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History education within cultural policies of the republican era; comparison of one-party regime and multi-party system (1923 -1960)

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Abstract

The most effective elements upon policies that were conducted in fields of education and culture during the period of Atatürk were nationalism, secularism and westernism. The field of history was also shaped in this direction as a part of culture and the history education was arranged accordingly. During the period of İnönü, the humanist movement of thought affected the culture policies and being different from the period of Atatürk, humanism started to be effective in history courses, alongside of the nationalism, which was taught predominantly. The process of multi-party life started in Turkey within the new world order as from 1945 and the Democratic Party, which was established as the opposition party in 1946, came to power as a result of the elections in 1950. During the period of the Democratic Party, the studies on the Ottoman History increased. Some of the historians of this period considered the historiography of the one-party regime romantic and dreamer, and they defended the necessity of teaching the historical subjects with a scientific method and critical aspect.

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Introduction

Being simply used as a science that examines past and present (Braudel, 1983; 82), history is concerned with all fields such as culture, civilization, social life, economy, which are brought by a society from the past. History plays a very important role in the social life, owing to this feature. It became a much more important field

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especially as from the XIX. century, when the nationalism started to develop all around the world, and all young governments started to increase their history researches on one hand and use mainly history in organizing their new ideologies on the other. (Copeaux, 1998; 15.) In this sense, a progress was made in science of history and research methods initially in the West and this progress was also reflected on education.

1. One-Party Period (1923–1945)

1.1. Period of Atatürk

During the process following the proclamation of the Republic; Atatürk started a series of revolutionary movements in order to enable the new Turkish Government to reach the level of modern world and develop the mentality of the Turkish Nation, which was forced to stay behind within the system that had been sustained for centuries. A radical change started to be made in fields such as economy, education, law, social life, which are among the most important elements in an individual's life. Nationalism provided the basis of Atatürk's revolution in all fields. (Dönmezer, 1983; 21) One of the preconditions for the development of nationalism in a society is the culture of that society. The field of history, on the other hand, is among the most important elements that build the culture of a nation. Thinking that a modern future in Turkey could only be possible through raising a generation with a national consciousness and cultural richness, Atatürk (Horata, 2009; .66) was aware of the importance of especially the subject of history. During the period of Atatürk, the studies in the field of history were started with institutionalization and the Turkish Historical Society was established in 1932, in an attempt to conduct historical studies, enlighten the ancient history of Turks and spread it through education (İnönü, 1970; İnan, 1947, 175–179) Besides, approaches which assert that the Turks had spread their ancient and specific cultures serving for world civilizations on a vast land during their migration from the Central Asia were displayed by constituting the Turkish Historical Thesis. (Zurcher, 1996, 277-278) Considering the objectives of the Turkish Historical Society and Turkish Historical Thesis, it is seen that the initiative was to develop and extend the national and historical subjects. Especially the history courses and books that would be taught in educational institutions became the most important aspects of this objective. Objectives and targets of educational institutions during this period could be summarized as raising a generation with national feelings and commitment to the Turkish Republic. Stages that were experienced until the foundation of the Republic, period of National Struggle, meaning of the Republic regime, understanding the revolution and providing commitment to the revolution comprised the most important aspects of history education during the period of Atatürk. (Ünder, 1998; 220–228)

The subjects of Abolition of the Sultanate, National Struggle, Treaties of Sevres and Lausanne, Foundation of the Turkish Republic and Abolition of the Caliphate were involved in the first high school program in 1924. Besides, the General Turkish History and Turkish History started to be taught to the IVth and Vth grade primary school students in a mixed way. (Tunçay, 1977, 277.) While “Public History” that was written by Ahmet Refik for 5th graders of primary schools discussed about the history of New and Modern ages, his other book that was written for 4th graders with the same title discussed about First and Middle ages. During these years, school books titled “History in Republic” by İhsan Şerif Saru, “National History” by Fuat Köprülü and “History Courses for Primary School Children” by Süleyman Edip and Ali Tevfik were also prepared for 5th graders. (Ata, 1998, 70–74.) After the amendments that were made in 1927, the Turkish history started to be used as base in the history education, and new arrangements were made for school books and course hours. During this period when the Turkish Historical Thesis was not constituted yet, Ahmed Hamid and Mustafa Muhsin's book that was titled “Turkish History” narrated the history from the Rise of the Ottoman Empire until 1924. This book was taught in secondary schools until 1929. (Behar, 1992; 100–102.)

Following the suggestion of the Turkish Historical Thesis, Atatürk required writers to write “Guideline of the Turkish History” and “Introduction to the Guideline of the Turkish History” and new arrangements were made for primary and secondary schools accordingly.

1.2. Period of İnönü

İsmet İnönü was elected as the President of the Republic after the death of Atatürk on the 10th of November, 1938. During his Presidency of 12 years, İnönü conducted his own political, economic, cultural policies.

“Humanism” formed the basis of the cultural policy of the period of İnönü. This view was also the basis of the European modernization. Humanism was defined as “getting to the civilization of Ancient Greece and Rome” during the period of İnönü. While Arabic works and languages were banished, Western works started to be examined in this period. (Şeker, 2000; p.13.) Historical concept of this period intended to be integrated with the Western culture within the scope of nationalism, which was presented during the period of Atatürk. They wanted to place Anatolia in the middle of history with a common consciousness of history and interpret the history by attributing the rise of the Western civilization to these territories. (Karacasu, 2002, 335)

The humanist policies that were followed in the field of culture during the period of İsmet İnönü were reflected not only on historical studies and congresses, but also the history education being provided at schools. While the I. Educational Council that was held in 1939 discussed about the subject of “humanism”, the II. Educational Council that was held in 1943 discussed about the history courses. A commission was established and a report was presented to the Presidency of Council, regarding this issue. The report involved information about the inadequacy of the available program at primary and secondary schools, and the necessity of planning a new program. A decision was made to continue teaching school books of the 1st and 2nd grade secondary school students until the new books would be written and exclude the school book of the 3rd grade secondary school students, due to wrong information. Regarding the school books of high schools, on the other hand, the history books that started to be taught as from 1942 and 1943 were found to be more convenient than previous books. (Köken, 2002; 236)

2.Period of Transition to the Multi-Party Life (1945–1950)

The historical concept with an approach of humanism that was conducted during the period of İnönü started to be questioned under the influence of the multi-party system, which started in Turkey as from 1945. Famous historians of this period such as Fuat Köprülü, Nihal Atsız wrote articles criticizing the approaches asserting that Turks and Greeks were relatives. (Şeker, 2000; 85) In the Fourth Congress on Education that was organized in 1948, education started to be handled with a “democratic” entity together with the transition to multi-party life in Turkey, in line with the new sense of democracy that developed in the World after the II. World War. Besides, the Turkish Historical Thesis was criticized. According to this criticism, while researches aimed at our early history were conducted in terms of the Turkish civilization and science, the late history was neglected. (Fourth Educational Council; 1949) Considering the national concept, there was no remarkable change on subjects being taught and books being written in the beginning, just like in the period of Atatürk. The Turkish Historical Thesis was generally repeated in the history books.(Günaltay, 1939; Mansel,& Baysam& Karal, 1942) The book “History of the Turkish Republic”, which was written by Enver Ziya Karal in place of his previous History IV book, mainly discussed about the policy that was followed during the period of İnönü. The book involved the concept of “National Chief” and used the speeches of İnönü. (Karal,1945) During this period, the curriculums of history books gave a little place to the Turkish history and a greater place to the world history and histories of Greek and Roman civilizations, compared to the period of Atatürk. It could be asserted that the concept of humanist culture plays an important role in this situation.

3. Period of the Democratic Party (1950–1960)

The Democratic Party that was established in 1946 came into power as a result of the general elections on the 14th of May, 1950. The Democratic Party had a different approach in the field of culture, just like all other fields (Eroğul, 2003; 101- vd.). In this sense, it touched upon the issue of culture in government programs in 1950, 1954 and 1957. These programs emphasized that cultural affairs would be conducted in line with the principles of party programs in general. Considering the subject of education in particular, the necessitation of religious education at primary schools, reopening of Imam Hatip schools, and closing of Village Institutes and Community Centers were among the primary differences of this period. The DP period, when radical changes were made on historical studies and lessons, entered into a process where the “Humanist” concept of the period of İnönü was repressed and regarding the field of history, the interest in the Ottoman and Islamic history increased. (Öztürk, 1997; 250-.251.) Printing and publication of school books were permitted in accordance with the economic

policy of the period between 1950–1960. School books were fictionalized in such a way to reflect the culture and views of the political power. (Öztürk, 1997; 173-174.) History I, which started to be taught at high schools as from 1947 during the period of İnönü, primarily discussed about the classical ancient ages. Only almost 300 pages of the 762-page book were about the Turkish history. Some differences were observed on the instruction of the Turkish Historical Thesis, in terms of the policy that was followed during the Democratic Party. It was seen that the consciousness regarding “Turks were those who established the civilization first”, which was taught previously, was limited. (Akşit& Oktay, 1959; Copeaux, 1998;84–86.)

Even though the courses and books regarding the Republic History generally preserved their content of previous periods during the period of the Democratic Party, a political approach was displayed due to the increasing conflict between DP and CHP in the politics of the period. In this sense, the book of Enver Behnan Şapolyo titled Turkish Republic could be shown as an example to this estimation. As a matter of fact, the book defined the year 1950, when the DP came into power, as a Revolution. (Şapolyo, 1958; 176–177.) While the parts about İsmet İnönü were largely restricted, especially Celal Bayar who was elected as the President as from 1950 was clearly emphasized in the book. (Şapolyo, 1958; 54–55.) In his book titled “History of the Turkish Republic”, the famous historian Enver Ziya Karal approached the political power of the Democratic Party as “the Progress of the Turkish Democracy system”. (Karal, 1958; .218–219) The history book, which was written by Zuhuri Danişman for secondary schools, involved almost nothing about the activities of İnönü. (Öztürk, 1997; 176) An amendment was made in the curriculum in 1957 and History courses were separated from each other as history and Turkish Republic and the Revolution History at high schools. Accordingly; first graders were taught the First Age, second graders were taught the Middle Age and third graders were taught New and Modern ages, and by this way, the ages were followed respectively. (Tunçay, 1977; 282)

Conclusion

Atatürk made radical changes in all fields after the proclamation of the Republic in Turkey in 1923. He paid a special attention to the field of culture. The efforts of Atatürk to gather the public around national values and enable them to reach a modern level increased the importance of historical studies. During this period, the Turkish Historical Society was established and the Turkish History Thesis, which was based on the Central Asia that is the oldest settlement of the Turks, formed the basis of the historical concepts in the period of Atatürk. Cultural activities of the period of İsmet İnönü, on the other hand, were intended to be conducted based on “humanism”, which was perceived as the basis of the Western modernization. During this period, history was directed towards Anatolian and European centralism from Central Asian centralism. This policy being conducted started to be discussed and criticized as from the period of transition to the multi-party life (1945). Regarding the field of history, studies that were mainly based on returning to the old times started to be performed and Ottoman and Islamic History were redounded in cultural policies of the Democratic Party, which held the power between 1950-1960. Besides, during this period when the Turkish History Thesis was accepted without being changed, a transition from the European-centered history to the Anatolian and Mediterranean-centered concept was observed.

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