

Educational Foundations

In the land of the infidel, I have seen cities and mansions
In the dominions of Islam, ruin and devastation.

— Z I Y A P A S H A

Islam provides, it now appears, the fetters to all progress.
The tale is new, do not doubt its veracity, it is the fashion.
Forgetful of our nationhood in all we undertake
We bow before the thought of Frank capacity, it is the fashion.

— Z I Y A P A S H A

What does it mean for children to be pedagogical wards or educated citizens of a state? How are institutionalized ideas about citizenship as constituted in an educational system made credible and authoritative? In turn, how is social life organized, and reshaped, through institutions such as state-run schools? In what ways do boys and girls engage with the ideas, opinions, and sentiments offered in the curricula? Finally, how can one best retrieve the voices and critical perspectives of children and parents, whose own accounts on education have been all too often written out? All five questions lead us to reflect on the conjunction between schooling and governance, on the one hand, and subjectivity, on the other.

The founding of an advanced primary school up in the mountains of southern Turkey in 1879 offers a point of entry for reflection on this conjunction. My analysis of this case will illustrate how multiple and overlapping concepts of citizenship are deployed within state institutions, producing classificatory schemes and ultimately constituting subjects. The story

instantiates the close relation between modern state formation and the cultural premises of formal schooling, between political authority and authorized representations of society, between childhood and the moral regulation of social identities—in short, the pedagogical state that today constitutes the everyday reality of Turkish citizens.

A Foundational Story

In the southern mountains of Turkey are the famous Cilician Gates, the narrow gorge from which, for thousands of years, pilgrims, merchants, shepherds and armies descended on their way from the Anatolian Plateau to the Levant. Hidden behind the narrowest part of this mountain pass in a secluded valley is Yayla, a small town of six thousand.¹ Located at an altitude of 1,100 meters above sea level, on a clear day one can make out the Mediterranean Sea and the city of Tarsus, some fifty-five kilometers to the south. In the opposite direction, at 3,524 meters above sea level, the snowcapped Medetsiz Mountain hovers over the town like an eagle with outstretched wings. It is against this pastoral background that several older men at the central coffeehouse asked, “Why would an educated person come all the way from America to study our village?” For the next two years, they continued to voice disbelief, if not downright incredulity. After all, as I repeatedly heard from townspeople, schooling is a ticket out of the community, and no urban person with a university degree would come to live in the boondocks to study the local school system. But upon my arrival, on a cold crystal-clear day in January 1989, the old men also jokingly characterized Yayla as a “university,” implying that, thanks to them, I would finally complete my (doctoral) education. Irony aside, the coffeehouse patrons were in fact referring to their community’s long history with formal education. With considerable pride, they referred to well-known public figures who had graduated from the local elementary school; among the graduates were a recently retired ambassador to Pakistan, a doctor who practices medicine in the United States, a judge serving on Turkey’s Supreme Court, and a lawyer who owns the main electricity provider of the region. Then, taking me outside, they directed my gaze to a small square structure in the neighborhood of Peskenek, south of the coffeehouse. Currently used as an office for the Forestry Bureau,

the building, they proudly asserted, had served as a *rüşdiye*, a three-year advanced primary school, over a century ago.

My curiosity aroused, I asked why government officials of the Ottoman state, the political predecessor of the current Turkish republic, had bothered to set up such a school in this out-of-the-way community of sheep and goat herders. The townsmen then referred me to Alıncı Mehmet, who despite his advanced age (then over a hundred years old), narrated the foundational story of the village *rüşdiye*.

The story is about the confrontation between two poet scholars and their incommensurable worldviews. The two men were Ziya Pasha, the governor of the province of Adana, and İbrahim Rüştü, a theologian from Yayla. Each man understood differently what change was and what kinds of change were important. At the core of their differences were their respectively different interpretations of Islam. Their contemporaries, however, viewed the two with suspicion: both men unsettled the accepted social and cultural norms of the region in their actions and ideas.

Ziya Pasha was a well-known political figure, journalist, and poet. A leading member of a group of intellectuals and literary figures known as the Young Ottomans, he advocated integrating European constitutionalism and scientific positivism with state-supported orthodoxy.² He had spent several years in self-imposed exile in Europe before returning to government service. During his residency abroad, he used his poetic skills to advance his political views, either to lament the decline of Islamic civilization or to mock the slavish imitation of Western (“Frankish”) customs.³ Upon his return from exile, he served as governor in the provinces of Cyprus, Amasya, Konya, and Aleppo. His last appointment was governorship of Adana; it was to be brief—two years, from 1878 till his death in 1880.

In his official capacities as governor, Ziya Pasha set about combating fatalist attitudes and superstitions and exposing his officials to what he believed were the positive benefits of European civilization. He also decided to translate his strong beliefs into practice. Earlier governors, for example, had presided over rain prayers during droughts. Ziya Pasha, in contrast, refused to follow this precedent and instead insisted that the municipality build irrigation dams. He is quoted as telling a local delegation, “There is no point in performing a rain prayer on the banks of the river Seyhan. . . . If I lead the prayers for rain, then wouldn’t Allah say to me: ‘You were a famous gover-

nor from a big province. Rather than praying for rain, if only you would find the means to make use of the river and water the fields.”⁴ The lack of money in the provincial treasury, however, prevented the governor from initiating any irrigation works.

More irritating to his staff than his unrealized irrigation plans were the new governor’s attempts to introduce Western high culture. Every morning, before they began work, officials were required to follow lessons in French. Ziya Pasha did not content himself with language instruction alone. The governor decided to introduce changes in local entertainment, including the dramatic arts. He brought from the capital city of Istanbul a theatrical troupe that played his translation of Molière’s comedy *Tartuffe*. To set an example for the population, he compelled his civil servants to attend the performances.⁵

It wasn’t long before local notables began to slander the governor. In his earlier posts, he had amassed many opponents who accused him of stealing from the public coffers and enriching himself at the expense of the state. These accusations followed the governor to his new duties in Adana. A local poet, who resented the governor’s patronage of a rival poet, set about lampooning Ziya Pasha. Punning on the governor’s name and title, he wrote on the walls of Adana, “The property has lost its light (*ziya*) when its master (*Paşa*) came.”⁶ Whether he embezzled or not, Ziya Pasha died penniless.

The other character in Almancı Mehmet’s story about the *rüşdiye* was sitting in prison when Ziya Pasha took up his new post. The sixty-eight-year-old Ibrahim Rüştü was a theologian and mystical poet who had been convicted of corrupting orthodox practice and, as a prisoner, now became a charge of Ziya Pasha. It was customary for provincial governors to begin their tenure by pardoning prisoners, just as sultans granted amnesties upon accession to the throne. Indeed, one of the first duties Ziya Pasha undertook upon settling in his new post was to go over the list of prisoners, their crimes and sentences. At the end of the list was the entry “Ibrahim Rüştü and his accomplices.” The entry mentioned neither crime nor sentence, however. Not surprisingly, this lacuna caught the governor’s attention. Upon further inquiry, Ziya Pasha learned in writing from a local notable that “Ibrahim Rüştü together with his accomplices consisting of family relations has been sitting in jail for four years. Following complaints and denunciations by Muslims from the . . . subdistrict, he has been detained for the crime of lead-

ing the people astray [*dalâlet*] from the religion. He has deduced all sorts of meanings from the Qur'an and the prophet Muhammad's traditions and has created a new religious sect [*firak-ı dalle*] within Islam, and in the process has acquired many disciples and supporters."⁷ Rüştü's recidivism precluded any chance of a pardon. Even before receiving a sentence, he had already converted all two hundred inmates to his interpretation of Islam. The governor who preceded Ziya Pasha, Nusret Pasha, had insisted that Ibrahim Rüştü remain forever locked up lest he convert other Muslims outside prison to his "sect." In the meantime, the religious scholar applied his poetic skills in prison and translated the Qur'an into Turkish verses.

Who was this sixty-eight-year-old man of religion, and why was his preaching so threatening to society and polity that he was condemned to live out his days in prison? What was his heresy that seemed to attract so many followers? We know that Ibrahim Rüştü was a well-known authority on Islam in the region who was also suspicious of Western ways. Born in 1811 in Yayla, he had attended various theological seminaries (*medreses*) of the empire (Kayseri in central Anatolia, the capital city of Istanbul, and Cairo in Egypt) and taught Islamic law in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina before returning to his native community in old age. His fame, or better yet his notoriety, was not his scholarship but rather his unorthodox interpretation of Islam. In fact, his nickname, the Three Timer (*üç vakitçi*), gave away his crime. According to those villagers old enough to have heard from their grandparents about the elderly theologian, Ibrahim Rüştü had come back from his teaching duties in Arabia with a new understanding of the Muslim believer's obligations. From his reading of the Qur'an and the traditions ascribed to the prophet Muhammad, he had decided to omit the obligatory morning and night prayers; henceforth, a Muslim need pray only three times a day instead of the obligatory five. As a result, he abjured the Hanafi school of religious jurisprudence (*mezheb*), the legal school to which the Ottoman state officially adhered. More problematic to the state was that Rüştü's innovative and less demanding practices found many followers. As the local notable had written to Governor Ziya Pasha, all two hundred prisoners at Adana had become "three timers."

The new governor was intrigued by this man of religion, so strange in background, experience, and ideas, and called him into his office. At that moment, Ibrahim Rüştü was in the midst of preparing his ablutions for his af-

ternoon prayers. The old man entered, not bothering to roll back his sleeves in honor of the governor. Worse still, he sat down without greeting the governor. To greet, or *selâm vermek*, then as now, connotes more than a mere salutation for devout Muslims; the *selâm* recognizes the addressee as a fellow believer. The government authorities had imprisoned Ibrahim Rüştü on account of his heretical interpretations of Islam. Yet it was the prisoner who refused to greet the governor, thereby symbolically removing the Ottoman official from the Islamic community.

The old man's behavior piqued the governor's curiosity, and he immediately asked the prisoner why he did not greet him. The answer was straightforward: he greeted only Muslims, and since the governor wore the fez he wasn't sure whether he was an infidel or a Muslim. In the theologian's view, the governor's dress blurred the sartorial markers that once defined clear-cut membership in a religious community. Other than the conical red fez, he dressed for all intents and purposes in the same fashion as did men hailing from London and Paris, the two cities where Ziya Pasha had spent time.⁸ Ziya's costume was, in fact, common to late nineteenth-century Ottoman officials. Ibrahim Rüştü, on the other hand, kept to a wardrobe that clearly indicated his Muslim affiliation. He donned a turban on his head and wore baggy shalwar pants.

The differences between the two men were not simply over dress. Clearly, both men interpreted Islam and its role in society and polity differently. Ziya Pasha, like many self-styled reformers of the time, set about adapting Western technology and aesthetics to the dictates of state-endorsed Islam, while Ibrahim Rüştü advocated a return to those religious practices that he deemed to have once defined the pristine Muslim community. No less important were their different understandings of the relation between state and society. Religious dissent, as far as state officials were concerned (and Ziya Pasha was no exception) was understood to potentially upset the political stability of the empire. A "state of heresy and ignorance" (*bir hal-i dalalet ve cehalet*) precluded the integration and assimilation—in short, the unity—of all Ottoman Muslim subjects of the empire in one mainstream orthodoxy (the Hanafi legal school of thought) and, hence, prevented all Muslims from identifying with state and dynasty.⁹ The governor, thus, had to ensure that a local man of religion, however insignificant, did not challenge the state.

First, Ziya Pasha persuaded Ibrahim Rüştü to stop propagating his inno-

vative take on religion. The governor released him, and the old man, in turn, kept to the bargain. Ibrahim retired to Peskenek to write mystical poetry. Not quietly, however. He annexed the graveyard next to his garden. His neighbors, of course, were taken aback by this odd action. His reply was simple: "From now on there will be no need for a graveyard." For ten years, nobody died in the neighborhood.¹⁰ He did, however, withdraw from the travails of everyday life. A few verses written during his retirement suggest as such: "We abandoned the world of earthly goods / Happy to derive virtue from poverty / To others, O you Heaven, surrender your honor and worldly possessions / We are satisfied to be one of the poor."

Ziya Pasha, on the other hand, was not the retiring kind. Nor did he forget the preacher. The governor took action. Within a year of Ibrahim Rüştü's release from prison, the governor persuaded the government to set up the advanced primary school in Peskenek whose curriculum would he hoped prevent youth from straying from state orthodoxy. At the time, there were no advanced primary schools in villages. The school, nevertheless, was modest: one headmaster and twenty pupils.¹¹ Nor did it survive for very long. Two years later, the government transferred funds and staff to the rapidly developing port city of Mersin.¹² The Ottoman state, however, pursued Ziya Pasha's pedagogical mission in the immediate region of Yayla. Since 1890, there has been an elementary school, and in 1934, on the initiative of the villagers, the school expanded the curriculum from three to five years and became a boarding school for the entire subdistrict. Currently, there are two coeducational elementary schools and one middle school; the total enrollment in the two elementary schools was officially 226 for the 1987-1988 school year; about half that number, mostly boys, were enrolled in the middle school.

One could ask, why bring up this lengthy anecdote when none of the townspeople, not even the venerable old *Almancı Mehmet*, experienced the event. The point, here, is neither about the origins of the short-lived school nor about several themes such as economic modernization, didactic plays, competing moral orders, or dress codes, which remain ever salient in the contemporary republican school system and which will be discussed at length in the book. Nor was this the first time Ottoman officials relied on state institutions to combat alternative interpretations of religion and inculcate official representations of faith. Centuries before the encounter be-

tween Ziya Pasha and Ibrahim Rüştü, deviation from state orthodoxy was equally taken to threaten the ideological foundations of the Ottoman polity. In an endeavor to curb dissident beliefs and thereby reaffirm state authority, troublesome preachers and their supporters were sometimes deported or killed, but more often the state erected Friday mosques in which state-appointed religious leaders educated the adult population in the state-approved tenets of the Islamic faith. Indeed, following religious insurrections in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman state erected such a mosque-school at Yayla.¹³ Rather, the fragments of oral memory and written sources, which I have gathered to narrate the educational foundations of Yayla, call attention to a central feature of modern state formation: the state consolidating its authority by laying claims over the subjectivities of its citizens, beginning with the education of children.¹⁴

What was radically new at the time of Ziya Pasha was treating schools as key institutional sites at the disposal of statesmen and government officials to manage the population. Until then, formal education was the prerogative of future government officials and religious scholars, those relatively few men who were entrusted to apply their knowledge and skills to either preserve and transmit the values of their society or, conversely, to redirect and transform them. Ziya Pasha was particularly receptive to the idea of a paternalistic state, socializing children through government schools. Throughout his career he devoted great attention to state education, beginning with his translation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophical treatise on education, *Emile*, to expanding the school system in the different provinces he served in, to appointing teachers capable of instruction in secular subjects.¹⁵ Since then, in large cities as well as small villages, state education has become *the* privileged vehicle to create citizens committed to the Turkish state and its orthodoxies. In turn, citizens from all walks of life in Turkey have come to define themselves in terms of schooling, distinguishing those "who have seen education" from those "who have not seen education."¹⁶

Childhood and Children's Education

From birth on, an individual is hailed as a citizen of a state—a member of a political collectivity who is everybody yet nobody in particular.¹⁷ The task

of producing citizenship has fallen on universal education, a central feature of modern state formation. Schools are more than bureaucratic institutions serving the public. They are state projects, both totalizing and individualizing, in which various forms of knowledge are deployed, imparting a sense of purpose and coherence to a population by simultaneously producing homogeneous totalizing categories (e.g., schooled or unschooled) and individuating identities (e.g., levels of education, diplomas). Moreover, schools incorporate and exemplify those state-regulated cultural forms, pedagogical practices and activities, and political representations that, taken together, are intended to have the public take for granted historically contingent identities. Or they perform what Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer define as “moral regulation”: “a project of . . . rendering natural . . . what are in fact ontological and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order. . . . coextensive with state formation.”¹⁸ The habitual routines, rituals, and discourses to which children are exposed during their years of schooling are all designed to inscribe them with a prereflective background to civic action. And as the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu points out, “One of the main powers of the state is to produce and impose (especially through the school system) categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world—including the state itself.”¹⁹

Likewise, a central tenet of the Turkish state is a commitment to produce citizens out of schoolchildren. The educational system is understood as the key institutional site from which political morality and unity are established. Through schools, children are expected to assimilate national principles relevant to their lives as adult citizens. In 1989, in his farewell address to the National Assembly, outgoing minister of Education Hasan Celal Güzel affirmed the pedagogical mission of the state: “national education is a state affair.” Ever since the (short-lived) Ottoman constitution of 1876, state officials are required to supervise and control all school systems.²⁰ The latest constitution, promulgated three years after the military coup in 1980, reaffirms the central role of the state in educating the country’s youth. Thus, article 58 asserts “the State shall take measures to ensure the training and development of youth into whose keeping our State, independence, and our Republic are entrusted, in the light of contemporary science, in line with the principles and reforms of [the first president of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal] Atatürk, and in opposition to those ideas which aim at destroying the

indivisible integrity of the State.” Irrespective of how the national ideals are interpreted, through the national educational system the state has custodial and tutelary responsibility to ensure that all children attain the basic requisites of citizenship. The legitimacy of the state is embodied in the claim to represent the will of the children who fall under its tutelage. Accordingly, childhood is a distinct but integral part of a society’s political structure: children are forced to attend a minimum number of years of schooling as the state has not only the legal right but the moral duty to enforce “universal” education.

Raising the new generation of children as the *raison d’état* is closely linked to perceiving youth as a preparatory phase to adult citizen life, as the object of the historical destiny of a nation, and as the subject of the political vitality of the state. As the conference organizers of the tenth National Education Conference declared in 1981, Turkish society’s survival hinges on passing “on the national culture to the new generations in order to attain continuity and stability in social life.”²¹ Education, childhood, and child development have become tropes with which a whole variety of social and political imaginaries are woven in Turkey. The national community is embodied metonymically in the classroom: all members of the polity are characterized as fraternal citizens bound with the same language, culture, and ideals. This pedagogical articulation of national identity iconically indexes not only the union of state and civil society but renders both arenas politically equivalent moral communities and thus erases any differences there may be in their respective social make-up and practices. Previously privileged categories, such as occupation, religion, social stratum, and locality, which cut across pedagogical boundaries, are demoted for the putative homogeneity that can be found in a generalized citizenship.

The preeminent role that the state takes in legally defining childhood, as a period of dependence and inculcating civic duties and rights in children, has only recently gained momentum in historical and anthropological studies. This is all the more surprising given that since the nineteenth century the progress of a country has been premised on the education of children, and accordingly, children spend many years of their lives in schools. A major stumbling block preventing scholars from seriously studying children in their historical and cultural contexts is an ongoing assumption that childhood is a temporary and impermanent period during which children pas-

sively and gradually accumulate those physical and cognitive dispositions that will turn them into full-fledged grown-ups. This assumption fits with the Aristotelian “great chain of being”—a unilinear, continuous ranking of living creatures from lower to higher forms, wherein the adult human being is at the summit of the cosmos and the child is an incomplete version of the ideal adult. With its emphasis on biology, this organic model views child development as a coherent universal process, unfolding over time along genetically programmed behavioral and cognitive functions. Indeed, much of developmental and child psychology downplays the child’s different environmental and cultural conditions (e.g., Piaget’s theories of universal structure). This is despite several decades of historical research that have shown that age-specific categories such as childhood and the transition between infancy and adulthood are as culturally constituted as gender, race, and status.²²

More recently, a historical-cultural approach to the study of children has made inroads into the biological view of socialization. Inspired by the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1933), whose *Mind and Society* became widely available in the English-language world in the late 1970s, psychological anthropologists and sociocultural psychologists approach children’s cognition in terms of historical, cultural, and institutional contexts. Specifically, they examine how culturally structured events and mediating institutions like schooling organize each individual child’s development. The overall aim is to explore children’s hermeneutic agency, that is to say, their ability to interpret self, others, and the world on their own terms.²³ Most importantly, all these scholars register the fact that children do not simply mimic adults, but actively contribute to shaping the adult culture in which they live. Children think, talk, and behave differently from adults, and only over time do they learn to adapt to the majority adult culture, to (mis)understand what grownups do and say. As Lawrence Hirschfeld observes, the fact that children “share a cultural tradition [with adults] is an achievement to be understood, not a presumption that can be ignored.”²⁴

Yet for the most part, sociocultural anthropologists have been reluctant to study children as social actors. Rather, they have focused on birth, child care, or adolescence, all of which directly relate to adult culture. Erika Friedl recently summarized the anthropology of childhood as one in which “children not only are underrepresented in our texts but also undertheorized and

outright neglected.”²⁵ This neglect, however, is giving way to an ethnographic literature that focuses on the impact of formal schooling on children’s political sociability.²⁶ What set these ethnographies of education apart from psychological studies of children’s culture are a concerted effort to understand how schools organize knowledge and meaning to shape people’s political conscience and actions. This is understandable given that people throughout the world perceive and experience the state as a major agent in their lives, and most of all, in national educational systems.

Political Culture, Citizenship, and the State

Modern state formation has frequently been understood in terms of elite interest and competition. Indeed, the academy has institutionalized an “elitist” way of emplotting change and continuity, of inscribing traditions and memories, of narrativizing sociohistorical processes. That is, since the history of the ruling classes is realized in the state, the dominant values of the state have most often determined the criteria for what counts as historically significant.²⁷ In practice, this has often meant that dated and legally binding documents, written for political elites, provide the context by which scholars make sense of the past and present of a society. Any transformations of significance are credited to dominant groups (politicians, officials, journalists, and scholars) in the society, while the politically defined minorities (e.g., women, workers, children) are assumed to either acquiesce or resist the totalizing effect of domination.²⁸

A more culturally attuned approach to the state is the symbolic (or interpretive) school of politics. This school focuses on those systems of signification that a regime disseminates to organize and orient political thought and action of all members of a polity. Lynn Hunt, for example, shows how images of the family in late eighteenth-century France produced a republican imaginary constituted as a self-ruling fraternal citizenry.²⁹ According to Corrigan and Sayer, the English bourgeoisie developed a series of positive “undefinable and inimitable qualities . . . such as reasonableness, moderation, pragmatism, hostility to ideology, eccentricity” that simultaneously defined Englishness and the English state.³⁰ Clifford Geertz claims that the Balinese state reproduced in the form of pageants the cosmic order

to which ruler and ruled subscribed.³¹ For Lisa Wedeen, repeated performance of paternal symbols and rhetoric around the cult of Hafiz al-Asad socialized the Syrian citizenry to compliance with an authoritarian regime.³² Each of these works reveals how embedded factors of cultural significance emanating from political contexts come to define state power. Yet like their elitist counterparts, symbolic studies of politics tend to view the state as a monolithic, coherent entity having a relatively bounded political culture, distinct from and located over and above society. And as a result, they fail to consider what citizens on the political margins expect from the state or the processes by which consensus over relations of dominance and subordination is forged. This failure results to a large extent from collapsing human behavior and social structures within shared patterns of meaning.³³

Clearly, neither the elitist nor the symbolist approach appeals to a broad range of anthropologists committed to retrieving the less tangible histories of politically marginal populations, documenting their political consciousness, and as much as possible, providing these populations with the means to represent their own views. This interest in how people of different social backgrounds define, understand, and interpret political regimes and action has occurred as scholars recognize that, one, definitions of collective identities are replete with indeterminacy and contingency among members of the same community as well as between different communities, and that, two, the power relations, in which identities are established, maintained, contested, and transformed, change over time. In other words, the notion of the state is constantly being defined within changing political and social contexts. To this effect, recent ethnographies closely follow Philip Abrams's programmatic essay in which he distinguishes between state institutions and the state as a metapolitical concept that confers legitimacy upon centralized decision making and governing institutions that often have competing agendas and interests.³⁴ Common to these ethnographic studies of the state are three interrelated issues, all concerned with local meanings, circulating discourses, multiple contestations, and changing forms of power: one, the state as articulating a cultural project that projects its unity onto society through institutional sites; two, the responses to state rhetoric and symbols as strategic attempts at reimagining power and its representations in everyday life; and three, alternative ideas about statecraft and the complex ensemble of social relations that mediate these ideas.