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**“The Battle for the Ottoman Legacy:  
The Construction of a Postmodern, Neo-Ottoman Identity in Turkey”**

**Abstract Only – Work in Progress**

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This paper explores the uses of history in shaping contemporary Muslim identities by looking at the use of Ottoman history in constructing the identity put forth by the AK Party, the Islamic party currently in power in Turkey. The development of this uniquely *neo-Ottoman* identity created by the AK Party and its predecessors is explored, particularly as an alternative to the official form of secular modernity imposed by the Kemalist Turkish state. Rather than being a reactionary group dedicated to the restoration of a *premodern* system, this examination of Ottoman history and neo-Ottoman rhetoric reveals that the AK Party owes at least as much to contemporary human rights discourse as it does to Ottoman history. The result is a new form of political Islam with a distinctly *postmodern* character, which is opposed both to Kemalist modernism and more typical forms of Islamism found in other countries. This study focuses on in-country interviews with journalists, academics, and senior political figures, as well as primary and secondary source print material in Turkish, English, and French. It is structured around three primary questions: “In what ways do the Islamically-oriented political movements of Turkey make reference to the Ottoman Empire for political purposes? How does invoking the Ottoman past in the construction of an identity relate to notions of modernity prevalent in Turkish society? To what extent are these claims of Ottoman continuity projections of contemporary human rights discourse onto the past, and what effects do they have?” Although significant aspects of this neo-Ottoman identity do not directly correspond to any specific historical realities that were operative during the Ottoman period, this does not damage the legitimacy of the project, which, for the first time, has created an essentially *postmodern* worldview which considers itself authentically Muslim and which has some degree of mass appeal.