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BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEWS

Turkey's citizenship education: a battlefield between secularism and islamism

Sen, A. and Starkey, H. (2019). *Citizenship Education in Turkey: From Militant-Secular to Islamic Nationalism*. London: Lexington Books. 146 pp. \$85.00 (hardback) ISBN: 978-1-4985-9468-4; \$80.50 (eBook) ISBN: 978-1-4985-9469-1.

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Citizenship education has been a central school subject from the beginning of the Turkish Republic (1923), the chief goal being to create a homogenous Turkish society out of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. The main aim of the highly centralized formal education system in general, and citizenship education in particular, has been to transform (mostly religious) rural peasants into (secular, Western style) citizens. Citizenship education has, thus, been a field of contestation between different ideological powers throughout Turkish history.

Abdulkerim Sen and Hugh Starkey's *Citizenship Education in Turkey: From Militant-Secular to Islamic Nationalism* examines citizenship courses and discourses in the context of the ideological transformation of Turkey from 1995 to 2012. This is an important period of Turkish history, as it witnessed an ideological power shift from militant-secular nationalism to Islamic nationalism. By framing the development of citizenship education and curriculum reforms as a case study, the authors make a valuable contribution to making sense of the interplay between the external and internal power struggles that have shaped contemporary Turkey.

The book is based on analyses of textbooks, interviews, documents and archives. The authors consider their dataset as 'the discursive embodiment of power relations in the wider society' (p. 11) and analyze it with a critical discourse methodology. They present their arguments in accessible language. The book consists of seven well-organized and well-written chapters. Following the introduction of the subject in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 discusses four major citizenship theories or theoretical approaches: universalist citizenship education, multiculturalist citizenship education, democratic citizenship education, and critical citizenship education. The authors analyze the Turkish case from the basis of a conceptual differentiation between what they call the old nationalist version (traditional civic education) and the contemporary liberal-internationalist model (citizenship education). Chapter 3 provides the historical backgrounds of the rise of militant-secularism and Islamic nationalism, and these two tendencies are covered in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6 presents how the changing balance of power between secularist and Islamist circles during Turkey's European Union accession process has influenced the citizenship curriculum reform. Chapter 7 is reserved for concluding remarks and an update on developments since 2012.

Throughout the book, the authors mainly explore three aspects of citizenship education reform in Turkey: (1) the external and internal drivers of the curriculum, (2) changes and continuities in the citizenship education curriculum, and (3) mechanisms of curriculum development. I think that one of the greatest strengths of the book is its multi-layered analysis of the interplay between external and internal drivers of citizenship education in Turkey. The citizenship curriculum has been shaped in the context of international developments such as the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (which led to Turkey's incorporation of Citizenship and Human Rights Education courses in 1995) and the recognition of Turkey as a candidate to the EU in 1999 (which resulted in the introduction of Citizenship and Democracy Education in 2010). During these processes, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) collaborated with several international bodies, such as the Council of Europe (CoE). Several studies of citizenship education point out the democratizing role of international agencies, as they promote a liberal-internationalist model of citizenship education on the basis of EU norms. However, the authors' close analysis of the documents and textbooks shows that this has not been the case in Turkey. They skillfully demonstrate how the power struggle between different actors in the MoNE (the CoE officials, proponents of the CoE's internationalist model, secular nationalists, Islamist nationalists) was influential in curriculum reform. The analysis of Citizenship and Human Rights Education textbooks, for instance, demonstrates how international bodies' sponsorship in curriculum reforms was subverted in order to promote a militaristic nationalist content, under the name of human rights education (p. 103). Likewise, the curriculum reform in 2010 resulted in the infiltration of religious content into citizenship education when the AKP consolidated its power. Thus, as the authors note, 'The nation state ideology disseminated by citizenship education changed from secular to religious nationalism but the mechanism conveying monolithic official ideology has persisted up to the present with no significant change' (p. 102). The authors demonstrate the limited impact of international bodies and the decisive role of local/national dynamics in the formation of the curriculum.

In reaching this final argument, the authors argue that the AKP's engagement with the CoE's model of democratic citizenship education was just 'a strategy to terminate the ideological hegemony of secular nationalism in education' (p.91). I think this argument carries the danger of falling into the trap of an essentialist position. It is a fact that the EU process enabled the religious nationalists to infiltrate their Islamic agenda into citizenship education. Yet the AKP also introduced several reforms, such as the inclusion of Alevis in textbooks and elective Kurdish courses, until it took a nationalistic turn after 2016. Arguably these initiatives were based on an anachronistic Islamic multiculturalist imagery that harked back to the Ottoman period (Kaya 2013 and 2015). These initiatives could also be framed in terms of what Terence Turner calls 'difference multiculturalism' (Turner 1993). The authors could have discussed Islamic versions of multiculturalism and engaged in a dialogue with multicultural and critical multicultural citizenship education in international literature (Al-Haj and Mielke 2007). This would have elaborated their discussion of the AKP period.

In sum, the book is a worthy contribution to the literature on citizenship education and it lays out solid arguments and insights for future research. By presenting differing perspectives, the book gives a glimpse into the complex power relations between internal and external agencies and positions in the case of Turkey.

As the authors note ‘...international education projects having the potential to interfere with the nation-state ideology needs strong political support and detailed planning and preparation in advance’ (p. s 81), as well as the participation of marginalized groups in the curriculum development process. I find this suggestion highly valuable for scholars of citizenship and human rights education and international agencies aiming to promote a democratic model.

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