A tale of ambiguity: citizenship, nationalism and democracy in Turkey

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ABSTRACT. We argue that historically the official Turkish nationalism and citizenship regime have been marked by an ambiguity that arises from the simultaneous existence of – and repeatedly occurring swings between – the ethno-centric and civic-political understandings of citizenship. We also suggest that the concept of territoriality, which took precedence over other factors in the creation of a new state in 1923, has functioned as a hegemonic reference in the official conceptualisations of the Turkish nation and self. The territorial focus, over time, has been conflated with the ethnic conceptualisations of the nation: both become the underlining elements of the discourse of official nationalism in Turkey, and are utilised in the successive reformulations of citizenship into the 2000s. Through the analysis of schoolbooks and curricula, we further argue that the major oscillations in nationalism nevertheless coincided with the ruptures that characterised the making of modern Turkey: modernisation, democratisation, globalisation and Europeanisation.

KEYWORDS: citizenship; democratisation; education; globalisation; modernisation; nationalism; schoolbooks

Introduction

One of the significant accomplishments of Turkish modernity is its creation of unity within diversity through republican citizenship. However, significant ambiguities have been embedded in the historical construction and unfolding of citizenship discourse and regime in modern Turkey. As revealed by various studies focusing on citizenship, nationalism and nationhood in Turkey, these ambiguities have arisen in the existing discrepancies between how citizenship has been approached and conceptualised in the constitutive texts, and the practice, perception and implementation of citizenship (Kadıoglu 1998: 31; Yeğen 2004: 55). Education is one of the significant sites where the embedded ambiguities of citizenship discourse and regime of modern Turkey can best be observed. In this article, we will provide a discussion of citizenship in Turkey by working through the analysis of school textbooks and curricula in reference to wider socio-
political events. We will delve into the complexity of the language of Turkish nationalism, and delineate the continuities as well as the changes in this language in order to provide insight into the nature and the reconceptualisations of citizenship in Turkey. The local, regional and global developments and changes in fact make an analysis of citizenship necessary in the Turkish context; moreover, such a discussion of citizenship will serve to further the understanding and analysis of modernity in Turkey.

We argue that the official Turkish nationalism and the citizenship regime\(^1\) that has been built upon it have historically been marked by an ambiguity that arises from the simultaneous existence of – and repeatedly occurring swings between – the ethno-centric and civic-political understandings of citizenship. We also suggest that the concept of territoriality, which took precedence over other factors in the creation of a new state in 1923, has functioned as a hegemonic reference in the official conceptualisations of the Turkish nation and self. The territorial focus, over time, has been conflated with the ethnic conceptualisations of the nation; both have become the underlining elements of the discourse of official nationalism in Turkey, and have been utilised as such in the successive reformulations of citizenship into the 2000s. Nevertheless, the major oscillations in Turkish nationalism have coincided with the ruptures that have characterised the making of modern Turkey – modernisation, democratisation, globalisation and Europeanisation.

In this article, we provide an analysis of the official Turkish nationalism and citizenship regime by concentrating on public education in Turkey, throughout the history of the republic, taking the years in which the ruptures of democratisation, globalisation and Europeanisation have occurred as the main turning points. Public mass education, besides being a mechanism for the socialisation and disciplining of populations, is also an instrument for creating social change and realising the process of nation-building (Gellner 1983; Weber 1976). In countries where state-centric curriculum development and textbook production or authorisation is accepted practice, textbooks and national curricula are the transmitters of officially selected and organised knowledge (Goodson 1987; Meyer et al. 1992) and are among the sources that can be used to analyse the political and social order. Thus, we will focus here on the schoolbooks and curricula that have been officially designed and authorised for primary education, which by virtue of being compulsory reflect mass education in Turkey.\(^2\) In doing so, we will offer firstly a framework for the analysis of the socio-political history of Turkey, and secondly a discussion on nation-state building and the formation of ‘state-centric modernity’ in Turkey by focusing on the schoolbooks and curricula that have been used in the late 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Thirdly, we will set out the changes and continuities in the years following the transition to multi-party politics. Fourthly, the years in which globalisation and Europeanisation processes started to affect Turkey and became intensified – the years after 1980 up to the present day – will be analysed in detail.
The making of modern Turkey has been conditioned by what de Ferro calls ‘the will to (Western) civilisation’ (1995). The early republican ruling elite accepted the universal validity of Western modernity as the way of building modern Turkey, and abided by the Ottoman experience with social engineering. The making of Turkey was a project of modernity that was premised upon the epistemic and moral dominance of the West. According to Mardin, such a project of modernity involved a set of transitions: (i) the transition in the political system of authority from personal rule to impersonal rules and regulations; (ii) the shift in understanding the order of the universe from divine law to positivist and rational thinking; (iii) the shift from a community founded upon the ‘elite – people cleavage’ to a ‘populist-based’ community; and (iv) the transition from a religious community to a nation-state (2006b).

In this respect, the republican ruling elite undertook a rapid modernisation effort carried out through reforms from above. The intention was to ‘reach the level of Western civilisation’ by establishing its political, economic and ideological prerequisites, such as the creation of an independent nation-state, the fostering of industrialisation and the construction of a secular and modern national identity. The practices of the strong-state tradition (based on the state acting as the privileged and sovereign subject, assuming a top-down modernisation of society) and national developmentalism, as well as the idea of organic society (based on a division of labour among associations assigned with duties serving the societal good at large) had been embraced as the means of rapidly reaching the level of contemporary civilisation. In addition to these, the concept of citizenship – with an emphasis on universal suffrage rights and an ethical commitment to the duty of carrying the civilisational motto of the new republic – has been the defining element of modern Turkey.

The making of modern Turkey continues today, and over time it has involved a number of significant ruptures (Keyman 2008). The first was the transition to parliamentary democracy in 1946–50. Despite frequent regime breakdowns and significant democratic deficits, the history of modern Turkey has been, and remains, a process of modernisation that entails a significant reference to the question of democratisation. Turkey’s exposure to globalisation in the 1980s led to a new rupture, and since then globalisation has constituted the world-historical context of the transformation process of Turkey. It has brought into existence the squeeze of ‘the national’ between global forces and local dynamics. Thus, since the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, the process of modernisation involved not only the question of democratisation but also a reference to globalisation. In 2000, Turkey faced another rupture. At the Helsinki Summit of December 1999, the country was granted candidate status for European Union (EU) membership. Since then, Turkey has been undergoing a process of European transformation, covering
almost all areas of the governing structure, and of state – society and individual interactions.

This process has been a continuous, multi-dimensional and complex one, insofar as it comprises:

(a) From 1923 to the present: the process of modernisation (involving the formation of nation-state, the rationalisation of political authority, the expansion of capitalist relations, industrialisation and urbanisation, as well as individual and civil rights and freedoms.

(b) From 1950 to the present: the process of democratisation (involving procedural democracy with parliamentary system of rule, consolidation and deepening of democracy through the development of the language and practice of rights and freedoms).

(c) From 1980 to the present: the process of globalisation (involving the squeeze of ‘the national’ – the nation-state, national economy, national identity – between global forces and local dynamics, the rise and prevalence of neoliberal economic policies, discourses of minimal and effective state and free-market rationality, as well as the notions of identity/difference).

(d) From 2000 to the present: the process of Europeanisation (involving the process of European transformation, which covers all areas of the governing structure, state – society and individual interactions, democratic and cosmopolitan social models, normative ideals, cultural diffusion, institutional adaptation and policy adaptations).

Moreover, as a result of this multi-dimensional process of transformation, different political cleavages – each corresponding to the different dimensions of modernisation – have evolved. These political cleavages can be categorised as follows:

(a) From 1923 to the present: the centre – periphery cleavage (leading to the negotiation of politics with reference to secularism and modernisation).

(b) From 1950 to the present: the left – right cleavage (giving rise to the concepts of democracy, equality, liberty and social justice).

(c) From 1980 to the present: the global – national cleavage (focusing on how to respond to the economic, political and cultural effects of globalisation on the nation-state and national identity).

(d) From 2000 to the present: the identity – citizenship cleavage (concerning the increasing importance of identity-based claims to recognition, and whether or not these claims can be responded to within the larger context of citizenship rights and freedoms).

In this sense, it can be suggested that the contemporary political and institutional structure of Turkey is characterised by the concurrent and intertwined existence of modernisation, democratisation, globalisation and Europeanisation, which have been negotiated at the level of politics on the basis of the centre – periphery, left – right, global – national and identity –
citizenship cleavages. Of course, the growing complexity of Turkish modernity and politics as a result of these processes and cleavages has had important effects on Turkish nationalism in general, and on the way in which citizenship is conceptualised in education through school textbooks. Although there have recently been significant shifts towards a civic understanding of citizenship, as a way of responding to globalisation and identity claims, the ethnic component remains powerful. Despite these changes, citizenship in Turkey still involves an ambiguity: the simultaneous existence of ethnic and civic elements. Primary-school textbooks still reproduce, rather than overcome, such ambiguity.

Nation-state building and the making of state-centric modernity in Turkey: schoolbooks from the late 1920s to the 1940s

The primary-school textbooks of the late 1920s put specific emphasis on the territory of the new state, and portrayed Vatan (homeland) as the main signifier of the nation. Although the textbooks were not without references to ethnic elements, the emphasis on territory was one of the focal points of the Kemalist discourse together with other civic elements such as republican morality and duties. National identity was thus conceptualised primarily as a state/political identity. In this republican, duty-based design of citizenship, duties were defined as performing military service, internalising a Protestant work ethic and paying taxes, and they were deemed to exist not because of rights but because of love and indebtedness towards the territory – the homeland.

This territorial focus in the discourse of the textbooks is in line with the temporal order of state and nation formation in Turkey; the state, preceding the nation, tries to form the nation in congruence with its geographical borders. As stated in the passage, People’s Government: The Republic, published in the 1928 language reader, the nation was not the same as the communities that existed prior to the new state:

An independent individual in an independent society; the happiness of the individual besides the happiness of the society; an independent and happy national in a new and well-constituted nation; dear brother, this is the aim of your new government. (Emre 1928b: 97)

The goal of the new state was in fact to create a ‘new and well-constituted nation’. In this respect, the Turkish case resembles the historical trajectory of nation-building in France (Weber 1976). The realisation of such an imagined political community, defined along the territory of the state, required geographical awareness with respect to that territory (Anderson 1991). Mass education was treated as one of the instruments of instilling such awareness in the populations living within the borders of the new republic; the textbooks, as in the poem, Geography of the Homeland (published in a 1928 language reader), frequently argued that ‘one who does not know the geography of the homeland is not a Turk!’ (Emre 1928a: 10).
In the textbooks of the late 1920s, the emphasis on territory varied from inculcating geographical awareness and knowledge of the land to instilling historical awareness and emotional appeal, through utilising the narratives about the battles and self-sacrifices of the War of Independence. Passages like, The Child of the Homeland, which narrated the story of a child sacrificing his life to protect the homeland (İçsel and İçsel 1929c: 213), worked to shift ‘finite human experience from the sphere of the mundane and contingent to the realm of the eternal’ (Tamir 1997: 236). The citizenship discourse was structured through both the awareness and love of the land and the notion of repaying a debt. Duties were linked not to rights but to the love and indebtedness one was supposed to feel towards the territory of the new state. Anatolia was called ‘the homeland of martyrs’ (Emre 1928a: 172); the emphases on self-sacrifices made all the living, and all who will be born, indebted to the martyrs and thus to the homeland. Death was glorified in this context ‘in an attempt to counter the fear of the moment of death itself’, with a view to mobilise the society for self-sacrifices (Tamir 1997: 234). As can also be seen in the passage, Little Soldier, citizens were imbued with the duty of serving the homeland, the most fundamental element being military service (İçsel and İçsel 1929b: 205–7). This formulation made an essential differentiation between women and men’s status as citizens: not allowed to fulfil the primary duty of citizenship, women were turned into second-class citizens.3

In the textbooks of the late 1920s, besides military service, citizens were also urged to assume the Protestant work ethic and pay tax. All citizens, out of their love and indebtedness towards the homeland, were supposed to work vigorously throughout their lives. The language readers called upon children to wake up early and perform their duty of ‘working for the homeland’, which was in this case defined as going to school (Emre 1929: 65–6). Paying taxes, the other fundamental duty of the citizen, was required for managing the expenses of the government – a necessity for the nation to govern itself.4 Because the abolishment of Islam from the public sphere and the secularisation of national identity required the construction of a new framework of action and behaviour, an attempt was made in the textbooks to define republican morality. A new morality scheme, serving the needs of the secular republic, was constructed and introduced into the textbooks to replace that of the ancien regime. Being hard-working, well-mannered, docile, obedient, trustworthy, brave, heroic and sacrificial were presented as the characteristics to be internalised.5

The textbooks of the late 1920s were not without ethno-cultural references. Although used sparingly, racial ideas, in the form of racial purity and eugenics, were evident. In a history textbook published in 1930, it was argued that ‘the lineage [soy], as well as the health, of the sultans who mingled with women not from our breed – from foreign nations – was corrupted’ (Nasır and Siyavuşgil 1930: 131–2). In the passage, Improvement of the Generation, published in a 1929 language reader, the words generation, nation and race were used interchangeably:
For the improvement of the race, first of all, what needs to be trained are the bodies of young girls. The health of young girls has the utmost importance for their nation . . . when they become mothers, with their health or sicknesses, they will become the source of power, health or disease for the next generations. (İçsel and İçsel 1929c: 44–8)

However, it was the introduction of the officially formulated Turkish History Thesis in the early 1930s that brought about a discursive shift in the textbooks, and solidified the ethnic axis of the nationalist discourse. The thesis was formed between 1929 and 1932, with its public articulation made at the Turkish History Congress of 1932 (Ersanlı-Behar 1992). It was argued that the Turkish nation was one of the oldest on earth (Kültür Bakanlığı 1936: 11, 12, 69) – originating in central Asia, migrating to different parts of the world and bringing civilisation along with it. As stated in the fourth-grade history textbook published after the introduction of the Turkish History Thesis to mass education:

Today we live in our genuine homeland called ‘Turkey’. Turkish is our genuine language. We are called Turks. Every people living around, in every corner of our homeland are our real brothers/sisters . . . Because their ancestors are also Turks, they think the same, they feel the same. They are similar to each other, they fight together against the enemy, and they die together. When these are considered, shouldn’t they be regarded brothers/sisters of each other? Thus we call the brothers/sisters living in the Turkish Homeland and who have consciousness of themselves, who know their friends and enemies, all together, the Turkish Nation. This nation is the oldest and greatest nation of the world. (Ibid.: 12; emphases in the original)

The definition of nation was made by referring to both the ethnic origins and the territory of the republic. These references were reinforced with a discourse on enemies and homogeneity – consciousness about the existing enemies, fighting and dying in this respect, and unity in feelings and thoughts.

As part of the new official nationalist discourse on the nation’s origins, the newly defined ‘real motherland of Turks’ (Kültür Bakanlığı 1936: 77) – central Asia – added an ethno-cultural component to the citizenship discourse. At the same time, the territory of the republic was reconstructed as the genuine homeland of Turks:

For a homeland as beautiful as the genuine homeland of the Turkish Nation one can risk everything . . . The value of a homeland also depends on how ancient it is. Because only then would it be a place that has been lived upon, blended with the bones and blood of the nation, and its land processed with the efforts of the nation . . . Let’s explain since its time has come, Anatolia and Thrace have belonged to Turks since the ancient and dark ages of history. When Turks found this place, it had no owners, and they moved into this land from its eastern gates, and through settling and creating the first constructions, they made it prosperous. (Ibid.: 67–8)

As stated by the passage, The Turkish Nation and Homeland Before the Great Revolution (cited earlier), since pre-historical times Anatolia had been populated by Turks migrating from central Asia. It was further argued in the fifth-grade textbook that because Anatolia was ‘rescued’ from the Byzantines, the ‘pure Turkish language and culture had re-flourished’ in these lands (Kültür Bakanlığı 1937: 46–7).
This rewriting of history was an attempt to create an identity divested of Muslim and Ottoman influences. Besides duties and modern behaviour roles, a myth of origins and ethnic attachments was offered as the basis for solidarity in the new nation. Citizenship was increasingly ethnically defined as the geographical territory of the Republic was discursively constructed as ethnically Turkish. Also, with this new configuration of history – through presentations of civilisation as belonging originally to the Turkish nation, and the concerns of Western modernity (such as progress and productiveness) as the national characteristics of Turks – what is modern was shown not as Western but indeed as authentic, and thereby national.

**Turkey in the aftermath of World War II: continuity and change**

The end of World War II ushered in a new era throughout the world. The international context has been transformed. The liberal global economy runs alongside a discourse of democratisation and the older narrative of national developmentalism. In this context, Turkey began to modify its political-economic system by accepting societal demands coming mainly from rural-dominant sections of the populace. This created a space for market liberalisation and transformed the single-party political system into a multi-party parliamentary one. The period between 1946 and 1950 proved to be an important rupture in Turkish modernity as the country made its transition to democracy. This was followed by the market liberalisation of the 1950s. Thereafter, Turkey consolidated its national developmentalism through import substitution, state industrialisation and a planned economy (Aydın 2005).

Unlike Latin American and south European countries, where the transition from authoritarianism to democracy was realised through a radical break with the old regime, Turkey’s experience involved a peaceful transition – with a movement of ‘reform’ in the single-party political system (Özbudun 2000: 13–4). Parliamentary democracy became and remained an accepted and dominant ‘political norm of governance’, even if it faced three regime breakdowns – in 1960, 1971 and 1980. However, democracy did not become fully consolidated, and its prospects were limited to majoritarian and functionalist practices. The transition failed to close the gap between centre and periphery that has defined the nature of Turkish politics (Mardin 2006a: 313–4), and it gave rise to the emergence of the left – right cleavage that remains one of the country’s most significant political divisions. While the international context was being increasingly framed by third-worldism, the 1968 student movements and the discourses of justice and freedom (Sunar 2004), the left in Turkey found a suitable platform to function as one of the main axes of national politics.

In the schoolbooks of these years, the emphasis on ethnic elements in the reconstruction of citizenship discourse decreased with the abandonment of the most extreme claims of the Turkish History Thesis. However, the focus on the
ethnic origins of national identity in the mythical motherland of central Asia persisted. The emphases on language and national character – the latter defined with respect to ancestors – were replete in the textbooks. At the same time, the geographical territory of the state continued to be imagined as ethnically Turkish since time immemorial (Oktay 1958: 32, 103; Unat and Su 1954: 86). The textbooks of the 1950s also focused extensively on the birth of Islam, as well as on the services of Turks to Islamic civilisation, locating them within the boundaries of state- and war-making. The Kemalist historiography of the immediate past – the narrative of the late Ottoman times, the independence movement and the early republican years – was not challenged, yet the Ottoman and Islamic past was restored. Although secularism was still a part of the nationalist discourse in the 1970s, later in the decade, with the introduction of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis into the textbooks, religious cum-Islamic component of national identity was solidified. The Synthesis was attained through the invention of similarities between the pagan religion of ancient Turks and Islam, as well as between the culture of ancient Turks and the Islamic civilisation. This discourse, in addition to glorifying Islam, presented it as an integral part of Turkishness. The textbooks continued to signify central Asian ethnic origins, yet ethnic continuity in Anatolia was no longer traced back to time immemorial. It was argued that Anatolia became ‘a Turkish country’ from the eleventh century onwards (Sanır et al. 1978: 219).

The transition to democracy did not bring any real change to the holistic and statist nature, and the duty-based design, of citizenship in Turkey. Alongside ethnic references, the basis of citizenship, as in the former textbooks, was generalised as ‘serving the homeland’. In the words of a poem published in a 1949 life sciences textbook:

As you say that you are a Turk, rejoice.
You are indebted to serve the homeland (Akısan 1949: 30)

In this republican citizenship model, the most fundamental service was presented as protecting the homeland. In addition to military service, the textbooks published in this period continued to present ‘working’ as one of the foremost citizenship duties (Ötüken 1959: 6, 7, 19; İrge 1953: 25, 28).

References to raids and Turkish warriors as the main element of the nation’s history and glory existed side by side in the textbooks with arguments in favour of democracy and peace. In addition to numerous examples of and calls for heroism and martyrdom, underlining the indebtedness of the citizen to the homeland, a poem published in the 1952 language reader made a different call:

For the homeland one can die
But you are indebted to live (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1952: 29)

For the Homeland was an excerpt from a poem originally written by Tevfik Fikret, although still duty-driven, it differed from the general lines of the
discourse on homeland. Instead of asking for the sacrifice of lives, it made a call to live.

However, it is not possible to find such exceptions in later years. The textbooks of the 1970s stick to the statist and sacrificial template for citizenship, linking the so-called national characteristics and duties. Presenting hard work as an intrinsic element of Turkishness, and explaining it through the motto ‘being useful to the society is a Turk’s main goal’, they actually underlined the duty to adopt a Protestant work ethic and pointed to the primacy of society over the individual (Sanır et al. 1978: 227). Another national characteristic – bravery – referred to the duty of protecting the homeland. While explaining this characteristic of Turkishness, it was argued that ‘for the homeland, nation, flag and rights, the Turk knows how to die willingly and without hesitating’ (ibid.). Sacrificing lives to protect the homeland, the nation and its symbols was not only a duty, but in fact a defining feature of being a Turk.

The passage, The Strong Ties Connecting Turks To Each Other, in the fourth-grade social sciences textbook, combined territorial, ethnic and civic elements to conceptualise the nation as the following:

(a) We all live on the same land . . . Our ancestors possessed this land, shedding their blood, and sacrificing. We all together make our living from this land. We love this homeland more than anything; protecting it is our primary duty.

(b) We share the same culture. We share the same tradition and customs. The outward appearance of our houses, the materials they are made of and the order inside are similar. So too are our mosques, our life styles, our feelings, our folk songs, our sazs [a traditional musical instrument], and our folk dances, all of which differ from those of other nations.

(c) We are united by a shared ideal. All of us want to live free and independently. We share the goal of reaching the level of the most advanced nations . . .

(d) We share the same history . . . Our ancestors and brothers, in order to save our existence and honour, fought side by side, shed their blood, and did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives. For centuries, they were neighbours, fellow countrymen, brothers-in-arms . . .

(e) The symbol of our unity is our flag. The flag is the symbol of a nation’s honour, unity and cooperation. Showing respect to the flag means showing respect to our homeland, nation and ancestors. (Sanır et al. 1978: 229–30)7

As seen in the first entry, the emphasis on territory as well as the love of it and duty to protect it continued to be important themes. The indebtedness that is supposed to be felt towards the homeland is linked to the country being a land of martyrs, and sacrifice for the homeland is underlined. The emphasis on territory is followed by an emphasis on shared culture. The definition of culture does not refer to political attachments and processes; instead, it is
described as a way of life, and linked to traditions, customs and folk elements. Mosques are also included among these elements. A specific emphasis is placed on the similarity of lifestyles and feelings as representing the shared culture. Such a definition of culture, besides its religious connotations, makes a totalising claim on citizens’ lives. While the third entry – the existence of a shared ideal – is a civic conception, the later additions again stress ethnic elements. The new symbol of ‘shared history’ utilises the myth of the ancestors, and again emphasises the territory and sacrifices made for it. The last item introduces the flag as a symbol of unity, and again draws upon the ancestors.

Turkey and the process of globalisation: schoolbooks of the 1980s and 1990s

The 1980 military coup in Turkey brought about wholesale political and economic restructuring. Civilian rule was restored in 1983, yet the new constitution of 1982 strictly limited the political rights and liberties of individuals, as well as their social and economic rights. It was also in this period that the processes of globalisation started to affect the country. Throughout the 1980s, the discourses of a minimal state and free-market rationality gained increasing strength in Turkey. The abandonment of the import-substitution mode of development, the opening up of the economy and the embracing of neoliberal economic policies brought sweeping changes. In these years, Turkey was marked by the growth and strengthening of civil society, the revival of Islamism and the escalation of the Kurdish conflict (Keyman and İçduyu 2005: 7). As globalisation placed the nation-state in a vulnerable position, the state elites made increasing use of nationalism – now defined as ‘Atatürk nationalism’ and differentiated from the nationalisms of the circles in the left and right – to secure the primacy of the state in the face of rising societal actors. This ‘authentic version’ of nationalism found its place in the introduction and general principles of the new constitution, and was used as a defensive measure against the disintegration of the organic homogenous society that had been sought (but never actually realised) since the foundation of the republic.

The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, which introduced a new religious – ethnic rewriting of history, was solidified in this period as the main narrative of all schoolbooks. The focus on territory, together with an emphasis on self-sacrifice, continued to be central to citizenship discourse and the regime, and was advanced by framing it with the concept of ‘threat’. In 1986, a list of subjects were added to the textbooks under the title ‘subjects pertaining to Atatürkism’ following a decision of the Board of Education and Discipline and the High Council on Education. Threat was among these newly introduced topics, and the reasons for its existence were defined as the ‘geopolitical significance of Turkey’ and the other countries’ ‘dislike of a strong Turkey’ (Milli Eğitim Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı 1988: 165, 167, 225).
This stress on the discourse on enemies and geopolitics increased as threat became a subject to be studied. The distinction between homeland and front was blurred through such discourses. In fifth-grade social sciences textbooks, the subject of threat was incorporated into the first chapter, Our Homeland and its Neighbours (Sanır et al. 1988: 241–3). The significance of Turkey’s location was emphasised, and the need for ‘strength, awareness, unity, and solidarity’ was trumpeted in relation to this geopolitical significance (ibid.: 243).

Throughout the 1990s, in the unpredictable post-Cold War international context, Turkey increasingly became subject to the economic, political and cultural effects of globalisation. The concept of minority was introduced to the nationalist narrative of the textbooks in these years, and was used when referring to the internal others of the nation. With the rise and prevalence of the notions of identity/difference, the growing connection between security and nationalism in the textbooks was coupled with an increase in ethnic references in the definitions of national identity. Although citizenship continued to be conceptualised through a simultaneous utilisation of ethnic and civic elements, now ethnic emphases became much stronger.

Special significance was attributed to the concept of national security as it was restructured along ‘internal and external threats directed against Turkey’. These threats, reintroduced into the curriculum and textbooks in 1995, were again divided into two categories: ‘the geopolitical significance of Turkey’ and the ‘dislike of a strong Turkey’. However, this time, the aims for teaching ‘the subject of internal and external threats directed at Turkey’ were specifically defined and clearly stated: ‘grasping the importance of Turkey’s location in the world’ and ‘becoming aware that the advancement of Turkey is not desired by other states’ (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1995: 50–1). Appropriate behaviour modes with respect to these issues were presented in detail, and the students were to fulfil these expectations; they had to ‘think’, ‘talk’, ‘act’ and ‘feel’ in the ways presented. The citizen was in fact strictly limited through the national security discourse.

In 1990, a map of central Asian republics entitled, Turkish World was introduced to all the textbooks, and the social sciences curricula and textbooks were rewritten. A new chapter, Homeland and Nation, was introduced with this revision. The chapter first defined nationhood with respect to the love of homeland then signified it as the land of martyrs, stating that ‘we who form the Turkish nation willingly give our lives for the homeland’ – underlining the primary duty of the citizen (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 1991: 238). The following section of the chapter, ‘Nation’, set out to provide an authoritative answer to the question of what a nation is:

For a society of people to be a nation it should have various characteristics. The major ones of these characteristics can be listed as the following: unity of language, unity of history, unity of homeland, unity of culture and unity of ideal [Ulku]. The people living on the Turkish homeland have these characteristics. These people form the Turkish nation. (Ibid: 239)
Although the definition of the nation embodied both ethnic elements such as shared language, culture and history, and civic elements such as shared ideals, another definition was also provided, made up largely of ethnic elements: ‘As we see, a society which has within it a unity of language, culture and feeling is called nation.’ The argument that ‘the Turkish people founding the Republic of Turkey are called the Turkish nation’ again underlined the ethnic elements; it stressed the existence of an ethnic Turkish base, and presented it as the founder of the state (Ibid.).

In 1999, the space allocated to the chapter, Homeland and Nation increased as it was made the first unit of the fifth-grade social sciences textbook (Şenünver et al. 1999: 9–23). This revision points towards an increased emphasis on the notions of homeland and nation, as well as on the themes of sacrifice and unity. The ethnic emphases in the definition of citizenship were still strong, yet some changes were also applied sparingly to the sections where a definition of the nation was provided. For instance, the phrase ‘Turkish people’ was changed to ‘the people of Turkey’: ‘the people of Turkey [Türkiye halkı] founding the Republic of Turkey is called the Turkish nation’ (Şenünver et al. 1999: 12). This might be regarded as a positive move that reduces the ethnic focus of the central narrative, but must be considered alongside ethnic discourses. Thus the textbooks continue to feature regular references to the ancient ethnic Turkish base, the mythical motherland central Asia and the historic Turkish migrations.

Encounters with the process of Europeanisation: schoolbooks in the early twenty-first century

The Helsinki Summit recognising Turkey as a candidate country for full membership of the EU marked a change in Turkey – EU relations. Yet it was the Copenhagen Summit of 2002 that proved to be the landmark in the process of Europeanisation for Turkey (Keyman and Önis 2007: 15). As agreed at the summit, the accession negotiations were premised on the condition that Turkey succeeded in the application of the Copenhagen criteria. Although conditional, it created a sense of ‘certainty’ by giving a specific date for the beginning of the accession negotiations. Accordingly, the governments of the early 2000s undertook various legal and administrative reforms to meet the Copenhagen criteria. Despite these reforms, the textbooks followed the same lines, such that the social sciences textbooks were almost identical to the ones used at the end of the previous decade. ‘The subjects pertaining to Atatürkism’ became definitive, as did the stress on threat and national security concerns. Statements such as ‘the people of Turkey founding the Republic of Turkey are called the Turkish nation’ existed side by side with ethnic emphases and references (Sarralioğlu and Karadaş 2004: 13).

However, curriculum reform was realised in 2005, with considerable revision of teaching requirements. The need to meet modern standards and
integrate to EU norms, objectives and education practices were designated as reasons for the changes (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 2005a: 50). Although the process of European transformation and the government’s will to comply with EU norms were major push factors, the ongoing democratisation efforts of civil-society organisations and concern about responding to identity-based claims to recognition have created public demand for education reform.10

The textbooks published after the curriculum reform are indeed written in a completely new style. Rather than demanding that children obediently think, speak, act and feel in specific ways, the new textbooks place the emphasis upon the child as an individual, and focus on activity and research.11 Identity and difference are among the catchwords used in the new textbooks. At the same time, they provide a sense of living in society and in the world. Beyond providing abstract concepts, definitions and historical narrations, the textbooks focus on everyday lives and the activities of individuals. There are no chapters specifically focusing on the concepts of nation and homeland; the frequency of these words has decreased, and instead, words like ‘country’ and ‘society’ are used more frequently. The new role models are world-famous Turkish athletes, artists, scientists and politicians rather than warrior ancestors, as in earlier textbooks. In contrast to the earlier texts, foreign nations and their citizens are not presented as innate enemies. The notion of rights (citizenship rights, children’s rights, consumer rights) is emphasised.

However, the new textbooks also contain some shortcomings. Most importantly, the terms identity and difference are used in limited ways; only to reference positive identification factors such as physical traits, identification cards, and/or feelings, thoughts, hobbies (Kolukısa et al. 2006: 10–23; Tekerek et al. 2005: 14–19). Even though there have been positive changes with respect to the introduction of rights alongside duties, the textbooks allocate more space to consumer rights than to other rights and liberties. Despite the reduced use of the concepts of nation and homeland in the new textbooks (designed for the early years of primary school), these terms are still used in sections related to the history of the republic, in order to underline the ideal and duty of defending the state. Although no concrete definition of the nation and homeland is provided in these passages, the latter is still closely linked to the idea of martyrdom (Kolukısa et al. 2006: 59). The discourse on threat, geopolitics and enemies is not abandoned but rather relegated to sections of the textbooks that focus on the War of Independence and Atatürkism. The ethnic references, although less frequent, still persist. The map of central Asian republics, entitled ‘Turkish world’, continues to be featured. Although subjects relating to the mythical motherland of central Asia, migrations and the Turkic states are not a part of the fourth- and fifth-grade social sciences textbooks, they have not been discarded completely; rather, they have been moved to the sixth and seventh grades. These upper-level textbooks, despite the decreased space allocated to such subjects, continue to stress the myth of origins, as well as the warrior and martyr ancestors (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 2007).
At this point, the difference between the pilot textbooks and the new textbooks is worth mentioning. In August 2005, after further evaluation, the chapters ‘Everybody has an identity’ and ‘Individual and identity’ were changed to ‘I get to know myself’ and ‘Individual and society’, respectively (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı 2005b). These revisions point to the unease that many feel about the increased focus on the individual and identity, and the abandonment of ideas about an organic society – especially at a time when identity-based claims are on the rise. The almost caricatured representations of identity and difference, extending to portrayals of physical traits and identification cards, are most likely related to this uneasiness. Although the chapter headings and visual aspects show similarities to their European counterparts, the convergence is limited. When the aforementioned characteristics are considered, the new textbooks can hardly be regarded as forming part of a ‘project of diversity’ (Soysal 2008) of the kind found in the current textbooks of many EU countries.

The new textbooks were challenged in various ways, and changed in response to these challenges. For instance, they were criticised for ardently embracing neoliberal ideology and global capitalism (Bianet 2005); however, they were criticised most fervently for not paying close enough attention to subjects pertaining to Atatürkism (Kozok 2007). In the face of such criticisms, a commission was founded in September 2007, from the experts of the Board of Education and Discipline and military personnel, to revise the texts (Göktürk 2007). The revisions were made at the end of the 1990s according to a list of issues defined as ‘Subjects pertaining to Atatürkism’. These reflected the content, concerns and expectations of the time. They reintroduced a security emphasis and underscored the ideal and duty of ‘defending the state’, countering the earlier positive changes brought about by democratisation.

**Conclusion**

As our critical analysis of Turkish primary-school textbooks indicates, the discourse and practice of citizenship in Turkey has been framed and defined by an ambiguity set by the repeated swings in official nationalism between ethno-centric and civic-political modes. Such ambiguity can be observed in the use of the concept of territory as the dominant – even hegemonic – element in the official conceptualisation of national identity in Turkey. In the early years, the textbooks attempted to inculcate geographical awareness, knowledge and love of the territory of the new republic. The emphases on territory centred on presenting narratives of the battles and self-sacrifices of the War of Independence with a view to instilling historical awareness and emotional attachment to the nation. Although the imaginings of the nation were not deprived of ethnic elements, the ethnic axis in the conceptualisations of citizenship was only solidified in the mid-1930s through the introduction of
the officially formulated Turkish History Thesis into the textbooks. The arguments of the Thesis, in addition to focusing on a mythical motherland (central Asia), also highlighted the territory of the republic to conceptualise Anatolia in highly ethnicised fashion.

The textbooks used in the aftermath of World War II, as the process of democratisation gained ground, placed less emphasis on ethnic elements than their counterparts of the 1930s and early 1940s. However, this situation began to change from the 1970s onwards. In the 1980s, territorial and ethnic factors reinforced each other as Turkey was increasingly subjected to the economic, political and cultural effects of globalisation. The emphasis on territory was increasingly set forth through the notion of ‘threat’, and the stress on territoriality was coupled with a rising ethnic emphasis. The existence of a Turkish ethnic base was flagged, and underlined as the basis of the state. These territorial and ethnic touchstones have persisted into the 2000s. Together with a de-emphasis on inclusive aspects of nationhood other than territory, this formulation worked to undermine the civic understanding of citizenship and structure the conception of citizenship through concepts of indebtedness to ancestors and self-sacrifice.

The curriculum reform and changes that have been made to primary-school textbooks recently are related to the recent transformation of Turkey, its globalisation and its Europeanisation. In this sense, there is a dialectical link between changes in the conception of citizenship in primary-school textbooks and the broader context of Turkey’s transformation – and the cleavages, risks and potential it has brought. While the broader context suggests that existing nationalist and security-oriented conceptions of citizenship – together with ethno-nationalist references – should be deleted, there are strong obstacles to this. These stem from the endurance of nationalism and its ethnic references, and resist calls to make Turkish citizenship more democratic, plural and rights-based. Despite alterations, ambiguities in Turkish citizenship discourse and regime remain. The resolution of these requires the consolidation of democracy – as a political regime, political culture and the main mechanism by which state – society and individual relations are regulated. The growing complexity of Turkish modernity and politics as a result of the processes of democratisation, globalisation and Europeanisation has brought about the cleavages of centre – periphery, left – right, global – national, and identity – citizenship. This necessitates governance based on democratic consolidation, which is also the key to creating a discourse and regime of citizenship based on equal rights and freedoms among citizens possessing diverse identities. The paradox here is that the ambiguities historically embedded in Turkish citizenship allow positive changes, yet, with the endurance of nationalism, foreclose the possibility of civic and democratic reconstruction. Of course, the solution to this paradox lies in the consolidation of democracy in Turkey, which has not yet been achieved. Education is a critical site that will determine and reflect the direction that Turkish democracy will take – whether towards consolidation or continued ambiguity.
Notes

1 By citizenship regime we mean the way in which the state approaches citizenship discursively and institutionally, and through which it governs society.
2 The survey of primary-school curricula and textbooks covered grades one to five, and was analysed through discourse and content analyses. The textbooks are the officially authorised language readers, Turkish language, life sciences, history and social studies textbooks, used between the years 1928 and 2009.
3 For a detailed analysis of this point, see Yuval-Davis’ pioneering work (1997); see also Feinman (2000) and Kwon (2001). For an analysis of the Turkish case, see Altınay (2004); for research on school textbooks, see Kancı and Altınay (2007), Kancı (2008).
4 For further elaboration on duties and citizenship education in Turkey, see Üstel (2004).
5 See, for example, Emre (1929: 35–6) and İçsel and İçsel (1929a: 173–6).
6 Tevfik Fikret (1867–1915) was one of the chief figures of the Servet-i Fünun magazine and the New Literature movement. See Berkes (1998). Being an opponent of the regime of Abdulhamid II, Fikret ardently supported the Young Turk revolution of 1908; however, he was dissatisfied with the new regime and, in his last years, also opposed the rule of the Union and Progress.
7 The same passage can also be seen in the subsequent editions of this textbook, which were used throughout the 1980s. See Sanır et al. (1987: 229–30).
8 The concept of minority was used in the textbooks of the 1990s to refer to the members of the non-Muslim millets living under the Ottoman empire (specifically with respect to the Armenian and Greek communities, the latter also called the Rum). The millet system consisted of the organisation and governance of the people living under the empire along ethno-religious axes.
9 The textbooks of subsequent years made the same arguments. See Şahin and Şahin (1995: 226–31).
10 The History Foundation’s research on textbooks used in 2001 and 2002 was the most comprehensive project in this respect. See Ceylan and Irzik (2004).
11 For more detail, see Kancı (2009) and Tüzün (2009).

References


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