

Creating a New Identity: From the Secular Turkish Cypriot to the Muslim Turk of Cyprus

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the recent and noted effort to empower the religious framework in Turkish Cypriot education. The main argument of this paper concerns the question of whether this effort must be analysed as a new effort of ‘Turkifying’ the Turkish Cypriot community and not ‘Islamifying’ it. The term ‘new’ applies since the first procedure to ‘Turkify’ the community, according to the connotation of the term Turk that equates it to nation, is considered to have occurred in the late nineteenth century. Over a century later, the term Turk seems to also include the religious element, as opposed to the corresponding term after the creation of the modern Turkish nation. This change and the transition from the secular Turk to the Muslim Turk, a change that comes about in Turkey after the dominance of AKP, tries to penetrate the Turkish Cypriot community, turning the Turkish Cypriot into a Muslim Turk of Cyprus. However, what one should examine carefully are the peculiarities of the Turkish Cypriot community, especially in relation to religion, and, therefore, the difficulty to identify the average Turkish Cypriot with the term Muslim Turk of Cyprus.

Keywords: Turkish Cypriots, education system, religion and education, identity

The complexity of Cyprus’ history, both before and after its independence, has been and still is the main difficulty in an effort to interpret the developments on a historical and political level. To add to this complexity, it appears that the educational system on the island, and the ideology or ideologies that influence it at times, is an even more complicated matter. Evidence of this complexity is the fact that in 1960, with the independence of Cyprus, a state was created that had no notion of a national educational system but was well acquainted with a communal system of education.¹ A state was constructed which did not have a Ministry of Education and a unified

1 Cyprus became an independent state and the colonial period, which began in 1878 when the island was transferred from the jurisdiction of the Sublime Porte to the British, ended. For the colonial period in Cyprus, see: G. Hill (1972) *A History of Cyprus*, Vols. 3 and 4, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; G.S. Georghallides (1979) *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus, 1918–1926: With a Survey of the Foundations of British Rule*, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre; R. Katsiaounis (1996) *Labour, Society and Politics in Cyprus during the*

educational system, but rather two separate systems under the supervision of the Community Assemblies, the Greek Communal Chamber and the Turkish Communal Chamber. In compliance with article 87 of the Constitution, each Community Assembly was responsible for all educational matters of the community.² Therefore, in this framework, two different worlds were developed on the island through education.³ The key ideology and the ruling class in each community had the ability to reproduce and be legitimised on a collective level. During the British period, education was developed on the basis of ethnic and religious diversity; however, when the efforts to establish a public educational system were intensified after the island gained independence, it probably played a leading role in assimilating the controversy between the Greekness and the Turkishness of the Cypriots.⁴

But where the Turkish Cypriot community feels particularly disturbed is in its concern over the provisions of the Constitution, especially after 1960 when Turkish Cypriot education came under the absolute control of the Turkish Cypriot community and the ideological powers that dominate it.⁵ Thus, the Turkish Cypriot educational system developed and operated under the powerful influence of the realities in Turkey, notably in relation to the educational and ideological framework that was formed after the establishment of the Turkish state.⁶ The Turkish Cypriot educational system, in essence, continued its connection with the Turkish educational system, and its curriculum was prepared within the context of the Turkish syllabus.⁷ Taking into consideration these facts, it should be alluded to that every change in Turkey, in ideological and other levels, was transferred to the Turkish Cypriot community. And so, after the rise of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP*) to power, the growing role of religion in relation to the political and ideological developments in Turkey created new standards that introduced the Turkish Cypriot community to a new course. This course, generally where the

Second Half of the Nineteenth Century, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre; A. Varnava (2009) *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1878–1915. The Inconsequential Possession*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- 2 *Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus* (1960) Nicosia, p. 41 [in Greek]. For the Turkish Communal Chamber (*Türk Cemaat Meclisi*) and educational matters, see: H. Cicioğlu (2000) 'Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti ve Eğitim' ['Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' and Education], *Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 217.
- 3 See: S. Photiou (2005) *Segregated Education in Cyprus between 1920 and 1935*, PhD Dissertation, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- 4 A. Pollis (1973) 'Intergroup Conflict and British Colonial Policy', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 589.
- 5 A. Suha (1973) 'Turkish Education in Cyprus', in Th. Papadopoulos and M. Christodoulou (eds), *Proceedings of the First Cyprological Conference*, Nicosia: Etaireia Kypriakon Spoudon, Vol. 3, Part I, p. 363.
- 6 For an overview of the Turkish Cypriot education system and structure, see: H. Cicioğlu (2000) 'Kuzey Kıbrıs', *op. cit.*, pp. 209–224.
- 7 T. Atalay (2005) 'Öğretmen ve Müfredat Ekseninde KKTC'de Örgün Din Öğretimi' [The Teacher and the Formal Religious Education in 'Northern Cyprus's' Curriculum Axis], *Değerler Eğitimi Dergisi*, Vol. 2, No. 7/8, p. 15.

educational system is concerned, is related to the formation of a new Turkish identity, an important component of which, and to the contrary with the past, is religious faith.

The fundamental purpose of this article is to analyse the question of whether the recent and noted effort to empower the religious framework in Turkish Cypriot education is a new effort of 'Turkifying' the Turkish Cypriot community and not simply 'Islamifying' it. This paper argues that the 'new effort of Turkifying' applies since the first procedure to 'Turkify' the community, in harmony with the connotation of the term Turk that equates it to nation, is considered to have materialised in the late nineteenth century.⁸ Over a century later, the term Turk seems to also include the religious element, as opposed to the corresponding term after the formation of the modern Turkish nation. This change and the transition from the secular Turk to the Sunni Muslim Turk, which comes into being in Turkey after the dominance of AKP, tries to penetrate the Turkish Cypriot community, reshaping the Turkish Cypriot into a Muslim Turk of Cyprus. Be that as it may, what should be examined carefully are the peculiarities of the Turkish Cypriot community, especially in relation to religion, and in consequence the difficulty to identify the average Turkish Cypriot with the term Muslim Turk of Cyprus.

After the formation of the Turkish nation and the formulation of a national educational system in Turkey, the Turkishness of the Turkish Cypriots was passed down to the community on a collective level through the educational system, which was oriented towards the Turkish educational system. In this framework, not only was the complete dominion of the military and the Kemalist understanding of national powers, which dominated Turkish internal politics until the rise to power of AKP, not questioned, but it was also empowered by the existence of a Turkish Cypriot community from which those social and political powers that could formulate an internal Turkish Cypriot policy were either absent or successfully excluded. Amongst the Turkish Cypriots, the powers that were established were those that were imposed as the sole solution for the survival of the community; that is a complete dependence on Turkey, the motherland. In other words, the politico-military status quo in Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot leadership managed to hold the Turkish Cypriot community outside of time and, more importantly, they stopped any development that could lead to the questioning of their policy in Cyprus, incorporating the Turkish Cypriot community into the Turkish nation.⁹ In this framework of development, Turkish nationalism, as it was formulated in the Kemalist framework, along with the realities on the island, led to the establishment of Turkish nationalism as the dominant axis of the Turkish Cypriot educational system.¹⁰

8 A. Nevzat (2005) *Nationalism amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave*, PhD Dissertation, University of Oulu, Oulu.

9 S. Anagnostopoulou (2004) *Tourkikos Eksihronismos. Islam kai Tourkokyprioi sti Daidalodi Poreia tou Kemalismou* [Turkish Modernity, Islam and Turkish Cypriots in the Labyrinthine Course of Kemalism], Athens: Vivliorama, p. 217.

10 A. Güneçli (2013) 'Kıbrıs'ın Kuzeyindeki Eğitimin ve Ders Kitaplarının Eleştirel Değerlendirilmesi' [Critical Evaluation of the North of Cyprus Education and Textbooks], *Eleştirel Pedagoji*, Vol. 5, No. 26, p. 23. The

The Turkish national state and the Kemalist understanding of Turkishness were based on degrading the religious faith as the factor to define Turkish identity, and in its place, the defining element of Turkishness became the Turkish nation and the cultural elements of the Turkish people. Not only was religion not considered a primary element of Turkish national identity, an element of the nation that is, but it was considered by Kemalism as a factor that would impede progress and the modernisation of the nation and the state.¹¹ As a result, the newly-constituted Turkish nation proceeded to a reformation whose goal was to remove society from the strict religious framework of the Ottoman period. This included banning the Caliphate, closing mosques, Sufi orders, banning the fez and adopting the western hat.¹² Intrinsically, after enforcement of this secularising reformation in the newly-constituted Turkish nation by Mustafa Kemal, the Islamic ideas and institutions that were related to religion stopped being the legalising element of politics, and particularly where the educational system is concerned, the analysts note that it was separated from every form of religious influence and effect.¹³ Although religious education continued to exist, the control of the state over all the religious and educational matters was strong. The abandonment of the Arabic alphabet and the adoption of the Latin, along with the cleansing of the language of any Arabic and Persian influences constituted one of the most important moves, which was automatically connected to education, that contributed to the removal from the religious framework. In essence, a reformation was attempted, and a new orientation for the Turkish nation was created.¹⁴

On that account, the basis for the Kemalist understanding of national state and to a great degree of the Turkish national state has been the enforcement and the protection of its secular character, a value that was considered the cornerstone of Turkey's westernisation. Secularism was a basic principle of Kemalism whose importance was not reduced to separating the state from Church but expanded to the conflict between the powers that sought the westernising of the country with powers affiliated with the dominant role of religion and its role in formulating politics. For a long period, the Kemalist power of Turkey kept and was kept from the above principle, discouraging any public expression of religious feelings from the citizens, believing that this would undermine the secularity of the state – a basic Kemalist principle – and would lead to the development of dynamics that would not be *Western* or *European*. With this in mind, the

integration of the Turkish Cypriot identity into a Turkish national identity is shown by the fact that until the changes of 2004, in history books in the Turkish Cypriot educational system, the community was downgraded as part of the Turkish nation, and the history of Cyprus was devalued as a chapter of Turkish history. Y. Papadakis (2008) *History Education in Divided Cyprus: A Comparison of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Schoolbooks on the 'History of Cyprus'*; Nicosia: PRIO Report, 2/2008, p. 13.

11 S. Anagnostopoulou (2004) *Tourkikos Eksihronismos* [Turkish Modernity], *op. cit.*, p. 54.

12 E.J. Zürcher (2004) *Turkey: A Modern History*, London: I.B. Tauris, p. 173.

13 H. Yavuz (2009) *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 26.

14 A. Kazamias (1966) *Education and the Quest for Modernity in Turkey*, London: G. Allen and Unwin, p. 187.

main goal of the Turkish educational system during the Kemalist era was to fashion a clean national state and a national identity free of religion.¹⁵ The period of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis that began during the 80s must be analysed as a period in which Islam began to degrade the secular character of the Turkish state. As a result of these new relations between the state and Islam, even the term secular as a term that describes the Turkish state, does not seem correct, since neither the state, nor politics have become non-religious.¹⁶

The Turkish Cypriot community, which had already begun to distance itself from Islam from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, as it operated in the British colonial but modern framework, seemed to be ready to embrace the basic principles of Kemalism, especially in relation to secularism and westernisation.¹⁷ The assistance of the British administration, the annulment of Ottoman institutions and practices on the island, the effort to formulate a more up-to-date educational system in the standards of modern nations of the era and the introduction of the island into the world of the colonies of a western country, these were elements that reinforced the efforts of the Kemalists to remove the community from the strict religious framework of the Ottoman period. Therefore, after the establishment of the modern Turkish nation in 1923 and the secularising reformations of Mustafa Kemal, the Turkish Cypriot community seemed to enter a course of intense removal from the strict religious framework. The application of the Kemalist reforms to the Turkish Cypriot community, for example, the adoption of the Latin alphabet, appeared to weaken religion and favour the emergence of secular elements.¹⁸ Simultaneously, the previous decades of British modern administration on the island – Cyprus was transferred to the British administration in 1878 – and the loss of power of the religious institutions debilitated the religious feelings of the Turkish Cypriots. In that sense, the Turkish Cypriot secularism has two roots: the British modernity framework and the Kemalist secularism.

In this structure, the Turkish Cypriot educational system operated as part of the broader secular character of education in Turkey. Turkish Cypriot education, in the framework of its *national mission*, highlighted as one of its leading characteristics *the conservation of the national conscience of the person and the safeguard of devotion to concepts such as Atatürk's nationalism ...*¹⁹ For this reason, the Turkishness of the Turkish Cypriots concerned their secularity and their involvement with Turkey as the origin of the population. Not only was the Turkishness of the Turkish Cypriots

15 H. Yavuz (2003) *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 48.

16 A. Davison (2003) 'Turkey, a "Secular" State? The Challenge of Description', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 102, No. 2/3, p. 342.

17 A. Nevzat and M. Hatay (2009) 'Politics, Society and the Decline of Islam in Cyprus: From the Ottoman Era to the Twenty First Century', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 6, p. 919.

18 H.M. Ateşin (1996) *Kıbrıs'ta İslâmî Kimlik Dâvası* [Islamic Identity Case in Cyprus], İstanbul: Marifet Yayınları, p. 276.

19 H.S. Yaratın (1998) 'Education in the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus"', in K. Grothusen, S. Winfried and P. Zervakis (eds), *Zypern* [Cyprus], Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, p. 611.

not related to their religiousness, but, on the contrary, it was also related to the lack of this religiousness and the undermining of the religious element. Many times, expressly where education is concerned not counting the support of secularity instead of religiousness, it appears that Turkish Cypriot educators were even more zealous than the educators in Turkey.²⁰ Undermining religion and weakening religious institutions, which was happening in Turkey, also concerned the Turkish Cypriot community, where relevant developments were transferred.²¹

It is worth emphasising a particularity of the Turkish Cypriot community in relation to religion. While the community is recorded as a Muslim community, in essence it had already distanced from Islam in the middle of the nineteenth century in a process during which religion played a decreasing role in everyday life.²² Despite the Turkish-Islamic synthesis (*Türk-İslam sentezi*) of Turkey in the 80s, the Turkish Cypriot community remained, and possibly still remains, intensely secular, and as recent research demonstrates, Turkish Cypriots are perhaps the most secular Muslim group in the world. It is characteristic that while at some point religious lessons were introduced to the syllabus at Turkish schools, the Turkish Cypriot community did not include such lessons in its syllabus, thus making a substantial differentiation.²³ According to research conducted among the Turkish Cypriots, today the vast majority do not belong to organised religious orders. They do not follow a religious way of life, and they do not believe that religious institutions can provide solutions to individual problems. It is characteristic that only 79% go to the mosque for Friday prayer and only 1.3% have mentioned that they might go to the mosque more than once a week.²⁴ The same research has demonstrated that the Turkish Cypriots consider religious faith as a completely personal matter and that they do not look positively on a legislative or organised religious activity.²⁵

The fact that the Turkish Cypriot educational system developed and operated in the framework that was defined by Kemalist secularism and Turkish nationalism resulted in an essential differentiation from the corresponding Greek Cypriot educational system. This distinction concerned the complete elimination of the religious element from education and the immersion of a particular progressiveness amongst the Turkish Cypriot teachers and professors. This progressiveness was expressed with the participation of important associations and guilds of Turkish Cypriot educators in mobilisations of reaction against nationalism and religious conservatism.²⁶ As opposed to the Turkish

20 A. Nevzat and M. Hatay (2009) 'Politics, Society and the Decline', *op. cit.*, p. 919.

21 H.M. Ateşin (1996) *Kıbrıs'ta İslamî* [Islamic Identity], *op. cit.*, p. 281.

22 A. Nevzat and M. Hatay (2009) 'Politics, Society and the Decline', *op. cit.*, p. 912.

23 T. Atalay (2005) 'Öğretmen ve Müfredat' [Teachers and Curriculum], *op. cit.*, p. 15.

24 B. Yeşilada (2009) 'İslam and the Turkish Cypriots', *Social Compass*, Vol. 56, No. 1, p. 56.

25 B. Yeşilada, P. Noordijk and C. Webster (2009) 'Religiosity and Social Values of the Cypriots', *Social Compass*, Vol. 56, No. 1, p. 21.

26 See, for instance, the reactions of the KTÖEOS (Kıbrıs Türk Orta Eğitim Öğretmenler Sendikası – Turkish Cypriot Secondary Education Teachers' Union) and KTÖS (Kıbrıs Türk Öğretmenler Sendikası – Turkish

Cypriot educators, in the Greek Cypriot case, the role of the Church was and remains important, perpetuating a religious and political conservatism among Greek Cypriot teachers and educators. Important associations of Greek Cypriot educators express conservatism in many cases and obscurantism of an education that remains linked to religiousness and the nationalism that is expressed by the ecclesiastic institution on the island.²⁷ Indicative of this differentiation is the fact that it is often noted by officials from Turkey that north Cyprus needs more mosques and more religious education to compensate for the links that exist between the Greek Cypriot community and the Church of Cyprus in the south.

Changes in Turkey:

Islam as a Component of the National Identity

Radical transformations, often at a speed that makes an understanding of them more difficult, and changes to the ideological framework are the main characteristics of the transitional period that Turkey entered after the rise of AKP to power. Political Islam in Turkey is a complex evolutionary process, which under no circumstances should be perceived as static. Analysts note that during the 80s, the Turkish nation used Islam, emphasising Islamic values, in an effort to promote faith in its citizens, who have various origins, and to maintain the territorial integrity of the country. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis became the official ideology of the state elite since that period and played an important role in the rise of a kind of Turkish Islamism in Turkey.²⁸ During Kenan Evren's period, Sunni Islam was conceived as an important tool for the promotion of social and political stability in the country.²⁹ It is characteristic that Turgut Özal has been the first Turkish Prime Minister to make the pilgrimage to Mecca during his premiership. Important Islamic institutions were supported, while through various decisions, the framework to legitimise religion was given.³⁰ Therefore, during and after the 80s, political Islam in Turkey was legitimised in a social, cultural, economic and political field.

Cypriot Teachers' Union) regarding the compulsory religious education in Turkey and Cyprus.

27 M.N. Michael (2007) 'Ethnohiskeyitiki Ellinki kai Tourkiki Paideia stin Kypro' [Ethno-religious Greek and Turkish Education in Cyprus], *Historica*, Vol. 24, No. 46, pp. 43–64. See also: P. Persianis (1978) *Church and State in Cyprus Education: The Contribution of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus to Cyprus Education during the British Administration (1878–1960)*, Nicosia: Violaris.

28 M. Şen (2010) 'Transformation of Turkish Islamism and the Rise of the Justice and Development Party', *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 61.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

30 H. Yavuz (2003) *Islamic Political Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 75. For education matters during this period, see: N. Moudouros (2012) *O Metashimatismos tis Tourkias. Apo tin Kemaliki Kyriarhia ston Islamiko Neofilelytherismo* [The Transformation of Turkey: From the Kemalist Prevalence to the Islamic Neoliberalism], Athens: Alexandria, p. 203.

Today, political Islam is represented by AKP and Tayyip Erdogan. Above all, it is the carrier of a Turkish and not only Islamic transformation, which does not appear to be based on an absolute rupture with the nationalistic Kemalist ideology but instead combines it with religiousness. In this framework, and since the first electoral victory of the AKP, its political leaders promote the 'Islamic way of life' in Turkish society.³¹ The current administration in Turkey understands religiousness as a *national element* that is not opposed to the modernisation of the country whilst recent works mention that religiosity is a sound measure of conservatism in Turkey.³² It is noteworthy that in the government agenda after the 2002 elections, AKP noted that its educational policy targets the better legislation of religious education, always in the framework of a secular state in an effort to maintain the cultural values of Turks.³³ At present, political Islam in Turkey has managed to maintain religious faith, Islam, as an element of Turkishness, subverting the Kemalist ideology which degraded the importance of religion and religious identity. It is characteristic that Turkey's President Abdullah Gül, debunking the essence of *Kemalist secularity* and disconnecting it completely from *westernization*, has said in the past that the representatives of classic Kemalism are

'... antireligious. They are not secular elite. They want to create another religion, the atheism. It is the seculars who are not tolerant and who want to impose their lifestyle here. They do these for the sake of the Western world, but if you look at Western countries, none of them is like this'.³⁴

In this manner, Abdullah Gül gave the message that the power of westernisation of the country could be Islam itself, something that in previous decades had not only seemed impossible but also contradictory. The current administration in Turkey, in other words, seeks the transformation of the Kemalist Turkish state into a state with a powerful Islamic ideological framework.³⁵

In the course of the Kemalist ideology from 1923 onwards, the term *Turk* replaces the term *Muslim*, and religious faith is no longer the primary element that defined the identity of the citizens of the Turkish state.³⁶ In the process of enforcing political Islam as the dominant political power in modern Turkey, the term *Turk* is combined with the term *Muslim*. In this framework of change, education is of primary importance, especially where the consolidation of a new national identity is concerned, an identity whose components are Islam and the religious identity of Turkish citizens. Furthermore, recent studies reveal that the Turkish public has become more

31 N.B. Criss (2010) 'Dismantling Turkey: The Will of the People?', *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 45.

32 B.A. Yeşilada and P. Noordijk (2010) 'Changing Values in Turkey: Religiosity and Tolerance in Comparative Perspective', *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 10.

33 A. Şaşmaz (2013) 'To Which Direction Does the Education Policy of AK Parti Change?', *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 40–47.

34 S. Peterson (1998) 'Can Miniskirts and Veils Walk Amid Mosques?', *The Christian Science Monitor International*, 20 January.

35 S. Anagnostopoulou (2004) *Tourkikos Eksihronismos* [Turkish Modernity], *op. cit.*, p. 90.

36 T. Bora (2002) 'Ordu ve Milliyetçilik' [Army and Nationalism], *Birikim*, Vol. 160/161, p. 58.

conservative during the period from 1995 to 2005.³⁷ Analysts note that one of the overriding forces assisting the formation and politicisation of the new Islamic framework in Turkey is religious education.³⁸ In an effort to understand the changes that are attempted in relation to Turkish Cypriot education, it is necessary to outline the politics of AKP in the matter of education in Turkey itself. Relevant research into the subject demonstrates the gradual change in relation to education in AKP's agenda. While educational issues were not a main priority in AKP's agenda, it seems that from 2007 onward, education is placed as a core priority in AKP's policy; while up to 2011, specific changes in the legislative framework established education along with its contents as a basic part of governing the country.³⁹

The importance of education in relation to the change in the ideological framework is especially apparent from the fact that a public debate on the possible threat to the secularity of the Turkish nation by political Islam was principally focused on the matter of education and the use of the Islamic scarf.⁴⁰ Moreover, since that period, the educational policy of the nation was directly and intensely related to two pillars: first, the creation of a new Turkish identity whose content would be defined by religious cultural values, that is Islam and second, the connection between education and economic and developmental policy.⁴¹

In this framework, the increase of students attending religious types of schools (Imam-Hatip) and the introduction of selective courses of religious content in public education, such as courses entitled 'The Qur'an' and 'The Life of the Prophet', were promoted.⁴² More specifically, according to accusations of Turkish educators, the government of AKP seems to be pursuing the increase of students in the Imam-Hatip types of schools at the expense of secular public schools. Additionally, 2004's legislation allows the entrance of Imam-Hatip alumni into higher education institutions, while the governing party appears to be favouring the appointment of Imam-Hatip alumni to various government departments and institutions.⁴³ Imam-Hatip schools were formed in 1923, and before the dominance of political Islam in Turkey, they consisted of an effort to control the

37 B.A. Yeşilada and P. Noordijk (2010) 'Changing Values in Turkey', *op. cit.*, p. 24.

38 H. Yavuz (2003) *Islamic Political Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

39 A. Şaşmaz (2013) 'To Which Direction', *op. cit.*, pp. 40–47. It is worth mentioning that under the AKP government, the main debate over secularism focused almost exclusively on religious education and the headscarf issue. See: H. Yavuz (2009) *Secularism and Muslim Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

40 H. Yavuz (2009) *Secularism and Muslim Democracy*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

41 For the connection of the economy with education see: K. İnal and G. Akkaymak (2012) (eds), *Neoliberal Transformation of Education in Turkey: Political and Ideological Analysis of Educational Reforms in the Age of AKP*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

42 According to data given by the Turkish authorities, between 2001 and 2010, the number of registered students in Quran courses tripled. See: A. Yıldız (2013) 'Türkiye'de Yetişkin Eğitiminin Dönüşümü. Halk Eğitiminden Yaşam Boyu Öğrenmeye' [Transformation of Adult Education in Turkey. From Popular Education to Life Long Learning], *Eleştirel Pedagoji*, Vol. 5, No. 26, p. 11.

43 A. Rabasa and F.S. Larrabee (2008) *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, Santa Monica: Rand, p. 19.

state with a religious type of education.⁴⁴ During the period when secular Kemalism was applied to Imam-Hatip schools, the schools were even threatened with extinction, and when they later continued to operate, a group of regulations and legislations encouraged secular education and discouraged enrolment in the Imam-Hatips. When the Turko-Islamic composition of the 80s appeared to create a problem in relation to intense Islamic activity, the coup d'état of 1997 came as an effort to weaken Islam. Under these circumstances, one of the most important blows to Islam was the establishment of various regulations that aimed at making it more difficult to enrol alumni of religious schools in higher education.⁴⁵ Today with the rise of AKP to power, it seems that the opposite logic is developing. New laws encourage enrolment in Imam-Hatip types of schools and discourage enrolment in secular types of public schools. Analysts believe that this change in relation to the Imam-Hatips, and more specifically their conversion to normal middle education schools along with the possibilities offered to their alumni, are one of the most important channels of cultural transformation of Turkish society from the strict secularity of the Kemalist framework to the rise of the Muslim element of identity. These schools have operated as a space from which a dynamic Islamic class of intellectuals and entrepreneurs has risen.⁴⁶

In relation to the neoliberal policy of the ruling party in Turkey and the role of religion, it is perhaps important to note that historically religion and its representatives, a typically conservative space, cultivate a lifestyle whose chief characteristic is compromise. In Islam, because there is no organised Church, as is the case with Christianity, and because the political coexists or is often part of the religious, this compromise is even more intense, and it is undoubtedly more acceptable. Within this way of thinking, any possible reaction seems to be a counteraction against the religious framework. Hence, every political reaction contains an element of a lack of faith on a religious level. As recent research has demonstrated, Islam and the development of an intense religiousness in Turkish society ultimately operate as the framework of acceptance and consolidation of the neoliberal policies on an economic and political level.⁴⁷ Following criticism of the new educational policy of the Turkish government, the new educational system is oriented to prepare students for a competitive economy, and the textbooks published after 2005 reflect a neoliberal language and agenda.⁴⁸ What is more, the AKP administration is accused of making the language of economics dominant in educational literature and practices since it came to power in Turkey.⁴⁹

44 M.K. Coskun and B. Senturk (2012) 'The Growth of Islamic Education in Turkey: The AKP's Policies toward Imam-Hatip Schools', in K. İnal and G. Akkaymak (eds), *Neoliberal Transformation*, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

45 N. Moudouros (2012) *O Metashimatismos* [The Transformation of Turkey], *op. cit.*, p. 227.

46 H. Yavuz (2003) *Islamic Political Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

47 N. Moudouros (2012) *O Metashimatismos* [The Transformation of Turkey], *op. cit.*, p. 304.

48 H. Koşar-Altınyelken and G. Akkaymak (2012) 'Curriculum Change in Turkey: Some Critical Reflections', in K. İnal and G. Akkaymak (eds), *Neoliberal Transformation*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

49 K. İnal (2012) 'The Educational Politics of the AKP: The Collapse of Public Education in Turkey', in K. İnal and G. Akkaymak (eds), *Neoliberal Transformation*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

A New Era: Islam and Turkish Cypriot Education

In the new framework of the last decade in Turkey and especially after 2008, the changes that are attempted in the Turkish Cypriot educational system on behalf of Turkey are primarily concerned with the penetration of an Islamic religiousness and the abandonment of the strict Kemalist secularity. According to publications of Turkish Cypriot educators, vis-à-vis the changes promoted in the Turkish Cypriot educational system, these concern the formation of a framework similar to Turkey.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that it has generated a lot of reaction regarding the danger of Islamifying society, this policy of the Turkish government should not, in the opinion of this author, be seen as an effort to 'Islamify' the Turkish Cypriots; rather it should be regarded as an effort to 'Turkify' them. As the secularity of Turkish nationalism after 1923 gradually tried to integrate the Turkish Cypriots into the Turkish nation, whose central identifying element was secularity, in the same manner, religiousness or rather the religious dimension of Turkishness re-introduces the Turkish Cypriots into the Muslim Turkish nation.

This process, therefore, differs from the previous one since it corresponds to the new connotation of the term Turk, which is defined, or at least there is an effort to explain it, by the political Islam that is in power. This Turkifying regards the Turkish Cypriots first and above all as Muslim Turks, an integral part of the Turkish nation. It is characteristic that the term Turkish Cypriot is used as little as possible by officials of the Turkish government. It seems, then, that the government of AKP tries through the institutions that it controls, religious and otherwise, to promote among the Turkish Cypriots the term Muslim Turks of Cyprus instead of Turkish Cypriots. This development is especially important if one considers that the Turkish Cypriots still insist on calling themselves Cypriot Turks – Turkish Cypriots (Kıbrıslı Türk) rather than using the term Turk of Cyprus (Kıbrıs Türkü).

All the interventions and developments that originate from the Turkish government and are carried out in a religious framework in relation to the Turkish Cypriot community seek to change the identity of the Turkish Cypriots in a renewal of the effort to Turkify them. Rather like the attention focused after the end of the Ottoman period and the founding of the Republic of Turkey, emphasis is firmly placed on the Turkish nation when defining the Turkish Cypriots in relation to the nation, or rather defining them as an integral part of the nation. Likewise, with the rise of AKP in power, there is an effort to foreground the religious dimension of the national identity and the definition of the Turkish Cypriots as an integral part of a Muslim Turkish nation.

In this framework and regardless of changes that originated with the Turkish government, the Turkishness of the Turkish Cypriots should be defined if not completely, then at least to some degree by religion, which seeks to be dominant in the Turkish Cypriot community in much the same way as it is in Turkey. This is realised despite the fact that, as mentioned before, the Turkish

50 T. Gökçebel (2013) 'AKP'nin Kıbrıs Politikası' [AKP's Cyprus Policy], *Eleştirel Pedagoji*, Vol. 5, No. 26, pp. 32–35.

Cypriot community is one in which religion plays a very small role. After the rise of AKP to power, an attempt was initiated to forge a new reality in relation to Islam in the Turkish Cypriot community and highlight Islam as a component of the new emerging political framework. An intense public discussion about the necessity of religious education began within the community with diverging views. Religious officials announced that the operation of religious schools on the island is necessary since there are no schools to prepare the clergy. Talip Atalay, the religious affairs official, advocated the operation of religious schools, underlining the fact that relevant laws do not restrict the operation of such schools, and he proceeded to note that in reality the operation of religious schools is a necessity for Cyprus.⁵¹

Educators' unions as well as a large section of the community reacted intensely in an effort to stop the operation of religious schools, while religion-related agents and the new administration in Turkey announced their support of this possibility. The reaction of the Turkish Cypriots brings to the fore that basically, the policy of AKP in relation to the community and especially in regard to education, aims to gradually integrate the community into the newly defined Muslim Turkish nation.⁵² It is characteristic that the union KTÖS openly accuses the Turkish government of promoting religious education in Cyprus in the context of an organised scheme that threatens the existence of the Turkish Cypriot community. The union notes that the identity, the culture and the understanding of religion plus the quality of life of the Turkish Cypriot community is in danger because of changes promoted by the Turkish government that aim to transform the Turkish Cypriots into religious people,⁵³ and the union's General Secretary noted that this equates to an attack on Cyprus.⁵⁴ To demonstrate the reaction of the educators' unions, it should be noted that a lawsuit was apparently filed on behalf of KTÖS and KTOEÖS against the Turkish Cypriot Minister of Education and the relevant authority of Technical and Training Education. As reported in a relevant publication, the unions accuse the authorities of promoting harmful changes in the Turkish Cypriot community.⁵⁵

Undeterred by these reactions, within a short period of time, various religious educational institutions began operating in Cyprus with economic support, largely from Turkey. It was decided to create a theological school in the University of Near East as well as a theological school in the

51 'Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın İmam Yetiştirmeye İhtiyacı Yok' [No Need for Imam Training in 'Northern Cyprus'], see: *BIA Haber Merkezi*, 15 November 2011.

52 T. Gökçebel (2013) 'AKP'nin Kıbrıs Politikası' [AKP's Cyprus Policy], *op. cit.*, p. 35.

53 For statements by the Secretary of KTÖS Burak Maviş, see: 'Ada Bilim Eğitim Vakfı, AKP'nin Üzerinden Yayılma Projesinin Bir Ürünüdür' [The Island Science Education Foundation is a Product of the AKP's Project for Spreading from Above], Newspaper *GazetadaKıbrıs*, 2 January 2014.

54 'Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın İmam Yetiştirmeye İhtiyacı Yok' [No Need for Imam Training in 'Northern Cyprus'], see: *BIA Haber Merkezi*, 15 November 2011.

55 'İlahiyat Koleji'yle "Suni İslam Modeli" Dayatılıyor' [With the Theology College the 'Sunni Islamic Model' is Imposed], see: Newspaper *Havadis Online*, 17 January 2014 [last entry: 5 June 2014]. See also the article written by KTOEÖS chairman, T. Gökçebel (2013) 'AKP'nin Kıbrıs Politikası' [AKP's Cyprus Policy], *op. cit.*, pp. 30–35.

area of Mia Milia, while the operation of an Imam Hatip school as a department of Haspolat Endüstri Meslek Lisesi (Haspolat Industrial Vocational High School) was also decided. The most important transformation, however, was the decision to turn the religion course into a compulsory course in education together with the organising and initiating of courses on the Qur'an, in which students can participate. There was also a change in the Ministry, since a new department was established, the Department of Islamic and Theological Affairs.

The Theological School (*İlahiyat Fakültesi*) of the Near East University (*Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi*), the first of its kind to open in the Turkish Cypriot community, commenced operation during the 2011–2012 academic year and seeks, as claimed in information given by the University,

'to bring up highly qualified individuals who are specialists in their fields to become religious officials and religious teachers, to facilitate the internalization of national, religious, spiritual, moral and cultural values and to keep these values alive, to bring up strong minded youth to support and contribute to the development of Turkish Republic and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'.⁵⁶

Quintessentially, the faculty, apart from the practical goal of creating religion specialists has, according to the University, also been transformed into the connecting link between Turkey and Turkish Cypriots, on the basis of the religious – which is also the national – identity. Characteristic of the supportive effort to convince students to attend this particular faculty is the fact that all students are given a scholarship to aid with their studies,⁵⁷ while at the beginning of the faculty's operation, it was announced by the Dean of the University that on the grounds of the University, the largest mosque in Cyprus would be erected in a nearby area.⁵⁸

As far as the Theological School in the Mia Milia area (*Hala Sultan İlahiyat Koleji*) is concerned, its foundation stone was placed on 20 July 2012, and it was announced that a mosque would also be erected there to serve the area as well as the students of the School.⁵⁹ In this school, religious matters will be taught in addition to the Qur'an, and lessons on Arabic will be available. According to articles in the Turkish Cypriot press, the operation of the School was received positively in Turkey, while it was recorded as an event that would lift all the obstacles from operating religious schools in Cyprus.⁶⁰ The construction of the complex and the mosque were

56 Available at: <http://www.neu.edu.tr/tr/node/1363> [last entry: 12 May 2014].

57 H. Özder (2013) 'Kıbrıs Türk Eğitim Sistemine AKP İlgisi' [The Interest of AKP to the Turkish Cypriot Education System], *Eleştirel Pedagoji*, Vol. 5, No. 26, p. 28.

58 'YDÜ: Ülkenin En Büyük Camisini Yapacağız' [YDÜ: We'll Built the Biggest Mosque in the Country], Newspaper *Kıbrıs Postası*, 27 April 2012.

59 'Hala Sultan İlahiyat Koleji Resmen Açıldı' [Hala Sultan Theological College Officially Opened], Newspaper *Gündem Kıbrıs*, 27 September 2013.

60 'KKTC'de Yıllardır Açılmaması için her türlü engel Çıkarılan İmam Hatip Lisesi Nihayet Açıldı' [Imam Hatip

received favourably in the Turkish press, while statements made by the Deputy Prime Minister, BeKir Aralay, affirmed that this feat connects the Turkish Cypriot community to Turkey.⁶¹

The building of new mosques, usually even larger than the existing, is another way to affect the secular identity of the Turkish Cypriots and to transform the area, in the words of the Turkish Prime Minister, into a Turkish Muslim country. The Turkish Cypriot groups that reacted intensely to the creation of new mosques point out that there are already 193 mosques in the occupied areas, while there are only 162 schools.⁶² Over and above this they make accusations about the large number of Mosques that have been built on the island during the last decade – a Mosque in each village, has been noted – moreover, a new need has arisen, that of staffing these mosques with clergy. Consequently, as a result of this prerequisite, the discussion for the operation of religious schools on the island has also increased.⁶³

In relation to the compulsory teaching of the religion course in public education, it is observed that in 2009, despite the intense reaction of the Turkish Cypriot educators' unions, it was nonetheless established as a compulsory course from the fourth to the eighth grade.⁶⁴ From information provided, this compulsory religious instruction covers religion, culture and ethics and focuses primarily on Islam. Attendance is compulsory for all students, while non-Muslims may be exempted from attendance after a request by their guardians. At higher levels, the religion course is a selective course. In the framework of promoting religious education, an Imam Hatip school began operating as a department of the professional high school *Haspolat Endüstri Meslek Lisesi*. In this particular school, students were registered from a specific area of Nicosia. And according to accusations by the teacher's unions, while this particular high school is connected to a technical school in Turkey, in Cyprus it promotes religious education.⁶⁵

A number of important articles in the Turkish Cypriot press concern statements mainly from educators about the organisation of religious holidays for students in Turkey through the Turkish embassy. As claimed in these statements, Imams living in Cyprus approach Turkish Cypriot families to convince them to allow their children to participate in summer camps in Turkey. In

Secondary School finally opened after a long struggle against many obstacles preventing its opening in the 'TRNC', see: *Dünya Bülteni Haber Portalı*, 27 September 2013 [last entry: 5 June 2014].

61 'İlk İmam Hatip Lisesi Açıldı' [First Religious Vocational High School Opened], Newspaper *Yeniçağ*, 29 September 2013.

62 T. Gökçebel (2013) 'AKP'nin Kıbrıs Politikası' [AKP's Cyprus Policy], *op. cit.*, p. 35.

63 'Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın İmam Yetiştirmeye İhtiyacı Yok' [No Need for Imam Training in 'Northern Cyprus'], see: *BIA Haber Merkezi*, 15 November 2011.

64 A. Dayioğlu (2013) 'Aleviler, Zorunlu Din Dersleri, "Cemevi ve Kültür Kompleksi"' [Alevi, Compulsory Religious Education, 'Cemevi and Culture Complex'], Newspaper *Yeni Düzen*, 29 December 2013.

65 For statements by the Chairman of the KTOEÖS, Tahir Gökçebel, see: 'Haspolat Endüstri Meslek Lisesi'ne "İmam Hatip Bölümü" Açılıyor' [The Haspolat Industrial Vocational High School Opens an 'Imam Hatip Department'], Newspaper *Kıbrıs Postası*, 14 November 2011.

keeping with the statements, the children there are taught religious lessons besides lessons about the Qur'an on a daily basis.⁶⁶ This development created a strong reaction from Turkish Cypriot educators and their unions. In their statements, they mentioned that the Turkish Cypriot community is a secular community and any education should come from educators and not from clergy.⁶⁷

All of the above evidences the fact that after 2007, a process of enhancing the Islamic element as part of its identity began in the Turkish Cypriot community. This process is especially intense concerning educational matters, and it combines changes in the educational system and an increase of religious spaces. Notwithstanding the reaction from some educators as well as from sections of society, it seems that these changes will be permanent. In conclusion, in the face of the obvious analyses of an Islamifying agenda, the essence of AKP's policy and its effort to empower religiousness among the Turkish Cypriot community through education is a renewal of the endeavour to Turkify the community on a political level and a re-introduction of the community to the larger national group – the Muslim Turkish nation. Although this Turkifying will establish Turkey's policy in relation to the community as accepted and indisputable, it will simultaneously establish economic development, and an understanding of the neoliberal reality as a natural course. And more importantly, it will categorise any Turkish Cypriot reaction to this new reality as a sign of a lack of faith and, that being the case, as a sign of the absence of their Turkishness.

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66 'Türkiye'den Kuzey Kıbrıs'a Eğitim Çıkarması' [Disembarkation of Turkey to 'Northern Cyprus' Education], see: *SoLportal*, 28 August 2008.

67 See statements by KTOS officials, 'KKTC'de Okulda Kuran Kursu Tartışması' [Discussion for Koran Courses in Schools in 'TRNC'], Newspaper *Hürriyet*, 6 June 2007.

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