In today's Turkey under the Justice and Development administration, it seems that religion becomes or is imposed as an important element of the Turkish national identity. The education system works as the channel for promoting this change. Thus, the case of Turkey is that of a nation-state that has been under construction since it emerged from a successful war of independence, and any analysis of policies needs to pay careful attention to the dominant state ideology. Set against the general historical background, this analysis examines and interprets the educational policies and decision-making in this area in relation to political ideologies. In fact, it is the series of Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) governments which, since the party's first election victory in 2002, have implemented several reforms so as to change educational thinking in Turkey. Within this framework and especially after 2002, Islam, and most specifically the Turkish political Islam, plays an important and defining role in Turkish society. It is an agenda, consisting of market-oriented education, that includes transforming and privatising the public education system, developing policies on religious education in line with emerging notions of political Islam, promoting the growth of Islamic educational curricula, whether in Imam-Hatip schools or in higher education, and generally putting more emphasis upon Islam as an important constituent of the Turkish national identity.

This book provides both historical context and state policy information in order to meet researchers' and lecturers' needs and expectation to learn about the characteristics of different policies used by Turkish governments in education. It enables civil society groups, researchers, university students and academics to identify problems and opportunities that the Turkish Government has been dealing with. Hence, it can be used both by researchers and policy makers as well as educators.

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State Ideology and Education in Turkey, 1980–2015
Onur Şaraplı

State Ideology and Education in Turkey, 1980–2015
I am dedicating my study to my beloved niece Dilara who unfortunately lost her life at the tender age of four.
“Educating a child is like engraving on stone”

Al-Ghazali

(1058 – 1111)

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1. Theoretical, Methodological and Historical Consideration

Scholars of Islam, in defining the religion, have treated the subject from the point of view of the divine religions and have claimed that the religion is a divine law that takes intelligent people towards things that are inherently good and beneficial through their own preferences and calls them to take to heart the truths declared by the prophets.¹ For Süleyman Hayri Bolay and Mümtaz Türk’öne, who maintain that religion is a part of a person’s identity, it is the most important source for giving meaning to any individual’s existence in this world. According to Bolay and Türk’öne, human beings come to understand their own place within the universe and, along with that, these forms of existence thanks to their own religious preference, and they seek to live out their underlying values and ideals in the framework of such an understanding. Religion as a personal choice is the source of fundamental values that make it possible to live a life with meaning.² For Ali Coşkun, who states that one of the basic functions of religion is to give people an identity, it has a significant role to play as a source of identity when it provides both identity and a sense of belonging for people who are far away from
their normal religious environment, or have migrated either to a new setting elsewhere or into the country from outside.\textsuperscript{3}

Researchers think, the national identity,\textsuperscript{4} after 1950s, has been replaced instead of class concept. Man’s identity is determined by a kind of coordinates which are called belongings. Some of these coordinates exist by birth; some of them are gained later. The individual’s origin, the environment he lives in, the perception of space, common historical consciousness, common culture and religion are some of those belongings. Religion is one of the fundamentals which has an active role in the construction of identity, but it is not enough to construct identity itself. However, it is not totally distinctive. The determination of religion in order to build an identity depends on how much the individual and his/her society developed.\textsuperscript{5}

Religion has also a strong influence on shaping of the dilemma. It, therefore, functions as a kind of paradigm. Religion finds its source in human existence. The two-way relationship between religion – culture and religion – society has a direct effect on person who is a social entity. Human attitudes towards religion determine a level and quality of this effect. Every person who was born in a society finds itself in the circle of influence of a widespread understanding of religion. God’s imagination (Tanrı tasavvuru), which man possesses, is the founding one which builds both the understanding of religion and his identity. Perhaps this is the main reason why distortions in the God’s perception have direct effect on both identity and the understanding of culture and civilization.\textsuperscript{6}

Tawheed belief builds a healthy identity and personality by liberating human being. Man can only build a freedom-based, strong and well-balanced identity if he knows his creator. Religion has a direct influence on identity formation by God’s imagination and creation. In essence, religion exists to bring a meaning to human life and it helps us to gain the basic common stake of living in the context of human values. Identities can help to bring happiness to individuals and their society if they are formed by the meaning and conformity together. It is only possible if the universal meaning of religion has to be decoded and transferred to life again. It is known that one of the most important goals of the social plan is to create an ethical society based on adherence. The main principle of religion also functions as a steam cell in cultural confidence. Human beings are able to construct their identity and personality in both safe environment and manner. They also can use his creative talents only in free and safe environments effectively.\textsuperscript{7}

According to Niyazi Kızılyürek, identity formation is a product of socio-economic and political dynamics. In societies where these dynamics are weak, identity confusion is more likely to be the case rather than identity formation.
Debates over identity emerged on the stage of history when societies came to be ordered along capitalist lines. There is no ‘national identity’ in feudal societies. The emergence of capitalist society in Western Europe and the formation of national identity are more or less one and the same thing. According to the same author, a Frenchman has been a Frenchman since the arrival of the French bourgeoisie revolution. This French bourgeois revolution is the French bourgeoisie’s act of building a national state. And once again, it is socio–economic and political conditions that feed such an action.8

Tanyel Bedia Taysi writes that the notion of an official national identity represents the ideology fostered by the Turkish state (being a political entity) for the purpose of specifying what it means to be a member of the nation, that is to say one of all the citizens living within the territorial boundaries of Turkey. In the case of Turkey, as also of many other countries around the world, this official national identity came to be constructed after the political structure (the state itself) had been established. Official Turkish national identity is an artificial concept posited by Atatürk during his years as the first president of the Turkish Republic. Atatürk’s concepts of national identity were mainly based upon choices and attitudes; his identity project received little in the way of positive codification. According to Tanyel Bedia Taysi, the national system of symbols that represents the official national identity remains an opaque and shifting phenomenon when codified, and is not consistently applied. For Taysi, there is no set of laws and identifiable state machinery in existence to disseminate this official identity. Institutions of the state that would appear to have influence on the articulation of identity, for example ‘The Atatürk High Institution of Culture, Language and History’ do not have much real power in the promotion of identity issues, while other state bodies such as the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) do. Moreover, changes in the nature of the state have been mirrored by corresponding changes in the relative degree of power and influence wielded by various institutions, ministries and groups within the state in regards to dealing with identity issues.9

Just as religion has an important part to play in shaping society, society itself also influences religion, and every generation re–interprets, updates and re–fashions the social values of the society it is born into according to the conditions of its own era. Naturally this situation necessitates a systematic mechanism, one which is achieved through the “education system”. In this sense we encounter two different elements, “religion” and “education” that are not independent the one from the other, but instead complementing one another. From birth onwards, individuals on the one hand learn and internalize the values of the society they
are members of, and on the other function as vehicles for carrying and transmitting that culture. In this sense, from the moment individuals enter upon the process of becoming socialized they are in fact also drawn into the process of education. It is the family that constitutes the first rung of the educational ladder.\textsuperscript{10}

Berger and Luckman term this stage – the first link in the chain, namely that equivalent to babyhood and childhood – “basic socialization”. Then, in the stage when individuals have completed this basic socialization and begin to become socialized, they start to take on an active role in the process of “secondary socialization”. At this time, which equates to the first phase of “secondary socialization”, individuals become acquainted with “school”. This schooling phase is in effect the most active and dynamic period when the character of individuals is formed in their lifelong process of socialization. In this process it is especially at the middle school stage that individuals start to adopt role models.\textsuperscript{11}

In his study of the concept of ideology as it emerged in 19\textsuperscript{th} century France, the sociologist and political scientist Doğu Ergil offers us two distinct definitions. In the more comprehensive one, he defines ideology as one of the types of all – embracing cognitive and ethical belief systems developed by human beings and societies which are in turn to do with humanity, human society and the universe. In a narrower framework, however, he expresses it as the sum total of the beliefs, attitudes and thoughts that perform the task of ideology, which is to justify or to influence ways of thinking and behaving along specific lines. The 19\textsuperscript{th} century, in which structural changes took place, also caused changes to come about within the actual concept of ideology. While defining ideology for our own day, Doğu Ergil mentions these changes and underlines the fact that, just as ideology that is ‘made up of very closely – interrelated beliefs, thoughts and attitudes peculiar to a group or a cell’ may be adopted by a small clique. It may also be adopted by larger groupings or indeed by all members of a nation. Nonetheless, while he makes clear that in any historical period ideology may also live on as the belief system of some minority group or sect. This scholar defines those ideologies that are largest in their scope as representing a ‘world view’.\textsuperscript{12}

An approach parallel to the above – mentioned thinking on official ideology is set forth too in the work of Louis Althusser. For Althusser, the whole of the state’s ideological tools have but a single goal, mainly economical. That goal is the reproduction of the relations of production. Every state ideological tool moves forward along a path peculiar to itself. For example, the state’s political tool makes individuals conform to the state’s political ideology. The communication tool uses mass media to feed citizens daily doses of nationalism and liberalism, and so on. Althusser maintains that the most important tool of dominant
state ideology is the school. As he sees it, schools have taken on the functions of an old ideological tool and dominant power of the state, namely the church – in other words, of religion. The same writer takes the view that, from the nursery stage onwards, schools put into children’s minds skills that are imbued with the dominant ideology (languages, arithmetic, natural history and the sciences) or otherwise just the pure and dominant ideology (morals, philosophy and citizenship training).13

One group of children at age 16 enters the wheel of production: these are the workers or small peasants. Another group keeps going on, despite any difficulties, and forms the petit bourgeois social class that consists of lowly white – collar or medium – ranking state officials. Then there is a last group which receives education at the most advanced level. Those who come within this group either fall into a state of part – time unemployment peculiar to the intelligentsia, or become the exploitative officials (managers) or the repressive ones (soldiers, policemen and politicians). Part of this group turns out to consist of religious people who were thought to have been ‘secular’. A large part of the relations of production (that is, the relations between those being exploited and their exploiters) in a capitalist social setup is achieved through mass indoctrination and the teaching of skills imbued with the ideology of the ruling class (elites); and this is best brought about via the school system.14

As Antonio Gramsci saw it, “ideologies should be regarded as organizing forces in a dynamic sense that form the basis for people to act, struggle and come to an awareness of their own social conditions”.15 In other words, for Gramsci the interests of different classes in society may be represented at the ideological level. What lies beneath such a link is the fact of a world view that may be defined as arising from the material interests of social classes. According to Peter Mayo, the various aspects of the educational and cultural formation processes have a considerable role to play in laying the ideological groundwork that prefigures the transformation of the state, this being complete only when mastery of the state apparatus is achieved, with consequent control over the process of exchange. As Gramsci maintains, “class consciousness cannot be completely modified until the mode of life of the class itself is modified, which entails that the proletariat has become the ruling class through possession of the apparatus of production and exchange and state power”.16

In his account of situational analyses and power relationships, Gramsci sees it as a duty that a social hegemony and politics should replace the sub – function of government and that the intellectuals who form the hegemony’s civil servant class should protect the idealized revolution together with the status quo. In general, he regards the equilibrium between political society and civil society, or one
group in society being imposed on the entire national society through all of the special institutions such as churches, trade unions and schools, not as a hegemony but as a way of creating a state that should be seen as a dictatorship of the proletariat. Basically, he makes it clear that, as a viewpoint borrowed from Lenin, what brings together the country dweller and the city dweller is education.¹⁸

Gramsci regards schools as a part of the social hegemony. At the same time he suggests that the bourgeoisie uses the working class for a temporary period, and in order to get the working class to accept its hegemony draws up radical reforms to teaching and learning. Gramsci uses this concept of hegemony to clarify the relationships that characterize national questions with a similar political history, and in particular relationships between the social classes. In a capitalist-type society the relationships between the bourgeoisie, peasants and the industrial working class are hegemonic. Through a socialist revolution the bourgeois hegemony will be replaced by that of the working class (the proletariat). However, hegemonic control will be brought about not by physical (military or political) or legal compulsion, but rather by education. The underclass will be persuaded to continue the existing status quo under the illusion that its own best interests are thus being served.¹⁹

For Gramsci, the hegemonic education connection can be seen clearly in a variety of civil society institutions – churches, schools, trade unions and the mass media. On this point Gramsci’s social theory seems paradoxical. This is because his school curriculum presents a picture that is as conservative as it could possibly be. The way he approaches the matter, if schools are to act as the basic vehicle for ensuring the existence of a hegemony, a detailed understanding and appreciation of the content of that education will be required. So in ideological terms the reality that is distorted and has a hold over the working class will be transmitted to the working class by the bourgeoisie by means of education. Thus the schools, serving as they do in the formation of the distorted consciousness of the working class, contribute towards keeping in place the hegemony of the middle class. The curriculum taught in such schools has a rather functional role in ensuring that continuity.²⁰

For Gramsci, true education necessitates a methodology and a fixing of direction – even acting as a sort of coat hanger: the aspect of the educator as one who exercises strong willpower is highlighted, and in order to educate a cultural tool is required. Thanks to such a tool the older generation transmits to the new generation all the experiences of the past. It makes sure that certain habits and inclinations are acquired; indeed, through apprenticeships it sees to it that physical and technical knowledge and experience is acquired. Consequently it both
passes on and enriches the legacy of the past. The code of state and society creates people who are fit for the historic order of things that makes the dominant natural code possible. This is the most significant feature of the dominant system. Its final aim, in order to have a deeper and more intensive transformation, is to create a model of human beings who participate actively in natural living. Inculcating the reality and the idea of work is the secret function of education in primary schools, because according to the social state order rights and responsibilities are taught through the medium of work and employment.

In line with this it is essential to have a national education system that has a common language and a centralized structure. For only such an education system can provide the education of the workforce and the consumers seen as required for the economy and the political individuals who are citizens of the nation state. This kind of broadening out phenomenon made accessible to all citizens on the one hand ensures that there is equality between them. On the other hand, however, it also serves to legitimize the inequalities thrown up by the education system itself. So it is that individuals take their place in society not according to their innate and pre-political attributes, but rather according to the status and the diploma they have achieved though the education system. Here it is the choices formed by a technical discourse involving such notions as success, aptitude, hard work and merit that create inequality. Through providing equality of opportunity to all citizens in education, inequalities in society are rendered acceptable. This being so, the national education system has always run up against approaches that bring into question the education/state, education/ideology and education/economy relationships.

At the same time, neo-liberalism as an ideology retains in its make-up aspects of both the liberalism and conservatism of the nineteenth century. With the logic of the marketplace underpinning its political and economic philosophy, it is natural that neo-liberalism should actively encourage laissez-faire economic systems around the world. Whereas, however, such an approach should suggest minimal intervention on the part of the state, in actual practice national governments still retain a major role in domains such as employment, social welfare, education and defence. Moreover, they are responsible for ensuring that their economic system is capable of being reproduced; which implies the need for persistent efforts to guarantee that there will always be a supply of individuals whose thinking and habits have been carefully fashioned to enable them in the future to play their part in that economic system. The main instrument for achieving this is education, one of the state’s greatest ideological tools and one
which neo-liberal governments regularly use to ensure and promote the internalization of national policies.\(^{25}\)

It is through such a tool that states aim to secure a sustainable economic future, and they do so by tweaking mainly the content, but also other aspects of the education system. The neo-liberalist approach is one that aims to create an economic culture of individualism and market-oriented behaviour that involves people from all sectors of society, and therefore education in a neo-liberal age exists above all to emphasize the kinds of knowledge that can make for economic productivity and thus to have as its end – product students who are compliant, productive and capable of responding to whatever is required by the economic system. As a consequence of this, questions to do with effectiveness and efficiency have replaced earlier intellectual and moral ones as the central focus of educational systems.\(^{26}\)

All of this is clearly indicated by those concepts to be found within neo-liberal discourse, such as those of nation, homeland, religion, family and society, and by the place assigned to the family and womanhood. We may further cite as instances of the same the place taken up in the education system by religious instruction, the function this performs, the content of lessons, the disputes arising, the courts where legal actions are brought, the international spread of schools belonging to the religious communities, plus all the private schools and courses.\(^{27}\)

In countries where reforms to governance were seen by officials and donors concerned as relatively advanced, the possibility of a more proactive neo-liberal social engineering\(^{28}\) project came more to the fore. Such a project typically involves an ambition not only to remodel the state but also to imagine how a renewed and remodelled state might in turn reconfigure a whole national society. Neo-liberalism as a social model takes as its premise the idea of society being composed essentially of rational individuals. Consequently, countries may introduce certain policies in order to bolster particular social identities associated with neo-liberalism; and to that end, they may attempt to extend the remit of neo-liberal reforms through educational programmes.\(^{29}\) From the start of the Republican era in Turkey, formal education as part of a social engineering project has revolved around a monist mentality that serves to reinforce nationalistic notions and the ideological primacy of the homeland, the \textit{vatan}. This monist mentality permeating the Turkish education system can most clearly be seen in the history courses and history textbooks used. This is a monist nationalistic approach that sees homeland as something sacred, given that virtually all references to homeland in Turkish textbooks are positive and/or affirmative in nature.\(^{30}\)
1.1 Methodology

This research will begin with an introductory chapter outlining the history of modern education in the late Ottoman Empire and Turkey. This preparatory stage will cover aspects of modernism and the birth of official ideologies such as Ottomanism, the state ideology of the Tanzimat era during the last period of the Ottoman Empire; it will consider modernizing activities in education generally and also the promotion of religiosity in education. The essential groundwork for the core of this study will be provided by examining the process of modernization and the transformation of state education through the idea of ulus, or nation, and a new concept of the Turkish national identity. An overview will be given of the various processes that have determined political approaches to organizing education and to regulating it from the Tanzimat era up to the present day. Previous research work in this field will also be reviewed, so as to evaluate the solutions and reflections offered and to narrow down the focus of the study as it continues into the next stage.

The last decades Justice and Development Party (AKP) administrations have enacted certain specific moves to promote religious courses in Turkish education by changing the syllabus, publishing revised textbooks and making an amendment to the education system which has made religious courses, in principle, elective. The question of the Imam – Hatip schools and the whole issue of compulsory religious education have generated fierce public debate in Turkey; and these controversies at least help to shed light on the country’s position regarding religious freedom, respect for which is seen as a universal norm and which as a principle is protected under international agreements to which Turkey is a signatory. Another principle, protected as a human right under international treaties, is the right of parents to choose the kind of education that their children will receive. Turkish domestic legislation also includes clauses on this subject as well as one article that provides for and regulates the status of religious courses.

The main focus of this research is, therefore, on the educational policies pursued during the years of AKP rule. The research conducted concentrated mainly on the administrative changes made by the AKP political party on remoulding the Turkish education system. The study was observed using the following perspectives; education passage and avenues in, education excellence attainment merit and standing, education administration, structure, control as well as direction. Additionally the study looked at AKP parties’ ways of reducing funding using the mechanism of promoting privatization. The AKP party’s main ambition and aspirations when taking office were to increase student enrolment rates
at all levels, increase the average years of schooling and provide an all – round better quality of education. They regarded the previous education system as inadequate and felt this short fall in education needed to be addressed as it was seen to be a great hindrance to the country’s economic expansion.  

In the year 2002, the AKP party invested heavily in the education system and its structure; following this investment average class sizes were seen to fall. Primary schools from 30 a class to 22, secondary schools 30 to 27 and high schools from 30 to 23. Technology in education was another area that saw immense investment within a period of ten years; over one million computers were commissioned in classrooms. The ‘Fatih project’ another example (2011 were most students were issued with tablets). During the years 2004–2005 the AKP party made major changes to the curriculum and teaching methodology in both primary and secondary education. The main emphasis of the changes was geared more towards a student – oriented program. Changes to education ministry structure were made. The government’s education institutions were compacted into a smaller and simpler structure which is believed to have increase coordination, efficiency and reduce duplication; however no wide – ranging studies have been completed concerning the impact of these changes to the education systems function. In August 2012 the council of ministers abolished all tuition fees for day time university programmes as well as Open University majors to increase student enrolment.  

For Mustafa Cinoğlu, education is an expensive investment and government sources are limited to provide quality education for all students. The private sector, on the other hand, can be an option in educational investment to build and run schools. Here, a competitive environment can increase education quality and private sector can provide important alternative sources of educational funding. In the last decade economic growth in Turkey has helped provide additional funds for the education system but providing quality education for all students is a great strain on public resources. The AKP government has concentrated vigorously on increasing private institutions’ share in education, and they have openly pledged to increase this share to 10%. So as to achieve its targets in this area, the AK Party government drew up an education bill in July 2003 that offered public funding based on individual merit that would cover private school tuition costs for low – income students, and it authorized the government to provide financial support of up to TL 1,000 per year to successful students.  

Although this education bill went through the Parliament, the President at that time Ahmet Necdet Sezer declared it unconstitutional on the grounds that under the government’s constitutional mandate other institutions could not be
authorized by the state to provide such services. Although the idea of greater private sector involvement continued to receive support under future development plans and the Ministry of National Education’s education strategies, it was not until 2012 that the government was able to move ahead seriously in this area. It was then that the AK Party declared its policy of closing down dershanes, private tutoring centres which specialized in centralized tests and offered additional classes, and announced that public funding would be available to those dershanes that were prepared to turn themselves into private schools. However, although the Ministry of National Education has announced that it has some specific plans in the pipeline, this work has yet to produce any actual results. Private schools have seen a certain rise, though, in the total number of students enrolled over the past ten years, despite the absence of any major reforms.\(^\text{42}\)

In 2012, participation in private education was still at much lower levels compared to public school enrolments, with a mere 3% of all elementary school students and 3.1% of all secondary education students enrolling in private institutions. Meanwhile higher education in Turkey has traditionally been regarded as a public service in much the same way as elementary and secondary education. Under Article 130 of the Turkish Constitution, the Parliament is required to pass legislation in order to permit the setting up of any new universities, including not–for–profit private ones. The number of private not–for–profit universities in fact rose from 23 in 2002 to 69 in 2013, with a corresponding increase in the student population. Indeed, Turkey’s higher education system has grown 2.5–fold in terms of student numbers.\(^\text{43}\)

In recent years the AKP party has taken steps in order to make the higher education system accessible to everyone by getting rid of the coefficient system, a system that penalized particular students by lowering their scores. The lower coefficient is a product of the February 28\(^{\text{th}}\) 1997 intervention (postmodern coup) and was introduced in an attempt to keep students from Imam–Hatip schools, classified as vocational schools, out of the secular higher education system. The decision on the coefficient system had long been sought to end many years of long injustice imposed on vocational school graduates, including those of religious Imam–Hatip high schools in its Official Agenda of 58th Government in 2002 and in the Urgent Action Plan in 2003. The government adopted measures to reduce the coefficient system’s influence as part of its higher education reform efforts in 2003 and 2004. Consequently, the Parliament passed a legislation in May 2004 to move away from the coefficient system.\(^\text{44}\)

The contentious headscarf ban is another area that imposed stark restrictions on students. The ban was lifted by the AKP and Nationalist Movement
Party (MHP) government deputies sponsored a constitutional amendment in 2008, but critics worry that Turkey’s relaxation of the headscarf ban will blur the line between religion and the state and could herald a stealthy march toward an Islamist state.

The Primary School and Education Law No 6287, which was known generally as the system of $4 + 4 + 4$, and which increased the period of compulsory education to 12 years, one stage followed by the next, was published in the Official Gazette No 28261 on 11th April 2012. When this new law came into force it stated that all university applicants, regardless of their area of specialization and type of high school, were to be dealt with under the same coefficient. This 2012 law effectively did away with the previous coefficient system that had aroused so much controversy after it began to be applied in 1998.

A mention is appropriate here of the sources of information used for the research carried out in this study. For the purpose of examining and analyzing the country’s national educational policies and strategies, and how they have been implemented during the period in question, this study will make use of a number of documentary sources. These will involve analysis of the following types of material: the official agenda of earlier governments, educational reports both official and unofficial, statistical data produced by local and international bodies, certain other international studies such as PISA and TIMSS carried out by the OECD and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), and also the AKP’s own party programmes and regulations issued since 2002. For example, while the party’s 8th Development Plan aimed to increase secondary education enrolment levels to 75% by the end of its mandate in 2005, the Official Agenda of the 60th Government aimed to boost secondary education enrolment to 90%.

The AKP government aimed to increase pre–school enrolment to 50% in accordance with its 9th Development Plan and the Official Agenda of the 60th Government; likewise, the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of National Education aimed at raising the pre–school enrolment rate to 70% by 2014. Circular Note No 53 on promoting pre–school education was issued on June 15th, 2009, highlighting the need to ensure that pre–school institutions worked at full capacity, that each elementary school had at least one pre–school grade and that empty school premises be used for pre–school education. Decree No. 652 covering the organization and functions of the Ministry of National Education made significant changes to the central structure of the Council of Higher Education in 2011.
1.2 Historical Consideration

Since the new Turkish state, the Republic of Turkey, was established in 1923 politics and society have largely accepted secularization and the subordination of Islam to politics. The process of secularization initiated by the Ottoman leadership in the first half of the 19th century had been made to be acceptable to the general population by virtue of being an endogenous phenomenon that took place under Islamic auspices. The reforms brought in at that time subsequently facilitated the task of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, in transforming the old Ottoman monarchy into a nation – state on the European model.

Throughout the early Republican period Kemalism stood as the official doctrine of the new Turkish state. However, when a multi – party political system was introduced in 1946 this changed the character of government in Turkey, and the Kemalist ideology seems to have suffered significant dilution under this new framework.

The Turkish Republic, however, transformed the earlier multi – religious and multi – ethnic Ottoman state exclusively along the lines of Turkish nationalism and Sunni Islam, which then became the twin pillars and sources of legitimacy for the Kemalist state. This hegemony of a clear Turkish ethnic identity combined with a religious homogeneity amounted to a policy designed both to strengthen territorial integrity and to form a new national identity. However, this political and religious ideology at the same time has contributed to fostering the anxieties that most trouble the Kemalists to this day, namely that Turkey may become socially and territorially fragmented along three main fault lines: laicists vs. Islamists (the constitutional dimension), Turkish vs. other minority nationa- lists (the ethnic dimension), and Sunnis vs. other Islamic doctrines, Christians and Jews (the religious dimension).

Turkey’s model of secularism has aimed to co – opt Sunni Islam, the branch of the religion followed by more than three quarters of the population. In effect, Sunni Islam has been nationalized, given that the state has pledged itself to financing and administering this faith exclusively. This means, however, that the state has not only set aside its obligation to remain neutral in religious matters, but has also created for itself a monopoly of interpretation of and control over Sunnism. As a result of all this, the state has politicized Islam, the purpose being to secularize the whole of Turkish society, homogenize the various religious communities (specifically in an attempt to “Sunnify” Islam) and marginalize all other identities, and by this means to secure Turkey’s territorial unity against other nationalist forces. The state has therefore propagated a republican, laicist
and ethno–nationalist (i.e. a “Turkifying”) state version of Islam. Thus, it has come about that the model of laicism adopted by the Kemalists has unintentionally made it easier for certain political parties and social groups to politicize Islam. Their aim has been not so much to make Turkey revert to being an Islamic state as simply to weaken the Kemalist monopoly on the interpretation of religion, to exploit anti–Western sentiment, to win votes from other ethnic groups within the state, and to end the Kemalist restrictions on religious freedoms.

Rather than promoting separate, conflicting worlds, then, the Kemalists and the Islamists have in fact enjoyed a symbiotic relationship in contemporary Turkey. This is a process which had its origins in the domestic political and socio–economic changes that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, and then in the years following the end of the Cold War. Eventually the evolution of a political Islam in Turkey under the banner of the Justice and Development Party (the AKP) and this party’s accession to power through the 2002 elections were factors that contributed significantly to the development of Turkey’s soft power.

Since Turkey has a highly centralized education system, the majority of reforms and change proposals originate at the national level. The decisions of policy–makers have often been influenced by global trends. Since the 1980s, neo–liberal policies have been embraced in the Turkish education system. The outcomes of the neo–liberal trend such as privatization and increases in parental contributions have been subject to heightened debates and substantial private criticism. An important aspect of this neo–liberal trend is monetization of education by an increasing amount of spending by parents. AKP government aims to increase the share of private schools in the primary education sector. For this purpose, the government proposed a number of measures to promote the establishment of private schools with the help of public funds.

The commercialization trends have also been observed in higher education. The government supports private enterprise through tax breaks and land grants. The declining public resources and lower quality education at public schools have led to an explosive increase in the numbers of private tutoring institutions preparing students for entrance exams to secondary and universities. Another concern is that the emphasis has shifted in education to providing the basic competencies required by the market economy. Instead of educating conscious citizens with humanist values, the schools are aiming at producing conservative entrepreneurs. Public education has come to be seen as an outdated concept and the notion that education is a service which should be bought by consumers has become prevalent.
Ever since the AKP, with its Islamist roots, achieved political power in November 2002 there has been fierce debate over the issue of the Imam – Hatip schools and compulsory religious courses in the state education system. At the same time the Party sought to promote a neo–liberal as well as a neo–conservative ideology in the education system, and did this through the 2004 reform and then through the introduction of elective religious courses in 2012. Moreover, the AKP after its 2002 victory at the polls set in train the process of reviving religious education in Turkey. Its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had emerged from the National Vision Movement, while other party members had graduated from the Imam – Hatip schools, which now expected that their negative image was about to undergo a change. Indeed, under the new government the number of students in the Imam – Hatip schools saw a threefold increase between 2003 and 2012, even though the number of schools remained virtually static.

Radical reform was introduced in 2012, when the Turkish education system underwent a major overhaul which also involved an improvement in the status of the Imam – Hatip schools. Under the new law, eight years of compulsory education now became twelve, and this twelve – year period was divided into three stages: four years of elementary school, four of middle school and then four more to complete the final stage of high school education. The new law provided for the re–opening of the Imam – Hatip middle schools. It also brought in a reorganization of university entrance and placement procedures, according to which Imam – Hatip school graduates were now permitted to participate freely in all areas of university – level study.

Together with the lifting of the headscarf ban in schools and universities in 2014, these reforms became the subject of heated debate in the country since they were seen as a threat to secularism. Criticism of the reforms went further than that, however, for many educational researchers noted that the school curriculum was being progressively Islamised. In the secondary schools in 2012 two optional courses, Civic Education and Agriculture, were removed from the curriculum, while three religious courses, on the Qur’an, the Life of the Prophet Mohammad and Fundamentals of Religion, were introduced. These latter were optional in principle, but according to several reports they became in effect compulsory later on, given that in many cases they are the only optional courses available and students need to take them in order to gain the necessary credits. An increasing degree of religiosity in education may also be observed through other developments. For example, some Ministry of Education staff have been replaced by others with a more religious outlook; more than 7000 religious education teachers have been appointed to a school system that has received a much smaller number of the
chemistry, physics and biology teachers that they need; some teachers have been penalized for teaching the theory of evolution in biology classes; students have been issued free copies of religious books; many more teachers with a religious education background have been appointed to management posts in schools; and religious references have increasingly been seen in school textbooks.72

Mehmet Tarhan thinks, Turkey at the present time is going through a large-scale experience of “post-Kemal self-discovery”. This is a movement that concerns itself not just with Islam itself, but with the potential that religion has for inculcating broad and high-level cognitive, emotional and ethical skills and qualities that can enable people to cope better with the chaos of the social, economic and ideological upheavals of our contemporary world.73 The primary research questions that underlie this study are, (a) How and in what framework Islam began to penetrate the Turkish Educational System after 1980? and (b) How the new educational system, after the penetration of Islam, operates as an agent and tool of change in Turkey, especially after 2003?

2. Current State of Research

According to Mehmet Öznur Alkan, who has written about modernization, the birth of official state ideology and the educational process in the Ottoman Empire of the 19th century, the history of education has been as it were a sort of subheading of political history. For changes on the political scene very quickly found an echo in the world of education. Educational institutions served not just as places for developing socialization along with knowledge and skills but at the same time as establishments in which official ideologies were transmitted very effectively. Alkan has made a detailed study of the school textbooks of this period, and he has explained how the Tanzimat era, that of Abdülhamid II and that of the Second Constitution were years in which, respectively, the ideologies of Ottomanism, Islamism and Nationalism were transmitted through education.74

Mustafa Gündüz has focused on the socio-cultural origins of Turkish educational reforms and on the intellectual origins of the late Ottoman intellectuals. According to this writer, the modern Turkish state and society have been influenced by reforms made to the education system. In his paper, Mustafa Gündüz analyses the ideological origins of education reforms during the Second Constitution Period, and he presents a study of the traditional primary schools known as the sıbyan mektepleri, the medrese, the Palace schools known as the Enderun mektebi and the establishment of new schools and a new education
system. He also offers an analysis of courses taught at the newly opened military and medical schools.\textsuperscript{75}

Mustafa Gündüz has also focused on the main goals of the Republic’s reforms to education as well as on the relationship between nation – building, citizenship, education and the origins of Kemalist thought; additionally, he tells us about some educators and their particular areas of influence during the early Republican period. Mustafa Gündüz thinks the leadership of the Republican era saw education as the most important basis and vehicle of transformation in order to create a modern state to forge new values and new ideologies. During the Second Constitution, the policy of Turkification pursued by the İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (the Committee of Union and Progress) amounted to a project of nation – building, transforming the whole empire into a nation – state and aiming to preserve the unity of the empire under a dominant Turkish national core. Education was used by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) not only for nation – building but also for the centralization of education itself. Turkish pedagogues conveyed a blueprint for the new society they felt empowered to create. At the same time, they cultivated relationships among the basic conceptual referents of Kemalism, which included nationalism, freedom, duty, equality, society – orientedness, rationality and secularism.\textsuperscript{76}

Mustafa Öcal, has described the historical development of today’s Imam – Hatip high schools, which represents the foundation of every kind of religious education and instruction in Turkey. According to Mustafa Öcal, Imam and Hatip schools were opened for the first time in the history of the Republic in accordance with the commanding decree of Article 4 of the Law on the Unification of Education, one of the revolutionary laws of the time. Even though the Law on the Unification of Education was passed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1924, the Imam and Hatip schools began their educational and instructional activities with effect from the 1923–1924 teaching year. Another matter highlighted by Mustafa Öcal is the systematic prohibition of religious education and instruction and the pressure and interference placed upon religious life. Öcal further refers to the negative impacts arising from all this – including to the fact that there was a dearth of religious functionaries available to perform funeral prayers. A consequence of this was the rise of false religious ideas and orders. In the study he has carried out, Mustafa Öcal offers a detailed account of the re – opening, with the transition to multi – party political life in the Turkey of the 1950s, of the Imam – Hatip schools and high schools and of all the developments that have taken place in these schools up to the present day.\textsuperscript{77}