

# **National education and the Kurdish Question in Turkey**

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*In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful*

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### **Abstract**

This thesis examines Turkey's 'Kurdish Question' from an educational perspective, since this remains the most serious issue in Turkey today. In so doing, this study places emphasis on the experiences/challenges of Kurdish pupils in the eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey. Furthermore, teachers' perception of the Kurdish Question and the educational issues are also one of the main focusses of this research, since teachers are considered to be powerful actors in this study. Apart from this, in order to understand the challenges facing Kurdish pupils and the educational issues leading to the exclusion of non-Turks more generally, critical analysis of textbooks and policy documents is also undertaken. The findings of the research show that there is a serious issue of exclusion and even assimilation facing pupils within the existing education system, something which also affects their success and the reproduction of their culture. Furthermore, linguistic issues and the nationalist/ideological characteristics of the Turkish education have a huge effect on Kurdish pupils. Specifically, students starting school with no or little Turkish struggle to adapt, and their lives are ruined in the schooling system. Results also show that young teachers are courageous actors who attempt to bring a level of flexibility to the educational system so as to help students, despite the education system remaining strictly centralised. Lastly, critical analysis of textbooks reveals that the Turkish education system indoctrinates students by promoting the Kemalist ideology and Turkish nationalism. The findings can contribute to a better understanding of the struggle facing the Kurdish minority in Turkey. This research, therefore, provides a timely and necessary study of the national education system which is believed to lie behind many social problems existing in society.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

- AKP/Ak Party: Justice and Development Party
- BDP: Peace and Democracy Party
- CHP: Republican People's Party
- CUP: Committee of Union and Progress
- Dev-Genç: Federation of Revolutionary Youth
- DISK: Confederation of Revolutionary Worker's Party
- DP: Democrat Party
- DTK: Democratic Society Congress
- DTP: Democratic Society Party
- DYP: True Path Party
- EU: European Union
- HDP: People's Democratic Party
- Hüda-Par: Free Cause Party
- KCK: Group of Communities in Kurdistan
- KNC: Kurdish National Council
- METU: Middle East Technical University
- MHP: Nationalist Action Party
- MoNE: Ministry of National Education
- Mustazaf-Der: Solidarity with the Oppressed
- OIC: Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
- PKK: Kurdistan Worker's Party
- PYD: Democratic Union Party
- RP: Welfare Party
- TWP: Turkish Worker's Party
- UN: United Nations
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
- TRT: Turkish Radio and Television
- TCF: Progressive and Union Party
- SRK: Society for the Rise of Kurdistan



## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Introduction**

This thesis scrutinises the relationship between the nationalist characteristics of the ideology-driven Turkish educational system and Turkey's Kurdish Question by analysing the effects of the education system on Kurdish pupils from the perspective of teachers coming from different ethnic, religious and political backgrounds. Based on teachers' perceptions, current policy documents, and official textbooks used in civic education, it specifically proposes to address teachers' accounts of Kurdish pupils' experiences in Turkish schools, and how they are affected by the centralised curriculum, textbooks and teaching practices in public schools.

Turkey's 'Kurdish Question' has always been at the centre of the state's political agenda, which could even be considered the most complicated issue in the history of the Turkish Republic. With the foundation of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK) and the start of armed conflict between Kurdish insurgents and Turkish security forces, the Kurdish issue in Turkey has taken a new turn in a conflict that has cost more than 40.000 lives since the 1980s (Ince, 2015). One of the implications of this conflict has been that politicians in Turkey came to consider the Kurdish issue to be a security problem – something which made finding a solution to the problem impossible. Thus, the other aspects of the problem, such as the cultural and educational ones, were mainly ignored.

Even though the complexity of the Kurdish Question was not recognised by the Turkish state for decades, there has been a promising development in the past few years

regarding the recognition of the issue as being multi-dimensional in its nature, especially after the Justice and Development Party (Adâlet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Ak Party) began a new initiative aimed at ending the conflict, something which has been officially called the 'Kurdish Opening'. Having said that, the attempts made in order to solve the issue have always been lacking an educational perspective on the matter. Although very few reforms have recently been implemented in the field of education, the reformation process in education remained superficial, and the exclusionist characteristic of the Turkish educational system prevails in many ways.

Turkey has an educational system that is generating controversy for its heavily ideological nature as well as its bias relating to particular issues. This is because national education in Turkey is still primarily based upon the Kemalist ideals and principles. It is also ethno-centric, with a particular focus on Turkish nationalism promoting the Kemalist interpretation of Turkish nationalism and the idea of 'Turkishness'. What is more, the educational system in Turkey is also militarised, with military jargon used in school textbooks, even though textbooks and educational attainments have recently been revised and democratised as a result of a comprehensive reform implemented as part of the country's European Union accession program, especially after 2005. Textbooks, for example, have shown a trend towards a reduction in the use of military jargon since 2005 (see Kancı and Altınay, 2007, Çayır, 2011, Çayır, 2014); however, the type of citizenship promoted by Turkish national education is still militarised in many ways.

It could be argued that the Turkish educational system still operates pretty much in the same way as before, as the Turkish state uses it as a mechanism to impose the constructed national identity on students ever since the early days of the Republic. In other words, this was meant to Turkify all "others" within society, and this goal of the national education remains the same in today's Turkey. Thus, the Turkish education not only excludes non-Turkish ethnic groups in Turkey, but also tries to assimilate them into the hegemonic Turkish culture (e.g. see Çayır, 2015), which appears to be one of the main issues leading to problems in society, and especially regarding the Kurdish

Question. The promotion and even exaggeration of the characteristics of a particular nation –the Turks- somewhat stigmatises other ethnicities existing in society, as they are automatically otherised by the educational system against the “glorified nation” (the Turkish nation). However, despite the significance of these issues and the seriousness of the possible implications, educators, pedagogues and researchers in Turkey are mainly interested in the achievements of pupils in both school and national exams without examining how their success is affected by the current structure of the educational system. This surely prevents them from being able to notice/see more serious issues in education, which are too important to overlook.

Therefore, along with a lack of perspective on the role of education in the Kurdish Question, there is also an unavoidable gap in the extant literature on Kurdish pupils’ experiences that are directly linked to the ideological (Kemalist) and ethno-nationalist characteristics of the Turkish educational system. In addition, this is reinforced by the paucity of existing empirical research on the same issue in Turkey. This is partly due to the fact that the Kemalist educational system of Turkey has not been analysed ‘thoroughly’ in terms of its effects on pupils, as the topic was quite sensitive for researchers in Turkey. However, in the post-Kemalist era <sup>1</sup>, even though direct criticism against the official ideology of Kemalism might still be easily interpreted as an insult against the personality of Atatürk and his ideals, and could even be considered as an offence due to the ambiguity of Law 5816 concerning crimes committed against Atatürk <sup>2</sup>, it could definitely be claimed that conducting a research on Kemalism in a critical way

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<sup>1</sup> Although the post-Kemalist era in Turkey could be traced back to the late 1990s under the leadership of Turgut Özal and Necmettin Erbakan (former President and Prime Minister of Turkey), notably, the ideology of Kemalism within the state discourse weakened especially in the 2000s after the conservative Ak Party came to power.

<sup>2</sup> “Anyone who publicly insults or curses the memory of Atatürk shall be imprisoned with a heavy sentence of between one and three years. A heavy sentence of between one and five years shall be given to anyone who destroys, breaks, ruins, or defaces a statue, bust, or monuments representing Atatürk or the grave of Atatürk. Anyone who encourages others to commit the crimes outlined in the paragraphs above will be punished as if committing the crime. If the crimes outlined in the second paragraph of the first article are committed using force...the penalty will be doubled” Law No. 5816 Crimes Against Atatürk.

is now much easier. Therefore, this thesis aims to do exactly this, and it further intends to fill an important gap in the literature.

The following sections detail the abovementioned issues around Turkey's Kurdish Question and the controversial characteristics of the Turkish educational system, explain the significance of the topic, and highlight the research questions with the main aims of the study and the limitations of the research discussed. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined at the end.

## **1.2. The use of education by nation-states to shape the characters of their citizens: The Turkish Case**

*Globalisation shapes sovereignty.  
Globalisation changes the internal architecture of the state.  
Jayasuryia (2011: 444)*

Education is indeed a powerful phenomenon, as it prepares children for the future. In this sense, education is certainly of a paramount importance to nation-states, since nation-states used education as a tool to impose the promoted "ideal" identity on their citizens. In fact, nation-states actually used education quite well for their ideals, because they knew that to educate children means to shape their personalities. However, as the above quote suggests, with globalisation becoming an undeniable fact of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, along with social diversity becoming more common, things have changed for the nation-states for the worse. Within the traditional structures of nation-states, originally inspired by the Westphalian system<sup>3</sup>, "nationality" used to be considered as a fundamental element insuring the unity and solidarity of the state (Susan, 2007). With globalisation shaking the authority of nation-states, nationality, as the guarantor of the

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<sup>3</sup> Westphalian system developed as a result of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 acknowledged the sovereignty of nation-states over domestic affairs within their 'national borders', which is believed to have created the structure of the modern nation-state.



safety of nation-states, has lost some of its significance. With the increasing flows of money, knowledge, people and goods between borders (Appadurai, 1996), countries have become more inter-connected, which has resulted in the loss of the importance of “national borders”. Moreover, with the extension of cross-border dynamics, the internal architecture of the state is now defined by “diversity”, which was further fortified by the creation of supra-national entities such as the European Union aiming at promoting cross-border relationships between nation-states. This has obviously made nation-states more diverse due to migration being made much easier.

With the pace of globalisation and the changes in the concept of citizenship, education systems also face the same issues as nation-states do, because education clearly played a crucial role in the continuity and survival of the nation-state. Having said this, education systems still operate pretty much in the same in many nation-states. For instance, in Turkey, the educational system and the existing curriculum are still primarily based upon the Turkish nationalist ideals and Kemalist principles. The ideas of Turkish nationalism inspired by Kemalist ideology, including the cult of Atatürk, dominate the educational attainments and textbooks. This has an impact on every child due to the educational system being very centralised in Turkey, as all textbooks taught in both public and private schools must either be prepared or approved by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE), with all the textbooks distributed by the MoNE alone. The MoNE also prepares teacher’s guidebooks for each textbook which provides information about what should be taught and how this should be done in the classroom, with the priority of the educational attainments specifically given in each unit. Even though use of the same teaching method is not compulsory for teachers, this clearly shows how the MoNE tries to control teaching practices as well as everything else within the system (Öztürk, 2011). As a result, with the unchanged structure of the educational system in Turkey, education still appears to be at the centre of Turkey’s core issues. Therefore, one should understand the relationship between the practices pupils/students experience through schooling and the issues they are facing in their daily lives in order to understand the bigger picture, since these two phenomena are inseparable.

Previous research has shown that the Kurds in Turkey face serious issues both within wider society and the educational system in particular (e.g. see Altınay, 2004, Ceylan and Irzık, 2004, Üstel, 2005, Aycan, 2005, Çapar, 2006, Kadioğlu, 2007, Kancı and Altınay, 2007, Çayır and Gürkaynak, 2008, Cemiloğlu, 2009, Uçarlar, 2009, Çayır, 2010, Dixon and Ergin, 2010, Fırat, 2010, Çayır, 2011, Ince, 2012b, Ince, 2012a, İnce, 2012, Kaya, 2013, Çayır, 2014, Çayır, 2015, Kaya, 2015). These reports, however, also mention that there has been a promising development regarding the improvement of Kurdish rights in the country in the past decade. Before the Kurdish Opening initiative introduced by the Ak Party in 2009, Kurdish people suffered from what can be called the exclusionary behaviours of the Turkish state, whereby the existence of Kurdish ethnicity was even denied outright by the state. The Kurdish initiative, which was part of a comprehensive democratic initiative move that also included Roma, Alevi, Caferi, and Greek initiatives aimed at ending such rejectionist policies against the Kurdish ethnic minority in Turkey, something which required reforms promised to be implemented gradually by the Turkish government. Within the framework of the Kurdish initiative, the Ak Party government has implemented many crucial reforms over time. For example, the use of any language other than Turkish was restricted by law before the Kurdish Opening, as language was given certain significance after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in order to build a mono-linguistic society wherein everybody speaks Turkish. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, stressed the importance of the language himself by saying that “it is not possible to believe a person’s claims that he belongs to the Turkish nation and to Turkish culture if he does not speak Turkish” (Kieser, 2006: 44). Moreover, a “Citizen! Speak Turkish!” campaign was also one of the initiatives promoted by the Turkish government at the time in order to put pressure on non-Turks not to speak their own mother tongues in public (Toktaş, 2005, Aslan, 2007). These policies somehow created a country where all “others” were assimilated into the Turkish culture, with Turkish being the only spoken language in public places. Such programs were successful in that, interestingly enough, when the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, broadcasted his yearly Nevruz message to the public in Diyarbakır in 2014, many Kurdish people – including some of the MPs from the pro-

Kurdish Party HDP (People's Democratic Party, Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) – waited for the Turkish version of the message (Hürriyet, 2014). However, after the Kurdish Initiative, the Turkish government allowed election campaigning to be made in Kurdish and languages other than Turkish. Furthermore, Kurdish language started to be offered as an elective course unit at universities and in public schools (Hürriyet Daily News, 2010a). Kurdish people started to feel the change in their daily lives as well. For example, local residential areas in Kurdish inhabited towns were renamed into Kurdish ones, decades after the Kemalists had forcefully changed their native names into Turkish ones in the early years of the Republic (BBC News, 2012, Armenian Weekly, 2014).

Having said that, even though the findings of recent studies clearly confirm that there has been a significant improvement on Kurdish people's rights, they also point out that there is still a number of crucial reforms needed to improve rights. For example, the reforms implemented in the field of education within the framework of the Kurdish initiative remained superficial, such as the abolition of the Student Pledge/Oath, or the making of Kurdish as an elective course unit in public schools, and allowing mother tongue education in Kurdish in 'private schools'. Although allowing Kurdish to be the language of instruction in private schools seems to be a momentous move, practices do show otherwise. For instance, after the Turkish government's reform package paving the way for making education in Kurdish possible in private schools at the end of 2014, the first private primary school *Ferzad Kemanger* opened in a district of Diyarbakır to provide education in Kurdish received many inspections, faced serious difficulties such as police raids and forced closure, and as a result the Directorate of National Education refused to approve it as an authentic school, because they claimed that the school lacks the required standards to be an official private school. However, the standards that are claimed as requirements for a school to operate are missing in most of public schools across Turkey (Al Jazeera Turk, 2014, Al Jazeera Turk, 2015). Even though the *Ferzad Kemanger* primary school still continues to provide Kurdish mother tongue education, it is not yet recognised by the Ministry of National Education, making certificates issued by them illegal, something which discourages parents from sending their children to that school. Thus, this experience actually implies that although the reform seemed to be a

big step forward, the MoNE seems to deliberately hinder attempts to provide Kurdish mother tongue education even in private schools.

The abovementioned discussion, therefore, shows that one of the most serious problems Kurdish people face in today's Turkey is obviously in the field of education. There is a need for a radical overhaul of the ideological structure of the Turkish educational system, changes to mother tongue education in languages other than Turkish in public schools, and revision to the existing curriculum and textbooks, among others. This thesis, therefore, seeks to reflect Turkish and Kurdish teachers' perceptions on how the experiences of their Kurdish students in public schools affect them, and what are the implications of this? Furthermore, it also tries to discuss what is wrong with the educational system in terms of its exclusion of minority groups, and what should be done in order to make Turkish education more inclusive for all groups, regardless of their ethnic and religious background.

### **1.3. Why the Turkish national education and the Kurdish Question?**

Turkey is a country which has some serious issues with its ethnic and religious minority groups such as the Kurds and Alevis. Amongst these groups, the Kurds appear to be at the forefront compared to others. This is, of course, because Kurdish people constitute the biggest ethnic minority group in Turkey; and the Kurdish Question has long been one of Turkey's most serious issues affecting the country and thus always being at the top of Turkey's political agenda. For example, according to a recent survey investigating social-political trends in Turkey (Kadir Has, 2016), terrorism is seen as the biggest problem of Turkey by 39.3% of the participants, which even comes before the problem of unemployment (16.3%) something which had always occupied the first rank in the previous surveys and the last four consecutive years. Still, 5.2% of the participants thought that the Kurdish Question is the biggest problem in Turkey. Based on this data, it could be argued that 44.5% of the participants considered the Kurdish Question the

biggest issue in today's Turkey, because Turkish people generally regard the Kurdish Question as linked to the problem of "terrorism", which is a direct result of the conflict between the Turkish security forces and the PKK insurgents. In addition to this, there is also the popular trend in Turkey which generally ignores other dimensions of the issues and focuses on the political and security elements alone. An educational perspective on the Kurdish Question, for instance, has been lacking since the Ak Party's Kurdish initiative was officially introduced, and education is still not seen as a powerful element of the Kurdish Question.

With the significance of the Kurdish Question and the neglect of the role of education in these issues in mind, this research, therefore, aims at exploring the relationship between the Turkish national education and the Kurdish Question. This is because I strongly believe that offering an educational insight into the –both academic and political- debates of the Kurdish Question might contribute to the solution efforts greatly. This is definitely a key to the solution of many issues that are similar to that of the Kurdish Question, such as the issues affecting the Alevi and Roma people, and non-Muslim Turkish citizens. Thus, in this thesis, education is believed to be an important element with the power to change things positively in the country.

#### **1.4. Research Questions and Realisation of the Research**

Turkish and Kurdish teachers' perceptions about the effects of the Kemalist/nationalist Turkish educational system (including curriculum, textbooks and teaching practices) on Kurdish pupils are examined in this thesis. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of two different versions of the *History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism* textbook taught in primary and middle schools (compulsory education) in all Turkish public schools is also conducted in a separate chapter, along with the examination of current policy documents in order to understand the issue better, because "information and values that fall in line with the official ideology adopted and legitimized by the political

government are transferred and re-produced” through textbooks (İnal, 2004: 11). This research, therefore, raises the following questions, the answers to which will help in understanding the relationship between the Turkish educational system and the Kurdish Question:

1. What is the relationship between nationalism, the Turkish educational system, the curriculum/textbooks, language of instruction and Kurdish pupils’ experience of primary and secondary education?
2. How does the nationalist educational system – which is dominated by the national ideology of Kemalism – curriculum and language of instruction affect Kurdish people and thus the Kurdish Question in Turkey?
3. What do teachers think about the Kurdish Question, the effects of the nationalist Kemalist educational system on the Kurds, and how do they respond to these in practice?

This research is a case study. In order to conduct the research, Turkish and Kurdish teachers from twelve Kurdish-inhabited provinces of the east and southeast regions of Turkey were interviewed. The interviews with both the Turkish and Kurdish teachers coming from different social and political background enabled the researcher to be able to realise both the seriousness of the existing problems and the implications of such issues for both academic and political debates. The research, however, has some limitations which are explained as follows, although a more detailed list of limitations will be discussed in Chapter 4 (Methodology):

1. As the research is based on a case study, it does have some limitations. First of all, as the data was collected from specific provinces that are located in eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey, one of the first issues in using this method relates to the

generalizability of the data. The results of the study may not reflect Turkey as a whole. However, as the sample was selected by the researcher very carefully in order to reflect the issue better, it could be claimed that this increases the generalisability of the results of this study.

**2.** The second limitation in this research is that the Kurdish Question was examined from an educational perspective by the researcher. The participants of the research were all teachers and the results produced by this research are based on educational issues. Therefore, even though the political side of the issue is mentioned in different chapters, political perspective of the issue is not the main focus in this study (though the thesis has implications for political issues).

**3.** Third, another limitation is that since all participants were teachers, the experiences and perceptions in this study are predominantly from teachers' perspectives. With this in mind, although pupils' experiences and difficulties/challenges are mentioned in the study, these are all produced from the interviews conducted with teachers. Thus, it could be said that the data reflects teachers' own experiences and observations.

**4.** Lastly, the research covers a certain period of time from October, 2012 to July 2015. Therefore, any development after July 2015 is beyond the scope of this research.

### **1.5. Significance of the research**

First, in this thesis, Kemalist national education is critically examined for the first time with a particular focus on the Kemalist and nationalist characteristics of the Turkish educational system and the critical analysis of textbooks taught in Turkish schools.

Second, the results of this thesis are based upon teachers' opinions, who live in the Kurdish inhabited provinces that are located in the east and southeast of Turkey, and who come from different social, cultural, and political backgrounds. This is expected to help the researchers/politicians understand the problems and struggles of the Kurdish people better.

Finally, as this thesis examines Turkey's Kurdish question from an educational perspective, it intends to offer an educational insight into the Kurdish issue, which is believed to contribute to the solution of the problem greatly.

## **1.6. Personal motivations**

There were a variety of factors motivating me to choose this specific topic and do this research. First of all, when I was in primary and middle school in Turkey, I experienced an almost identical educational system as the one in existence in today's Turkey. In fact, it was much worse in several respects, due to the fact that the reforms made as part of the application process for the European Union Membership began only in the late 1990s, by the time I had already finished my primary education (these reforms played a key role to make education system much better in terms of human rights). At that time, Turkish education was more nationalist, and the Kemalist ideology was more powerful in both state discourse and in the educational system, and as a result, I was greatly affected by this. For example, by way of an anecdote, when my family members used to ask me the question, "who is the mother of the Prophet Muhammad?", I always hesitated to answer in the first instance, because two names used to come to my mind: "Is it Zübeyde or Âmine?" (Zübeyde was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's mother). Thus, as a child, I was affected by Kemalist ideology and indoctrination to the extent that I had thought of Atatürk as a Prophet. I was no exception in this case, because despite all the changes made over time in the Turkish educational system, the Kemalist indoctrination still makes children believe that Atatürk is a hero, a spiritual guide (akin to a Prophet), and even possessing a godlike character (Yalçın, 2010).



Second, in university I studied for a course in 'Social Science Education', and some of the core subjects included history and 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism'. Therefore, I had to study these courses in-depth at university too, which was not any different from my primary school experience. In my final year, I had to teach 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in a middle school in the Akçaaabat district of Trabzon province as a trainee teacher. Even though all of my students were homogenously Turkish, I had a chance to observe the effects of the nationalist themes and the Kemalist ideology on pupils, which were largely negative. Most of the pupils I taught were very nationalistic, and they, in some ways, worshipped Atatürk.

Third, I had a chance to investigate the relationship between Kemalism and creativity in the Turkish educational system for my MA dissertation. The findings of that research project convinced me that Kemalism had a hugely negative impact on pupils. Moreover, since Kurdish pupils also participated in the study, I found out that the exclusion of the Kurds, even in Western cities such as Istanbul and Ankara, is also a very serious issue. I, therefore, concluded that the way this exclusion happens and the consequences of this on Kurdish pupils' education, their daily life practices and their culture, are worth investigating more deeply in a future research project. This was one of the reasons why I decided to study the challenges that Kurdish pupils faced in the mainly Kurdish-inhabited eastern and southeastern cities.

Fourth, before I embarked on my PhD, Turkey was going through a democratic process. The Turkish government had introduced the Kurdish initiative along with many other initiatives aimed at resolving issues with minority groups in the country. Official talks as part of the peace process between the PKK insurgents, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan and the Turkish officials seemed to progress well and people were hopeful. This formed part of the political backdrop which encouraged me to study this subject further, as I personally wanted to make a contribution to these precious efforts to bring about peace in the Kurdish region in Turkey.

Finally, considering all the above-mentioned reasons, there was one final reason motivation for me to conduct this research, which was the ease of researching/questioning the national ideology of Kemalism outside of Turkey. Even though Kemalism is questioned by academics in Turkey today in a way that could never be done in the past, unfortunately, it is still considered a kind of taboo to question the authority of Kemalism in education. Academics in Turkey generally abstain from studying such subjects that might potentially pose a risk to their careers and reputation.

### **1.7. Structure of the thesis**

This study is composed of nine chapters in total. In the first chapter, the main problems posed in the research, the research questions, the limitations of the research, and personal motivations making this research possible are outlined and discussed. Chapter 2 reviews the literature regarding the relationship between nationalism and education in general by looking at examples from different countries in the world, and then highlighting the status of the existing Turkish educational system and its issues. In the third chapter, Turkish and Kurdish nationalism are thoroughly discussed via a historical overview of both kinds of nationalisms, along with the examination of the national ideology of Kemalism and Kurdish Question in today's Turkey. Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical framework and the methodology used in this research, touching upon the issues relating to method, the data collection process and the research design. In the fifth chapter, the textbooks the 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism' for 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades are analysed. Chapter 6, 7 and 8 are based upon the empirical data of this research providing unique findings generated from the fieldwork. Chapter 6 explores Turkey's Kurdish Question and related topics, such as the peace process, from the teachers' perspectives. In the seventh chapter, the relevant educational issues and linguistic issues are scrutinised by looking at pupils' experiences based upon teachers' observations. Chapter 8 queries both the domination of the Kemalist ideology in education and the implications of this domination on Kurdish pupils. Lastly, Chapter 9

reviews the main findings of the research in relation to the research questions, and discusses further the political and academic implications of the findings of the study, with the researchers' personal reflections also mentioned here.

## **CHAPTER 2 NATIONALISM AND EDUCATION**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter seeks to theorise the relationship between nationalism and education. First of all, it shows the ways in which nationalism persists, and remains a powerful phenomenon in today's world despite predictions made earlier in the 1990s about its demise. Secondly, it gives a brief overview of how 'nation' and 'nationalism' have been conceptualised. After this, it looks at education and how educational systems were designed to support nationalist projects. After giving information regarding the history of the creation of national educational framework, there will be a critical discussion of the concept of national education by examining how different scholars have examined whether a national education is positive or negative in terms of national cohesion. In doing so, this chapter will argue that education is in fact an instrument used by nation states to facilitate nationalism within their geographical borders, and that education becomes the 'sector' wherein nationalist and assimilationist policies are conducted. Turkey represents one of the examples where this process was most pervasive. This process here created some unfortunate and serious issues among different ethnic groups, threatening national cohesion, and thus the peace between different ethnic groups in the state. In order to support this view, other examples are given from different countries that also suffer from the problems caused by this process of national/patriotic educational systems privileging national languages and cultures over other languages and cultures within their borders.

### **2.2. Nationalism**

### 2.2.1. Does nationalism still persist?

It is not impossible that nationalism will decline with the decline of the nation-state, without which being English or Irish or Jewish, or a combination of these, is only one way in which people describe their identity among many others which they use for this purpose, as occasion demands. It would be absurd to claim that this day is already near. However, I hope it can at least be envisaged. After all, the very fact that historians are at least beginning to make some progress in the study and analysis of nations and nationalism suggests that, as so often, the phenomenon is past its peak. The owl of Minerva which brings wisdom, said Hegel, flies out at dusk. It is a good sign that it is now circling round nations and nationalism (Hobsbawm, 1990: 192)

As can be seen with the above quote, Hobsbawm had predicted that nationalism would lose its popularity in the future, and the sense of identity would evolve and become more globalised with the decline of the nation-state. He was not alone in this view. Appadurai (1996), for instance, also claimed that the concept of nation-state was in a serious crisis, because, for him, intensifying international relations would definitely affect the nation-state in a negative way and this would finally result in the demise of the nation-state. Likewise, Bauman (1990) expected that one of the changes that might be seen in the future was the 'denationalisation of the state'. He claimed that this process is similar to the process of separation between religion (the church) and state. Rosenbaum and Staiger used a new phrase called homogenisation in order to illustrate the decline of national initiatives. They exemplified this by pointing out the increasing popularity of the international film industry and showing how it dominated other national film industries throughout the world, damaging nation-states (Williams, 2012). Furthermore, as stated by Zuelow et al. (2007), the ideas of 'Coca-Colonisation' and 'McDonaldisation' also illustrate the dominance of a globalised culture over nations, creating a sort of a global culture which has the potential to negatively impact national cultures. With all this in mind, these writers/thinkers unanimously foresaw the same end, claiming that the nation-state was on the verge of decline in terms of its power.

Despite all these pronouncements, a number of credible examples do show that nationalism persists, and it is still one of the most influential political forces in world-politics today. As mentioned by Ferguson (2012), even though globalisation has made countries more integrated with each other, and that this has culminated in the decline of the authority of the nation-state over years, it cannot be claimed that nationalism does not remain a significant element of policy making process in many countries. In the case of Turkey, the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) remains one of the three major political parties in Turkey. It won 52 seats in the Turkish Parliament in the June 2011 elections, receiving 13 percent of the vote. Meanwhile, the pro-Kurdish national political movement named the Peace and Democracy Party <sup>4</sup> (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP) received seven percent of the vote, which enabled them to enter the Turkish Parliament with 36 seats. Both of these parties represent completely opposite nationalist ideologies in Parliament. An example of the antagonism between these parties can be seen in the example of Şerafettin Elçi, a Kurdish MP, who died on 26 December 2012, and despite MPs from all political parties attending his funeral, the MHP did not attend (Hürriyet, 2012), something which clearly shows one of the negative effects of the nationalist approach to politics.

Similarly, nationalist movements/groups are on the rise in the rest of Europe as well. For example, Greece's right-wing extremist political party, Golden Dawn, gained popularity under dire economic circumstances in the country and won 18 seats in the Parliament after elections held in June 2012. Golden Dawn is described as neo-Nazi by some Greek scholars such as Ellinas (2013) and labelled as 'fascist' by others such as Xenakis (2012), despite the fact that the group rejects these claims. The following examples may be given to support these views. First, the official symbol of Golden Dawn is similar to the one that has been associated with Nazism, created by Adolf Hitler himself. Second, Nikos Mihaloliakos, leader of Golden Dawn, said that "We will take Istanbul, Izmir as well as the Black Sea back" during an election meeting in the Greek city of Thessaloniki in 2012

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<sup>4</sup> Predecessor of the "People's Democratic Party" (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP).

(Hürriyet Daily News, 2012b). This statement indicates a degree of nationalist feelings which enables a person to become aggressive and offensive.

Furthermore, recent research carried out by the British think tank Demos shows that nationalist ideology is on the rise across Europe even among young people who are increasingly part of anti-immigrant groups (Bartlett et al., 2011). The main focus of the research was the attitudes of the supporters of nationalist parties and movements in social media. The results have indicated that a significant number of participants are deeply concerned about the presence of immigrants in their countries and the growth of Islam in Europe, and they express these feelings in social media, especially on Facebook, writing things, posting photos and promoting populism (Bartlett et al., 2011). Emine Bozkurt, a Dutch politician and a Member of the European Parliament said “In five years’ time we will... see an increase in the forces of hatred and division in society, including ultra-nationalism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism” (Guardian, 2011). Likewise, Gavan Tiley, co-author of the book *The Crises of Multiculturalism*, has argued that “Over the past decade, Muslim populations around Europe, whatever their backgrounds, have been represented as the enemy within or at least as legitimately under suspicion. It is this very mainstream political repertoire that newer movements have appropriated” (ibid). A far-right English street protest movement called the ‘English Defence League’ is also another extremist group promoting nationalist ideas, opposing the religion of Islam in the United Kingdom and feeding Islamophobia among fanatics (Garland and Treadwell, 2012). What these examples clearly indicate is that the idea of nationalism not only continues to dominate politics, but that voters too, thus the entirety of social life in today’s world.

Because nationalism continues to play this significant role in today’s world, it is, therefore vitally important to define the terms ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’, and to look at how nationalism is perceived within nation-states.

## **2.2.2. Defining the terms nation and nationalism**

### **2.2.2.1. What constitutes a nation?**

Etymologically, the word 'nation' comes from an old French word "nacion" which originally stems from the Latin word "natio" meaning "that which has been born" (Darighgoftar, 2012: 447). Otto Bauer defined the nation as "the totality of people who are united by a common fate so that they possess a common (national) character. The common fate is primarily a common history; the common national character involves almost necessarily a uniformity of language" (cited in Davis, 1967: 150). Alternatively, it was defined by Joseph Stalin as "an historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a community of culture" (ibid., p. 163). Stalin added another point by saying that "nationality is not a racial or tribal phenomenon" (Bottomore, 1983: 344). Likewise, Guibarneu (1996: 46) has defined the nation as "a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated and claiming the right to rule itself". However, Tamir (1995: 424) criticises some of these definitions for mixing together "reasons for the emergence of a nation (a shared historic territory, a common economy, and a common legal system) with the results (sharing myths and historical memories)". Above all, Anderson's (1991: 6) definition would better match what is experienced today: "an imagined political community, and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign".

Considering the relationship between nations and states, many states are regarded as nations in some sense, but it can be said that there are many nations which do not have their own sovereign states. As an example, the Kurdish people constitute a nation in the Middle East, but not a state. Instead, they live in four different countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.



The nation-state here is a significant term which played an unavoidable role in defining, thereby constructing the 'national identity' within its official borders. Held (2000) defines the nation-state as a country ruled by a governing body which has absolute authority in all matters of the state over a given territory, and with absolute sovereignty within specific geographical borders.

#### **2.2.2.2. What is Nationalism?**

Even though the term 'nationalism' has several meanings, two basic phenomena are generally meant once it is used. The first one is that the common attitude of the members of a nation, which creates a sense of 'national identity', whereas the second one is the actions taken by the members of a nation in order to achieve a particular, 'national' goal. On the one hand, generally speaking, being a member of a nation is usually considered an involuntary one. On the other hand, it can also occasionally be considered voluntary (Miscevic, 2000).

Politically speaking, nationalism is defined by Rutland (1994: 4) as a "statement of claims on behalf of an ethnic group", while Haas (1986: 727) defines nationalism as "a belief held by a group of people that they ought to constitute a nation, or that they already are one". Gellner (1983: 1) defined it as "a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. It is a theory of political legitimacy." At its core, as pointed out by Duignan and Gann (1981), there is an idea that all members of a particular nation are presumed to owe allegiance to the country they were born in.

Nonetheless, some scholars criticise what they call 'the loose use of the term nationalism' by pointing out that equating nationalism with ethnic politics is unacceptable. For example, Richmond (1987: 5) claimed that "the politicisation of ethnicity is not the same thing as ethnic nationalism although it may lead to it where a historical claim to a particular territory can be established". Having said that, while doing research on dynamic political concepts like nationalism, it would actually be very

important to consider how these concepts are perceived in today's world rather than just focussing on the theoretical definitions and conceptualisations.

Lastly, it is worth noting here that there are other scholars who define the concepts of nation and nationalism in a more critical way. For instance, Grayling (2001: 78-79) sees nations as "artificial" and argues that "there is no country on earth which is not home to more than one different but usually coexisting culture. Cultural heritage is not the same thing as national identity". Another example is Einstein, who argued that "Nationalism is an infantile disease.... It is the measles of mankind" (cited in Isaacson, 2007: 386). Likewise, from Orwell's perspective (1953: 21), nationalism is "power-hunger tempered by self-deception".

Each definition mentioned above could be applied to different cases; however, because this research specifically examines Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms in Turkey, this thesis therefore adopts a critical approach to 'nationalism', considering 'nations' as artificial modern phenomena generally constructed by nationalists and states; and 'nationalism' as a phenomenon constructed and used by nation-states and nationalists as an instrument for their own sakes. This approach is based upon the 'state-led nationalism' model in which nationalism is considered to be linked to nation-building and modern state formation processes. In this regard, cultural homogenisation and linguistic uniformity are regarded as essential phenomena by nation-states, as the former is believed to make citizens more loyal and devoted, and the latter is considered to make the management of the state easier (Tilly, 1994). In order to legitimise this new situation, "state-builders attempt to erode the base of peripheral nations by fostering cultural homogeneity through public education and other policies" (Hechter, 2001: 28). Likewise, Castiglione and Longman (2007) also pointed out that the notion of homogenisation/uniformity is being imposed on citizens through "education, military service, and national language" (p. 199). In this case what is being imposed on citizens – in most cases- is the idea of 'loyalty' and even 'patriotism', as stated by Hobsbawm (1989):

The state not only made the nation, but needed to make the nation. Governments now reached down directly to each citizen in their territory in everyday life through modest but omnipresent agents, from postmen and policemen to teachers and (in many countries) railway employees. They might require his, and eventually even her, active personal commitment to the state: in fact their “patriotism” (p. 149).

Apart from the notion of cultural homogenisation, as Orman (2008) noted, linguistic uniformity is also considered to be a prerequisite for the formation of ‘national unity’. In this case, the state promotes ‘single official language’, and deliberately ignores the diverse structure of society. Because these policies are what Turkey has been experiencing since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the ‘state-building/state-led nationalism’ model is used in this research.

To sum up, taking into consideration the ambiguity in the definitions of the terms nation and nationalism, and criticisms of both these concepts, the following section aims at examining what is practiced rather than what is theorised while addressing issues surrounding the terms nation, nationalism and even the nation-state.

### **2.3. Nationalism and Education**

Of all political questions, that [of education] is perhaps the most important. There cannot be a firmly established political state unless there is a teaching body with definitely-recognised principles. If the child is not taught from infancy that he ought to be a republican or a monarchist, a Catholic or a free-thinker, the state will not constitute a nation; it will rest on uncertain and shifting foundations; and it will be constantly exposed to disorder and change (Napoleon Bonaparte, cited in Reisner, 1922: 35).

It is apparent from the quote above that education has been seen as a significant tool available to the state in order to build a nation for a long time. In this regard, the notion of education as an efficient vehicle for the building of nations could be traced back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before that, philosophy during the age of empires was rather more 'cosmopolitan'. The idea of having a specific 'ethnic character' began to gain popularity and prominence as a result of the Philosophy of Enlightenment. With the unprecedented change at the time, the role of education changed after the 18<sup>th</sup> century, since one of the main outcomes of both the Philosophy of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution was the rise of the nation-state. Nationalism began to be reflected in the curricula of schools, and schools have since become one of the key state institutions facilitating nationalist projects, because, in most cases, the nation-state centralised many institutions such as schools in the name of achieving the major goals set by the state itself. This irony, however, might be explained by the fact that the nation-state is itself a type of authoritarian character.

Robinson (2010) also stated that current educational systems across the world are primarily based upon the principles of the Philosophy of Enlightenment and that they were also conceived within the economic circumstances of the Industrial Revolution. He goes on to argue that almost every country in the modern (or postmodern) world is presently trying to find the most efficient way of educating their children so that they have a sense of cultural and/or national identity. Similarly, Green (1997a) claimed that children are educated in accordance with nation building policies in most countries. These are because "education is, by definition, the space for the construction of national identity" (Novoa, 2000: 46). It could therefore be concluded that the idea of nation building which enables a dominant culture to become a hegemonic and/or assimilationist one still plays an important role in educational policy-making processes. Hence, in order to understand this process, I shall now look at the foundations of national educational systems and look at the theories underpinning these systems.

The foundational theories of existing national educational systems were highly dependent on particularly renowned intellectuals such as Rousseau, Herder, Condorcet,

and Fichte whose ideas are still reflected within educational systems across the globe. For instance, the most influential of these, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Gottfried Herder, both regarded education as a significant tool for creating a common national identity (Barnard, 1988, Wiborg, 2000). Nevertheless, what they meant by the term 'national identity' was not the same. Rousseau's view of national identity represents *political nationalism*, relating national identity to a nation-state, whereas Herder's view of national identity represents *cultural nationalism*, reflecting cultural aspects of national identity rather than the political aspects. Considering this difference, they both emphasised that nationalism and patriotism could be either created or moulded through education within specific geographical borders of the state.

It could be claimed that states reproduce national narratives through institutions and policies in today's world. Foreign policy, for example, is one of the indicators showing how nationalism is perceived by the state itself. In addition to this, the policy towards minorities and/or refugees, asylum seekers is another key indicator showing how other ethnic groups are treated by the state. However, above all else, one of the most significant indicators is, of course, the educational policy of the state. This is partly because of the fact that politicians are involved in educational policy-making processes. As a matter of fact, aims and objectives of education are determined by politicians in compliance with the general policies of the state (Gellner, 1983, Anderson, 1991); and, of course, it cannot be ignored that, from a government's perspective, education is a vital instrument which could not be left to the mercy of anyone other than themselves. Needless to say, education is being centralised and politicised as a result of this processes. Furthermore, in these circumstances, the presence of ideology which comes to dominate education becomes more visible. Hence, to put it more simply, it could conceivably be hypothesised that education is a key sector which reflects the main characteristics of the state very poignantly. Therefore, 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers, such as Rousseau, were right in seeing the importance and the power of education and realised its power in shaping society, the future of the state, and thus determining its fate.

Moreover, Rousseau (1996a) believed that the institutions of the state (including schools) ought to be used as instruments for developing a common national character among people. He argued that there has to be a political culture which should not dominate only education, but also religion, military and even festivals in order to maintain the concept of citizenship. Rousseau's ideal state has some sense of authoritarianism within it, and it seems that his understanding of the state framework is, therefore, open to discussion. For example, he claimed that the state must take care of the education of children for the sake of the future of the state, so this is not something that can be left to the mercy of their parents (Rousseau, 1996b). He actually envisioned a sophisticated and systematic method of educating children:

Education - this is the essential point. It is education which must shape their minds in the national mould and which must direct their tastes and their opinions, till they are patriotic by inclination - by instinct - by necessity. A child should see his fatherland when he first opens his eyes, and till death he should see naught else. The true republican sucks in with his mother's milk the love of his country, that is of law and liberty. This love makes up his life; he only sees his fatherland, and only lives for his fatherland; his country lost, he lives no more; if not dead, he is worse (*ibid.*, p. 64).

He later added another important point by highlighting the importance of patriotism and citizenship and the reasons why children should be educated in a patriotic way in government schools:

There can be no patriotism without liberty, no liberty without virtue, no virtue without citizens; create citizens, and you have everything you need; without them, you have nothing but debased slaves, from rulers of the State downwards. To form citizens is not the work of the day; and in order to have men it is necessary to educate them when they are children (Rousseau, 1996a: 147).

Rousseau's suggestions regarding sustaining citizenship had some other interesting consequences, too. For instance, he suggested that subjects such as history and geography should only cover the territory of the nation-state; so the content of these subjects should not address the territories beyond the official national borders (Wiborg, 2000). In his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, Rousseau (1985) analysed the situation in Poland before the partition and gave some advice to its authorities. What he proposed was that Poland should create a strong national identity to challenge its neighbours and to solve its problems. In order to do this, it was necessary for the young generations to be taught 'national history and national geography'. Likewise, Hobsbawm (1990) also stressed the importance of the construction of 'national history' narrative for the 'state-building' process. Among the two phenomena, especially, 'national history/historiography' has usually been used by nation-states for nation-building policies (Smith, 2001).

Overall, Rousseau's writing on patriotic education had a big effect in the following decades and has retained a huge impact on many educational systems to this day. However, some thinkers such as Cardiff (1996) have challenged Rousseau's claim on the grounds that his writings/thoughts rely too heavily upon the idea of having a patriotic state, ranging from education to politics; all of these features reflect a rather totalitarian state, according to these scholars. Cardiff has also stated that the concept of compulsory education controlled by the government, which was proposed by Rousseau, is against the idea of liberty, and that it is, in fact, a process of 'brainwashing':

Children failing to learn the state-required material (mandatory curriculum) can be required to sit through it year after year until they demonstrate that the material has been sufficiently implanted. This method of 'compulsory education' meets my dictionary's definition of brainwashing. Whether the material 'taught' is based on liberal, conservative, religious, communistic, democratic, or fascist ideologies, the government school system method of delivery is founded on compulsion, coercion, force (p. 1).

Apart from the term *political nationalism* formulated by Rousseau, the other important formulation which needs to be understood in order to fully grasp the relationship between nationalism and education in today's world is the idea of *cultural nationalism* formulated by Herder. Unlike Rousseau, Herder (1969b) pointed out that governments should not have such a duty like creating nationalism in any sense; instead, for him, what governments should do is to let nationalism evolve naturally in society. Moreover, Herder's ideal state is also different from that of Rousseau's. He regarded the state as an 'organic entity' rather than a mechanism that is in control of everything. Herder further emphasised that "good government is invisible, and the gentler and the more invisible the political bonds which link a community, the more effective is its influence" (Herder, 1969a: 324).

In Herder's writings, education was seen as a tool that could be used in order to transmit cultural heritage from one generation to the next (Barnard, 1988). It seems, therefore, that Herder's understanding of education is similar to that of Rousseau's, as it is obvious that they both concentrated on developing a person's character, rather than focussing on their intellectual abilities and thus using education as a sort of 'glue' between the nation and state. Furthermore, they both agreed that an educational system should, in many ways, be patriotic. The only difference between Rousseau and Herder, however, was their purpose. In brief, the major aim of Rousseau's educational system was to create a nationalist, while the main purpose of Herder's system was to support the 'pre-existing national sense' in a person. The practices of nation-states in today's world indicate that both Rousseau's and Herder's views have been taken into consideration, since policies in the context of both 'political' and 'cultural' forms of nationalism have been and are still implemented by nation-states.

Overall, it could be concluded that a 'national education framework' in many countries including Turkey generally depends on one particular aim (secular enlightenment), one curriculum (all children should be taught the same subjects with the same textbooks by recognised qualified teachers) and, of course, one specific (official) language with a standardised, sophisticated schooling system throughout the country. As pointed out by



Usher and Edwards (1994), one of the possible implications of this is that governments manipulate this system in order that obedient, law-abiding citizens are produced in schools. This results in shaping students' personality, making them similar, squandering their creative capabilities as was beautifully illustrated in Pink Floyd's (1979) single *Another Brick in the Wall*.<sup>5</sup> One of the serious issues emerging from this is that such a system automatically leads to the homogenisation of the culture within the state, and inevitably affects minorities in a negative way. Therefore, one question that needs to be asked here is how cultural pluralism and diversity could be sustained and a sense of belonging could be maintained under these circumstances.

In the traditional theory of nationalism, multi-ethnic countries treat the right/demand to be educated with reference to minority ethnic and cultural identities as a threat to national unity and cohesion (see Barry, 2001). There emerges a fear among the majority ethnic community that the sense of national belonging cannot flourish under any other circumstance (Banks, 2008). With this view, national education, with a national curriculum, may pose problems for a multicultural society in terms of failing to reflect the diversity of citizens coming from other ethnic backgrounds; this is all the more problematic for, a democratic state, where the idea of providing equal opportunities for all ethnic groups is considered an important value (Gutmann, 2004). For minority ethnic communities, the forceful imposition of unitary and uniformed national education/curricula can be seen as an assimilationist policy that has to be rejected because it threatens the possibility of national coherence. Scholars add another point to this debate by highlighting the dynamic and multiple characteristic of the term 'identity' itself, both in ethnic and a national sense. Ladson-Billings (2004: 112) points this out as follows:

The dynamic of the modern (or postmodern) nation-state makes identities as either an individual or a member of a group untenable. Rather than seeing

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<sup>5</sup> Lyrics of the song are as follows: "We don't need no education. We don't need no thought control. No dark sarcasm in the classroom. Teachers leave them kids alone. Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone! All in all it's just another brick in the wall. All in all you're just another brick in the wall".

the choice as either/or, the citizen of the nation-state operates in the realism of both/and. She is both an individual who is entitled to citizen rights that permit one to legally challenge infringement of those rights [and one who is] acting as a member of a group... People move back and forth across many identities, and the way society responds to these identities either binds people to or alienates them from the civic culture.

Despite the dynamic characteristic of identity explained above, the main problem with this nationalist approach, therefore, appears to be a serious threat to multiple identities in society. This is because, by taking a patriotic approach, one particular identity becomes hegemonic, and this system forces all people to adapt to that particular identity (the 'official' identity in most cases). With all these criticisms against national education, it is very unfortunate that this is what is practised in many states today. Thus, it is important to look at some credible examples. However, before looking at these, the substantial difference between schools and universities should be briefly noted here even though the circumstances in universities are beyond the scope of this chapter. As mentioned by Coulby (2000), it is notable that compulsory education is associated with national curricular systems and the transmission of the hegemonic national culture from one generation to another, whereas universities are more often regarded as being more open to cosmopolitanism and diversity (differences) in societies. This might be explained by the fact that the aims of compulsory schooling and universities are slightly different from each other, since these institutions are categorically different. For instance, universities are expected to have academic freedom and autonomy while schools are not (Cowen, 2000). Another possible explanation for this is that governments may assume that students' personalities are already shaped before the student starts university; this is why the student should concentrate on more intellectual abilities at university, as governments do not need only obedient and law-abiding citizens, but also well-educated persons for the national labour market (Green, 1997b).

Despite the distinction with university mentioned above, it is worth stating here in the case of Turkey, some course units in universities are highly questionable, too. For instance, the compulsory module "History of the Turkish Revolution" for university

students views history from the nationalist perspective in parallel with the official history thesis created in the early years of the Turkish Republic, just as in the case of the course unit “History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism” taught in middle and high schools (ortaokul ve lise). As an example, Uysal’s (2008) research, which investigated how the national ideology of Kemalism is perceived by students of the Middle East Technical University (METU) (regarded as one of the most prestigious universities in Turkey) concluded that even METU students “who believe [in] modernity recognise Kemalism as a castle against [the] conservative-nationalist values of the rest of the society”. Uysal also stated that “although Kemalism contains some non-democratic notions and the application which contradicts current universal values, METU students who support Kemalism ignore these realities and continue to support Kemalism as a core representer of modernist values” (p. 103). Even though Uysal cautiously noted that conducting such research in another university such as *Gazi* or *Bilkent* may yield different results, the findings of the research clearly show that even university students are affected by the national ideology of Kemalism, and how they embrace/internalise the ideology without ever critiquing it. This might be explained by the fact that these students have gone through an ideological education that is primarily based on Kemalist indoctrination, in which ‘critical thinking’ is undermined by the ideological characteristic of the curriculum.

#### **2.4. Examples from different countries having a ‘national’ educational system**

In today’s world, education systems in many countries are shaped by both nationalism and globalisation (Rhea and Seddon, 2005). Therefore, even many countries take the process of globalisation into consideration in their educational policy-making endeavours so as to keep the country integrated with the global system, they are nonetheless still prioritising nationalist ideals in education. Thus, the curricula of many states are still national in many ways. In this regard, perhaps the most serious disadvantage in such a system is that having this kind of nationalist policy in education

culminates in many serious challenges. For instance, as pointed out by Winther-Jensen (2001: 3), one of the biggest issues is “the challenge(s) from increasing internal cultural differences and from equally increasing economic and cultural influences from outside”. Critics thus mention two basic phenomena here, which are internal cultural differences and external factors. External factors are simply the results of the processes of globalisation, both in an economic and cultural sense. As highlighted by Burbules and Torres (2000), international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the World Bank would like to see the implementation of some new educational policies having an economic rationale, which forces governments to perceive education beyond the scope of national characteristics. For example, *the Lisbon strategy for Education and Training 2010* concludes that the Union must “become the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world... capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion..” (European Commission, 2010: 1). In this case, member states of this union are supposed to design their educational systems on the basis of the idea of ‘economic growth’, taking a global perspective into consideration rather than the national one for the creation of a ‘knowledge society’ that transcends national borders (Ozga and Lingard, 2007). Therefore, with the increasing power of ‘global culture’ over local/national cultures within nation-states, it could well be argued that educational systems are also being reformed accordingly in some cases (e.g. see Schissler and Soysal, 2005, Sağlam et al., 2011); yet it is also worth noting that the effects of this on national educational curricula is not powerful enough to make such a huge difference in some countries such as Turkey.

One of the examples showing how a national educational agenda may end up having serious consequences is the case of Hong Kong. Tens of thousands protesters took to the streets to protest the national education curriculum in Hong Kong in July 2012, which was introduced in primary schools in September and planned for secondary schools in 2013 by the Chinese Communist Party, with the exception of private and international schools. According to the new curriculum, Hong Kong students should be taught how to be a loyal citizen of China and how to appreciate the mainland (Telegraph, 2012).

On the other hand, from the perspective of the Chinese government, implementing a form of national education to teach Hong Kong pupils to love the motherland (China) is not strange and should not be criticised in any way. Protestors, however, regarded the new curriculum as a process of 'brainwashing', borrowing the lyrics of Pink Floyd's song 'Another Brick in the Wall', chanting "We do not need no thought control. Leave them kids alone." In response to this, Jiang Yudui, the chairman of the China Civic Education Promotion Association of Hong Kong, stated "If there are problems with the brain, then it needs to be washed, just as clothes need washing if they are dirty and kidneys need dialysis if they are sick" (Washington Post, 2012). This could be considered a rather unfortunate statement, but most importantly, the Hong Kong example clearly provides a valuable lesson: education is still viewed as an ideological instrument to shape/brainwash people and society, and that people are very passionate about any developments to this.

This example further demonstrates that the official ideology of the Chinese Communist government is already dominating the educational system in China. In fact, China specifically pursues a policy of defaming Western values in order to protect its youth from "Western propaganda" (Guardian, 2015). Moreover, even music lessons in public schools include a sense of nationalism/patriotism and the official ideology of Communism in China. Moreover, Brand (2003) looked at music textbooks used in the Chinese educational system, examining song lyrics, and he found out that song lyrics in music textbooks promote the idea of nationalism, a strong work ethic, unity and socialism. In relation to music education more broadly, one of the most important parts of the curriculum is the teaching of the national anthem, something which is done in most countries. For instance, Wimmer and Schiller (2002) stated that even pupils in the United States sing patriotic songs as well as memorising the national anthem, although Americans are usually regarded as a 'civic nation' referring the type of citizenship in the United States. Kennedy and Guerrini (2012) argued that the teaching of the national anthem could be "an unhealthy type of patriotism" (p. 21). Likewise, the national anthem is considered very important in Turkey, too. As a matter of fact, for example, if

one does not stand up while singing the national anthem in Turkish schools, where students have to sing the national anthem twice a week (on Mondays before the classes and Fridays after the classes), it is very likely that s/he might be punished by the principal.

Schissler and Soysal's (2005) research revealed that the Greek national educational system promotes the Greek identity that is based on the Hellenic origin, and alienates others such as the Ottomans (Turks) and Roman Catholics. The study showed that even though Greece implemented required reforms after they joined the EU, History textbooks still propagate the nationalist ideology, something which affects students negatively. Similarly, in a recent research, Stevens (2016) investigated Greek and Turkish Cypriots' attitudes against each other in the south part of Cyprus, and he found out that Greek Cypriots have such nationalist feelings – that stem from the strong sense of the Hellenic identity – that they view Turkish Cypriots unfavourably, excluding and discriminating them, using the phrases such as “the best Turk is a dead Turk”, “stupid Turk”, “Cyprus is Greek”, and “Turks out of Cyprus” (p. 89).

Lastly, Arnott and Ozga (2010) investigated the Scottish national education that has developed lately under the rule of the Scottish National Party (SNP) government. They found out that the educational policies implemented by the SNP show that the image of Scotland as being a competent country is promoted in the Scottish educational system. Hence, they concluded that despite the popularity of the international policies promoting the ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘knowledge society’ which should normally be based upon the notion of ‘competitiveness’ rather than ‘competence’, they believe that this image is deliberately disseminated by the SNP in order to “promote and persuade the ‘people of Scotland’ that they could safely aspire to independence” (p. 347).

The examples from different countries listed above clearly indicate that the nationalist policies in education are still popular in many countries, and they are still used by states in order to disseminate the national feelings and ideals to the masses. The next section

will discuss similar policies within the Turkish case.

## **2.5. Turkish National Educational System**

Because it is crucial to understand the real dynamics and characteristics of national education in Turkey so as to be able to see the bigger picture of how the education system is operating, this chapter thus seeks to examine the current status of the education system along with educational policies, policy documents and existing curriculum in Turkey.

### **2.5.1. Historical Overview of the national education in Turkey**

Soon after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his colleagues embarked on creating a new modern and secular state, with many radical reforms implemented in a short time. Education was, unsurprisingly, one of the areas that could not be left untouched while the new modern Turkish state was being formed. In fact, it could well be claimed that education was given a certain priority at the time, because one of the very first laws, the 'Unification of Education' (Tevhîd-i Tedrîsât Kânûnu), entered into force as part of Mustafa Kemal's revolutionary reforms in 1924 only one year after the Turkish Republic was founded. With this reform, madrasas (Islamic educational institutions) were abolished, and all other educational institutions including international colleges, such as the Robert College in Istanbul, were unified under the Ministry of National Education. This, indeed, gave the Ministry of Education a significant power to control education by all means. Thus, it could be said that the Turkish educational system was not only secularised, but also centralised by the Turkish state (Kaplan, 2005). This obviously made it easier to diffuse the constructed national identity to everyone throughout the country, because the Kemalist elite clearly wanted to bring education under control in order to educate the future generations in accordance with their ideals.

With the changes mentioned above in mind, the aims of the Turkish national education were altered accordingly. Students were supposed to “respect and serve the Turkish nation, the Turkish Grand National Assembly, and the Turkish state” (Beşikçi, 1978). All of these changes were made by the order of Mustafa Kemal, because, for Atatürk, education “must” be national, as noted in this speech:

Education must be national, individuals must be educated to protect their own national values, government, the Turkish Chamber of Deputies and their society and basic principles which constitute Turkish Republic such as Republicanism, Populism, Nationalism, Revolutionism, State Socialism, Secularism must be given to Turkish society by all means (In Aycan, 2005: 137).

Drawing upon Mustafa Kemal’s ideals on education, it seems that citizens were expected to acquire a ‘secular’ and ‘national’ identity in the early republican era. Apparently, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s state-founding ideals, thoughts and ideas regarding education are promoted by the Turkish national education policies with the primary aim here being to ‘create’ either uniformed loyal citizens recognising and internalising Kemalism as the official national ideology; or what Gellner (1983: 38) calls “viable and usable human being[s]”. This has not changed even under the rule of the conservative Ak Party that has been in power since 2002. Despite the redefinition of Kemalist secularism and political melting away of Kemalism under the conservative Ak Party rule, the influence of Kemalism and its concept of nationalism in education has endured, and it has been further diffused throughout the country. It is, therefore, crucial here to ask what the Kemalist interpretation of nationalism really is, as nationalism was declared as the main objective of education by Mustafa Kemal himself (Aycan, 2005). Aytürk (2011) claimed that the Kemalist interpretation of nationalism, which dominates the Turkish education, represents an assimilationist approach, treating other minority and ethnic groups in an intolerant way and aiming at homogenising the nation with the main goal of



Turkification. This approach means that a particular identity is forged, defined and dictated to others by the Turkish nation-state through education.

What is more radical is that the Turkish state deliberately ignored all ethnic groups other than the Turks. For instance, in a textbook called '*Medenî Bilgiler*' (Civil Knowledge) prepared by Mustafa Kemal himself and written by his adopted daughter, Âfet İnan, so that it could be taught in every public school in Turkey, the following is mentioned:

Today, within the Turkish political and social community, there are our citizens and nationalities who were propagandised with the ideas of kurdishness, circasiannes, and even bosniannes and lazness. Nevertheless, these wrong thoughts which are the products of despotic periods of the past, could not affect any individual of the nation except some instruments of the enemy, brainless reactionaries. Because the members of this nation [referring to non-Turks] have the same common history, ethics and principles like the general Turkish community (ethnicities written in non-capital letters in the original text, see İnan, 1998: 18-24).

This quote obviously shows the degree of xenophobia in the hegemonic ideology prevalent at the time. In fact, the way Mustafa Kemal and İnan approached and described the 'issue' is actually reminiscent of racist rhetoric, since the remarks clearly privileged Turkishness over other identities, with other offensive language used in the textbook. It is also interesting to see from the above quotation that ethnicities, apart from the Turkish one, are written in non-capital letters (probably deliberately), which might well be considered another indication of how the new Turkish state welcomed other ethnic groups in the newly-formed nation-state. For these reasons, some scholars have claimed that the Kemalist interpretation of nationalism is indeed xenophobic (see Karaveli, 2010). As a matter of fact, it does take a racist approach to other ethnic minorities in many ways and something which will be discussed in detail later in Chapter 3.

### 2.5.2. Goals of the Turkish National Education

The Constitution of Turkey makes it very clear that Atatürk's principles and reforms are given a significant importance in the Turkish educational system, as the Article 42 explains this under the section "Right and duty of education":

Education shall be conducted along the lines of the principles and reforms of Atatürk, based on contemporary scientific and educational principles, under the supervision and control of the State. Educational institutions contravening these principles shall not be established (TBMM, n.d.).

The Basic Law of National Education explains all the goals of the Turkish education, including the general and specific targets of national education in much detail. In the existing system, the major (first) goal of the Turkish national education is mentioned as follows in the 1<sup>st</sup> Article of the basic law of national education:

To raise all individuals as citizens who are committed to *the principles and reforms of Atatürk* and to *the nationalism of Atatürk* as expressed in the Constitution, who adopt, protect and promote *the national, moral, human, spiritual and cultural values of the Turkish nation*, who love and always seek to exalt their family, country and nation, who know their duties and responsibilities towards the Republic of Turkey which is a democratic, secular and social state governed by the rule of law, founded on human rights and on the tenets laid down in the preamble to the Constitution, and who have internalised these in their behaviours (Ministry of National Education, 2012 [my italics]).

The italicised phrases in the above quote highlight two key points, which are 1) the importance of the Kemalist ideology with a specific focus on the principles of Atatürk and his interpretation of Turkish nationalism, and 2) the significance of the characteristics of the Turkish nation. In other words, students are expected to become

the Kemalist, Turkish nationalists embracing both the Kemalist principles and the values of the Turkish identity.

Within the specific goals section of the National Education Law, Article 10 mentions “Atatürk’s reforms and principles and Atatürk nationalism” as a specific target of the Turkish education. It further goes on to say that “for the preparation of all curriculum, syllabi, and all educational activities for all grades, Atatürk’s reforms and principles and Atatürk nationalism as mentioned in the Constitution are used as bases”. As Article 10 clearly mentions, Atatürk’s reforms, principles, and his version of Turkish nationalism (Kemalism) are considered an essential part of the Turkish national education (ibid). For instance, most of the units in different courses include at least one educational attainment about Atatürk’s personality, his reforms, principles, and his brand of nationalism. Apart from social sciences course units, even textbooks pertaining to maths include sections such as “Atatürk and his views on science”. In doing so, it could be concluded that the Turkish Ministry of National Education wants to make sure that students are familiar with the Kemalist ideology by all means, and that they thus embrace/internalise the main philosophy of Kemalism more fully.

Article 11 states “Democracy Education” as a specific goal, which suggests that one of the other goals of the Turkish national education system is to improve students’ awareness of democracy. However, in the very same section, any teaching or political and ideological discussion against “Atatürk nationalism stated in the Constitution” is strictly prohibited by the law (ibid). In this case, making an exception for Kemalism in the Democracy Education section appears ironic, since democracy should normally allow everything to be discussed freely, even in a classroom environment. This clearly shows that students are expected to accept the Kemalist ideology without question, yet is something which results in an absolute obedience that contradicts democracy.

As can be seen in the aforementioned examples, Kemalism (including the Kemalist interpretation of Turkish nationalism) is considered to be the most important element in

education, and is further privileged over other goals. Therefore, it can be concluded that the goals of the Turkish national education, including the main and specific ones, are about placing special emphasis on the national ideology of Kemalism in regulating one's life.

### **2.5.3. Citizenship Education in Turkey**

#### **2.5.3.1. The concept of citizenship**

Seidman (1999) stated that the concept of citizenship has been developed by nation-states in order to create 'a new form of commonality' for their citizens within the official borders of the state. As Yeğen (2004) notes, the concept of citizenship means a status in society such as having specific rights, and it further means a membership to a particular political community. In this regard, citizenship could be considered a civic identity. However, Derek (2004) suggested that the concept of citizenship actually includes some controversial issues such as the uncertainty of how 'duties' and 'rights' should be balanced in the definition of citizenship. Besides, another issue is called the 'consent descent distinction' which questions whether the concept of citizenship is something established by a person who could freely choose to be part of a specific nation (consent), or is it something that is associated with a particular country a person is actually born in (descent) (Yvonne, 2002). Furthermore, some scholars such as Turner (1999) and Newell (2000) warned against the exclusions that might be created by the bond between citizenship and nation-states. In this regard, there are two types of exclusion, which are 1) the exclusions created by the concept of citizenship against non-citizens within nation-states, and 2) the ones created by the definition of citizenship, something which directly affects citizens of nation-states. Even though the former can be seen in almost every country, the latter could easily be observed in Turkey, because ethnicity is still one of the determining elements in the definition of citizenship in Turkey (Bayır, 2013), something which even excludes the citizens coming from non-Turkish ethnic origins in society.

*Why the examination of the citizenship education in Turkey?*

The type of exclusion mentioned above is further reinforced by the exclusion existing in society. For instance, Ince (2012b) has mentioned in her research that 44% of people in Turkey did not trust foreigners partly, with 29% not trusting them at all, according to World Survey Association's 2008 research. Likewise, according to a recent World Survey Association's (2010-14) research, 35.7% of participants did not trust people coming from other ethnic background partly, and 24.3% did not trust them at all, whereas only 4% of participants trusted people of another nationality "completely". Even though the number of people viewing other nationalities unfavourably fell over time, the data clearly shows that there is a serious problem in society in terms of viewing other nationalities as hostile. As a matter of fact, this is further reinforced by another finding in the same reports that show 25% of respondents as viewing people speaking a language other than Turkish negatively in 2008, and 30% of respondents in a 2010-14 research agreeing that "they would not like to have people who speak a different language as neighbours". This indicates that a significant number of people in Turkey do not view languages other than Turkish favourably. The data reported here appears to support the assumption that the ideological position of the Turkish educational system fuels xenophobic attitudes in society. Therefore, Ince (2012b: 115) concluded in her study that "there is an urgent need to re-examine civic education that is taught in schools, which, ideally, plays an important role in promoting tolerance among citizens". Likewise, this thesis also considers the examination of Turkey's national education approach as crucial for solving some of the serious problems in society, such as the Kurdish Question.

**2.5.3.2. Historical Overview of Citizenship Education in Turkey**

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, where which different ethnic and religious group used to live in relative harmony, the establishment of modern Turkey brought about new types of attitudes against ethnic and religious entities other than Turks, as

noted earlier. During the nation forming process in the early years of the Republic, the Turkish nationalist cadre, or the Kemalists as they are known, had the aim of creating a new state that was homogenously Turkish. For the purpose of creating an ethnically pure homeland for the Turks, a population exchange with Greece, for example, was implemented after the foundation of the Turkish state in 1923. However, Turkey was still home to other ethnic and religious groups such as the Kurds, Circasians, Lazs, and Armenians, among others. Because the Kemalists saw the practical impossibility of homogenising the Turkish Republic, they embarked upon nationalising education in order to assimilate and Turkify the “others” in society. As mentioned by Kadioğlu (2007: 291):

The nationalisation of citizenship in Turkey meant the erasure of religious, ethnic and language-related differences in society. The Republic that evolved became a Republic of Turks at the end of the various policies of the homogenisation of the population via exclusionary as well as assimilationist policies.

The quote above highlights the assimilative characteristics of the national policies implemented at the time for the sake of nation-building process, which culminated in the eradication of ‘religious, ethnic and language-related differences in society’. These policies that dominated the single-party period in Turkey (1923-50) were, however, implemented gradually. For example, within this period, the main objectives of the primary school program were in 1926 to “raise good citizens”, to “raising people, physically and psychologically fit to be Turkish citizens” in 1929, and “raising republican, statist, secular, revolutionary citizens” in 1936, respectively (Çayır and Gürkaynak, 2008: 51). This shows how the objectives evolved over time to finally include some of the basic principles of Kemalism, which are Republicanism (*Cumhûriyetçilik*), Populism (*Halkçılık*), Nationalism (*Milliyetçilik*), Statism (*Devletçilik*), Secularism (*Laiklik*) and Revolutionism/Reformism (*Devrimcilik*).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> These are the six basic principles of Kemalism which are also stated in the Constitution, and something considered as unalterable.

After 1950, which brought about a measure of democratisation in Turkey known as the “multi-party period”, the Turkish state revised its stance on citizenship education. For example, the goals of the citizenship education included phrases such as “working hard, being someone who has a sense of responsibility, studiousness”, with citizenship textbooks containing topics like “democracy within family” and “democracy at school” (ibid., p. 52). One of the possible explanations for this change is that the political atmosphere in the West started to be dominated by democratic regimes with the influence of American liberalism after autocratic regimes and single-party dictatorships (such as Germany and Italy) were defeated in World War 2. Therefore, it has been claimed by many scholars that this trend also affected Turkey, and further triggered the shift from single-party era to multi-party system (Gülboy, 2010). With this in mind, the change in the aims of education mentioned earlier could well be interpreted as a result of the political shift in Turkey at the time.

In 1970-71, the newly introduced Social Studies course unit comprising of history, geography, and citizenship course units was aimed at promoting the idea of ‘freedom’. This change can be seen as a result of the liberal characteristics of the 1960 constitution widening basic rights and freedoms in Turkey. However, after the 1971 Turkish military coup, more nationalist concepts were introduced for the sake of reviving Turkish nationalism (Ince, 2012a).

After the 1980 Turkish military coup, with the Turkish armed forces taking on absolute power in the administration of the country, further changes were made to the citizenship education. For example, because Turkey had experienced a near civil war between rightists/Turkish nationalists and the leftists/socialists/communists for the first time in its history during the 1970s (which formed the pretext for the coup), the mind-set of the post-coup administration was dominated by the perception of “external and internal threats” which needed to be dealt with (Üstel, 2005). Within the frame of the militarisation and re-nationalisation of education, a new “National Security” (Millî

Güvenlik) course unit was introduced and taught by Turkish army officials in schools, a functional example of the militarisation of the education system by the Turkish armed forces. Apart from the National Security course unit, a compulsory “Religious Culture and Moral Information” course unit was also introduced. As Kaya (2014) has noted, what would become the “Turkish-Islamic Synthesis” begun to be promoted after the 1980 coup so as to neutralise the ideologies of the far leftists who had dominated the political landscape during the 1970s. İnal (1996) has also noted that the post-1980 military coup period was marked by a new wave of “ideological indoctrination” of the national education system. Indeed, the Turkish armed forces did in fact use education as an instrument for indoctrination; however, İnal fails to note that Kemalist indoctrination had already dominated the educational system in Turkey ever since the 1930s (Kaplan, 2005).

What can be concluded from the historical developments discussed above is that Turkey did try to transform its educational paradigm for a few times in order to adopt to a more liberal educational system promoting the idea of freedom; however, the military (Turkish Armed Forces) appeared to interfere and hinder those attempts, thus kept the ideological educational system as it was designed in the Kemalist single-party period. Therefore, it can be argued that the military in Turkey made the preservation of such an ideological educational system from 1930s to the present day possible.

Nonetheless, changes to the education system were made again from the late 1980s and up until the present day, when another process – that of Turkey’s bid for accession into the European Union – came to considerably affect Turkey’s approach to citizenship education. Turkey begun the accession process in 1987, though it was officially accepted as a ‘candidate’ for full membership only in 1999. Thus, even though positive changes could be seen in the post-1980s due to the fact that Turkey began to be become more integrated into the free market economy of the world, considerable changes in education came only in the late 1990s.



After the Ak Party came to power in 2002, Turkey's EU accession process gained momentum, because the Ak Party took a pro-EU stance in the early period of its rule (Özbudun, 2014). Several educational reforms that reduced the domination of nationalism and militarisation to a certain extent continued to be introduced during the Ak Party period. All textbooks, for instance, were redesigned in 2005 based on the idea of constructivist philosophy <sup>7</sup>, prioritising the idea of student-centred learning (Ministry of National Education, 2009). Furthermore, a new "Democracy Citizenship and Human Rights Education" course unit was introduced, and citizenship education began to be dominated by notions of human rights and democracy; this was at the time when Turkey was undergoing a reform process aimed to make it ready for European Union membership. Also, content regarding Alevism was added to the compulsory "Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge" textbook in 2011, and non-Muslims were exempted from these classes (Çayır and Gürkaynak, 2008: 52, Europa, 2013). Then, the "National Security" (Millî Güvenlik) course unit was removed from the curriculum, and some minority languages such as Kurdish and Laz were introduced as elective course units in public schools in 2012 (Çayır, 2015). Likewise, "Mardin Artuklu University provided post-graduate education in Kurdish, and established Arabic and Syriac language and culture departments. Muş Alpaslan and Bingöl Universities set up Kurdish language and literature departments" (Europa, 2014: 62). Afterwards, the Student Pledge/Oath that included the controversial phrase "How happy is the one who says I am a Turk" was abolished, and mother tongue instruction in Kurdish was allowed in private schools in 2013 (Europa, 2015).

The 2009 European Council inspection report stated that, "A debate on minority-related issues has developed in the country. Several reports by academics and NGOs have been published, in particular on education and discrimination in education. Work is under way to remove discriminatory language from textbooks" (Europa, 2009: 27). Even though the aforementioned reforms ensured that the Turkish educational system became more

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<sup>7</sup> Constructivism is primarily based on Piaget's ideas, and promotes the idea that students are complex and active learners, and they are an important part of the learning process. See WERTSCH, J. 1997. *Vygotsky and the formation of the mind*, Cambridge, MA..

inclusive of ethnic and religious minorities within society, and that the authority of the Turkish armed forces in education weakened, Turkish nationalist related themes/concepts, and the domination of the Kemalist ideology remained more or less the same. Furthermore, the exclusion of other ethnic and religious groups is still a significant problem in both textbooks and the curriculum in the Turkish educational system (e.g. see Ince, 2012a, Zeydanlıoğlu and Güneş, 2013, Çayır, 2014, Arslan, 2015, Çayır, 2015). Despite all of this, what is surprising is that Turkey's progress reports produced by the European Council have not mentioned any of the discriminatory language used in school textbooks since 2009, though discrimination against minorities still exists in the curriculum. Instead, they have specifically been highlighting the lack of mother tongue education other than Turkish (especially in Kurdish) in primary and secondary public schools in Turkey (Europa, 2009, Europa, 2010, Europa, 2011, Europa, 2012, Europa, 2013, Europa, 2014, Europa, 2015).

As a result, what can be concluded – and what the European Council progress reports show – is that Turkey still has a long way to go in order to make its educational system inclusive of all groups without prioritising/promoting Turkishness, the Sunni interpretation of Islam, and the Kemalist ideology.

**Table 2.1.** Key reforms implemented in accordance with Turkey's EU harmonisation processes

Transformation of the Social Studies programme	2004
Transformation of all textbooks according to student-centred learning	2005
Introduction of a new Democratic citizenship and Human Rights Education course unit	2005
Addition of the content about Alevism to the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge textbook	2011
Legalisation of optional course units in minority languages such as Kurdish	2012
Legalisation of Kurdish mother tongue education in private schools	2013

Along with the promising reforms/developments mentioned above, what is also positive is that in recent years several inquiries have taken place into the status of the citizenship education in the country. Indeed, with multiculturalism and multicultural education becoming more popular in Turkey as a result of increased discussion about ethnic and religious minority issues, studies on citizenship education have also increased correspondingly (e.g. see Toktaş, 2005, Toktaş, 2006, Kadioğlu, 2007, Çayır and Gürkaynak, 2008, Tüzün, 2009, Çayır, 2011, Ince, 2012b, Ince, 2012a, Çayır, 2014, Çayır, 2015, İbrahimoglu and Yılmaz, 2015). All of these studies highlight the fact that Turkey still needs to improve its stance on citizenship in order to end the exclusion of 'others' in society, and to create a more diverse society where no one is excluded.

#### **2.5.4. Language of instruction in education and Turkey's language policy**

Aside from history, the other significant element used by the nation-state to facilitate nationalism is, indeed, language. It could be argued that language policies create a single official language as part of an ideology of nation building; and this process generally ends up privileging an official language over a minority language or minority languages, finally leading to linguistic homogenisation. The term 'linguistic nationalism' comes into play here.

##### **2.5.4.1. Historical Overview of Turkey's Language Policy**

The Republic of Turkey was established by the Turkish nationalist cadre (Mustafa Kemal and his friends), most of whom had been active members of the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihâd ve Terakkî Cemiyeti) which was the dominant political force in the 1910s and which pursued Turkish nationalist ideals. During the period of the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress, a policy of 'Turkification' was embarked upon by Turkish nationalists. With this policy, the Unionists aimed at saving the Ottoman Empire by homogenising the Empire, and Anatolia in particular. Turkish was of the paramount

importance to this process. For example, the theoretical founder of Turkish nationalism and the ideologue of the Turkish nationalists at the time, Ziya Gökalp, who also provided the inspiration for the Kemalists during the nation-building period, suggested that “today in Europe only those states which are based on a single-language group are believed to have a future” (Gökalp, 1981: 81)

The policy of Turkification continued in the early days of the Republic extensively. Turkish was given a certain priority as part of these Turkification policies. In this regard, the Kemalist elite wanted to ‘purify’ two things, that is, the homeland and the language. For the former goal, the Kemalists signed the Treaty of Population Exchange with Greece in 1923 in order to exchange Greek and Turkish population living in the two countries, something which aimed at homogenising and Turkifying the new Republic. As for the latter, the nationalist cadre implemented two major policies. The first was to purify the Turkish language by eliminating words of Arabic and Persian origin, since Ottoman Turkish (*Osmanlıca Türkçesi*) had borrowed heavily from these. The second policy was to promote the Turkish language by banning other languages from being spoken in public, such as Kurdish.

The language policies aimed at assimilating all ethnic minorities in Turkey. Therefore, languages other than Turkish were strictly prohibited by law. This point is beautifully illustrated in comments made by İlhan Selçuk, who was the owner of a secularist/nationalist daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* in Turkey, and seen as a loyal campaigner of the national ideology of Kemalism. He stated as follows:

My parents occasionally spoke Greek with each other, but they were intimidated by the coercion to speak only Turkish. These were the early years of the Republic, when citizens were told by the state to speak Turkish. If only my parents had spoken Greek, if only I had learned Greek; then I would have been able to read the Greek classics (Karaveli, 2010: 98).

#### **2.5.4.2. Turkey's current language policy in education**

The language policy of the Kemalist nation-building project flourished in Turkey in the post single-party period. The existence of a Kurdish ethnicity has been denied by the state and Kurdish has been prohibited from being spoken in public up until 1994 (Ince, 2012a). Kurdish people have only recently regained most of their basic rights as a result of the recent 'Kurdish Initiative'. For instance, the state broadcasting institution, TRT (Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyonu/Turkish Radio and Television) only introduced a new channel broadcasting in Kurdish in 2009, even though children's programmes in Kurdish remained forbidden. In 2010, the right to use Kurdish as the language of campaigning during elections was granted. Moreover, the government introduced Kurdish, along with some other languages such as Laz and Abaza, as elective course units in public schools in 2012. After then, using Kurdish in the right of defence in a court was also allowed beginning in 2013. Furthermore, the right to be instructed in Kurdish in private schools was legalised at the end of 2013 as part of the democratic package introduced by the Turkish government (Arslan, 2015). Therefore, having looked at the linguistic reforms implemented by the government from 2009 to 2013, it could be seen that there has been a promising development in terms of acknowledging fundamental rights of ethnic minorities, showing the transition from absolute non-recognition of minorities to the recognition of basic rights in a legal context.

Despite all the changes made regarding minority languages in recent years however, Turkey still needs to revise its language policy in the Turkish Constitution, and in the field of education in particular, such as allowing mother tongue instruction in public schools so as to improve the rights of minorities, and to make Turkey a more diverse country that respects 'other' cultures.

On the other hand, given the unpredictability of the political climate in Turkey at times, it is probable that the revitalisation of the minority language issue may lead to reactionary movements against the dominant majority language – something which may

culminate in a new type of nationalist discourse within the formerly embittered minority – something which Hechter (2001) calls ‘peripheral nationalism’. For him, when state-building nationalism fails, “it can generate peripheral nationalism within state borders” (p. 56). For instance, in Spain, educational policies regarding language, such as the ‘Catalan law of language normalisation’ in the region of Catalonia focussed on privileging Catalan over Spanish in 1983 when the Catalan language was allowed in public schools and taught alongside Spanish. This might be explained by the fact that the Catalan government needed to promote the Catalan language at the time in order to protect it from a more powerful language, Spanish. Nevertheless, Figueras and Masella (2009) claim that after this change, pupils educated in Catalonia, and whose parents are not Catalan, said that they feel themselves to be ‘more Catalan than Spanish’. The Catalan case, therefore, appears to be an example of how a minority language could also be used as an instrument to create a new nationalist perspective alongside another dominant national perspective in a single country.

Having said this, it would be very difficult to judge multicultural policies in education by using the Catalan example as an evidence for failure; especially since the multicultural educational perspective is already being accused of damaging the culture of the nation-state, threatening national cohesion (Bekerman, 2003). In this case, it should be taken into consideration that the main problem with the approach taken in the Catalan case is that authorities there tried to use the same policies previously used by a proponents of a majority language and thus created similar problems for other ‘minorities’ (who actually belong to the national ‘majority’) within that locality. This claim is reinforced by the fact that there are other countries who implement multicultural policies more successfully. By way of an example, the Polish minority has a right to be instructed in their own mother tongue in the Czech Republic. As a matter of fact, the Czech Republic has a sophisticated schooling system whereby all subjects are taught in Polish in areas where the Polish minority lives (European Parliament, 2001). According to a report produced by the Czech Republic, which was submitted to *the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* Committee, there were 4000 pupils being instructed in the Polish language in 2004 in the Czech Republic. Moreover, the Polish language is also

taught at university level. The Czech case, therefore, demonstrates that multicultural policies in education focusing on mother tongue instruction could indeed be implemented successfully. This happens only if there is no strong nationalist view promoted in the curriculum which is designed by the minority group who want instruction in their own language.

From an international law perspective, regarding the mother tongue instruction, in the 1960 *United Nations Convention against Discrimination in Education*, Article 5 is very clear, which explicitly says that

The members of national minorities [have the right] to carry on their own educational activities, including... the use or the teaching of their own language, provided... that this right is not exercised in a manner which prevents the members of these minorities from understanding the culture and language of the community as a whole and from participating in its activities (UNESCO, 1960).

As stated above, in multi-ethnic countries, a sophisticated schooling system and network should be established in which pupils from all minority groups are given the right to be instructed in their mother tongue. In the case of the successful implementation of mother tongue instruction, different cultural identities could be better preserved in societies, and the importance of cultural diversity can be better understood and appreciated by members of society.

## **2.5.5. The Existing Status of the Ethnic and Religious Minorities in the Turkish Education**

### **2.5.5.1. Conceptual Framework of Minority Rights in Turkey**

In Turkey there has always been a problem regarding the definition of “minority”. After the foundation of the Republic, minorities were defined in the Treaty of Lausanne which Turkey signed with the Allied powers in 1923. According to the Treaty, minorities were given the right to establish their own educational institutions, and use their own language in these institutions, even though they have to be checked by the Ministry of National Education regularly; they also had other rights, such as equality before the law. However, the main problem was not the rights given to minorities in Turkey, it was the definition of which groups constituted one. It was stated in the Treaty that Turkey only recognises Armenians, Greeks, and Jewish as minorities. In other words, only major non-Muslim groups were treated as minorities. Thus, Muslim minorities such as the Circassians and Kurds were treated as part of the Turkish nation. Consequently, these minorities have faced serious problems and challenges in Turkey, both in education and in society in general. Indeed, all non-Turkish Muslim groups face issues around the use of their own language in education, and have thus faced a big challenge of preserving their languages and cultures; this is down to the fact that they are not counted as minorities according to Turkish law.

Even though what constitutes a minority has not been defined in international law so far, Šmihula (2008) has categorised two types of minorities, which are 1) traditional minority, 2) modern non-traditional minority/immigrants. In this case, the only factor separating traditional minorities from non-traditional minorities/modern immigrants is that the requisite of “a long-term presence on the territory where it has lived” (ibid., p. 99). In this regard, only those who are considered as traditional minorities enjoy a kind of special treatment, benefiting from specific minority rights in addition to basic human rights in many countries including European countries, while non-traditional minorities/modern immigrants are granted human rights only. According to Šmihula, a group could be categorised as a traditional national minority only if:

1. it is numerically smaller than the rest of population of the state or a part of the state;
2. it is not in a dominant position;



3. its culture, language, religion, race, etc. is distinct from that of the rest of the population;
4. its members have a will to preserve their specificity;
5. its members are citizens of the state where they have the status of a minority (ibid., p. 99).

In addition to the criteria above, such a group is indeed expected to 'have a long-term presence on the territory where it has lived', as mentioned earlier. Taking into consideration all of these, the Kurdish people should clearly be considered as a traditional minority in Turkey where they have lived for centuries.

Because Armenians, Jewish, and Greeks are legally classified as minorities in Turkey, they have certain rights above Kurds and Assyrians. These groups have their own schools that are not directed by the Ministry of National Education. For example, in Istanbul English/Hebrew is the language of instruction in Jewish schools; Greek in Greek schools; Armenian in Armenian schools – all of which are taught alongside Turkish. However, even these schools do not enjoy total flexibility away from the centralised curriculum. For example, in all these schools, History, Geography, History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism, and Social Studies course units have to be taught in Turkish. Furthermore, the weekly hours of Greek and Armenian instruction must work alongside an equal amount time given to Turkish course units (Kaya, 2011). This indicates that these schools are still strictly 'controlled' by the MoNE. In fact, the MoNE further appoints one deputy principal to all minority-led schools, which automatically causes a raft of management issues.

#### **2.5.5.2. Challenges of non-Turkish Muslims and non-Muslims**

In Turkey, some of non-Turkish Muslim and non-Muslim groups have serious challenges due to the fact that they are not granted a minority status. For example, the Assyrians, like many others, do not have the right to be educated in their own mother tongue, even though they constitute a large community in southeastern cities such as Mardin. In

2012, an Assyrian church foundation in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul demanded the right to have mother tongue education in Assyrian in a kindergarten from the Provincial Directorate of National Education in Istanbul. The response from the Provincial Directorate was as follows:

You are not a minority group, but a primary component in Turkey. Therefore, you cannot have a mother tongue education in Assyrian in a kindergarten. As Turkish citizens in Turkey do not have a mother tongue apart from Turkish, you cannot teach Assyrian to students (Agos, 2012).

This clearly shows that the definition of minorities stated in the Treaty of Lausanne is still used today as an excuse by the Turkish state in order not to grant more rights to some ethnic and/or religious groups such as the Assyrians, Kurds and Alevis. Having said that, these issues are not the only challenges facing these groups. For example, Assyrians also face other serious forms of discrimination within the Turkish educational system. For instance, in 2011, the Assyrians were described as “traitors who co-operated with Western states” in a History textbook for 10<sup>th</sup> grade, something which naturally caused great anger in the Assyrian community (Milliyet, 2011).

The Assyrian community is, however, not the only non-Turkish group suffering from a discriminative attitude within the existing education system. The Armenians are probably facing the highest levels of prejudice in Turkish society, which could actually be interpreted as a reaction to the ‘genocide claims’ made by the Armenian community regarding events during WW1. Both the Turkish state and the overwhelming majority of people in Turkey believe that the Ottoman Empire only forcefully relocated Armenians during the war as a military necessity. This is the official state narrative and can be seen in the educational system. For instance, one of the points teachers must pay attention to while they are teaching the ‘History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism’ is that “teachers – according to the principle of actuality – should prioritise the discussions of the Armenian claims and further explain that these claims do not match with the facts of

historical events” (Başol et al., 2012b: 35). Apart from efforts to teach students the official Turkish view of historical events, the same textbook for 11<sup>th</sup> graders describes Armenian groups, such as the ‘Hunchakian Organisation’ which aimed at establishing an Armenian state in Eastern Anatolia, as “a harmful organisation” (Özcan, 2014: 29). The purpose of mentioning all this is not to debate the historical veracity of the statements made in textbooks, but to show that Armenian identity is only ever mentioned in history textbooks in negative light and that this is to blame for creating prejudice in society against Armenians. As a matter of fact, this prejudice might well turn into xenophobia. For example, an anecdote told by a 23-year-old participant in a research project about the challenges Armenians face in society explains this clearly:

Since some Armenian massacres took place in Erzurum province, teachers used to visit each classroom in March every year, telling students how brutal and blood-thirsty the Armenian nation is, and how they are the enemy of the Turks. After these talks, students became so motivated that had they seen an Armenian outside the classroom, they would have lynched him/her straightaway (Firat, 2010: 46 [my translation])

### **2.5.5.3. Challenges of the Kurds in the Turkish education**

As stated earlier, some of the most significant issues facing Turkey today result from the implementation and imposition of a Kemalist nationalist curriculum and constructed Turkish identity onto people. This has profound effects on minority ethnic groups such as the Kurds. To give an example here, I found that during my MA dissertation *Creativity in the Turkish National Educational System in relation to the National Ideology of Kemalism and the Industrial Revolution*, the majority of Kurdish participants (both teachers and students) criticised the prevailing influence of Kemalism and its interpretation of nationalism on education. One Kurdish student’s statement is particularly notable in this regard: “There is a strong nationalist concept in Mustafa Kemal's ideas and I do not want to be a Turkish nationalist as a Kurdish person” (Ince,

2012: 58). Furthermore, one Kurdish teacher's statement regarding the ideological education is also interesting to note here, which reads

In democratic countries, the educational system should be built upon democratic values instead of ideologies. Especially if the country includes multi ethnic groups, it is important to have common values in public institutions. So, in my opinion, students should be taught in the name of democratic and/or common values rather than imposing a particular ideology to everyone in society.

One Turkish teacher disagreed with this assessment by arguing that "I certainly believe that the next generation of the country should be taught under the guise of Kemalist principles in schools. If some people do not like this, they actually do not have to live in Turkey. If they do [want to live here], they have to respect the national ideology of Turkey" (Ince, 2012: 42). Of course, this statement could be considered offensive by many. These examples suggest that a multi-ethnic country like Turkey should develop a more democratic, transparent and less nationalist educational system in order to promote an atmosphere of diversity for both its teachers and students.

Apart from the ideological issues mentioned above, one of the biggest challenges Kurdish pupils face in Turkey is related to language. As Romaine (1994) has noted, language issues are one of the most serious barriers impacting minority pupils' attainment. This, in fact, is the case in Turkey for Kurdish pupils who start school with either no or very little Turkish, as illustrated by the following:

Having to begin their education in Turkish is a serious disadvantage for Kurdish children, as demonstrated by the following statement by a Turkish teacher: 'The kids did not understand me and I did not understand them... The first year of education is wasted. There is no time set aside for the kids to learn Turkish. They have to learn a new language and catch up with their peers elsewhere in Turkey' (International Crisis Group, 2012: 13).

As mentioned above, the fact that some Kurdish pupils (especially in rural areas) start school with little Turkish creates a big gap between Kurdish pupils and their Turkish peers. Coşkun et al. (2010), also includes an interesting quote from a teacher working in the southeast of Turkey:

Sometimes one can easily sink into despair, thinking about how we can do it and what will happen to these children. I sometimes call my niece who live in the western part of Turkey, and is in Grade 2. I personally teach students at exactly the same level. There is such a difference between them. (..) These pupils are certainly hugely disadvantaged in terms of language, financial circumstances, family, and the region [they live in]. For example, I used to live in a suburb of İzmir, only now I understand how lucky I actually was [compared to these pupils] (ibid., p. 55).

Likewise, another teacher in the same study also commented that,

If you have Turkish pupils, then you have to teach them how to use the language, how to read and write it, but if you have Kurdish pupils, you have to first teach the language itself. This is the biggest disadvantage they are experiencing (ibid., p. 55).

These examples clearly indicate that there is a huge language barrier faced by Kurdish pupils, something which affects their achievements, and thus their careers. As a result, Coşkun et al. (2010) further highlighted the importance of the establishment of a multi-linguistic educational system, with minorities' mother tongues acknowledged as the language of instruction in public schools.

Another significant issue that emerges from the aforementioned examples is that teachers with Kurdish students also face serious difficulties in primary education, as they struggle to communicate with their students. The famous documentary "On the way to

school” (İki Dil, Bir Bavul) is a useful example showing the difficulties of Turkish teachers working in Kurdish inhabited cities. The film tells the story of a Turkish teacher named Emre and the challenges he faces as a teacher in a remote Kurdish town where he is appointed. When Emre goes to the school for the first time, he experiences a culture shock, finding out that people and students there do not know Turkish, finding himself as ‘a stranger in Turkey’, his own country (Demir, 2014). He struggles to communicate with his students, but they make progress over time, by learning how to understand each other, even though some problems persist. One day, one of the parents tells Emre “You came here to teach, but it is you who also needs to learn” (ibid., p. 382). With the story in mind, as noted by Demir, the “learning” mentioned by the parent above is not in reference to learning the Kurdish language alone, but also the culture, identity, the way they live etc. Using this anecdote, the researcher argued that Turks in general “have to engage in the demanding job of learning and discovery and engage Kurds as equal interlocutors”, just as the teacher Emre did in the film, so as to institute a “meaningful interaction between the two main groups in Turkey” (ibid., p. 382).

## **2.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that education is the best instrument for nation building policies, and has been treated as such the world over by nation states. By giving contemporary examples, I first attempted to show that nationalism is on the rise across the world and secondly I tried to demonstrate the ‘bigger picture’, that is, to explain how education is being used and, in fact, manipulated by nation-state authorities for the sake of creating ‘national unity’.

This chapter has thus showed that nationalism continues to persist globally and, in fact, nationalist approaches might sometimes be transformed into racist approaches like the ‘Golden Dawn’ political movement in Greece. It may be that such movements benefit from economic recessions taking place, just as the popularity of the Nazis increased and

they then came to power immediately after the great depression of 1929.

Secondly, returning to the hypothesis/question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that even though Usher and Edwards (1994) argued that national education was diminishing in influence, a number of examples mentioned throughout the chapter from different countries clearly indicates that education policies in nation states are generally determined by the state in order to diffuse the national identity created and defined by the state itself through the implementation of a centralised curriculum in the modern (or postmodern) world. Examples/anecdotes mentioned throughout the chapter further assist in our understanding of the role of education being used to facilitate nationalism and exclude (even assimilate) minorities in society. Despite the effects of globalisation, nationalism still influences educational policies both in a national and cultural sense. Education, in this case, is used by politicians and educational authorities by constructing a national history curriculum and privileging an official language over minority languages, and thus creating a specific national (ideal) identity. Therefore, all of these corroborate the idea of Wiborg (2000) who claimed that education is an indispensable sector for the nation-state in order to produce new generations necessary to achieve its goals/targets. The examples mentioned in this chapter suggest that national education may threaten the existence of minority identities, thus the idea of pluralism in multi-ethnic countries altogether. Hence, it is possible to hypothesise that these conditions are less likely to occur in countries having less national, less centralised and less politicised educational systems.

Thirdly, it was mentioned before that Rousseau emphasised the necessity of having a 'national' history and geography curriculum in order to form a strong national identity. Given this idea, it can be said that nation-building policies in modern states are reinforced by the construction of a nation's history, just as in the case of Turkey, and it is then diffused through the educational system. For instance, the official history narrative in Greece has been built on the pillars of nineteenth-century Romantic historiography and has not changed since then. In the Greek history thesis, the continuity of the Greek nation was constructed by linking its modern culture to the Hellenic identity of

Byzantium (Liakos, 2001). Likewise, the official Turkish history thesis also reflects a political project aiming to creating a modern, secular and national identity which was seen as a necessary precondition for creating the Turkish nation-state in a territory ruled by the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years. Therefore, in the Turkish history thesis, the history of the Ottoman Empire was intentionally ignored and the Arian origins of the Turkish people were presented as the 'real' Turkish civilisation that should be celebrated (Ersanlı-Behar, 1998). Nonetheless, these newly created history discourses generally end up having an ethnocentric view of history which usually feeds xenophobia and nationalism. In this regard, so-called 'enemy states' are created by the nation-state. For example, Greece has been seen as an enemy of the Turkish state since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Similar processes were experienced after the breakdown of Yugoslavia whereby Croatia and Slovenia, for example, still regard Serbia as a great enemy (Koren, 2002). Therefore, it could be said that these examples show us that the construction of the national history inevitably creates 'the other', thus promoting xenophobia and damaging the idea of different groups living peacefully together in a diverse society.

Lastly, another issue emerging from this chapter relates to ideas about the authoritarian characteristics of the nation-state. In this regard, I defend the view that there is a sense of authoritarianism inherent in the nature of the nation-state. The dictation/imposition of a particular national identity by the state appears to be a functional example for this claim. With this in mind, generally speaking, modern nation states tend to see themselves as authorities that have a duty to take care of the education of the young generation.

To sum up, conclusions drawn from this chapter add to a growing body of literature that looks at the politicisation and centralisation of education by the state as necessary way to form national identity and for the preservation of the entity of the nation-state itself – something which results in the exclusion of other ethnic groups in society; this chapter also contributes additional evidence to idea that the nation-state represents a type of authoritarian system in society.



Finally, this chapter gave an overview of the relationship between education and nationalism, and therefore provided context and background that are necessary in order to understand the examination of Turkey's Kurdish question from an educational perspective better.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **TURKISH & KURDISH NATIONALISM IN TURKEY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

Nationalism played a huge role in the foundation of states after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. With the great influence of the idea of nationalism, especially after the French Revolution, many revolts were also initiated against the Ottomans, since many parts wanted to establish their own nation states instead of living under the rule of someone else.<sup>8</sup> Turkey was also one of these nation states, founded in a territory ruled by the Ottomans for hundreds of years. In fact, it would not be incorrect to say that every nation that used to live under the rule of the Ottoman Empire has its own nation state except the Kurds today. Therefore, given that nationalism is a crucial concept to understand the current situation in the area and thus the Kurdish Question in Turkey, this paper seeks to understand the main framework of Turkish and the Kurdish nationalisms and further examines their main aims along with the dominant ideologies forming the mainstream Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms.

#### **3.2. Turkish Nationalism**

When discussing Turkish nationalism, one has to account for the existence of varying versions of Turkish nationalisms: (i) extreme nationalism which is the main philosophy of the the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – MHP), (ii) Turkish

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<sup>8</sup> Just a note that some academics today discuss the idea that actually initial revolts were not about nationalism but centre-periphery struggles; nationalism came later and was back projected by nationalists. See ARDIÇ, N. 2013. *Islam and the Politics of Secularism: The Caliphate and Middle Eastern Modernization in the Early 20th Century*, London, Routledge.

nationalism among Muslim conservatives (iii) and Kemalist nationalism which is the official one embraced by the Turkish state. Even though only the official Turkish nationalism is examined deeply in this paper, it is, however, important to understand the birth of Turkish nationalism, its background and how it has evolved over time.

### **3.2.1. Three Ways of Policy to Save the Sick Man of Europe (The Ottoman Empire)**

In his famous book titled "*Üç Tarz-ı Siyâset*" (Three Ways of Policy), Akçura (1976) discussed three different policies proposed at the time as necessary to save the 'Sick Man of Europe' (that is, the Ottoman Empire). The three policies mentioned by Akçura were Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism (or Turanism) respectively. With the first policy, the unification of all people under the umbrella 'being Ottoman' was aimed at, regardless of people's religious and ethnic backgrounds and thus making each individual equal before the law and the creation of an 'Ottoman nation'. Akçura, however, criticised this policy in his book and labelled it as "pointless" and "impractical" by arguing that "the illusion of organising an Ottoman nation passed away with the French Empire and, like it, can never be revived again" (ibid., p. 3). Indeed, the policy of Ottomanism did fail especially soon after the Ottoman Empire was defeated in the Balkan wars ending in 1913. The great loss of territories in Rumelia (Albania, Bulgaria etc.,) proved that Ottomanism would not be sufficient to achieve success in preserving these territories. The second policy is Pan-Islamism which was an attempt to politically unify Muslims under the banner of Islam, regardless of their ethnicity, and seeking to create a kind of 'Islamic Commonwealth'. Sultan Abdul Hamid II in particular embraced a Pan-Islamist policy, using the title 'Caliph' more vigorously than his predecessors, as opposed to only using the title 'Sultan'. Nonetheless, there also appeared a potential here for divisions in the empire between non-Muslims and Muslims which was actually the main obstacle to the success of the policy. Furthermore, Akçura (1976) adds another point by highlighting the risk that other empires felt, like the British Empire, who would not let the Ottomans to implement this policy successfully since it had the potential to

adversely affect its colonial presence in India. Due to all of these risks, Akçura said the implementation of this policy was actually too difficult.

Aside from two policies (Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism), some other Ottoman intellectuals and officials also sought to find an alternative policy in order for the great empire to rise from the ashes, yet they thought that all territories beyond Anatolia were practically surrendered and thus at risk. For them, this complicated policy-making processes at the time and the only idea left to save what was left of the empire was thought to be 'Turkism' which aimed at unifying all Turks. Akçura (1976) called this policy '*Türk Milliyet-i Siyâsiyesi*' (Turkish Political Nationalism). Nevertheless, with this policy, there appeared other issues, such as the necessity to assimilate other people coming from different ethnic backgrounds and thus the risk of tensions between Turks and non-Turk Muslims alike.

Even though Akçura (1976) was one of those who supported the policy of Pan-Turkism, he finished his book by arguing that "In short, the question which is in my thoughts and inviting an answer is still unanswered. The question is: of the three policies of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism, which one was the more beneficial and practical for the Ottoman state?" (ibid., p. 17). This, of course, indicates that Ottoman intellectuals were never really very sure that which policy would be better to rescue the empire.

However, some other intellectuals, such as Ali Kemal, a friend of Akçura, criticised Akçura's thesis. To him, the Ottomans had never pursued any specific (planned) policy like Ottomanism or Islamism, because he thought that they were too weak to do so and had other priorities, such as the improvement of intellectual, economic and educational standards of the Empire. He also claimed that these three policies were actually implemented unintentionally and simultaneously, because, for him, "Turkism, Ottomanism and Islamism cannot be separated from each other" (Akçura, 1976: 37). Ahmed Ferid also contributed to this discussion and criticised Ali Kemal, arguing that the policies of Ottomanism and Islamism were implemented by the Ottoman Empire as

Akçura had said. Furthermore, Ferid claimed that these policies were actually the natural consequences of the *Tanzimat* which, for him, “meant the abandonment of medieval traditions... the reformist politicians of the [Tanzimat] era accepted as they should have [the idea of people’s representation] brought about by the great [French] revolution and strived to achieve the administrative unity of the Ottoman subjects.” He, therefore, regarded Ottomanism as “the most powerful shield, the greatest defence policy and the most suitable goal” of the Ottoman Empire (cited in Karpas, 2001: 393).

### **3.2.2. The Committee of Union and Progress and the policy of Pan-Turkism**

Even though the discourse of Turkish nationalism emerged as an ideology in both a linguistic and cultural sense (Mardin, 2000), it can be said that it became a more powerful ideology dominating politics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century especially with the Union and Progress political movement, as mentioned by Akçura (1976) earlier.

After the coup against Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1909, who embraced and practiced Pan-Islamism during his rule, the *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Committee of Union and Progress – CUP), a political party founded by Young Turks, began to dominate politics. This popularity reached its peak in 1913, and after another coup called the *Bâb-ı Âli Baskını* in the very same year, the CUP became the sole political movement. By the time they had come to power, Pan-Islamism and Ottomanism had already failed because of the Muslim uprisings against the Ottomans and the great loss of Ottoman territory after the Balkan Wars in 1912-13. Due to this fact, a new ideology was thought to be needed at the time. Therefore, the CUP embarked upon the policy of Pan-Turkism which was seen as a way of reviving the Ottoman Empire (Akçam, 2006).

Under CUP leadership, the Ottoman Empire joined World War I on the side of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary etc.,) in 1914, because three prominent figures in the CUP (Enver Pasha, Cemal Pasha, Talat Pasha) thought that the war represented a good opportunity for the implementation of Pan-Turkist policies. The CUP

attempted to use the war to homogenise Turkey in order to better implement its Pan-Turkist agenda. With this in mind, for instance, the Dispatchment and Settlement Law (The *Sevk ve İskân Kânûnu*), which is also known as the Deportation Law (*Tehcir Kânûnu*) came into force in 1915 and forced Armenians to leave Anatolia where they had lived for hundreds of years, and move to other areas, such as Syria (Goldberg, 2006).

World War I, however, led to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after defeat in the War. As a result, the rule of the CUP finally ended. Nevertheless, members of the CUP continued to pursue their ideology within Turkey even after the Turkish Republic, up until the so-called 'İzmir assassination', a failed attempt to kill Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1926. With this incident, powerful CUP figures were either hanged or imprisoned, and they were banned from politics (Savaşal, 2006). Other leaders of the CUP left Turkey and continued to fight for this ideology abroad. For instance, Enver Pasha, one of the CUP leaders, revolted against the Bolsheviks (Soviet government) in Turkestan for the Turanism, a Pan-Turkist cause, though he was subsequently killed in a battle in 1922.

### **3.2.3. Ziya Gökalp's Nationalist Ideals and the Kemalist Nationalism**

First and foremost, it is worth noting here that the driving force for Turkish nationalism often came from people displaced at the end of the Ottoman Empire. This was frequently Europeans from Rumeli, but also came from the East – for example Gökalp, who was a Kurd. Taking into consideration the official nationalism in Turkey, it could be said that the most prominent figure promoting nationalist ideas, thus 'nationalism' in Turkey, was actually Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924), an ideologue who inspired the Kemalist cadre designing modern Turkey. He was in fact regarded as the father of Turkish nationalism and even "the Grand Master of Turkism" (Kaya, 2004: 61). Furthermore, his ideals were the source of inspiration for the Kemalist interpretation of nationalism that has flourished in Turkey after 1923. Besides, most of the Kemalist reforms implemented during the early days of the Republic were also shaped by the ideas of Gökalp (Parla, 1980).

Gökalp, like some other Ottoman intelligentsia, abandoned the policy of Ottomanism after the Balkan Wars. He then began to theorise the idea of Pan-Turkism, intensely studying pre-Islamic Turkish history and Turkish civilisation. In Gökalp's mind, the Turkish nation is different from other nations. For instance, he claimed that, unlike Egyptians, *all* the Turks are considered Muslim and this is why all Turkish speaking Muslim countries should unite under the banner of 'Turkism'. When talking about 'Turkishness', he meant the people who have the same language (Turkish) and the same culture (e.g., shared history). As pointed out by Akçam (2006), Gökalp believed that a modern state must be homogenous in both national and religious sense. Due to these beliefs, Gökalp has been severely criticised by some historians such as James Reid who argued that "What Wagner was to Hitler, Gökalp was to Enver Pasha", referring to the Armenian incidents <sup>9</sup> that took place in 1915 which resulted in the loss of a great number of Armenians (Lewy, 2005: 45). What is more, due to his position against minorities, Gökalp has also been cited by many nationalist thinkers such as Türkdoğan (1997) in order to support the view that the Kurds in Turkey are not a nation, but only a branch of the Turks, and that their language is also merely a dialect influenced by Turkish and Persian. Having been influenced by Gökalp, this is exactly what the Turkish state has thought of the Kurdish people in Turkey up until the 1990s which culminated in denying their unique identity.

With the foundation of the new Turkish Republic, the Kemalist elites designing the new state abandoned Ottoman pluralism, and instead embarked upon creating a modern sense of nationhood based on a single ethnicity in 1923. Nationalism played a significant role in the transformation processes of Turkey in the early years of the Republic, along with other processes of Westernisation and secularism. As a matter of fact, these three

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<sup>9</sup> That the deportation of Armenian people resulting in the extermination of the great number of Armenians is acknowledged as a 'genocide' by some Turkish academics (e.g. see AKÇAM, T. 2006. *From Empire to the Republic*, London, Zed Books.), whereas it is regarded as 'deportation' by some (e.g. see HALAÇOĞLU, Y. 2001. *Ermeni Tehciri ve Gerçekler*, Ankara, TTK Yayınları.). Because it is a contentious and political issue, and because it is beyond the scope of this paper, we prefer to refer to the events as 'incidents' here without delving into detail.

(nationalism, Westernisation and secularism) were the pillars the new Turkish state was built upon, and they were further strengthened by Kemalist reforms for the purported purpose of creating a modern, secular and national 'Turkish' identity. Mustafa Kemal himself emphasised the importance of nationalism as a policy:

We are a nation that has come very late to and acted very negligently in the implementation of nationalist ideas. Our nation has paid an especially bitter price for having arrived without knowing nationalism. We have [now] understood that our error was that we have forgotten ourselves (in Goloğlu, 1971: 177).

In order to create a secular and national identity, it is apparent that the Kemalist nationalist cadre implemented radical reforms and the whole transformation process might well be regarded as 'dramatic'. Also, even while implementing the related reforms to transform the state, Gökalp's ideals always played a profound role.

The first thing Mustafa Kemal and his ruling Republican Party (Cumhûriyet Halk Fırkası) did was to make Turkey a more homogenous country consisting of the 'Turks'. With this purpose in mind, a population exchange treaty was signed with Greece on January 30, 1923. Having signed this treaty, it primarily aimed to replace the Greek population in Turkey with the Turkish-Muslim population at the time living in Greece (Cagaptay, 2006). In accordance with this treaty, the last Greek group left Turkey in 1924, which culminated in the end of the Anatolian-Greek community, making Turkey more homogenous in an ethnic sense, thus paving the way for the forthcoming social and political reforms necessary to nationalise the country.

#### **3.2.4. The policy of secularisation**

The Kemalist government knew that Islam had to be brushed, along with other dominant ideologies threatening the idea of Turkism. Therefore, the secularisation of



the new state was seen as a precondition for creating a national Turkish identity. Attempts made to secularise Turkey begun in 1924 with the abolition of the Islamic caliphate and finished in 1935 with the change of the weekly holiday from Friday and Saturday to Saturday and Sunday. Other radical reforms were implemented accordingly. For instance, one of the most daring was the replacement of the Ottoman, hitherto written using the Arabic script, with the Latin one. Aside from these drastic reforms, in the 1920s, madrasas (Islamic educational institutions) and Islamic law (Sharia) were abolished, and the lunar calendar was replaced with the Gregorian calendar. The statement declaring 'Islam is Turkey's official religion' was also removed from the Constitution. However, despite all these reforms aimed at eradicating the influence of Islam in the daily lives of people, as well as on politics, Islam remained a force in society. For instance, the presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyânet İşleri Riyâseti) was established and remains today an official institution embracing only the Sunni interpretation of Islam. This indicates that even though the newly constructed Turkish identity was meant to be secular in many ways, Islam was still one of the determinants shaping 'Turkishness' in the 1920s.

### **3.2.5. The domination of the Turkish language in daily life**

Along with the significant role of language in education discussed in the earlier chapter, the Kemalist regime put a profound emphasis on Turkish language in daily life, as promoted by Gökalp and Namık Kemal (Akçam, 2006). For example, Namık Kemal once said that "we must try to annihilate all languages in our country except Turkish... Language may be the firmest barrier – perhaps firmer than religion – against national unity" (cited Mango, 1999: 537). For instance, in the late 1920s, the Prime Minister, İsmet İnönü, highlighted the necessity of making every citizen speak only Turkish regardless of their ethnicity in Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*), an institution founded to specifically promote Turkish nationalism at an intellectual level by the CUP. Moreover, İnönü said that all citizens other than the Turks were going to be transformed into Turkish "no matter what happens" (Vakit, 1925). In the meanwhile, a public campaign called "*Vatandaş! Türkçe Konuş*" (Oh Citizen! Speak Turkish) was launched in 1928,

which aimed at encouraging everyone to speak only Turkish in public. These attempts were designed to make Turkish the only language which could be spoken in public but naturally created serious issues for minorities.

These assimilationist policies and political oppression automatically led to unrest in Turkey. For instance, the Sheikh Said rebellion, which was both a Kurdish and Islamic rebellion, begun in the eastern provinces in 1925 and was only quashed after huge military offensives. Other serious disturbances included the Menemen rebellion and the Ağrı uprising in the 1930s, both of which were ruthlessly suppressed by Kemalists. It can be said that with all these rebellions and uprisings, the Kemalist regime was given a certain justification for their oppression of minorities, particularly those inspired by Kurdish or Islamic ideals.

In the 1930s, the main concern of the Kemalists was promoting their brand of nationalism, since the nationalist cadre already established a secular state quite firmly as a result of the policies in the 1920s. Hence, it was now time to pay more attention to ideology which will be shaping the future of the young Republic. In 1931, as stated by Aykut (1936), Mustafa Kemal declared Republicanism, Populism, Laicism, Revolutionism, Nationalism and Statism (or state socialism) as the main principles of Kemalism, which later became part of the Constitution. Webster (1939: 307) considers these principles as “the fundamentals of the CHP, constituting Kemalism”.

The policy of the replacement of the non-Turkish (Armenian, Kurdish, Greek etc.,) names of some provinces with Turkish ones was another indication of the policy orientations of the Kemalist nationalism, which had been initially implemented by Enver Pasha in 1913 (Nişanyan, 2010). For example, the province of *Dersim*, which was a Kurdish word, was replaced with *Tunceli*, a Turkish word meaning ‘land of bronze’. Another Kurdish word *Genç*, a district in the province of Bingöl, was replaced with a Turkish word *Karlıova* meaning ‘snowy plain’ among many others (Cagaptay, 2006).

The Kemalist government accelerated its implementation of cultural policies aiming at the Turkification of other ethnic groups in the 1930s. The regime attempted to make 'Turkishness' a supra-national identity over all other national identities, very much like the idea of 'Britishness', though the main problem with this approach is that Turkishness was already regarded as an ethnic identity by the majority at the time. Thus, it was absurd to expect other ethnic groups to recognise 'Turkishness' as a supra-national identity.

In this vein however, the Turkish Hearth Committee for the Study of Turkish History (*Türk Ocakları Türk Tarihi Tedkik Heyeti* - TOTTTK) was established in 1930 and was given a specific task by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself: to study/investigate pre-Islamic Turkish history and the whole Turkish civilisation. Soon after this order, the First History Congress was held in Ankara, which included nationalist ideologues like Yusuf Akçura and well-known intellectuals such as Köprülüzade Fuad (Köprülü) and Âfet İnan (Copeaux, 1998, Cagaptay, 2006).

"The history of Turkish civilisation, anthropological characteristics of the Turkish race, and Turkish language and literature" (Ergün, 1982: 126) were the main topics discussed by the participants. With this congress, a sense of Turkish nationalism was meant to be built in order to show that Turkishness could be a supra-national identity, and one which could be regarded as an umbrella for other ethnic identities. With this purpose in mind, it was concluded that Turkish history before Islam was also highly remarkable. For example, the idea was promoted that the Turks of the Central Asia had established well-developed states, and had a unique civilisation which influenced many other civilisations. In this case, Ottoman history was intentionally ignored by the Kemalists in order to put a profound emphasis on the pre-Islamic period of Turkish history, which might be explained by the fact that the Kemalist regime did not want to use Islam anymore when defining 'Turkishness'. Indeed, this idea of Turkishness now assumed a more secular connotation than it had done during Ottoman times and even in the 1920s. Another significant implication of the congress was the assertion that the Turks in the Middle Asia were the ancestors of all people (Ergün, 1982).

### 3.2.6. The use of 'national' language

National languages are ... almost always semi-artificial constructs and occasionally, like Modern Hebrew, virtually invented. They are the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind (Hobsbawm, 1990: 54).

As Hobsbawm pointed out, language is used by nation states to justify their interpretation of nationalism, and for broader nation-building policies. This could well be applied to the Turkish case too since attempts made to 'prove' that the Turks had a great civilisation before Islam automatically forced the Kemalists to take another thing into consideration – that is, language. As mentioned previously, Gökalp had already argued that the Turkish language should be given importance in order to establish a 'Turkish nation'. The new Turkish Republic did what Gökalp desired. What is more, Mustafa Kemal also highlighted the significance of the language as a part of any definition of a Turk, by arguing out the following:

One of the significant characteristics of the nation is language. One, who regards himself as a member of the Turkish nation, should before everything and in any case, speak Turkish. If someone who does not speak Turkish claims membership to Turkish culture and community, it would not be right to believe in this (Arar, 1981: 371).

The *Güneş Dil Teorisi* ('Sun Language Theory') was, therefore, established in order to support the 'Turkish History theses'. In this narrative, it was concluded that the Turkish language was the mother of all Indo-European languages (İğdemir, 1963). Furthermore, the Committee for the Study of Turkish Language (Türk Dili Tedkik Cemiyeti) produced reports/books to prove that "Turkish is, hence, the mother tongue of the Sumerians, the Hittites, and the other ancient Anatolian civilisations, of the ancient Egyptians and the

Cretans and of the Aegeans, who were the founders of the Greek civilisation, and the Etruscans, the founders of the Roman culture” (ibid., p. 647).

Taking into consideration the aforementioned theories, ancient Anatolian civilisations such as the Sumerians and the Hittites were also regarded as Turkish civilisations, evoking the idea that Anatolia was once the Turkish homeland before the emergence of Islam. It is apparent that the major target of these endeavours was the attempt to theorise Turkishness as a first real identity, and Turkish as the first language in history so that people could be convinced to accept ‘Turkishness’ as a supra-national identity beyond any loyalties to their ethnicity.

Consequently, having held a number of conferences on Turkishness, the definition of the term began to change when compared to the 1920s. For instance, in a dictionary written by the people appointed by the Kemalist government in 1930, Turkishness is defined as “a brave, heroic race of forty million that has inhabited Asia, and spread into Europe and Africa to conquer the world” (Yeni Türk Lûgatı, 1939: 1152).

Another issue, that of the “the purification of the Turkish language”, also came to the fore during the First Turkish Language Congress (Türk Dil Kurumu, 1933: 389). Turkish MP Mehmed Şeref defended the view that the influence of Arabic and Persian on the Turkish language was inconceivably huge during Ottoman times. Therefore, he argued, Arabic and Persian words must be eliminated from Turkish for the sake of ‘purifying’ the language, or as pure as it was once before the Ottoman Empire (Cagaptay, 2006). Given this, even Mustafa Kemal Atatürk replaced his middle name *Kemal* coming from Arabic, with a newly created so-called Turkish name *Kamal* meaning ‘fortress’ (Yıldız, 2001), which indicates how seriously the policy of language purification was taken.

### **3.2.7. Persecution: Independence Courts**

After the foundation of the new Turkish Republic, it could be argued that persecution was also another method used by the Turkish state to strengthen the new reforms made by the Kemalists to create their version of modern republic. A special type of legal entity, called Independence Courts (*İstiklâl Mahkemeleri*) were used by the state to execute people deemed to be against the policies of secularisation and nationalisation in the 1920s and 1930s. With the decisions of these tribunals, thousands of people were hanged due to anti regime activities (Alkan, 2011). Mumcu (1992: 1) considered these tribunals as anti-democratic foundations judging counter-revolutionists, labelling them 'penal institutions'. He, in fact, stated that these institutions could not be regarded as tribunals.

### **3.2.8. The use of racist rhetoric against 'others' in society**

The Turkish History thesis defended that the Turks – anthropologically speaking, had 'brachycephalic alpine' origin (Cagaptay, 2004). In order to prove the Turkish History thesis, anthropological studies were commissioned by the Turkish state in the late 1930s (Copeaux, 1998). For instance, anthropometric measurements (of people's skulls) were employed by Âfet İnan, adopted daughter of Atatürk, by the orders of Atatürk, something which resulted in the measurements of an estimated of 64.000 people's skulls across Turkey. In fact, even the Ottoman architect Sinan's <sup>10</sup> skull was taken from his tomb in order to prove he was an ethnic Turk (see Hür, 2010, Hürriyet Daily News, 2010b). According to Eugene Pittard, Âfet İnan's mentor at the University of Geneva, this was 'the biggest anthropometric measurement commissioned by the state' at the time (Aydın, 2001). This is a functional example of the racist mentality of the Turkish state in the 1930s.

Racist language was sometimes used by the Turkish authorities in the 1920s and 1930s, too. As mentioned by Tunçay (1999), 'racism' played an important role in the Kemalist

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<sup>10</sup> Sinan was the chief architect of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century.

version of Turkish nationalism during the process of identity formation and nation-building. For instance, Prime Minister İsmet İnönü commented on the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 that “only the Turkish nation is entitled to claim ethnic and national rights in this country. No other element has such a right” (Kendal, 1980: 65). Likewise, Mahmud Esad Bozkurt, the Minister of Justice at the time, made the following statement on 16 September 1930: “We live in a country called Turkey, the freest country in the world... I believe that the Turks must be the only lords, the only master of this country. Those who are not of pure Turkish stock can have only one right in this country, the right to be servants and slaves” (both cited in Kendal, 1980-66). This statement obviously shows that the Kemalist cadre considered other ethnic groups to be subservient and who should be ruled over, which is a result of the “hegemonic *efendi* (master) positioning of Turkishness”, as Demir calls it (2014). Similarly, Mahmud Esad Bozkurt also commented at one point that “the worst Turk is even better than the best of a non-Turk” (Yıldız, 2001), something which also shows ‘the superiority and *efendi* role’ that was beginning to be associated with Turkish identity.

In such an environment, the Kurdish identity was also alienated. For example, Tevfik Rüşdü Saraçoğlu, the Foreign Minister in 1926, had this to say of the Kurds as: “in their [Kurdish] case, their cultural level is so low, their mentality so backward, that they cannot be simply in the general Turkish body politic... they will die out, economically unfitted for the struggle for life in competition with the more advanced and cultured Turks ... as many as can will emigrate into Persia and Iraq, while the rest will simply undergo the elimination of the unfit” (cited in McDowall, 2003: 277). This quote indicates that the Kurds were seen as inferior by the Turkish government in the early years of the Republic. Furthermore, as hinted in the last phrase of the statement, the assimilation of the Kurds was also being thought about during this time. In fact, the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü spoke of this necessity to assimilate all ethnicities other than the Turks by saying that “Our mission is to make all non-Turks within the Turkish homeland Turks no matter what happens” (Yıldız, 2001: 156).

### 3.2.9. The national ideology of Kemalism

Kemalism is an ideology primarily based upon 'Atatürk's Principles', which is also referenced in the Turkish Constitution: Republicanism (Cumhûriyetçilik), Populism (Halkçılık), Laicism (Laiklik), Revolutionism (Devrimcilik), Nationalism (Milliyetçilik) and Statism or State Socialism (Devletçilik). As mentioned by Yavuz and Esposito (2003), Kemalism was systemised by Mustafa Kemal in the Fourth Congress of the CHP in 1935, when the six principles were acknowledged as the main principles of the CHP and the Turkish state. Even though there are different interpretations of Kemalism among adherents, these 6 principles are considered to be the fundamental tenants agreed on unanimously by Kemalists.

Apart from Atatürk's principles, in order to understand the philosophy of the Kemalist ideology it is vital to comprehend the ideas shaping Atatürk's thoughts, thus Kemalism. For instance, Insel (2004) suggested that the prevailing characteristic of Kemalism is actually 'authoritarianism'. To him, the ideal political system for Kemalism is an 'authoritarian democracy', which promotes the disciplined and ordered society, expecting an unconditional obedience to state authority, adopting the understanding of limited freedom under the absolute authority of the state. Uyar (2004) also highlighted the importance of the 'authoritarianist' feature of all existing versions of Kemalism. Moreover, Çandar (2000) further adds another point by highlighting the inspiring phenomenon for Kemalism: "In their secularism (and in their statecraft generally), Atatürk and the Kemalist elites were powerfully influenced by French ideas, particularly those of French Revolutionary Jacobinism". Insel (2004) also believes that the French Revolution and Jacobinism greatly affected Kemalism in many ways. In this regard, it is true that the Kemalist modernisation project represented a rather 'authoritarian' and 'Jacobenist' model which considered a "top-down transformation" crucial in order to change society. Generally speaking, as Ünder (2004: 142) puts it, "The political method of Atatürk is Jacobenist, his attitude to people is paternalist".



Moreover, as stated by Vahide (2005: 192), Atatürk's "outlook and worldview were shaped by positivism". Atatürk was influenced by the positivist ideology that developed in line with August Comte's thinking. Comte's positivist ideology sought to substitute empirical science for revealed religion (Mango, 1999), and Atatürk used positivism for the same purpose to bring about a modern Turkish republic. In this vein, Adnan-Adivar (1951: 129) has argued that that the Kemalists' understanding of positivism actually made it "the official dogma of irreligion" in Turkey and thus making the single-party era a "positivistic mausoleum". In this regard, Atatürk placed a great emphasis on science in the early republican era, claiming that a person guided by science cannot go wrong and thus attaching a moral value to science (Mardin, 1983). To illustrate this, Atatürk highlighted the importance of science by claiming that "the best guide in the world of civilization, for life and for success is science. Searching other guides out of science means heedlessness, ignorance and heresy" (in İnal and Akkaymak, 2012: 38).

Even though Atatürk was in favour of 'Turkifying' Islam, and even trying to reconcile Islam with science in his speeches in the 1920s so as to use the power of Islam for constructing a nation (Zürcher, 2004), his way of thinking leaned more to the idea that science would provide people with something that religious guidance could not by the 1930s. That is why, for Atatürk, the ideal thing to do was to promote "the advancement of all mankind in experience, knowledge, and thinking, and the establishment of a world religion through the abandonment of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism" (Hanioglu, 2011b: 157). The 'world religion' Atatürk was referring to was actually 'science'. In his last address to Turkish Parliament in 1937, he made his stance against religion very clear by saying that "Our principles should not be confused with the dogmas of the books that are supposed to be heavenly revealed. We seek inspiration, not from the heavens, but from real life" (cited in Yeşilada and Rubin, 2011: 97). Therefore, inspired by positivism, it could be claimed that Atatürk had an evolving stance against religion, from acceptance to negligence, and finally towards an adoption of the positivist and rational French model of secularism (unlike the Anglo-Saxon embrace of a more liberal approach to secularism or the Soviet total rejection of the role of religion, see Tunçay, 2004). The fact that Atatürk preferred the French model instead of others stems from the fact that

almost all late Ottoman *pashas* (generals in the army) were under the influence of the ideas of the French revolution. Most of them including Atatürk studied the French language <sup>11</sup>, and were able to read the French philosophers' books, whose ideas shaped the revolution (Turan, 1999).

Another philosopher who deeply affected Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's thoughts was Jean Jacques Rousseau. Specifically, Atatürk's ideas about 'republicanism' were influenced by Rousseau. As cited by Turan (1999: 14), Atatürk even said in one of his addresses in Parliament that "You should read Jean Jacques Rousseau thoroughly from beginning to end. I did". With this fact in mind, it could well be hypothesised that Atatürk might also have been affected by Rousseau's ideas on national education; indeed, it was seen in Chapter 2 that Rousseau was one of the pioneering thinkers who defended the view that education must be national, and be used as an instrument in order to create a common national identity within the border of a nation-state.

Ziya Gökalp was probably one of the most influential figures influencing Atatürk's thinking. As pointed out by Belge (2004), Atatürk admitted himself that though his biological father was Ali Rıza Efendi, his emotional father was Namık Kemal, a renowned Turkish novelist and thinker, while the one inspiring his 'thoughts' (father of his thoughts) was, indeed, Ziya Gökalp, an ideologue behind the idea of Turkish nationalism. Atatürk's thoughts were profoundly influenced by Gökalp. That being said, for instance, it is claimed by Belge (2004) that even his sympathy to positivism was affected by Gökalp's stance, who was inspired by Emilie Durkheim and August Comte.

Belge (2004) goes on to highlight another point by arguing that Atatürk considered 'liberalism' one of the enemies of the early republican era along with the 'Islamist and communist ideology, and the Kurdish Question', because Gökalp was also against the

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<sup>11</sup> According to Turan (1999), Atatürk studied the French revolution and the French philosophers' revolutionist ideas intensely in Monastery Military High School (Manastır Askerî İdâdîsi).

idea of liberalism. In parallel to this, İnel (2004) also stated that the Kemalist ideology was against the idea of pluralism, considering it as a threat to the concept of 'discipline' prioritised by Kemalism. In this regard, as mentioned by Yeşilova (2010: 44), the Kemalist single-party period embraced the 'one-man one-party spirit'. It appears that Mustafa Kemal – who was affected by Gökalp's ideas deeply – also adopted the idea of having a unitary nation-state which is strictly centralised and militantly secularised, and is administered by an absolute authority that considers pluralism/diversity and heterogeneity a direct threat to national coherence.

Apart from the aforementioned points, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Gökalp was also a prominent sociologist/thinker who is seen "the father of Turkish nationalism" (Melson, 1990: 164), systemising Turkish nationalism in the late Ottoman period, defending it against the ideas of Islamism and Ottomanism. Because his ideas significantly affected Atatürk, thus the nation-building policies of the Kemalist modernisation project in the single-party period, he has been portrayed as part of the "cult of nationalism and modernisation" (Erickson, 2001: 97). However, even though it is a common assumption that Mustafa Kemal's nationalist ideas were 'totally' inspired by Gökalp, there appears to be a clear distinction between the two. As Turan (1999) and Belge (2004) noted, Gökalp was not in favour of racism, defending the version of cultural (Turkish) nationalism that should neither be aggressive nor imperialist, while the Kemalist version of nationalism included a 'racist' rhetoric. To illustrate this, as mentioned earlier, Âfet İnan's anthropological research – commissioned by Atatürk himself – on 'cephalometry' (the measurement of living people's cranium<sup>12</sup>) and 'craniometry' (the measurement of dead people's cranium) shows the racist characteristic of the Kemalist version of Turkish nationalism (Guttstadt, 2013). Therefore, even though Atatürk was influenced by Gökalp's nationalist ideas, the 'racial-based definition of the Turkish nation' and 'racism' seem to be distinctive features of Kemalist nationalism.

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<sup>12</sup> The main part of the skull.

Apart from the prominent thinkers affecting Atatürk's ideas, another significant figure shaping/systemising the national ideology of Kemalism was Recep Peker who served in various posts in the early republican era. However, he was most influential between 1931 and 1936, when he was the General Secretary of the CHP. According to Yıldız (2004), Recep Peker was highly influenced by the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany, and he wanted to formulate the Kemalist ideology accordingly. For instance, Peker coined the term 'Chief' by calling Atatürk the 'National Chief' for the first time in 1930 (Ünder, 2004). Atatürk later began to be called the 'Eternal Chief'. As Froembgen put it, "As a living guarantee of the state, [Atatürk] has the People's Party whose chief he is. State and party are identical. The organization of the party is military and rests on the principle of authority" (cited in Ihrig, 2014-145). Peker, furthermore, formulated Kemalism as a 'totalitarian ideology' by establishing the 'party-state' model ruled by 'the chief' (Yıldız, 2004).

On the other hand, contrary to Yıldız's claim that Peker, and thus Kemalism, was influenced by the Italian and German fascism, in his recent book titled *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*, Ihrig (2014) argued that contrary to what is generally believed, first Mussolini, and then Hitler took Turkey as the example, and built their autocratic systems with the inspiration of the Kemalist ideology. In fact, he even asserted that Hitler himself praised Atatürk as being "the star in the darkness" (p. 144). Moreover, Ihrig claimed that the characteristics of Kemalist Turkey such as the ethnic cleansing policies, a one-man and one-party spirit, the party-state model, absolute authority, ethnic nationalism and racism played a huge role in the formation of the Nazi regime in Germany, thus turning the 'Chief regime' into the 'Fuhrer regime'.

### **3.2.9.1. Kemalism after the single party period -1950 to the present day-**

In the post-World War II atmosphere, Turkey was forced to become a democratic state, starting the multi-party period. After 1950, when the CHP was defeated in the elections, the new Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti – DP) gained the majority in Parliament in

three consecutive elections in a row, and ruled Turkey for 10 years between 1950-60. Under the DP, even though the Kemalist state model was damaged due to onset of democratic order and the subsequent weakening of the Kemalist autocratic regime, Kemalist discourse within the state, and the Kemalist indoctrination in general and in education in particular remained intact. In fact, the cult of Atatürk was actually strengthened. For instance, the law on the protection of Atatürk<sup>13</sup> – which is still in the Constitution – entered into force during DP rule (Ertem, 2013). Therefore, the rule of the DP did not change the ‘paradigm’ in Turkey, since most of its deputies including all the founders had previously been the members of the CHP (Ahmad, 2003).

In 1960, Turkey experienced its first coup d’état that resulted in the suspension of all political activities. The Turkish armed forces claimed that they had to stage the coup in order to preserve democratic rule in Turkey, but the real reason was the assumption that the DP had undermined the Kemalist principles of the state. The Prime Minister, Adnan Menderes, Foreign Minister Fatin Rüşdü Zorlu, and the Minister of Finance, Hasan Polatkan were all later hanged. This was a turning point in the history of modern Turkey, starting the period of military coups. Indeed, Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, another right-wing politician, was forced to resign after the 1971 Turkish military memorandum (Zürcher, 2004). The Kemalist mind-set, and the Kemalist interpretation of Turkish nationalism within the Turkish state mechanism flourished in both post-coup periods. In the late 1970s, Turkey experienced its first civil war after clashes between far rightists and far leftist activists intensified. This turned out to be a functional excuse for the Turkish armed forces to launch the next coup d’état (1980), which also suspended all political activities just as with the 1960 military coup. After the 1980 coup, a new constitution was written and accepted, and remains in force today in Turkey, which is referred to as the ‘coup constitution’ (ibid). With this new constitution and the post-coup military domination in society and politics, the regime brought a new type of Kemalism into existence, which is called ‘right Kemalism’. In fact, some thinkers such as Kahraman claimed that the period from 1980 to 1997 and from 1997 to the present day

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<sup>13</sup> Law No. 5816 Crimes Against Atatürk mentioned earlier in Chapter 2.

can be interpreted as the right Kemalist period. He further pointed out that the period between 1997 to the present is slightly different than the previous period, as the latter is based upon 'symbols and ceremonies', and 'the cult of Atatürk' became more visible as a reaction to the rise of Islamic ideology especially in the 1990s (Kahraman, 2008). Another distinctive feature of the right Kemalism was that it accepted religion, and recognises it in its discourse, unlike the 'left Kemalism'. To illustrate this, a right Kemalist, Kenan Evren, a former general in the Turkish armed forces and the chief perpetrator of the 1980 coup, made the 'Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge' course unit a compulsory one in schools after 1980, which remains the case today (Bora and Taşkın, 2004). In addition to this, the 'National Security' course unit was also introduced by the post-coup regime, which was a clear indication of the increasing role of the military in education. For Jacoby (2004: 145), the post-coup era was the period in which "the discourse of the 1930s" was reintroduced. Likewise, Belge (2004) argued that Kemalism actually developed as a 'doctrine' after the 1980 military coup, because it culminated in the institutionalisation of the Kemalist ideology/mind-set within the state mechanism. With this in mind, the Kemalist ideology remained privileged in today's Turkey because of this institutionalisation.

In the late 1990s, Necmeddin Erbakan, a pro-Islamist politician, gained popularity and his political party, the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi – RP) came to power in a coalition with the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi – DYP), a right-wing political party. The Turkish armed forces were suspicious that the 'political Islam' and increasing Islamic activities in society would damage the secular Kemalist Republic. As a consequence, the most important outcome of the National Security Council meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February in 1997 was the military memorandum, which was part of what came to be known as the 'post-modern coup' which forced Erbakan to resign (Çandar, 1997). Apart from this, since the military thought that the secularist and Kemalist characteristics of the Turkish state were undermined by Islamic events/activities, they forced the Security Council to take some controversial decisions, such as the closure of Imam-Hatip middle schools and the abolition of *Tarikats* (Sufi-based Islamic institutions) (Türkiye, 2013). It can be argued that all these coups mentioned above gave absolute authority to the

Turkish armed forces who could decide to interfere in politics whenever they saw fit. In fact, one of the prominent generals in the 1997 Turkish military memorandum Çevik Bir argued at the time that: “In Turkey we have a marriage of Islam and democracy. (..) The child of this marriage is secularism. Now this child gets sick from time to time. The Turkish armed forces is the doctor which saves the child. Depending on how sick the kid is, we administer the necessary medicine to make sure the child recuperates” (Vatan Gazetesi, 2012). This shows that the military considered itself as the true guardian of the state.

In 2002, the Ak Party, a conservative party, came to power and has ruled Turkey ever since. Even though the role of Kemalism within the state – from the constitution to education – remained more or less the same, the Turkish armed forces tried to force the Ak Party government to resign in 2007 due to the conservative/religious characteristics of the Ak Party, with another military memorandum published online (thus called the ‘e-memorandum’). The statement made by the military is as follows:

It is observed that some circles who have been carrying out endless efforts to disturb fundamental values of the Republic of Turkey, especially secularism, have escalated their efforts recently. The problem that emerged in the presidential election process is focused on arguments over secularism. Turkish armed forces are concerned about the recent situation. It should not be forgotten that the Turkish armed forces are a party in those arguments, and absolute defender of secularism. (..) Those who are opposed to Great Leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s understanding “How happy is the one who says I am a Turk” are enemies of the Republic of Turkey and will remain so. The Turkish armed forces maintain their sound determination to carry out their duties stemming from laws to protect the unchangeable characteristics of the Republic of Turkey. Their loyalty determination is absolute (BBC News, 2007).

As can be seen from the statement, the Turkish armed forces considers itself to be a political actor with a say in politics. Having considered all the interventions of the

Turkish armed forces in politics, it can be argued that the Turkish armed forces wanted to remind everyone of the idea that the main (Kemalist secularist) characteristics of the Turkish state cannot be changed.

As a result, after Atatürk died, it seems that the development of the Kemalist ideology and the institutionalisation of Kemalism have been completed over time. Even though some of the developments such as the rise of the Communist or Islamist ideology were interpreted to be undermining the Kemalist ideology and the role of Atatürk in Turkey, it appears that the Turkish armed forces played a key role in re-establishing and consolidating the Kemalist ideology within state mechanism. Thus, Kemalism still remains a strong/privileged and an official ideology in today's Turkey, dominating many areas ranging from the Turkish Constitution to the educational system. This is because the military in Turkey played an important role in designing the new Republic. Harris (1965: 55), for example, stated that "it was the military and not the party that became the fountainhead of progressive practices; an organ for the spread of the reforms considered vital. Further it was the ultimate base of power for the regime, the guardian of its ideals". With this in mind, the army was not only guarding the frontiers of Turkey, but also the Kemalist secularist characteristics of the Turkish state, too. As Biltekin (2007: 101) put it, the Turkish armed forces has been "the forerunner of the [Kemalist] reforms, and the guardian of the regime, [therefore] the army could not simply be out of politics".

### **3.3. Kurdish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question**

For the past few centuries at least, the Kurds have had a general awareness of being a separate people, distinct from Persians, Turks and Arabs as well as from the various Christian groups living in their midst. There was also, at least among the literate, a quite concrete idea of who were and who were not Kurds, and of where they lived. This awareness of identity and unity is surprising, given the many things that divided (and still divide)



the Kurds. Language and religion are, to many Kurds, essential aspects of their identities, but neither do all Kurds adhere to the same religion, nor do they speak the same language (Van Bruinessen, 1992: 34).

According to Van Bruinessen, Kurdish national identity is quite a new phenomenon compared to other national identities such as the Turkish one, and the possibility of becoming assimilated by other ethnicities (Arab, Persian, Turkish) was always a distinct one for the Kurdish identity. It was usually dominated by another identity throughout history (Romano, 2006).

When talking about Kurdish nationalism, it can be said that, like Turkish nationalism, there are different types of Kurdish nationalism, too. Primarily, (i) early Kurdish nationalism without a dominant ideology, (ii) Kurdish nationalism among Kurdish Muslim conservatives, and (iii) a left-wing Kurdish nationalism declaring Marxism and Leninism as the main philosophy. These are the three versions of Kurdish nationalism. However, it should be noted here that the mainstream Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is, of course, the Marxist-oriented socialist (secular) Kurdish nationalism.

Even though the discourse of the mainstream (modern) Kurdish nationalism in Turkey can be regarded as quite new, the history of the Kurdish nationalist movements could be traced back to Ottoman times, to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, approximately one hundred years after the French Revolution, Sheikh Ubeydullah Efendi wanted to found an independent Kurdish state, demanding political autonomy for Kurdish people. However, this uprising attempt was suppressed by the Ottomans with the leaders of the separatist movement exiled to Istanbul (Özoğlu, 2004).

Taking advantage of the atmosphere of political freedom during the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1920), the Society for the Rise of Kurdistan (*Kürdistan Teâlî Cemiyeti* - SRK) was established in Istanbul in 1918. The main purpose of this society was the foundation of an independent Kurdish state in Eastern Turkey, with its claims based

on the Treaty of Sèvres signed by the Ottoman Empire just after the Empire's defeat in World War I. Furthermore, the SRK wished to promote the Kurdish language through a weekly magazine *Jîn* (Life) (Romano, 2006). With the help of the SRK, the *Koçgiri* Kurdish tribe revolted against the new Grand National Assembly founded by Mustafa Kemal and his colleagues. The rebellion started in the province of Dersim, which is now Tunceli, in 1920 and spread to other provinces such as Sivas, Erzincan; it was finally suppressed in 1921 (Olson, 1989).

It would not be wrong to say that, having been influenced by the French Revolution, both of these rebellions were led by early Kurdish nationalists whose aim was to only found an independent Kurdish state able to govern itself. Thus, there was no specific ideology playing a role in these uprisings – besides nationalism and the desire for self-rule (Romano, 2006).

With the foundation of the new Turkish Republic, as mentioned earlier, Kurdish identity was denied and all people in Turkey were regarded as 'Turks'. In the *Kurdish Report* written by İsmet İnönü in 1935 who was the Prime Minister at the time, it was specifically mentioned that Turkish schools are of paramount importance for the Turkish state in enforcing its agenda on the entire country. Therefore, every Kurd should be forced to go to Turkish schools so that they could be more easily assimilated into the Turkish identity (Öztürk, 2008). What is more, during this period, 5 Kurdish soldiers escaping from the Turkish army presented a report to the English authorities in Iraq, making the following statement:

The Turks forbade the institution of primary schools... They refused to allow the Kurds to learn their own language, and, since they did not wish to learn Turkish, education became practically non-existent... In addition, they closed down pious institutions – the only source of education left to the Kurds. The word 'Kurdistan' has been deleted from all books of the education and Kurdish geographical names were replaced by the Turkish ones (cited in Meiselas, 1997: 124).

In response to the assimilationist policies of the new Turkish Republic, there were approximately 18 Kurdish uprisings between 1923 and 1938 (Çelik, 2010), but many of these uprisings were marginal. Yet, there were some rebellions which were powerful and challenged the Turkish state. One of these was the Sheikh Said rebellion that started in 1925 in the eastern provinces of Turkey.

Sheikh Said was an elite Kurdish figure and a prominent religious figure recognised as a respected and influential Islamic scholar in the Kurdish region of Anatolia. With this in mind, it could be hypothesised that Ankara's policies against Islamists and Kurds in the early years of the Republic led him to revolt against the Turkish state. The rebels were successful initially, capturing some important towns such as Elaziz, Ergani and Varto. The siege of Diyarbakır was the turning point where the Kurdish rebels were defeated however. As a result of the uprising:

Hundreds of villages were destroyed, thousands of innocent men, women and children killed. Special courts, established in accordance with the Law on the Reinforcement of Order, condemned many influential persons to death – including several who had no connection whatsoever with the revolt. On September 4, 1925, Sheikh Said and forty-seven other leading Kurds were hanged in Diyarbakir. Thousands of less influential Kurds were slaughtered without a trial. The population of entire districts were deported to the west. The role of sheikhs in the uprising was, moreover, the reason for a law ordering the closure of all tekkes [religious orders], tombs and other places of pilgrimage (December 1925) (Van Bruinessen, 1992: 290-291).

The Sheikh Said rebellion was labelled as a religious reaction to the reforms undertaken by the Kemalists between 1923 and 1925 (Brockett, 1998). Yet, having used Kurdishness along with Islamic themes to gain popularity and support before and during the uprising, the Sheikh Said rebellion might well be considered as an example of a fusion between Kurdish nationalism and Islamism. This might be reinforced by the fact that both pious

Muslims and Kurdish nationalists in Turkey still consider Sheikh Said to be one of the most important leaders of their own respective movements. In fact, the President of the Independence Tribunal established after the rebellion made this clear at the trial of the rebels on 28 June 1925: "Certain [people] among you have taken as a pretext for revolt the abuse by the governmental administration, some others have invoked the defence of the Caliphate, but you are all united on one point: to create an independent Kurdistan" (Viennot, 1974: 108).

After the Sheikh Said rebellion, the Kemalists began to think that the Kurdish culture must be eradicated entirely. For instance, in 1927, Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tewfik Rüşdü, told Sir George Clark, a British diplomat at the time that "the Kurds must be suppressed and assimilated until they disappear" (McDowall, 2003: 199). In order to do this, the Kemalist government showed its brutality under the guide of martial law in the Kurdish regions of Turkey.

The Sheikh Said rebellion was, therefore, neither the first nor the last. The next Kurdish revolt after the Sheikh Said rebellion was the Mount Ararat uprising that broke out in 1930. Soon after the beginning of the uprising, the Turkish armed forces tried to suppress the rebellion. The Kurdish nationalist organisation *Xoybûn* co-ordinating the rebellion and asked for help from other Kurds in eastern Turkey. Kurdish people did not leave this appeal unanswered, attacking other cities in eastern Turkey such as Van, Bitlis, Iğdır in order to attract the government's attention elsewhere, thus to relieve the pressure on rebels around Mount Ararat. Besides this, Armenians living in Iran gave important support to the rebels. However, despite these reinforcements, the Turkish government received support from the Soviet Union, and as a result, the rebels were finally crushed (Jwaideh, 1960: 623).

The other significant uprising occurred during Mustafa Kemal's presidency was the Dersim one, which was suppressed by the Turkish army in a more ruthless way compared to the other two uprisings mentioned earlier. In Dersim (later replaced with

the name 'Tunceli') the Kurds were predominantly Alevi. This meant that they did not support the Sheikh Said rebellion when it broke out, as Sheikh Said was a Sunni Muslim. However, after the Grand National Assembly passed the Resettlement Law aiming at promoting homogeneity within the official borders of Turkey and assimilating minority ethnic groups into Turkish, the Alevi Kurds began to complain about the status of Kurdish people in the new Turkish Republic as well, claiming that the Kurdish culture was being ignored intentionally by the government, something which they deemed to be unacceptable. After the Law on the Administration of the Tunceli Province entered into force in 1935, the rebellion begun under the leadership of a prominent figure, Seyid Rıza, the chieftain of one of the Alevi Kurdish tribes. Military operations were carried out between 1937 and 1938 by the Turkish armed forces with orders given by Mustafa Kemal himself (Hürriyet, 2010).

The Turkish armed forces even used warplanes to bomb targets in Dersim. In fact, Sabiha Gökçen, the adopted daughter of Mustafa Kemal, participated in these operations, bombing several targets and becoming the first female pilot in Turkish history. According to some Alevi eyewitnesses, warplanes bombed the villages and then the people trying to escape from the bombardment were captured and cut down by the Turkish soldiers. After all of this, Seyid Rıza himself was captured in 1937, and he was consequently executed in Dersim together with his lieutenants (Beşikçi, 1991). Before his execution, he said "I am 75 years old, I am becoming a martyr, I am joining the Kurdistan martyrs. Kurdish youth will get revenge. Down with oppressors! Down with the fickle and liars!" (Dersimi, 1988: 299).

As a result of the uprising, 13,160 civilians were killed by the Turkish armed forces with 11,818 people taken into exile (Radikal, 2009). However, in 2011, the Dersim massacre was officially recognised as such by the state, and then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan apologised to the people of Dersim on behalf of the Turkish state for the massacre, labelling it as "one of the most tragic events of Turkish near history" (BBC News, 2011).

After all this destruction, deportations and suppression, the Turkish state continued to assimilate the Kurds into Turkish culture. Therefore, many Kurdish people began to think that resistance to the Turkish state was pointless. Especially as a result of the destruction of villages by armed forces (in the 1930s and between 1980 and 1999), many Kurdish people abandoned their hometowns and migrated to western cities within Turkey, starting a new life, trying to forget what happened in the past. With this in mind, the urbanisation of the Kurdish population resulted in the emergence of another form of Kurdish nationalist movement. With a well-educated young Kurdish generation gaining university education, a left-wing Kurdish nationalism influenced by Marxism emerged in the 1960s (Romano, 2006).

Even though Kurdish intellectuals attempted to establish journals, such as *İleri Yurt* founded by Musa Anter after the 1950s, most attempts were unsuccessful as they were closed down by the state. After then, leftist organisations such as the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers Union (DISK), the Federation of Revolutionary Youth (Dev Genç) and the the Turkish Workers' Party (TWP) became popular among the young Kurds. These groups organised protests in major cities of eastern and western Turkey, mobilising the Kurdish youth and demanding rights for Kurdish people. However, in 1970, at the TWP's Fourth Congress, the following statement was made regarding the Kurdish issue:

There is a Kurdish people in the East of Turkey... The fascist authorities representing the ruling classes have subjected the Kurdish people to a policy of assimilation and intimidation which has often become a bloody repression (Kendal, 1980: 29).

Having made this statement, as mentioned by Dodd (1990: 16), the TWP was closed down soon after the 1971 military memorandum (in effect, a coup that forced the government to resign) and members of the TWP were accused of "propagating communist propaganda and advocating autonomy for the Kurds" (Romano, 2006: 43).

In the 1970s, the polarisation between the right-wing and left-wing groups began to grow at an unbelievable pace, and it finally turned to serious clash between rightists and leftists, especially in the late years of the decade. This might be explained by the fact that the 1960 Constitution, which was the most liberal one since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, created an atmosphere of political freedom for both rightist and leftist political movements (Romano, 2006). Nevertheless, the 1971 coup resulted in constitutional amendments, taking back the political advantages/gains of the liberal 1960 constitution, showing that the fate of the Turkish state was something which could, the military, not be left to the mercy of anyone other than themselves, as the Turkish armed forces always saw themselves as guardians of the Kemalist principles of the Turkish state, and they assumed that political freedom and pluralism would challenge those principles.

The main clashes were between leftists and rightists, the latter supporting the idea of Turkish nationalism and thus the Nationalist Action Party. It could be said that the Turkish and Kurdish revolutionary groups were mainly based on workers and students in the 1970s and their main strategy was urban guerrilla warfare. Streets and university campuses were the places students and workers fought each other. This circumstance did not change until the 1980 military coup.

While all of this was happening, Abdullah Öcalan and his friends founded a Kurdish nationalist party called the Kurdistan Workers' Party (in Kurdish: Parti Karkerani Kurdistan – PKK) in 1978. Öcalan and other insurgents, unlike other revolutionary groups, chose to reside in rural areas and the main strategy of the organisation was 'hit and run' operations against Turkish garrisons (İmset, 1992). It was not too difficult for the PKK to attract all people's attention in Turkey in such a short time. After the insurgents attacked Turkish military posts on the borders and the village guards

stationed in Kurdish villages in the 1980s, the Turkish state had to pay attention, and the conflict between the PKK insurgents and the Turkish army has not stopped since.<sup>14</sup>

However, the Kurdish issue was resolvable especially during periods when cease-fires were declared by the PKK. For instance, Öcalan once expressed their demands by saying the following:

We should be given our cultural freedoms and the right to broadcast in Kurdish. The village guard system should be abolished and the Emergency legislation lifted. The Turkish authorities should take the necessary measures to prevent unsolved murders and should recognize the political rights of Kurdish organization (McDowall, 2003: 437).

The Turkish state left this reasonable demand unanswered, considering making a deal with the 'terrorist organisation' a sign of the state's weakness. Instead, Turkey continued spending billions of dollars on military operations against the PKK for the sake of crushing it completely. As an example, an estimated of \$9 billion was spent on operations in the southeast region of Turkey in 1994 alone (McDowall, 2003). Yet, ironically, one of the biggest hopes for the solution was in 1993 when the PKK declared a ceasefire, and the President, Turgut Özal, made hopeful statements, telling people publicly that the Turkish state might recognise the Kurdish identity. Unfortunately, this hope faded due to the sudden death of the President (Öcalan, 2009). In fact, things even got worse afterwards. For instance, İsmail Beşikçi, a Turkish sociologist, was put on trial and imprisoned due to his writings and comments on the Kurdish Question during this tense period in the 1990s. As stated by Beşikçi (Beşikçi, 2015: 17) in his book *Paths Opened by Courts* (Mahkemelerin Açtığı Yol), the Attorney General Cemalettin Çelik at

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, there have been numerous prolonged ceasefires between the Turkish state and Kurdish guerrillas so far, but what I mean here is that the war has not stopped permanently since it started.



the time made the following statement during Beşikçi's trial in a State Security Court in 1990:

Citizens of the Turkish Republic are called Turks. In Turkey, there is no other nation other than the Turkish nation, no other language other than the Turkish language. Existence of a nation other than the Turks, a language other than Turkish is unacceptable. All people dependent on the Turkish state are Turks... To say that there is a nation other than Turks and a language other than Turkish and to support this language and culture is a crime.

The quote clearly shows that the attorney did not recognise the existence of any other nationalities except the Turkish one, which is reminiscent of the very mentality of the authoritarian and patronising prospect of the Kemalist single-party period. Consequently, these policies of the Turkish state intensified its conflict with PKK insurgents.

Despite the year by year escalation of the conflict, the Turkish state did not abandon its policy of denying Kurdish national existence until only recently, making the issue more complicated and unresolvable year by year. Furthermore, the attempts made by the Kurdish people to found political organisations and thus to become part of the political process was not permitted. For instance, legal Kurdish political organisations such as the TWP, DEP and HADEP were all closed down. Even the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi – DTP) was closed down by the Constitutional Court as recently as 2009. What is strange here is after all these closures, Kurdish MPs established a new political party. People's Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP) is now the only pro-Kurdish political party in Turkish Parliament.

However, even though the state made serious mistakes in dealing with this issue, it is worth noting here that there has been a promising development in Turkey since the Ak Party government introduced the Kurdish Opening (Kürd Açılımı) in 2009 as a way of

solving the Kurdish problem permanently by making the necessary democratic reforms and giving rights demanded by the Kurds. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister at the time, himself admitted after the introduction of Kurdish Initiative that the Turkish state had made a lot of mistakes in the past by denying the Kurdish identity and persecuting its own people (BBC News, 2011).

With the Kurdish Opening, Kurdish identity has now been officially recognised by the Turkish state. A number of reforms have already been implemented accordingly. For instance, a state Kurdish TV channel has been opened; the Kurdish language has been made an elective course in primary schools; Kurdology departments have been opened in some Turkish universities such as in Mardin Artuklu University; and mother tongue defence in Turkish courts has recently been allowed. Numerous Kurdish towns were renamed (into Kurdish). Lastly, Kurdish instruction made legal in private schools (Yeğen, 2015).

The Turkish government also initiated official talks with Abdullah Öcalan and even the PKK via the pro-Kurdish political party, HDP – something which is officially called the peace process. Even though the public opinion was against any (direct or indirect) official talks with Öcalan and the PKK, it has evolved over time and finally adopted a more positive approach to these negotiations because of the peaceful atmosphere the peace process brought about in the region. These developments clearly played a significant role in the implementation of the reforms listed above and the improvements of the rights of the Kurdish people (SETA, n.d.) until July, 2015 when the PKK broke the ceasefire, something which finally resumed the conflict.

Lastly, it is worth noting here that the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan has changed his views since he was caught by the Turkish Intelligence in 1999. For instance, he made the following remarks for the solution of the Kurdish issue in his book:

I offer the Turkish society a simple solution. We demand a democratic nation. We are not opposed to the unitary state and republic. We accept the republic, its unitary structure and laicism. However, we believe that it must be redefined as a democratic state respecting peoples, cultures and rights. On this basis, the Kurds must be free to organize in a way that they can live their culture and language and can develop economically and ecologically. This would allow Kurds, Turks and other cultures to come together under the roof of a democratic nation in Turkey. This is only possible, though, with a democratic constitution and an advanced legal framework warranting respect for different cultures. Our idea of a democratic nation is not defined by flags and borders. Our idea of a democratic nation embraces a model based on democracy instead of a model based on state structures and ethnic origins. Turkey needs to define itself as a country which includes all ethnic groups. This would be a model based on human rights instead of religion or race. Our idea of a democratic nation embraces all ethnic groups and cultures (Öcalan, 2009: 39-40).

However, even though Öcalan's demands above are reasonable, the PKK did not follow Öcalan's advice on the disarmament for the negotiation that was expected to bring the permanent solution. For instance, after Öcalan's call for disarmament, Group of Communities in Kurdistan (Koma Civakén Kurdistan – KCK) announced that "We own the will of disarmament. Demirtaş or Öcalan cannot urge us to lay down our arms" (Daily Sabah, 2015). This just shows the complexity and hardship of the negotiation process that turned out to be unsuccessful.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the main characteristics of Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms, the factors shaping both nationalist ideals and goals, and the historical overview showing how these two nationalisms have evolved have been discussed thoroughly. In addition to this, the national ideology of Kemalism and the Kurdish Question in Turkey have also been

examined in detail. Thus, this chapter provided the necessary contextual information in order to understand the emergence of the Kurdish question in Turkey.

On the one hand, this chapter clearly showed that Turkish nationalism emerged as a political ideology when the Ottoman Empire was about to dissolve. With World War 1, it started to dominate the political arena in Turkey, and finally became the most important ideology after the foundation of the Turkish Republic. The Kemalists made Turkish nationalism one of the pillars modern Turkey was built upon. They further laid down theoretical foundations for ethnic Turkish nationalism, and claimed that Turkishness was something that affected all other ethnicities, and the Turkish civilisation was the first civilisation in history. In this case, Ottoman pluralism was replaced with the creation of an ethnic identity (Turkishness) in modern Turkey. Kemalism, in this regard, appears to be an authoritarian ideology that is based upon Turkish nationalism.

On the other hand, the chapter revealed that Kurdish nationalism emerged as a political ideology after the nationalist effects of the French Revolution became influential in the Ottoman Empire. However, secular (leftist) Kurdish nationalism emerged as a reaction to the exclusionist and assimilationist behaviours of the Turkish Republic in the late 1970s. It then transformed into a separatist ideology starting the war that has caused a great number of deaths in Turkey so far. This is why the Kurdish question has always become the most serious issue in Turkey since the beginning of the war.

Finally, it is worth noting here that Chapter 2 mainly focused on the theorisation of the concepts nationalism and education, and it further presented examples of national education systems across the world, examining specifically the Turkish educational system at the end. It provided the context and background for the relationship between nationalism and education, and how national education is perceived both in theory and practice in different cases. On the other hand, this chapter specifically looked at how Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms have evolved over time, and further examined the national ideology of Kemalism. Education, for instance, was not the main focus of this

chapter, as it mostly dealt with political developments surrounding Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms.

## **CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, the appropriate methodology of the research and method of data collection with the theoretical framework of the study shall be justified and presented. The ethical implications of the research and the steps that were taken to address related issues, and the research design that underpinned the fieldwork shall also be presented and discussed.

Furthermore, the chapter also gives an account of the approach used, and further discusses the sampling strategy. In this regard, how participants were recruited for interviewing is also explained and described thoroughly. In doing so, the place/region where the data was collected, issues around sampling strategy, access to participants, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants are also taken into consideration. Another matter discussed in this chapter is related to the selection of the ethnicities of participants (Kurdish and non-Kurdish) and the justification and rationale for this.

### **4.2. Research Aims and Questions**

In this research, participants' responses and comments will help the researcher understand how nationalist the Turkish educational system is in practice as well as in theory, and how it negatively affects the Kurdish culture, thus the Kurdish Question in Turkey. This will also show how the Kurdish students are excluded in the Turkish

educational system. The thesis further aims at finding out how the nationalist characteristics of the Turkish national education operate in a schooling environment, and how teachers' pedagogical strategies play out despite the strictly centralised curriculum. Finally, in a broader perspective, the study will also reveal the role that education could play in resolving political issues facing Turkey.

The questions addressed by the research are as follows, with the justification for each research question given accordingly:

**1.** What is the relationship between nationalism, the Turkish educational system, the curriculum/textbooks, language of instruction and Kurdish pupils' experience of primary and secondary education?

**Sub-questions:** What is the relative importance of nationalist influences on the curriculum and the language of instruction from the teachers' perspective. Are there different perceptions between those who teach the nationalist aspects of the curriculum and those who do not? Are there differences in perception and perspective between Kurdish teachers and Turkish teachers?

These questions seek to address 'what' teachers think about the issues around the Kurdish Question in general and in the field of education. The responses to these questions will enable the researcher to have a better understanding of the opinions of Turkish and Kurdish teachers on the Kurdish Question and its effects on education. It will show what Turkish and Kurdish teachers think about 'nationalism' and its relation to education. Besides, the responses will also show how they see education and its role in social issues (specifically the Kurdish Question) as teachers. More specifically, these will reveal how the Turkish national education, with its nationalist conceptions, is perceived by Turkish and Kurdish teachers.

**2.** How does the nationalist educational system – which is dominated by the national ideology of Kemalism – curriculum and language of instruction affect Kurdish people and thus the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

**Sub-questions:** How do teachers perceive the relationship between nationalism, the curriculum and the language of instruction and the wider Kurdish Question? How do teachers perceive education having an impact on Kurdish pupils? How do teachers perceive pupils and their parents' responses to their educational experiences? How might the educational system contribute to the resolution of the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurds in the view of teachers?

These questions seek to address 'how' teachers see the issues around the Kurdish Question in general as well as in the field of education. The responses are expected to show how teachers (as active players in education) see education and its relation with the Kurdish Question. The responses will enable the researcher to better understanding how Turkish national education is impacting upon the Kurdish Question. Since teachers experience the curriculum better than anyone else does, the responses will give a clear idea of the curriculum and its nationalist characteristics, as well. With these questions, teachers' own judgements will also be revealed. It is important to see how they think about certain issues, such as mother tongue education, which are being discussed by politicians and experts. Furthermore, these questions will also show how they view Kemalism and its relationship with the Turkish education. It will be good to compare the views of Turkish and Kurdish teachers.

**3.** What do teachers think about the Kurdish Question, the effects of the nationalist Kemalist educational system on the Kurds, and how do they respond to these in practice?



**Sub-questions:** How do teachers approach the challenges Kurdish pupils face in schools, and in wider society? How do they perceive Turkey's Kurdish Question? Why might there be variations between teachers in their perceptions and judgements about the education system and its effects? Are these due to ethnicity, teaching experience or other factors? How do they teach course units in schools? Are they following the guideline strictly, or are they sometimes acting on their own using resources other than official ones?

Because teachers are one of the most important actors in education – especially when it comes to teaching what is in the curriculum, this thesis placed a particular emphasis on them. In this regard, it is very important to grasp how they see the issues both within education and wider society, and how they react to these problems in practice. This is considered remarkable in this study, since teachers are able to comprehend the challenges/issues pupils are facing in the school environment, and how this affects them in terms of their identity and culture in daily life, as well as their progresses and achievements in school. Furthermore, teachers' behaviours and reactions to the issues in education are also of the great importance, because they might potentially affect pupils/students directly more than any other actors in education. This is why the responses to these questions are believed to help the researcher understand the issues pupils experience in the classroom/school, and they are further believed to contribute to attempts to resolve the Kurdish Question.

### **4.3. Significance of the research**

This research is significant and contributes to the academic field for the following reasons:

1. It is the first attempt to examine Kemalist national education in Turkey thoroughly, with the Kemalist/nationalist characteristics of the educational system and the curriculum/textbooks discussed critically.
2. It is the first study to examine the opinions of teachers on the issues of the Kurds/Kurdish Question, who come from different social, cultural, and political backgrounds, and who work in the provinces of the east and southeast of Turkey, which is predominantly inhabited by Kurds.
3. The thesis regards the Kurdish Question as a cultural issue rather than a security one, and thus questions the educational system for the purpose of offering an alternative perspective to the topic. Therefore, it will offer an educational insight to the Kurdish Question, which has been ignored highly ever since the beginning of the Kurdish Initiative.

In short, the project aims at searching for tangible evidences of how Kurdish students are affected by Turkish national education, and it further asks how this is affecting Turkey's Kurdish Question. Since my MA dissertation revealed that there is a serious issue regarding the exclusion of the Kurdish students within the Turkish educational system, this thesis, therefore, questions why and how the Kurdish students are excluded in Turkish schools, and what the implications are in terms of their ethnic identity or culture and their academic performance. Finally, the research is expected to propose a solution to the Kurdish Question from an educational perspective, suggesting what needs to be done in the field of education, mentioning the implications for both academic and political debates regarding the issue. This research may, however, not be limited only to the Turkish case, and may serve as an example of how national educational systems could be redesigned in order to be inclusive of all ethnic groups in those countries facing similar integration problems.

#### **4.4. Research Methods**

One of the purposes of this research is to explore what characteristics of the Turkish national education affect the Kurdish Question in Turkey. It will examine how this is related to the exclusion of the Kurdish students within the Turkish national educational system. By doing so, this research is expected to reveal experiences and examples of how the inclusion of the Kurdish students take place in Turkish public schools. In my MA dissertation, I examined the creativity of students in the Turkish educational system in relation to the dominant ideology of Kemalism, which involved Turkish and Kurdish students. This research showed that the majority of the Kurdish students suffer from the exclusion within the Turkish national education. Therefore, it was stated in the conclusion of the dissertation that this area should be investigated further with an in-depth examination/analysis of multiple factors such as teachers' opinions, experiences, and actions, textbooks, and educational policies. Thus, a qualitative research method has been selected for this research, as this will help the researcher compare different perceptions of participants, and thus interpret their attitudes and experiences in terms of the relationship between the Turkish national educational system and the Kurdish Question.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) pointed out that qualitative research is both interpretive and naturalistic, which "means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). In other words, most importantly, qualitative research enables the researcher to be able to see any social phenomenon through the lenses of the actors. In this case, social issues could well be understood from the perspective of the actors living in that particular society rather than trying to explain the same issues from the outside. This is due to the fact that social phenomena cannot be separated from the people who construct them.

'Nation', 'nationalism' and 'national identity' are all terms which make appeals to 'the people' in the broadest sense, and we might expect to see these things represented in the 'talk' of individuals (Kiely et al., 2005: 66).

This quote offers a good justification for the methodology of this research, since this study is concerned with examining the implications of the educational system/curriculum on a particular ethnic group in terms of the concepts of nationalism, national identity etc.

There are a number of other advantages of qualitative research. The first of these advantages is flexibility. Because this research planned to use semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection, it is obviously more flexible for the researcher attempting to collect the required data when compared to other methods (in this regard, quantitative methods are fairly inflexible). In other words, qualitative interviews are a less rigid style of eliciting responses to questions posed. Thus, this makes the research design (e.g., wording of interview questions) flexible as well (Griffin, 2004). However, it is worth noting here that just because the research is more flexible, this does not automatically mean that it is more scientific. In this regard, the degree of flexibility helps the researcher understand the issue better. Furthermore, this method also allows for the possibility of unanticipated issues to be introduced by interviewees, meaning that new issues can emerge from the research which were not anticipated beforehand.

Second, there is more interaction in qualitative research, that is to say, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is more interactive. For instance, participants' responses might affect what questions could be asked next while the interview is taking place. Besides, participants also have the opportunity to answer questions more elaborately rather than simply saying 'yes' or 'no', by giving examples or mentioning their experiences in order to explain their responses in a much more detailed way (Opdenakker, 2006).

These features, therefore, enable researchers to

...explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate. We can do all this qualitatively by using methodologies that celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity, rather than being embarrassed or inconvenienced by them (Mason, 2002: 1).

One of the factors that motivated me to use qualitative methods is that I used quantitative methods for the data collection for my MA thesis, and collected very limited data for that study. Furthermore, I could not get people's views in depth, since I was not able to ask them follow-up questions. These are why qualitative research was employed in this research, and it can be concluded that – as the pilot interviews also proved – I was able to collect useful data to work on for this thesis.

#### **4.4.1. The Interpretivist Approach**

This research uses the interpretivist approach in order to make sense of the data collected through interviews. Given the fact that the research is primarily based upon teachers' perceptions and their experiences in terms of nationalism, exclusion, ideology etc., the interpretivist approach is assumed to reflect all of these issues in a more satisfactory way; indeed, as explained by Deetz (1996), the interpretivist paradigm attempts to understand the issues by using people's own interpretations, perceptions and experiences.

As Putnam (1983) also notes, people are not passive objects of a world around them, instead they are the subjects who have the potential to influence the world around them by interpreting and reproducing things in their own way. Likewise, in this research, teachers and even pupils are not seen as passive objects, they are, on the contrary, seen

as the active subjects who interact dynamically, and thus react to the issues they face, and also who have the potential to reconstruct and/or deconstruct what is being imposed on them.

Interpretivism is also expected to enable the researcher to better understand how information and identity are constructed by the ideology-driven Turkish curriculum by discussing different teachers' perceptions and experiences.

#### **4.4.2. Research Design**

This section details the design used in this research as well as giving detailed information on the research site, and the pilot study conducted before the fieldwork.

##### **4.4.2.1. The In-Depth Semi-Structured Interview**

In this research, data was collected using the following methods: face-to-face individual interviews and Skype video interviews. Because visiting 12 provinces to conduct interviews was not possible for the researcher due to lack of funding for the fieldwork, only the most crowded province (Diyarbakır) was visited and 8 face-to-face interviews were conducted. Besides this, 22 more interviews were conducted with teachers from 11 other provinces using Skype.

Kvale (2003) argued that the most important aspect of the qualitative research interview is to understand what the interviewees think about the issue being researched. He regarded interviews as "an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data" (p. 14). Because this research aims to discover people's perceptions, experiences, and judgements regarding the relationship between the Turkish national education and the Kurdish Question; the

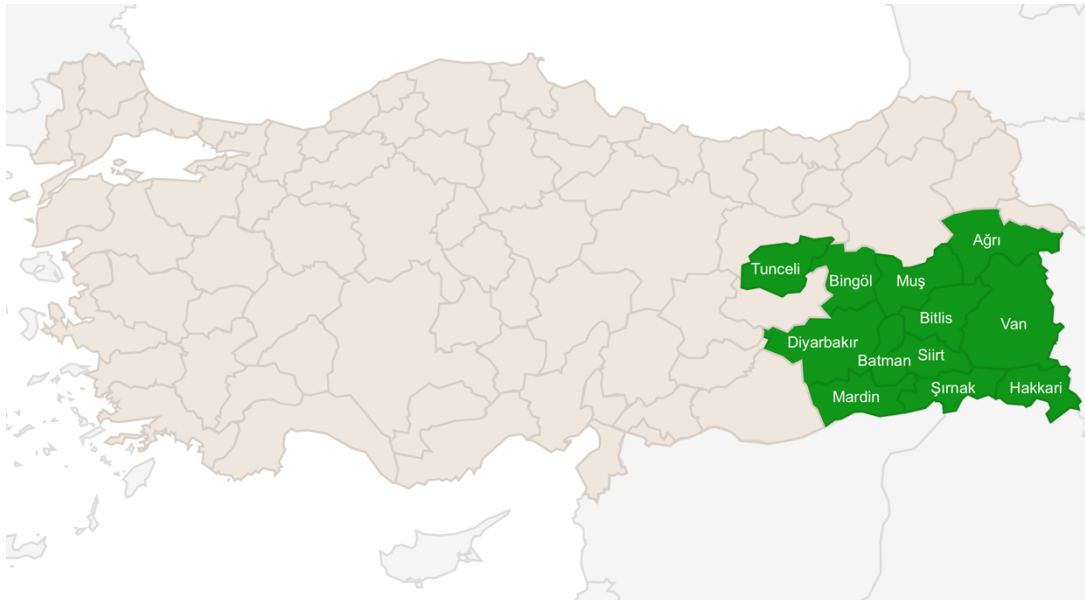
qualitative interview has, therefore, been selected as the main tool of data collection to reach the aims of the study. Moreover, as pointed out by McNamara (2009), the qualitative interview also gets to the hidden story behind the interviewees' experiences, because via a questionnaire, for example, it is not always possible to learn about people's thoughts in much detail. Instead, qualitative analysis allows the researcher to ask further questions to get the whole story. Another advantage of interviews is that the interviewees can be asked follow-up questions with regards to their responses while s/he is being interviewed. Using open-ended questions also enables participants to express themselves in a more comfortable way without any given limitation. With the comfort of the participants in mind, Mason (2002) claims that the qualitative interview should not be too formal; it should rather make the interviewees feel comfortable so that they might raise any issue they wish regarding the research topic, something which has been taken into consideration in this thesis.

Qualitative interviews are primarily divided into three categories: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. A structured interview is more standardised (it is also called a 'standardised interview'), and it is regarded as something that mostly produces quantitative data (Corbetta, 2003). On the other hand, an unstructured approach is inadequate if the researcher aims at producing a highly generalizable set of findings (Fontana and Frey, 2005). In this research, participants' attitudes are crucial in order to understand the research topic in the broadest sense. This is why both a structured and unstructured interviews were considered unsuitable for the research. Instead, a semi-structured interview method has been selected for data collection.

A semi-structured interview method is the most used technique in qualitative research. This approach allows the researcher to explore the issue in-depth, and to probe and ask questions spontaneously right after participant responses, something which creates a certain degree of flexibility during the interview process (Gray, 2004). Probing, in this case, is a way of investigating any social phenomenon deeply from the perspective of the interviewee. However, having "key themes and sub-questions in advance... [gives] the researcher a sense of order from which to draw questions from unplanned

encounters” (David and Sutton, 2004). A semi-structured approach also helps the interviewee when s/he does not understand the question. In this case, the researcher is able to explain the question to the interviewee and make it crystal clear. Taking into consideration all of these features, a semi-structured interview was considered as the most adequate method of data collection for this research in order to reflect people’s experiences, attitudes and perceptions in a more adequate way.

#### 4.4.2.2. Research site

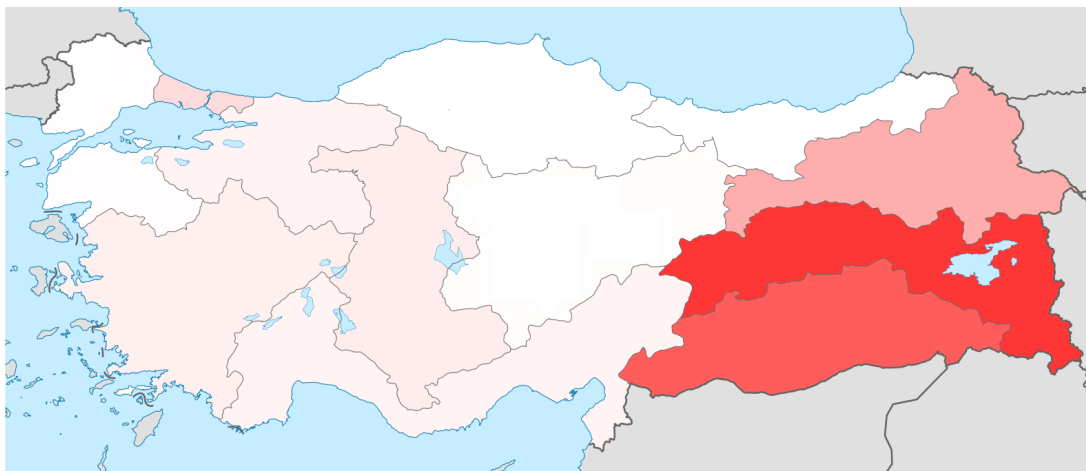


**Figure 4.1.** Kurdish-inhabited provinces of eastern and southeastern Turkey

The provinces of Siirt, Mardin, Van, Batman, Tunceli, Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Şırnak, Bitlis, Muş, Ağrı and Hakkari, which are located in both Eastern Anatolian and Southeastern Anatolian regions of Turkey were selected as the research site (see Figure 4.1). This is because these provinces are predominantly inhabited by Kurds. Besides, these places are where the Kurdish culture is still alive and visible in many respects. Another important detail is that the Kurdish language is spoken in daily life in these provinces more than other provinces in Turkey.



McDowall (2003) argued that 23% of Turkey's population is Kurdish, whereas the CIA World Factbook (2014) suggested that there are approximately 14 million Kurds in Turkey, which roughly constitutes 18% of the whole population. However, Sirkeci (2006) warned against potential biases in studies and censuses, and cautiously noted that the closest figure would certainly be above 17.8%. More specifically, a more recent survey suggested that around 76% of the Kurds live in the east and southeast of Turkey (KONDA, 2010). As can be clearly seen from the Figure 4.2 below, the 12 provinces selected for the data collection part of this study are the ones that inhabit most of the Kurds in Turkey.



**Figure 4.2.** Turkey's Kurdish population by region <sup>15</sup>

[Source: KONDA, 2010]

Even though these provinces have also been subjected to the homogenising policies of Turkey's nation-building project resulting from the Kemalist nationalist doctrine (Gambetti, 2008), they continue to reflect Kurdish culture in daily life. This is partly due to the fact that the municipalities of these provinces have rejected the Turkification policy via institutional means in the recent past, and most of these provinces are currently run by the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP, Halkların Demokratik

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<sup>15</sup> Most of the Kurds in Turkey live in the darker areas marked on the map.

Partisi). Apart from the municipal elections in 2009 and 2014, the HDP was also able to gain the majority of the votes here in the June 2015 elections.

Furthermore, another reason why these provinces were selected was that each of these was expected to give a unique account of pupils' experiences, stemming from the demographic and cultural uniqueness of each province. For example, there are many Assyrian people in Mardin province, and the teachers from that city mentioned particularly unique examples concerning their Assyrian students.

As a result, based on the reasons given above, these Kurdish inhabited provinces are assumed to help produce more reliable data in order to reveal Kurdish pupils' experiences within the Turkish educational system.

#### **4.4.2.3. Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted before the fieldwork. This was done at the end of July, 2013 via Skype. A sample group was selected amongst teachers. This included one Kurdish and non-Kurdish primary school teachers, and one Kurdish and non-Kurdish middle school teachers teaching the compulsory course unit 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism'. These four teachers were interviewed via Skype and these interviews were recorded using an mp3 player.

A pilot study was expected to help the researcher test the quality of his interview questions, and to see how well these questions address the issue. The researcher, therefore, had the opportunity to compare teachers' responses, and had a chance to make some changes to the questions (which was not planned initially) where necessary. This pilot study was believed to improve the interview questions so that the fieldwork part of the project could be done in a more beneficial way. The pilot study was also believed to help the researcher test the length of interviews, and this did indeed give an

idea of how interviews should be done in the fieldwork phase. Lastly, the pilot study helped the researcher to be able to better use Skype for later interviews conducted for the research.

#### **4.5. The Dataset of the Research**

The dataset of the research is as follows:

- Interviews with 30 teachers who work in the east and southeast of Turkey
- Analysis of the 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism' textbooks
- Review of policy documents and regulations about education

First of all, teachers were selected as the participants of this research. The rationale for this selection is that teachers are powerful actors in education. For instance, Hurt et al. (1978: 125) suggested that "a certain degree of teacher power is always present" within the classroom. He goes on to say that "power refers to a teacher's ability to affect in some way the student's well-being beyond the student's own control" (p.124). In this regard, teachers can act as lecturers, and are able to interpret what is in the curriculum, and teach that to students. They are also observers who track their students' progress, and witness what they experience in the classroom. Furthermore, I selected teachers, because I had chosen middle school pupils for my MA research, and found out that getting information from pupils at that age is extremely difficult.

Second, the critical analysis of textbooks was made in this study. Olson (1980: 192) claimed that an "authorised version of society's valid knowledge" is constructed through school textbooks. It can safely be stated that textbooks contain the official knowledge that can represent the mind-set of the state. This is why Thoma (2015) asserted that Foucault's following remarks could well be applied to "textbooks as teaching tools":

When, for example, the newsreader on the radio or television says something, you believe it or you don't believe it, but in the heads of thousands of people this statement becomes fixed as truth, just because it has been delivered in this way, in this tone, by this person at this time (Foucault, cited in/translated by Thoma, 2015: 3).

Foucault's statements clearly indicate the significance of the way the knowledge/information is presented. With this in mind, this chapter attempts to show how the "official knowledge or narratives" could be constructed through school textbooks, and how this constructed knowledge might affect students.

Lastly, the policy documents and regulations about education have been reviewed, since both of these directly reflect how the state approaches to these matters, and how it wishes to educate the next generation of the country. In this case, things like ideology and nationalism can clearly be seen in the official documents and regulations.

## **4.6. The Fieldwork - Conducting Interviews**

### **4.6.1. Sampling**

Random sampling was deliberately avoided in this research. Instead, purposive sampling was employed in order to avoid the probability of biases in the sample. Purposive sampling (also known as *judgmental*), a form of non-probability sampling, has been used for the fieldwork of the research. Purposive sampling is to select a sample "on the basis of your own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of your research aims" (Babbie, 1990: 97). Likewise, Mason (1996: 93) also stated that "purposive sampling involved selecting individuals on the basis of their relevance to the research questions". Taking into consideration these characteristics, it is obvious that purposive

sampling gives the researcher an advantage of selecting his participants in line with the research questions. Finally, using purposive sampling in this research is expected to help the researcher select relevant people (teachers) to be interviewed in order for that the main goals of the study could be reached easily and efficiently.

30 teachers in total were interviewed for the research. The details of the sample group are as follows, though a detailed list of interviewees will be given later in Appendix: 8 teachers were from Diyarbakır province. 22 other teachers were from Siirt, Mardin, Van, Batman, Tunceli, Bingöl, Şırnak, Bitlis, Muş, Ağrı and Hakkari provinces in the east and southeast regions of Turkey. 14 teachers were female, 16 teachers were male. 13 primary school teachers, and 17 middle school teachers participated in the research.

The sample group for the interviews were chosen very carefully by the researcher using contacts already working in the Kurdish inhabited towns. Given that the limitation of the case study in terms of generalisation, interviewees were selected from different political and social backgrounds. This selection was deliberately chosen by the researcher in order to produce rich data. This also enabled the researcher to be able to gather data based on different perceptions and views on the issue. It also helped to witness a lot of different experiences regarding the issue.

For the ethnic selection of the sample, Turkish and Kurdish teachers were interviewed, since this research aims to compare Turkish and Kurdish teachers' responses and to give an analysis of their attitudes towards the national curriculum of Turkey, how it is practiced in Turkish schools, and what the implications are.

Teachers who were recruited for the research were all aged between 25-35. This age range was intentionally selected, because 1) there are a lot of young teachers working in the east and southeast regions of Turkey due to the fact that experienced teachers generally tend to move to the western part of the country, and 2) teachers at this age

are recent graduates from university, and most of them are energetic and idealist teachers who want their students be successful, which means that they may care about their students more compared to their older counterparts. These factors made the selected sample valuable to this research, because the former made the recruiting process easier, and the latter helped the researcher to be able to understand Kurdish pupils' experiences better.

In terms of access to participants, snowball sampling is used. As pointed out by MacNealy (1999: 157), snowball sampling can be used "in those rare cases when the population of interest cannot be identified other than by someone who knows that a certain person has the necessary experience or characteristics to be included." Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) claimed that it is better to use snowball sampling if the research is carried out on a sensitive issue. However, there is a disadvantage of this sampling method, since it is not seen as highly representative. Having said that, the participants of this research project were selected from different backgrounds as much as possible so as to ensure that the findings of the research can be generalised to a population, and can be more consistent. I was able to use my contacts in the region in order to access each participant who work in one of the Kurdish inhabited towns, and whose pupils mostly come from a Kurdish ethnic background.

Informed consent was obtained from the research participants themselves. I first met each participant and explained the reason of my study and the nature of my research; emphasising the importance of their help, participation, willingness and honesty. It was made crystal clear to them that the data which was to be collected will remain completely anonymous, confidential and safe; as well as the fact that their participation would be absolutely voluntary. An informative leaflet including the main goals of my research, methodology and the importance of the research were given to them. This included my contact details as well. Consent form was then given with enough time (3 days at least) to decide if they would like to participate in the research or not. I then collected the consent forms during the second time we met and did the interviews with each participant. On the other hand, for the majority whom I interviewed via Skype, they

were sent the required information and the consent form of the research via e-mail and they were given a 3-day period for their final decision, and then they were interviewed via Skype.

#### **4.6.2. Interviews**

##### *Using Skype for interviews*

As Lo Iacono et al. (2016) noted, using online technologies within academia is becoming more common with the internet being more popular in today's world. They further stated that Face Time and Skype are two of these online technologies researchers prefer to use for data collection. Berg (2007) stressed the practicality of using web-based in-depth interviews by talking about 'synchronous environments' such as video conferences and chat rooms, and 'asynchronous environments' such as the use of e-mails and messages. For him, even though the latter is rather useful for surveys, the former is very similar to face to face interview. Likewise, Bertrand and Bourdeau (2010: 73) said:

a Skype to Skype research interview is more than a face to face research interview. In fact, recorded audio and video data could be more studied exactly with the same material. The recorded interview is a mirror of what it was in reality. Non-verbal are visible and do not depend on the interviewee's spare notes nor his memories.

Furthermore, conducting interviews via Skype is also practical, since it saves time and money for the researcher, and thus makes the process easier. For instance, the interviews for this research were conducted with teachers living in twelve different provinces in the east and southeast regions of Turkey, with eleven of them being not visited due to lack of funding. Thus, using Skype appeared to be "a very convenient way of being able to maximise the research effort on a budget" (Lo Iacono et al., 2016: 8). All

of these made the data collection part of this research much easier; because otherwise, it would not have been possible to collect the same amount of data from different cities.

On the other hand, some scholars discussed the disadvantages of using Skype for interviews. For instance, Janet (2011) stated that during Skype interviews only a head shot of the interviewee can be seen on the screen by the researcher and this definitely prevents the researcher being able to observe participants' body language. Furthermore, Markham (2008) pointed out that obtaining an informed consent through the Internet might be difficult, especially if the participant is worried about his/her anonymity. However, this research revealed that the point Janet made above is actually not at the centre of the interviews, as it turned out in this research that participants' reactions/emotions/feelings could easily be read from their faces. Regarding Markham's point, as the recruiting of interviewees was based upon the snowball method and purposive sampling strategy, obtaining an informed consent was not an issue for this research, as only two teachers refused to participate in the study.

Another disadvantage of using Skype mentioned by academics is that some people might be unwilling to use the Internet which might create problems for the researcher (Lo Iacono et al., 2016); however, as the participants of this study are younger people aged between 25-35, this was not the case for this research. Additionally, Seitz (2015) also warned against any possible technical difficulties such as experiencing an Internet connection problem while the interview is taking place, and further said this might have an impact on both the interviewer and interviewee, because the conversation is interrupted and returning to conversation can be difficult on these occasions. For this research, this issue did occur and the connection was lost four or five times during the interviews; however, resuming the conversation was not as difficult as anticipated by Seitz.



Having looked at the advantages and disadvantages of using Skype for qualitative research, it can be concluded that, as Sullivan (2012) noted, the advantages of using Skype clearly outweigh the disadvantages.

#### **4.6.3. Anonymity of the research participants and the security of the researcher**

Even though each interviewee is given a specific pseudonym for anonymity reasons and to protect their identities (Grinyer, 2002), as little information as possible is given in the research, especially regarding the area/school/neighbourhood they are living/working in. Any information that may allow anyone to find the participant was avoided. Along with this, the main site of the research (cities in the Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia regions of Turkey) constitutes quite a large area amongst Turkey's local regions that have a population of 14.178.348<sup>16</sup>, which means that there are a great many public schools and teachers in these two regions. Given this, along with the information that will be given in the research, it will almost be impossible to find any participant. Having said that, the participants of the research were informed about these issues and the measures taken by the researcher to prevent or minimise potential ethical concerns. I also made sure that they are fully aware of these potential concerns and the measures taken to prevent them before the interviewees were interviewed.

In terms of the risks that I might face in the site, there was no serious risk anticipated by the researcher in the first instance before the fieldwork. Cities located in the Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia regions were quite peaceful while the interviews were taking place. There was a ceasefire in place at that time, and I only visited the province of Diyarbakır. Therefore, as anticipated earlier, I did not face any difficulties in the field.

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<sup>16</sup> Data derived from: <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist> (Accessed at 20 January, 2016).

Also, I asked very similar questions (about Kemalism and nationalism in education) while conducting questionnaires for my MA dissertation in 2012. I also obtained permission from the MoNE (the Ministry of National Education) for that research, and those questions were reviewed by a committee in the Ministry of National Education before permission was granted. This shows that the questions of this research will not be a problem for the researcher and participants alike, even if the research is public knowledge. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning here again that there is no permission required unless a researcher undertakes his/her research in a school environment (in a classroom or playground) in Turkey. For this research, I did not wish to obtain such permission, because it usually involves a 3-4 month waiting period, and the MoNE even makes it more difficult when the interview questions are sensitive, especially regarding the national ideology of Turkey, Kemalism. Therefore, the research was not undertaken in a school environment. Another important point is that I had a number of personal contacts in these cities, which made the recruiting process a lot easier than it would otherwise have been.

#### **4.6.4. Translating and transcribing the data**

Since all interviews were undertaken in Turkish, the interview questions had to be translated into Turkish. Besides, after conducting all interviews, the responses collected were translated from Turkish into English. The translation and transcription of the data appeared to be one of the challenging issues.

First of all, some technical issues shall be taken into consideration. For instance, using a digital recorder (MP3 recorder) rather than using a tape recorder enabled the researcher to easily make several copies and transfer the data to a computer. Digital recorders were used, as they have a better sound quality, which can be made even better by using software programmes specifically designed to remove background noise in order for that the participants' responses to be heard and understood more clearly. Due to all of these reasons, a digital MP3 recorder was used for recording interviews. As Denzin and

Lincoln (2000: 13) noted, transcripts of audio recordings that are “based on standardized conventions, provide an excellent record of ‘naturally occurring’ interaction” and “recordings and transcripts can offer a highly reliable record”.

A clear distinction between ‘translation’ and ‘transcription’ has been made by Eco (2001: 75) who said, “It is clear that in the processes of translation proper there are margins of decision according to the context. These are, however, absent in transcription processes, in which there is no freedom of choice”. In this regard, another important issue emerges, which is to transcribe the data collected in another language (other than English). In this case, I chose to transcribe the data in English. All responses were translated and transcribed accurately for use in the research or in any publication. The time spent on transcribing did however definitely limit the time available for data analysis, which is another important phase of the research.

Nonetheless, in this research, an overview of participants’ perceptions/experiences and feelings were analysed carefully. Despite all the translating and transcribing issues, the translation and transcription of the responses were done carefully by the researcher. The meaning in general was at the heart of the translation and the transcription processes, since Harrington and Turner (2001) cautiously highlighted the importance of ‘correct interpretations’. It is also worth mentioning here that some specific phrases that are difficult to translate into another language remained in Turkish within the text, with an explanation of the phrase given separately. This was to make sure that all responses from the participants are fully understood in the thesis, since Simon (1996) noted:

The solutions to many of the translator’s dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are ‘the same’. These are not technical difficulties, they

are not the domain of specialists in obscure or quaint vocabularies (p. 137, emphasis in the original text).

#### **4.6.5. Data Analysis**

The analysis of the raw data collected through interviews began by translating (from Turkish into English) and transcribing each interview. As a native Turkish speaker, considering ethical purposes, I did translations of all interviews in order to protect the data as well as the anonymity of the participants. This process was followed by the organisation of the translated and transcribed data. Because the questions and sub-questions of the interviews were systematically designed to elicit responses to the research questions posed in this research, this made the process of the categorisation of the data easier, since Miles and Huberman (1994: 432) highlighted the importance of this point by stating that “valid analysis is immensely aided by data displays that are focused enough to permit viewing of a full data set in one location and are systematically arranged to answer the research question at hand”. In this process, coding was employed, which was simply “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 61). As a result, teachers’ ideas and the concepts in the interviews were organised into codes such as *teachers’ concerns over Kurdish people’s culture*, *the effects of the nationalist themes on Kurdish pupils*, and *the consequences of the indoctrination of Kemalism*. With this step, the data was reduced to a manageable form. Following the translation/transcription and organisation of the data, the list of codes, ideas, and patterns were classified under different categories such as *the mother tongue education*, *Kemalism*, and *nationalist themes in the curriculum*, all of which constituted the sub-sections of the empirical chapters of this study.

The final step that was employed before writing the empirical chapters was the interpretation of the organised data. At this stage, the interpretivist approach was used, as mentioned earlier in the methodology section. This is because in this thesis, knowledge is considered to be socially constructed by actors in society (see Putnam,

1983, Deetz, 1996). Therefore, in order to make sense of the data, the text organised into codes and patterns, and then classified under categories was interpreted by the researcher.

Apart from the data collected through interviews, textbooks were also analysed using the method of critical analysis.

#### **4.6.6. Data access**

All data collected in this research was anonymised and codified after all interviews. Unique pseudonyms were given to each teacher. An MP3 digital voice recorder was used for interviews, which allowed the data transfer to the researcher's personal computer at home and his external hard disk, where access is controlled and password protected in both. Furthermore, personal address, e-mails, telephone numbers and faxes were put in a database stored in the same personal computer, securing access from unauthorised users. Any publication of direct quotations will be anonymous, since pseudonyms will be used to protect the participants.

#### **4.7. Limitations of the Research**

1. First, because this research is a case study, one of the first things that comes to mind would be the issue of the generalizability of the findings/results of the study. One may argue that the findings of this thesis may not necessarily reflect Turkey as a whole, as the research was undertaken in a specific location (the eastern and southeast regions of Turkey) with a specifically selected sample (Turkish and Kurdish teachers whose students are predominantly Kurdish) in order to understand a specific problem (the relationship between the ideology-driven Turkish educational system and the Kurdish Question). Thus, conducting

the same research in a different location might produce different results. Having said that, there are ways to improve the generalizability of the case studies via the right strategy in the selection of the case (see Gerring, 2008). For instance, as this research seeks to find out the relationship between the Turkish national education and Turkey's Kurdish Question in terms of the effects of the educational system on the Kurdish pupils based on their experiences through schooling, early in the fieldwork process, the province of Diyarbakır was selected to be the sole location wherein the data would be collected. However, in order to increase the generalizability of the data and to collect more appropriate data for the research, twelve other provinces in the eastern and southeast region of Turkey (Siirt, Mardin, Van, Batman, Tunceli, Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Şırnak, Bitlis, Muş, Ağrı and Hakkari) appeared to be the best locations to conduct this study, since these are all predominantly inhabited by the Kurds and are, therefore, the best places to investigate the impact of the Turkish education on Kurdish pupils. This is because the Kurds living in the western parts of the country such as Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir are assimilated into the dominant Turkish culture more than the ones living in the abovementioned twelve cities.

Despite the possibility of limitation in terms of the generalizability of the data, using the case study method has had some distinctive advantages in order to collect the appropriate data for the research. Firstly, the case study method enables the researcher to investigate a particular topic thoroughly and deeply by providing an empirically-rich account of a specific phenomenon (Eckstein, 1975). Secondly, as mentioned by Donmoyer (2000), "accessibility to a rare location" wherein researchers do not usually prefer to conduct their research is a significant advantage for the researcher in order to be able to discover the significance of that location, as a rare location is sometimes required for the research in order to study a rare phenomenon which is specifically related to that location.

On the other hand, it must be noted that this research was not conducted for generalization purposes. It is designed to be a case study, since it aimed at discovering the complexity of a specific issue by focussing on particular

experiences of particular people in a certain location. As deftly explained by Ragin (1987: 54), "...in the case-oriented approaches (..) it is clear that the goal of appreciating complexity is given precedence over the goal of achieving generality". Thus, criticism of generalizability of the data collected through the use of a single case study method may not be relevant if/when particularisation is specifically selected in order to understand the complexity of an issue.

2. Secondly, as this research is based on the findings of interviews conducted with Turkish and Kurdish teachers working in the primary and middle schools, the findings may, therefore, not be applicable to other Kurdish students who are studying in a high school or at a university. Also, some specific issues this research was meant to examine mostly occur in the first years of schooling, such as issues relating to mother tongue instruction that pupils face when they start school.
3. Thirdly, this thesis overall reflects the perceptions of Turkish and Kurdish teachers coming from different social and political backgrounds, and it mainly gives an account of teachers' perception on the issues along with their observation about the experiences of their students.
4. The analysis of textbook chapters is limited to the History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism, though there are a few quotes taken from other textbooks too. That being said, a comprehensive analysis of all textbooks used in the Turkish educational system already exists in the literature, examining the concept of citizenship which is promoted in textbooks within the framework of fundamental (human) rights and freedoms (see Çayır, 2014).
5. This thesis is meant to cover a specific time frame, which is from October 2012 to July 2015. This was required for the thesis, because teachers were asked about up-to-date developments when they were interviewed. It must be noted that there have been many radical developments recently regarding the Kurdish

Question, such as the return to conflict in the Kurdish region after the PKK broke the cease-fire in July 2015.

#### **4.8. Ethical considerations**

The main ethical issues that might arise relate to the fact that the project questions the national characteristic of the Turkish educational system and its embrace of the ideology of Kemalism. This is because Kemalism is an ideology that cannot be criticised directly in Turkey according to the law.

The main ethical concerns of this project relate to:

1. Anonymity of teachers: I interviewed Kurdish and non-Kurdish teachers and gave each one a different pseudonym in order to make them more comfortable about confidentiality. Therefore, teachers' real names will never be revealed in my PhD thesis or any possible publication related to my research. This is to protect them from any possible concern or anxiety regarding their identities.
2. Disclosure of personal information: No personal information about teachers was given. Furthermore, the names of the schools they are working for were not mentioned specifically, either. The only information that is mentioned is the provinces chosen as the main research site for this study.
3. Freedom of choice: Teachers were given a consent form beforehand and they themselves decided if they would like to be interviewed. So it was entirely voluntary. I also introduced myself, explaining explicitly what I was doing, what my research was about, how I was planning to conduct and organise my research (methodology), what the possible implications are, the importance of the project



and why I have chosen them for data collection. I also told them that I would also be happy to answer any question that may be asked by the teachers. They were told specifically that if they were uneasy and became upset, the interview would have been cancelled or postponed. The teachers were also given a chance to withdraw from the study whenever they wanted, without explaining the reasons they did so.

4. There was a very small chance that some teachers might feel uncomfortable with a questioning of the nationalist characteristics of the curriculum and/or the educational system. However, they were assured that any answers or opinions that they give would remain completely confidential.

#### **4.9. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the methodological position of this study along with the detailed explanation of the methods used in the research. Research aims and Questions have been mentioned in the second section. Section 3 tried to show the significance of the research. Then, the research methods used in this study have been discussed in the fourth section. Section 5 summarised the fieldwork process, in which the details of the sample, information on how to access participants, conduct the interviews to collect the data and interpret the results have been mentioned and discussed. Finally, the chapter has also tried to give an overview of some of the limitations of the research and the possible ethical considerations at the end.

By using the methodology described thoroughly in this chapter, I successfully gathered the data. As a result, the data collected through interviews as well as the data generated from the critical analysis of the textbooks and policy documents served to help in achieving the goals of the research.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTBOOKS TAUGHT IN THE TURKISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

In this study, the critical analysis of the “History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism” textbooks is considered to be significant, as the analysis of these textbooks in this chapter provides context for the interviews. These two specific textbooks were chosen for the analysis, because these are believed to represent the ideology (Kemalism) that is disseminated by the Turkish educational system. Even though quotes from other textbooks are used in this chapter, these two textbooks are seen as key materials in order to understand the Kemalist national education in Turkey.

The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to critically analyse the content of textbooks taught in Turkish schools. In doing so, the chapter specifically evaluates the ‘History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism’ textbooks taught during compulsory schooling, along with quotes from other textbooks. Before analysing the textbooks, the aims of the course units will be analysed and discussed. Afterwards, the content will be analysed in terms of its relation to nationalism, discrimination and the exclusion of different ethnic, religious or other group ideologies.

While analysing the “History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism” textbooks, the following points are going to be taken into consideration:

1. Cult of Atatürk
2. Turkish nationalism

3. Critical thinking/obedient citizens
4. Racism
5. Exclusion
6. Historical bias

These six key points are believed to have an impact on students' personalities in Turkish schools, as these main points are very likely to affect students in a negative way. For instance, "racism" and "Turkish nationalism" may result in the production of "chauvinist ideas" which might make students develop xenophobic attitudes towards "other" ethnic/religious identities in society. This is why the critical analysis of the textbooks is considered to be an important part of this thesis in order to understand the topic better.

## **5.2. The policies of the Ministry of National Education and the aims of the textbooks taught in Turkish schools**

It has already been documented in Chapter 2 that the Turkish educational system is highly centralised, with the policies and the aims of all course units determined by the Ministry of National Education itself. The Turkish educational system is dominated by the national ideology of Kemalism and Atatürk nationalism, since the Ministry of National Education Law explicitly entails Atatürk's reforms, principles and his brand of nationalism:

In the process of the preparation of every academic program for every course unit, Atatürk's reforms and principles, and Atatürk's nationalism that is stated in the Constitution must be treated as the main pillar (Article 10 in Ministry of National Education, 2012).

As mentioned above, Kemalism is regarded as the main pillar by the law, and it is, therefore, seen as an ideology students must grasp and follow sincerely. This could even

be seen more clearly in the teachers' guide for the Social Sciences course unit taught to 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. For example, in the description section of this course unit, it is mentioned that "the main target of the course unit is to raise students as ones who embrace Kemalism, and grasp the Turkish culture and Turkish history" (Ersöz, 2012: 10). Turkishness and the Turkish culture seem to be only nation and culture mentioned in the 'targets'. It could, therefore, be argued that the targets of the course units are not inclusive of other ethnicities and other ideologies, that is to say, the targets appear to promote 'one nation' (Turkish) and 'one ideology' (Kemalism). Furthermore, another aim mentioned in the book is "to raise students who are loyal to their families, their nation, their homeland and Atatürk's principles and revolutions (..) Students should acknowledge the cleverness, the knowledge, the talents and the aesthetic taste of the Turkish nation and the supremacy of these characteristics (..)" (ibid., p. 1, my italics). This aim clearly shows the racist attitudes promoted by the aims of the textbook as it talks about 'the supremacy of the characteristics of the Turkish nation', which results from an ethnocentric approach, as pointed out by Sumner (1906). Yet, ideally, education should enable students to respect very different cultural and regional identities/groups in the postmodern era and to care about the inclusiveness of these identities (Banks, 2004).

What is more, the excessive emphasis of Atatürk is also mentioned in the aims, the educational attainments and the content of the Social Sciences textbooks (for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades) in order to constantly remind students that Atatürk was 'the supreme leader of Turkey', as he is portrayed as someone who had an important role to play in every matter, very much like a philosopher. For instance, one of the educational attainment targets says that "students should know how Atatürk has given importance to rationalism and science by giving some examples from Atatürk's life" (ibid., p. 10). Another educational attainment target suggests that "students should give the examples of how Atatürk has promoted the communication between people". These educational attainments appear to be functional examples of how the idea of the 'greatness' of one man (Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) with one ideology (Kemalism) is being imposed on all students in the Turkish education system. In fact, students are not only expected to

recognise Atatürk and his great talents, but also to think in an 'Atatürk way'. For example, another educational attainment target mentions that "students should evaluate Turkey's cultural, social, political and economic relations with its neighbouring countries and other countries from the perspective of Atatürk's national foreign policy" (ibid., p. 14). As a result, students are taught to be devotees of Atatürk, and thus defenders of his views. It appears that another important educational attainment, 'critical thinking', is not taken into consideration when the topic is about Atatürk, his ideas, and his principles. In other words, students are expected to accept these without any criticism in the existing educational system.

All these references to Atatürk in the textbooks appear to be an example of the existence of the cult of Atatürk's personality in the Turkish education system. This might also be explained by the term 'charismatic authority' defined by Weber (1968: 215) as "resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him." There is no doubt that Atatürk had a charismatic authority in his time. In fact, it could be claimed that his charismatic authority continued to exist even after he died, which we can put down to the fact that the figure of Atatürk has always been portrayed as extraordinary, with statues and images depicting him placed everywhere, from schools to public places. As Glyptis (2008: 356) notes:

Atatürk's houses exist in an Atatürk-inundated context with his face and sayings appearing on all official documents, buildings, television channels, newspapers and schoolyards, coins and banknotes. Moreover, regardless of personal belief, every Turk lives in a country where nationalism is part of standard political discourses. Politicians, teachers and journalists appeal to the nation and Atatürk on a daily basis.

As can be seen from the quote, the image of Atatürk is not just in the textbooks or in schools in Turkey, it is actually everywhere in daily life, and is highly visible. One could easily see "the omnipresence of Atatürk images" everywhere in the public sphere, from

hospitals to schools, and from private businesses to the streets. Thus, “the visual symbolism” is actually a significant part of Atatürk cult. Likewise, “unique posters of Atatürk and inscriptions of his image in previously unusual context such as T-shirts, mugs, and crystal spheres have become popular as birthday gifts and wedding favours” (Özyürek, 2006: 93-96).

In 2012, there was a study conducted regarding the cult of Ataturk. In one of the questions posed to students, 51 out of 60 students said, “We owe our lives to him.” (Elmas, 2007: 42). As explained by Özyürek (2006), Atatürk’s cult of personality has a long historical context, which is still defended today in daily life. Thus, the perception of students is always reinforced by materials in schools, the wider political discourse, and statues and portraits in daily life too. As argued by Mateescu (2006: 227), it could be said that “in the making of the post-Ottoman Turkish political identity, Kemalism tended to act more like a political than civil religion.”

The discourse mentioned above could even be seen more elaborately in the aims of the “History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism” course unit, which are as follows:

1. Student should embrace Atatürk’s world view/philosophy and he/she should be a fierce defender of Atatürk’s system of thought at the end of the course unit.
2. He/she should evaluate the geopolitical importance of Turkey in terms of its effects both regionally and globally and he/she should be aware of the internal and external threats.
3. He/she should have enough ability to find solutions to today’s and tomorrow’s problems by using the Kemalist approach (Ministry of National Education, 2010: 4-5).

These aims show that students are asked to put Kemalism at the centre of the way they think. Likewise, the way they look at the issues around the globe also needs to be Kemalist. It could, therefore, be assumed that students in the Turkish educational system are not expected to broaden their horizon while being educated; instead, they

are expected to accept a dogmatic ideology that no one can criticise within the system, and further understand everything from the perspective of this ideology. With this in mind, it may be the case that the excessive emphasis of a particular ideology to the exclusion of other ideologies and identities might create a kind of xenophobia amongst students.

In the Turkish educational system, the Ministry of National Education provides 'guide books' in order for teachers to teach course units in a more systematic way. For instance, some of the points teachers should consider when teaching the History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism course unit are as follows:

1. Teachers should teach the following things wherever appropriate: Atatürk's personality, his patriotism, his creativity, his idealistic characteristic, his patience and discipline, his farsightedness, his love of humans and nation, his rationalism, and his sophistication.
2. National and religious celebrations, the independence dates of the cities and such celebrations should be used to develop students' sense of history and their sensitiveness.
3. Teachers should speak about Atatürk's personality, his reforms and his principles on these specific dates: 29<sup>th</sup> of October the Republic Day, 23<sup>rd</sup> April the Children's Day, 19<sup>th</sup> May the Day of Remembrance of Atatürk and the Youth's Day, 13<sup>th</sup> October when Ankara was made the capital city.
4. Having been inspired by Atatürk's sayings 'Oh Turks! Work and trust!', 'How happy is the one who says I'm a Turk' and 'Peace in Turkey and peace in the world', teachers should show the role that the Turks played in history, and how they served human beings in the field of military, law, science and the arts (Tüysüz, 2015: 15).

The first point seems to be a reminder of how to teach Atatürk and his ideas in a better way. After all of these repetitions, Atatürk appears to be an idol of the educational system in Turkey, who must be followed by any means, and who cannot be criticised in any way. The third and fourth points are about nationalist feelings, patriotism, and again Atatürk's personality and Kemalism. Lastly, the fourth one appears to be more

nationalist, overemphasising the ‘Turkish nation’ and its achievements. In particular, the saying “How happy is the one who says I am a Turk” appears to be provoking and insulting for other identities, as this was also the last statement of the ‘Student Pledge’ which has recently been abolished as part of the democratic reform package in 2013. Besides this, this statement was also written on the mountains and on the streets of south east of Turkey in order to remind the Kurdish population what they are supposed to be, though these have also recently been removed as part of the Kurdish Initiative (Tönbekici, 2013), which will be discussed again later in this chapter

### 5.3. Critical analysis of the textbooks

In all textbooks taught in the Turkish education system, the first few pages are devoted to Atatürk, patriotism and nationalism. For instance, each textbook has a national anthem on the third page, which is followed by Atatürk’s Youth Address and Atatürk’s portrait (see Figure 5.1).

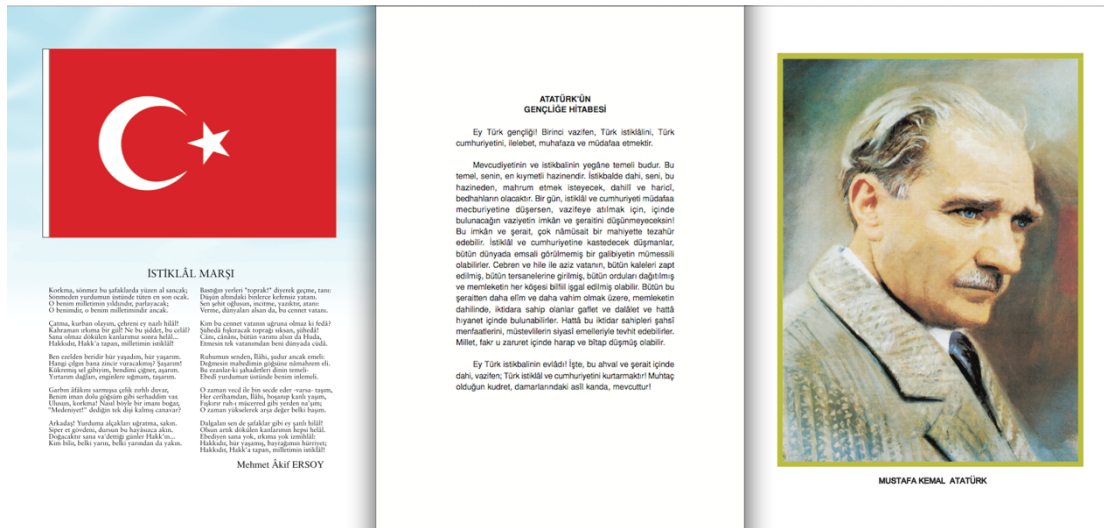


Figure 5.1 National Anthem, Atatürk’s Youth Address and Atatürk’s Portrait  
(Source: Başol et al., 2012a: 1-2-3)



In 'Atatürk's Youth Address', Turkish youth are given the responsibility of preserving the Turkish Republic by Atatürk himself. He dedicated his regime to the youth in this address. This might be explained by the fact that, as mentioned by Füsün Üstel (cited in Elmas, 2012: 36), "in the construction of the 'citizen', who is the new political actor of the modern central state, the role of school – especially the role of primary school – is critically important. Children began to be perceived as the 'future of society' and they began to be drawn into the sphere of influence of the state as the 'future of the regime'." It is apparent that the Turkish Youth were perceived as 'the future of modern Turkey', and also 'the guards of the regime' by Atatürk.

What is also remarkable is that the Youth Address finishes with the statement "You will find the power you need in the *noble blood* in your veins" (my italics). Atatürk obviously meant the Turkish blood with the phrase 'the noble blood' here, which is yet another indication of the racist rhetoric in Atatürk's nationalist doctrine.

Another issue is that the textbooks, especially 'Social Sciences' and the 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism' textbooks, are primarily based upon Atatürk's book titled 'Nutuk' (The Address) which was originally a speech delivered by Atatürk himself in Parliament in October, 1927. The speech took a total of 36 hours and 33 minutes, and it was published later as a book, constituting the fundamental source of the history of the Turkish Republic. Nutuk is considered by some historians as a propaganda book which acts to justify certain historical events, and apologise for others. As mentioned by Zürcher (2010: 13), "we will not be surprised to find that in some places it gives us a rather lopsided view of historical realities." Therefore, it could be hypothesised that the issues regarding the accuracy and the objectivity of the historical realities are derived from the use of the Nutuk as the primary source for the history of Turkey, since it is clear that the history textbooks are full of Atatürk's quotations taken from the Nutuk. For example, in the 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism' textbook (Başol et al., 2012a: 87), one of the units talks about the abolishment of the Sultanate. To justify the abolishment, the following quote from the Nutuk is mentioned: "If we continued with the Sultanate at that time, that would have been the worst thing done against the

Turkish nation.” This is just one example of how historical events are justified using quotes from Atatürk’s Nutuk.

#### **5.4. Critical Analysis of the History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism for 8<sup>th</sup> grades**

A great deal of pages in this textbook are devoted to Atatürk, his personality, his ideas, his principles, and his reforms. It could well be claimed that Atatürk is portrayed as a ‘great hero’ who did the right thing at the right time, and consequently saved the country. The first unit is, accordingly, titled ‘A hero is about to be born’. Atatürk’s life, from his childhood to his death, is taught in this unit. The unit is full of Atatürk photos and quotations that are appropriate to stories about his life. Atatürk is also portrayed as a very sophisticated man who is interested in everything, very much like a philosopher. For instance, an interesting point drawn in this unit regarding this is given in a small information box: “Did you know Atatürk’s interest towards mathematics continued later in his life as well. The Geometry Book written by him is the best example of this interest” (Başol et al., 2012a: 18). There are also strange questions posed in small information boxes in order for students to brainstorm. For example, one of them asks: “Why was Mustafa Kemal regarded as a genius who contributed a lot to the victory during the Gallipoli War?”

On the page 18, there is an interesting note that reads:

In Atatürk’s time, there wasn’t unity in education. There were traditional schools dominated by religious education, western schools, military schools, non-Muslim schools, and there were even a lot of foreign schools opened up by foreign states within the borders of the Empire. All these schools had their own aims and targets, and thus educated children accordingly. However, the best schools at the time were the military schools where education was given by experts and whose students were

rational and patriot, who were be able to look at issues objectively (ibid., p. 18).

It seems that there are two points students are expected to pay attention to. On the one hand, differences in education are discredited in this note. This is because authors wish to lay the ground before students are taught about the Unification of Education Law reform, and so that they may understand that the Unification of Education Law was something highly necessary at the time. Secondly, military schools are claimed to have been the best; naturally, Atatürk graduated from a military school. The objectivity with which historical events are presented here is questionable and are all interpreted according to Atatürk's own experiences and ideas.

In the second unit of the book, there is a topic about the 'Armenian issue'. It basically justifies what happened to the Armenians in 1915. Interestingly, quotes from different writers are given as anecdotes. For instance, there is a quote from an Armenian carpet maker Karapit Nedeniyan who says that, "We used to live peacefully. We as the Armenians were happier than even the Muslims (in the Ottoman Empire). They [NB: Armenians who fought the Ottomans] used our youth to realise their bad dreams, and now we are in different regions of the world" (ibid., p. 34), while in the same book it is argued that the Ottomans even punished their own soldiers who treated Armenians badly while escorting them during their 'deportation' (tehcir). There is also a picture that accompanies this topic (see Figure 5.2 below). Underneath the photo, it says: "A group of Armenians who fought along with the Russians against the Turks." This is used to give the idea that the Armenians were totally in the wrong during this period and what later transpired at that time was something necessary. This seems to be another example of teaching history according to the ideological interests of the nation-state, which might also be regarded as an ethnocentric way of writing/fictionalising historical events.



*Rusların yanında Türk ordusuna karşı savaşan bir grup Ermeni*

**Figure 5.2** Photo of Armenian Fighters fighting against the Ottoman Army

(Source: Özcan, 2014: 34)

Moreover, page 39 talks about the resistance movements. There were a lot of resistance movements when Anatolia was under invasion just after World War I. On this page, some resistance movements are labelled negatively because they refused to fight along with the movement founded by Atatürk, so they are portrayed as movements which were against the unity and independence of Turkey. In other words, they are regarded as 'traitors'. For example, the 'Society for the rise of the Kurds' and the 'Society for the rise of Islam' are two of these movements mentioned. In the textbook, the former is accused of going against the unity of Turkey, and the latter is accused of having a devious plan to establish a new Islamic state ruled by the caliph.

The issue of out-dated information in the textbooks is also problematic. There is a topic titled 'from national borders to national economy' in which all the reforms implemented on the basis of Atatürk's principle of 'Statism' are mentioned. Even though Turkey is today implementing liberal policies, the importance of a national economy is mentioned on page 91, where it is implied that the state should control all businesses and run some strategic areas of the economy, such as that pertaining to the use of natural resources.

On page 100, the clothes that Muslim people wore at the time are discredited. Instead, Western clothes are regarded as the markers of modernity and civilisation. When the prohibition of the fez (hat) is mentioned, the modern hat is promoted as the necessary modern alternative. On page 100, it further adds that, “The transformation of the clothes was done in order to strengthen the national unity and it made Turkish people look modern.” Thus, the transformation of the clothes is presented as something directly related to the national unity of the country. However, the main issue here is that it does not mention that the people at that time were forced to wear new modern clothes which were defined/chosen by the Turkish state – a stark example of the intervention of an authoritarian state into people’s personal choices, and even their private lives. This further shows how the elite-led Kemalist modernisation project was operating in a top down, dictating way.

It can also be observed in the textbooks that religious figures and their followers are excluded from history entirely. On the page 102, it says that “Turkey cannot be a country of sheiks, dervishes and religious leaders.” Even though sheiks, dervishes and religious leaders are still part of Turkey’s culture, they are excluded and/or insulted with this quotation which also appears highly offensive. Besides this, another quote from the Nutuk on the same page reads: “Can we consider the people who are following the Sheiks, Dedes <sup>17</sup>, and Sayyids <sup>18</sup> as civilised people?” This statement seems much more provocative, labelling Sunni Sheiks, Alevi Dedes and Sayyids as ‘uncivilised people’. In a country where a lot of people follow Sheiks (or religious leaders), Dedes (or Alevi leaders) and Sayyids, such a statement only contributes to furthering discrimination against those who hold such identities.

In the fourth unit, the Sheikh Said rebellion and the closure of the Progressive Republican Party (Terakkiperver Cumhûriyet Fırkası, TCF) are mentioned (and the latter is justified). As a matter of fact, the TCF and its followers are considered narrow-minded,

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<sup>17</sup> Dede is a religious figure who leads the prayers in Alevi Cem houses (Alevi Imams).

<sup>18</sup> Sayyid is a religious figure who comes from the Prophet Muhammad’s family.

as shown by a quote taken from Atatürk's Nutuk: "Gentlemen! Don't the narrow-minded people who see our great achievement of transformation and also the abolishment of old institutions along with superstitions follow and protect the political party <sup>19</sup> which declares 'it has respect for religious thoughts and beliefs'?" (Başol et al., 2012a: 106). It is remarkable that Atatürk's argument for justifying the closure of the TCF is via the statement 'the TCF has respect for religious thoughts and beliefs' as declared in the party's constitution. It is surprising that 'having respect for religious beliefs' is regarded as akin to being 'narrow-minded'. Moreover, this justification shows once again that historical events are read through Atatürk's lens in the book.

On page 112, the replacement of the Arabic script with the Latin one is justified using a quote from the Nutuk, which briefly says that this replacement was required, because after having established the nation-state, a national alphabet was also required to fulfil the goals of the Republic. One of the issues that emerges from this justification is that the Latin script is interestingly considered as the 'national alphabet', while the Arab one is discredited. This might be explained by the fact that the modern Turkey envisaged by Kemalists was one cut off from its Ottoman heritage.

Indeed, in the early years of the Republic there were many reforms implemented for the sake of nation-building policies. For instance, on page 115, under the title 'our national culture is being enlightened', Atatürk's adopted daughter, Âfet İnan, is mentioned along with her works on Turkish culture and anthropology. It is stated that the reason why Âfet İnan authored these studies is because she had read that the Turks were presented as second class people in French geography, something she learned about when she was in France in 1928, and Atatürk thus ordered her to investigate the Turkish culture by saying: "Our ancestors who founded great states had also great civilisations. Investigating this civilisation and informing the Turks, thus the world about this great

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<sup>19</sup> Atatürk here refers to the *Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (Progressive Republican Party) established in 1924, and closed forcefully by the Turkish state due to the fact that the Constitution of the party stated that "the party respects religious thoughts and beliefs".

civilisation is our duty.” The two projects completed as part of this cultural study laid the foundation for the ‘Turkish History Institution’ (Türk Târih Kurumu) and the ‘Turkish Language Institution’ (Türk Dil Kurumu). Atatürk clearly saw that in order to build a nation, history and language must be used as the instruments for creating a unified nation and a new cultural identity.

Page 128 talks about the ‘Tenth Year Speech’, a speech which was delivered in Ankara by Atatürk before the public to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the republic. The entire transcription of the speech is given in the fourth unit. The speech appears to include a lot of nationalist arguments. For instance, the concepts ‘Turkishness’ or the ‘Turkish nation’ are mentioned almost in every sentence:

The Turkish Nation! We are in the fifteenth year of the start of our war of liberation. This is the greatest day marking the tenth year of our Republic. May it be celebrated. At this moment as a member of *the great Turkish nation*, I feel the deepest joy and excitement for having achieved this happy day. (..) I have no doubt that we shall succeed in this, because *the Turkish nation is of excellent character. The Turkish nation is intelligent*, because the Turkish nation is capable of overcoming difficulties of national unity, and because it holds the torch of positive sciences. (..) I must make it clear with due emphasis, that a *historical quality of the Turkish nation*, which is an exalted human community, is its love for fine arts and progress in them. (..) *The Great Turkish Nation*. (..) You have heard me speak on many occasions over the last fifteen years promising success in the tasks we undertook. (..) Never have doubted that the great, but forgotten, civilized characteristic *and the great civilized talents of the Turkish nation*, will, in its progress henceforth, rise like a new sun from the high horizon of civilization for the future. The Turkish nation, I express my heartfelt wish that you will celebrate, after each decade elapsing into eternity, this great national day, in greater honor, happiness, peace and prosperity. *How happy it is to say that I am a Turk!*” (ibid., p. 128 [my italics]).

The Tenth Year Speech of Atatürk clearly shows that Atatürk believed that he had succeeded in creating a 'new nation'. It is noticeable that some statements in the speech seem to be very nationalist and even racist. The bold and italic statements above talk about the greatness, the intelligence, and the excellent characteristics of the Turkish nation. In other words, the speech is all about the superiority of the Turkish nation.

The topics at the end of the fourth unit are "Atatürk and Art", "Atatürk and Music", "Atatürk and Sports" and "Atatürk and Sculpture". Each of these topics includes quotes from Atatürk, informing students how Atatürk has given 'great importance' to each of these different areas. However, under these topics, a lopsided view of historical events can be observed. For instance, while it talks about Atatürk and his interest in Music, it simply says that Atatürk contributed to the development of the national (Turkish) music, whereas, Atatürk, in fact, prohibited Turkish/Anatolian folk music in the 1930s (Stokes, 1989) in order to force citizens to listen to the Western classical music, because this was seen as a sign of being civilised and modern by the Kemalist elites at the time. Despite this, however, villagers preferred listening to Egyptian and Lebanese radio stations instead of Turkish radio stations broadcasting Western music <sup>20</sup>. At the end, this prohibition caused the emergence of another type of music in Turkey, *arabesk*, which is a mixed Turkish-Arabic music usually dealing with melancholic themes (Ateş, n.d.).

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<sup>20</sup> It seems Atatürk was inspired by Gökalp's views on this matter, too; since Gökalp said: "There are today three musical genre in our country: Eastern music, Western music, and folk music. Which one of them is national for us? We have seen that Eastern music is morbid and non-national. Since folk music represents culture and Western music is the music of our new civilization, neither should be foreign to us. Therefore our national music will be born out of the welding of folk and Western music. Our folk music provides us with a rich treasury of melodies. If we collect and rearrange them in accordance with the Western musical style, we shall have one both national and European" cited in EROL, A. 2010. Controlling National Identity and Reshaping Public Taste: The Turkish State's Music Policies in the 1920s and 1930s. *Musicology Today*, 7, 138-161. (p. 149).



The fifth unit is devoted to Kemalism which is presented by the textbook as a philosophical system of thought (Atatürkçülük in Turkish). In this unit, Kemalism is defined as a system that ‘aims to go up to the level of modern civilisation in the light of the national culture, mind and science’ (Başol et al., 2012a: 140). The aims of Kemalism are also mentioned. For instance, one of these aims is to ‘have and keep the national unity’ (ibid., p. 141). It is also mentioned that the Turkish nation has a voice in the administration of the regime thanks to Kemalism. It seems that students are expected to think that Kemalism is necessary for the existence of a democratic regime in Turkey.

What is ironic is that even though it is not possible to criticise Atatürk within the educational system, it is mentioned that “Kemalism is not based on dogmas, instead, it is based upon rationalism and science” (ibid., p. 141). In fact, it is not ‘legally’ possible to criticise Atatürk/Kemalism even outside schools according to Law 5816 ‘Concerning Crimes Committed Against Atatürk’, which prohibits any kind of criticism against Atatürk’s personality and his system of thought, Kemalism.



**Figure 5.3** Captions of Atatürk created and shared by youngsters on social media

Having said that, youngsters nowadays actually ridicule Atatürk by generating captions, using his photos on Facebook and Twitter. For instance, in the photo above (Figure 5.3), the one on the left shows Atatürk taking a ‘selfie’ with his iPhone. In the middle, Atatürk says, “Have a blessed Friday”, referring to the importance of Friday to Muslims. On the right side, it says “Keep calm and Stay Laik (laic/secular)”, ridiculing the overstated

discourse of 'laicism' within Kemalism. These examples clearly show a trend among younger generations in terms of how social media (especially Facebook and Twitter) allow them to be more courageous, given that even these examples could easily be interpreted as going against the law.

Another remarkable point to note is that the Turkish armed forces is given a significant role within the state. For instance, there is a quote from Atatürk, which reads, "[the] National army is a decent example of the national unity and the existence of the state. The Turkish Army defends Turkey against external threats (..) It also defends the state... and the government against attempts targeting the Turkish Republic" (ibid., p. 144). This statement actually echoes back to the military coups done by the Turkish armed forces against the elected legitimate governments of the past. Turkey has experienced two military coups, three military memorandums; four of these attempts succeeded, ending up with the resignation of the legitimate governments. In all of these attempts – except the last one that occurred in 2007 – the Turkish armed forces justified what it had done by arguing that 'it has a duty to defend the state if there is any attempt/threat targeting the Turkish Republic'. Therefore, one who studies the textbook might presume that the Turkish armed forces has such a right to intervene with the politics whenever it detects any threat against the state; the statements in the textbook thus seem open to misinterpretation and might, therefore, be used as a justification for military interventions into politics.

Under the subtitle "How happy is the one who says I am a Turk", the definition of Atatürk's nationalism is defined and explained via his quotes. Atatürk's nationalism is defined as "to love the nation, aiming to develop it and trying to work for this goal. Atatürk's nationalism principle regards everyone, who recognises themselves as a Turk and who is proud of being a Turk believing the future of our history, homeland and our nation, as a Turk" (ibid., p. 151). On the same page, Atatürk says: "My only pride and fortune in life is nothing but Turkishness." Another quote from Atatürk reads: "We are patriots and Turkish nationalists. The base of our Republic is the Turkish nation. So the more our citizens know the Turkish culture, the more powerful our Republic is" (ibid., p.

151). It is also mentioned that the Independence War was won with the great efforts of the Turkish nation relying on Turkish nationalism. Despite these statements and quotes, ironically, the next page starts with the sentence “Atatürk’s principle of nationalism is not based on racism, because for him, one who considers himself/herself as a Turk is a Turk regardless of their religion and ideology” (ibid., p. 152). In this case, Turkish identity is offered as a supra-national identity every citizen in Turkey is expected to accept/embrace. However, the Kurdish Question seems to be an example of the fact that this idea already failed, since the Kurdish people have not accepted Turkishness as a supra-identity. In fact, other segments of society such as the Greeks, Armenians and the Roma people have not accepted it, either.

All leaders having a desire to build a nation used particular elements to fulfil their aims in history. For example, the reconstruction of history and language are two of these elements; and they have been used in the Turkish case, too. As a matter of fact, they are still being used by the Turkish state. For instance, it is mentioned that “the elements that support Atatürk’s nationalism are national education, national borders, common language, common history, national culture, the sense of Turkishness and moral values” (ibid., p. 153). The textbook admits that these elements are crucial for Atatürk’s nationalism, that is to say that Atatürk’s nationalism, thus his ideal nation, were built on the bases of these elements. It is obvious that when we take the issue of the Kurdish Question, these nation-building policies appear to be the main problem; indeed, reforms implemented as part of the Kurdish Initiative have been made precisely in these fields.

### **5.5. Critical Analysis of the History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism for 11<sup>th</sup> grades**

There is an interesting story told on the page 9, which says that Mustafa Kemal once met with a Western general during his visit to Europe for military purposes. Mustafa Kemal expressed his views during this visit and was told by the general that: “I do not

understand why you wear this hat (referring to the *fez*). As long as you wear this, no one will have respect for your views” (Özcan, 2014). At the end of this story, it is told that this conversation affected Mustafa Kemal deeply, and made him believe that the way Turkish people dressed was not respected, so this became the reason for why he revolutionised the way they dressed. One of the reasons to tell students this story is that students are expected to leave the class believing that the *fez* was out-dated, and that Atatürk did the necessary thing by banning it. Indeed, the book later remarks that the clothes worn during Ottoman times, such as *fez*, were ‘out-dated’, while Western clothes are regarded as ‘modern’ (ibid., p. 92).

The Armenian incidents were mentioned earlier in the primary school textbook, which presented the Turkish version of the 1915 events. There are more details regarding the 1915 Armenian incidents in the secondary school textbook. It basically claims that the Armenian groups helped the Russians enter the Ottoman lands in WWI. They also attacked Turkish villages in the east of Turkey by taking advantage of the on-going war, and they rioted in Kayseri, Kahramanmaraş, Muş, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Elazığ and Van provinces, massacring villagers. After giving this information, it states that the 1915 Deportation Law entered into force (ibid., p. 23). However, the other side of the story is ignored in the textbook, which is that massacres of innocent Armenians took place during the ‘deportation’. It could, therefore, be hypothesised that the textbook seems to impose a specific judgement on such a controversial issue and make students think that the Armenians were entirely wrong about the ‘massacres’ taking place in 1915. Furthermore, page 29 talks about ‘harmful organisations’ founded before the Turkish War of Independence and mentions the Armenian Hunchakian Organisation, whose main aim is said to have been to found an Armenian state in Eastern Anatolia. Thus, the idea that the Armenians had bad intentions, aimed at splitting the Ottoman Empire, attacked villagers, rioted in the eastern lands of the Empire are reinforced.

Regarding the ‘Unification of Education Law’, this book also mentions that because the education system was not unified, the fact that every group was able to found its own school is discredited (ibid., p. 79); in fact, this is regarded as a threat to the national

unity of the country. It goes on to say that this is the reason why Mustafa Kemal transformed the Turkish education system with the Unification of Education Law. This obviously served to justify what had been done.

On page 86, there is a small information box with a question and an answer. It asks: "What type of people does the Turkish educational system want?" and the answer given underneath is: "The main target of the Turkish national education is to make each individual of the Turkish nation embrace Kemalist principles, the Kemalist interpretation of Turkish nationalism that is stated in the Constitution, the Turkish national, moral, humanist, spiritual and cultural values. It also aims to make them love their family, their homeland, and their nation..." This looks quite similar when compared to the main goals of Turkish national education, which is listed in the policies of the Turkish national education. Therefore, expressions such as 'Turkishness', 'Turkish nation', 'Kemalist principles' and 'Kemalist nationalism' appear to be controversial issues in this text. In other words, the text assumes that there is a homogeneous Kemalist Turkish group of people being educated in Turkish schools, ignoring different ethnicities and ideologies, which, in fact, amounts to the exclusion of 'others' in society.

The textbook discusses how language and history were used in the early years of the Republic. It clearly states that 'language' and 'history' were restructured in accordance with the nation-building policies of the Turkish state in order to strengthen the concept of national unity, and to raise the awareness of it (ibid., p. 87-90).

There is a text on the page 91, which is titled 'Our intellectuals and getting to know our nation'. In this text, one of Atatürk's quotes reads "[the] Islamic world can be divided into two groups, one is the ignorant people constituting the majority and the second one is the intellectuals constituting the minority". This statement shows how Atatürk actually saw the majority in Turkey during his time, and this might well be the reason of why he implemented most of the reforms in an authoritarian way.

The textbook mentions that the most significant person which impressed Atatürk deeply was Ziya Gökalp. It says Gökalp was one of the people who contributed a lot to the literature regarding the idea of Turkish nationalism. He affected Atatürk with his nationalist views. He thought that education and economy should be national, and that law and education should be purified from the effects of religion (ibid., p. 116). Thus, this makes it obvious that Atatürk was highly impressed by the ideas of Gökalp, since it is apparent that most of Atatürk's reforms were inspired by Gökalp's nationalist views.

There is also a very interesting section on page 126. There is a question, along with four photos with different statements given underneath. The question is "Please use the photos and statements below, and discuss what factors affect the acceptance of an idea and a leader by society." Mussolini and Hitler are seen in the first photo and the statement given underneath is "Italian fascist Mussolini was hanged by his people and the leader of the Nazi Germany Hitler committed suicide". There is a statue of Stalin, seen demolished on the ground in the second photo and it reads: "Communist Russian leader Stalin's statue demolished by the people of Georgia, 2010". The third and the fourth photo are from Atatürk's funeral with the caption "the Turkish nation showed great interest in Atatürk's funeral in 1938".

There is also an interesting conversation given below the photos. An American journalist named Baker asked Atatürk why he did not like to be called a dictator, and he replied: "I am not a dictator. They say that I have power. Yes, I do. I can do everything I want. However, I do not act ruthlessly. I think a dictator is someone who subjugates people's will. I, however, want to rule not by breaking people's hearts, but by winning them [over]".


This section seems to aim to make students think that Atatürk was not a 'dictator', because the Turkish people were mourning after his death (as seen in the photo above), and they still love Atatürk, while this is contrasted with other dictators such as Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin who were not accepted by their own people after they died

or lost power. However, this argument does not make any sense, since dictators might be loved by their people and this does not alter the fact that they are dictators.

**3. Atatürkçülüğün Nitelikleri**

**etkinlik**

Aşağıdaki görsellerden ve metinden faydalanarak bir liderin ve düşünce sisteminin toplum tarafından benimsenmesinde nelerin etkili olabileceğini tartışınız.



İtalya'nın faşist lideri Mussolini (solda) halkı tarafından idam edilmiş, Nazi Almanyası'nın lideri Hitler (sağda) ise inihâr etmiş.

Komünist Rus lider Stalin'in halk tarafından yıkılan heykeli (Gürcistan, Gori, 2010)

Atatürk'ün cenaze törenine Türk milleti büyük ilgi göstermişti. (1938)

**Amerikalı Gazeteci Gladys Baker'in Atatürk'le Röportajı:**  
Kemal Atatürk'e neden diktatör diye çağrılmaktan hoşlanmadığını sordum:  
- Ben diktatör değilim. Benim kuvvetim olduğunu söylüyorlar; evet bu doğrudur. Benim arzu edip de yapamayacağım hiçbir şey yoktur. Çünkü ben zoraki ve insafsızca hareket etmeyi bilmem. Bence diktatör diğerlerini iradesine ram edendir. Ben kalpleri kırarak değil, kalpleri kazanarak hükmetmek isterim.

Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri, C III, s. 140

**Figure 5.4** Photo from the textbook comparing Atatürk with other dictators

(Source: Özcan, 2014: 126)

This section shows that because the textbook has no solid example of why Atatürk was not a dictator, it instead prefers to give ungrounded arguments in order to support the idea that 'Atatürk was not a dictator'. Therefore, the textbook appears to distort the facts by telling strange stories and making irrelevant comparisons, rather than reflecting the truth regarding Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Page 129 is devoted to the grounds for Atatürk's Principles and the Kemalist Revolution. It says: "[the] Turk had lost his spirit, his personality; he forgot his real life and became an instrument of others", and it goes on to say that Atatürk's Principles and the Kemalist Revolution were required to give the Turkish nation their own identity. What should be given to the nation is referred to as the 'national awareness' in the textbook (ibid).

The Republic and its virtues are mentioned on page 136. The textbook relates the Turkish Republic to the Turkish nation, and further sees them as inseparable. In order to support this argument, one of Atatürk's statements is given, which reads: "We are straight nationalists and Turkish nationalists, and the basis of our Republic is the Turkish nation. Thus, as long as the individuals of this nation are full of Turkish culture, this means that the Republic that is based upon this nation remains powerful". In this section, it gives the impression that because the Republic is related to the Turkish nation, and because its life is bound to the existence of the Turkish culture, it is argued here that the Turkish Republic automatically excludes other nations living in Turkey. Instead, it should state that the Turkish Republic belongs to all people living in Turkey, regardless of their ethnic and religious background. Otherwise, it would be meaningless to expect people coming from different ethnic backgrounds to have a sense of belonging to the Turkish Republic.

In the textbook, it is said that "Kemalist nationalism is inclusive, it does not exclude any other ethnic group, as it regards every citizen of the Turkish Republic as a Turk" (ibid., p. 148). The attempt to redefine the meaning of Turkishness, however, has obscured assimilation attempts taken by the state. Furthermore, this definition does not reflect reality, either, because Atatürk's nationalist speeches and the nationalist policies of the Turkish state, such as the attempted Turkification of the Kurds, clearly show that the Turkish Republic's approach to Turkishness was predicated on a 'racial' sense in many cases. For instance, measurements of skulls to check whether they were Turks or not appears to be a functional example here, and is something which was done by Âfet İnan (on the orders of Atatürk himself) (Maksudyan, 2005). After all of this, it is not logical to expect other people to accept Turkishness as a supra-national identity.



The textbook also includes statements praising the Turkish nation, such as “[The] Turkish nation is clever. The character of the Turkish nation is advanced. [The] Turkish nation is hardworking. [The] Turkish nation was able to deal with difficulties through national unity...” (Özcan, 2014: 151). These examples further reinforce the racist rhetoric used in the educational system.

Pages 165-171 are devoted to Atatürk’s ‘statism’ principle. All reforms and nationalisation policies of the Turkish state in Atatürk’s period were mentioned. What is remarkable in this section is that along with historical facts and policies, students are expected to accept and embrace ‘statism’ as a significant principle in their lives, and to defend it accordingly. Furthermore, the textbook relates the ‘statism’ principle to the principle of ‘nationalism’. It states that statism is required for a country to be/remain fully independent. Another issue that is mentioned is that the management of national resources must be controlled by the state for the sake of its national interests. It goes on to say that “statism has actually always played an important role in the Turkish case in its support to nationalism and the principles of Atatürk” (ibid., p. 171).

Page 187 is titled “Own the values of Atatürk’s Principles and maintain their continuity.”

On this page, it is stated that:

Atatürk’s Principles are the foundations of the new Turkish Republic. These principles that accepted the leadership of rationalism and science aim to make the Turkish nation more advanced and civilised (...) Therefore, the continuity of Turkey’s reputable position depends on Atatürk’s principles. Also, to preserve the national unity and national unification, to develop democracy, to maintain the prosperity of the people, and to make rationalism and science dominant in all areas, the protection of Atatürk’s Principles is crucial (ibid., p. 187).

The quote above shows that students and all citizens in Turkey are supposed to embrace Atatürk's Principles, thus the Kemalist ideology, because the textbook makes the assumption that the Turkish state and Atatürk's Principles are inseparable. Moreover, to strengthen this idea, and to give some concrete examples of how to do so, the textbook lists some duties citizens are supposed to discharge:

- To avoid behaviours which might harm national unity and unification
- To work hard in every field in order to develop the Turkish Republic
- To have respect for the rights and freedom of each individual
- To latch on to Atatürk's Principles and reforms and to make the next generation aware of these (ibid., p. 187).

These two quotes above clearly show that the authors preparing the textbooks see it as impossible to live in Turkey without embracing and accepting the ideology of Kemalism, including its principles and its nationalist perspective and all that this entails.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

One of the findings that emerge from critical analysis of textbooks is that they clearly promote the sanctification of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The excessive use of the personality of Atatürk in the textbooks appears to construct and maintain 'the cult of Atatürk'. As can be seen in the textbooks, this automatically leads to the indoctrination of the Kemalist ideology into pupil's minds. Kemalism is exaggerated and privileged above other ideologies in society.

Apart from Kemalism, 'Turkish nationalism' is also presented as something that every student must embrace regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. For example, in every context in which the concepts 'nationalism' and 'patriotism' are used, 'Turkish

nationalism' is always meant. In fact, the textbooks always refer to 'nationalism' as 'Atatürk nationalism' which is the Kemalist interpretation of Turkish nationalism. Even though textbooks persistently state that Atatürk nationalism is not based on a particular ethnic group, it is very obvious that the notion of Turkishness is at the centre of Atatürk nationalism. Therefore, it could be claimed that although textbooks attempt to present Turkish nationalism under the guise of Atatürk nationalism (which is presented as a supra-national identity in the textbooks) it can nonetheless clearly be seen that 'ethnic nationalism' constitutes Atatürk nationalism. In this case, the textbooks contradict themselves, claiming that Atatürk nationalism does not take an ethnic and racist approach, while simultaneously referencing Turkishness in an ethnic sense within the context of nationalism. Likewise, in a recent research that revised all textbooks within the framework of human rights, it has been concluded that "the national identity in textbooks excludes universal experience and the outside world, and is based on an understanding that looks at every concept with an ethno-centrist vision. Rather than adopting universal values, the textbooks attempt to instil essentialist thought in the form of the essence of everything lies with us" (Çayır, 2014: 117).

Another contradiction in the textbooks is that even though the aims of the course units promote the educational attainment 'critical thinking', critical analysis of the textbooks clearly shows that pupils/students are, on the contrary, expected and encouraged to be 'obedient citizens' who cannot criticise the official ideology, Kemalism and Turkish nationalism, in any way. One of the possible outcomes of this might be that pupils/students may not easily develop critical thinking skills in an educational system like this. In fact, as mentioned by İnce (2012), who studied the effects of the ideological educational system on students' creativity, it appears that both Turkish and Kurdish students experience serious difficulties when attempting to discuss issues in a critical way.

Along with the ethnocentric approach that is embedded within the Kemalist interpretation of nationalism, what is more striking is that sometimes racist rhetoric is also very noticeable in the Kemalist ideology. Textbooks usually talk about 'the

supremacy of the characteristics of the Turkish nation', with controversial phrases such as 'noble blood' used throughout the units, which is an obvious indication of the racist discourse within 'Turkish/Atatürk nationalism'. Therefore, considering the fact that the textbooks promote the idea of Turkishness solely, and thus excluding other ethnic identities, it appears to be impossible to "create in people a sense of pluralistic identity" (Çayır, 2014: 117).

A number of examples discussed in this chapter indicate that there is a serious issue of exclusion in the Turkish educational system. Textbooks – not only the ones analysed in this chapter – do not mention any other race and ethnicity other than the Turkish one as constituent parts of Turkey. When other ethnicities are mentioned in the textbooks, such as the Kurds and Armenians, these are always in a negative context of illegal organisations plotting the downfall of the Ottoman Empire for the sake of creating their own states. Similarly, as Çayır (2014: 119) puts it, statements in the textbook that "present the country, identity, language, etc. as being constantly under threat" make students be paranoid about other nations, and this may further cause conspiracy theories among students, since the theory that foreign countries usually have secret plans to divide or destroy Turkey is so common in society (Zeydanlıoğlu and Güneş, 2013). This clearly excludes, and even alienates 'other' identities. Furthermore, this might also potentially feed the notion of xenophobia among Turkish students, since mentioning those identities in a negative context leads to the development of negative perceptions of these other groups.

Critical analysis of the "History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism" textbooks show that the version of history told in the books is one-sided. Historical events are presented from the point of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk alone, since the Nutuk is taken as the main source of Turkish history. This reinforces the idea of an official history narrative within the Turkish educational system that cannot be deviated from.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **TURKEY'S KURDISH QUESTION FROM TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to look at Turkey's Kurdish Question from the perspective of Turkish and Kurdish teachers who are currently working in Kurdish-dominated cities of the southeastern part of Turkey. In doing so, the peace process and the exclusion of the Kurdish people in society, together with the key characteristics of these issues, will be discussed.

Teachers' views are considered very important in this thesis, since they are influential actors who have the power to affect their students. Furthermore, they are able to shape the next generation of the country. This is why what they think about these issues is worth knowing, and it would further help us understand how these issues are viewed by the most powerful actors in schools. What is more, this chapter will also help us compare how Turkish and Kurdish teachers view the Kurdish question in Turkey. What are similarities and differences?

#### **6.2. Teachers' views on the Kurdish Question**

##### **6.2.1. Teachers who deny the Kurdish Question**

Kurdish issue does not seem to be 'a real issue' for some in Turkey. Most of the Turkish nationalists, such as the followers of the Nationalist Action Party think that the issue is

artificial and exploited by external/foreign powers.<sup>21</sup> For them, it is not true that the Kurds have serious social and cultural issues. Instead, most of them believe that the Kurds are the citizens of Turkey just as the Turks are and that they have equal rights as mentioned in the Constitution.

Furthermore, they also believe that the people creating this issue want Turkey to split up with the foundation of the independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey. Turkey's powerful opposition party, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), could be a good example of this view, with Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the MHP, claiming that "Turkey does not have a Kurdish problem and it will not have in the future, either. The ones claiming that it does are nothing but only stooges and servants of the global powers" (Habertürk, 2012). This statement is a functional example of the rejection of an existing problem, enabling nationalists to be able to maintain their own ideology.

This rejectionist approach can also be seen in some teachers' responses as well. It seems that some teachers tend to deny the Kurdish problem, claiming that it is not one of the 'real problems' of Turkey. In this section, the views of these teachers will be revealed and discussed.

First of all, some teachers believe that the Kurdish Question does not exist, and that the ones who want other people to believe that it does are actually benefiting from the existence of the problem. They believe that these are mostly Kurdish people, even though there are a few Turkish people amongst them. For instance, when asked about the peace process negotiations, one of my respondents, Mete, argued:

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<sup>21</sup> The term 'external/foreign powers' is quite famous in Turkey. In fact, it could be claimed that it has become a myth of the Turkish political life. For almost every issue in Turkey, external/foreign powers are believed to have a significant role to play. This is always reinforced by such sophisticated conspiracy theories, and there are always people believing that a foreign country (Israel and the US are the most popular ones) is behind Turkey's political issues such as the Kurdish Question and the Armenian issue etc.

This peace process is not a negotiation between the Turkish people and the Kurdish people. The people who represent the Kurds in the peace process are not the real representatives of the Kurdish people. The man living in an island (*adadaki zat*)<sup>22</sup> does not represent the Kurdish people, he cannot. These people have hidden agendas; they have different aims, like having a separate Kurdish state etc. They are after their own benefits; they do not care about the Kurds. Unfortunately, the Kurdish people are forced to vote for these people; and they are elected in this way. They are also forced to attend the meetings of this party (HDP, People's Democratic Party). So misrepresentation is a serious issue here.

For Mete, the HDP, the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan seem to benefit from the Kurdish Question and there is no point negotiating with them for the solution to this problem. It is obvious from responses that there is a tendency to believe that the people who represent the Kurds in Parliament or claim to fight on their behalf are 'the Kurdish elites' who benefit from the issue and want the issue to exist for their own sake. Another teacher, Attila, also claimed that "Kurdish elites have been talking about this so-called Kurdish problem since the 1980s and I think they now became successful, as many in Turkey started thinking that the Kurdish problem is Turkey's reality."

However, the Kurdish elites are not only seen as problem creators, but also 'traitors' who are controlled by 'external powers'. For example, Beyhan argued that "this problem was created by a few rich Kurds who have close relations with external powers. They have always been sponsored by these powers and it is obvious that they should act according to their ambitions." Asena also claimed that "They fabricated the so-called Kurdish problem and they now want to solve it. The government has made some concessions. It was said that there are demands from the Kurdish side. I think these are all games in order to divide our country, Turkey. I do not want to go into details here, such as [blaming] America, Israel [as] behind all of this, etc. I see all of this as a game to

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<sup>22</sup> He is referring to Abdullah Öcalan here; Öcalan has been prisoned in an island called İmralı in Marmara Sea since he was caught by the Turkish intelligence.

split Turkey.” It might be argued that focussing on the actors and not the problem itself appears to be the main problem in this case, as the matter that should be investigated here is whether the Kurdish Question really exists or not, and this should be done via discussions of the arguments surrounding the problem. Another teacher, Ayhan, supports Beyhan’s view by saying that “the Kurds creating the problem were supported by Western countries. The Sheikh Said rebellion was supported by England and I think this [what is happening today] is not very different.” This shows that external powers are believed to play a crucial role here, always creating problems for Turkey. In fact, a recent study shows that 32.8% of the respondents (the highest proportion) answered the question “What is the main political reason of the Kurdish problem?” with “external/foreign powers having a desire to see Turkey as a weak state” (Yilmaz, 2014).

The claim that the Sheikh Said rebellion was supported by the West and that Turkey’s Kurdish Question today is a continuation of intervention by Western powers requires tangible evidences. However, when Beyhan was asked, “How do you think that the West supports the Kurds?”, she replied, “It is obvious, the weapons the PKK terrorists are using are Western-made.” The main issue therefore is that these teachers link the Kurdish problem to Western countries (the ‘external powers’ in other words), something which is very easy to do since the claim that the PKK is armed by Westerners is quite a popular one in Turkey. However, this approach would be very naïve, as the Kurdish problem itself cannot be oversimplified due to its complex cultural, political dimensions. As a matter of fact, even if the PKK was armed by the West, this would not prevent people from accepting that there are real problems the Kurdish people try to deal with in their in everyday lives.

When it comes to the historical exclusion of Kurdish people in Turkey, these teachers also deny this claim altogether. For example, Asena argued that,

I have been a teacher for years, and I have never experienced any exclusion affecting the Kurdish students directly. There are problems but these problems are due to the fact that the region



is not as developed as the western part of the country, so this is why the Kurdish students are not as successful as the others living in the west.

Another teacher, Tarkan, also argued that “This is just an artificial claim, I as a teacher do not observe anything like this. My Kurdish students are happy in their classes.” Attila adds, “Some people want the Kurdish students to feel excluded, that is why some say so, but this is not the reality when you go to schools.” Here the views of the teachers coming from the nationalist background appear very rejectionist, claiming that there is no such thing as exclusion in schools. However, the previous chapter examining the textbooks clearly shows that the curriculum does not seem to be inclusive of the Kurdish identity. Furthermore, the claim that the failure of the Kurdish students stems from the development level of the region seems insufficient to explain the academic performance of the Kurdish students, as there are other teachers claiming to witness Kurdish students feeling excluded in the system as a result of the exclusivist system. This is further reinforced by the claim highlighted by many other teachers that there is definitely a language barrier that Kurdish students face when they start school. Therefore, even if the development level of the region is a factor affecting the quality of education and the achievement of students, this does not alter the fact that the Kurdish students face integration problems in the Turkish educational system, with the language barrier being the most obvious sign of this.

Ceyda says, “I do not believe that my Kurdish friends share the view of those using terrorism for their own benefits. The Kurdish people do not have any objection to the idea of living with the Turks peacefully.” It is obvious that the ones seeing the Kurdish issue as an issue of terrorism ignore the sophistication of the issue, and the violations of the basic human rights. One possible explanation for this might be that they have a fear of the separation of the southeastern part of Turkey as part of the new Kurdistan which might be founded in the region, and they, therefore, prefer that differentiation to reassure themselves. Likewise, another teacher, Melike, argued that “The Kurdish people are deceived by the terrorists who have a desire to establish a separate Kurdish

state, because they are mostly uneducated and ignorant. So, it is really easy to deceive these kind of people.” Here it appears that there is another issue, that of labelling people as ‘ignorant’. This is actually the view of the Kemalist elites known as ‘white Turks’<sup>23</sup> in Turkey, who also claim that the Kurds are ignorant and that they are being deceived by those exploiting them. Thus, labelling seems to be a serious problem/barrier that prevents people from understanding others and they have a tendency to explain a situation they do not like via use of negative phrases.

The peace process, moreover, is not supported by some teachers. Ayhan, for example, commented that “I am sorry to say this, but we will probably see a separate Kurdish state at the end of this so-called peace process.” Mete added another point by saying, “I do not understand this at all, as there is already peace in the region between people, between the Turkish and the Kurdish and the Arabic people. The war, however, is between the PKK and the Turkish army. So peace for whom? The Kurds or the PKK terrorists? I do not want and cannot support any effort to establish peace for the PKK terrorists.” It seems that there are two different points mentioned by the Turkish nationalist teachers here. First, the fear that Turkey will be divided appears to drive the nationalists’ feelings, but this fear seems to stem from history, and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the anxiety it caused in society afterwards. Furthermore, these teachers seem to be obsessed with the unitary structure of the Turkish state. In fact, this fear is still a commonly shared belief in society in Turkey (Kentel et al., 2007). Second, seeing the peace process as beneficial for the PKK does not reflect the bigger picture, since there have been serious and documented violations of basic human rights against Kurds which cannot be ignored by using the excuse that the PKK might benefit from the peace process.

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<sup>23</sup> ‘White Turks’ is the term used to define people who see themselves as the ones who could and even should design and modernise Turkey. It basically represents a privileged position over all others in Turkey.

On the other hand, not all teachers see ‘the Kurdish elites/terrorists’ as the sole perpetrators of the Kurdish problem, since another teacher, Utku, argued that “I think the AKP rulers want to split our country, and this is why they declared the Kurdish opening and now their project continue under the name ‘peace process’. It is sad that no one cares, they are just watching.” Another teacher, Yılmaz, even thinks that “We should see that the AKP was supported by the United States (of America) in the first elections as part of their extended Middle East Project, and I now believe even more strongly that Erdoğan is definitely the co-chairman of this project.” He further adds, “Erdoğan’s role in this project is to split Turkey and help the US design the new Middle East. For example, the foundation of the independent Kurdistan is also part of this project. Why do we still ignore the status of the Kurdish regional government in Northern Iraq, as it is surely part of the planned Kurdistan state”. Such conspiracy theories and simple assumptions that are not based on any fact or any tangible evidence are quite common among the secular Kemalists and Turkish nationalists in society.

Having looked at the types of words used by the participants during interviews, another significant point to mention is that the ones that deny there is a Kurdish problem in Turkey prefer to use inexplicit expressions such as “the man living in an island” or even dysphemistic ones such as “baby killer”, both referring to Abdullah Öcalan. Besides, they refer intentionally to PKK militants as “terrorists”. Speaking of using inexplicit and dysphemistic expressions, it is also worth mentioning here that the expressions used by the media to refer to Abdullah Öcalan in Turkey was also “baby killer”, “terrorist chieftain”, and “leader of a bloody organisation” (Çelik, 2013a). However, since the beginning of the Kurdish opening and the peace process, most of the media in Turkey (newspapers and television broadcasts) have been referring to him simply Abdullah Öcalan. This is just an example of the effect of the change in state language on the language used by the media, which is significant.

One great difference among the views of the teachers who deny the existence of the Kurdish issue is that when some were asked about the exclusion of the Kurds, even if they denied the exclusion (as the nationalists did) via similar reasons, they did however

divert the topic to the exclusion of the Alevi students in the educational system. For example, Ufuk argued that, “The exclusion we should talk about is not the exclusion of an ethnic group, as this is not the case. Instead, we should talk about the exclusion of other religious groups such as the Alevis.” Koray adds, “The Alevi students have difficulties in this system designed by the Sunni Muslims. If you are not a Sunni, you cannot have any sense of belonging to this system.” It is true that the Sunni interpretation of Islam still dominates the Religious Culture and Moral Culture textbook, even if content regarding the Alevi interpretation of Islam was added recently. In fact, the role of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, an official religious institution, is to represent the Sunni Islam, appointing Imams for the mosques, having a responsibility for all kinds of religious issues. So, the issue is actually more complex than it seems, as the state only embraces the Sunni interpretation of Islam, which means that the Alevi people are excluded in daily life as well.

On the other hand, almost all of these teachers oppose the Ak Party and see it almost as ‘evil’ which prevents them from accepting even positive things that have come about in the country, such as reforms completed at the Ak Party’s behest. One of the reasons they do not support the peace process is because of the Ak Party itself, since statements such as “the Ak Party is the project of the external powers” or “the AKP wants to split the country” represent a total rejection of this party. This is, indeed, far from constructive criticism and represents more of a clear hostility.

### **6.2.2. Teachers who recognise the Kurdish Question**

In modern Turkish history, the Islamists were one of the first who recognised the Kurdish issue and voiced their intentions to resolve it. For instance, Necmeddin Erbakan, Turkey’s first Islamist prime minister (also known as the father of the Turkish Islamism in politics) made important points in his party’s fourth convention in 1993, saying that the Kurds and terrorism are two different concepts that should be separated from each other, that the problem cannot be solved through military means, and that the right to

broadcast and to be educated in Kurdish should be legalised (Beriker-Atiyas, 1997). As such, Barkey and Fuller (1998) explain how the Islamists approach to the Kurdish issue as follows:

The Welfare Party <sup>24</sup> and Islamists in general view the Kurdish issue as a problem created by the state, based on the decision to use Turkish nationalism as the sole foundation of the new state, a policy that deliberately excluded and alienated the Kurds from the Turkish republic. To them, ethnic divisions are artificial; the Welfare Party naturally contends that if Islam had formed the foundation of the state, the Kurds would not have felt excluded. Accordingly, a return to the Islamic identity in Turkey will comfortably accommodate both Kurdish and Turkish peoples (p. 101).

As can be seen from the quotation above, Islamists actually blame the Kemalists for the Kurdish issue and accuse them of founding modern Turkey based upon nationalism, and excluding all except the Turks, which, to them, created serious problems, including the Kurdish problem.

In light of this general view of Islamists, it can be seen from my research that some of the teachers' views are also very similar. For instance, Mehmed Âkif says, "The Kurdish issue is actually a result of the nationalist policies implemented by the Turkish republic in the 1920s and 30s. Mustafa Kemal and his friends preferred a rather nationalist state with a significant emphasis on Turkishness, [something] which caused serious problems." Another teacher, Muhammed, also states that "Mustafa Kemal had the vision of creating a new country with a sole nation; and Turkey then became a nation-state. I think all problems stem from this status of modern Turkey. I mean founding a nation-state was the biggest mistake [and] creating other mistakes over time." For such people, nationalism and the nation-state seem to be two main problematic concepts

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<sup>24</sup> The Welfare Party was an Islamist political party founded by Necmeddin Erbakan in 1983 and banned from politics in 1998.

which brought about a new order in Turkey. There is certainly credence to the argument that by establishing a state based on a particular nation in a place that was home to the multiculturalism of the Ottoman Empire appears to be a serious mistake made by the Kemalists. With this in mind, differences in society were also ignored intentionally. To quote Atatürk himself:

These are the historical and natural facts regarding the basis of the Turkish nation: a) political unity; b) linguistic unity; c) territorial unity; d) racial unity; e) shared history; f) shared morality (İnan, 1969: 371).

It can be deduced from the quotation above that non-Turkish ethnic groups were likely seen as a barrier against constituting a Turkish nation, as 'racial unity' was considered an essential element of the defined nation by Atatürk himself. One of the consequences of this approach was the implementation of the Turkification policy of non-Turkish groups, which aimed at standardising a diverse range of identities into a single racial identity and further imposing this single identity on every citizen through the institutions of the nation-state. This, of course, created a reaction amongst non-Turkish ethnic groups (Updegraff, 2012).

Some of these teachers also reference Islam while discussing the Kurdish issue. For instance, Ramazan argued that "Unfortunately, Turkey did not previously accept ethnicities other than the Turkish one. If Turkey respected Islam and its humanitarian values, the situation would have been much better, because Islam does not allow us to prioritise our ethnicity." Likewise, Ayşe states, "The Kemalist elites considered Islam as a scapegoat and wanted to replace it with the idea of nationalism; but it is strange and funny that they made a hash of it. As a result, they belittled other ethnic groups and caused political instability in Turkey. However, I wish they could realise that one of the teachings of Islam is to treat all people equally regardless of their colour." Referencing Islam consistently, of course, seems to be an indication of their approach to issues from the perspective of Islamic teachings. Moreover, this also brings these teachers closer to

liberals in Turkey, as it might be said that the Islamists' views are very similar to liberal intellectuals in Turkey when it comes to the Kurdish issue – except the emphasis on Islam. As an example, regarding the mother tongue instruction, liberals defend the view that the right to be educated in Kurdish language is part of basic human rights and that it should be implemented. Similarly, teachers who reference Islam think the same, but their reference is different in this case, as Abdullah mentions, “The Quran makes it very clear that every ethnic group has a different language, so we have a responsibility to maintain this in our society.” Most of these teachers regard the right to be instructed in mother tongue as part of “sünnetullah”.<sup>25</sup>

A Kurdish teacher, Emrullah mentioned that “It is true that Turkey has a Kurdish problem and it is serious but this is because of its nationalist nature. I believe that if modern Turkey had been established based on Islamic values, it would have definitely been a different country today. At least we would not have had any of the problems caused by Turkish nationalism.” Likewise, another Kurdish teacher, Zahide also commented that “Turkey’s existing Kurdish problem was the result of its nationalist and assimilationist policies. The Ottoman Empire, for example, did not impose any particular identity on its citizens. This is exactly what Islam taught the Muslims. This should have been maintained after the Ottomans but unfortunately we have been experiencing the bitter fruits of a wrong decision made in the early years of modern Turkey.” These indicate that some Kurdish teachers agree with the notion that Islam should have been taken into consideration when the modern Turkish state was established, but the fact that this did not happen and that Turkish nationalism (with its racist aspects) played a significant role in the foundation of Turkey had caused massively negative consequences, such as the Kurdish Question. For these teachers, Islam guarantees that everyone has a right to exist in society with their own cultures preserved so that different cultures can live in harmony.

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<sup>25</sup> Sünnetullah is an Arabic word meaning ‘unchanged rules established by Allah’.

Another related view that is worthy of consideration is that these teachers also see Islam as a glue that can be used in order to bind Turks and Kurds together. Ramazan said that “The majority of the Turkish and Kurdish people are Muslim, so we should take advantage of this, using Islamic teachings to raise awareness, promoting the idea of living together. Isn’t this what we have been doing for centuries?” Speaking of the role of religion, these teachers’ views and the view of the majority in Turkey are not dissimilar. For example, a national survey titled “Public Perception of the Kurdish Question” conducted by SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research) and the Pollmark Research Corporation revealed that religion was considered by both the Turkish and Kurdish participants to be the “most important bond which holds people of different origins... together in Turkey” over “Sense of Brotherhood” and “Shared History and Geography” (see Table 6.1.) (SETA and Pollmark, 2009).

**Table 6.2.** People's perception of religion in Turkey  
(Source: SETA and Pollmark, 2009: 22)

<b>In your view, what is the most important bond which holds people of different origins such as Turkish, Kurdish, Laz or Circasians together in Turkey?</b>		
	<b>TURKS (%)</b>	<b>KURDS (%)</b>
<b>RELIGION</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>31.9</b>
<b>SENSE OF BROTHERHOOD</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>28.9</b>
<b>SHARED HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>18.3</b>
<b>NATIONAL AND CULTURAL VALUES</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>5.7</b>
<b>CITIZENSHIP OF REPUBLIC OF TURKEY</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>3.1</b>

Furthermore, according to another public survey firm KONDA Research & Consultancy, more than half of those surveyed (54%) commented that being a Muslim was a precondition for being a citizen of the Turkish state, while only 45% voted that being an ethnic Turk was required. The majority also agreed that shared religious beliefs are of the great importance for coexistence of people of different origins (KONDA, 2007). The

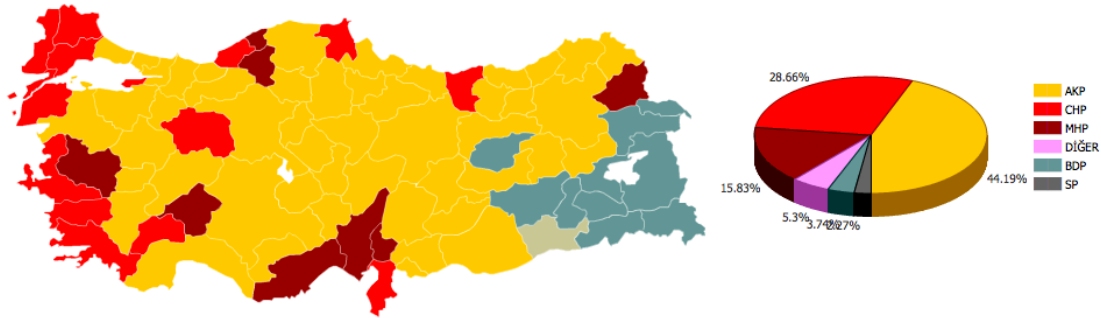


findings clearly indicate that the majority in Turkey sees religion as a unifying tool, which might be explained by the fact that Islam is deeply rooted in Turkey's culture, that is to say that Islamic values and the dominant/prevailing culture of Turkey are interdependent. Therefore, there is no doubt that religion could also be used as part of the solution of the Kurdish problem. Having said that, due to the sensitiveness of the use of religion, non-Muslims (Turks, Kurds and others) and even different sects within Islam such as Alevism should also be taken into consideration whilst religion is being used to solve the issue. Overall, all of these discussions support the idea that Islam can be a part of the solution process.

Some teachers also seem to be more open-minded than others on some rather sensitive issues. For example, Hatice argued that "There is no point in rejecting any kind of dialogue or discussion. Well, to be honest, I even think that we could come together with the separatists and discuss the option of whether the Kurdish region of Turkey should be independent or not. Because I believe that to be open to any kind of discussion is a key factor helping us understand each other." Mehmed Akif also noted that "If we do not talk to each other, we create 'others', we create enemies." Having said that, the peace process is highly important to these teachers, as Hatice also said that "...but I personally prefer living together with other ethnic groups in the same country, as the independence of the Kurdish region will only create another nation-state, which I think is problematic." Similarly, Abdullah said that, "The peace process gave many of us great hope. We can now believe that peace is not far away." On the other hand, while they support the negotiations between the government and the Kurdish side (Abdullah Öcalan and the HDP), they also argued that the peace process would have been better without the involvement of the PKK. For example, Ayşe said that, "I wish the Kurdish people could be represented by others in this peace process, as I am personally against the mentality of the PKK and its ideals. I think it does not represent all the Kurds, but they started this war and they are now part of this process." However, there is not a consensus amongst these teachers regarding the reasons for why one should be against to the PKK, as some are against the PKK because they use

violence and kill innocents, while others think that the PKK is a Marxist group who see the religious Kurdish people as ignorant and do not respect their belief/Islam.

The representatives of the Kurdish people in peace talks are not accepted by half of the Kurdish teachers. For example, Emrullah argued that “Well, there is a fact even if we do not want to accept, it is obvious that the HDP and Öcalan are part of this process and I do not see any problem here. If these talks lead us to the peace in the region, I think they can remain part of this reconciliation process.” On the other hand, Mehmed commented that “I personally do not want the PKK or HDP to represent me in peace talks with the government. We, religious Kurds, have a problem of representation here.” Zahir said that “The Kurdish people have reasonable demands, but we have a problem of representation. The HDP politicians and PKK militants are benefiting from our situation. People assume that they represent us but they actually do not.” When asked about the reason why the HDP and PKK cannot represent the Kurds, Zahir answered, “Because these groups are secular and they mostly do not care about the religious Kurds and their problems. They are after their secular ideals.” It seems that the pro-Kurdish political party HDP and the PKK have a problem of legitimacy amongst some Kurds. This could even be observed in the ballot box, as even though some Kurds support the pro-Kurdish HDP, many also vote for the Ak Party. For instance, in the 2014 municipal elections, although the HDP received 50% of the votes in Kurdish majority provinces such as Diyarbakir, Van, Batman, and Mardin, the Ak Party also received more than 35% of the votes in these provinces (Balci, 2014). This clearly indicates that religious Kurds vote for the Ak Party due to the party’s conservative characteristics, though other reasons, such as the party’s approach and determination to solve the Kurdish Question, may also play a role.



**Figure 6.1** Results of the 2014 Municipal Elections

(Source: Hürriyet Daily News, 2014) <sup>26</sup>

Kurdish nationalism is, on the other hand, currently represented by the HDP in parliament. The HDP, however, could be considered as a local political party receiving most of the votes from eastern and southeastern Turkey. Apart from Istanbul and Tunceli (formerly Dersim), the HDP's (formerly BDP) presence cannot be seen in other cities outside of these regions. For example, the map above shows that all of the municipalities the BDP won in the last local elections were in eastern and southeastern Turkey.

**Table 6.3.** Public Perception of the pro-Kurdish political party

(Source: SETA and Pollmark, 2009: 22)

In your opinion, do the political views of DTP represent all Kurds in Turkey?		
	TURKS	KURDS
YES	36.4	46.4
NO	51.9	41.0

<sup>26</sup> *AKP*: Ak Party, *CHP*: Republican People's Party, *MHP*: Nationalist Action Party, *DiğER*: Others, *BDP*: Peace and Democracy Party (the predecessor of the pro-Kurdish HDP), *SP*: Felicity Party

<b>NO IDEA</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>12.6</b>
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The table above also shows that 41% of the Kurds said that the DTP (the HDP's predecessor party), does not represent all Kurds in Turkey. In another question posed to the participants regarding the representation of Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK, 42.7% of Kurds disagreed with the claim that Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK represent all Kurds in Turkey, while 38.1% of them agreed with this statement. Another point that is worthy of consideration is that more than 50% of the Turks do not think that the HDP, the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan are representatives of all Kurds in Turkey (see Figure 6.3. below).

**Table 6.4.** Public Perception of Öcalan and the PKK  
(Source: SETA and Pollmark, 2009: 22)

<b>In your opinion, do the political views of Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK represent all Kurds in Turkey?</b>		
	<b>TURKS</b>	<b>KURDS</b>
<b>YES</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>38.1</b>
<b>NO</b>	<b>51.8</b>	<b>42.7</b>
<b>NO IDEA</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>19.2</b>

Having said this, important Kurdish nationalist ideas can be seen in the discourse of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), the group that has been at war with the Turkish state for more than 30 years. In fact, the PKK's ideology was originally derived from socialism (Marxism-Leninism) and Kurdish nationalism. Having said that, the foundation of the PKK by Abdullah Öcalan and its war against the Turkish state has also meant the evolution of Kurdish nationalism over time. For instance, during the long armed conflict, and especially after the capture of Abdullah Öcalan by the Turkish state, PKK-inspired Kurdish nationalists developed the cult of Abdullah Öcalan's as a key component of Kurdish nationalism. This ideology, which can be called "Apoism" (Apo is short for

Abdullah and an endearing name for Abdullah Öcalan) is very similar to the personality cult of Atatürk in Kemalist ideology. The idea of one great man leading people, for example, was produced in Apoism, too. The use of Abdullah Öcalan's pictures in HDP rallies and in protests seems to be just the beginning, as Selahattin Demirtaş, the chairman of the HDP, argued in one of his speeches, "They said 'You cannot hang Öcalan's poster.' If the Kurds cannot hang Öcalan's poster in Kurdistan, then where would they hang it? We will go further and erect his statue, put that in your mind" (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012a). It is, however, not just about pictures and statues: the unquestionable authority of Öcalan can also be seen amongst nationalist Kurds, since it is almost impossible for them to criticise Abdullah Öcalan in any case. Besides, Cornell (2001: 40) even goes further and criticises the "megalomania" of Abdullah Öcalan and the "cult of personality he developed around himself" which considers other Kurds who did not recognise Öcalan's leadership as "a dog looking for a piece of meat." This indicates that not recognising Öcalan's leadership (not to mention criticising it) may result in the exclusion of a person amongst Kurdish nationalists.

The cult of Abdullah Öcalan is also seen in some Kurdish teachers' comments. For example, one Kurdish teacher, Sami, argued that "Mr. Öcalan is the hero of the Kurdish people, that's how most Kurds including myself see him, because we owe everything to him. The Kurds have acquired all the rights thanks to his efforts." Perihan also added, "Abdullah Öcalan is the person who fought for the rights of our people [referring to the Kurds], he is such a noble-hearted man to me. He has a respectable place in Kurdish people's hearts." Murat highlighted another point by saying, "Mr. Öcalan is very much like the Atatürk of the Kurdish people. Atatürk is considered as a great man by the Turks, for us, it is Abdullah Öcalan. Thanks to his efforts, we are now honourable people in Turkey. We can even do politics now, raising our voice against the unequal policies and practices. No one could imagine this 30 years ago when the war started." These answers show that Öcalan has a strong standing among some Kurdish teachers. Most of them tried to explain this by arguing that Öcalan started the war against the Turkish state, and that the Kurdish people have gained their rights over time thanks to this war. It could be argued that this is partly true, due to the fact that the PKK insurgency has attracted the

state's attention more than any other Kurdish group in the past, and that the long conflict has played an important role in the Turkish state's recognition of the Kurds and its implementation of the necessary reforms to improve their rights.

These (Kurdish) teachers see the Kurdish Question as an attempt by the Turkish state to assimilate the Kurdish population in order to make them Turks. Cemil, for example, mentioned that "The Kurdish people have always been the target of the assimilationist policies of the Turkish state ever since it was established. They were somewhat successful, because some of us do not know how to read and write Kurdish, or to speak Kurdish. This is a shame." The Kurds, indeed, have a language problem, as a recent study revealed that only 60% of Kurds see themselves as proficient in Kurdish (Yılmaz, 2014). There is no doubt that the prohibition of other languages, especially Kurdish, in public has made the Kurds forget their language over time; and this is clearly an indication of the assimilationist tendencies of the state. Gülten further added another point by saying that, "Even the name of the country was given for a specific purpose, as it was designed to give a sense of a home for the Turkish people only. We were not wanted here with our own identity." The claim that the Turkish state has assimilated the Kurdish people and tried to make them Turks instead is true, as modern Turkey was certainly built upon a specific identity, that is, Turkishness. The recently-abolished 'Student Pledge' (Öğrenci Andı) was, for example, a functional example that worked as a constant reminder of the importance of being a Turk, as it finishes with the sentence, "How happy is the one who says I am a Turk." This actually evokes the idea that the ones who do not say, "We are Turks" will not be happy in Turkey, and the fact that many non-Turks (Kurds, Greeks, Armenians etc) have faced serious difficulties, such as exclusion or discrimination in society, shows that being a non-Turk was certainly a challenge in Turkey.

Some teachers do not seem to trust the Turkish state in the peace process. For example, Sami commented that, "In the past, the Kurdish people used to say, 'we want a separate state' while the Turkish side used to say, 'we will never let you establish another separate state within Turkey'. Talking about the present, the Kurdish people say, 'we want to live together and we want peace' while the Turkish state says in a suspicious

manner 'you are separatists'. It is the Kurds who want peace more." Indeed, polling data suggests that it is true that the Kurds want peace and support the settlement process more than Turks. A public survey shows that 82.9% of Kurds support the peace process, while 52.4% of the Turks hold the same view (Yılmaz, 2014).

There, however, is not a consensus amongst the Kurdish teachers on the solution of the Kurdish issue. Some believe that the Kurds will be able to live in Turkey freely after significant improvements are made to ensure their basic rights, while others think that there must be an autonomous Kurdish region within the borders of Turkey. Cemil, for instance, said, "I do not see the autonomous Kurdish state as necessary, you know, as vital. I think our people would also like to live in Turkey but they just want improvements, development, and these kinds of things. If you ask the Kurdish people, I do not think that the majority want autonomy or independence. But I must also add some – even some of my relatives – do want to see either an autonomous or an independent Kurdish state." As a matter of fact, most Kurds share Cemil's view according to the SETA and Pollmark (2009) report: 59% of Kurdish respondents do not want a separate state, while 71.3% of the Turkish participants believe that the Kurds demand a separate state, while only 30.3% of Kurdish respondents actually shared this view. This shows that the Turkish public opinion is based on wrong assumptions, and also that the majority of the Kurds do not share the views of Kurdish nationalists who think that autonomy is necessary for a solution to the issues they face. For example, Doğan commented that, "For me, the solution is not just to have the same rights as the Turks. The Kurds should also have autonomous cities in southeastern Turkey, because it is normal for the Kurds to want to govern Kurdish dominated cities." Murat also expressed his desire to see an autonomous Kurdish region within Turkey by saying, "If Turkey becomes a federal state rather than a unitary state, the Kurdish region might then become an autonomous state. This should be the result of the reconciliation process." This is similar to the idea of "democratic confederalism" as defined by Öcalan (2011: 32) as follows:

Democratic confederalism can be described as a kind of self-administration in contrast to the administration by the nation-state. However, under certain circumstances peaceful coexistence is possible as long as the nation-state does not interfere with central matters of self-administration. All such interventions would call for the self-defence of the civil society. Democratic confederalism is not at war with any nation-state but it will not stand idly by at assimilation efforts. Revolutionary overthrow or the foundation of a new state does not create sustainable change. In the long run, freedom and justice can only be accomplished within a democratic-confederate dynamic process.

For Öcalan, certain power should be granted to local authorities/councils in order for them to govern themselves under a federal structure. He also thinks that founding a Kurdish nation-state is not the right decision because, for him, a new nation-state will not guarantee improvements to freedoms. He concludes by highlighting the goal by saying that, "The goal is not the foundation of a Kurdish nation-state. The movement intends to establish federal structures in Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq that are open for all Kurds and at the same time form an umbrella confederation for all four parts of Kurdistan" (ibid., p. 34).

Some teachers also think that the Kurds are not the only ethnic group facing discrimination and exclusion within the educational system. Muhammed commented, "I personally know some Assyrian students who also have similar difficulties in schools to Kurdish students, so the problem is actually bigger than we assume." Likewise, Ayşe said, "When I think of the exclusion of the Kurds within the system, it always comes to my mind that the main issue with the existing curriculum is that it is not inclusive. It is that simple." Hatice explained why non-Turkish ethnic groups are excluded in Turkey by pointing out that "...This is due to the fact that the Turkish state did not recognise the existence of other ethnicities legally. Instead, it tried to eradicate them by implementing the Turkification policies and imposing the Turkish culture on all citizens." It is true that the modern Turkey was built upon one particular identity and other identities were thus intentionally ignored and excluded by the state. The nationalist policies of the Turkish



state resulted in assimilating citizens of other origins. Nevertheless, as stated by Abdullah, the Turkish state even excluded the Turks who did not fit in with the ideology of the state. Ergil (2000: 122) explains this as follows:

Although the plight of the Kurds has tended to receive the greatest international attention, other groups outside the official mainstream of Turkish society—Islamic activists, ethnic and cultural minority groups, and intellectuals on both the left and the right— have all, at one time or another, been silenced by the Turkish state. The root of this intolerance is to be found not in the character of the Turkish people or their political leaders but in the very nature of the Turkish state.

Drawing upon the aforementioned discussions, it could well be hypothesised that the Turkish state only accepted one particular identity before the 1980s: 'a national and secular Turk'. All others were either excluded or discriminated by the state. However, the ideal type of citizen promoted by the state became 'a Sunni, nationalist Turk' after the 1980s.

Speaking of the discrimination, most of the teachers were of the view that the Alevi citizens should not be exposed to any kind of discrimination, either. For them, the compulsory "Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge" course unit should either be elective or include equal amount of content from all religions/beliefs. Ramazan commented, "I agree with the claims that the Alevis also feel excluded, as the prevailing Sunni interpretation of Islam does not include them. For example, who can say that the Presidency of Religious Affairs represents the Alevis? I think it does not." Hatice adds, "Alevis are still excluded in general, but I must admit that there have been improvements, as the government added some pages to the Religious Culture textbooks regarding the Alevi interpretation of Islam." As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Alevi interpretation of Islam is not officially recognised by the state. Even though 88.7% of Muslims are predominantly Sunni-Hanafi, and most of the Kurds are Sunni-Shafi, the Alevis are still the third largest group and the biggest religious minority in Turkey.

Despite this fact, it is obvious and very unfortunate that they face serious issues. For example, “cemevi” (pronounced as djemevi) wherein the Alevis gather to pray is not yet recognised officially by the Turkish state. “We cannot educate our clergy. We cannot teach Alevism to our youth” said Metin Tarhan, the head of an Alevi association based in Istanbul (Hürriyet Daily News, 2011). He further adds, “We have suggested to the Ministry of National Education that our children should not participate in compulsory religious classes, instead, they could study the history of religion, but this proposal was rejected”.

The Alevis, like the Kurds, have also suffered intimidation and even massacred at the hands of the Turkish state in the past. For example, the infamous Dersim operation between 1937-38 directly targeted the Alevi citizens, resulting in the massacre of hundreds, thanks to a direct order by Atatürk. Taking into consideration all of this, the Alevis have always had obstacles in expressing themselves in public. They have not been able to reveal their identity explicitly due to the fact that their belief/culture has always been underrated. Moreover, given the fact that 22% of the Alevis are originally Kurdish (Mitchell, 2012), it is possible to say that these people have suffered more than others due to the fact that both their ethnicity and belief have not been accepted by the state for decades.

The majority of the teachers interviewed hold the same view that the Kurdish Question is a complicated issue with its political, cultural and educational dimensions. For instance, Şirin argued that “The Kurdish Question is not something that can be solved via military actions. This is what Turkey has tried so far, and all of us have seen that this way will never work.” Emrullah further added, “the Turkish governments should focus on implementing the necessary reforms in different fields, and the military actions should be ignored, because the claim that the Kurdish issue is a security problem has caused the death of thousands so far. We should not make the same mistake, instead we must learn from our mistakes.” The complexity of the Kurdish issue seems to be acknowledged by all Kurdish teachers along with the idea that the required reforms in different areas of life should be implemented.

The exclusion of the Kurdish identity in the educational system is also acknowledged and further exemplified by the teachers, which can be illustrated nicely by Mehmed's comment:

I have a few Turkish students. They also have an objection to the Kurds and the Armenians. Let me give you an example. If you call someone 'the son of a Kurd', this is a bad phrase; it is like swearing at someone for some Turkish people. It is same for the word 'Armenian', it is also a bad word for my Turkish students.

This is a functional example of how the Kurdishness is perceived within the educational system, and this is further an indication of the creation of xenophobia in students' minds against non-Turks (Kurds, Armenians etc). As a matter of fact, the words "Kurds" and "Armenians" are only mentioned once in the "History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism" textbook for secondary schools (Özcan, 2014) and even then, it is in the context of "the harmful organisations against national unity". It talks about such 'harmful organisations' established by both the Kurds and Armenians against the independence and the unity of Turkey after World War 1. One who studies from these sections would likely assume that the Kurds and Armenians had bad intentions against Turkey, and that they should be, therefore, regarded as bad people.

It is interesting to note that some of the teachers who recognise the Kurdish question also used particular words very deliberately. For example, all of them referred to Atatürk as 'Mustafa Kemal' and never once mentioned 'Atatürk'. This is remarkable, as there is a difference between Mustafa Kemal and Atatürk in Turkey. The fact that the surname 'Atatürk' was given to Mustafa Kemal after the foundation of the Turkish republic makes Atatürk different from the latter. In this regard, Mustafa Kemal and Atatürk had different personalities due to a significant difference in their approach to issues at the time. For instance, Mustafa Kemal had no objection to religion; he seemed to be an ally of communist Russia, even calling his friends 'comrades'; he even said that there might

be an autonomic Kurdish region within the borders of the new state; he stated deliberately a couple of times that he fought to save the Sultanate of the Ottoman Empire. Atatürk, however, did not agree with any of these opinions. Therefore, the socialists, the Kurds and the Islamists of Turkey prefer Mustafa Kemal (Kahraman, 2013). Therefore, the use of 'Mustafa Kemal' shows that Mustafa Kemal represents a character/personality rather than a person in this case.

On the other hand, having looked at the specific words used by some Kurdish teachers, the ways in which Öcalan is referred to/addressed is noteworthy. They prefer to call him 'Sayın Öcalan' (interpreted as Mr. Öcalan, which actually means 'honourable' in Turkish), something which was once prohibited in Turkey. For example, Kurdish politicians using the word "sayın" were harshly criticised by their Turkish counterparts. In fact, the Supreme Court of Appeals reversed the judgement given to an imprisoned journalist who had addressed Öcalan as "sayın" only in 2012 (CNN Türk, 2012). Having said that, using the word "sayın" for Öcalan is still not accepted both in Turkish politics (amongst Turkish political parties) and in society more broadly. It is, therefore, still possible to face severe criticism for addressing Öcalan as 'sayın'.

## **6.5. Discussions of the findings**

The views of Turkish and Kurdish teachers relating to the Kurdish Question, the reconciliation process, and the exclusion of the Kurds in society have been presented in this chapter. This study is empirically significant, as it attempts for the first time to examine the views of the Turkish and Kurdish teachers coming from different political/ideological backgrounds in Kurdish-dominated cities regarding the Kurdish Question.

The complexity of the Kurdish issue was mentioned earlier in the introductory section of this chapter. The different views of teachers made the complexity and the ambiguity of

the issue obvious. The Kurdish Question, therefore, remains a complex and complicated issue which is seen very differently by among different people in Turkey, which might also explain the fact that it has not been solved despite more than 30 years of war.

Drawing upon the participants' comments on the Kurdish Question and the on-going reconciliation process, it seems that the Kurdish Question is still not recognised and that the problems faced by Kurdish people are still being ignored according to almost half of my interviewees. This is somewhat remarkable, as the Kurdish Question was officially recognised by the Turkish state a few years ago, with public opinion regarding this issue having undergone a considerable change in Turkey since then. Moreover, teachers are normally expected to have a more positive approach to serious problems in society, as they are the ones influencing the minds of the future generations of the country. Having said this, the opinions encountered here should be addressed and resolved, as the reconciliation process makes it necessary to deal with this kind of tensions characterising public opinion.

Teachers' negative attitudes towards other ideologies seem to make it difficult to come up with an agreement on the problems. On the one hand, the completely rejectionist stance taken by some teachers against the actions/policies of the Ak Party government seems to be a serious issue. This is partly because when one totally rejects all the policies of a political party, there remains no point for someone who do not in discussing and reasoning as a means of gaining support for the political processes necessary to find a solution to an existing problem. This rejectionist approach can also be witnessed in the mentalities of some political parties such as the CHP and the MHP, which are the two main opposition parties in Parliament. A consensus among the three main political parties on the Kurdish Question and the road map of the reconciliation process might actually increase public support for the solution process by changing people's views on the issue. On the other hand, the rejectionist stance of some teachers in terms of HDP's and Öcalan's involvement in the peace process also seems problematic. The claims 'religious Kurdish people are not represented in the process' might have grounds, but requiring the dismissal of the HDP and Öcalan from the reconciliation process does not

appear to be a wise move if peace is what is being sought. In this case, the religious Kurdish representatives communicating with the government and delivering the demands of the religious Kurdish people could contribute to the process in a positive way.

Blaming each other also makes it very hard to talk about the issues calmly, as has been observed during my interviews that some teachers coming from different backgrounds (e.g., the Kemalists, the Islamists, and the Turkish/Kurdish nationalists et cetera) do not talk to their colleagues in their free time, based on their ideological preferences and political views. It seems that the diversity of opinions is seen as a rather negative thing here. This should, however, be regarded as a significant opportunity as it offers differing and unique insights to the issues. However, many Turkish teachers seemed to keep some of their colleagues at a distance, which further complicates the issue.

There seems to be lack of respect for others in teachers' attitudes and manners, as they do not seem to value their colleagues' thoughts and ideological positions. For instance, having looked at the specific language used by the respondents in interviews, it becomes quite obvious that they otherise people who do not think like them. Otherisation automatically creates barriers preventing people from even communicate with one another, so this is obviously a major problem among teachers.

The findings show that religion is considered an important element of the solution process, as almost half of those interviewed mentioned the importance of Islam and the role it plays in bringing people together. They believe that the majority of the Kurds and the Turks care about Islam and this might, therefore, play a significant role in the reconciliation process. As a matter of fact, after the beginning of the Kurdish Opening, the government used religion to this end, and Friday Sermons emphasising the importance of unity and peace were delivered across all mosques in Turkey.

The findings from this study also indicate that there are different cults of personalities developed within individual ideological approaches. For instance, having looked at the teachers' responses, the cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk seems to have triggered the creation and the development of the cult of Abdullah Öcalan within the Kurdish nationalist ideology. Teachers who support these sides appear to be very sensitive about these cults, considering them as beyond criticism.

Although it was mentioned before that the findings of the study may not necessarily reflect Turkey as a whole and might not be generalised due to the fact that the study is after all a case study, it can still be reasonably suggested that the findings of the chapter indicate that teachers' opinions largely reflect the general public perception of the Kurdish Question in Turkey (SETA and Pollmark, 2009). This is partly because the sample was selected on purpose. The findings of this study, therefore, suggest that the views of teachers, like many others in society, are shaped or influenced by their ideological and/or political background. What is interesting in this case is that teachers' views remain anchored along ideological lines, even after having worked in a Kurdish dominated city for a long time.

Finally, having looked at the interviewee responses towards the reconciliation process between the Ak Party government and the Kurdish side (the HDP and Abdullah Öcalan), the majority seems to support this process, even though some teachers generally oppose it. Although there are many disagreements regarding how the peace process should be dealt with, most of the participants are in favour of the attempts to solve Turkey's Kurdish Question, something which leaves room for some optimism about the future of the conflict.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TURKEY'S KURDISH QUESTION AND THE EDUCATIONAL, LINGUISTIC ISSUES**

#### **7.1. Introduction**

In order to understand the real dynamics and characteristics of the Kurdish Question in Turkey, it is actually crucial to understand the notion of education, educational policies and the curriculum. This chapter, therefore, seeks to approach the Kurdish Question from an educational perspective, since education – despite its significance to the issue – has been generally ignored by researchers. In doing so, teachers' perception about the importance of education will be revealed. After this, the linguistic issues that Kurds face in school will also be discussed, with the issues around the mother tongue education examined from teachers' point of view.

#### **7.2. The importance of education in the peace process**

All teachers agreed about the usefulness of education to the so-called solution process, but there are two major views amongst teachers regarding how it should actually be used. Some suggested that education should be used to improve the sense of belongings of all Turkish citizens to the Turkish state regardless of their ethnic and religious identity, while others claimed that education should be used to educate the Kurdish young generation in order to prevent them joining the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) as fighters.



On the one hand, for example, Melike commented, "Education is, of course, the most important weapon to solve this problem. (..) What should be done is to pay more attention to the Kurdish populated areas and make sure that the Kurdish youth are well educated just as the Turkish youth in the western part of Turkey. This will definitely make a change and further prevent Kurdish youth from joining the terrorists. <sup>27</sup>" Ceyda also shared Melike's view and added, "If we can give the Kurdish people a better education and make their economic circumstances better, there will be no reason to rebel against Turkey." Another teacher Mete also claimed that "..the quality of education in the southeast of Turkey and the poor infrastructure conditions as well as the financial problems left the Kurdish people no other choice." During this discussion, some teachers used contemptuous words for the Kurds. For instance, Beyhan argued that "the Kurds living in rural areas are quite uncivilised. Our state must offer an opportunity through education in order for them to be civilised (*medenî*) people."

First of all, one of the serious issues in abovementioned approaches to the Kurdish Question is that the Kurds are seen as uneducated and ignorant, and they are perceived by these teachers as being in need of someone else's help to become 'civilised', which is problematic considering the type of language being used. This reminds the research of the term "mountain Turks" (*Dağ Türkleri*) used in the past to define the Kurds in Turkey (see Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008, Sagnic, 2010). Some Turks see themselves as the 'main component' of Turkey and they further assume to have a right and an authority to define/name other ethnic groups/components however they like.

Secondly, the assumption that if only the Kurds have better education within the current Turkish educational system then they become civilised and different people also seem to be ambiguous. Given the fact that the targets of the Turkish national education, and the existing curriculum are dominated by Turkish nationalism, the only possible consequence of the aforementioned assumption is that the Kurds having a better education probably become better Turks. This, in fact, echoes back to the "Kurdish

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<sup>27</sup> She is referring to the armed Kurdish organisation, PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party).

Report” prepared by İsmet Pasha <sup>28</sup> in 1925 where suggested that “There is actually no benefit in educating the Turks and Kurds separately. Kurdish pupils should be sent to Turkish schools, and they should, on the contrary, be educated together. This will make these people Turks” (Öztürk, 2008). Skutnabb-Kangas and Bucak (1995: 362) emphasised the seriousness of the issue by arguing that, “To kill a language you have to either kill the individuals speaking it or make these individuals change their mother tongue. Turkey tries to change the mother tongue of the Kurds and make Turkish their mother tongue”. Turkey seems to have succeeded in its assimilationist policies, as there many Kurds in Turkey who do not speak and/or do not write and read in their own mother tongue (e.g. see BBC Türkçe, 2015).

Thirdly, there also appears to be a denial of the Kurdish Question altogether in some respects. Some Turkish teachers, for example, highlighted the social and economic aspects of the problem deliberately in order to ignore the cultural dimensions of the issue. It is true that the financial problems the majority of the Kurds are experiencing are worse compared to the western part of the country, that the infrastructure of the cities populated by the Kurds is very poor due to the overall lower development level of the region, and that the quality of education cannot be compared to the western part either. This is because more qualified/experienced and accomplished teachers generally tend to prefer working in more developed cities. Having said this, the Kurdish issue is more complex than its simple portrayal by some teachers, and one cannot ignore the existence of the violations of basic human rights mentioned throughout this chapter.

On the other hand, some other teachers argued that education should be used for the peace/reconciliation process in order for the Kurds to have an improved sense of belonging to the Turkish state, based on the ideal that this could satisfy the Kurdish people by providing an inclusive education. Mehmed Akif, for instance, commented that “the Kurdish people have been experiencing a cultural assimilation for decades. So I am

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<sup>28</sup> İsmet Pasha was literally the ‘second man’ after Atatürk in the early days of the Republic. He became President of Turkey after Atatürk passed away.

asking what is actually more normal than giving these people their fundamental rights in education and in other areas of life? (..) These rights will definitely develop a better and healthier relationship between the Kurds and the Turkish state. Thus the Turkish state will also benefit from this. Why are we waiting then?" Emrullah also commented, "As Sheikh Edebali <sup>29</sup> said, 'make the human live that the state can stand' If you cannot satisfy your people, your state cannot stand firmly." It seems that these teachers expect the Turkish state to take concrete steps for its own citizens to make Turkey a more liveable country, so that different ethnicities, cultures and religions could exist in harmony.

On the other hand, some Kurdish teachers take a more critical view of the Turkish state. For instance, a Kurdish teacher, Sami, said:

Well, it is actually the Turkish state's responsibility to improve its citizens' rights by making changes in education policies. Issues such as the mother tongue instruction and the existing curriculum are being discussed seriously by many people including teachers, activists, journalists etc. (..) I as a Kurd will not request any improvement from the Turkish state. If it does not intend to make necessary changes today, we will have our rights sooner or later, this is inevitable (*Er ya da geç haklarımızı alacağız, bu kaçınılmaz*).

These Kurdish teachers also tend to accuse the Turkish state of making all things difficult in every situation. Despite the latest efforts made by the Turkish state, which has improved the status of the Kurdish people in Turkey in important ways, these types of teachers continue blame the state for not acting sincerely and not making enough efforts to solve the Kurdish issue. This, however, might be explained by the fact that these people were literally the 'victims' of the Turkish state in the past, as their language was stolen from them, their culture was forgotten, their identity was ignored, and even

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<sup>29</sup> Sheikh Edebali was a spiritual leader who inspired and influenced Osman Gazi, the founder of the Ottoman Empire.

their existence went unrecognised by the state. Therefore, many Kurds in general have negative feelings about the Turkish state, and it is true that this negative perception needs to be repaired by the Turkish state. Having said that, some Kurdish teachers went even further and they justified the violent actions of the PKK, just because they think the Turkish state seems reluctant to give the Kurds their rights. For instance, Doğan commented, “If your country does not want to give your human rights, you could fight for your rights, because they do not leave you with another choice. The PKK was born against this strange attitude of the Turkish state.” It is obvious that Doğan supports the use of violence against the Turkish state if this remains the only option in order to gain rights, but the interpretation of violence as being the only option might differ from one person to another. For instance, another Kurdish teacher, Emrullah, argued “...the PKK does not have any legitimacy, because the Kurds can now raise their voices through non-governmental organisations and more importantly in Parliament, too. So why do these people still insist on violence then?” Of course, the legitimisation of the use of violence is part of the broader leftist ideology of the PKK, so that is why they still insist on using this method against the Turkish state.

After the pro-Kurdish party, HDP, gained some 13% of the general votes in the June 2015 general elections, the idea that this problem should be solved in Parliament via discussions with other elected members from different political standpoints should have been strengthened. This is because when there is a legitimate and legal method of discussing human rights issues and violations, sticking to violent methods in order to bring peace to the Kurdish populated cities becomes somewhat ironic. However, the latest clashes with the Turkish state have shown once again that the PKK still insists on the old methods of the past, which makes the issue insolvable in many ways.

Considering the fact that the clashes between the Turkish state and the Kurdish insurgents have restarted, it seems that the disarmament of the PKK at this stage is a crucial condition to bring the permanent peace to the Kurdish region. Even though Öcalan urged the PKK to lay down arms earlier in 2015, the group has delayed this process and even argued that Öcalan is not able to call for disarmament while he

remains in prison (Middle East Eye, 2015). It could, therefore, be claimed that the PKK's persistence in preserving the organisation's armed capacities played a negative role in the collapse of the long standing talks between the Turkish state and the Kurdish guerrilla group, although the Turkish state has made some serious mistakes during the process too, such as not introducing any kind of official road-map (a detailed timetable) which resulted in the atmosphere of uncertainty.

Drawing upon the comments of the interviewees, the majority of those interviewed seem to be in favour of the use of education in the peace process in order to improve the lives of Kurdish people and their rights. It has been suggested that the Turkish government ought to grant the Kurds more rights in education, such as allowing mother tongue instruction in public schools, and that the educational policies should be made more inclusive. The existing educational system is not inclusive of other ethnicities with the exception of the Turkish identity.

What the Turkish government ought to do is to implement crucial reforms in education by removing the themes/contents related to Turkish nationalism and the official ideology of Kemalism from the curriculum, and to make it inclusive of all ethnic and religious groups of Turkey. It is quite normal that this process will take time, but a detailed timetable could be produced even at this stage in order to organise the required reforms, and to make people become used to the changes. These could be spread out over time instead of implementing unplanned and random reforms. This is because the uncertainty over what was going to be done during the peace process was actually one of the more serious mistakes made by the Turkish state, since this ambiguity made the process more fragile as both Turkish and Kurdish people were not aware of what was being planned for the future. Furthermore, having no detailed timetable of the reforms to be implemented might have raised doubts among PKK activists about the decision to disarm.

### **7.3. Issues around language in the Turkish educational system**

#### **7.3.1. Brief Historical Background of Turkey's stance on language**

Modern Turkey was founded on the bases of Turkish nationalism that was built upon three main pillars: one nation (Turks), one language (Turkish), and one homeland (Turkey). However, the ideal of having single language dates back to the late Ottoman period. After the French Revolution and its effect of nationalism on the Ottoman Empire, some Turkish intellectuals and politicians came up with an ideology of 'Turkism' as a means of saving the Empire, after the perceived failures of the ideologies of Islamism and Ottomanism respectively. They had no doubt that the existence of a strong nation was required to form a strong and modern state. The Turkish language was, of course, at the heart of discussions about the Turkish nation-building purposes. The arguments around the necessity of having a single language (Turkish) were made by the Turkish nationalist political party, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) as part of a policy of Turkification (*Türkleştirmek*) which was one of their main aims. Besides, the significance of the Turkish language in order to build a unified Turkish nation was highlighted by famous writers at the time such as Ziya Gökalp and Namık Kemal.

The abovementioned discussions of nation building and the requirement of a single language continued in the early days of the Turkish Republic, too. This was because the Kemalist elites who founded the new state were formerly the members of the CUP, and they were also strongly influenced by the ideas of Ziya Gökalp who was regarded as the theoretical father of Turkish nationalism. Accordingly, the Turkish nationalist ideals of Gökalp flourished under the Kemalists' rule. Alastair Bonnett (2004: 74-76) has claimed that Turkish nationalism in the Kemalist single party period "deployed a form of orientalism in which the East is cast as a separate and primitive realm, to be distinguished from both the West . . . as a model . . . and 'the Turk' as an idealised ethno-national identity". As part of the idealisation policy of the Turkishness, the Turkish language was also accepted as an ideal language that should be spoken in public. Public

campaigns such as “O Citizen! Speak Turkish!” (*Vatandaş! Türkçe Konuş!*) were also promoted by the Kemalists. Furthermore, along with the foundation of the official “Turkish Language Organisation” (*Türk Dil Kurumu*), research on the origins and significance of Turkish language were encouraged and further commissioned by the Turkish state, as ordered by Atatürk. As a result of these efforts, the “Sun-language Theory” (*Güneş Dil Teorisi*) was formulised, which argued that Turkish was the source of all languages.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Republic, always stressed the importance of Turkish language to the Turkish nation. For instance, he once said, “The language of the Turkish nation is Turkish. Turkish is the most beautiful, the richest, and can be the easiest language in the world” (İnan, 1998: 351). Speaking before the public in Adana province in 1931, he also delivered the following speech:

Being a Turk is to speak the Turkish language. The person who claims to be part of the Turkish nation must above all speak Turkish in any case. It would not be right to believe a person who claims to be attached to the Turkish ideals but at the same time s/he does not speak Turkish. However, there are more than 20.000 citizens in Adana, who do not speak Turkish. If the Turkish Hearths<sup>30</sup> tolerate this, and if the Turkish youth, political and social organisations remain insensitive to the issue, this situation that has existed for at least a century will continue. What will be the consequence of this? Gentlemen! In any of your dark days, these people might collaborate with other people who speak another language, and might act against us. The major target of the Turkish Hearths is to make people like these real Turks who speak our language. These are the true Turkish citizens (Toros, 1981: 61; my translation).

This speech clearly shows the level of intolerance against publicly spoken languages

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<sup>30</sup> “Turkish Hearths” was the nationalist organisation founded in 1912 in order to promote the Turkish nation-building policies. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, they joined with the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP*) by direct orders of Atatürk.

other than Turkish at the time. Atatürk's eagerness in promoting assimilationist methods against non-Turkish components in the country can also be clearly seen in this speech. It is also apparent that the people who did not speak Turkish were portrayed as potential traitors by Atatürk. It can, therefore, be concluded that the language policy of Turkey was extremely nationalist and that it developed into an assimilationist policy during the Kemalist era, with the nationalist and assimilationist characteristics of the approach to the Turkish language further flourishing after the single party period, too.

### **7.3.2. Turkey's current language policy**

International agreements all highlight the notion that ethnic communities should be provided with different rights, which include cultural, political as well as linguistic rights. For example, Article 2(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly stated, "Everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as... language." In the Turkish educational system, the only official/legal language of instruction in public schools is, however, still Turkish. Having said that, Kurdish was allowed in Turkish public schools as an elective course unit in 2012, as part of the Kurdish Opening process. What is more, in 2014, Kurdish instruction was made legal in private schools after an amendment to the law by the Turkish Parliament, as part of a democratisation package initiated by the Ak Party government to grant Kurdish people more rights in the field of education (Günay and Aydın, 2015).

### **7.3.3. The effects of the Turkish instruction on the Kurdish students**

Since the only recognised language of instruction in public schools is Turkish, it then becomes necessary to ask: What are the negative effects of the compulsory Turkish instruction on the Kurdish students and their culture? How does it affect the Kurdish students' academic performance in both regular school and national exams? The answers to these questions will reveal the consequences of a lack of mother tongue instruction for Kurds.



A number of teachers interviewed specifically talked about some of the negative impacts of the Turkish instruction on the Kurdish students. For example, Zahide commented, "I have personally seen a lot of Kurdish pupils who started school with absolutely no Turkish and they had a terrible time while they were going through their compulsory education." Emrullah added, "Some of our Kurdish students do not even want to come to school after their first negative experience, or we could call it shock if you like, but as the law requires them to attend, we go to their houses, talk to them and convince them to attend their classes." Hatice also said, "It actually takes a lot of time for these Kurdish students to get used to the new and strange school environment." More interestingly, one of the interviewees even admitted that one of his students graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade, though they had very little Turkish. Furthermore, the responses of a number of teachers also showed that this problem sometimes affects students' attendance quite negatively. These comments show that there exists a serious question about the integration of Kurdish pupils in schools when they do not know any Turkish. Another problem in this category is related to their lack of academic success and the negative impact this has on their careers. For instance, Zahir narrated his personal experience as follow:

I personally wanted to be an engineer when I was in high school. This was my dream, but given that I was not as proficient in Turkish when compared to a native Turk, I could not get enough marks in the university entrance exam, and I ended up becoming a teacher because of my results. (..) I consider myself as a lucky person, because many other Kurdish young people cannot even become teachers, most of them cannot go to university because of their poor results. I am currently following my own students' academic progress and I am very sad that the situation is still more or less the same, even though I volunteer to help them improve their Turkish (..) but they simply cannot compete with their native Turkish peers.

Zahir's comment clearly shows the desperate situation of the Kurdish pupils and how they are affected by the Turkish instruction. Furthermore, Sami mentioned one of the specific reasons why Kurdish pupils do worse than their Turkish peers in national exams:

A lot of my Kurdish students were not good at the national exams. This is not because they are not good at Math etc., but because they do not understand the questions, or some Turkish words in the questions. Let me give you an example from my own experience, I once asked my students "Let's assume that I buy something which costs 600 Turkish liras, and I have to pay it in 3 instalments over 3 months. So, how much should I pay each month?" No one in the class was able to answer this correctly; I was shocked, because this was very easy for them, but when I asked why they could not solve the problem, I found out that they did not know the meaning of "*taksit*" (instalment) in Turkish.

It is obvious that these Kurdish students do have serious handicaps at the beginning of their educational journey and that they are swimming against the stream during their journey within the Turkish educational system. In fact, a recent report published by the MoNE revealed that students in the east and southeast of Turkey are underperforming compared to their peers living in other parts of Turkey. The average score of the southeast of Turkey in "every subject" in the national examination for the entrance of high schools is significantly lower than any other region of Turkey. For instance, the average score for the "History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism" is 53,04 in the southeast of Turkey, while it is 64,04 in the Marmara region. Likewise, the average score for "Turkish" is 57,56 in the southeast of Turkey, whereas it is 69,45 in the Marmara region (Ministry of National Education, 2015: 9-15). These results clearly indicate the struggles of the Kurdish students in national examinations. With these results in mind, it could be concluded that lack of Kurdish mother tongue education – along with other reasons such as the economic ones – affects Kurdish students' performances quite negatively, which further creates a huge inequality between Kurdish and Turkish students in national examinations.

This fact was not denied by any teacher, but some blamed the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) responsible and guilty for this issue. For example, Koray commented that “the difficulties the Kurdish pupils face when they start school are very obvious, but the MoNE is doing absolutely nothing about this matter. These students surely need extra support during their education.” Some others, such as Attila, also highlighted the importance of more support in the pre-school period in order for Kurdish pupils to be able to get used to the school system and, more importantly, to the language. It is apparent that the Kurdish pupils who face integration problem because of their mother tongue do indeed need extra support in order to compete with their Turkish peers, as they are expected to take the same national tests (for secondary schools and universities) when they finish pre-university schooling. These teachers are right to mention that the MoNE does not seem interested in addressing these issues, since the students experiencing difficulties cannot access any official support provided by the MoNE, unless teachers themselves want to give private lessons and/or extra support voluntarily outside school times. Having said that, the main problem with these teachers’ perceptions is that they do not seem to be willing to see the usefulness of mother tongue instruction in solving this issue; instead, they insist on replacing these pupils’ mother tongue with Turkish. They, therefore, stick to accusing the MoNE of not being able to achieve this very well.

Educational integration is, in fact, very important. For example, in Kosovo, authorities have introduced a catch-up class programme for some minority groups such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian pupils (OSCE, 2009). With this programme, pupils coming from these minority ethnic groups have a chance to catch-up with their peers and close the gap created by the disadvantage that stems from language barrier (the main language in the country being Albanian).

Drawing upon teachers’ experiences, the Kurdish pupils facing integration difficulties at the beginning of their educational careers, most likely, tend to be less successful academically when compared to other students facing no similar barriers. Thus, the integration problem caused by the lack of mother tongue instruction creates a serious

handicap for Kurdish students, and this further adversely affects their careers. As pointed out by the Kurdish teacher Murat, the percentage of the Kurdish pupils who know no Turkish when they start school is more than 60% in rural areas, while the figure might drop to 20% in urban areas. Even though this is estimate, the situation remains very serious in the Kurdish majority regions. Therefore, Turkish authorities need to work to alleviate these issues.

Amongst those interviewed for this study, one teacher with Assyrian students made remarkable comments on the issue of the language of instruction. He said:

I have Assyrian students along with the Kurdish students in my class. And what I have been observing for years is that these people also have more or less the same difficulties and problems as the Kurdish people do. But I think they are more organised than the Kurds. For example, they also complain about the difficulties caused by the Turkish instruction in schools. However, they have weekend schools in their neighbourhoods and the Assyrian pupils attend these schools to learn their mother tongue well and in a proper organised way, and they are also taught about their religion, which is Christianity, because as you know, the Turkish educational system does not teach much about Christianity and their beliefs.

What this quote clearly indicates is that the Assyrian people also have problems regarding the maintenance of their language and their religion. In other words, the Turkish education excludes them, too. It, therefore, seems that the main issue appears to be the exclusiveness of the Turkish educational system and its assimilationist approach against all other ethnicities. Thus it is not just the Kurds who suffer from the exclusive educational system, but so are other minority groups. Furthermore, this also highlights the importance of the detailed analysis of the existing educational system and its effects on all ethnic and religious minority groups in Turkey, which seems necessary in order to create a more inclusive educational system for all citizens regardless of their ethnic and religious background.

#### 7.3.4. Current Developments

Teachers were also asked about the current developments in the Turkish educational system such as the elective Kurdish course unit and Kurdish instruction in private schools, and how these affect Kurdish students and parents. According to the majority, elective Kurdish course units are a positive development, but teachers use different arguments to support their views. For instance, a Turkish teacher, Asena, commented:

I am not against an elective course unit. This is good for Kurdish pupils, because they can also learn their language along with Turkish in this case. (...) However, I am against the Kurdish mother tongue instruction, and these course units show that it is not necessary.

Likewise, another teacher Ceyda said:

Of course this is something good. I can see how this makes Kurdish pupils happy in our school. I think there is nothing wrong with it. These people learn English as a second language, so it is normal that they also learn their own language (...) but people should also understand that as long as these students learn their language like this in public schools, I think there is no need for the mother tongue education.

The quotes above show that these teachers seem to support the elective Kurdish course units in middle schools, something which is optimistic; however one of the problems that emerges from their responses is that they use the elective Kurdish course units as an excuse for the rejection of the mother tongue education. They appear to consider anything that might damage the dominant position of Turkish in education negative, as the Turkish teacher Utku stated that “as long as Turkish remains the language of instruction in all schools, students can learn any language. This might be Kurdish,

Persian, Arabic and others. (...) What matters is that all of us should have a common language in this country, and this is Turkish in Turkey”.

On the other hand, there are some other teachers who also support the elective Kurdish course units in public schools, but they criticise it in the meantime. For example, a Turkish teacher, Mehmed Âkif commented that:

Well, of course this is a big step-forward for me. Nobody could think about this a decade ago, but it is now a reality. (...) However, one of the problems here is that students start learning Kurdish in middle schools, like after 4 years they start school, and I think this is very late to learn a mother tongue, because these pupils already know it, they just need to know how to read and write, and learn the grammar etc.

Similarly, a Kurdish teacher, Zahir who also teaches Kurdish in their school stated that “Kurdish people are very happy about these elective course units, but Kurdish should be taught earlier in primary school. I teach Kurdish, and I can see that my students are very eager to learn it, they are very happy in that class. I also teach ‘Social Studies’ course unit, and their mood is different in that case.” Zahir also added another important point by highlighting the importance of mother tongue education: “This move must be seen as a stepping stone for the application of Kurdish mother tongue education, -you know- like a pilot project or something like that. (...) The feedback I get from Kurdish parents is very promising”.

Likewise, Perihan who also teaches Kurdish besides ‘Social Studies’ course unit said:

It is good that Kurdish pupils can learn Kurdish in schools, but not enough. (...) My students are very happy in Kurdish classes, I cannot tell you how happy they are. They are very active, communicating each other confidently. (...) This is normal, because people need to understand that this is our mother

tongue, we can express ourselves in Kurdish much better. (...) I must say that I am also worried. My gut tells me that these course units are only for show in order to prevent Kurdish people getting mother tongue education in Kurdish.

Similarly, Doğan, also said that “this is just a formality. The Turkish government is not sincere on this. The elective Kurdish course unit is just to delay Kurdish people’s rights like the mother tongue education”. Even though some Kurdish teachers see this move as a ‘formality’, most of them support the elective Kurdish course units, but they also criticise it. One of the criticisms is that Kurdish should be taught earlier in primary school. In the existing system, the elective Kurdish course units are offered to 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. In this case, in primary school (the first four years), Kurdish pupils move away from their mother tongue (spoken language) to try to learn Turkish, and afterwards, they start learning how to read and write in their mother tongue (written language) four years after they start school, something which is problematic. As suggested by the majority of teachers, ‘Kurdish’ should be offered as an elective course unit earlier in primary school as well as in middle school. Having said this, because the findings revealed that Kurdish parents and Kurdish pupils are very happy about the elective Kurdish course units, even offering Kurdish as an elective course unit appears to be a momentous move in the Turkish educational system.

As mentioned earlier, Kurdish instruction was made legal in private schools by the Turkish government in 2014. The majority of the teachers interviewed criticised this reform, and seem to agree with the notion that allowing Kurdish instruction in private schools is not a positive development. For instance, Murat said that “this [making Kurdish instruction legal in private schools] definitely does not make any sense, because there are already elective Kurdish course units offered in schools, so I do not understand the point”. Similarly, Melike commented that, “The Turkish government made a huge mistake by allowing Kurdish instruction in private schools, because the PKK and Kurdish nationalists can now open a private school where they can teach all course units in Kurdish. How can we be so sure that they do not teach things like Abdullah Öcalan or the PKK”. These teachers seem to be completely against any further improvement on the

Kurdish language apart from the elective Kurdish course units which is sufficient for them.

Nonetheless, the majority of those interviewed think that making Kurdish instruction legal in private schools was a 'controversial' reform. For example, Sami stated that "allowing Kurdish instruction in private schools is not an actual reform for me. This is because if you know the Kurdish people and their financial circumstances, you can then understand how ridiculous this is. (...) Most of the Kurdish people living in the southeast of Turkey cannot afford to send their children to private schools". Likewise, Şirin commented that "people in this region do not even send their children to public schools, let alone the private ones. (...) The MoNE provides all textbooks free now; however, Kurdish parents did not even buy textbooks for their children in the past. (...) I think this gives an idea of how this reform is controversial". Another teacher Emrullah also said, "I personally do not think that the Turkish government implemented this reform sincerely. This is just to show everyone that they implemented an important reform about the mother tongue education, but this is not the case".

These teachers are clearly against the Kurdish instruction in private schools, because they believe that this reform is practically inadequate. It seems that they have a point, because despite the latest change of law paving the way for instruction in Kurdish in private schools, the Turkish state has yet to tolerate fully the Kurdish language. For example, after law change was accepted by Parliament, a private primary school named "Ferzad Kemanger"<sup>31</sup> was opened in Bağlar district of Diyarbakır where 110 students are taught to this day. After opening, it has been shut down several times by Turkish police, as the school was deemed to have opened without obtaining a permit from the Provincial Directorate of National Education. After these incidents, the necessary application to become a legal private school was made to the local authority, but the Directorate have not yet approved the application, as they suggested that 'further

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<sup>31</sup> The school was named after Ferzad Kemanger who was a human rights activist in Iran. He was executed there on charges of collaborating with the Kurdish organisations.



elements are required to be approved'. Nevertheless, the Ferzad Kemanger primary school remains open, and it now fully functions despite its ambiguous and unofficial status (Al Jazeera Turk, 2015).

The abovementioned incident might also be explained by the fact that the Ak Party government has always maintained a type of nationalist discourse since it came to power in 2002. This nationalist discourse of the Ak Party was softened during certain periods, but it has never gone away completely. On the contrary, it became visible during important times of crises. As a matter of fact, in a recent interview conducted with President Erdoğan, he was asked 'do you find some demands like the mother tongue instruction extreme?', to which he responded:

Well, did we make their mother tongue elective in schools? That's all. What else should be done? They say 'it should be compulsory'. Could this really happen? This country has an official language. In Western countries, let alone the mother tongue of different ethnicities being compulsory, they do not even allow elective course units in different mother tongues, despite the fact that this actually exists in the European Union *acquis*. We already made Kurdish elective in schools, they now want to make that course unit compulsory. These demands will go on incessantly. Why? Because they are not sincere and honest (Bila, 2015).

This quote is a functional example of the nationalist discourse within the Ak Party, as Erdoğan explicitly mentioned that he does not view making a Kurdish course unit compulsory favourably. He has also spoken about compulsory mother tongue instruction before, and argued that this cannot be taken into consideration in today's Turkey, as it might lead into a dangerous path that may result in damaging and ruining the unity and solidarity of the state. Likewise, another prominent Ak Party MP, Burhan Kuzu, also stated that he is against the mother tongue instruction because, for him, "the mother tongue instruction will break the peace in Turkey." He further said, "Not only Kurds have

mothers <sup>32</sup> in Turkey. There are 18 (eighteen) different ethnic groups and what should we do if they bring their mothers as well? What if they say ‘I brought my mother, I also want to be instructed in my mother tongue?’” (Radikal, 2013). These arguments seem to be baseless, since the Kurds are the second biggest ethnic group with a population of more than 15 million in Turkey, so they cannot be compared to other smaller ethnic groups. Having said this, even the demands of smaller minority groups should be taken into consideration.

It is worth noting here that the turning point for the Ak Party to recognise the Kurdish question as it is was only after the significant decrease in support for the Ak Party in Kurdish dominated cities in the 2009 local/municipal elections which cost the Ak Party a number of major Kurdish cities that were formerly headed by them. After then, the Ak Party saw that it was necessary to address the Kurdish concerns more seriously and more directly, which resulted in the official introduction of the so-called ‘Kurdish Opening’ in 2009 (Larrabee, 2013).

Having looked at the statements and practice mentioned above, it seems that making Kurdish instruction in private schools legal could well be considered merely a formality or tactical move. For many, it is obvious that the Kurds should be allowed to have instruction in their own mother tongue – even in public schools.

### **7.3.5. Issues around the mother tongue instruction**

*Every nation has its own storehouse of thought rendered into signs; this is its national language: a store to which the centuries have added, that has waxed and waned like the moon, that has experienced revolutions and transformations, [language is] the treasury and the thought of an entire people.*

Herder (translated and quoted by Morton, 1989)

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<sup>32</sup> He is referring to ‘mother tongue’.

It has been noted in the United Nations Human Development Report (2004) that there is “...no more powerful means of ‘encouraging’ individuals to assimilate to a dominant culture than having the economic, social and political returns stacked against their mother tongue. Such assimilation is not freely chosen if the choice is between one’s mother tongue and one’s future” (p. 33). Moreover, it has also been highlighted that “limitations on people’s ability to use their native language – and limited facility in speaking the dominant or official national language – can exclude people from education, political life and access to justice.” It is clear from the above that people should not be put in a position where they must choose either their mother tongue or their career. The dilemma here is that even the freely chosen assimilation into the dominant majority culture does not guarantee one a bright future, as, in fact, it is likely that one might not have the same opportunities as the natives of a dominant culture, due to persistent language barriers. This is because a particular group sometimes wants to preserve their privilege over others, and do so by establishing a certain hegemonic position above others, as Tollefson and Tsui (2003: 197-98) neatly illustrates:

The effort by one language group to seek hegemony may contain within it the seeds of a cycle of resistance and repression. Hegemonic policies make compromises increasingly difficult and polarization increasingly extreme. The resulting struggle is not “ethnic conflict” grounded in linguistic or cultural differences, but rather a conflict over power and policy resulting from the effort of one group to establish hegemony over others.

Mother tongue education was actually one of the most sensitive issues in the interview themes. The reactions and the emotions of the teachers were different on this matter. Some became very angry and some felt a bit uncomfortable while talking about the issue of mother tongue instruction. For instance, Melike argued:

Mother tongue education seems very innocent at first, but it is actually very complex and the application of mother tongue education should be different and unique in different countries, based on their circumstances. In Turkey, for example, I fear that

the possible application of the mother tongue instruction may divide the country, as one thing is obvious: language binds us together.

Amongst some teachers, the fear that Turkey might be divided was very visible while discussing the mother tongue education issue. They thought that this step would probably lead to an autonomous Kurdish region, which will indeed result in the foundation of an independent Kurdish state. In fact, their ideological reactions were sometimes unusual. For example, a Turkish teacher, Tarkan, commented that “Let me tell you the real target lying behind the mother tongue education. With this, it is obvious that they (*referring to the Kurdish separatists*) are preparing the foundations of their independence in this region. They will then change the language here completely. I am a patriot and I like my homeland. I cannot remain silent on this [my italics]”. When he was asked “Don’t you think that this is a basic human right everyone should be given?”, he replied, “Yes, everyone should speak their mother tongue freely, but making it the language of education instruction is problematic. It will automatically divide the country, as people will not understand each other, which creates a real mess for the unity of the country.”

According to a recent study of mother tongue education in Turkey, the majority of the participants (academics, teachers and students) agreed with the view that Turkey’s current political atmosphere is not ideal for mother tongue instruction in Kurdish at the moment. 15% of those who supported this view think that Kurdish mother tongue instruction aims at separating Turkey. There are different reasons given by these participants as to why they thought this. For instance, 13.75% thought that there should be only one official language in Turkey, that is, Turkish. 12.50% argued that the people of Turkey are not ready enough for this change. Another 12.50% claimed that allowing mother tongue instruction would increase racism in Turkey. Others suspected that if Kurdish is made the language of instruction in public schools, this will only divide Turkey into two parts, a western and eastern part, because with this change there would be two entirely different languages dominating at either side of Turkey, with people from

both sides not able to understand each other (Aydın and Özfidan, 2014). This shows that there are many teachers, academics and university students in Turkey, who think in parallel with some of the interviewees of this study. Having said that, one of the ironies with such responses is that they mostly state that mother tongue education is a fundamental right of each individual. They, nevertheless, think that it will be harmful when it comes to the Kurdish case in Turkey.

It seems that there is a need in Turkey for a broader understanding of the notion of the mother tongue education in multicultural societies, since in many cases the existence of the mother tongue instruction within an educational system does not have to interfere with the official common language of a country. For example, as mentioned by the UN Report (2004: 107) “multicultural countries often need a three-language formula: i) a national or official state language, ii) a lingua franca (*a bridge language*) to facilitate communications among different groups – in some cases the official language serves this purpose – iii) official recognition of the mother tongue or of indigenous languages for those without full command of the official language or lingua franca [explanation added by the researcher].” In fact, as pointed out by Selma Irmak, who is the co-president of the Democratic Society Congress <sup>33</sup> (*Demokratik Toplum Kongresi – DTK*) while attending an event in the Ferzad Kemanger School where Kurdish instruction is being provided, “It was a dream for us and for our children to have mother tongue education in our own language. Of course, these children, as citizens of this country, will also learn Turkish that is the official language” (Al Jazeera Turk, 2015). With Turkish remaining as the official language of the country, allowing Kurdish instruction in public schools would only make Turkey a country that respects human rights more, and that cares about the values of different cultures existing in society.

There are many examples of the application of the mother tongue instruction in more than one language within a country, and Turkey, therefore, could choose what is best for

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<sup>33</sup> Democratic Society Congress was founded in 2007 in Diyarbakır in order to unite all Kurdish NGOS under one umbrella.

the society from these different examples. Moreover, Turkey has a chance to examine the advantages and disadvantages of these different examples, and it could then create its own, unique version.

There are many countries in the world which permit mother language education in language other than the official language of the state. For instance, in Spain, minority communities are allowed education in their mother languages, while Spanish remains the official language that everyone is supposed to know. This is mentioned in the Spanish Constitution:

3.1—Spanish is the official language of the State. All Spanish citizens have the duty to know Spanish, as well as the right to use it.

3.2—Other languages spoken in Spain will be official languages, along with Spanish, in their respective Autonomous Communities, in accordance with their Autonomous Statutes.

3.3—The different linguistic traditions in Spain are an important and enriching part of the country's cultural heritage, and must therefore be respected and protected. (Ferrer, 2000: 189).

Article 3 here clearly mentions that Spain does not see linguistic differences as a threat to the national unity, instead, it actually considers them as part of the Spanish culture which is enriched by these differences. Having said that, this model has been criticised by some, such as Ferrer (2000), who argued that although Spain allows other languages such as Catalan and Basque, the constitution makes it very clear that the only language seen required by the state is Spanish, which is “a legal imbalance in the constitution that is prejudicial against minority language rights” (ibid., p. 189). Despite this criticism being true in some aspects, this model might well be introduced as an initial one in a country where instruction in different languages is completely prohibited in public schools.

In another model, almost every minority groups are provided with the right to be educated in their own mother languages. In Kosovo, communities are defined in Article 3 of the constitution as follows:

National, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious groups traditionally present in Kosovo that are not in the majority, such as the Kosovo Serb, Kosovo Turk, Kosovo Bosniak, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Gorani and other communities (OSCE, 2009: 1).

In Kosovo, all ethnic minority communities either have a right to be educated in their mother tongue or have access to some assistance programmes such as a catch-up class programme, even though Albanian and Serbian are considered as the official languages of the state. If there is an insufficient number of students or another reason preventing a specific ethnic group getting mother tongue education, the local municipalities have a responsibility to provide subsidised transport to an area where they can attain mother tongue education. For example, Kosovo Turks have access to mother tongue education in towns like Prizren, Prishtina, Mamuşa and Gjilan, since Turkish is regarded as the official language of the Prizren municipality at the local level where the Turkish population constitutes more than 5% of the total population of this municipality. Besides, students who receive mother tongue education in Kosovo are also offered one of the official language course units (Albanian or Serbian) in school (OSCE, 2009).

Moreover, in another example, both English and French are regarded as the two official languages in Canada. Pupils have a right to choose to be educated in one of these languages in many places across Canada. Even pupils whose mother tongue is English can choose French as the language of instruction. Thus, although English-French bilingualism is becoming very common in Canada, it is significant that mother tongue education in these different languages are provided by the state (Churchill, 2003).

Çelik (2013b) also states that in Finland, Swedish pupils gain their education in their own language in places where the Swedish population are dominant. All these examples, along with others that not mentioned in this study, show that a number of countries in the world are trying hard to make their educational systems inclusive of different minority ethnic groups by providing them with linguistic rights such as mother tongue education. Furthermore, these examples also indicate that enabling people to receive mother tongue education in different languages within one state is quite possible and even beneficial for many nation-states – contrary to what has been argued by teachers interviewed for this present study, as they insisted that the possibility of providing minorities with the right to be educated in different mother tongues may create serious problems which might potentially affect national unity.

Despite these very different positive examples and experiences from the rest of the world, which have potentials to inspire and guide Turkey, a number of teachers are of the opinion that the mother tongue instruction should not be legalised at all in Turkish public schools. However, when they were asked about the rights of the Turkish minority in Germany, they seem to support the idea of mother tongue instruction for the Turkish community there. For instance, Melike commented that “the Turkish community in Germany had a lot of difficulties associated with assimilation in the past, but they did not set up a fight against Germany. They only waited (..) Of course, I as a Turk fully support their right to be educated in their own mother tongue.”

Another teacher Tarkan, replied to questions posed as follows:

Q: Do you think that the Turkish people living in Germany should have a right to be instructed in their own mother tongue?

A: Well, yes I would certainly want that.

Q: So what are the differences between the Turks in Germany and the Kurds in Turkey, then?

A: [He smiles] There are some differences. I have no objection to the Kurds in this country, but the people who want the mother



tongue instruction are not the Kurdish public, these people are the terrorists. They have a plan to divide our country. Nonetheless, Turkish people in Germany do not have such sneaky plans. I want to say this: If we give these terrorists the right to be educated in Kurdish, they will use it for the establishment of their independent state in the region.

Such quotes and similar ones expressed by interviewees suggested double standards in their treatment of German Turks and Turkish Kurds. Ethnic belonging and the ideology of Turkish nationalism appear to play significant roles in shaping these teachers' views. It might be true that some Kurds wish to have their children educated in their own mother language due to the fact that they would really like to see an autonomous or independent Kurdish state in the region, which is not wrong either. However, teachers seem to fail to notice the fact that the establishment of the Kurdish state is sought after by some in today's Turkey, precisely because these people's identities – including their language – were ignored and suppressed by the Turkish state for so long. Therefore, ignoring the violation of this basic human right might actually have greater consequences for Turkey.

The fact that the Kurdish teachers are underrepresented in the Turkish educational system was also used by some teachers as a reason for not implementing mother tongue instruction in public schools. Some teachers stated that even though the mother tongue instruction is required, Turkey could provide the Kurds with the right to be educated in Kurdish because there are not enough Kurdish teachers within the system. For example, İsmail commented:

Of course I support mother tongue education in any other language aside from Turkish, of course, if there is a demand. But Kurdish instruction does not seem to me very realistic. Turkey has very few Kurdish teachers employed under the MONE. Yes this is the reason why I say that making Kurdish as the language of instruction in public schools is very difficult.

Even though İsmail's comment stands on valid grounds, this fact should not prevent the Turkish government from allowing Kurdish instruction in public schools, because this is further evidence of underrepresentation of Kurdish teachers in the Turkish educational system. At this stage, Turkey could introduce Kurdish instruction in a limited number of the Kurdish populated cities as a pilot project, which could then be expanded into the region and other areas in the western part of Turkey. It seems that a detailed timetable including a set of reform plans is necessary in order to make the transition clearer and simpler.

#### **7.4. Discussion of the findings**

The views of Turkish and Kurdish teachers on issues such as the effects of Turkish instruction and the mother tongue education have been presented in this chapter. This chapter attempts for the first time to examine different views from a variety of teachers coming from different social, political and religious backgrounds regarding language issues in Turkey's Kurdish Question, something which makes this study empirically significant.

Linguistic issues that are being discussed in Turkey today, especially with relation to the peace process, remains a very complicated affair. The consequences and experiences of the current education system are obvious, with a strong negative effect on students, teachers and society – something which is accepted by almost all teachers interviewed. The reasons cited such problems however vary from one teacher to another. There is no consensus on this matter among teachers.

If we compare the views of the teachers examined in the previous chapter with this present one, it could well be said that there are consistencies in teachers' responses in terms of their stance on educational issues (such as mother tongue education) too. For instance, in the previous chapter some teachers were of the opinion that the Kurdish

Question is something that is exploited by foreign powers, so Turkey does not have a real Kurdish issue, instead, it has only a 'terror issue'. In this chapter, the same teachers saw mother tongue education as a threat to Turkey's national unity. Second of all, in the previous chapter, some other teachers thought that the Kurdish issue is an issue that has different dimensions ranging from the politics to education, and it should be dealt with accordingly by working in these different areas. In this chapter, these teachers stated that mother tongue education is a basic human right that should be given to the Kurds in Turkey. Lastly, in the previous chapter, a number of teachers believed that the Kurdish Question is Turkey's most serious issue, and that the Turkish state is reluctant to act and solve the issue, and that Kurds should fight to take their rights from the state, even if this meant a bloody struggle. In this chapter, they held the same position, claiming that mother tongue education and language are very important for the Kurds, and that these rights are worth fighting for.

The use of education for the peace process was supported by all teachers. However, some supported the use of it in order to assimilate the Kurds and 'to solve' the issue, whereas others argued that it could be made more inclusive of other ethnicities and therefore, it should be used to make people feel more accepted by the Turkish state.

The challenges faced by the Kurdish students who do not know Turkish when they start school was recognised by all teachers. They all agree with the fact that these students have serious adaptation problems, which affect their mood and their academic performance in a very negative way. However, despite the consensus on the recognition of this issue, teachers gave very different reasons for the causes of this problem. Some accused the Turkish state of not providing enough support to these students, while some claimed that this could only be solved by letting them access mother tongue education; some others mentioned that these problems are apparent because of the region's underdevelopment. It can however be argued that all these factors have an impact on students.

It has been acknowledged by all teachers that nothing is being done by the MoNE to support pupils who face language barriers in the system. As it stands, there is neither pre-school support or after they begin school, and they thus face very serious issues. Some teachers thought that pre-school support is vital, because these students need to be helped to adapt to a new situation that they are not aware of, while others argued that although students need support before school, the ideal thing to do is to allow Kurdish pupils to gain their education in Kurdish from the outset.

Offering elective Kurdish course units in middle schools are considered to be a progressive development by almost all teachers, something which is a remarkable and promising finding. On the other hand, all teachers were against the recent reform allowing Kurdish instruction in private schools. Only a few teachers seemed to be against making Kurdish the language of instruction in both public and private schools. However, most of them thought that this move is impractical.

Another noteworthy finding is that two teachers interviewed in this research appeared to teach the elective 'Kurdish' course unit, even though they are normally qualified to teach the 'Social Studies' course unit. As a matter of fact, some teachers even stated that these optional course units cannot be offered to students in many middle schools due to the lack of Kurdish teachers. There are two reasons for this: Kurdish teachers are underrepresented in the educational system, and there is also lack of (enough) infrastructure (sources, instructors etc.) – for elective course units. In fact, a recent research revealed that only 83.344 students selected elective courses in other languages (Kurdish, Abaza, Circasian etc.) in the 2014-15 academic year, something which probably stems from the existence of infrastructural problems mentioned above (Kaya, 2015).

Some teachers seem to have some kind of dilemma on the issue of mother tongue education. They actually looked very nervous while the interviews were being conducted. They usually support mother tongue education in different languages, but when it comes to the Kurdish case in Turkey, they hesitate and answer in a rather

uncomfortable way. At times it appears as though their nationalist ideology does not allow them to express their real views on the issue, though these views may actually be quite positive. Instead, they always talked about excuses and the 'hidden agenda of separatist Kurdish groups' in order to justify their views on mother language instruction in Kurdish.

## **7.5. Implications of the research**

In earlier chapters, language was mentioned specifically with regards to the definition of nation and nationalism. It was stated that language is an important element in the creation of a nation, and thus nationalism. For instance, as highlighted by Davis (1967: 150) "the common fate [of a nation] is primarily a common history; the common national character involves almost necessarily a uniformity of language." This chapter shows that some teachers considered the uniformity of language to be very important. For this reason, many argued that mother tongue instruction in Kurdish in public schools would damage national unity and cohesion, because it would create two groups of people who would not be able to understand each other. It seems that in their minds, the link between the Turkish nation and the Turkish language is actually more important than is usually assumed.

Another relevant finding here is the difference between the terms 'assimilation' and 'integration', something that is frequently discussed in the literature on education too. In this chapter, a few teachers were in favour of assimilation, while the majority supported integration. However, as mentioned earlier, integration could sometimes become a gentler version of assimilation. For example, according to the assimilationist ideology, some of the rights of minority ethnic groups or immigrants could well be limited, and the purpose of this is "the eventual elimination, by education or decree, of all but one language, which is to remain the national language" (Jacob and Beer, 1985: 2). On the contrary, as stated by Bourhis (2001), according to the integrationist

approach, the state is seen as a liberal body that does not interfere with the rights of its citizens regardless of their background. Nonetheless, integration does not always mean that it is beneficial for minority groups. For example, support for 'one official language' to be taught to everyone in public schools (which may include ones providing mother tongue education in different languages) might mean a kind of 'soft assimilation', because this idea sometimes establishes the hegemonic position of the 'official language' spoken by the majority over other languages spoken by the minority (Uçarlar, 2009). Therefore, this point should be taken into consideration by the Turkish state.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **THE EFFECTS OF KEMALISM AND NATIONALIST THEMES WITHIN THE TURKISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE KURDS**

*Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them.*

Foucault (cited in Ball, 1990: 3)

#### **8.1. Introduction**

Kemalism has been the official national ideology of Turkey since its foundation. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Kemalist ideology has flourished in Turkey after Atatürk died, and remains the official ideology of the Turkish state, maintaining its significance even under the rule of conservative parties for years, such as current Ak Party (Justice and Development Party) which is known for its anti-Kemalist position.

The ideology of Kemalism is embedded in the state philosophy of Turkey. Therefore, one could see the presence of Kemalism in government departments/offices, hospitals, and schools including public and private ones. Aside from these, Kemalism is also visible in Turkey's daily life. Atatürk's statues, his portraits and his sayings are everywhere in the streets of every city in Turkey. It is obvious that Atatürk has a ubiquitous presence in public places. As Glyptis (2008: 356) notes, "Atatürk's face appears on posters behind supermarket counters, in barbershops and video stores, in bookshops and banks; Atatürk talismans even dangle from car mirrors, while Atatürk pins adorn lapels. And even the Turks who do not join in with such spontaneous commemorations know how to 'read' the Atatürk semiotic universe."

The cult of Atatürk is a crucial part of the Kemalist ideology, which was initially established in the 1930s when Atatürk was still alive. For example, the first examples of statues/monuments across Turkey were encouraged by Atatürk himself as he clearly made himself out to be the unquestionable leader, referring to himself as the 'eternal chief' (*ebedî şef*) even during his own time. Having said that, the establishment of the cult of the Atatürk personality was completed by his followers (including the Turkish armed forces, which is a fierce defender of the Kemalist ideology) after his death. Zürcher (2007: 182) explained this as follows:

...[six principles of Kemalism] formed the state ideology of Kemalism and the basis for indoctrination in schools, the media and the army. Sometimes Kemalism was even described as the 'Turkish religion'. Nevertheless, as an ideology it lacked coherence, and more importantly, emotional appeal. The ideological void [which] was filled to some extent by the personality cult which grew up around Mustafa Kemal during and even more so after his lifetime... He was presented as the father of the nation, its savior, its teacher.

In the existing curriculum in Turkish education, the cult of Atatürk's personality and his ideology, Kemalism, are the two fundamental elements that are promoted to students. Students are expected to embrace Atatürk's world-view, and they are even supposed to interpret different phenomena according to his ideas. Kemalism is considered to be a taboo which should not be questioned within the classroom environment according to Article 11 of the Basic Law on Education (Ministry of National Education, 2012), even though one of the most important educational attainments emphasised in schools and often in textbooks is 'critical thinking' (*eleştirel düşünce*). This is somewhat ironic.

Because Kemalism continues to dominate the education system in Turkey, as well as its influence in politics and daily life, this chapter thus seeks to understand how it, and the themes that are related to the cult of Atatürk in the curriculum, are viewed by teachers with predominantly Kurdish students. Moreover, I seek to understand how the Kemalist ideology that is embedded in the existing curriculum plays a role in shaping students'



personalities. Furthermore, and more specifically, this study also looks at the effects of Kemalism on the Kurdish pupils, and how the ideology-driven education system affects the stance of Kurdish pupils towards the Turkish state.

In the second section, teachers' attitudes towards Atatürk, and the themes/educational attainments that are directly related to the ideology of Kemalism will be discussed. The effects of the Kemalist ideology on pupils will also be examined. After this, the next section examines the "official history narratives" and how teachers teach these in the classroom. The fourth section of the chapter will specifically analyse the nationalist themes in the textbooks. In the fifth section of the chapter, what teachers think about how students are shaped by the existing system will be discussed. Finally, in the sixth section, the views of teachers on the so-called 'Student Pledge'<sup>34</sup> will be examined.

## **8.2. Teachers' views on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the ideology of Kemalism within the Turkish Educational System**

Teachers have different views about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Even though a number of teachers have favourable views about Atatürk, most of the teachers' views are quite unfavourable. For example, a Turkish teacher, Utku commented:

Atatürk devoted his life to the independence of this country. We owe him in this case. Having said that, when we talk about Atatürk in, let's say, textbooks or in the curriculum, I admit that there is definitely some sort of exaggeration there. I believe that we should tell our students about him but it should be done in a more logical way. (..) Yes I mean the way we do it now seems not to be logical to me. We just teach his personality and the Kemalist ideology right now, we should teach about his ideas like how his nationalist idea created this country from nothing.

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<sup>34</sup> Student Pledge was a controversial nationalist "oath" that used to be recited by pupils every day before school. The issues about the Pledge will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Another Turkish teacher, Asena, also commented that:

I think that our textbooks mention Atatürk more than enough. Nevertheless, I do not agree with the opinion that Atatürk and his ideology should be removed from our textbooks. No, if we do that, that would mean we do not appreciate what he did for us anymore. However, we should teach what he did and his ideas without making students think that he was a super hero. (..) He was a man with capabilities, but he was able to do what he did just because his nationalist opinions made people come together and believe in him. This was the spirit of the Turkish Independence War.

It seems that the main point highlighted by these teachers is not about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and even Kemalism, but his 'nationalist' ideas. They believe that Atatürk's personality is definitely exaggerated in the curriculum, despite the fact that they love Atatürk, but the exaggeration in terms of nationalist ideas in the curriculum seems to be fine with them. In fact, some teachers such as Tarkan even said that "...educational attainments and themes involving Turkish nationalism should actually be increased in order to make students embrace Turkish nationalism." In this regard, the some Turkish teachers think differently to their nationalist counterparts. For example, Ceyda commented that:

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is the leader and founder of this country, so I don't see any problem in mentioning Atatürk in our textbooks, but it is quite popular to attack Atatürk nowadays, and this especially has been the case since the AKP came into power in 2002. So the political atmosphere of the country is now open for criticism of Atatürk. They abolished the Student Pledge for the same reason. (..) I foresee that they will try to wipe Atatürk out from everywhere in Turkey but I will make sure they won't succeed.

Another Turkish teacher, Koray, also said:

We will teach Atatürk to our children as long as the Turkish nation lives in these lands. It is our duty to do so. (..) I personally don't care about those people criticising Atatürk irresponsibly. (..) His system of thought [Kemalism] should also be treated the same.

For these teachers, Atatürk's personality appears to be a very important matter since it seems that for them he is considered as someone who created a new country and a new modern lifestyle for them, without whom these would not have been achieved. The difference here between these teachers who shared very similar views on previous issues is that some of them love Atatürk purely because he founded the Turkish state based on Turkish nationalism which – they believe – made Atatürk successful, while the others credited Atatürk himself for everything he did. In short, Atatürk can be defined as the modern and secular leader of Turkey in the minds' of some, though he is certainly a great nationalist leader for the others.

In this regard, teachers' perceptions and the way they define Atatürk do indeed vary according to their ideological backgrounds. For example, Atatürk becomes a completely different character in the responses of some teachers. A Turkish teacher, Mehmed Âkif, commented that,

Mustafa Kemal was the person leading the Independence War of Turkey. He was certainly a successful general. However, apart from these facts, he was not a good man in my opinion. We know for sure that he was a dictator causing the deaths of many innocent people for the sake of creating the new secular state in the single party period. If you ask my opinion, I personally do not like him.

Similarly, a Kurdish teacher, Zahir, even argues that:

To be honest with you, I hate Atatürk. He was the person who tried to assimilate my ethnic identity. He started all of this nonsense, and we still suffer from it.

It appears that a number of Turkish and Kurdish teachers share more or less the same views on the personality of Atatürk, even though the Kurds seem to be filled with more hatred against him when compared to Turkish teachers. This might be explained by the fact that the Kurds have suffered a lot since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. These include policies such as forced assimilation attempts that were implemented in the first instance directly by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Another significant difference that emerges from the responses is that some Turkish teachers, unlike the Kurdish ones, gave Atatürk credit for winning the War of Independence, although they specifically mentioned that they do not like him personally.

In some Kurdish teachers' minds, the image of Atatürk is even worse when compared to the ones mentioned above. For example, Sami commented:

Mustafa Kemal was no different to Hitler and Mussolini. (..) I think he would have done similar things if he had as much power as Hitler. He had rather limited power and even then he has done terrible things against minorities in Turkey.

It is apparent that these teachers think about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in a very negative way. In fact, he was compared with Adolf Hitler specifically by a number of Kurdish teachers due to the similarity between the two leaders they claimed was based on the fact that both created a "nation" by exercising their authority over people (resulting in the emergence of the cult figure), and dealt with opposition in a ruthless way. Lastly, all these leaders viewed minority groups unfavourably within their states. As a matter of fact, in his recent book *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*, Ihrig (2014) claims that Atatürk and his new (Turkish) state – along with the nationalist policies implemented at the time – were taken very seriously by Adolf Hitler in nationalist sense while he created the

Third Reich. Ihrig further asserts that Hitler's nationalist policies, his views on minority groups in Germany and his attempt to make himself an unquestionable leader called *Führer* (together with the development of a cult around his figure and an extreme ideology) were all influenced by the example of Atatürk's Turkey, since "...for the Nazi texts and commentators, the new Turkey was a Führer state par excellence." (ibid., p. 165)

On the other hand, some other teachers also commented on Atatürk's authoritarian character, but in a way that is specifically within the context of religion. For instance, Ayşe said:

I personally do not want to teach Kemalism to my students. (..) I see it as an ideology that is full of hate and I do not like Atatürk himself... (..) In particular, Mustafa Kemal's stance against religion was very unpleasant. He tried to remove Islam and its symbols from the public sphere in Turkey and he partly succeeded in this. I cannot have any sympathy for a man like this, because I try to be a pious Muslim.

Similarly, a Kurdish teacher, Mehmed added:

Mustafa Kemal ordered the execution of many Islamic scholars at the time in order to replace the authority of Muslim scholars with his secular authority.

With regard to Atatürk and his position on religion, these teachers appear to be against Mustafa Kemal and Kemalism because they regard Mustafa Kemal's policies towards religion as unacceptable. In fact, pious Muslim people in general do not view Atatürk very favourably within society in Turkey, and the main reason for this is the fact that Atatürk's stance against religion was not very positive.

In his book named *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography*, Hanioglu (2011a) claimed that Atatürk was not completely against religion, despite being an atheist. Instead, he was very pragmatic about it. According to him, he used Islam in times when it served his purpose such as during the War of Independence and in the process of the formation of his version of Turkish nationalism. As also mentioned by another Turkish historian Toprak (Radikal, 2012), Atatürk actually held an “anticlerical position” against religions. It could be argued that Mustafa Kemal was in favour of the Turkified version of Islam, as he clearly saw that Islam was actually inseparable from the Turkish culture at the time. That is why he established the Directory of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) under his secular authority, and he further commissioned Islamic scholars to translate the Quran (Holy Book of Islam) and Hadith (Prophet Muhammad’s Sayings) into Turkish. In fact, he even dared to change the Adhan (Call to Prayer) from Arabic to Turkish in order to Turkify Islam. The aforementioned examples show a man trying to use religion for specific purposes, such as promoting Turkish nationalist ideals, rather than someone trying to destroy it. Having said this, Mustafa Kemal attempted to secularise Turkish political life in an authoritarian manner, executing Islamic scholars who resisted his reforms during the early days of the Republic.

Even though Atatürk’s stance against religion is well-known in Turkey, ironically, some of the textbooks such as the *Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge* (e.g. see Kutlutürk, 2012) include sections like “Atatürk and Religion” in which Atatürk’s positive comments on Islam and the Prophet Muhammad are mentioned with quotes like “Religion is necessary. Nations without religion cannot survive” and “We have [such] a strong religion” (see: Meral, 2015). Yet, it needs to be borne in mind that there were different ‘Atatürks’; there was the one during the Independence War, and then another during the process of the establishment of the new Turkish Republic. Before the war was won, Atatürk seemed to be a religious person, giving sermons on Fridays in the mosques, constantly claiming that he was trying to save the Sultanate and the Caliphate. However, it is known that he told one of his closest friends of his secret plans and his hidden agenda even during the war (Dündar, 2008). In fact, he later explained himself in his book, *Nutuk* (the Address) why he would pretend to be a defender of the Sultanate and

the Caliphate: 1) it was easier to recruit people to fight in the war this way 2) he thought that people were not ready for his radical and revolutionist views during the war (Atatürk, 1970). However, Atatürk's stance against Islam after the foundation of Turkey changed radically. He tried to Turkify Islam in a ruthless way, because he seems to have come to the realisation that Islam was part of the Turkish identity then, and the only way to decrease its importance was, in his view, via its "Turkification".

Based on this discussion, it appears that the textbooks trying to link Atatürk and Islam by mentioning his earlier comments on religion might well be the result of the conservative mind-set of the Ak Party government that has ruled Turkey since 2002. This is because the content of the textbooks has become more religious in some sense with the addition of new themes and quotes promoting Islam. Atatürk's quotes on Islam in the textbooks appear to be a result of this specific policy in Turkish education. Although scholars such as Cornell (2015) see the Ak Party's policy in education as an attempt at "Islamisation" of the Turkish educational system, I argue that it is more appropriate to call it the "Islamisation of themes" which were already present in textbooks. This is because, in general, the dominance of the Kemalist ideology in the education system (in the curriculum and educational attainments, and themes) has also been strengthened.

### **8.2.1. The effects of the cult of Atatürk and the national ideology of Kemalism in education on pupils**

One of the Kurdish teachers Şirin commented:

My Kurdish student came to me once and told that his parents were talking about Atatürk at home, criticising him by using some harsh phrases such as '*katil*' (killer). He said he started crying while they were discussing this and when he was asked what he was crying about, he told them "Because you are criticising Atatürk but I love him. Why are you doing this?" When he told me all of this, I actually felt very bad. This is just one example, there are many examples showing that students

are influenced very negatively by the Kemalist propaganda in the education system, and I feel responsible myself, because we are here to make this propaganda work.

The quote above clearly indicates how Kurdish students are affected by the ideology-driven Turkish national education. With this in mind, this demonstrates that the Turkish national educational system shapes these students' personalities by reconstructing their mental state through the ideological curriculum, and by doing so, the main goal of the national education – which is to create a generation following Atatürk's path sincerely – seems to be accomplished in some sense, at least at the primary school level.

On the other hand, this example also shows that the effects of the implementation of the ideology-driven national education on the Kurds are very serious, as the story above shows the ways in which the Kemalist propaganda within education could potentially foment a negative relationship within Kurdish families. In addition to a possible conflict within families, another type of conflict may also become a serious matter between families/parents and teachers, as another anecdote mentioned by Melike shows:

While I was talking about Atatürk's life in the classroom one day, one of my Kurdish students said something in Kurdish that I did not understand. After the class, I tried to find out what he said and I learned from his friends that he actually said "Biji Serok", and my Kurdish colleagues said this automatically means "Long Live Abdullah Öcalan" when the phrase is used without a specific name by a Kurd. Of course, I got very angry and asked his parents to come to the school as soon as possible. When they came, I was very straightforward, telling them this is something that cannot be tolerated in the classroom. They did not say much and left embarrassedly. I cannot allow such a thing in the classroom no matter what the consequence is. (..) So you see how Kurdish families are raising their children. (..) They are filled with hate against us. This is one of the reasons why we must teach these children the importance of national values.



It is evident from the quote that teachers and parents experience unpleasant and awkward social situations over controversial issues caused by the ideological character of the education system. This further appears to be a functional example showing that the indoctrination through the Turkish nationalism-oriented curriculum not only affects Kurdish students, but their families as well. Likewise, a similar anecdote was mentioned by a Turkish teacher, Beyhan who says:

When I was teaching the 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism' course unit, my Kurdish student asked me "My teacher! Did Atatürk really kill Islamic scholars?" A pupil at that age cannot ask a question like this without someone telling him this kind of information. I guessed he might have heard this from his family.

This quote, a slightly different version of the former one, also indicates a similar probable "parents-teachers (family-school) conflict". These further suggest that schools are seen as one of the main departments of the state wherein the dictation of the hegemonic ideology takes place; teachers are seen as the agents of the educational authority which operates in a way that leads to the assimilation of all citizens other than Turks. On the other hand, these examples can also be interpreted as examples of the reactions of Kurdish parents/families to such designs, as it seems that Kurdish parents try to neutralise or at least minimise the negative impacts of the Turkish educational system on their children. It is quite normal for Kurdish families to show a reaction in this case, as they may be worried that their children might be assimilated into the hegemonic culture, that is, Turkishness.

On the other hand, the phrase "Biji Serok" used by Melike's student offers a window into another crucial issue – that is the reproduction of the hegemonic culture in a dominated community in a different form. In this case, the idea of having "one" great leader for the Turks (Atatürk) seems to be reproduced within the Kurdish national movement for the Kurds (Abdullah Öcalan). This can be seen, for example, in the new curriculum and textbooks recently introduced by the *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*

(Democratic Union Party – PYD), the Syrian affiliate of the PKK, in the regions they rule in Northern Syria. The newly introduced curriculum is causing controversy over its promotion of Abdullah Öcalan and his ideological tenants, as well as for including biased information. Indeed, other Kurdish political parties in the region, such as the Kurdish National Council (KNC), accuse the PYD of implementing a curriculum that is too ideological (Syria Direct, 2015). The new textbooks include sections such as “Öcalan Philosophy”, with long passages devoted to Abdullah Öcalan’s saying and including many photographs of him. Therefore, as mentioned by the secretary of the West Kurdistan Teachers’ Union, Jian Zakaria, this ideology-driven national curriculum has the potential to foster a kind of “totalitarian ideology” within classrooms “by sanctifying the leader and militarising the schools” (Syria Direct, 2015: 1). This is precisely what has been happening in Turkish schools since the 1920s.



**Figure 8.1.** Page of a primary school textbook showing Öcalan's photo, from Northern Syria

(Source: Syria Direct, 2015)

The creation of a new “cult” of Abdullah Öcalan within Kurdish nationalism might actually be explained by the Kurds’ reaction to the hegemonic Turkish culture and the cult of Atatürk that is visible everywhere in Turkey, ranging from schools to streets. As a matter of fact, this statement can further be reinforced by one example given by a Turkish teacher, Hatice:

I have observed a kind of reaction amongst my Kurdish students. For example, I remember we were reading a poem about Atatürk in the textbook once and my Kurdish student told me in front of the class “Atatürk is not my leader, my real leader is Abdullah Öcalan”. I can certainly understand how they can feel like this with our current education system. I suppose I also sometimes feel a similar thing to this ‘[i.e.,] this man is not my leader, somebody else is’.

The example above shows that some Kurdish students do react to what is being taught in schools. Additionally, as mentioned in another recent study conducted by Can et al. (2012), one of the teachers interviewed commented that “the textbooks talk about ‘a Turkish child’ in poems. Some students argue against it, saying that it should actually be ‘all children’...” (p. 34). Likewise, some of the teachers interviewed in this study mentioned that they witnessed many times that some Kurdish students used to recite the latter statement in the Student Pledge (which has now been abolished by the government) as “How happy is the one who says I am Kurdish” instead of the official “How happy is the one who says I am Turkish”; many Kurdish students did not recite it at all.

The excessive use of Atatürk narratives in the textbooks not only has a negative impact on Kurdish pupils, but also on Turkish pupils, too. In particular, pupils in primary schools might well be influenced by the cult of Atatürk narratives in a cognitive sense. To illustrate this, Turkish columnist Hakkı Yalçın wrote an article in 2010, publishing some of the letters written by primary school pupils to Atatürk himself for the purpose of

remembering him during the anniversary of his death. Some of the striking examples are as follows:

- I know that you see see and hear me, my (founding) father. I drink my milk every morning and I do my homework (An 8 years old girl)
- People who sit in your seat make my father and mother cry. Can you help us my (founding) father? (A 7 years old girl)
- They even stole our children's day from us. Please say something to them. (A 10 years old boy) (Yalçın, 2010)

These short examples clearly indicate that there is a serious issue of children developing worrying perceptions about Atatürk, as pupils tend to see him as an extraordinary person who, despite his death, continues to have the power to help them. Interestingly, one of the teachers who used to work in the western part of Turkey commented that:

Since I have worked in the western part of Turkey, I can actually compare the perceptions of Turkish and Kurdish pupils. My Turkish students would admire Atatürk, they would simply love him and I did not have any problem regarding teaching Atatürk or anything like that, but my Kurdish students seem confused, and I sometimes feel awkward when teaching – you know – Atatürk, his life, his principles et cetera. (..) Well, I think Kurdish pupils already have an idea about Atatürk before they start school, because many Kurdish families dictate to their children that Atatürk was a bad man. I am against the ideology of Kemalism but not Atatürk, so this is not acceptable for me, because Atatürk was our saver. I mean he saved us all, including the Kurds.

This comment draws a clear distinction between Turkish and Kurdish pupils on their perception of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. One of the issues that emerges from these is that while Kurdish pupils might potentially react to the ideological culture dominated by Kemalism and its interpretation of nationalism, which is constructed through the ideology-driven educational system, Turkish pupils seem to tend towards internalising/embracing the ideology, including the aggrandisement of Atatürk's

personality and the exaggeration of his ideology, Kemalism, with its nationalist and sometimes even racist discourse. In her postgraduate work titled *Reading of Turkish Modernisation: Primary School Children's Perception of Atatürk*, Elmas (2007) examined Turkish primary school pupils' perception of Atatürk constructed both in the schooling environment and in daily life. The study mentions the main keywords used by participants when talking about Atatürk as "saver" (20 times), "leader" (19 times), "sun" or "light" (18 times) "clever" or "intelligent" (18 times) respectively (ibid., p. 41). She further stated that the current education system in Turkey, with a huge reference to the cult of Atatürk, results in the creation of a "sacred and secular" (laic) figure within students' minds. Hence, she concluded that, "schools in this system become a holy place (chapel) under the symbolic domination of Atatürk" (ibid., p. 62).

The cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk could actually be seen in many people's minds. For example, Özyürek (2006) examined the guest books of the exhibition named "To Create a Citizen" displaying objects about Atatürk. One of the visitors wrote the following paragraph:

Dear Atam [Atatürk],

If I can breathe, I owe it to you. Unfortunately there are still a number of people who dare to call you traitor. They are lower than human beings and have serious brain damage. I ask for forgiveness for a thousand time in their name (p. 83).

Likewise, a university student also wrote the following note:

I love you,

I am thankful that you taught me and others how to think and how to be a human. But there are some people who misunderstand your principles and ideas. I am sure your bones are aching in your grave. I am a second year student in a dental school. (...) I am sure you will reincarnate (*reenkerne olursun*) one day. I am waiting for that day. It will be a lot of fun. Atam,

please cut off your peace and do something. You can do it. I am really sick of these people. There are all nutcases who hide behind your principles. I want you back.

Trying to be a student (p. 102).

These examples only show how 'the cult of Atatürk' that is promoted by the Turkish state, and that is visible in public places might make people even 'paranoid'. Thus, considering the negative effects of the cult of Atatürk in the education system, there appears to be two major consequences for Turkish and Kurdish pupils. These are : 1) to make Turkish pupils sanctify Atatürk, something which culminates in the unquestionable authority, and thus to make them become sincere Kemalists by using this authority, with a strong sense of Turkish nationalism which becomes internalised, and 2) to make Kurdish pupils become assimilated into the Turkish culture, by making them forget their language and culture, which usually leads to them becoming passive persons who are ashamed of being who s/he is in the first place. This eventually makes them become very different people who feel a deep hatred against the hegemonic Turkish culture after they finish their schools and go to university.

With the rise of both Turkish and Kurdish nationalism in society, the polarisation between the Turkish and Kurdish nationalists becomes more visible. Therefore, it could be argued that Turkey's efforts to maintain a unitary state entity, which is one of the major goals of the Turkish educational system and one of the obsessions in society, is actually feeding the idea of separatism more than the idea of unity. It is, therefore, possible to hypothesise that the state-driven and Kemalism-oriented national educational system threatens the likelihood of national cohesion in Turkey.

### **8.3. 'Official History' narratives in History textbooks**

Another matter regarding Turkish history textbooks is something called the 'official history' (*resmî tarih*). In Turkey, history that is told in the textbooks is known as the

'official history', which is written according to the Kemalist ideology and especially Atatürk's book 'the Address' (*Nutuk*). Many historians in Turkey believe that any history narrative that is based on *Nutuk* is actually single-sided because the *Address*, the main source of the official history, was actually a speech given by Atatürk in Parliament in order to justify his actions during the Independence War and his policies during the foundation of the Turkish Republic, thus making it highly problematic.

Based on the interviewees' responses, it seems that the majority do not believe what is told in Turkish history textbooks. Interestingly, those who teach history-related course units use different methods in teaching so as to circumvent what they perceive as biased. Therefore, even though the Ministry of Turkish National Education (MoNE) strictly controls both the production and the distribution of the textbooks taught in Turkish schools, it appears that many teachers are not solely dependent upon the textbooks given by the MoNE. They are in fact eager to use different materials, such as secondary sources (books, magazines etc.,) or visual sources (videos, movies etc.,) in parallel with the textbooks. As a matter of fact, some teachers seem to do the teaching in a way that contradicts the contents of the textbooks. For example, a Kurdish teacher, Emrullah commented:

While teaching History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism course unit, I usually tell my students that some of the information given in the textbook is absolutely biased and a complete lie. I sometimes tell my students other sides of the stories that are not told in the textbooks.

Likewise, a Turkish teacher Mehmed Âkif also said:

Believe me or not but my heart tells me "do not teach this bullshit", because you know these history textbooks do not tell the truth. However, my brain then tells me that "your students will be asked for these in the national exams", and I teach them

historical events as they are in the textbooks. Nevertheless, I sometimes cannot help myself commenting on some topics.

The Kurdish teacher Sami, however, uses a different method:

I teach them what I am supposed to do in the classroom, but I recommend them some history books, novels, and memoirs, and I further chat with them in Kurdish to discuss these things out of the school, which is not illegal.

Interestingly, a Turkish teacher, Murat who made rather nationalist comments on previous matters so far also commented:

We should also teach the mistakes made by our predecessors in history. (..) Atatürk made mistakes, the Ottoman Empire made mistakes as well. I try to teach these to my students. (..) I think teacher should not be dependent on the textbooks and teach only what is there.

Having looked at the comments above, teachers highlight an important point that shows us teaching is sometimes done differently in classrooms when compared to what is defined by the MoNE guidelines. Therefore, the construction of history by the Turkish state appears to be deconstructed first, and then reconstructed by many teachers in this case.

Those who are teaching a different version of history by challenging the “official history”, however, take a huge risk here by teaching what is not in the textbooks, because in case of a complaint to the principal, teachers would likely first receive an official warning, or be relocated, and perhaps even be fired entirely. In fact, besides teaching something that contradicts the official curriculum, one Turkish teacher working in Erzurum province was even punished with relocation by the Provincial Directorate of National Education due to an accusation that he spoke Kurdish with his Kurdish students



in the classroom. In an interview after the incident, the teacher further claimed that the school administration put huge pressure on teachers and students, and that some of his colleagues used to punish their students merely because they spoke Kurdish to each other or sang a song in Kurdish (Radikal, 2014). This is undoubtedly one of the practical examples showing the degree of intolerance in Turkish schools towards any kind of “difference” that is not tolerated within the frame of the educational policies and the curriculum.

Another point worthy of mention is that teachers face a complicated dilemma in teaching what is written in the textbooks against what they believe to be true. Based on teachers’ responses, it seems that they feel quite uncomfortable in both cases since on the one hand student attainment is at stake and on the other there is the idea of teaching a single-sided and biased. Therefore, the rewriting of history textbooks with a reference to a different range of sources seems to be a crucial step here, as the current version of history reflects Atatürk’s point of view alone.

Teacher autonomy is also another matter that needs to be addressed by the MoNE in this case due to the strictly centralised characteristic of the Turkish educational system. As mentioned by Pearson and Moomaw (2006), many issues teachers and students face in the classroom –such as the ones mentioned above- could be solved by granting more autonomy to teachers. Indeed, this would empower teachers as well as students, because students would also benefit from a more autonomous environment in schools. In this regard, teacher autonomy that should be granted by the MoNE can be described as follows:

If teachers are to be empowered and regarded as professionals, then, like other professionals, they must have the freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students (as doctors and lawyers do for their patients and clients). Experts have defined that freedom as teacher autonomy (ibid., p. 44).

As for teachers' views on the "History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism" course unit, there are two main positions that I could discern from the data: 1) those who are in favour of the course unit, and 2) those who think this course unit should be redesigned from scratch and should not include the cult of Atatürk. For example, a Turkish teacher, Melike commented:

We should of course teach our history and the person who created it [referring to Atatürk]. What is wrong with this? (..) If some people do not like this, well, they can go wherever they like, because this is our country and this shall remain like this.

On the other hand, a Kurdish teacher Şirin argued:

This course unit should be removed from the curriculum, just as the National Security Information course unit was recently removed. Teaching students [about] Atatürk and Kemalism does not make any sense in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If this was in Hitler's time, I would have understood it (..) We should focus on teaching more common values that everyone in this society would benefit from.

As argued by those advocating the second position, the "History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism" course unit reflects the mind-set of the single party period and the rule by dictatorship in the early days of the Republic. In order to have a more diverse education system that is inclusive of all ethnic and religious groups, the removal of this course units from the curriculum seems to be required, together with removal of other similar themes in other textbooks.

#### **8.4. Nationalist themes in the textbooks**

Nationalist themes are everywhere in the textbooks, they are not just in the social sciences course units, you can even find something in maths, which is strange, but it certainly shows that how nationalist our education system is.

A Kurdish teacher, Gülten

There are nationalist themes in the textbooks, because it is our national education (*he laughs*)... I do not understand why this should be wrong. Other countries also want to educate their youth according to their nationalist ideals. If I live in one of those countries, I cannot criticise anyone for being a nationalist, because it is who they are.

A Turkish teacher, Yılmaz

These two comments reflect the main positions on the issue of the existence of the nationalist themes in the textbooks. The former quote represents the first position which argues that nationalist themes are overemphasised in the current textbooks, and that this is a huge mistake, while the latter represents the second position which defends the idea that Turkish education is nationalist and that it should remain nationalist because there is nothing wrong with this.

Another thing that is worthy of consideration regarding the comments above, especially with regards to the second comment, is that some of the teachers seem to assume that the Turkish state is their personal property, exemplified by the comment mentioned earlier "...if they do not like it, they can go wherever they like." Using this kind of language appears to be very problematic, because it assumed that not every Turkish citizen has a right to comment on issues they find questionable.

Returning to the topic, Kemalism not only dominates the education system with the cult of Atatürk, but also with its nationalist discourse, too. Turkish nationalism within the

Kemalist ideology is very visible and powerful; indeed, one of the six pillars of Kemalism was built upon is nationalism. However, “nationalism” within the Kemalist discourse appears to be an ambiguous concept, which is usually referred to as “Atatürk nationalism”, as stated in the Turkish Constitution too.

Some teachers defend the assumption that Atatürk nationalism is not based on ethnicity, instead, it is rather a supranational identity that is inclusive of every Turkish citizen, as they claim that Atatürk defined the Turkish nation as something constituted by every Turkish citizen. Having looked at the textbooks, Atatürk nationalism is – similarly – defined as being inclusive of all ethnicities, and not being racist. Nevertheless, when the textbooks mention the Turkish nation, they do talk about it within a historical context with a specific focus on the “Turkish ethnicity”, and they further talk about “external Turks” living in other countries. In other words, the Turkish nation and Turkishness are clearly mentioned as an ethnic identity in the textbooks. Therefore, even though it is claimed that the Turkishness is not an ethnic entity, it is, per contra, mentioned very visibly that it is an identity that is only related to the Turks, and Atatürk nationalism thus automatically becomes an ethno-cultural nationalism in this case. Hence, for the time being, the textbooks and the curriculum, in this regard, contradict one another.

Teachers’ and students’ experiences also prove that Atatürk nationalism promotes the Turkish ethnicity alone, and excludes all others existing in Turkey. What is more, the textbooks also mention the Turkish nation as being a great and glorious one. In fact, the virtues referring to the Turkish nation may well be considered as racist. Phrases like “... in your noble blood” and “the clever Turkish nation” are very common in the textbooks, which were thoroughly discussed separately with more examples given from textbooks in Chapter 5.

Considering the ethno-cultural nationalism that is embedded within Kemalist ideology, which is referred to as Atatürk nationalism, the Kurdish people appear to be the victims

of this hegemonic nationalist discourse more than others, as they are by far the biggest minority ethnic group in Turkey. Therefore, the negative impact of the Turkish education on the Kurds is a particular serious matter worthy of discussion.

One of the Kurdish teachers, Zahir, gave an example, which is as follows:

One day, I was sitting in the garden of my school during the noon break, I was a bit sad on that day, and one of my students approached me. He said to me “My teacher! Please do not feel sorry. I know you are Kurdish, but you are a good person.” I was really shocked and did not know what to say. This memory usually comes to my mind and makes me very sad. (..) [the student] was Kurdish (*he then laughs*).

Likewise, Can et al. (2012: 32) mentions another similar example given by a Kurdish teacher working in Istanbul:

One of my students was always denigrating the Kurds in the classroom, saying things like “They kill our soldiers. They are bad people”, words that are full of hate. I later met his mother. She told me that she was a migrant and her husband is actually Kurdish. I was astonished. I learned that he also argues with his father when his father talks with his mother on the phone in Kurdish, saying “Why are you speaking in Kurdish. Shut up. I do not want to hear that.” I am wondering whether there is any other ethnic group that hates its own ethnicity. (..) Being Kurdish is regarded as being unsuccessful and ignorant.

It has also been mentioned in the same study that a Kurdish mother living in Istanbul said that her son wants her not to wear a white headscarf when she goes to school to meet teachers, because other students could identify that she is Kurdish in that case. Besides, he also wants his mother to speak “proper Turkish” with his teachers (*ibid.*, p 42).

Having looked at the aforementioned examples regarding Kurdish identity, the alienation of Kurdish identity in the Turkish educational system seems to be one of the main causes here. Considering the literature, Kurdish students at early stages including primary, secondary and high schools do indeed feel ashamed of their ethnic and cultural identity. They often try hard to look Turkish in all aspects of daily life. In this regard, the Turkish educational system operates in a way that makes the Kurdish students ashamed of their own identity, and even to hate it.

### **8.5. Teachers' views on the type of students moulded by Turkish education**

The notion that Turkish schools produce the same calibre of students seems to reflect the reality for the majority of interviewees, even if they also held that there are always exceptions. Despite the different positions that they held on the issues discussed above, all teachers share the same view that the same calibre of students are moulded by the current education system, despite differences in their explanations of how this happens. For example, a Turkish teacher Ceyda commented:

Although I cannot say that this is the reality 100%, but I guess it is generally true, since our education system has some problems and that is why it produces more or less the same type of students in practice.

On the other hand, a Kurdish teacher Doğan noted:

After going through Turkish education, a lot of students become nationalist in one way or another, including Kurdish pupils unfortunately. Let me give you an example from my experience. I was also somehow a Turkish nationalist in some sense when I finished my compulsory education, though I was able to become fully aware of many things when I went to university, because it

takes some time to understand what is going on around you (..) I also think that this is changing, because the awareness of families is increasing day by day.

A Turkish teacher, Ramazan mentioned:

I see with my own eyes that a lot of students who finish the middle school are at least sympathisers of Atatürk and Turkish nationalism, but this situation changes for many of them later in their lives.

The Turkish educational system is assumed to produce the same calibre of students by the majority of teachers. With regards to the definition of the specific type, there appears to be three main positions: 1) The majority of the teachers interviewed were of the view that the Turkish education aims to raise a generation that is Kemalist and Turkish nationalist. 2) A number of teachers thought that the aim of Turkish education has changed recently, and thus the ideal students according to this new change are the religious ones. 3) Very few Kurdish teachers claimed that the Turkish educational system promotes only one type of person, that is a Sunni-Turk. To exemplify these, a Turkish teacher, Abdullah, said:

Students are expected to become the Kemalists with its corresponding interpretation of Turkish nationalism.

Ufuk, on the other hand, commented:

Especially with the AKP government, our education system is now promoting the type of a rather religious character. (..) There are people outside, who do not want their children be religious in any way.

Lastly, a Kurdish teacher, Doğan asserted:

It is very obvious that if you are not a Turk and a Sunni-Muslim, this then means you are not wanted within this education system which wishes to teach only why students should be a Turk and embrace the Sunni interpretation of Islam.

Considering the goals of the Turkish educational system and the contents of the textbooks used in education, the third position seems to be closer to reality than others, because it could well be hypothesised that the Turkish educational system promotes the national ideology of Kemalism with the idea of Turkish nationalism, and the Sunni interpretation of Islam. Even though the contents related to the Alevi interpretation of Islam had been added to the Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge textbook in recent years, it is obvious that the Sunni-Islamic mind-set still dominates the textbooks.

## 8.6. Teachers' views on the Student Pledge

*I am a Turk, honest and hardworking. My principle is to protect the younger, to respect the elder, to love my homeland and my nation more than myself. My ideal is to rise, to progress. O Great Atatürk! On the path that you have paved, I swear to walk incessantly toward the aims that you have set. My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish existence. How happy is the one who says "I am a Turk!".*

Student Pledge/Oath

The Student Pledge was a practical example of how the primary school pupils were constantly reminded of the main (ideological) philosophy of the Turkish education, every day, which dictated to them what type of person they needed to be. The Pledge was always treated as a controversial issue that was at the centre of the heated debates on Turkish nationalism. However, it was finally abolished in 2013 as part of a democratic reform package introduced by the Turkish government within the frame of the peace process aiming at solving the Kurdish Question (Milliyet, 2013). The decision to abolish the Pledge led to the discussions on the national characteristics of the Turkish education



on the one hand, and arguments about the necessity of preserving national values against the government's actions on the other. There were two major reactions to the reform act: 1) Some approved of the government's decision, saying that this was a necessary step, while 2) some others criticised the decision, claiming that the main purpose of this action was to damage the Turkish nation.

Teachers' views on the Student Pledge also reflect public opinion in Turkey. There are two main positions in this case, which are 1) those who fully supported the abolishment of the Pledge, and 2) those who were strictly against it.

For example, a Kurdish teacher, Perihan, commented:

The Student Pledge was something that did not make any sense at all. It was full of Turkish nationalism. Some of the Kurdish pupils in my schools did not recite it, but even those who were reciting it did not really know what it actually meant. Students at that age could not know that, they were just doing it, because it was required.

Another Kurdish teacher, Sami also added:

The Student Pledge was a symbol in my opinion. It was the symbol proving that Turkey's past was not different from Mussolini's Italy or Hitler's Germany. (..) It was definitely outdated and I am very thankful that the right decision has finally been made.

Likewise, a Turkish teacher, Muhammed, also said:

The main problem with the Pledge was actually the last two phrases. No one is supposed to dedicate their existence to another ethnic group. This evoked the idea that the Turkishness

had a privileged position over other identities, which is actually the case in Turkey.

The abovementioned comments show that the Pledge is criticised by these teachers for its overly nationalist tone, and for assuming that Turkishness was a privileged identity. It is obvious that statements such as “My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish nation” (*Varlığım, Türk varlığına armağan olsun*) and “How happy is the one who says I am a Turk” (*Ne mutlu Türk’üm diyene*) are problematic in the context of Turkey. As a matter of fact, the latter also used to be carved into mountains in South Eastern provinces; these were also later removed from mountains (see Figure 8.2). In this regard, the interpretation given by Turkish writer Ahmet Altan (2009) of the last statement in the Pledge is worthy of consideration here, arguing as he did that it was part of the Turkish state’s message to the Kurds: “If you want to be happy in this country, you need to be Turkish.” The lived experiences of many prove this point. The fact that some teachers noticed that Kurdish pupils would sometimes finish the Pledge by changing the last statement to “How happy is the one who says I am a Kurd” (*Ne mutlu Kürd’üm diyene*), shows a kind of reaction by students to a statement they felt uncomfortable with.



**Figure 8.2.** Photo showing inscription on a mountain in the district of Kızıltepe, Mardin. It says: “How happy is the one who says I am a Turk”  
(Source: Mamoste, 2013)

As a result, it is clear that the abolition of the Student Pledge, the greatest symbol of Turkish nationalism in education, was a big step forward and a significant achievement

for Turkish education. Having said that, it could also be argued that its removal, while satisfying ethnic groups such as the Kurds, functioned in a way that made the necessary broader discussion of nationalist discourse more difficult. The Student Pledge was only the most visible part of the nationalist discourse, and more efforts were – and are – needed to address the other more substantial issues within education.

## **8.7. Findings and Conclusions**

In this chapter, teachers' attitudes towards the cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the national ideology of Kemalism dominating the national education system and the existing curriculum have been thoroughly discussed. Students' perceptions, actions and reactions have also been examined, with the experiences and anecdotes given by teachers. Having looked at the responses of the interviewees, the negative effects of the Kemalist and nationalist educational system on the Kurdish pupils have also been explored.

It seems that teachers' perceptions about the cult of Atatürk are predominantly negative – apart from very few teachers, with all others were not sympathetic to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Furthermore, when it comes to the cult of Atatürk and the Kemalist ideology that are embedded within the Turkish educational system, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees including the ones who had rather nationalist views on most of the issues, agreed with the idea that there is certainly an overemphasis on these matters within both the curriculum and the textbooks.

One of the striking findings of this study is that a number of teachers actually prefer teaching some course units such as History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism according to their own preferred teaching style, and including the teaching of things that contradict the current curriculum. Even though the way teachers do this varies, the majority argued that they see the current historical narrative as constructed via a single-

sided view of historical events, so they would like to offer their students different narratives of history. Having said that, a great many of these teachers expressed their worries about the national exams where students will be asked about content derived from the official curriculum. Therefore, teachers said they could not ignore the entire textbook and teach what they want instead, and most of them specifically mentioned that ignoring what is in textbooks and teaching something else would do more harm for students in that they may fail their exams.

Another significant finding revealed in this chapter is that Kurdish students' reaction to the existing curriculum seems to create another "nationalism" amongst Kurds, whereby all the characteristics of Turkish nationalism, such as the cult of a leader and the exaggeration of the national attributes, can similarly be observed. This ideology might well be interpreted as a kind of micro-nationalism that is constructed through imitating the hegemonic culture of the official nationalism in Turkey, that is, the national ideology of Kemalism and its interpretation of Turkish nationalism.

One of the interesting findings is that the excessive emphasis on the cult of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which often leads to the sanctification of his person, appears to have some undesirable impact on the Turkish pupils, too. Given the fact that Atatürk is portrayed as an extraordinary person and a near super-hero in textbooks, the relationship between students and Atatürk becomes even more complicated and thus more controversial than is usually admitted. My findings are consistent with those of Elmas (2007) who concludes that this relationship has a "metaphysical and mystical dimension", and "regularly repeated Atatürk-centred rituals both inside and outside the school, and the state of Atatürk within the physical atmosphere of the school altogether make Atatürk a celestial and mystical figure, or even a divine figure in pupils' minds so to say" (ibid., p. 36).

Moreover, all teachers supported the view that Turkish education moulds the same calibre of students. This finding seems to be consistent with those of a recent study that

concluded that 66 out of 75 participants agreed to the statement that schools mould the same type of students in Turkey (İnce, 2012). Furthermore, this finding also corroborates with those of Toffler (2009) which claimed that some of education systems in the world are very much like factories producing standard products.

With regard to the Student Pledge, teachers expressed different opinions. Even though it has been recently abolished, some teachers still defend the philosophy behind the Pledge, saying that there was nothing wrong with it. In this regard, one of the interesting findings is that Kurdish students would react to the Pledge in different ways.

Finally, considering all of the issues discussed in this chapter, in order to understand the key issues in the Turkish educational system, the relationship between “power” and “knowledge”, as characterised by Foucault (1978), may be considered, and especially his argument about the link between knowledge, which is created by discourse, and power. In the Turkish case, knowledge is created by the Kemalist nationalist discourse, which then becomes “power” shaping/determining relationships amongst individuals within society. With this power, the national ideology of Kemalism maintains its privileged positions over other ideologies existing in society.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **9.1. Introduction**

In this thesis, I aimed to examine the relationship between the Turkish educational system and the Kurdish Question by exploring teachers' accounts of the experiences of Kurdish pupils' in Turkish education, and the effects of the ideological characteristic of Turkish education, existing curriculum, textbooks and teaching practices from Turkish and Kurdish teachers' perspectives. As I wanted to find out the real challenges Kurdish pupils are facing through schooling, I specifically looked at what was actually happening in Kurdish inhabited cities, what were the real problems facing Kurdish pupils and what are the implications of these? The data was collected via semi-structure interviews with 30 (Turkish and Kurdish) teachers from different social and political backgrounds. The subjects were chosen because for us teachers are assumed to be the actors with the best understanding of what Turkish education looks like in theory and how it is practiced, and finally how this affects pupils. Apart from interviews, the data-set also included an in-depth critical analysis of Turkish textbooks covering near history and the review of the current educational policy documents, which shape the national curriculum. In so doing, I sought answers to three main questions, which are as follows:

- 1.** What is the relationship between nationalism, the Turkish educational system, the curriculum, language of instruction and Kurdish pupils' experience of primary education?
- 2.** How does the nationalist educational system (which is dominated by the national ideology of Kemalism), the curriculum, and language of instruction affect Kurds, and thus the broader Kurdish Question in Turkey?

**3.** What do Turkish and Kurdish teachers think about the Kurdish Question, the effects of the nationalist Kemalist educational system on Kurds, and how do they react/respond to these in practice?

In the sections below, I present and discuss the key findings of the thesis, and then draw conclusions based on my analysis in this study. The main findings presented in this chapter are given and discussed under three main sections designated according to the research questions. I then move on to the main implications of my research for both academic and political debates, with the appropriate literature and current debates mentioned. Then, I intend to make some recommendations based on my findings and conclusion about what should be done in the field of education in order to be able to better address the issues raised by this study. Moreover, I address what the implications of the findings could mean for different actors such as educators, politicians and policy makers. Finally, based on what I discovered in this study, I conclude the chapter by suggesting the areas that could and should be examined by researchers in the future.

## **9.2. Overview of the chapters of the research**

Chapter 1 has given an overview of the topics of the research, explaining the background of the issues that are examined in this thesis. Chapter 2 has tried to theorise the relationship between education and nationalism by examining the views of Rousseau and Herder who both influenced the national educational systems around the world. Then, the rise of nationalism/nationalist ideas/nationalist movements has been mentioned with a number of examples from different countries given. At the end, the Turkish educational system was analysed thoroughly. Chapter 3 has looked at both Turkish and Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, with the historical overview of both nationalisms given. Also, Turkey's Kurdish Question was explained within the context of Kurdish nationalism that developed in Turkey. Chapter 4 gave a detailed summary of the

methodology used in this thesis. Chapter 5 has attempted to thoroughly analyse the 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism' textbooks taught in schools along with other textbooks. Chapter 6 explored teachers' perceptions about Turkey's Kurdish Question in general, and the views of the teachers given in this chapter on issues surrounding the Kurdish Question, such as the Kurdish Initiative and the peace process. Chapter 7 exclusively looked at the educational issues/challenges Kurdish pupils face in schools, with a particular focus on the linguistic aspect of the debate, such as mother tongue education. Finally, Chapter 8 examined the effects of Kemalism on Kurdish pupils along with the impact of the nationalist themes in both textbooks and the curriculum.

### **9.3. Turkish national education and the Kurdish Question**

*What is the relationship between nationalism, the Turkish educational system, existing curriculum, language of instruction and Kurdish pupils' experience of primary education?*

It has been documented in earlier chapters that the Turkish educational system (the existing curriculum and textbooks) is highly dominated by the national ideology of Kemalism, which also results in a Turkish nationalist discourse permeating the curriculum. The values the Turkish educational system propagates do not reflect the multicultural characteristic of Turkey, where a range of different ethnic groups exist: such as the Kurds, Armenians, Circasians, Lazs and Greeks (among others). This appears to be a serious issue in Turkish education, which causes many problems for minority students, and in our case Kurdish pupils, in both schools and their daily lives (e.g. see Uçarlar, 2009, İnce, 2012, Ince, 2012a, International Crisis Group, 2012, Kaya, 2013, Zeydanlıoğlu and Güneş, 2013, Çayır, 2014, Arslan, 2015, Çayır, 2015, İbrahimioğlu and Yılmaz, 2015, Kaya, 2015).

It has been accepted by the majority of interviewees that Kurdish pupils are being affected by the nationalist characteristics of the Turkish educational system in different



ways, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Having said that, despite this acceptance, one of the most striking findings of this study is that almost half of the teachers interviewed did not recognise the existence of a specifically 'Kurdish issue' in Turkey. Indeed, some teachers deny that there is a Kurdish problem. This is quite significant, as public opinion in Turkey regarding the Kurdish issue has changed considerably, in a very positive way in the recent past – from non-recognition to the recognition of the issue ever since the introduction of the Kurdish Initiative by the government. However, teachers who work in the east and southeast of Turkey and are directly observing the problems faced by Kurdish pupils prefer to ignore it. One possible explanation of this might be that these people are most probably Turkish nationalists and this means that they are more likely to deny that the Turkish state did not and does not treat Kurds justly. My impression from the interviews is that to those teachers holding such views seems to believe that by accepting a Kurdish problem this would damage the image and reputation of their country. However, quite the contrary, this is interesting when one considers the fact that the non-recognition of the existence of the Kurdish issue is likely to damage Turkey's image much more than the former in this case, as recognising the existing issue is very likely to lead to a possible attempt for the solution.

Another factor that is affecting Kurdish pupils is that the only language of instruction allowed in public schools is Turkish. It has been pointed out by the majority of teachers interviewed that Kurdish pupils face serious issues in schools because of this and struggle to achieve their best – something which impacts their grades as well as their personalities. This confirms the research of Coşkun et al. (2010). The challenges Kurdish pupils face when they start school, possessing either little or no Turkish, has been acknowledged by all teachers unanimously. Because there is no support provided by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the orientation period takes a lot longer for these students due to their mother tongue being Kurdish.

The national ideology of Kemalism appears to have a huge impact on Kurdish pupils. Since students are supposed to embrace/internalise the ideology of Kemalism in every

way, its effects on Kurdish youth go beyond the school environment, affecting their families and causing problems in their daily lives. This is mainly because the Kemalist ideology that is embedded in the education system is meant to shape students' personalities by making all of them sincere and even fierce Kemalists expected to interpret what is going around the world from the Kemalist perspective. This finding confirms the research of Elmas (2007) who studied the effects of Kemalism on Turkish pupils and found out that it has a hugely negative impact similar to the ways in which this thesis has described. As someone who comes from a Turkish ethnic background myself, I also had much the same feelings (e.g., admiration, adoration) for Atatürk and his ideology (Kemalism) when I was in primary school.

The negative impacts of Kemalism on Kurdish pupils are at the core of this study. There are two main reasons for this negative impact, which are 1) the excessive use of the Kemalist rhetoric in the curriculum, with the cult of Atatürk dominating textbooks, 2) the nationalist characteristics of the ideology of Kemalism promoting only Turkish nationalism. These two tend to affect all students regardless of their ethnic and religious background. To elaborate, this causes the discrimination of non-Turks in society, such as Kurds, and also aims at making Turkish students more nationalist, which automatically leads to polarisation between these groups later in their lives. This thesis, therefore, suggests that the polarisation existing in society in Turkey is fuelled by the Turkish national educational system.

The relationship between the Turkish educational system and the Kurdish Question seems to be quite negative according to the findings of this research. The findings clearly show that the existing education system in Turkey – the aims of the education system, curriculum and textbooks – has a hugely negative impact on the culture of Kurds, such as that relating to the reproduction of their language and literature. In fact, this study concludes that the education system actually aims at assimilating the Kurdish identity into the Turkish one, the latter being seen as a supra-identity in the curriculum, as well as by the Constitution of Turkey.

On the one hand, the Kurdish identity appears to be affected by the nationalist and assimilationist characteristics of the Turkish educational system, as the challenges Kurdish pupils face in schools clearly show. However, the characteristics of the education system and its assimilationist agenda drive Kurdish people to become more (Kurdish) nationalist, which may be explained as a reaction to the assimilationist policies of the Turkish state. They feel obliged to try and remain Kurdish in their lives by keeping their culture, language and traditions alive. One can understand that this is not an easy task, because the textbooks taught in Turkish schools do not mention the Kurdish culture, music, language and literature at all. Thus, Kurdish youth do not learn about their culture like Turkish students do while completing compulsory education.

The findings also revealed that particularly in rural areas of southeast Turkey, many Kurdish parents do not pay much attention to their children's education. Indeed, there are a lot of reasons for this, such as the negative financial situation and the development level of the region, but this research confirms that the nationalist characteristics of the Turkish education also has a rather undesirable impact on parents. According to teachers, the current status of the Turkish education, wherein the othering of minorities is entrenched, creates a degree of discouragement among Kurdish parents. Consequently, they do not even want to send their children to public schools.

*How does the nationalist educational system, which is dominated by the national ideology of Kemalism, the curriculum and language of instruction affect Kurdish people and thus the 'Kurdish Question' in Turkey?*

The findings of this research clearly show that the nationalist characteristics of the Turkish education, such as the nationalist themes in the existing curriculum and the domination of the Kemalist nationalist ideology, negatively affect Kurdish pupils in a rather serious way. After the initial shock they face when they begin school in trying to adapt to the Turkish language, they go through an intensive process that simply leads to

the indoctrination of a certain ideological perspective on every issue that they encounter in their studies, because, as this research showed, textbooks actively promote the indoctrination of the Kemalist nationalist ideology.

An in-depth critical analysis of the textbooks reveals that there is a domination of the monolithic ethno-nationalist approach, along with the Kemalist ideology in all textbooks. In this regard, ethnic groups other than Turks are not only excluded, but also negatively portrayed. This appears to be the most serious issue in the textbooks. Therefore, the degree of diversity existing in society and the multicultural structure of the country are not reflected and celebrated in the textbooks. These findings are in accordance with other research (see Çayır, 2014).

In terms of the negative effects of the Turkish educational system, there are two major issues facing Kurdish pupils: 1) the difficulties/challenges they face due to language barriers as they try to adapt to the new schooling environment where their mother tongue is not spoken, 2) the feeling that their ethnic identity is insignificant when measured against the supremacy of the Turkish national identity that is promoted in the curriculum and textbooks. This automatically leads to the assimilation of the Kurdish ethnic identity into the Turkish one. The former appears to create a lot of serious issues regarding Kurdish pupils' academic performances/achievements, while the latter affects them in both an ethnic and cultural sense.

Indeed, when Kurdish pupils start school, they face a huge challenge caused by the fact that the language of instruction is Turkish. It is significant that a lot of Kurdish pupils – especially the ones living in rural southeastern Turkey – know little Turkish, and thus face serious adaptation issues. The main problem and the paradox here is that they are expected to learn how to read and write in a language that they do not even speak. This process appears to take much longer for Kurdish pupils compared to their Turkish peers, something that creates a kind of 'handicap' affecting Kurdish pupils' careers. As a matter of fact, in some cases, Kurdish pupils who know very little Turkish can still graduate from

middle school, as noted by one of the interviewees in this study – something which does not make any sense. These results are similar to those reported by Coşkun et al. (2010) and Kaya (2015).

Findings suggest that the linguistic issues Kurdish pupils face in school cause such serious issues for Kurdish pupils. In their first years of schooling, Kurdish pupils experience a kind of conflict. Findings suggest that they do not like the school due to the problems that they experience; however, 12-years of compulsory education and their future career aspirations prevent most of them from dropping out. This might have a further negative impact on their psychological well-being. This finding seems to be consistent with the research of Romaine (1994: 206) who stated that “children who do not come to school with the kind of cultural and linguistic background are likely to experience conflict.”

Apart from the two main problems at school environment mentioned above, Kurdish pupils also face serious conflicts at home with parents or at schools with their teachers. Findings suggest that some Kurdish pupils are put into strange positions, whereby they either get in trouble at school by disobeying their teachers and criticising what they are taught (such as the nationalist themes praising Turkishness and Atatürk) or they risk causing issues at home by disagreeing with their parents while defending what they learn at school (such as defending Atatürk and Kemalism). These situations have the potential to have an immense impact on Kurdish pupils’ personalities, and, therefore, should be dealt with seriously.

All teachers unanimously agree with the fact that Kurdish pupils face language issues in their early schooling years. In fact, this seems to be the biggest challenge facing Kurdish pupils at school. This corroborates the findings of Coşkun et al. (2010) and Kaya (2015). Moreover, the Ministry of Education does not have ‘compensatory education’ programmes for students who do not know any Turkish. It thus appears that they are

being ignored by the educational authorities. Therefore, it is very important for the MoNE to address this issue.

The findings of the research revealed that the elective Kurdish course units were a promising development. Furthermore, it also seems that Kurdish pupils and Kurdish parents are quite happy with these classes. In fact, it has been reported that students are very enthusiastic in Kurdish classes. Therefore, this further indicates how beneficial the mother tongue instruction in public schools would be for both Kurdish pupils and their parents. However, despite the existence of the elective course units for other languages such as Kurdish and Abaza, even the 'Kurdish' and 'Abaza' textbooks do not mention anything about the Kurdish and Abaza culture (Kaya, 2015).

In response to the excessive use of the cult of Atatürk in Turkish schools, Kurdish pupils tend to defend the PKK's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan, probably because their families tell them to do so, as reported by some teachers. This causes another significant issue to emerge, which is the creation of another cult of personality within the secular Kurdish nationalist movement. In this case, the national characteristics of the Turkish educational system makes Kurds more nationalists, which is ironic. In this regard, 'Apoism' (Apo is the honorific name for Abdullah Öcalan) appears to be just another version of 'Kemalism'. This thesis suggests that these two ideologies make Turks and Kurds more 'fanatical' by developing Turkish and Kurdish nationalist ideas around the cults of Atatürk and Öcalan. The fact that the Turkish educational system promotes the Kemalist ideology makes the Kurds promote their own ideology, which appears to be the main paradox here.

*What do teachers think about the Kurdish Question, the effects of the nationalist Kemalist educational system on the Kurds, and how do they respond to these in practice?*

First and foremost, this thesis shows that the views of teachers who were interviewed generally reflect the views of their ideological positioning in society. In this regard, teachers do not think in a radically different way than most of people in society (that is, from their respective ideological 'positions'). Furthermore, what is more remarkable is that the polarisation of different ideological positions in society does even exist among teachers. In fact, it sometimes becomes worse, because teachers sharing different ideological positions and political opinions do not talk to each other, which is something that is not common in society. However, more educated people – especially teachers who have the power to shape the future of the country – are usually expected to be more open to other ideological positions.

On the other hand, according to the findings of this study, teachers tend to accept the facts as they are rather than ignoring them. They do this even though the facts clearly go against their ideological stance. Having said that, what they do in this case is to accept the fact and then interpret it according to their world-views. In so doing, they sometimes distort the facts by re-interpreting. This is definitely one of the visible impacts of their ideological commitments on their thinking.

The finding that many teachers use their own judgement while teaching their course units certainly shows the power of teachers as instructors. Even though the Ministry of National Education in Turkey strictly controls educational arrangements, such as by preparing the centralised curriculum, the approval and distribution of all textbooks and even preparing teachers' guide books to keep teachers under control, it seems that teachers remain powerful actors inside the education system in Turkey. Although the centralised curriculum is not flexible, the differences of teachers' practices in teaching makes the education system quite flexible. It could be argued that this behaviour might actually stem from the inflexible status of the existing curriculum.

Especially those teaching the 'History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism' course unit tend to use secondary sources more than other teachers. This is because most of

the teachers interviewed believed that history-related course units generally give biased information about historical events. They mostly talked about 'the official history' (a rather famous phrase) to explain how history – especially the history of the Turkish Republic – was written by the Turkish state using Atatürk's book '*the Address*' (Nutuk) as the main source. This evokes the ideas of Rousseau (1985) who suggested the construction of a 'national history' in order to create a 'national identity' was a necessary part of the education system. Considering all of these, the official history narrative appears to result in the construction of history, and the deconstruction of it at the same time. Teachers who do not believe the official history feel obliged to teach an alternative version of historical events, which culminates in the deconstruction of historical events taught in the textbooks that are primarily based on the official history narrative. These findings are in line with those of previous studies (e.g. see Öztürk, 2011).

The findings of this study also revealed that even though teachers sometimes do teach things differently in the classroom, they face big dilemmas. They are usually obliged to teach a lot of things in conformity with the instructions of teachers' guide books. This is because students are asked about these things when taking national examinations necessary for admittance into high school. The dilemma here is to choose either teaching their own version of "facts" and thus risking students' future carriers, or teaching things precisely they are supposed to do according to the official instructions and letting students learn all the information in textbooks regardless of their accuracy. Therefore, in one way or another, even though teachers try to use different sources for lessons other than the official textbooks, they also feel compelled to teach everything in the textbooks.

The findings show that teachers have very different perceptions about the Turkish Government's Kurdish Initiative, including the peace process, negotiations between the Turkish government, the PKK and Öcalan. It seems that their perceptions and the views of their ideological backgrounds are corresponding. In this regard, as far as this thesis is concerned, teachers usually appear to think in line with their political and ideological



backgrounds. However, besides this, the fact that the majority of teachers expressed their support for the Kurdish Initiative is quite a positive finding.

Another noteworthy finding that emerged from this study is that the majority of the teachers support the attempts to create a multicultural learning environment, thus multicultural education, even though some of the Turkish teachers defend the existing educational system and the nationalist characteristics of the Turkish education. These findings are consistent with data obtained in the research of Söylemez and Kaya (2014) who examined teachers' perceptions of the multicultural education in the province of Diyarbakır, and concluded that Turkish teachers constituted the 'least supportive group' among others (such as the Kurds and Arabs).

### **9.3. Implications of the research for academic and political debates**

In this section, I present the implications of my research for both academic and political debates. In so doing, I hope to offer a new insight to the issue both academically and politically. The contribution of this research to the academic literature is actually expected to help people better understand the relationship between the Turkish education and the Kurdish Question, and make all others in the field aware of the importance of the topic.

First of all, this thesis provides a great amount of new data regarding teachers' attitudes towards the issues that are related to the Kurdish Question and Turkish education, and also gives a detailed account of Kurdish pupils' experiences based on their teachers' observations, which is quite unique. What is more, teachers were specifically selected from the eastern and southerneast part of Turkey, their observations and experiences are assumed to be more accurate. Furthermore, as the sample was selected from a many different provinces in the east and southeast of Turkey such as Siirt, Mardin, Van, Batman, Tunceli, Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Şırnak, Bitlis, Muş, Ağrı and Hakkari, the issues that

are unique to a specific location are also revealed in this study. Therefore, academically, this study fills an important gap in the literature.

### **9.3.1. Implications of the research for academic debates**

Turkey's 'Kurdish Question' is definitely one of the most heated debate topics among academics in Turkey. Even many have studied the Kurdish Question from different perspectives, there was little interest into the effects of Turkish education on Kurdish people in the country. That is why this research expects to fill an important gap in the extant literature and thus contributes to the on-going academic debates on the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

In the academic field of Turkey, there has been a noticeable increase in studies such as focusing on education and ideology, discrimination and human rights in the education system (see Elmas, 2007, Çayır, 2010, Çayır and Alan, 2012, İnce, 2012, Çayır, 2014) education and its relation with the non-Turks (Firat, 2010, Çayır, 2015), and, in recent years, the issue of mother tongue education in languages other than Turkish, particularly relating to the Kurdish language (see Coşkun et al., 2010, Aydın and Özfidan, 2014, Arslan, 2015). Thus, this research is believed to be an important step and a source for those who would like to further study the experiences of Kurdish pupils in Kurdish inhabited cities.

The findings of this study confirm many other studies conducted in the same field. Generally, the effects of Kemalism and the idea of Turkish nationalism seem to have pretty much the same (negative) effects on primary school pupils regardless of their ethnicity (see Elmas, 2007). Likewise, the challenges that Kurdish pupils face in schooling are also very similar, whether they live in the west or east parts of the country (see Coşkun et al., 2010). Having said that, there are more issues relating to language in the south-eastern part of Turkey when compared to Kurdish pupils living in western cities

such as Istanbul. However, issues such as those relating to race and 'Turkishness' effect all Kurdish students regardless of where they study.

One of the differences between this study and others conducted in the western cities is the findings relating to the relationship between Kurdish pupils, their parents and teachers. In western cities such Istanbul and Ankara, as mentioned by Elmas (2007), some Kurdish pupils feel humiliated when their parents go to school meetings and talk to teachers about their children's progress, though it is not their progress that they are ashamed of, but rather their own mothers. For example, it has been reported that a lot of Kurdish pupils told their mothers to speak 'better' Turkish (in an Istanbul accent that is) when they come to speak with their teachers, because they do not want their teachers and classmates to find out that they are actually ethnically Kurdish. One of the possible explanations for this feeling is that Kurdish pupils are negatively affected by the curriculum that promotes Turkish nationalism, including the idea of the superiority of the Turkish identity and the 'privilege' that one has to feel for being Turkish. On the other hand, in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Turkey, the relationship between Kurdish parents and teachers is much more complicated. This is because, especially in rural areas, most of the parents (especially mothers) do not speak Turkish at all (or speak only very little). This study revealed that some teachers do not interact with students' parents because of the language barrier, and the ones who do communicate with them do so via the use of interpreters. Therefore, the difference here is that Kurdish pupils in the eastern and south-eastern cities do not feel 'humiliation' when compared to their western-situated counterparts.

As can be seen from the aforementioned discussions, this study gives a new insight into the Kurdish Question and the problems of the education system in Turkey, and what is more, this research also acts as an invitation to other academics to conduct more research in eastern and south-eastern Turkey in order to understand other issues affecting the Kurdish students-parents-pupils relationship better.

### **9.3.2. Implications of the research for political debates**

Politically, the Kurdish Question is undoubtedly one of the most challenging issues of modern Turkey. It, in fact, has influenced the political landscape in Turkey for more than 30 years, as the conflict between the PKK insurgents and the Turkish state has had a devastating impact on the people of Turkey and thus the Turkish state. For this reason, the Ak Party government embarked upon the negotiation process with the Kurdish insurgents, including the imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan as part of the Kurdish Initiative introduced in 2009. This radical decision could be seen as a result of the fruitless efforts of the Turkish state that previously saw this issue only through a 'security' lens for many decades.

In the 2000s, the state became aware of the fact that the Kurdish Question cannot be solved through military means. The Kurdish Opening was, therefore, meant to be a comprehensive initiative that aimed to approach the Kurdish Question from different perspectives. As explained in the earlier chapters of this thesis, education was, unfortunately, not given a priority in this important process. It seems that two of the few reforms implemented in the field of education during the process, such as the abolition of the Student Pledge and the introduction of the Kurdish mother tongue education in private schools, might be considered as perfunctory, as this research revealed that there are many more issues which remain in education and which are in fact at the core of the problem and thus require special attention.

This research suggests that education in Turkey needs to undergo a radical reform process. There is an obvious need for a more detailed analysis, and more discussion is required in order to make the education system more inclusive, less centralised and thus more flexible. There are indeed a lot of issues with the current Turkish educational system, and the most important seems to be the ideology that is embedded within it and which dominates the curriculum and textbooks. First and foremost, the ideological characteristics of the Turkish education ought to be changed completely. Kemalism and

its interpretation of Turkish nationalism should be treated as any other ideology that exists in society. In other words, the national ideology of Kemalism should not be the 'official' ideology in Turkey, which appears to be the biggest cause of many negative effects in society.

However, the influence of Kemalism should not be taken lightly in this process, which means that it should be accepted that all of these reforms discussed here cannot be done overnight, which is understandable, given that Kemalism is a strong ideology backed by the Turkish state, and one that has a strong influence on the majority of the people in Turkey, since Atatürk has always been venerated by the majority in Turkey. Having said that, the findings of this thesis strongly suggest that as long as the Kemalist ideology remains as the official ideology influencing education, the issues that Kurdish pupils face in both schools and in their daily lives will remain unsolved.

This thesis, therefore, strongly suggests that the Turkish educational system urgently needs to adopt a 'post-Kemalist paradigm'. In the case of a paradigm shift, the new educational philosophy should be developed according to the idea of multiculturalism/anti-racism. As mentioned by González (2008), this is because in a multicultural educational system, students tend to consider the existence of other ethnic/religious groups as 'richness' that should be enjoyed by members of society. In this case, the possibility of any kind of exclusion is also minimised by promoting a culture of diversity and the idea of living together by respecting one another.

The main problem here, however, seems to be the fact that politicians' actions are normally based on their voters' expectations, and it could well be argued that the overwhelming majority of the electorate in Turkey will probably react in a very negative way to any attempt to make radical changes in the education system, particularly regarding the character of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk or his ideology. Considering this and the popularity of the image of Atatürk in society, this radical transformation can easily be spread over time and done in a way which lets public opinion evolve in a more

natural way. For example, any kind of negotiation with Abdullah Öcalan was initially not seen as possible by the majority of people in the early 2000s, however, as the Kadir Has (2015) survey shown, public support for the peace process with Kurdish insurgents and the PKK has increased to 67.5% - something which is quite significant considering that in 2009 only 48.1% of those who participated in the survey considered the government's initiative to resolve the problem as something positive. This clearly shows that public opinion can definitely change even in issues concerning nationalism, which is as sensitive as Kemalism for the majority in Turkey.

Another thing the Turkish government ought to do is to investigate the issues mentioned in this thesis in a more detailed way, by inviting the parents of Kurdish pupils to the table for discussion and recommendations, along with teachers, educational authorities/experts, politicians and non-governmental organisations. Indeed, such a comprehensive attempt to reform the educational system requires the cooperation /collaboration of as many different parties/sides as possible. This will definitely help the government to manage the reform process in a much more efficient way.

#### **9.4. Discussions of the long-term solution proposals**

##### *The implementation of a bilingual educational model in Turkey*

Özfidan (2014) suggested that the Basque bilingual educational system could be used as a model for Turkey to develop its own policy towards its Kurdish minority. However, unlike the Basque model, as the Catalan case showed, embittered minorities are likely to develop a micro-nationalist system against the dominant hegemonic system. This appears to be a serious issue to consider while developing a bilingual educational model for the Kurdish minority in Turkey, because in the case of a similar scenario to the Catalan example, ethnic groups other than Kurds, such as Turks and Arabs, might face similar problems in Kurdish inhabited provinces, as in the Catalan case. In this case, it is worth asking: is a desire for mother tongue education part of an argument for

bilingualism as an educationally inclusionary strategy or is it part of a Kurdish nation-building project? The responses of some teachers who advocated for the Kurdish mother tongue education seemed to defend the bilingual educational model for the Kurds; however, the responses of the few Kurdish teachers appeared to support the Kurdish nationalist ideals, thus the Kurdish nation-building project, since they explicitly praised Abdullah Öcalan.

Nevertheless, given that the KONDA (2011) research highlighted that 11.97% of Turkey's population speaks Kurdish as either their first or second language, the development of a bilingual educational model in Turkey would certainly reduce the exclusion of Kurdish people both in education and in wider society. In this regard, on the one hand, Turkish might be taught as a second language, with Kurdish being the language of instruction in Kurdish inhabited provinces, which would contribute the integration of the Kurdish minority. On the other hand, Kurdish might be offered as a second language in other provinces where the language of instruction is Turkish, which would make Turkish students develop positive attitudes towards the Kurdish identity and Kurdish culture.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, it appears that public opinion would also not object to the implementation of the bilingual educational model, since the Kadir Has (2015) survey has shown that 45.5% of Turks and 87.4% of Kurds polled thought that mother tongue education in Kurdish is required. After all, as discussed earlier, the implementation of such a model firstly requires 'the revision of the curriculum and textbooks' in order not to promote the idea of one ideology (Kemalism) and one ethnic identity (Turkishness), but to promote the ethno-religious diversity and the multicultural characteristics of society by teaching students about the cultures of all ethnic groups existing in society.

### *Kurdish autonomy*

The reform suggestions discussed above also necessitate the decentralisation of the educational system in Turkey, which is no easy task given that the current system is very

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<sup>35</sup> For the implementation of a similar model in the Basque region, Spain, see GARDNER, N. 2000. *The Basque Language in Education in Spain*, Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, Mercator-Education.

centralised with everything in education is controlled strictly by the MoNE. This is because the decentralisation of the educational policies and curriculum would definitely ease the development of flexible curriculum programmes specifically designed to address the needs of different regions in Turkey. This would also pave the way for the foundation of an autonomous Kurdish structure in the Kurdish inhabited provinces. The establishment of such structure in the Kurdish region would make the policy-making process, the implementation of educational policies, and the preparation of the curriculum along with the textbooks much easier and quicker, which appears to be an efficient way of implementing multicultural policies in a diverse society. In fact, the Kadir Has (2015) survey revealed that the majority of Kurds (33.3%) stated that they would prefer an autonomous government in the Kurdish region, rather than an independent Kurdish state (23.4%). What is remarkable here is that in 2012, 44.4% of Kurds preferred 'independence' while only 28.6% desired 'autonomy' (ibid). This clearly shows that the Kurds have changed their views from 'separation' to 'remaining part of Turkey', which is probably a result of the reforms implemented during the Kurdish Initiative, and the positive, promising atmosphere that the peace process brought about in the region.

Indeed, the implementation of the policies discussed above including the bilingual model and the autonomous structure definitely require a long period of time to first lay the necessary groundwork. For example, for the implementation of Kurdish mother tongue instruction or bilingual model in Turkish schools, a sufficient number of teachers are needed to first receive the necessary training, on top of the production of lots of teaching materials. As pointed out by Cummins (2000), in order to establish the necessary infrastructure for bilingual educational system, the training of bilingual teachers is of the paramount importance and is something which takes a long time. Therefore, for the process to be as efficient as possible, the preparation of a detailed timetable seems to be a good first step, which will also make things easier.

*A suggestion for the transition period*



The findings of this research revealed the seriousness of the issues facing Kurds, and thus strongly suggests the need for the implementation of required reforms/actions discussed above in order for a permanent solution to emerge. However, the most pressing issue requiring the most urgent attention and action relates to the need for language support for Kurdish during their early schooling years. In the transition period – while the required discussions and preparations are ongoing – any attempt to support these students and help them learn Turkish faster will at least make them more likely to succeed in both their school exams in schools and national examinations. This action appears to be crucial and of paramount importance in order to close the gap between Kurdish and Turkish pupils in terms of their academic attainment. Having said that, as mentioned earlier, this will definitely not be the final or permanent solution for the issues and challenges facing Kurdish pupils, but they might at the least benefit in the short term. In this case, there might be two possible actions for the Ministry of National Education to consider immediately to help Kurdish pupils: 1) pre-school support, and also 2) continuing support during early schooling years.

## **9.5. Personal reflections**

In the introduction chapter, I mentioned what motivated me to specifically study the effects of the Turkish national education on the Kurds (thus the Kurdish Question in Turkey), because I, as a Turk, was one of the victims of the Kemalist national educational system in my childhood. Moreover, I used to be a trainee teacher for the academic year 2008-09, teaching a Social Studies course unit to 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in a middle school and thus witnessing the nationalist characteristics of the educational system first hand. What is more, I looked at the issue of creativity in the Turkish educational system in relation to the ideology of Kemalism in my MA dissertation, and the findings clearly showed the negative effects of the nationalist Kemalist ideology which dominates the educational system, affecting Kurdish and Turkish students alike in high school, and causing the exclusion of Kurdish students within the existing system. This was another

reason that motivated me to examine how the exclusion of the Kurds occurs in more detail.

The findings of this research made me more convinced that the nationalist Kemalist Turkish education system has a very negative impact on Kurdish pupils. In fact, some experiences of Kurdish pupils – such as the way they are influenced by the Kemalist ideology even in the Kurdish inhabited provinces – went beyond my presumptions. Furthermore, even though I taught in a middle school for a year as a trainee teacher, I was also amazed by teachers' responses. In this regard, the way that they taught course units via use of other sources, despite the fact that such a thing is strictly off-limits and which may even lead to a suspension, also surprised me greatly. As a trainee teacher however I did not observe any kind of tension between teachers who had different ideologies. However, this research revealed that the teachers interviewed for this study did not have a good relationship with other teachers from different political and ideological backgrounds, which I also found surprising.

## **9.6. Future Research**

This study has been one of the first attempts to thoroughly examine the effects of the Turkish national education on the Kurds. The findings of this study has made several contributions to the current literature. First, it has provided a deeper insight into the exclusion of Kurdish pupils, especially ones living in the rural areas in the eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey, within the national educational system and providing strong empirical confirmation that the issues in education do not only have an impact on Kurdish pupils' academic achievements, but also affect their relations with their families, their daily lives, and even their personalities. These findings add to a growing body of literature on the issues/challenges minority ethnic and religious students face in schools and in wider society. Thus, the empirical findings of this study provided a new understanding of how teachers experience different issues in schools, how they handle

these, and how they react to them. Furthermore, the findings reported in this research provided important insights into the role of teachers whose teaching practices seemed to differ to what the MoNE promotes. Third, this study appears to be the only empirical investigation into the impact of the Kemalist ideological indoctrination within education on Kurdish pupils living in Kurdish inhabited towns. Thus, this study has also presented evidence for how Kurdish pupils are affected by the Kemalist ideology and the cult of Atatürk. Finally, it can be concluded that one of the strengths of this study is that it represents a comprehensive examination of all major factors – teachers, the curriculum, policy documents, educational attainments and textbooks – that might possibly affect Kurds.

Despite the promising results, this research is primarily based upon the effects of the Kemalist national education on Kurdish pupils in the early years of education, that is, in primary and middle schools. Thus, further research is required to assess the long-term impacts of the Turkish educational system on Kurdish students in high schools and universities. Furthermore, because the Kurds have been considered as an ethnic minority in this study (something which has traditionally been denied officially by the Turkish state) it would be interesting to compare the experiences of other minority students, especially religious minorities such as the Alevis, since the contents of the textbooks promote the Sunni interpretation of Islam, though some information regarding Alevism is now included in the textbooks. Because this thesis placed a great emphasis on teachers' views, behaviours and reactions, further research in this field that might further examine teachers' role in the educational system would be of great help in understanding the implications of their actions for both students' personalities and academic achievements. In terms of the direction for future research, further work could examine teachers' difficulties/challenges caused by the ideological status of the Turkish educational system as reported in this thesis. Moreover, because a full appraisal of the relationship between teachers, students and parents was beyond the scope of this research, more research is needed to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between those parties.

## **9.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research questions and the structure of the thesis were discussed and the findings of the research were presented in line with the research questions. Furthermore, the implications of the findings for both academic and political debates on the Kurdish Question were discussed. The 'solution proposals' from an educational perspective were mentioned and a discussion was had. Finally, personal reflections and suggestions for future research were mentioned at the end of the chapter.

## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**1.** How long have you been working as a teacher? Do you like your job?

**2.** Which cities have you been to so far in Turkey?

-Which cities have you been working in as a teacher?

- Do you think there are huge differences between those cities and your current location? Why?

- What kinds of differences are there?

**3.** Taking into consideration the existing curriculum, are any particular ethnic groups excluded in the Turkish national education?

- If you think so, how these groups are excluded?

- What are their reactions to this exclusion?

- What are their parents' reactions?

- If you do not think so, can you tell why?

- Do you find the Turkish national curriculum inclusive?

**4.** How do you see Turkey's Kurdish question?

- Do you see it as a security issue, or a cultural one? What do you think in general?

- Why do you think so?

**5.** How do you see the ongoing peace process/talks between the government and Abdullah Öcalan? What do you expect?

- Why do you think so?

**6.** What role do you think education plays in Turkey's Kurdish question?

- Could education be used for the solution?
- How? What might be done for using it for the solution?
- Why do you think so?
- Can you give any specific example?

**7.** Do you think there are nationalist themes in the Turkish educational curriculum in general?

- What can you tell from your own experiences?
- Can you give any solid example?

**8.** How do you see the relationship between the Turkish national education and the Kurdish Question?

- Does it have any (positive or negative) impact on the Kurdish people/culture?
- Can you give any example?

**9.** Previous research found that the majority of the Kurdish participants agreed with the statement that 'the Kurdish people are somehow excluded in the Turkish national education'. Do you agree?

- If you agree, can you give any example?
- If not, what do you think about those responses? How do you see them?

**10.** Given the fact that the only official language to be taught in schools is Turkish, do you think whether this has any effect on any particular ethnic group other than the Turks?

- Do people use other languages?
- Do you ever hear Kurdish speaker inside the school or in the playground?

- How do you respond to this as a teacher?

**11.** Have you ever experienced that the Kurdish pupils feel segregated in a school environment?

- If so, what might be the possible reasons?

- What are the consequences?

**12.** Should mother tongue education be legal in the Turkish educational system?

- Why do/don't you think so?

**13.** Have you seen any child who started school without knowing Turkish and had some difficulties in understanding?

- What kind of difficulties did he/she have?

- Are there any special classes for the children facing difficulties?

- If not, should there be?

**14.** Do you think there is a link between the official ideology of Kemalism, which is stated in the Constitution, and the Turkish educational curriculum?

- If so, what kind of link do you think there is?

- If you do not think so, how do you see one of the aims of the Turkish national education, which is "to raise a generation that should have and understanding of Ataturk's nationalism and Ataturk's principles"?

**15.** Is there any specific course unit promoting Kemalism and/or Kemalist nationalism which is stated as one of the main aims of the Turkish national education by the Turkish Ministry of National Education?

- Do you teach this unit?

- If so, how did you come to teach it? Choice? Requirement?

- If you had the chance, would you change it?

**16.** Previous research found that the majority of the Kurdish participants (especially Kurdish teachers) see that there is a strong link between Kemalism and nationalism in the existing curriculum. These two cannot be separated in many ways. Do you agree with this opinion?

- Why do/don't you agree?

- How do you support your idea? Any example or experience?

**17.** Do you find 'Our Pledge' (Öğrenci Andı) nationalist? (e.g. some claim that the statement 'How happy the one who says I'm a Turk' is too nationalist).

- How do children react to the pledge?

- How parents of children react to the pledge?

- How do you think the Kurdish people see the pledge?

**18.** Given the fact that there is a Kurdish issue in Turkey, and they have different demands. Do you think whether some reforms should be undertaken in the field of education regarding the Kurdish question?

- What reforms have been implemented so far?

- Can you suggest any particular reform that should be implemented?

**19.** Does the Turkish educational system impose any specific identity? Why do/don't you think so?

- If so, what kind of identity do you think is being imposed?

**20.** There is a course unit in the curriculum, which is named "Ataturk's Principles and the History of the Turkish Revolution". How do you see this particular course unit in terms of the nationalist themes it includes?



- Do you teach this course unit?

- Do you think whether this course unit should be selective/optional or remain compulsory to all? Why?

**21.** Do you think whether pupils should follow Ataturk's path by learning his principles and embrace his nationalist ideals just as stated in the curriculum?

- Why do/don't you think so?

- What are the possible effects of having this in the curriculum?

- What would happen if the curriculum does not include such aims?

**22.** Do you have any difficulties while you are in touch with pupils' parents?

- Do you think there is a language problem affecting your communication?

- What kind of difficulties do you experience other than language? Any example?

- How can these problems be solved?

**23.** Do you think schools in Turkey mould the same type of students?

- What type of students do you think schools produce in Turkey?

**24.** Do you have any recommendations to make schools/education in Turkey more inclusive by all means (ethnically, religiously etc.)?

- What should/can be done?

**25.** Have you ever thought that education was a key area which enabled the Turkish state to impose its own ideology to everyone, thus causing issues like the Kurdish question?

- Why do/don't you think so?

## APPENDIX B: THE LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

PSEUDONYMS	AGE, ETHNICITY, SEX	PROVINCE	COURSES TAUGHT
Ayşe	25-30, Turkish, F	Tunceli	Primary School Teacher
Mete	25-30, Turkish, M	Diyarbakır	Social Studies
Attila	30-35, Turkish, M	Van	Social Studies
Beyhan	25-30, Turkish, F	Batman	Turkish
Asena	25-30, Turkish, F	Bingöl	Primary School Teacher
Ayhan	25-30, Turkish, M	Hakkari	Science
Tarkan	30-35, Turkish, M	Diyarbakır	Primary School Teacher
Ceyda	25-30, Turkish, F	Diyarbakır	Primary School Teacher
Melike	25-30, Turkish, F	Tunceli	Social Studies
Utku	30-35, Turkish, M	Şırnak	Maths
Yılmaz	30-35, Turkish, M	Hakkari	Social Studies
Ufuk	25-30, Turkish, M	Bitlis	Primary School Teacher
Koray	30-35, Turkish, M	Muş	Turkish
Mehmed Âkif	25-30, Turkish, M	Bingöl	Primary School Teacher
Muhammed	25-30, Turkish, M	Mardin	Social Studies
Ramazan	25-30, Turkish, M	Batman	Science
Abdullah	30-35, Turkish, M	Bitlis	Primary School Teacher
Gülten	30-35, Kurdish, F	Diyarbakır	Primary School Teacher
Hatice	25-30, Kurdish, F	Diyarbakır	Religion
Emrullah	25-30, Kurdish, M	Şırnak	Primary School Teacher
İsmail	30-35, Kurdish, M	Van	Primary School Teacher
Zahide	25-30, Kurdish, F	Ağrı	Turkish
Zahir	25-30, Kurdish, M	Diyarbakır	Social Studies
Şirin	25-30, Kurdish, M	Siirt	Social Studies
Mehmed	30-35, Kurdish, M	Muş	Primary School Teacher
Sami	30-35, Kurdish, M	Diyarbakır	Primary School Teacher
Doğan	30-35, Kurdish, M	Diyarbakır	Turkish
Perihan	25-30, Kurdish, F	Mardin	Social Studies
Murat	25-30, Kurdish, F	Siirt	Primary School Teacher
Cemil	30-35, Kurdish, M	Ağrı	Maths

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