

Preface

My mentor, the late Bernard Cohn, once posed to me the innocent question, *Why education?* It was only some years later at an international conference on democracy at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beer-Sheva, Israel, that I began to formulate an answer. There I met for the first time Yeşim Arat, a political scientist whose work on sexual citizenship and feminist religious movements in Turkey I admire. At some point in our conversation, she emphatically declared, “The problem with Turkey is education, and the solution is education.” To her, schools can be either the source or the cure-all of society’s ills. In other words, the success of a country hinges on the right schooling for children, future adult citizens.

Conceiving education as key to the betterment of society is not particular to Turkey. The idea of the omnipotence of education for shaping humanity has been successfully promoted all over the world, and most of all, in school systems. For a variety of reasons, I grew up in several places—New York City; suburbia in Princeton, New Jersey; the French Caribbean; Paris, France; and Israel. One outcome of my nomadic childhood was exposure to different school systems with their particular social and pedagogical norms. Yet all these societies share in the optimistic conceit the Enlightenment educator Helvetius first advanced, “L’éducation peut tout.”

Despite this widespread optimism, or in fact due to it, education stirs up the greatest public controversies. It is a concept heavily charged with political connotations to which people from a wide variety of demographic and biographical conditions assign different meanings and functions. Mass education is by definition socialization within, and on behalf of, a particular political order. Through the school system, the state acts to transmit core val-

ues that promote the basic requisites of citizenship; that is to say, children must be predisposed to accept the moral and social principles underlying the polity. And because school curricula seem to play up key social issues, carry the weight of official approval, and engage a captive audience, they spur debates at all levels of society. After all, what children—the next generation of citizens—will learn about ethnic, economic, gender, and cultural differences raise fundamental political issues about identity.

In Turkey, systematic state intervention in the curricula has spurred politically motivated groups (religious nationalists, neoliberal secularists, and the military) to lobby their differences through the highly centralized educational system. Likewise, Turkish citizens from a variety of social groups place great stress on education: not only is it a source of political contention, but for many it is a means of social salvation. This is the case in *Yayla*, a small town of six thousand in the Taurus Mountains of southern Turkey where I conducted ethnographic fieldwork of two elementary schools and one middle school between 1989 and 1991.

This book is not intended to be an exhaustive description of the entire educational system in Turkey or a detailed ethnography of a local community. It aims rather at elucidating two interrelated issues: (1) governmentality—how politically motivated associations broker their respective cultural politics in an attempt to define both national and local experience for schoolchildren; and (2) subjectivity—how mass schooling creates contexts for individuals to insert their private selves in public discourses and thus reconceptualize their political selves in light of changing everyday realities. For this purpose, I examine the bases upon which competing interest groups build up their arguments about education, the implementation of their arguments in the curricula, and the impact of the curricula on children's political sociability in a particular locality. The very scope of these three aims has required balancing ethnographic detail and broader historical and political developments in the country. A multisited ethnography of a local school system provided an ideal field of inquiry on the tenuous relationship between curricula and life-course strategies. Through a detailed analysis of mass media (newspapers and television transmissions) and ministerial sources (textbooks, circulars, reports, and legislation), I trace how historically informed ideas, identities, and relations are converted into pedagogical practices. Parallel to these forays into textual artifacts, I probe the many ways parents and

pupils direct the terms of education to their own objects. Through my many roles as foreigner, teacher of conversational English and mathematics, a jack-of-all-trades (truck driver, unskilled laborer, cotton picker, and shepherd), and spiritual kinsman, I explore how parents and pupils make sense of the curricula in their day-to-day lives. Thus, in analyzing the relation between officially prescribed representations of society and polity and different understandings of education across generations, the book lays groundwork for approaching state-endorsed identity formation from the vantage point of local facts.

The main issues that this book sets out to discuss are concerned with the political functions, sociocultural significations, and scope of school knowledge. Although these three issues overlap in many of their features, each is distinctly different.

First, the issue arises as to how to analyze the relationship between education and politics in the context of modern state formation. Because historically informed ideas are embedded and expressed in educational practices and institutions, school knowledge has political ramifications. Institutions like the school are designed to induce consent to a dominant political order. Yet consensus is never fully realized. Nor is it perduring and stable. Rather, consensus generates a gamut of contradictory and equivocal ideas among political elites and the public alike and is thus vulnerable to alternative perspectives about polity and education. Any serious examination of the politics of education requires attending to the historical mutability and flexibility of political ideals and pedagogical practices and to the power relations (i.e., accommodation, contestation, negotiation) operative in educational systems.

Second, the issue arises as to how to tackle the relationship between education and society. School knowledge is often conceived as the antithesis of popular knowledge; that is to say, educators in particular try to associate it with self-evident, disinterested facts that transcend opinion. The logic goes that when children correctly apply the curriculum in their extracurricular lives, arbitrary opinions are supposed to give way to impartial, rational pragmatism. On the other hand, it is possible to stress the common features between school knowledge and popular knowledge, rather than their apparent differences. The public at large is never entirely separate from the dominant discourses that provide the language and conceptual categories with which they articulate their political selves. To suggest otherwise is to unwittingly

create an artificial (and historically skewed) divide between center and periphery, between elite forms of knowledge and indigenous ones. In turn, formulators of education do not operate in isolation from their targeted publics. Politically motivated groups will do their utmost to achieve consensus by appropriating popularly sanctioned norms and sentiments about the public good, economic activity, and community membership. The overall aim is for the citizens to internalize their value systems as part of a national outlook, as native common sense.

Finally, the issue arises as to how to fathom the relationship between education and subjectivities. 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 prescribed thought and behaviors. Accordingly, schools and the curricula within them are intended to mold subjectivities, to elicit a particular constellation of desires, fears, attitudes, and hopes around key social issues. Yet it is crucial to recognize the heterogeneity among the public, to take into consideration factors such as generation, gender, ethnicity, and class. After all, the day-to-day experiences, emotions, and political consciousness of particular individuals cannot be assumed to hold for all within a community. Thus, it is critical to explore how men and women, young and old, the educated and unlettered differentially constitute a meaningful relation between their public and private selves through school knowledge.

These three basic issues are tackled under various forms and in different contexts within the six chapters of the book.

Chapter 1, “Educational Foundations,” draws out the main issues that led to the unique establishment of a modern postprimary school in Yayla, then an out-of-the-way mountain village in the 1870s’ Ottoman state. The school emerged out of the confrontation between two poet-scholars—one a provincial governor and religious modernist; the other a theologian and mystic. The foundational story provides a pretext to discuss key issues in educational research: childhood, political culture and the state, citizenship and identity politics, and the politics of pedagogy.

Chapter 2, “The State of Education,” takes the reader to another confrontation, this time over the role of religion in the current national educational system. It deals with the release of an educational report that unleashed a coalition crisis between neoliberal businesspeople and religious

nationalists in 1990. A study of the national debate over children's schooling provides an opportunity to examine central concepts of the Turkish educational system and their political uses, the intersection of multiple global and national discourses, and the close links between education, the state, and civil society in Turkey.

Chapter 3, "Nation and Faith," explores how state policy makers, aligned with the Turkish Islamic Synthesis, have successfully promoted a rationalist, religious version of nationalism in the school system. Following a quick historical survey of this educational movement, the chapter then focuses on the interplay of religious heritage, secularity, and identity politics through school textbooks and plays. Thanks to a steadfast belief in the fixity of text, the transparency of language, and the stability of meaning, both media attempt to dissolve the disjunction between in-text/on-stage character and out-of-text/off-stage person in order that children immediately identify and emulate prescribed ideals. A detailed study of a religion textbook provides a fruitful means of examining the relation between faith and nation inside and outside the classroom. Likewise, a didactic play that young female graduates of a Qur'an course staged for a wedding dramatically draws out the multiple understandings of femininity and conjugal relations among the townspeople. Thus, school textbooks and plays provide a means for examining how curricular texts constitute political imaginaries and social relations.

Chapter 4, "Nation and Market," examines how the secular business community promoted schools as the ideal site to transform Turkish citizens into an efficient, industrious work force. Following a brief discussion on the economics of education, the chapter then explores those pedagogical values and practices that the industrialists believed were necessary for Turkey to achieve and sustain competitive advantage in the face of international competitors. To this aim, they focused on socializing pupils to a rational work ethic, inculcating progress and progressive time, and limiting urban migration and family size. These ideals informed how townspeople conceive of the historically contingent relation between *villageness* and the domestic sphere (fertility and homemaking), on the one hand, and the public sphere (public health and time discipline), on the other.

Chapter 5, "Nation and Army," explores how the military has carried its conception of political education into the school system, following the 1980 coup. To instill a spirit of law and order and inculcate obedience to state au-

thorities, long-standing martial ideals were reformulated as part of the country's religious heritage. Central to this reformulation was linking warfare and masculinity with reverence for Atatürk, the first president of the republic, on the one hand, and piety, on the other. Moreover, the militarization of the curriculum—a syncretism of religion and militant nationalism—drew on prerepublican ethnic divisions to cast the nation as besieged from within and without the country's borders. This syncretism was far from complete, as some youth found themselves excluded from the military dream of society.

Finally, Chapter 6, "Educational Postfoundations," draws out the historical contingencies of research on schooling in a Turkish community and discusses the tensions between a school system designed to actively structure children's political behavior along collective lines and the unintended emergence of individual autonomy among schoolchildren.

Modern education and schooling have become central in constituting sovereignty and polity, not only among the Turkish townspeople of Yayla but throughout our pedagogical world. In the very act of educating children, school systems articulate a moral order that lies at the intersection of generation, gender, ethnicity, class, and consciousness. Exploring how this articulation plays itself out in a local community in Turkey provides a double lens that gazes both microscopically and telescopically into the central dynamics of modern identity formation.