conquered Istanbul, "deserving the praise of our prophet", and made it a center where different beliefs and cultures lived together, President Erdoğan defined the lofty traits of tolerance, brotherhood, and justice as "the legacy of our ancestors".[54] Having a similar symbolic meaning to that of Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, which was converted from a church to a mosque after the conquest of the Ottoman Empire – but was converted into a museum during the Republican period – was made into a mosque again, and a new mosque was built on Çamlıca Hill, the highest point of Istanbul; and the Panorama 1453 Museum, which provides the memory of the experience of conquest was opened, showing how it is possible to produce emotion for national identity through a space.[55]

On the basis of a common culture – Islam – Turkish popular culture is exported to the Arab space through television series and broadcasting in Arabic, reminding Arabs of their historical and cultural ties with Turkey, and presenting the Arab public with an alternative style of living through its politically and culturally hybrid modernity[56]. Also, the discursive space

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50 Birol Yesilada ve Barry Rubin (eds.), *Islamization of Turkey under the AKP Rule*, London Routledge, 2013; Tarık Oğuzlu, "Middle Easternization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: Does Turkey Dissociate from the West?", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, No 1, 2008.

51 Torbakov, "Neo-Ottomanism versus Neo-Eurasianism?".

52 Başak Alpan and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Balkans Amidst 'Soft Power'and 'De-Europeanisation'", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 22, No 1, 2022, p. 45-63; A. Şevket Ovalı,"The Global Financial Crisis and the De-Europeanisation of Turkish Foreign Policy", *Études helléniques/Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 23, No 1, 2015, p. 141-168.

53 Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, *Conditionality, the EU and Turkey: From transformation to retrenchment.* London, Routledge, 2018.

54 "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan İstanbul'un Fethi Mesajı",*TRT News*, 28 May 2019, https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-istanbulun-fethi-mesaji-417324.html (Accessed 21 August 2022).

55 Nagehan Tokdoğan, *Yeni Osmanlıcılık: Hınç, Nostalji, Narsisizm*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2020.

56 Marvan Kraidy and OmarAl-Ghazzi, O., "Neo-Ottoman Cool: Turkish Popular Culture in the Arab Public Sphere", *Popular Communication,* Vol. 11, No 1, 2013, p. 28.

came to emphasize the multiplicity and plurality of Turkish civilization, by referring to the cities of Samarkand, Istanbul, and historical vestiges such as Nizamiye Madrassah, the Orhon Inscription, and writers such as Mesnevi and many others. This strategy is illustrated well in the following words by Ömer Çelik, the then Minister of Culture and Tourism:

> "You will talk to the world through all the cultural factors, all ideological identities and all political identities in the geography that you live in. This is the way that how geography is a destiny that serves the people, humanity and government."[57]

This discursive policy triggered a debate about teaching the Ottoman language in schools. Even though these initiatives were discursively justified by Çelik as attempts to introduce all the cultures that existed in Anatolia,[58] spatializing Europe was largely absent from these debates.

With Ahmet Davutoğlu's appointment as foreign minister in 2009, the emphasis on the geographical focus of foreign policy was defined more openly with civilizational belonging, which refers to the cultural and historical heritage that makes Turkey not a "bridge" but a "central country" in Eurasia. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu (2009-2014) underlined the fact that Turkey, as an heir of the Ottoman Empire, has responsibilities due to its historical and geographical depth.[59] In the geographical area that Davutoğlu defined as a near land basin (the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Middle East)[60], "Turkey's inevitable Hinterland" is the Middle East.[61] The two elements that define the Middle East are the religion of Islam and the common historical heritage from the Ottoman Empire.[62] According to Davutoğlu, Turkey's greatest advantage in this geography will be that it adopts an all-encompassing and inclusive civilizational affiliation, unlike the Kemalist project that shaped traditional Turkish foreign policy.[63]

With the concept of "double alienation", Davutoğlu deplored the loss of Ottoman society and historic territory by perceiving the post-Ottoman arrangement – the new national structure and space – as an artificial creation and a "dismissive disconnect with almost four centuries of its own history"[64]. He insisted that the previous one hundred years constituted a "parenthesis" and "must be closed."[65] He therefore imagined a new nationalism based on the Ottoman past with the concept of "*tarihdaş*" – people who share the common Ottoman history – and gave Turkey a leading role in building a relationship between these people,

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57 Ömer Çelik, (2014, December 15). Proceedings of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. 24th Period, 5th Executive Year, 30th Gathering.

58 Ibid, p. 103-104.

59 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Teoriden Pratiğe: Türk Dış Politikası Üzerine Konuşmalar*, İstanbul, Küre, 2011, p. 135.

60 Ibid, p. 134.

61 Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik*, İstanbul, Küre, 2014, p. 129.

62 Ibid, p. 132.

63 Ibid, p. 37.

64 Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkish- Armenian Relations in the Process of De- Ottomanization or 'Dehistoricization': Is a 'Just Memory' Possible?", *Turkish Policy Quarterly,* Vol. 13, No 1, 2015, p. 22.

65 "Yüz Yıllık Parantezi Kapatacağız", *Yeni Şafak*, 01 March 2013, https://www.yenisafak.com/yazidizileri/yuzyillik-parantezi-kapatacagiz-494795 (Accessed 03 August 2022).

and made a blurred distinction between nation and *tarihdas*, which refers to cultural ties.[66] Related to the importance given to the Ottoman past, the Sunni-Muslim identity – as center of a Muslim-oriented larger nation and the cultural marker of Turkishness – has been the constituting element of this new nationalism. White refers to this new nationalism as "Muslim nationalism", denoting a devout Muslim Turkishness that has broken away from the Kemalist state project. Accordingly, Muslim nationalists form their definitions of nation not by referring to the current borders of the nation state and Central Asian blood ties, but through modelling the multi-sectarian Ottoman Empire with its historical, flexible borders.[67] It can be argued that the concepts of "central country" based on "historical and geographical depth" are for reimagining the Turkish national identity.

Relatedly, the aim of deepening relations with Middle Eastern countries, which Turkey has historical and cultural ties, was also clearly visible in the 2011 government programme.[68] This contrasts the 2002 and 2007 government programs which highlighted the EU membership goal instead, by associating it with universal standards on issues such as democracy, fundamental rights and freedoms, and the rule of law.[69] In the 2011 programme, Turkey's full membership of the EU was expressed as a "strategic goal" for "strengthening democracy and making our country a more effective and decisive actor in regional and global problems". In the 2015 government program of the Davutoğlu Prime Ministry (2014-2016), it was stated that Turkey saw EU membership as a "strategic goal", and relations with the EU were defined as "not an alternative to other relations, but a complement".[70] This shows that the EU was no longer seen as an unconditional focus of civilization or a superior civilization through the rhetoric that Turkey's full membership of the EU required the latter to move away from the aforementioned double standards.

Turkey initiated further steps to respatialize the homeland with Islam, by changing the name of the Presidential Palace from *Cumhurbaşkanlığı Sarayı* (palace) to *Külliye* (an Ottoman origin word meaning complex buildings adjacent to a mosque) after the completion of the Beştepe Millet Mosque in July 2015. Also, the welcoming ceremony for Mahmud Abbas from Palestine with the images of 14 soldiers from the Turkish world, lined up on the stairs of the Presidential Palace, used the same ideology of emphasizing the plurality of Turkish identity beyond its national frontiers. In relation to this, with the onset of the 2015 Syrian refugee crises, the AK Party's political elites started to distance the definition of Turkish national identity and homeland from the definition of Europe as a civilizational focal point, seeking

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66 Ahmet Davutoğlu's Speech in Symposium of Towards the Great Turkey, 26 March 2011, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-turk-ocaklari_nin-kurulusunun-100_-yilini-kutlama-etkinlikleri-kapsaminda-duzenlenen.tr.mfa (Accessed 01 August 2022).

67 Jenny White, *Müslüman Milliyetçiliği ve Yeni Türkler*, trans. Fuat Güllüpınar and Coşkun Taştan, Second Edition, Istanbul, İletişim, 2014, p.148-9.

68   2011 AK Party Government Program, https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2011/07/20110717-1.htm (Accessed 29 July 2022).

69 2002 AK Party Government Program, https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2003/03/20030324.htm (Accessed 30 July 2022); 2007 AK Party Government Program, https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2007/09/20070907M1-1.htm (Accessed 30 July 2022).

70 2015 AK Party Government Program, http://www.akparti.org.tr/media/272171/parti-programi-subat-2015.pdf (Accessed 13 December 2022).

instead to reinstate the idea of civilization with Islam.[71] President Erdoğan's speeches framing Turkey's position around an humanitarian responsibility in the region has important religious connotations in the sense that he identifies Turkey's citizens as *ensar,* who helped immigrated Muslims (*muhacir*) - the Syrian Muslims - by referring Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mekka to Medina in 622 A.C.[72]

It can be argued that the EU-Turkey relationship was now seen as an interequal relationship by Turkish policy makers as of 2011. Therefore, the more relations with the Middle East and Muslim countries had been deepened by constructing Turkey as a "leading country", both in the region and in the world, in terms of its cultural and geographical location, with regard to its Ottoman past, the more the national identity included Islam. After the 15 July 2016 failed coup attempt, which aggravated the securitization narratives both in Turkish foreign and domestic policy,[73] the emphasis on "us" and "them" has increased, whilst the references to the Ottoman Empire gaining a new dimension with discourses such as the "1000-year-old homeland".

Conclusion

Theoretical approaches have shown us that space draws a reminder framework and geographical context for collective memory, and that this framework is used in the process of nationalization of geography. In this respect, space is constantly being constructed physically and discursively by the state, and reconstructed according to changing political conditions and actors. Considering that the common "feeling of homeland" is the spatialization of social memory and the soil, a different spatialization of the Turkish homeland in time indicates the existence of different conceptions of – national – identity, which include different positions toward the West.

The political elites' strategy of spatializing Turkish national identity beyond Turkey's borders is not a new strategy but a heritage from the Ottoman state elites. In order to demonstrate the civilizational capacity of the Turkish nation, Kemalists constructed a Turkish space – Anatolia – as the cradle of civilizations, including Western civilization, which was perceived by them to be the only contemporary civilization. However, gradually, since the end of the Cold War, Turkey has lost its aspiration of defining its geopolitical space within the context of threat and danger, adopting the Blue Anatolian discourse of "cradle of civilizations" and seeking a multidirectional global player identity which requires the instrumental use of Turkey's historical, cultural, and political links rather than its identity as a bridge country.

Between 2000 and 2010, in line with the 1990's first wave of neo-Ottomanism, Turkish policymakers addressed the West by underlining the diversity of cultures that make up the Turkish identity, through an emphasis on the civilizations from Anatolia. The "central country" discourse, which has been intensifying since 2011, however, can be considered a serious break in the strategies for the spatialization of the nation in the Republic's history, in the sense that

71 Elif Gençkal-Eroler and Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, "Türkiye'de Medyadaki 'Medenileşme' Algısında Avrupa Temsili: Suriyeli Göçmen Krizi Dönemi", *Dumlupınar University Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 69, No 3, 2021.

72 Cagla Luleci-Sula and Ismail Erkam Sula, "Migration Management in Turkey: Discourse and Practice", *Uluslararasi Iliskiler*, , Vol. 18, No 72, p. 1-17.

73 Bülent Aras, "The Crisis and Change in Turkish Foreign Policy after July 15", *Alternatives*, Vol. 44, No 1, 2019, p. 6-18.

there is no effort to spatialize Europe in the national homeland, and the heavy emphasis on the country's Ottoman roots and Islam. Still, a similarity can be found in the sense of spatialization of homeland for cultivating a self-confident national identity. This serious break from the historical attitude that saw the West as a "contemporary civilization" is also triggered by a series of domestic, regional, and international changes such as the declining credibility of the prospects of EU membership perspective, expectations created by Turkey's carefully crafted the policy of "zero problems with neighbors" in the region, the Arab revolts and the emerging power vacuum in the region after 2011, as well as the resulting refugee crisis. All of these factors added to the domestic concerns created by the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016 and challenged the implementation of the foreign policy vision put forward by the AK Party.

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