

WHO IS A (GOOD) TURK?: THE IDEAL STUDENT IN TEXTBOOKS

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Turkey is going through a crucial transformation process. The sense of fear and insecurity that for many years has haunted our attitude to political questions, our views on education and textbooks, and even our everyday life has gradually weakened, and we have begun to think as self-confident individuals at ease with our problems. It is very encouraging to see the importance given to human rights in the steps being taken. On the other hand, we still witness examples of incompatibility with human rights and this formed the focus of discussion in previous panels. Fortunately, the need for change is accepted by a large number of people. Still, the question of "what kind of change?" has not yet been approached with necessary depth and maturity. In some cases, attempts have been made to create new truths by means of old ways of thinking, and the result is, naturally, unsound. In some other cases, we complain about not being able to find a firm foundation for the application of new ways of thinking.

The problems confronted in the reform process that the education system has now embarked upon, supported by civil organisations like the Turkish History Foundation, crystallise in the question "Who are we?" Who is included in the category defined as "Turk" in our school textbooks, and who is excluded? How are the differences between Turkish citizens handled? According to the textbooks, what sort of a world-view should good citizens possess, what and who should they fear, what should they avoid and who should they take seriously? In this paper, taking these questions as my point of departure, I will be analyzing the concepts of Turkishness and citizenship as they are taught at various levels in current textbooks.

First of all, I would like to read you some passages from a number of different textbooks. After that, I will discuss their relationship to such concepts as nation, culture and identity. I have arranged these passages in three groups.

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Group I:

"We are Turks and Atatürkists." (Yüksel et al. 2001, 57)

Task given in the music textbook: "To sing the national anthem in chorus." (Yener 2002, 5)

"Nationalism serves to create a unity that will protect our nation against external dangers, and will strengthen our state against external and internal threats." (Şenünver et al. 2001, 69)

"This nationalistic approach will protect our community against religious, sectarian, racial and class conflicts. It is the only way to ensure the peaceful progress and development of the Turkish nation on the path of civilisation." (Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi, 75).

"Denial of nationalism would mean the end of Turkish existence." (Mumcu and Su 2001, 251)

"Our nationalism embraces everyone who regards themselves sincerely as a Turk." (Mumcu and Su 2001, 275)

"Atatürk presented the Turkish History Thesis as a new approach. The gist of the thesis is: 'The history of the Turkish nation does not consist merely of Ottoman history as it has been related up to now. Turkish history is far older. The Turkish nation is a nation that has dispersed the light of culture to all other nations.' It was as a result of this thesis that our national history gained its true character. The most characteristic feature of the Turk is a free and independent lifestyle and the idea of world domination." (Şahin 2000: 138-139, my emphasis)

Group II:

"Our forefathers fought against the enemy. They shed their blood for their homeland. They died as martyrs. Our flag takes its colour from the colour of their blood." (Baraz and Kütük 1998, 28).

"If necessary, we will sacrifice our lives to defend our flag." (Tekişik 1999, 58).

"Every Turkish citizen is an indomitable volunteer soldier in our army in defence of the independence and integrity of our country." (Şenünver et al. 2002, 66).

"As the Turkish nation, we will willingly sacrifice our lives for our country." (Şenünver et al. 2002, 10)

"May our lives be sacrificed for our country!" (Balta 2002, 71)

"Love of the homeland and love of the flag is of great importance to the Turkish nation. Military service is viewed as a sacred duty." (Yılmaz and Yanıkoğlu 2002, 82)

"Military service means the responsibility to learn and perform the art of war in the defense of the Turkish homeland, Turkish independence and the Republic. This responsibility is set forth in special laws. Military service, the most exalted service to country and nation, accustoms and trains youth to true life. Anyone who fails to perform his military service is of no use to himself, his family or his country." (Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi, 20. My emphasis.)

Group III:

"It is the duty of us all for the future and security of our country to be aware of and alert to the external and internal elements that threaten it." (Kara and Kaman 2002, 53).

According to the high school Sociology textbook, a minority is "a social category differing in its characteristic features from the general social fabric and lacking equality of social rights with the majority." (Yamanlar 2000, 16).

"In recent years Turkey has been confronted with terrorist and separatist activities aimed at dividing the country on the basis of a 'separate race'. This movement, devoid of historical roots, although destined, like similar movements, to prove abortive, has great importance in showing how harmful the results of the games being played against our country may be. On the other hand, our citizens, in refusing to be taken in by these stratagems and acting in line with the clear recognition of the value and meaning of living in a state of unity and camaraderie have undermined all these activities, whether separatist or reactionary or destructive." (Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi, 97)

"According to the Lausanne Treaty, signed on 24 July 1923, there are no minorities in this country apart from the non-Muslim communities. For thousands of years, 95% of the Turkish population have shared the same destiny and have been kneaded in the same culture and the same aims." (Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi, 97)

"The recognition of different cultures can sometimes be harmful insofar as they can have a negative influence on the national culture." (Yamanlar 2002, 33)

These quotes are taken from textbooks ranging from primary one to the last year of high school. They are not presented in the context of the same lesson nor are they written by the same person. So what brings them together? One can give several answers to this question. First of all, they are connected to one another by being part of a national educational system which sees textbooks and curricula as one and the same thing. The curriculum, which is developed in a centralized way, is almost verbatim reproduced in textbooks, which makes textbooks almost identical with each other. But this is not the point I wish to discuss today. It was already touched upon this morning.

Another answer to the question "what brings these quotes together?" is simply students. And this is what I would like to focus on. All the students, in the course of their studies, read these quotes, or are supposed to have read them. My main question is this: Who is the ideal student as it is envisaged by the current education system? How will students who take these views seriously and internalise them define themselves? How will they think? How will they approach life?

Let us begin with the first group of quotes.

- 1) The first characteristic of the ideal student is a nationalistic world-view. A nationalism that is predominantly "Atatürkist," as in the slogan "Türküz, Atatürkçüyüz" (We are Turks; we are Atatürkists) is to be accepted as an

unquestioned ideology, or even, as pointed out by Tanıl Bora in the book *Human Rights Issues in Textbooks*, "a supra-ideological thought system" (Bora 68). "In other words, nationalism forms the doctrinal foundation of the national educational system." (Bora 87) A world-view other than nationalism or a world-view that could co-exist with nationalism is unimaginable in these textbooks. Furthermore, it is regarded as a great threat. (e.g. "A denial of nationalism means the end of Turkish existence.") Atatürk nationalism is, as declared in one of these books, the only way.

What sort of nationalism is this? From some of the statements it would appear to be a comprehensive nationalism based on common citizenship, as in the statement, "our nationalism embraces everyone who regards themselves sincerely as a Turk." This approach is compatible with article 66 in the Constitution which suggests that "Everyone who is bound to the Turkish state through citizenship ties is a Turk." On the other hand, other quotes reveal a kind of nationalism that is defined through ethnic or even racial criteria, as in the passage referring to the Turkish History Thesis. Although the approach proposed by the Turkish History Thesis, an approach that dominated the official view in the 1930s, has been scientifically invalidated and the concepts on which it rested (for example, "race" or the "nation existing from eternity") have been completely abandoned, one can find examples of its use in the current textbooks, revealing an essentialist approach to nationalism. As Tanıl Bora points out "the nationalistic approach propounded in the textbooks oscillates between an attitude that could be defined as 'racial' or 'ethnic-cultural' and a 'political' nationalism based on citizenship." (Bora 71). Apparently no contradiction is perceived between these two approaches to nationalism and both are to be found in the same textbook, or even on the same page.

- 2) When we look at the second group of quotes, we find another very important aspect of the nationalism that is expected of students. Here, the ideal Turkish student emerges as a "soldier." It would thus appear that the idea of the "ideal student" is limited to boys. Moreover, this approach defines first class citizenship through soldiering, and thus associating it with male citizenship. The definition of military service I referred to above is very important in this respect. Here, military service is defined not so much as the responsibility of the citizen but as a noble duty performed for oneself, one's family and one's country. Thus the concept of military service is removed from the political/legal context (as a duty of the male citizen) to a social/cultural context defined by the individual's relationship

with his own life, his family and his environment. Behind this context lies the idea of the "military-nation" that forms one of the main tenets of the Turkish History Thesis. The concept of the "military-nation" is formed and reinforced in the textbooks by slogans such as "Mehmetçik knows no obstacles" (Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi, 42). ("Mehmetçik" is the Turkish equivalent of GI Joe or Tommy Atkins.)

We have to ask ourselves how a student who has taken these ideas seriously and formed his attitude to life on the basis of such principles will feel when, for example, compulsory military service is replaced by a professional army. In this new environment, will he, or ought he, to feel that he is of no use to anyone? Similarly, what should be the feelings of a young person who, under the present system, does not or cannot do military service? For example, is it intended that young women who are taught this lesson should be given the message that because they cannot perform this sacred duty they are automatically second-class citizens of no use to themselves or to anyone else? This does not, of course, refer solely to women. It also creates discrimination against men who do not or cannot perform military service. The ground is laid for young men who, for physical reasons, sexual orientation or other reasons do not perform military service to feel in some way deficient and useless, and for others to judge them in the same way. Moreover, this attitude implies that the life of a successful and useful citizen begins with the performance of his military service and extols the qualities gained in the performance of that duty. The belief that the principles and attitudes governing life in the military should also govern civilian life creates the concept of an ideal society composed of militarised, subservient, passive and unquestioning individuals. It is obvious that this raises important questions as regards human rights.

This militaristic attitude of defining the ideal student as a good soldier also extols violence in the act of killing or dying. As Semih Gemalmaz points out in his contribution to Human Rights Issues in Textbooks, "the exaltation of dying leads to the inevitable but generally unacknowledged recognition of the 'right to kill'" (Gemalmaz, 38-39).

- 3) An examination of the third group of quotes shows the construction of "Turkishness" in relation to its various "other"s. All the quotes reflect the idea of a homogeneous nation representing a single race and a single culture. According to the textbooks, any acknowledgment that the Turkish nation includes different races amounts to separatism. The first problem here lies in the term 'race' itself, since we know that this term no longer has any scientific credibility.¹ The use of "race" in an uncritical way (i.e. as

a given) in textbooks is liable to mislead the students. "Ethnicity" as it is used in the social sciences, would have been more appropriate in this context. But, naturally, the question of terminology is not the only problem posed by these quotes. They define the Turkish nation as a homogeneous entity characterised by a single ethnicity, in which any reference to differences is regarded as a threat. Thus Turkishness is presented as being based not on belonging or citizenship but on ethnicity. This is in direct contradiction with the Article 66 of the Constitution.

While Muslim citizens of Turkey who regard themselves outside of the Turkish ethnicity are seen as a threat, the non-Muslim citizens are not even included in this definition of nationality. These citizens, defined as "non-Muslim elements," represent the 5% not included amongst those "who have been kneaded for thousands of years in the same culture and the same destiny." Accordingly, their existence is accepted but their belonging is denied. This ethnicized conception of the nation does not recognize non-Muslim citizens as fellow nationals. Just as important is the negative nature of their definition: i.e. as non-Muslims. This attitude leads not only to a dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims, but to the consideration of both groups as homogeneous. While the Muslims remain free of religious, cultural, ethnic, or other differences, the Greeks, Armenians and Jews are all identified under the same negative category of the "non-Muslim." It is quite obvious that in this respect the "ideal student" can only be a Muslim student.

Another product of the attitude represented by these quotes is the xenophobic student, the student who regards all foreigners as a threat. "The current textbooks arouse no interest in the outside world. On the contrary, they portray the outside world as "alien" and "threatening" (Bora 78). Semih Gemalmaz draws our attention to the same point (p. 31) Instead of teaching solidarity and cooperation between nations, they preach the view that "there is not a single nation on the planet that is not marked by enmity towards the Turks." (Gemalmaz, 47). Even cultural influences are regarded as threatening and to be avoided.

In short, the ideal student is a nationalist person with an essentialist understanding of culture and identity, (see Çötüksöken 2004 for an in depth discussion of essentialism), who, even if a civilian, has internalized militarism, who regards any sort of diversity with suspicion, who sees no differences between his/her Muslim colleagues and who regards his/her non-Muslim colleagues as categorically different from him/herself. According to the ideal student, Turkey is surrounded by enemies and love of one's country is synonymous with dying for it. As Kenan Çayır suggests, "In several examples

we see a leap from 'love of one's country' to 'fighting and dying for one's country' (100). Instead of declaring that 'we love our country, we want to live for our country, we will work to bring peace and tranquillity to our country, we will create a democratic way of life, we will fulfil our responsibilities as a citizen', we talk of hostility and war, and in doing so we ignore the concept of democracy that should be disseminated through education."

What is problematic about this framework? And what can be done? Let me conclude by making a few brief statements. Recent years have witnessed very important changes in the social sciences. For example, disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, together with multi-disciplinary fields such as nationalism studies, have felt the need to redefine themselves with reference to basic concepts such as culture and identity. The old concept of a homogeneous and static (unchanging) culture that embraced everyone within its own well-defined frontiers is now utterly obsolete. Anthropologists now discuss cultures in terms of their dynamism, flexibility, diversity and fluidity. They no longer talk of cultural characteristics "from time immemorial" but rather the dynamism of cultural influences and historical cultural transformations. In the same way, the term "identity" is also questioned. It is no longer regarded as something innate, based on biology, but, quite on the contrary, a category that is being continually redefined. None of us possess a single, fixed "identity." We choose between a number of different identities and redefine ourselves with respect to new identity criteria. As sociologist Cynthia Cockburn (2004) points out, all these definitions and the lines we draw around identities are first of all formed "in our head." That is what makes change possible.

A similar process has culminated in a redefinition of the term "nation." Social scientists seem to agree on a basic premise: it wasn't the nation that created nationalism, but rather nationalism that created the nation (Gellner). As Benedict Anderson (1991) says, the nation is, in effect, "an imagined community," and it is only in the last two hundred years that this imagination has been possible. In other words, there are no nations that have existed for hundreds or thousands of years, because "nation" is a new identity category and a form of categorisation closely connected with the system of nation-state in which we now live.

In short, unless, in our efforts to reform education in Turkey we fail to combine a utilisation of the discussions on the subject of human rights with due consideration of the views and findings that have transformed the social sciences and the humanities in the last twenty years, we will find it very difficult indeed to question and modify the essentialist, nationalist and militarist approaches that dominate our current textbooks.

The greater the number of sources on which our new educational philosophy is based the richer, the more nourishing, the more exciting it will be. This symposium offers a number of papers on new developments in the educational sphere, new ways of thought and new practices. The Human Rights in School Textbooks Project based on the active and voluntary participation of hundreds of people, and the international experiences we will have the opportunity of hearing in the course of this symposium offer exciting opportunities of coming to terms with "the lines in our heads" (Cockburn 2004) and slowly breaking them down.

ENDNOTE

- 1 See statement on this point by the American Anthropological Association. <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm>

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