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A hundred years of assimilation: Context of Kurdish people in the field education

Assimilation and integration policies towards to the Kurdish people, in the field of primary school education system of Turkey, Kurdistan

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A HUNDRED YEARS OF ASSIMILATION: CONTEXT OF KURDISH PEOPLE IN THE
FIELD OF EDUCATION

Assimilation and integration policies towards to the Kurdish people, in the field of primary
school education system of Turkey, Kurdistan

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Preface

This thesis examines the negative perceptions, or obstacles that the assimilation policies of the Turkish education system have created for the political future of the Kurds for decades, as well as the dimensions of the racism and discrimination it creates. This

My real name is Mazlum. I am the child of a people whose language and identity have been banned for a century. At the Registry Office after my birth, my name was first recorded as “Muhsun”. This deliberate change was a customary state policy in the early 1990s. The Kurdish names given to Kurdish children were recorded differently in Turkish. From my earliest memories, I knew that my name was Mazlum, the name my mother and father gave to me, until the moment when I started primary school. At school, I was the first student to fail in the first grade due to absenteeism. Everyone's names were read out by the teacher in the classroom and the students responded saying "I'm here". In a way, this was the first moment we declared our existence as an individual. But since I had not been called "Muhsun" before, I could not respond with “I'm here". I waited quietly and unobtrusively, the only student who did not make a sound during the roll call. This silence was broken at a parents' meeting with the teacher. The classroom teacher read each student's names and asked who their parents were. My mother, who was waiting for my name to be read, remained silent in this parents' meeting just like I was silent in the classroom. After the meeting was over, when my mother went to the classroom teacher and asked about the deliberate name change, it was revealed that I had been marked absent in the class which I attended every day.

My name was inspired by Mazlum Doğan, one of the leaders of the Kurdish political movement who was murdered by the state in 1982. However, this name has been politically prevented from being used and a state servant deliberately changed my name. This change was not immediately noticed by my family as we do not associate our identity with the piece of paper given to us by the state. This is an indication of how strong the relationship we Kurds have with the identity that the Turkish state gave us. Afterwards, I remember very well the speeches of my mother and father at home, who went to the court and filed a lawsuit to change my name. Because of concerns such as “let’s not put him under oppression” and “it will be trouble for him in the future”, Mahsun, a more acceptable name, has taken its place in my identity card.

As a young person whose language and identity had been assimilated, at 14 years old I started to become interested in activist movements and the freedom struggles of people around the world. I could no longer remain indifferent. Finally, I embraced my identity, which I had denied for years and had felt shame being associated with. This shame and rejection of identity has been imposed on our consciousness from the first experiences of education. Our social environment, and especially our economic situation, are also very influential factors in the assimilation process.

The Turkish language was adopted as a second language in my family as a result of the mass migration wave that began in the 1990's from Kurdistan to the Turkish metropolises, which we were a part of. There was a need to integrate into a society of a different nature and language to navigate economic or livelihood difficulties. Also, because of social pressures, language, and education policies, the Turkish state systematically targeted Kurdish families. This was achieved mainly through the assimilation of parents first who were looking to join the labour force as seasonal agricultural workers, construction workers and individuals providing social services. This then continued through the education of their children.

I was born as the only child of a Kurdish family who were part of the mass migration towards the Turkish metropolises. So, from an early age I became a victim of the assimilation and Turkification policies of the Turkish state and was effectively suspended from the culture and history of my people. During my first visit to the village of my family, I realised that I had been denied the opportunity to learn my own language or experience my own culture as I failed to communicate with other children of the village and felt ashamed because I was not able to speak my own language. Despite being the child of Kurdish parents, I am still not able to speak Kurdish fluently and completely. The first language I was introduced to was Turkish, and only started learning Kurdish later in life when we visited our village every summer.

This thesis, which I started to write as a Kurdish activist and musician at UiT, The Arctic University, is my contribution to the freedom struggle of my people.

Abstract

This research aims to question how the Kurdish people is affected by the assimilation policies starting from the 1923 until today. It aims to explain how the education system serves the assimilation policies and how and for what reasons the Kurdish language and culture are being destroyed. The thesis provides reasons why Kurdish language and literature do not develop. In order to explain these situations, the thesis focuses on primary school education within the education system. The aim of the education system implemented in North Kurdistan is to raise Kurdish children with the awareness of being Turkish. The easiest way to assimilate a society is to disrupt the language structure of that society and prevent its heritage to be transferred to future generations. This master thesis refers to international human rights and draw on the reflections gained from struggles of minorities and indigenous peoples against assimilation and integration policies of nation states.

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I convey my love and gratitude to my mother, who has always supported me throughout my life and stood by me in all circumstances. Your love and care guided my identity and knowledge. Despite all the difficulties you have experienced, I will never forget the efforts you have made for my life and education. I will fight for your happiness, and I will be blessed with your love forever.

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I would like to thank all the people whose support I received from in Kurdistan during this process.

Finally, I would like to thank my classmates who have been influential in my life during this process.

Dedication

*The one that enlightening my path in this unjust world order and whose
scent I always feel at the tip of my nose,*

To my mother...

List of abbreviations, figures and tables

Abbreviations

AFI – Academic Freedom Index into Action

AKP – Justice and Development Party

ECHR – European Court of Human Rights

EU – European Union

Eğitim-Sen – Education Union

FCNM – Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

FCIP – Free, Prior and Informed Consent

GDT – Güneş Dil Teorisi

HDP – the People’s Democracy Party

HSYK – Supreme Council of the Judges and Prosecutors

ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ISIS – Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

MEB – Ministry of Education Turkey

METK – Legislation of National Education

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PKK – Kurdistan Labour Party

T.C – Turkish Republic

TES – Turkish Education Union

TDK – Türk Dil Kurumu

TTK – Türk Tarih Kurumu

RHKT – Revolution History and Kemalism Textbook

U.K – The United Kingdom

UN – The United Nations

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

The Republic of Turkey, declared on October 29, 1923, officially ended the Ottoman Empire. After the end of the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of the new Republic Turkish state, the state policies concerning minority populations did not change because there were no major political differences between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey's views on minority populations. The Ottoman Empire recognised minorities based only on religion because the Ottoman Empire was a caliphate (Dewdney and Yapp, 2021). Essentially, the Ottoman Empire was only interested in dividing society into Turk-Muslim and other religious groups. "Minority status in the Ottoman Empire was determined according to religious affiliation, not racial identity." (Bilgiç, 2013, p:339, translated by me)". It was only the Greeks, Armenians, and Jews that were recognised as minorities by Ottoman policy and named as *gayrimüslim*. Compared to the Turkish Republic, the Ottoman policy towards other minorities was more flexible in ways such as recognising their own institutions and schools.

This research explores the ways in which Kurdish people are, and have been, affected by the Turkey government's assimilation policies starting in 1923 until the present day. It explains how the education system has been designed and deliberately used to destroy Kurdish language and culture. This thesis focuses on the primary school education system and highlights what kind of policies Kurdish former students experienced, and how they perceived the education system during their time in primary school education. Also, this thesis briefly touches upon how the Kurdish language and literature have not been taught in the primary school education system as a way to prevent transfer of cultural information to future generations. The aim of the education system implemented in North Kurdistan, which is within the Turkish borders, is to raise Kurdish children with an awareness of being Turkish.

This thesis will use the human rights framework on education and safeguarding minorities and indigenous peoples against assimilation and integration policies of nation states as a point of departure.

The current assimilation policies took root during the early stages of the new Turkish state and were envisaged as part of the reforms and changes necessary to meet the requirements of a modern society after the end of the Ottoman Empire. These reforms and policies will be

discussed further in the Discussion and Analysis sections of this thesis. From past to present, religious or national minorities in Turkey have undoubtedly lived under great risk as a result of their cultural and historical heritage. “From the founding of the Republic of Turkey until 2012, other than the minorities recognized by the Treaty of Lausanne, groups living in Turkey with a mother tongue other than Turkish were not able to learn their own language within the formal education system.” (Kaya. N, 2015, p. 25). To shine a light on this situation, this thesis will highlight how the education system has been used as a tool to assimilate minorities via a review of primary school education textbooks, curricula and interviews. In addition, this thesis will compare the reports created by the education system and include the experiences of Kurdish students. The aim is to understand how Kurdish former students perceive the education system in terms of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability.

The Turkish education system is designed in such a way that children of minority groups who pass through it are unable to explore their cultural and historical heritage. The education system teaches students to be a good citizen and a good “Turk”. This can cause conflict later when we learn about our heritage and discover our differences and identity.

In 2012, Prime Minister Erdogan declared in public how his party defined the role of Islam in current government politics: "We have four main red [important] topics: one state, one nation, one flag and one religion." (T24, 2012). (Mannitz, Göğüş, İdil, 2016 p.14). This statement was the framework of state policies, and still is with the current government, and it demonstrates the extreme nationalist structure of the state. This thesis explores the various reforms that were implemented after 1923, and discusses the changes made in the field of education in order to explain the short- and long-term effects of these changes on Kurdish former students.

There is a diverse and multicultural society in the territory of Turkey. However, there is no educational policy that supports this diversity and encourages peoples to safeguard their identity, culture and language. In fact, there is a constitutional system that stands opposed to diversity and multiculturalism. In the current Turkish constitution, the following is stated:

“No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institution of education. Foreign languages to be taught in institutions of education and the rules to be followed by schools conducting education in a foreign

language shall be determined by law. The provisions of international treaties are reserved.” (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, p.41 Article-42)

Many of these Constitutional Articles do not recognize, and actively prohibit, the rights of minorities and ethnic groups of access to education in their mother tongue. This thesis touches upon the social and cultural effects of educational reforms and changes.

1.2 Previous Research

İsmail Beşikçi is a sociologist and author who has published books and articles on the history and assimilation of the Kurdish people (Beşikçi, 2016). Due to these publications, he has been prosecuted and removed from his university. Much research has been done on mother tongue education and language at major universities in Turkey such as Ankara University (the first university of the Republic of Turkey), METU (Middle East Technical University) and Boğaziçi University. These universities have been quite objective and critical to the different governments of the Turkish Republic. For this reason, this section will mention some of the rare thesis work found in university databases that has been written about the Kurdish people. The role of language and prohibiting the mother tongue in education is one of the main layers of this research.

Nevruz Uğur's doctoral thesis focuses on problems experienced in public areas by people with Kurdish as their mother tongue. Uğur, who received their education in Turkish, summarises the problems as follows: "inability to communicate, inability to fully express oneself, encountering bans, inability to speak Kurdish in official institutions and organisations, encountering negative reactions in western provinces, shame, reprehensibility and annoyance." (Uğur. N, 2017, p.5).

In addition, Hazal Sürmeli (2015) wrote a master thesis on the right to education in the mother tongue where she explains the language rights in relation to international agreements, and also highlights the differences between people such as indigenous communities and minorities, all in relation to international treaties.

Nurcan Kaya has prepared reports based on fieldwork carried out within the scope of the projects *Mobilizing Civil Society for Monitoring Equality in the Formal Education System in Turkey (Monitoring Equality in Education)* (Kaya, 2015) and *Forgotten or Assimilated? Minorities in the Education System of Turkey* (Kaya, 2009). These reports reveal how the Turkish education system aims to make the society homogeneous and colourless. Kaya was targeted by government policies because of her research, which focuses on the topic of assimilation, and reveals the facts of Turkification policies, and because of the fact she used to work with Minority Rights International Group (MRG).

The general focus of these studies mentioned is that the right to education in the mother tongue is violated, and the purpose of the curriculums and textbooks is to only represent Turkish society, culture, history and language. Moreover, these studies claim that this violation of language, and an education based on assimilation, prove to be major obstacles in the development of Kurdish language and literature. Based on my review, there appears to be limited research on specifically the education of Kurdish children through the curriculum and textbooks.

In light of this previous research in the field of education, this thesis will focus on the impact of the education system specifically on former Kurdish children's experiences. In particular, this thesis will address the impacts of educational assimilation on the Kurdish language, culture, history and identity.

1.3 Research Question

With the new assimilation process that began with the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey, local people, ethnic groups and minorities faced many difficulties and challenges. The main goal of these assimilation policies was to Turkify the languages, religions and cultures of the peoples living within the borders of Turkey. Especially in the fields of education, the "Ottomanization" policies implemented during the Ottoman Empire were transformed into "Turkification" policies. The minority and ethnic groups of the Republic of Turkey were seen as a threat. Undoubtedly, the assimilation policies that started to be implemented after 1923 were comprehensive and calculated, and targeted strategic regions due to the cultural and religious diversity of these regions. The Kurdish people have never been recognised as a

minority by the Turkish State and yet they are seen as the biggest threat to the stability of the new Turkish State.

“The Kemalist regime, which was trying to establish a modern nation-state, considered the Kurds the most as a risk for the new state to be established, among the ethnic identities that could cause problems, as it inherited the Ottoman legacy, which tried to homogenize the population within its borders as much as possible.” (Savaş, 2020, p:101, my translation).

The assimilation policies that started with the education system and continued with social and economic assimilation mostly targeting the Kurdish provinces, affecting every age group. The most strategic, and perhaps wide reaching, of these policies is the alphabet change from Arabic letters to the Latin alphabet, which has been called the "letter revolution". This meant that every citizen living in the country was expected to learn the Turkish language. I will explore these policies further in the Data and Discussion chapters of this thesis.

Given the points raised so far, my research question is: *How is the education system perceived and experienced by Kurds who have been educated in the Turkish system?* This is concretized by the following sub-question: *What are their primary school experiences in terms of language education and the curricular subject of history?*

Kurdistan is not a defined country and most people do not know exactly where it is. Another aim of this thesis is to provide information about Kurdistan to address lack of knowledge about the Kurdish people. Therefore, in the Background chapter these questions will be briefly touched upon including perspectives on ancient history of the Kurdish people. Questions on ethics, positionality and relevance will be addressed in the third chapter on Methodology. Here I will try to link indigenous methodologies to the minority context and how it can be useful in discussions on minority movement. In the Data chapter I will include textbook and interviews as the main source of data. In addition, I will include information about international law and national legislation as these constitute the legal structure of the Turkish education system. The Discussion chapter will examine the education reforms as presented in textbooks and how former Kurdish students perceive the Turkish education system before I conclude.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Brief history of Kurds



Figure 1: Map of Divided Kurdistan (kurdistanaid.org 13/04/2002)

Xenophon, a student of Socrates, mentions the Kurds as Karduk in his book *Anabasis*, written in 400 BC, and defined the region where the Karduks lived as Kardukya or Karduya. Xenophon states that the people living in the mountainous regions of Mesopotamia were a warrior nation and defended their lands against empires such as Persia. However, due to the geographically steep terrain and difficult climatic conditions, this region was not particularly popular with empires and other states, and therefore the people and lands have maintained autonomy since ancient times (Wikander, 1996, p.162-174).

According to Bender, "in a long-time tunnel, especially in a period of 9-10 thousand years, there were occasional mixtures between the tribes. The Kurdish people of today are the product of this combination." (Bender, 1998, p.137).

Bender states that this mixing of tribes has developed over thousands of years, via cultural exchange and diversity between peoples, but continues to follow the same pattern. Bender argues that the Kurdish people should be perceived as the continuation of a people who came from ancient times (Bender, 1998, p.137). He describes a structure of cultural heritage transferred from society to society, from generation to generation. According to Bender, the place where the Kurdish people emerged is Zagros (Bender, 1999, p.138).

2.1.1 Kurdistan as a home

Kurdistan refers to a geographic region that was divided by colonial powers. On July 24, 1923, the Lausanne treaty was signed between Ankara and its allied states. This voided the Sèvres Treaty of 1920. According to the Sèvres Treaty, a Kurdish state was to be allowed within Kurdistan, but with the Treaty of Lausanne, most of Kurdistan was annexed to the Turkish state without respecting the rights of the Kurdish people and without any guarantees to the Kurdish people. These Kurdish lands are divided between four different countries: Southeast Turkey (Northern Kurdistan), northern Syria (Rojava or Western Kurdistan), northern Iraq (South Kurdistan) and northwest of Iran (Eastern Kurdistan) (Rubin, 2016). All four parts of Kurdistan are known by their cardinal directions, like how the part under the authority of Turkey is called North Kurdistan.

In terms of geographical size and Kurdish population, Northern Kurdistan is the largest part of a divided Kurdistan. With the adoption of international borders, the majority of East and South-eastern Turkey are within the historical borders of Kurdistan. The sources of the two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, are joined by dozens of other rivers in North Kurdistan.

In 1921, a different treaty was signed between the Turks and the French when they left the Kurdish territories occupied by the French to Syria. Kurdistan lands, within the borders of present-day Iran, were colonised by the Persian government. And moreover, Baghdad and

Britain discussed the sharing of Mosul and Kirkuk based on the oil resources that make Kurdistan strategically important.

“Both the KRG and Baghdad see the unilateral development of the Kurdish oil industry as furthering Kurdish autonomy by making the Kurdistan Region financially self-sustaining, which is why disputes over ownership and rights to produce and export oil are difficult to resolve.” (Nader, Hanauer, Allen, B., & Scotten, A. G, 2016, p. 36).

Considering the population of Kurds living in this region, the League of Nations decided to establish an independent Kurdish state, but Great Britain protested this decision with the Iraqi government. Thus, the last remaining territories in Kurdistan were annexed to the Iraqi government (Guiditta. F, 2010, p.1-16). Years later, during the American-Iraqi war, the opportunity for independence for the Kurds once again emerged. However, this opportunity was changed from the idea of an independent state to an autonomous zone practice within the state and as a result, the idea of an independent Kurdistan was once again thwarted. During Saddam Hussein's regime, Kurds were subjected to numerous massacres and inhuman policies

“While the U.S. commitment to a unified Iraq prevented the Kurds from gaining independence after Saddam's fall, the Kurds used their new influence in Baghdad to negotiate bilaterally with the CPA for concessions, such as the acceptance of Kurdish as an official state language and promises to resolve disputes over Kirkuk. These concessions were included in the TAL and Iraqi Constitution.” (Nader, A., Hanauer, L., Allen, B., & Scotten, A. G, 2016, p. 22).

In return, the Kurds were promised an autonomous region.

“Thus at the end of 1925, the country of the Kurds, known since the XII'th century by the name "Kurdistan ", found itself divided between four states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. And for the first time in its long history, it was even to be deprived of its cultural autonomy.” (Institut Kurde de Paris, 2016, p.1)

Within limited recognition, there is an autonomous Kurdish management within the borders of Iraq, recognized in by the Iraqi constitution. The territory where the Kurdish people live today is divided and shared between the countries through the treaties made between the imperialist and colonialist states, after the First World War. In return, Kurdish Region Iraq,

which has been evaluated for the Kurds and constitutionally adopted by the Iraqi government, is in fact nothing more than a divide-and-rule project.

2.1.2 Language

The language is Kurdish language and belongs to the Indo-European language family and the traditional land of the Kurdish people is called Kurdistan (Maunsell, 1894). There are a variety of dialects in Kurdish, as with any language, and therefore it is a rich and ancient language. In the "Secondary Education Kurdish Language and Literature" textbook, the basic structure and dialects of the Kurdish language are stated in a shorter form. According to the textbook the main dialects of the Kurdish language are Kurmançî, Sorani, Dimilî, Goranî, Kelhorî, Lekkî, Lorî, and Sencabî (Sidîq, 2011, p.101).

Kurdish language differs from region to region in terms of phonetics, intonation and fluency. The dominant form of the language spoken in Northern Kurdistan is the "Kurmançî" dialect. According to statistical data on this issue, 68% of Kurds speak the "Kurmançî" dialect.

Table 1: Sidîq Hecî Welî Berwarî, Projeya Hevgirtina Zimanê Kurdî Duhok, 2011, s.101,102

Dialects	Population	Percently
Yukarı Kurmançî	19.044.000	%68
Orta-Merkez Kurmançî	4.588.000	%12
Aşağı Kurmançî	6.784.401	%16
Gorani-Zazakî	1.165.000	%4
TOPLA	31.581.401	%100

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Reflexivity and the role of the researcher

The Turkish state's education system is designed to systematically ensure that Kurdish children are: suspended from their own cultural, language and historical realities, shamed by and never mention their identities (Webster, & John, 2010, p. 175-191). As a product of such an education system, my opinions and understanding of my own culture were distorted until I started to actively seek knowledge of my true self and identity. This thesis can be categorised under the advocacy or activist research methodology paradigm (C. Hale, 2014, p.13-15). In this research I reveal that my position contradicts the dominant nationalist ideology enforced by the Turkish government. My approach is to contribute to information building amongst the Kurdish people. I believe this information and knowledge is important in order to free our minds and gain an appreciation of our own culture and language. However, I have attempted to pay attention to "critical distance", a term that Torjer A. Olsen (2016, p.25-45) and Johnson (2014, p.289-302) emphasise and agree on. This thesis is however strongly rooted in Johnson's (2014, p.289-302) advocacy perspective as my personal experiences and the period spent doing research amongst the Kurdish diaspora in Germany constantly reminded me of negative consequences faced by those who dare to challenge the knowledge imparted by the Turkish education system

In this study process, I often found myself in an insider position. From the onset I had planned to maintain critical distance however I soon realised how much I was part of the research subject and how challenging it was to take an outsider perspective. The most striking point in this process was for me to go beyond the identity of a "research student". This situation can be explained by Olsen's term "reciprocity" in Indigenous Studies. Instead of the term advocacy, reciprocity refers to another term used in local methodology and indigenous research method (2016, p.25-45). Olsen defines it as a compulsory relationship between the researcher and society.

“Whereas advocacy mainly is a term and approach used by scholars working or coming from the outside of a particular community, a term more used within Indigenous methodology and Indigenous research method literature is reciprocity.” (Olsen, 2016, p.40)

Reciprocity will determine the role of the researcher and will ensure that one's respect and commitment to society is clearly observed (Olsen, 2016, p.40-45). As a result of 21 days of networking and sharing during my fieldwork, I ended up playing an active role as an insider throughout this study.

As a member of the community in which I conducted my fieldwork, I was able to share my experience, speak the same language and engage in highly political and emotional discussions. I conducted participant observation and found myself participating in some demonstrations organised by the Kurds in Germany amongst whom I was doing my research. These demonstrations were organised to raise awareness on the inhuman practices of the Turkish army in Kurdistan under the guise of extraterritorial operations. I also attended and volunteered at some weddings and cultural celebrations that coincided with my research visit. This strength of relationship was nourished by the cultural roots I had established with my research subjects allowing me to be a member of their community. Given my identity, my mother-tongue and my background of experiencing racist violence just because of this who I was. In this study, reciprocity was used as I was able to gain an insight into the experiences of other members of my society by sharing my own experiences and living amongst them.

3.2 Indigenous methodologies and their usefulness to minority movements

The development of indigenous studies stirred up debate in the academic world which has cemented traditional or mainstream ways of seeking, knowing and understanding knowledge. There is no doubt that the dominance of Western methodologies is closely related to colonial and imperial dominance of the West. The scholars from indigenous communities who have studied in Western systems of education have found it difficult to tell the stories of their people and find a voice that could be echoed by Western theories (Smith 1999, Wilson 2001). They began to challenge the supremacy of Western methodologies and advocate for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems and methodologies. In this section I shall discuss how some of the core elements of indigenous methodologies can be useful for research on minority movements seeking self-determination or recognition as a people.

Research and knowledge have been, and still are, used to maintain inequalities and suppression of those considered the 'other'. It is this realisation that has led proponents of

indigenous research, such as L. T. Smith, to argue that the decolonization of research methods had to be centred on our own concepts and worldviews which would in turn lead us to knowing and understanding theory and research that serves our own purpose and from our own perspectives (Smith 1999). Research, when made public or taught in schools, can be used to serve a certain purpose and in most cases that of those in authority. This has been, and continues to be, the case in Turkey where Kurdish children are taught research that does not serve their purpose, and which denies them the knowledge of themselves. This aspect of indigenous methodology can be useful to minority movements as they seek to share knowledge of themselves and preserve that knowledge.

Indigenous people tend to experience similar challenges as those of minority movements or groups. The most common is that of being perceived as an enemy of the majority groups and seen as a threat to the establishment once they decide to call for recognition of their being. According to Porsanger (2004), a Sámi, Western research starts with a research problem or question followed by investigations or experiments to find and interpret facts. However, for Indigenous people such an approach often ignores the fact that there is a link between being “Indigenous” and having “problems.” This is also the case for minority movements and can be modified to say that there is often a link between being a minority (Kurdish) and being seen as the problem.

Thus, the Turkish education sector has sought to deny the historicity of the Kurdish people in its bid to Turkify or get rid of the problem. Indigenous methodology can be a useful tool to fight against such colonising research or education that seeks to deny indigenous people and minority movements their own culture and history. Elisabeth Cook-Lynn (1997, p.111-138) stresses the importance of the American Indians reserving the right to define their own perspectives of their history and culture rather than to rely solely on the thoughts and dictates of anthropologists and history theorists. This is one of the core elements of indigenous research methodology; that the people must own their own story and knowledge. The preservation of the history and culture of minority movements, as that of indigenous people, is dependent on the education and participation of the people in the creation and sharing of knowledge about themselves. This is an opportunity that the Kurdish people have been denied in Turkey where great lengths have been made to destroy such knowledge about their culture and history.

Indigenous methodologies resist the dominant western methods because of their role in colonising and constraining, even ridiculing, indigenous knowledge, cultures and history. According to Cook-Lynn (1997, p.111-138) colonising research does not only stereotype Indigenous people as the problem but it also misrepresents their stories, depending on why they are being told, who records, interprets, writes and publishes them, the questions asked by the researcher, and whose interests are being served (Miheusah 1998, p.13). It is therefore important to understand how the curriculum in Turkey is designed to effectively obscure and ignore the history of the Kurds or to appropriate it into Turkish history. Unveiling the context from which stories or knowledge is translated or made public is imperative to deeper understanding and for change to occur (Estey, Kmetec, & Reading, 2008, p.24-39). Indigenous research methodologies offer a framework under which the dominant narratives are questioned and the marginalised people of this world are given a voice and an opportunity to define themselves and challenge the misrepresentations.

The goals set for indigenous research scholars are clear from the onset and although they are worded differently by different scholars, it is common to stress the need to empower and liberate the indigenous people. The research outcome should be beneficial to the entire group and the knowledge useful in furthering group interests. Decolonizing research methodologies, such as Indigenous methodologies, are crucial in the development of new ways to reclaim control over our indigenous ways of knowing and to reinstate lost ancestral teachings, values and goals (Laenui, 2000, p.150-160). It is this liberating goal of knowledge that is shared by minority movements who seek self-determination. The boldness of the indigenous methodology paradigm standing up to dominant Western theories and questioning the superiority of its knowledge is the same way in which colonised and suppressed minorities also rise up to claim their self-determination.

The scepticism with which indigenous methodologies have been met with, as well as criticism and backlash from the dominant way of doing research, can be comparable to the resistance that minority groups seeking self-determination have faced. According to Crazy Bull (1977, p.17), indigenous methodologies seek to preserve, maintain and restore indigenous traditions, languages and cultural practices; to revitalise, to regain physical, psychological and spiritual health, to cultivate economic, social and governing systems, and to maintain sovereignty and preserve nationhood. This objective appears more political than academic yet,

by reading in between the lines, most social research under the western tradition seeks to maintain the status and solidify the dominance of Western ideas of society. It is this refusal to shy away from contradiction which make indigenous methodologies suitable to understanding the quests of minority movements fighting for recognition (Crazy Bull, 1977, p.16–24).

3.3 Qualitative research strategy

Most fundamentally, this thesis study draws on indigenous methodologies. According to Kovach, it is a paradigmatic approach referred to as indigenous methodologies. “It is useful to explain what exactly is meant by the claim that Indigenous methodologies are a paradigmatic approach.” (2010, p.41). The question of why the Kurdish people are not recognized as indigenous people with their social and historical reality goes beyond the scope of this study. However, the research touches on the question of how and why Kurdish people have been denied the right to self-determination recognized by international conventions and collective rights. “Therefore, the meaning of methodology is the study of how research needs to be done, how we find out about things, and how knowledge is gained” (Datta, R. 2018, p.36). Especially when comparing the situation of Kurdish people and indigenous peoples in the perspective of access to human rights, the main difference is the recognition based on international human rights tools and UN. Therefore, it is important to understand the differences between indigenous peoples and minorities and to understand the status of the Kurdish people within the scope of international rights. Moreover, the qualitative research perspective is supportive for the different dimensions of a research to be carried and discussed.

This research is inspired by the paradigms of indigenous people's research. As a consequence, it employs storytelling and interviews. “Indigenous methodology is about the insertion of Indigenous principles into research methodology so that research practices can play a role in the assertion of Indigenous people’s rights and sovereignty” (Datta, R. 2018, p.36). This approach allowed me to document the voices demanding respect for human rights and calling for sovereignty of the Kurdish people. This perspective further notes that information is not something that can be produced only by a single method nor can be considered valid forever. “It is important to explore the concept of ownership with regard to knowledge when discussing an Indigenous research paradigm within an Indigenous research paradigm, knowledge is not

something achieved in isolation (Schneider, B. & Kayseas, B. 2018). I therefore interact with my sources and also briefly share my experiences which also guides me in how I interpret and share the knowledge in this work.

3.4 Theory framing

Indigenous paradigms and research on the international indigenous and minorities movements are the theoretical basis of this research. Areas of important issues such as decolonization, self-determination and peoples' struggle against the assimilation and integration policies are guiding concepts for this research. According to the Chilisa, Indigenous research has four dimensions: relationality, responsibility, reverence and respect (Chilisa, 2019, p:13-15). As a Kurd myself, I was guided by these principles to ensure that I respectfully gather and share aspects of my community's struggle against assimilation and inhumane treatment. This was done by using my relationship with my interviewees. These concepts have been adhered to while meeting with participants of this research. I recognised these concepts as the communication approach, the building up of a trust relationship and receiving of critical layers of knowledge.

There are various indigenous groups and minorities in the world that we have very limited knowledge about, and the political situation of the Kurdish people is just one. Topics such as language assimilation, self-determination and first settlers and land rights are basic elements of indigenous methodologies (Chilisa, B. 2019, p:10-12). In addition, discussions and research based on international human rights will contribute to the indigenous peoples and minorities movements for freedom as a literature.

Every nation deserves self-governance and the rights to self-determination. According to the indigenous peoples' and non-state forming people's movements, desires of those minorities are not very different with regard to determining their destiny. In this case, indigenous methodologies and studies form the theoretical platform of this research. In order to understand the situation of the Kurdish people and other minorities in Turkey, in regard to the field of education, this research will focus on curriculum and textbooks, and shared experiences of people of my generation who passed through the primary school education system of Turkey between 2000 and 2010.

This thesis addresses the background and political structure of the Turkish education system. This is done by comparing it to the Right to Education Primers 1, 2 and 3 theoretical framework which are a series prepared by Katarina Tomaševski. There is particular emphasis on the third version which details the main standards of Availability; Accessibility; Acceptability; and Adaptability which recommends inclusive regulation of the education system for different individuals, minorities, and indigenous people (Tomaševski. 2001, p.17-31). These standards have also been adopted under the General Comment 19 of The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): “The principle of equality and non-discrimination requires States to ensure that social protection programmes meet the standards of accessibility, adaptability, acceptability and adequacy for all rights holders.” (CESCR, 2007).

These concepts will be used as the main analytical tools for the discussion part of the thesis, starting with the constitution and reports about education systems’ quality prepared by the Turkish government. The 4 A standards are going to be a measurement for me to use and understand how the Turkish education system matches or differs from the requirements of Kurdish culture, language and history as well as wishes of Kurdish children. I will briefly discuss my understanding of 4A standards together with Tomaševski’s definitions on the 4A concept. The discussion section will discuss the 4A concept through textbook materials and experiences of participants.

Box 2:
4-A scheme

AVAILABILITY	SCHOOLS	Establishment/closure of schools Freedom to establish schools Funding for public schools Public funding for private schools
	TEACHERS	Criteria for recruitment Fitness for teaching Labour rights Trade union freedoms Professional responsibilities Academic freedom
ACCESSIBILITY	COMPULSORY	All-encompassing Free-of-charge Assured attendance Parental freedom of choice
	POST-COMPULSORY	Discriminatory denials of access Preferential access Criteria for admission Recognition of foreign diplomas
ACCEPTABILITY	REGULATION AND SUPERVISION	Minimum standards Respect of diversity Language of instruction Orientation and contents School discipline Rights of learners
ADAPTABILITY	SPECIAL NEEDS	Children with disabilities
	OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION	Working children Refugee children Children deprived of their liberty

Figure 2: (Tomaševski, 2001, p.17)

3.4.1. Availability

This standard is particularly concerned with the education policies of the state phenomenon, which is the largest investor in order to provide education as a service. The provision of education service and its availability to students of all educational ages, requires

significant investment plans and policies (Tomaševski, 2001, p.15-17). There are communities that live in different living standards and cultures within the borders of the state. An example of this are the nomadic families living in Kurdistan and western Turkey.

Therefore, building a viable education system for the children of these families of no fixed address requires a serious investment plan. States are obliged by international human rights to provide education services.

“Ensuring that primary schools are available for all children necessitates a considerable investment, which is amplified by post-compulsory education and universities. While the state is not the only investor, international human rights law obliges it to be the investor of last resort so as to ensure that primary schools are available for all school-age children.” (Tomaševski, 2001, p.17)

3.4.2 Accessibility

This standard specifically highlights who has access to education. In Turkey, girls are excluded from the education system. In terms of access to the education system, this section emphasizes the importance of eliminating discrimination and enabling girls to access their right to education. It also calls for this elimination of discrimination in access to the right to education to be immediate rather than gradual.

It underlines the need to ensure non-discrimination in accordance with international conventions on access to economic, social and cultural rights and the convention on the rights of the child. The Accessibility standard is of vital importance in order to prevent exclusion of children, especially girls, from schools due to religious reasons in Kurdistan.

“Access to public schools should be guided by non-discrimination, the overriding principle of international human rights law, which applies to civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights, as well as to the rights of the child. Non-discrimination is not subject to progressive realization but has to be secured immediately and fully.” (Tomaševski, 2001, p.27)

This standard also states that care should be taken to respect parental rights over children. However, it emphasises that this right of decision should not override any child's right to education.

“Respect of parental freedom of choice for the education of their children is also not subject to progressive realization but should be guaranteed fully and immediately. Its exercise, however, sometimes clashes against the elimination of discrimination for the rights of the child, such as deprivation of education for girls.” (Tomaševski, 2001, p.27)

3.4.3 Acceptability

Respect for the right of families to choose the course of moral, ethical, religious, language and cultural education they deem appropriate for their children is guaranteed in all general human rights treaties. According to Tomaševski, violations of rights in the education process occur especially in education in another language and acceptance of another religious education process. “Respect for parental freedom to have their children educated in conformity with their religious, moral or philosophical convictions has been affirmed in all general human rights treaties and is continuously subjected to litigation.” (2001, p.29)

When the right to education is taken into consideration, one of the most controversial issues is undoubtedly the violation of the right to education in the mother tongue. Since the mid-1900s, studies have been carried out on the right to education in the mother tongue. Discussions on this right focus on the right to education in mother tongue, minority languages and multilingualism in the education system. According to Tomaševski, dilemmas regarding the language of instruction have increased rather than decreased in the last half century. Acceptability standard: demands that minorities be guaranteed the right to education in their own language.

“Acceptability” takes as reference the international conventions and articles that defend the right of children to education in their mother tongue and stresses the importance of preventing children from being humiliated. The Acceptability standard argues that new sanctions should be increased in schools for this purpose (2001, p.17-30).

3.4.4 Adaptability

Discussions on what children should learn and in which way they should be trained during their education process are very varied. For this reason, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been drawn up to make children's rights fundamentally understandable.

“The usual approach is to review the contents and process of learning from the viewpoint of the child as future adult, while the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that the best interests of the child be given priority. The choice in the Convention to refer to the best interests of the individual child highlights the need for the educational system to become and remain adaptable.” (Tomaševski, 2001, p.31)

In this case, children may need different educational processes due to their social, economic, cultural and vital differences. Children may have physical and mental disabilities or have been forced to work at an early age. “Children with disabilities are often segregated into separate schools or denied education altogether, and also absent from schoolbooks.” (Tomaševski, 2001, p.31). At the same time, there may be children who have been subjected to physical and psychological violence. This violence can be practised by family, society, teachers, or it can be violence between children themselves. Adaptability proposes to pay close attention to the situation of each child and demands that children be integrated into the education system, considering their unique living standards. “The challenge is immense – the system of education is required to adapt to each individual child, against the historical heritage of excluding all the children who were deemed not to be able to adapt to the system of education as it was.” (Tomaševski, 2001, p.31)

3.5 Methods and selection of participants

The basic data collection method aimed for this thesis study is to create qualitative working dynamics by conducting interviews with individuals who have experienced and faced assimilation in the education system (Drawson, Toombs, and Mushquash, 2017, p.3-28). However, this process did not progress as planned due to the Covid pandemic. A literature review was the first method chosen for this research and later field trips and interviews were included.

In terms of analysing the Turkish education system, the Turkish constitution and specific reports, prepared by state organisations such as the ministry of national education, have been reviewed. This means that I have included text as data. I decided to narrow only to the articles of the constitution which determine the future of the education system and prevent the use of other languages in public institutions. This process provided ideas in order to create a framework of my data. After reviewing literature and legislation on the education system, I felt the need to talk with representatives from the education union in order to understand what constitution articles all are about. From a state perspective, the education system is designed for all segments of society, and it does cover requirements of diversity of whole populations. On the contrary, former students and education union officials strongly advocate that it is an education system designed as monotype and there is no inclusion policy. After having interviewed the education union officials, I met with Kurdish former students and gained knowledge from their stories shared with me. For this purpose, I had to travel to Germany and this travel introduced a fieldwork element to my investigation.

Fieldwork is important as it touches the ground in terms of generating primary data and to gain knowledge of the land, sources and community (Deborah, 2003, p.116-118). “The particular strengths of qualitative research lie in the knowledge it provides of the dynamics of social processes, change and social context, and in its ability to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions in these domains.” (Mason, 2006, p:16).

I planned to do fieldwork in the Botan region of Northern Kurdistan. The university to which I am affiliated cancelled all field work due to the risk factors posed by the epidemic conditions. Therefore, many of the intended interviews were cancelled and replaced with alternative participants. Given these realities, I had to change the research question and problem statement. Finally, addressing the assimilation and integration process of former Kurdish students with their own stories and involving them in the research formed the thematic skeleton of the thesis. After having revised the method of the thesis, I conducted interviews with 13 people both online and in person. The questions asked in the interviews are based on the idea that the problems faced by individuals (subjects) during primary school periods should be explained by individuals. For this reason, the questions are selected as intermediate titles where people can create their stories with an open-ended figure.

I travelled to Germany (specifically to Bremen), one of the most densely populated areas of the Kurdish diaspora, to reach the community where I could conduct my interviews. I had the opportunity to socialise and spend time in their houses as a guest. I believe that the relationship between researchers and the regions, people, cultures, languages and experiences their field work focuses on is important in making sourcing and analysis of the problem more understandable.

I made use of the participant-observer method as the second basic method of my research. I informed each individual I met before the meeting about my own story of assimilation and the pressures and effects this process had on my life. After telling them about myself, my past and my foregrounded struggle, I explained I wanted to collaborate with them, assuming there was a self-developing relationship of mutual trust. I organised several meetings in special places for the people involved. These places were mostly libraries and communal places, arenas for voluntary efforts and awareness about youth initiatives. In short, these places are “communal place”, and they are available for Kurdish people to gather themselves or use the place for any kind of benefit (wedding, seminar, festival, celebration etc.). After having several group meetings together with youths and adults, important networking took place. Together with the community, many issues were discussed and the main focus of these discussions were about education and struggle. It was interesting and sad to hear how elder people were integrated into Turkish communities mostly as seasonal workers, and how they have been forced to speak Turkish in public. Regarding their memories I heard a lot about suffering, from unforgettable traumas to the loss of loved ones as a result of the extreme pressure of state policies. From the moment of their exile until now, it is obvious that what has been transferred to the young generations was not only struggle but the memory and repercussions of trauma. In these group meetings it was quite hard to keep feelings hidden and be far from yourself as Kurdish individual to approach the situation, but since it has been group meetings and everyone recognised it as a safe zone, we obviously shared many stories securely. Moreover, together with all those individuals who passed through all, participants were holding a lot of stress and anger. In a way, these group meetings became more and more desirable to join so that people could get together and share their stories. After I left Bremen, I heard that people continued to meet and share their experiences and memories which was so rare as participants mentioned.

This thesis study on the education system is limited to primary school education. As a result, the participants of this thesis consist of Kurdish students who were students during the primary school period between 2000-2010. The main reason for selecting this period is that I was a primary school student in the same period. This is the common feature of the participants, but there are other variables that are considered. The participants were selected from different regions of Kurdistan and Turkey's metropolises. The main purpose here is to reveal the differences of opinion between Kurdish students born, raised and educated in Kurdistan villages and students born, raised and educated in the cities of Turkey (or in the big cities of Kurdistan). It also explores how the participants are affected by assimilation and integration in different ways, together with the differences of opinion.

Most participants are people from the Kurdish diaspora, who have settled in various parts of Europe for migration and asylum purposes. In addition, interviews were conducted with union members from Turkey who oversee the education system and report rights violations on the structure and content of the education system. The process of selecting the participants who created the data of this research was decided after the creation of the necessary contacts and networks. It is clearly seen that these sources overlap with the stories and events that unfold in interviews. Some of the comparisons made to reveal this situation are found in the discussion and analysis section.

During the group meetings in Bremen, I had a chance to meet many people, especially young Kurdish activists. The reason why they are living outside of the land is due to exile and asylum. Many of them are expelled from their institutes, universities as well as places of work, because of their activist movements in Turkey. When I explained my research, they were willing to have a conversation and discussion with me. After many meetings, trust began to be established and they became a participant of this thesis.

In addition, the reports published in the field of education by Eđitim-Sen, which advocates for the right to education in Turkey, will be used as side sources of data, especially reports carried about curriculum and educational rights violations. Unions and associations such as Eđitim-Sen and Human Rights Association (İHD) monitor human rights violations and publish their annual reports on this issue publicly on their website. It is a challenge to publish

all this information publicly and it is therefore common that they face various violations, legal sanctions, and arrests. Despite this, these organisations continue to insist on human rights advocacy, and work for political change.

3.6 Concerns on ethics

As a Kurdish individual who has been through the Turkish education system from primary school to university, I carried out this study with an insider approach (Kwame, A, 2017). My personal experiences as someone who underwent the assimilation process and felt its social and cultural effects have had a bearing on this research because I was able to reflect on the consequences of my life experiences and on similar experiences of my research participants. Ary et al. (2009, p. 424) notes that “it is impossible to develop a meaningful understanding of human experience without taking into account the interplay of both the inquirers and the participants’ values and beliefs”. I embarked on this research convinced that the forceful assimilation of the Kurds enforced through the Turkish education system is wrong and with a strong belief in self-determination. This awareness and the richness of my experiences were useful tools in presenting the data contained in this research. It also made me able to step back and accept that some of the possible informants were not willing to take part in the research because of their experiences and how it triggered them emotionally.

A trust relationship was established with my research participants, and I think the whole process unfolded naturally. I believe resistance is a unifying factor and I believe that it has now become a social norm for the Kurdish people. When I explained the objective of the research it made them more willing to share their stories. Bryman (2013) notes there is a growing acknowledgement that a researcher cannot be entirely free of their beliefs.

The process of assimilation of the Kurdish people is a historical fact and the objective here was listening to problems faced by the participants and the inhumane treatment they experienced. Davies (2008, p. 72) notes that just belonging to a society does not mean one becomes inherently aware of the oppression and become morally the voice of the oppressed, but rather it is the mixture of experiencing and becoming conscious which results in politically engaged and socially relevant research. The inclusion of racism, discrimination and assimilation faced by individuals in this research by comparing them to numerous incidents

experienced and reported, is planned as a process of ensuring the accuracy of information. This research calls attention to the continued denial of the Kurds right to learn in their own language and how the education policies hinder their exercise of these fundamental human rights. I do not only document my own experiences but those of other Kurdish people without presenting them as victims because I know of their/our struggle.

The information of the participants will be kept confidential, and I follow regulations on personal safety as a student at UiT the Arctic University of Norway. The transparency of communication and the importance of building on trust highly affects the data that the participants of a study have generated. The policies of repression and deterrence experienced by the Kurdish people make researching the policies of the Turkish education system to assimilate the Kurds not only difficult but also risky. Above all, the safety of participants is more important than the study. Therefore, stories and information shared by individuals are anonymised. No research is important enough to jeopardise an individual, and the sensitivity to be shown in this context is extremely important.

4 DATA CHAPTER

4.1 Textbook - Revolution History and Kemalism Textbook

According to Reviews of National Policies for Education: Basic Education in Turkey (2005), the Turkish education system is divided into a formal and non-formal section. Primary school is a 4-year education process followed by Secondary school for another four years. In addition, a child spends 4 years in high school education (OECD, 2007). There are 878 curriculums prepared for all these different educational stages. The curriculums are published on the official website of the Ministry of National Education. 131 of the published curriculums belong to Primary and Secondary school education. All the curriculums have been designed and enacted according to the national curriculum perspective and policies of the Turkish state. In this respect, there are two types of curricula in the Turkish education system. These are National Curriculum and Textbooks Curriculum.

“In the last eight years, as a result of “Curriculum development” that has been carried out according to national needs and values and also taking contemporary scientific and technical data and also the differing interests, wishes and capabilities of the students into account, 878 curricula for schools of all kinds and levels have been developed and put into practice.” (OECD, 2005, p.64)

The main sources to be used for this purpose are textbooks and online courses provided to students by the Ministry of National Education. Among the textbooks, particularly the "Revolution History and Kemalism Textbook (RHTK)" and the online courses belong to this topic are examined. This course was chosen due to its historical narrative feature and the presentation of minorities is remarkable. The course includes the developments in the process of World War I and the effects of the sense of nationalism spreading with the "French Revolution". It lists the fronts of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Sèvres and Lausanne made during and after World War I and mentions the results of the reforms and radical changes after the official proclamation of the Turkish Republic. (Ülkü, Mutlu, Çetinkaya, 2019, p. 38-40)

The content of the course is divided into seven chapter and these chapters are sequentially as follows.

Table 2 : Contents of RHKT (prepared by me)

• Bir Kahraman Doğuyor / A Hero Is Born
• Milli Uyanış: Bağımsızlık Yolunda Atılan Adımlar / National Awakening: Steps Towards to the Independency
• Milli Bir Destan: Ya İstiklal Ya Ölüm! / A National Epic: Independence or Death!
• Atatürkçülük ve Çağdaşlaşan Türkiye / Atatürkism and Modernizing of Turkey
• Demokratikleşme Çabaları / Democratization Efforts
• Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası / Foreign Policy of Period of Ataturk's
• Atatürk'ün Ölümü ve Sonrası / Ataturk's Death and Sequel

Each chapter terminates with measurement which is questioning of learning outcomes and evaluation sections. There is a special curriculum for the analysis of course contents, subjects and the language used (RHKT Teaching Curricula, 2018). In terms of content, this thesis chronicles the period from Ataturk's youth until his death in 1938 and developments such as the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the new Turkish State. It also includes some of the policies pursued in the state structure, and the education, society and bureaucracy, and reforms that have been implemented. As content in this textbook, the developments in Europe in the 19th century and their impact on the Ottoman Empire, Ataturk's education and military service and causes and consequences of the First World War included to the RHKT textbook. (Ülkü, Mutlu, Çetinkaya, 2019, p.14-32). Moreover, in the RHKT textbook, reforms in education and culture after the proclamation of the republic chronologically listed as Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu (1924), Harf İnkılabı ve Millet Mektepleri (1928), Türk Tarih Kurumu (1931), Türk Dil Kurumu (1932), and Üniversite Reformu (1933). These reforms of assimilation will be discussed in the Discussion chapter.

4.1.1 Law of Tevhid-I Tedrisat (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu)

The union of the education system laws were published upon the realisation that the education system was chaotic and was producing two sets of citizens with different

understandings of society. “According to this law, the regulation of the education system and the preparation of the curriculum of all schools in the Republic of Turkey were left to the Ministry of National Education.” (Ülkü, Mutlu, Çetinkaya, 2019, p.142, translated by me). In addition to the old-style schools from the Ottoman period (schools described as old-fashioned are traditional schools), new and modern schools had been opened. Based on this duality, the RHTK textbook claims that people who were graduating from these two types of schools represented two different mentalities in society and represented a source of social decomposition. In other words, from the onset these new laws were framed with the goal of creating a society that would think alike and saw separate education systems as a threat to a homogeneous society.

On March 11, 1924, the madrasas providing traditional education were closed, and İmam-Hatip Schools and theology faculties were opened to train religious officials. These new developments in the field of education concerned all segments of Turkey and were arranged according to the needs of the Turkish nation. “Education and training organized according to the needs of the Turkish nation gained a national identity and a contemporary appearance” (My translation) (Ülkü, Mutlu, Çetinkaya, 2019, p.143, translated by me).

4.1.2 Alphabet Reform (November 1, 1928, Harf İnkılabı) and Opening of National Schools (January 1, 1929, Millet Mektepleri’nin Açılması)

After the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, it was decided to examine the Latin alphabet to reach the level of modern civilization and approach Western civilization. With a law enacted on November 1, 1928 in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, new Turkish letters were accepted instead of the Arabic alphabet.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk interprets the alphabet change as follows: “Before every vehicle, it is necessary to give an easy literacy key to the great Turkish nation. The great Turkish nation can get rid of ignorance, with little effort, but with such a tool that fits their own, beautiful and noble language easily.” (Utkan K, 2018, p. 301, translated by me). Even changing the letters used in all institutional and public spaces is described as a necessity for the Turkish nation. In fact, it is important to focus on how alphabet change can leave the whole society as illiterate overnight, rather than the needs of change itself.

4.1.3 Institute of Turkish History (TTK 12 April 193, Türk Tarih Kurumu)

Historiography and written literature in the Ottoman period focused on the Ottoman dynasty and Islam. Therefore, the new Turkish state followed a different way of writing history in order to change this perception. For this purpose, the Institute of Turkish History (TTK) was established in 1931 and became operational. The Dissertation of Turkish History which was released by historians in parallel with this development, is an important thesis to understand the sociological and colonial structure of today's Turkish state.

4.1.3.1 Dissertation of Turkish History and Sun-Language Theory

Basically, it is the period of sanctifying the nationalist studies or research with the aim of the purity of Turkish language. "These studies are shaped in a nationalistic context based on the superiority of the Turkish language and aiming to prevent it from fading out, especially under the influence of Arabic and Persian language." (Akman, 2011, p. 90, translated by me). Research on improving the Turkish language started during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but mainly intensified in the 1930s after the proclamation of the Republic.

"Linguists who prepared the Sun Language Theory claim that all the world languages are of Turkish origin; they based this on the premise that Turks, "the oldest race in the world", first worshipped the sun, and on the claim that the Turks took their concept of life from the idea of the sun." (Akman, 2011, p:90, translated by me)

The Sun Language Theory has been examined by linguists and many studies and research have been published on this subject. According to these studies, after the proclamation of the Republic, the primary aim of the development of the Turkish language was to get rid of any remnants of the Ottoman period but instead it aimed to raise an obedient and nationalist generation fed with a sanctified concept of Turkishness.

4.1.4 Turkish Language Association (1932, Türk Dil Kurumu)

According to the RHTK textbook, "Ottoman Turkish", consisting of Turkish, Arabic and Persian words, was used during the Ottoman period. In addition to these official language of the Ottoman Period, a wide variety of different languages were spoken.

Turkish language studies started with the delegations formed in the early republican period. “On July 12, 1932, the Turkish Language Investigation Society was established by the instruction of Mustafa Kemal. This institution took the name “Turkish Language Institution” in 1935.” (Ülkü, Mutlu, Çetinkaya, 2019, p. 146, translated by me). The aim of these language studies was again declared as a glorification of the Turkish language and its liberation from the influence of other languages. In order to serve the aims of "National Unity" and "National Sovereignty" that emerged after the proclamation of the Republic and towards the end of the Ottoman period, great importance was attached to the reforms made in language and historiography. The aims of the Turkish Language Institution are expressed in the course book as follows;

“All these studies in the field of language and history contributed to the development of national culture and to the strengthening of national unity and solidarity. It also played an important role in creating a national identity.” (Ülkü, Mutlu, Çetinkaya, 2019, p. 146, translated by me).

4.1.5 Reform of Universities (1933, Üniversite Reformu)

In order to lay the foundations of universities and the whole education system, Albert Malche, a Swiss pedagogue and politician, was invited to Turkey in 1933 and was asked to organize a new university system (Sağın, 2001). The university reform is described as the last revolution of the republican period. A long report was prepared by Malche on the renewal of universities and the change of the education system. All the shortcomings and structural weaknesses identified in this report still apply to universities in Turkey today. According to Sağın, the identified deficiencies identified then are present also today:

“Unfortunately, most of the determinations in this page report by Malche, such as "lack of scientific cooperation", "lack of a widespread research environment", "weakness of the faculty members' belonging to the institution", "the disconnected and withdrawn image of education from society", are unfortunately common in today's Turkey. It is also valid in the universities of Turkey.” (Sağın, 2011, p:1247, translated by me).

4.2 Education and information network (EBA) online education

With the Covid-19 pandemic affecting the world, new educational regulations and practices came into force. On March 11, 2020, a pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) after the Covid-19 pandemic spread rapidly and reached an unavoidable level. Online education systems replaced physically delivered courses. Between 2011-2012, an online education program called Fatih Project was designed in Turkey, which then turned into EBA online education in 2012. According to the EBA website, the Education Information Network, "is a distance education platform prepared by the Ministry of National Education that we have recently completely renewed." During the distance education system process, three channels were opened on national television: TRT-EBA Elementary School, TRT-EBA Middle School and TRT-EBA High School. In 2020 "TRT EBA TV was opened for distance education purposes due to virus measures. The television channel that broadcasts lecture videos follows the curriculum of the Ministry of National Education, and broadcasts on three different channels: primary school, secondary and high school." In addition, it is possible to follow the published lectures as well as watch recorded versions published via the EBA official website. Eighth grade Revolution History and Kemalism courses were transferred online during the 2019-2020 academic year. There are twenty-four online lectures for the eighth grade RHTK course in the Education and Information Network (EBA) system.

Textbooks and necessary materials have been published on the EBA website and students can access these materials through the website. There are 6081 documents published on the website and the contents are of varied format: video (4662), journal (412), interaction (181), audio (36), visual (21), link (13), book (559), exercise and exam (8), and EBA static link (7). Thus, textbooks and educational materials of the current education system are accessed via the EBA website.

When the list of published textbooks is examined, there are more than ninety books and publications published by the education curriculum for primary and secondary schools. With elective courses, this number increases more. However, there is still almost no information or narrative about Kurdish people. The Revolution History and Kemalism course is also memorized to students within the scope of Open Education (Lifelong Learning) and EBA Distance Education.

4.3 Interviews

While reviewing the interviews three major categories revealed themselves - language, identity and violence. These three categories will structure part of the discussion. The participants were asked about how they introduce themselves in terms of language, identity and culture. The participants were also asked about the positive and negative experiences they encountered during their time as students in the Turkish education system (primary school period). In addition, they were asked to share their experiences about how they grasped the concepts of racism, discrimination and assimilation. The participants were left with a space to define themselves. Even though it is known that the participants are Kurdish, the arguments they used to define their identities and experiences differ more or less from each other. Core questions about identity and language were:

“How do you define your identity?”

“How did you become aware of your language and culture or historical heritage?”

“Were you using your mother tongue before you started school? Can you describe the environment you lived in as a child in terms of language, culture and geographical (metropolitan, city or village)?”

Participants were asked about how they perceive the education system in terms of the curriculum and its application. They were also asked about the main sources of this thesis study: "T.C. History of Revolution and Kemalism." A core question asked was the following:

“What did you learn about the Kurdish people, Kurdish, minorities and similar issues from oral and written materials provided to you in school during your education process?”

Along with these types of questions and other supporting questions, the participants were asked to discuss the education system they personally experienced.

In addition, two officials from Eğitim-Sen (Education-Union) were interviewed. This is the most important opposition education union in Turkey. Education union officials periodically examine and analyse each part of the Turkish Education System and present their work to the public in annual reports. They also offer alternative options to the education system they report on, and they continue to work for the implementation of fair, egalitarian and liberal education policies. Unfortunately, such educational unions or non-governmental organizations

are suppressed, closed down and fined regularly. Being aware of this, both officials who participated stated that their work is a duty and argued that it should be public. Information about the institutions are shared in this thesis in line with the wishes of the individuals. The opinions and analyses of union officials are shared publicly on their website.

4.4 International law applicable to Turkey

Within the framework of basic human rights, the right of individuals to education is one of the most important rights. The right to education is guaranteed by international conventions and its implementation seen as needed by the states. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), the European Social Charter (ESC) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) all guarantee the educational rights of individuals by addressing them from different realities.

Articles of UDHR such as 26/1-2-3, 27/1-2, and 28 state that primary and basic teaching should be compulsory and achievable for everyone. At least in basic education, it means that education should be free. The articles of ICESCR on education (13/1-2-3-4. and 14) are much more detailed with substances. In this case, if the articles 13, 14 and 15 are interpreted together, the importance of having the education system accepted and accessible to everyone is essential (ICESCR, 1966). In addition, the declaration has principles that can act as a guide in regard to the right to education.

According to international law, the right-to-education approach at the heart of contracts is inclusive. Thus, together with the sovereign nation, the right to education of all ethnic, religious, national or marginalized minorities is protected, and it is aimed to respect differences. CEDAW, on the other hand, is a very important convention in terms of political equality. For example, Articles 10 and 11 of this agreement are particularly relevant to the right to education. Women have been marginalized and disenfranchised as a result of gender discrimination by the male-dominated systems across the world throughout history and the present. Along with an unlimited number of examples that can be given, girls are prohibited from education in schools by mindset formed by family, state, religion and similar phenomena (CEDAW, 1979).

In this respect, CEDAW is vital in the context of women and girls being educated in schools and accessing the right to education. “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women.” (CEDAW, 1979, Article:10).

Another important convention is the CRC, which guarantees and commits to the parties the rights of children in need of assistance and attention in all respects; socially, culturally, economically and vitally. By accepting all the rights announced by the individual declaration of human rights, it guarantees the rights of children by establishing a bridge between states and families for all processes that will contribute specifically to the development and future of children. Article 29/a-b-c-d-e and Article 30 are about children's right to education (CRC, 1989). “In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.” (CRC, 1989, Article:30). An example of violation of the CRC rights is the closure of Zarok TV (Kids Channel) which was broadcasting for Kurdish children. Zarok TV was a channel where Kurdish children could access educational and instructive documentaries, cartoons or various audio-visual materials in their mother tongue, and it was broadcast only in Kurdish with 3 different dialects. However, Zarok TV, which was closed and then reopened by the Prime Minister but could not be broadcast solely in Kurdish. With the decision made, it was re-broadcast with the obligation to broadcast in Turkish at a rate of 40%.

These conventions ensure that the right to education is protected and accessible to all. Some conventions guarantee the right to language, culture and education of minorities. In particular the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) which protects and guarantees the language, religion and cultural rights of minorities (articles 9, 10, 11, 14). FCNM defends the importance and guarantees the right to language education and article 14 states that “The parties undertake to recognize that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to learn his or her minority language.” (FCNM, 1995, p:6). But Turkey ignores this and does not implement these standards. On the contrary, they are seen as a danger and threat by Turkey. Other articles of the convention underline the unconditional

application of this right, and the application of these rights do not pose any threat. “The opportunities for being taught the minority language or for receiving instruction in this language are without prejudice to the learning of the official language or the teaching in this language.” (FCNM, 1995, p.22).

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (CETS) which is the agreement that contains regulations on the transfer of education and cultural heritage of minorities in their mother tongue, has not been signed by Turkey (CETS, 1992). These regulations are clearly stated in Article 8, the Education section: “The articles of the convention are considered to be the general EU standard regarding the protection of minority rights, and Turkey is therefore expected to ratify the convention as a condition of EU membership.” (Kaya, 2015, p.14).

4.5 National legislation on education

Turkey’s constitution does not contain a single sentence about minorities and the constitution is still based on a homogenous notion of the territorial nation.

“Affirming the eternal existence of the Turkish Motherland and Nation and the indivisible unity of the Sublime Turkish State, this Constitution, in line with the concept of nationalism introduced by the founder of the Republic of Turkey...” (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, p:15).

This is how the preamble of the constitution starts. This statement clearly shows that the whole law system of the Turkish republic is not inclusive. The constitution sums up its introduction by stating: “...has been entrusted by the TURKISH NATION to the democracy-loving Turkish sons’ and daughters’ love for the motherland and nation.” (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, p:16). The constitution of the Turkish Republic is not in line with the requirement of diversity as an element of a democratic society. Article 3 describes the language of state: “The State of Turkey, with its territory and nation, is an indivisible entity. Its language is Turkish.” (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, p,17).

This way of describing the monotype language of a state has multi-dimensional implications in terms of culture, language, religion, and gender, which does not fit with the secular and democratic approach to governing the society. These articles are a stereotypical approach to diversity in terms of minorities, minority rights and education law.

There is no legal framework that constitutionally recognizes or protects the rights of minorities. As a member of the UN, Turkey is legally subject to UN requirements with bondage of several conventions. In fact, according to the Academic Freedom Index into Action (AFI)'s report, Turkey took place at the end of the list of world rankings with regard to research and reporting carried out within the framework of respect for human rights and protection of the rights of minorities. In AFI's Free Universities report published on March 2021, Turkey ranked 0.064 (scaled from 0 to 1 with divided scales A to E) marked red in the academic freedom rankings in 200 countries (Kinzelbach. K, Saliba. I, Spannagel. J, Quinn. R, 2021 p.24). Syria, Iran and Iraq are among the countries of red status where violations of academic freedom and right to education are most violated. The ideological and nationalist structure of the education system is clearly stated in Article 42 of the Constitution:

“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.” (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, p:40, Article-42).

Legislation such as Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu (The Basic Law of National Education), issued on 24 June 1973, determines the general framework of the Turkish National Education System as a national curriculum. The content contains the same national values and objectives as the constitution but does not include a regulatory clause on basic human rights, such as internationally accepted mother tongue language education for minorities. On the contrary, the law does prohibit and prevents education in the mother tongue:

“to raise individuals who are committed to Atatürk's reforms and principles, his concept of nationalism as defined in the Constitution; who adopt, protect and improve the national, moral, human, spiritual and cultural values of the Turkish nation; who love and always elevate their families, homeland and nation; who are aware of their duties and responsibilities towards the Turkish Republic- which is a democratic, secular and

social state ruled by law based on human rights and the basic principles defined in the beginning of the Constitution- and behave accordingly; ” (Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu, 1973, p.1).

The legislation of political parties contains articles that draw attention to minorities in particular. According to these articles, minorities are completely ignored. It also includes a prohibitive tone for the language, culture and differences of minorities.

“No shall argue that there are minorities in the country of the Republic of Turkey based on national or religious culture or sect or racial or language differences. b) No shall operate in order to disrupt the integrity of the nation by creating minorities on the country of the Republic of Turkey by protecting, developing or disseminating languages and culture other than the Turkish language or culture.” (Siyasi Partiler Kanunu, 1983, p. 25, translated by me).

Again, article 2 of the law published on the acceptance and application of Turkish letters imposes the use of Turkish letters in public and society. Other provisions of the law include sanctions to be applied in order not to use these letters.

“From the date of publication of this Law, it is obligatory to accept and treat the articles written in Turkish letters in all departments and institutions of the State, and in all companies, societies and private institutions.” (Article:2, translated by me.).

In four chapters of the Constitution of T.C, there are articles containing political rights and duties. The common feature of citizenship-related articles is its focus on Turkification.

“Everyone bound to the Turkish State through the bond of citizenship is a Turk. The child of a Turkish father or a Turkish mother is a Turk. (Sentence repealed on October 3, 2001; Act No. 4709)” (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982, p.41 Article-66).

4.6 Summary of findings

The data collected shows how the Turkish government has actively sought to promote a monoculture through its constitution, laws and education policies. In the process, minorities and their history, language and culture are distorted. The enactment and forceful application of

these laws and policies have meant that the minorities who resist these have been on the receiving end of state violence and repression. The nationalist agenda has and is actively promoted through propaganda and distortion of history.

5 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss core reforms of Turkish education system, from past to present, and how it fits into Tomaševski's 4A standards. According to "Revolution history and Kemalism" textbook those reforms are gathered under five headings. These key reforms play an important role in the understanding of the historical part of assimilation and how it is built up. After describing the education system, the discussion part will focus on how the curriculum and textbooks in primary schools were experienced by my interviewees. In this section, the discussion about the reforms that I define as the beginning of assimilation was created by examining the RHTK textbook. The reforms previously mentioned in the data chapter under section 4.1 Textbook are taken directly from the textbook.

5.2 Textbook

According to information in the RHTK textbook, during 1924 (Law of Tevhid-i Tedrisat), schools belonging to Greeks, Germans, Armenians and Jews which claimed to have been opened by "foreign" states, still continued their activities. This pattern of establishing school education for foreigners was only for groups who were recognised as minority by the constitution. The state had no authority and control over these schools in terms of structure and operation. In other words, minorities had the right to open their own schools.

According to Tomaševski, all governments need to recognise rights of the minority populations: "Governments have been required to respect the right of minorities to set up their own schools in minority languages since the time of the League of Nations." (2001, p.30). The RHTK textbook notes "Some schools belonging to minorities and foreign states were effective in the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire." (p.142, translated by me) ¹. The textbook apportions blame for the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire to the existence of separate schools for minorities. This has been used as a basis to deny minorities in the Turkish state the right to learn in their own languages and to fuel hatred of minorities. This distortion of history

¹ Azınlıklara ve yabancı devletlere ait bazı okullar ise Osmanlı Devleti'nin dağılmasında etkili olmuşlardır.

serves to create a negative attitude towards minorities amongst young learners and is contrary to the ideals of diversity.

While the written alphabet used until 1928 was Arabic, the transition to Latin letters caused chaos in the wider society. This rendered an entire society as "illiterate" overnight: a decision that was made without any regard of the needs of the population, only the needs of the state. In order to support the 1928 Alphabet change, National Schools were opened on January 1, 1929. Literacy courses were organized for all "Turkish" citizens between the ages of 16 and 45. The history textbook records that people showed great interest in the National Schools. However, this intense 'interest' was actually due to the use of force and pressure by the state. "Since May 1931, it has been forbidden to employ those who could not obtain a certificate from the National Schools in public and private institutions." (Mustafa A. 1994, p.478)². People faced the danger of being fired or unemployed. Therefore, with these sanctions and the laws published in the official newspapers, the entire Turkish society was forced to accept the new alphabet and the Kurdish people were effectively cornered to give up their own language and learn Turkish to fit into the new nation. Throughout history, the Turkish government has constantly carried out unilateral reforms with utter disregard for the diverse groups that constitute the population. "The historical heritage of education has encompassed many different criteria and methods of exclusion." (Tomaševski, 2001, p.31). These reforms have been implemented in the education system without considering public opinions hence they are neither acceptable nor adoptable. This way of decision making is avoiding the diversity of society and it is historically proven as a method of exclusion.

5.2 Recent education system curricula and structure

"Ever since the founding of the Republic of Turkey, the education system has been one of the main vehicles for reinforcing the ideology of the nation-state." (Kaya, 2015 p:10).

² "1931 yılı mayıs ayından itibaren Millet Mektepleri'nden belge alamayanların kamu ve özel kurumlarda işe alınması yasaklanmıştır." translated by me

Turkification formed the basis of policies towards minorities. The policy of this new state wanted to control cultural diversity and differences, and combine them under one roof to make it monotype state. These policies were actioned with the new education system (Kaya, 2009, p.10-15). Analysing the national curriculum helps us understand the country's educational approach and education system. Regarding the Turkish education system's curricula, the written and visual materials used for education and the way of teaching are not independent of national policies of the sovereign nation and the basic mindset policy of the state (Ayhan, Serhat, 2012, p.109-140). In this context, the "pedagogical" function of the Turkish education system is to systematically impose the sovereign nation's culture, social and religious values. "Clearly, curriculums and textbooks, also used as tools for the re-production of class relations, perform a "pedagogical" function in the self-protection and protection of the dominant system" (Eğitim-Sen, 2017, p.5) According to the Eğitim-Sen curriculum definition, "The curriculum is an official pattern, dictating by the state in which framework, under what circumstances, how and by what methods the teacher in school will explain a subject, what to pay attention to and what to bring forward." (Eğitim-Sen, 2017, p.7).

The Turkish education system accepts only the Turkish and Muslim identities. Other than that, the identities of non-Muslims, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, or national minorities have been rejected and in the curriculum of education they do not exist (Kaya, 2015, 12-25). When the education curriculum was organized, people from other groups were not asked for their participation and opinions, and no action or public opinion was taken for compliance of the regulated curriculum according to Tomaševski's 4A standards. In this case, the Turkish education system is nothing more than a Turkish Convention³ imposed, dictated, and accepted unilaterally. "Shaped according to the legislation and the ideology that decision-makers are trying to impose in schools, the curriculum is designed in a way that assumes that the only identity in the country is Turkish and Muslim" (Kaya, 2015, p.21).

³ This is a term has been used to describe how the assimilation policies and imposition are mainly structured. It is a one-sided convention which applies to whole society of Turkey and there no right to not recognise it. Individuals who do not recognise this convention face strong inhuman issues such as racism, discrimination either murder.

In accordance with published laws and official statements; it is claimed that all curriculums are tailored to the needs and abilities of the students (Kaya 2015, p.22). In contrast to this claim and confirmed by the interviews, the content of the curriculum prepared for the education system is no different from the objectives of the general education system with Turkification as the main aim.

“The Turkish education system is based on single nation and one official language. Lack of education in the children’s mother tongue makes it more challenging to learn a new language and to recognise their identity.” (Interview-1, 2021)

Kaya emphasizes the importance of the ideological dimensions of the content of the curriculums published:

“Shaped according to the legislation and the ideology that decision-makers are trying to impose in schools, the curriculum is designed in a way that assumes that the only identity in the country is Turkish and Muslim, thus excluding all non-Turkish and non-Muslim identities and encouraging animosity rather than respect towards different identities” (Kaya. N, 2015, p. 22).

Moreover, Eđitim-Sen states that published curriculums focus on an important issue which is a singularity. As an argument for this thesis, the colonization of societies has social, historical, cultural and economic impacts, and the economic dependence of colonial societies on states is a powerful obstacle in their political future and in their bid to achieve self-determination.

“Consequently, the curriculum and textbooks are focused on a single nation’s history and culture...The basic purpose behind this is the fact that a homogeneous society is less costly, and it is easier to provide control over them. Another reason behind not to meet the language and identity demands of the Kurdish, Laz and Circassian people is economic cost calculations.” (Interview-2, 2021)

In line with the research and interviews conducted, it is clear that the policy on curriculums is far from being in compliance with international law. It is also understood that the laws under which states define their own systems do not correspond to the statements of the institutions and organizations that oversee these laws. However, it is another fact that there are

mechanisms and organizations that support state policies in all circumstances. For example event, in January 2017, Ministry of National Education included the Türk-Eğitim-Sen (TES) as usual in the process of organizing the education curriculum and TES became a party to the operation of this process.⁴

5.3 Policy-Aim of the Turkish education system

The basic policy of the Turkish education system is to raise Turkish-nationalist individuals and to implement the Turkification of all diverse individuals. The impact of these policies supports the economic and social processes that form the foundation of Turkey's domestic politics and is continuing its systematic operation.

“A nation-building process was started after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish War of Independence. The effort to build a state that is based on one nation in a multi-nation geography has constituted the base of the problems that have not been resolved until today. The reflections of this policy can be viewed in the same perspective.” (Interview-1, Eğitim-Sen, 2021)

“While the education system went towards building a great Turkishness with full effort, it also tried to convince others to abandon other elements without any drawback. Consequently, the religious profile of the society was exploited through a formulation that suggest that the more Muslim one was, the more Turkish one was, or vice versa.” (Interview-2, 2021)

Education is a multi-faceted development process that covers the areas where people access information and open to improve themselves. Social sciences and humanities curricula are designed by Nation-States and passed down from generation to generation through teachers. The system is reliant on the attitude and buy in from the teachers as one interviewee noted: *“The teachers often avoided pronouncing the Kurdish word, without talking about the subject.”*

⁴ Türk Eğitim-Sen is a union that was established on 18 June 1992 and operates in the Education, Training and Science Services business line, and its full name is the Turkish Education, Training and Science Services Branch Public Employees Union. (<https://tr.wikipedia.org> , 13/09/2021)

(Interview-10, 2021). With this intention, the process of organizing the education system and the selection and training of teachers who will consider this system as a mission and transfer it to future generations was started. Sharp changes and reforms, previously planned and programmed, were made in the establishment process. Despite all the discrimination the education curriculum is also filled with teachings that are marginalising, discriminating, and promoting hostility towards the minorities.

Governments approached the disenfranchisements and problems faced by minorities in ways that resolve the issue without mentioning it at all. Society or social norms shaped by the imposition of "one state, one nation, one flag and one language" over the years will undoubtedly criticize and disapprove a government that will accept this contract.

“The program that was determined with the proclamation of the republic targeted to create a coherent, classless society. Education was used as an important means to provide it. The Turkish Language Association and Turkish Historical Association, both of which were founded in the 1930s, aimed to constitute a powerful ‘Turkishness’ in order to address the denied and assimilated people. Therefore, the only way of existing economically, socially and politically in a system where the Turkishness is the only way to go required melting in the same pot.” (Interview-2, Eđitim-Sen, 2021)

Instead of emphasizing the importance of a peaceful life and respect for religious, cultural, and linguistic differences, all articles of the constitution clearly impose Turkishness and loyalty to Atatürk's principles and reforms. In this context, all laws and articles published and enacted officially, are designed to be a continuation of this policy. As a matter of fact, the nation-state policies and the political system build on a high-level effort and tyranny to make the most effective use of these spaces and create a society specific to its own state system. The construction of the Turkish education system is based on two basic themes. These two themes are Turkish nationalism and adherence to State values (Milli Eđitim Temel Kanunu, 1973, p:1-17).

Kurdish children continue to be highly affected and assimilated by the Turkish education system, which is not objective, exaggerated (the race that ruled the world or the most powerful state in history) and even disrespectful to other countries and nations.

According to Kaya, the only thing that has not changed in the education system is the politicization of the system aimed at raising Turkish nationalists; “While the education system has been shaped by different ideological approaches at different times, one of the main aims of education has always been to create young ‘Turkish nationalists.’” (Kaya, 2015, p.21).

5.4 First concrete step of the national curricula

In my opinion, the most important areas to serve assimilation, are educational institutions and the most useful tools are teachers. This is a common aspect of assimilation, known from other areas, for example the assimilation of the Sami people. “The policy of Norwegianization was introduced in the field of culture« with school as the battlefield and teachers as frontline soldiers” (Niemi, 1997, p:268 in Minde, 2005).

The education system shapes the social structure and society, and social structure and society in turn shapes the individuals. Education and society are very much intertwined and have strong ties with each other and cannot be distinguished. What are the effects of "being educated" on our lives in a society that we are not connected to as individuals and groups?

The educational curriculum organized without the input of its participants, serves to achieve the main purpose of the polarization, Turkish nationalism, and loyalty to the state ideology. One of the stages applied in the education curriculum, which is not disrupted in any way, is the process of Turkish National Anthem⁵ and student anthem which is called *Andımız*⁶. The Turkish National Anthem consists of 10 paragraphs and with all students, it is mandatory to read at least the first two paragraphs before lessons every morning. Also in Turkish and Literature courses, the memorization of the national anthem is imposed on everyone, and oral exams are carried out in this form.

“Of course, these facts (Turkism and Nationalism) were dictated to every student by memorizing the "National Anthem" twice a week and "Our Oath" every morning.. ...

⁵ See İstiklal Marşı – (National Anthem) in supplementary

⁶ See Öğrenci Marşı – (Student Anthem) in supplementary

Slogans such as I am Turk and Turkist, long live Turkish nation, Such a Happy Turk I am! are made to repeat to the student every morning and made to swear allegiance without question.” (Interview-10, 2021)

The student anthem was immediately read after the Turkish national anthem, but since government started the “peace talks” with PKK in 2015, the government decided to remove the singing of the student anthem from the curriculum. The anthem called “Andımız”, was performed for 76 years, and for those estimated 76 years minority children in Turkey forced to say “I am Turk!” every morning along with the threat and reality of physical abuse by teachers.

“In fact, a Turkish nationalist classroom teacher made us scream in class. 'Who are we?' 'We're Turks!' He made us to shout slogans like 'I'm a happy Turk'. ... Even though we were little kids about 8 years old, we were getting beaten up a lot, sometimes there was blood coming out of our noses or ears.” (Interview-5, 2021)

Obviously, it is only one step of assimilation policy that these two anthems are taught, and students must shout out before starting their lessons. In order to perceive the identity structure imposed on Kurdish children, it is important to examine the words of national anthem and student oath. Additionally, there is an oratory of Atatürk taking a place afterwards in the literature and language courses⁷. The memorizing of the oratory of Atatürk is a type of examination during primary school. In order to pass the class, students must memorise it and shout it out in the class. The goal of the education system if its needs to be summarized is to educate pupils about Ataturk and how he came to be the father of Turks? As a result, his actions and words are used as a guide for future generations.. The first minutes of the education process begin in this way and the assimilation process continues with basic information, history, geography, music and social sciences.

“Imagine you're Kurdish, you have another language, your mother, your grandfather speaks Kurdish, but you don't learn anything about it in school, in the education you see.” (Interview-8, 2021)

⁷ See Gençliğe Hitabe by Atatürk - (Oratory to Youth) in supplementary

Yet again, no culture and history belonging to minorities are mentioned in any of the articles of constitution and law. This is the state's policy of systematically ignoring and refusing minorities and different ethnic groups. "The multicoloredness that exists in terms of people, beliefs, cultures in Turkey, the producer segments and their realities in social life have not paid off the educational curriculums prepared so far." (Eğitim-Sen, 2017, p:4).

5.5 Language

Students who have started their education life in village schools are more fluent and willing to speak Kurdish and embrace Kurdish identity. The language factor emerges as an advantage that only Kurdish is spoken in the environment they live in and that they have lived in direct contact with Kurdish culture for years. However, it is known that this is not the case for Kurdish children or former students who were educated in urban centers. Not all the interview participants who grew up in city centers can speak Kurdish as their mother tongue. This situation brings with it an identity problem and shame. The students who grew up receiving education in the city stated that they embraced their identity after the racist and discriminatory experiences they encountered, or they became aware of it.

The right to education in the mother tongue is a basic human right recognized by several conventions as mentioned previously. In order to create peoples' own history, literature, science and art, it is a necessity to receive education in the mother tongue. "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language." (ICCPR, 1976, p.14).

Essentially, education in the mother tongue is a linguistic and cultural lifeline for societies that have undergone cultural destruction and are still at risk. Regarding mother tongue education rights, participants were asked about the importance of receiving education in the mother tongue.

"Although the number of people writing in Kurdish and the number of materials in Kurdish are few, there was a group of people who had spoken completely in Kurdish ...

But the use of Kurdish among children is not that prevalent to the same degree. The two main reasons are lack of education in Kurdish mother tongue and not being able to adapt to the advancing technology.” (Interview-2, 2021)

In a state built in accordance with human rights and universal law values, the right to education in the mother tongue should be undoubtedly recognised and the exercise of this right should be encouraged (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1996). In the same way as indigenous peoples have faced repression and unequal conditions under the pressure of dominant societies (such as not being able to protect, develop or revitalize their own literature, language and cultural heritage), minorities and marginalized societies have, and are, facing the same issues. “Most of these threatened languages are indigenous languages, and concern for their disappearance is related to larger trends towards rethinking the rights and status of indigenous peoples” (Patten, A. & Kymlicka, Will, 2003, p:10). As stated above, in the constitution of Turkey the right to education in the mother tongue of the peoples living in Turkey is prohibited.

“A ban on education in mother tongue that is not the ‘official language’ has been put into practice since the foundation of the republic, and this practice has been continued with increasing intensity in the following years.” (Interview-1, 2021)

Many articles of the constitutions do neither recognize nor allow the right of minorities and ethnic groups to education in the mother tongue. Regarding the questions about constitutions, the member of the education union interviewed perceived the situation in the following way:

“However, there are articles that Turkey has not signed or put reservations. For that reason, the Turkish education system cannot do what is necessary in terms of the subjects that the international society have a consensus. It still continues to ignore the matters about the mother tongue.” (Interview-2, 2021)

The desire to join the EU, which has been expressed by most Turkish political parties who have come to power, can be said to be hindered by the denial of the right to learn the mother tongue and the use of force by government to maintain this has worked against the admission of Turkey into the EU. “First of all, it must be admitted that, over the years, Turkey

has acted consistently in avoiding any international obligations which might oblige her to guarantee the rights of Kurds as a minority.” (Aral, 2000, p.44).

Union officials from Eğitim-Sen were asked questions about the structure of the alternative education system and how it should function. According to the answers received, it is thought that the education system should be completely changed.

“We believe that multilingual or dual language education will be more unifying, integrative and contributive to the social peace, instead of being divisive... In this respect, each language and culture in our country should be deemed and regarded as a richness, and an effort to strengthen the domestic peace should be ensured for a democratic environment.” (Interview-1, 2021)

In order to meet the expectations of the people in Turkey from education reform, the education system should be removed from the basis of the nation-state.

“Accordingly, the education and daily life must be organized in a multi-lingual and cultural way. There is more than one official language in many countries today. The education system should be constructed in a libertarian and pluralist way, instead of a system constructing biased and monist minds” (Interview-2, 2021)

Although this expectation is something that should have happened, it is a threat to the state whose foundations were laid with "Turkish nationalism". The Turkish education system does not contain any field other than Turkish & Islamic values and stands directly opposite the education system that will lay the foundations of a multicultural or diverse society. The right to education in the mother tongue, which the participants frequently emphasize, should be the cornerstone of the new system that can be an alternative to the Turkish education system.

“Education in mother tongue should be begun in a formal schedule based on verbal lectures in preschool period, followed by reading and writing in mother tongue. Additionally, it should be continued in primary and secondary education so that it will cover some of the core curriculum.” (Interview-1, 2021)

5.5.1 Elective courses in mother tongue

There are several elective courses added to the curriculum during the secondary education process. Most elective courses are related to minority languages such as Abazaca, Adyghe Circassian, Adyghe, Albanian, Bosnian, Georgian, Kirmancki and Zazakî and Laz. In addition to these courses, Environmental Education, Law and Justice, and Media are offered as options in literacy courses. In addition to the textbooks designed for each language course, it is also officially published in voice training materials.

However, the addition of minority languages to the curriculum as elective courses does not make sense on its own. There are systematic and structural problems with the selection of elective courses to students. Elective courses are determined according to the number of students, and teachers manage this process. Therefore, students are often misled by teachers in this process. The opening of courses where students can study in the mother tongue is in a way prevented and instead, those students are offered religious or moral lessons. As a result, too many students are kept away from the knowledge that there are courses where they can learn their mother tongue.

“There is no such a project or work of the Turkish education system for Kurds to live in their mother tongue, only the elective Kurdish courses in the schools. These classes are inactivated by not letting the students to choose, so that the classes stay limited. (Interview-2, 2021)

According to published regulations regarding elective courses at least 10 students must have elected the relevant course listed in the elective courses before it is arranged. According to the Regulation on Secondary Education Institutions of the Ministry of National Education:

“The elective course is opened to the teaching at the request of at least 10 students. Even if the number of students decreases during the school year, the course continues to be taught. In common courses, class integrity is essential.” (MEB, Ortaöğretim Kurumları Yönetmeliği, 2015, p.6)⁸

⁸ “Seçmeli ders en az 10 öğrencinin talebi doğrultusunda öğretime açılır. Ders yılı içerisinde öğrenci sayısı azalsa bile o dersin okutulmasına devam edilir. Ortak derslerde ise sınıf bütünlüğü esastır. Özel öğretim

5.6 Identity

The identity factor is different for the participants who lived in villages and went through the same basic education system. These people realized their identity in early life and stated that they were aware of being targeted directly because of this identity. In line with the experiences shared by the participants, we can divide these awareness periods into childhood and adolescence. In other words, while the participants who received education in villages or rural areas lived as Kurds from childhood, other participants stated that they became awareness of their identity in their adolescent years.

Individuals who have been exposed to racism and discrimination throughout the education process have challenges in developing the definitions or knowledge which can give them an understanding of the source of the problems they encounter. In this context, the national identity of the participants of this thesis and the relationship they establish with identity differ. All participants described the distressing events they encountered during their primary school education as racism and assimilation. However, this knowledge amongst participants which is a result of their experiences has not made them to act or behave the same views on the whole process. Their emotional bond to Kurdish identity can be understood by examining the two groups which are set apart by how they choose to position themselves in the society rather than their acceptance of Kurdish identity.

For example, more than one participant states that it is not important to be proud of ethnic identity. Moreover, these participants claim that national identity, as like religion or gender, it is something we do not choose. Some of the interview participants answers are as follows:

“In fact, I think that none should feel pride for their nation, culture or religion... However, if you are part of an oppressed nation, if there are efforts to wipe out your identity, if you are murdered just because you belong to that nation and you cannot

kurumları ile resmî özel eğitim kurumları ve özel eğitim sınıflarında bu şartlar aranmaz.” This translation made by me.

...speak freely, things change. Of course I am proud of being Kurdish. And this pride will continue until my language, my culture and my lands are free.” (Interview-8, 2021)

“I don’t find it legitimate to feel proud for something that you haven’t chosen or established yourself. It was not my choice to be Kurdish, and this is why I cannot feel proud for just being a Kurd. However, I am proud for not forgetting my language and the efforts I do for improving it, for my struggle defending my own culture and, despite all the marginalization I experience, for the fact that I can still say that I am a Kurd and that I can speak my language.” (Interview-7, 2021)

“Anyhow, I am exhausted by this situation, and have been subject to fascistic violence many times. Being proud with my ethnic identity would mean that I would be like them. I do like my identity, but this doesn’t mean that I am proud or feel special because of this.” (Interview-4, 2021)

“It is not completely correct to speak about being proud. This is valid for every identity and every situation. I do feel pride to a certain degree, because my people made great things until today, but also big mistakes... We are the children of a people whose existence is denied and degraded, and is still deprived of its basic rights. We have no choice but to continue to embrace our identity...” (Interview-5, 2021)

The answers that can be gathered in another group are the answers of the participants who are unconditionally proud of their national identity. It is known that almost all of these participants were exposed to racist violence intensely. The extent of the problems they experience and the violence they face has been largely as physical violence. Despite this, the participants stated that the violence and racism they faced strengthened their emotional connection with their Kurdish identity.

“I am definitely part of an identity that I have always been proud of. I think that all the oppression and tyranny that has been done to the Kurdish people has strengthened my emotional connection to my identity.” (Interview-3, 2021)

“Of course, I feel endless pride with my identity. This feeling of belonging keeps me motivated to defend my culture, my language and my history. Moreover, it encourages me to fight against the issues such as racism and discrimination.” (Interview-10, 2021)

“On the contrary, the genocidal policies carried out on the Kurdish people creates an identity awareness and does strengthening the connection towards the identity.”
(Interview-6, 2021)

When and after what circumstances did the participants embrace their Kurdish identity? Are there moral lessons in the Turkish education system where Kurdish children can embrace and realize their identities? What do Kurdish children learn about their identities during the education process? In short, the participants were asked about the impact of the Turkish education system on the formation of Kurdish national identity. In this context, the content of the history course, which is one of the basic data of the thesis study, has been examined. It is important that the students interpret the "RHTK" course, the first step in which they can contact their own historical and cultural roots in the primary school period.

5.7 Violence

Institutions providing education in the cities of Kurdistan and also in its rural areas face serious lack of control. In these institutions, acts of pressure, harassment, psychological and physical violence, racism and discrimination are experienced within the scope of student-teacher relations without sanction. Violence by the educational institutions of the state in Kurdistan totally disregards human rights and is very common. In line with the experiences of the participants, there are differences between the rate and intensity of violence in Kurdish villages and the violence in cities. From the interviews with participants who went to urban schools, it has been observed that their experiences of violence are more psychological than physical violence. Although they are participants from the same education system, this difference can be clearly interpreted due to their shared experiences.

The process of involving Kurdish children in the education system, which is designed around Turkish language, culture and history, is difficult and problematic. There are great language differences between Turkish and Kurdish in terms of grammar, speech and comprehension as one of the participants states:

“I feel like I have been experiencing two different worlds since I was a little boy. A different culture in the village, different dances, jokes, food and many more, much

different in the metropolitan area. This two-dimensionality is starting to make me feel like two different people.” (Interview-10, 2021)

As a matter of fact, due to Kurdish and Turkish differences, it has been positioned by linguists that the two languages belong in different language families (Yılmaz, N. 2016).

Since 1923, systematic campaigns aimed at assimilation of minorities through language policy have prevented individuals from creating free spaces where they can identify identity and language differences. For example, after the removal of Arabic letters and the introduction of the new alphabet, a campaign called "Citizen Speak Turkish!" advocated the use of a “single language” which promoted a heterogeneous.

“Citizen, Speak Turkish!” (Vatandaş, Türkçe Konuş!) campaign, launched in 1927 and which peaked in 1937, posters were hung on walls, bulletins were distributed on the streets and public declarations were made advocating that all Turkish citizens should speak Turkish.” (Zeydanlıoğlu, W. 2012, p:103)

Years of repression and assimilation are still being imposed on Kurdish students who are just starting primary school with similar campaigns. Citizen, Speak Turkish! with the campaign, people who spoke a language other than Turkish in the community were punished by physical violence. This situation has not changed over the years, and it is known that Kurdish children who have difficulties adapting and integration into the Turkish language experience physical and psychological violence.

“Many people were detained and occasionally arrested for singing Kurdish folk songs. Circumcision and wedding ceremonies held in accordance with Kurdish traditions were prevented by security officers. Furthermore, some of the persons who attended those ceremonies were detained or arrested” (Human Rights Foundation Turkey, 1993, p:270)

For this reason, participants were asked about the difficulties they faced in primary school.

“The physical violence I faced from elementary school to the end of high school left incurable traumas. I spent a year in an F-type prison for my free thinking in college.

... My education as a Kurd was spent with the arbitrary practices of racist people.”
(Interview-3, 2021)

In my own experience, I can say that students who could speak Turkish well or learn it quickly were rewarded by teachers and sometimes we would be proud of the situation. Regarding to this example, one of the participants says;

“Some of us were appreciated when they learned Turkish and had a dialogue with the teachers. I aspired, so I started to learn Turkish and succeed in school. I worked harder as I received recognition and was entitled to continue my education in Istanbul as a scholarship.” (Interview-5, 2021)

According to the interviews analyzed, communication in the classroom takes place between teachers and Kurdish students who can speak Turkish and is transferred to the whole class by those students.

“I first started school at the school in the village. I stayed at that school for two weeks. What I remember clearly is that some of my friends communicated with teachers through me because I was one of the best Turkish speaker in the class.. ... In fact, I said something in Kurdish to a friend even though my Turkish was good enough, I remember being slapped by a teacher” (Interview-7, 2021)

The pressure of speaking Turkish on Kurdish students also affects their families. This pressurises Kurdish children to speak Turkish with their family or among their friends. Interviews and group meetings clearly show that children of Kurdish families who have migrated to Turkish metropolises are integrated much faster and therefore assimilation of those individuals is developing faster.

“My name is Turkish, and the names of family members are Turkish. I don't speak Kurdish and I don't have a dialect. But somehow the people at the school we were at knew each other's ethnic identity in some way.” (Interview-4, 2021)

The main reason for this is that Kurdish parents are involved in the assimilation process with their children, and as a result do not speak Kurdish in their private spaces or in front of their children, and are afraid to tell their children that they are Kurdish. Moreover, there is an

historical precedent of this problem . As a result, the violence (psychological and physical), discrimination and racism that parents have faced in their own childhood in the field of education, worry them and they fear that their children will be involved in this process years from now. The explanations of another participant regarding this process are noteworthy.

"I recalled that period and asked to my mother "Why didn't you teach us Kurdish?", she answered like, "We were scared." My parents usually spoke Kurdish between themselves.... But they communicated with us more in Turkish. I think the possibility that we as children would speak Kurdish at home and the violence, we could see from other people, forced them to do so." (Interview-8, 2021)

5.8 How participants perceive curricular subject of history?

According to the RHTK, during the First World War, people tried to protect their territory as unarmed than become an armed unit in order to ensure their own safety. The textbook examines this situation in two sections and as such as they define “organizations established by State Supporters”⁹ and “organizations established by societies harmful to national existence”¹⁰.

In addition, in the textbook, communities that are recognized with minority status, are the Armenians, Greeks and Jews. Kurds, on the other hand, are represented under the heading of societies harmful to national existence together with others which are officially recognised as minority (Ülkü, Mutlu, Çetinkaya, 2019, p.60-62). Participants were asked about how the Kurdish people are illustrated in textbooks?

"...In middle school and high school, all we heard with our own identity was the Kurdish Teali Society. Yes, the word Kurdish was only mentioned here in the textbooks. We have been told how the Kurds were traitors during the War of Independence and that they were subcontractors of imperialism." (Interview-8, 2021)

⁹ Kuvâ-yı Milliye

¹⁰ Milli Varlığa Zararlı Cemiyetler

The common feature of the answers to the relevant questions is that in the course materials, Kurds were, and still are, introduced only as groups that try to divide and shatter the country after the First World War.

“There is not a single information in favor of the Kurds in the Turkish education system. All that is mentioned is that in the 1920s there was a separatist Kurdish group that wanted to undermine the Turkish liberation struggle, but they were destroyed.”
(Interview-5, 2021)

Children are taught false and untrue information that Kurds are actually Turks.

“In my middle school years, the teachers gave information that Kurds were of Turkish ancestry. That is all I got. Then, during high school, the name of the Kurdish people was not mentioned once in books or in lessons.” (Interview-4, 2021)

Textbooks are one of the educational materials in which the first contact with students is established in the education curriculum. Textbooks should process topics that can contribute to the personal development of children socially, culturally, historically, and scientifically and should be objective during the period of information transfer. History books and courses include only the experiences, cultures, and religious processes of Turks and Turkish roots or former Turkish states in Anatolia. I asked questions to the participants regarding this fact, processing the history of Turkish states and the transition and acceptance processes of Turks to Islam. Religious culture and Muslim Ethic courses are also taught in schools as a compulsory elective course with history courses.

“It cannot be said that the rights of the minorities appear in the curriculum and textbooks. While only the Hanafi-Sunni Islam axis is prevalent in terms of religion, there is no comprehensive curriculum as for identity. ... The curriculum has been formed by protecting the Turkish dominated trend. Therefore, one cannot see an example through which an Armenian or Kurdish name, say Agop or Rojda, was used in a textbook.”
(Interview-2, 2021)

Even non-Muslim students are obliged to take this course. As a reference to this situation, I would like to give an example of the day when a classmate of my participant, who is a Christian, tried to read the surah of Quran, in order to pass the religious lesson successfully.

In addition to being the only Christian student in the class, it was the exam form of the course that he memorized a surah from the Quran and read it with a loud voice in the classroom for pass the course.

“We were seeing nothing in school except Turkishness, Islam and even Sunniism. Moreover, we found ourselves in teachings that only involved Turkishness and the similar things that were related to it... There were no other peoples, no other religions, no other colors in the world.” (Interview-4, 2021)

According to the participants of this thesis, the general system of education is problematic and not inclusive at all. National curricula of the education system and teachers are hostile towards to the Kurds. Moreover, non-of them received knowledge about their heritage, language and culture. Besides that, there was always pressure on top of the Kurdish children if there was a political discussion in the class. This type of discussions mostly starting with insulting other nations, particularly Kurds.

“I don't remember any mention about the Kurdish people during the lectures. It was explained that Kurdish is ignored and there is no Kurdish language. ... However, during the lectures political debates were starting and all eyes were on top of the Kurdish students in the classroom and we witnessed hate speech towards to the Kurds from entire class, including the teacher.” (Interview-7, 2021)

“During my primary education period, no oral nor written education were given about Kurdish people. What I learned about Kurdish and Kurdish culture was entirely made up of my own efforts.” (Interview-3, 2021)

“During my primary education period; I don't remember being taught or mentioned anything about the Kurdish people, the language, the history.” (Interview-10, 2021)

6 CONCLUSIONS

In line with interviews with former Kurdish students, the Turkish education system is not acceptable, not accessible, not adaptable nor available for Kurdish students. The Turkish education system is also not inclusive for other minority children, particularly for Kurds. Although the RHTK textbook is one of the basic data of this thesis, no information about the Kurds is shared in these written materials. However, it is clearly stated during the interviews that racist and discriminatory approaches faced by Kurdish students are ignored. For this reason, students define the Turkish education system as a set of racist and nationalist policies. All of the thesis participants stated that they were exposed to various forms of violence because of their identity and language. Kurdish students are exposed to intense physical and psychological violence during primary school education. This pressure and violence on children causes individuals to be ashamed of their mother tongue and identity. They stated that they had difficulty speaking Kurdish because they had to speak Turkish in the education system for years, and some of them even forgot to speak Kurdish. It is known that students who learn or remember to speak Kurdish again by their own efforts have completely lost their previous dialect. In such a case, it has been stated that Turkish is dominant in the regions where Kurdish is spoken. This situation: It causes people who speak Kurdish to use too many Turkish words (even speaking Turkish with a Kurdish accent), the younger generations to perform their literary and cultural studies in the colonial language, and the inability to establish an alternative education system.

In conclusion, this thesis has noted the impact and negative effects of forceful assimilation policies via the education system, and it highlights that the effects of assimilation are permanent. Considering the geographical borders of Turkey, it is clear that these borders encompass multiple societies and cultures. State policies that positively support minority rights and respect multicultural dynamics have not been implemented yet. Furthermore, this process has been ignored since the proclamation of the republic, and the differences of the multiple cultures have also been ignored. The stereotyping policies within the framework of one language, one culture and one religion are still in effect with the support of the state.

Thousands of children join the Turkish education system every year as new students. Every individual has the right to education and education should be free at the primary and basic education stage. As a result, primary school education is compulsory in Turkey. Although

participation in the primary school education process is compulsory, the right to education in the mother tongue should be equally available. Minority children should be able to learn about their own historical and cultural heritage in the education process. Campaigns for the recognition of religious and ethnic minorities living in Turkey should be intensified, but the intensity of these efforts is mostly on the violation of minority rights. However, these campaigns do not include people or groups that are not recognized as a minority under the Turkish constitution.

The problem of minority recognition has been an issue since the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. As elsewhere in the world, as well as defining the Kurds as a minority, or a national minority, is all about power relations. In this case, the source of the problem is the Turkification of the Kurdish people within the constitutional framework and the absence of an inclusive status for the Kurds under international conventions. The difficulties faced by this people with a population of 35-40 million who have been deprived of their right to independence with the Treaty of Lausanne should not only concern the Turkish state but also be a reason to act/change policies. In this context, it is my opinion that Turkey should be considered as a colonial power among the middle east countries. The Kurds have been trying to protect their lands against empires and states for centuries and have been forced to live with their land divided within the borders of four countries. On this basis, uprisings, or rebellions, which influence the structure of the Kurdish people's awareness of struggle, are treated as hostile acts in the history books and are not taught to Kurdish children during their education. The Kurds have not been able to establish their education system in a sustainable way and therefore they have faced great difficulties in institutionalization. Today in Kurdistan, institutions working in the field of Kurdish language, culture and art are closed with various pretexts. In addition, legal sanctions are imposed on researchers, teachers and volunteers working in these institutions.

In addition, the promotion of Turkish culture was forcibly included in the corporate regulation as another quota. When we consider this example, all non-independent initiatives established to promote the language, art and culture of the Kurds in Kurdistan and to pass it on to future generations have faced state pressure and sanctions. Institutions, or organizations declared as an alternative to the Turkish education system, do not give up on this effort despite pressures and closures. It should be noted that all these efforts are defined in the context of anti-colonialism. Moreover, it is necessary to explain and understand that there is a coloniser-

colonised relationship. The educational, economic and social systems of the Turkish state are not inclusive for the people of Kurdistan.

On the contrary, there are so many insulting explanations and categorizations. Undoubtedly, it goes against one of the fundamental human rights for children, the right to enter the education process and go through this process in the most objective, impartial, ethical, and qualified manner. As a matter of fact, Turkish nation-state policies and the political system coupled with high-level effort and tyranny are effectively deployed to force minorities to be integrated into a dominant nation. The construction of the Turkish education system is based on two basic themes which are Turkish nationalism and adherence to state values.

There is no doubt that the Turkish education system, that is premised on the two fundamentals of Turkish nationalism and adherence to state laws, has resulted in the denial of minority rights when it comes to education. The fundamental human right for children to receive education in a manner that is objective, impartial, ethical, and professional. It also denies the Kurdish children the right to learn in their mother tongue and seeks to effectively get rid of a people's culture and language in an attempt to build a homogenous society that has no regard for diversity and is hostile to minorities.

Colonization and Decolonization in Kurdistan

Today, the Kurdish population is estimated to be about 30-35 million people. According to a CIA report published in 2016, Kurdish people in Turkey expressed 20% of the population of Turkey and beside this report, another report prepared by the CIA in 2014, the average population of the Kurdish people in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria was 30 million (CIA, 2014). In addition, it is written that there is a diaspora of approximately 2 million Kurds who migrated to Europe due to exile, asylum, immigration, and war¹¹. It appears that, Kurds are one of the largest peoples in the world that do not have a state.

Statelessness or the fact of being left without a state; It is the part left to the Kurds from the Treaty of Lausanne by the colonization. With this agreement, was made without the participation of Kurdish representatives and this is the historical part of Kurds being a one of

¹¹ For more information to check: <https://thekurdishproject.org/kurdistan-map/kurdish-diaspora/> 29/05/2022

the colonized people. The inadequacy of the definitions made for the Kurds for centuries has gained an official title in this context.

Moreover, it is necessary to define this colonialism structurally as "settler colonialism" because for centuries, the people living in these lands spoke Kurdish and lived within the Kurdish cultural and historical heritage. The destructions faced by the Kurds began with the domination of the Ottoman Empire, and these lands, which were first turned into semi-colonies, were later divided, and turned into full colonies. Today, there are many Turkish settlers in Kurdistan, and as a result, the Kurdish language is weakening day by day, losing its feature of being the first language. When we consider the ongoing results of Turkey's local elections as an example, seven Kurdish political parties that have been established since 1990 have been banned due to the sense of nation and struggle they have created amongst the Kurds as a result of their work and achievements. All Kurdish parties, from the first Kurdish political party to the current Kurdish political party HDP, came out of the elections as the leading party in Kurdistan. Therefore, according to the results of the 7 June 2015 and 31 March 2019 elections, the HDP overwhelmingly became the first party in Kurdistan. However, it is not possible for the colonial mentality of state to welcome such a defeat, so trustees were appointed to all municipalities that HDP won after both elections, and these municipalities were taken from HDP by the authoritarian regime. In the history of the Republic of Turkey, Kurds have always been seen as a threat and ignores the rights of the Kurdish people. In this context, all social, economic, educational, and historical institutions to be established in Kurdistan must be independent of Turkish influence. The only right that will meet this requirement is the right of "self-determination" accepted by international conventions within the framework of collective rights. It is a right that must be applicable to every nation since every nation deserves its own determination and self-government.

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Supplementary files

1) Student Oath

“Türküm, doğruyum, çalışkanım.

Yasam; küçüklerimi korumak, büyüklerimi saymak,

yurdumu, milletimi özümden çok sevmektir.

Ülküm; yükselmek, ileri gitmektir.

Varlığım Türk varlığına armağan olsun.” (Reşat G, 1933)

“I am a Turkish (Turk), I am truthful (honest) and I am a hardworker.

My Law: is to protect younger ones, to respect my elder, to love my country (homeland) and my nation more than myself.

My ideal (mission, purpose); is to rise, to progress.

My existence shall be a gift (dedication) to the Turkish existence.”

Translation and Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student_Oath_\(Turkey\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student_Oath_(Turkey))

2) Turkish National Anthem

“Korkma, sönmez bu safaklarda yüzen al sancak;

Sönmeden yurdumun üstünde tüten en son ocak.

O benim milletimin yıldızıdır parlayacak;

O benimdir, o benim milletimindir ancak.

Çatma, kurban olayım çehreni ey nazlı hilal!

Kahraman ırkına bir gül! ne bu siddet bu celal?

Sana olmaz dökülen kanlarımız sonra helal,

Hakkıdır, Hakk'ka tapan, milletimin istiklal!” (M, A, Ersoy. 1921)

“Fear not, the crimson flag, waving in these dawns will never fade

Before the last hearth that is burning in my nation vanishes.

That is my nation's star, it will shine;

That is mine, it belongs solely to my nation.

Oh coy crescent do not frown for I am ready to sacrifice myself for you!

Please smile upon my heroic nation¹², why that anger, why that rage?

¹² In the Turkish version of anthem, author used “İrk” as a word, which means “race”. Instead of the using “race” as a word in this translation, the word as “Nation” has been preferred by translator.

If you frown, our blood shed for you will not be worthy.

Freedom is the right of my nation who worships God and seeks what is right.”

Translation and Source: <https://www.umass.edu/gso/tgsa/turkey/anthem.htm>

Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EDUCATION UNION OFFICIALS

- How did the Turkish education system was in the first place designed and put into practice after the proclamation of the republic and formal declaration of the new Turkish state? What were the policy targets especially during that period?
- How are the Kurdish people represented and illustrated in terms of culture, history, and identity in the Turkish Education System? Additionally, what is your take on the representation of minorities in the curriculum and textbooks?
- What are the targets of the curriculum studied in primary and secondary schools, as well as the classes published through the online Educational Informatics Network (known as EBA in Turkish)?
- Is there an education and training system that you would like to propose as an alternative to the Turkish Education System? If yes, what would be the most essential differences that distinguish it from the current system?
- Considering the international agreements, UN conventions and standards that accept the right to education in mother tongue, how would you comment on the situation and attitude of the Turkish Education System?
- What is the role and effects of the Turkish education system when it comes to the assimilation and integration of the Kurdish people? As a result of such an education system, how would you comment on the Kurdish youth's perspective on Kurdish language and literature, Kurdish political movement, and the struggle for liberation?
- How would you comment on the effects that the Turkish education system have on the Kurdish people's political status now and might have in the future?
- What kind of policies does the Turkish education system pursue about the Kurds mother tongue in daily life, its development and transfer to next generations?
- What kind of policies does the Turkish education system pursue about the creation of awareness of the Kurdish people's history and identity?
- How and under which conditions do the Kurdish children learn the Kurdish language and literature, culture and historical development, cultural heritage and traditions? Is there a system of self-education, self-knowledge sharing among the people?

Appendix B

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KURDISH FORMER STUDENTS

- How do you define your identity?
- When and where did you integrate with your daughter?
- How did you realize your language and bluntness or your cultural heritage?
- Were you socially and culturally living in your mother tongue, before your education system started? Can you describe the environment you lived in as a child in terms of language, culture and geography (metropolitan, city or village)?
- How did your education process begin and how did it progress? Can you talk about the positive and negative events you encountered in your primary school education?
- What did you learn about the Kurdish people, the Kurdish language, Minorities and similar issues from the oral and written materials provided to you by the state during your primary school education?
- Racism, Integration, Assimilation, Othering and Turkification. Do these concepts remind you of anything? Have you had any experiences that you associate with the concepts? Especially in your primary education process?
- Do you share your identity with others? What kind of reactions do you encounter?
- How is your emotional connection with your identity? Are you proud of your identity?
- Is it important to pass on your cultural heritage from generation to generation?
- How well can you speak your mother tongue at this stage?

