

# **Transformations in Social Studies Textbooks: An Analysis of Content on Gender, Religion, and Policy Concerns in Turkey**

İsmail Güven Tolgahan Ayantaş

In this study, content on gender, religion, and policy concerns was examined in Turkish social studies textbooks. Content and discourse analyses were conducted to clarify the text and narrative of these textbooks. This comprehensive approach enabled researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the textbooks, their key messages, and the broader social implications of the content. This multidimensional analysis can deepen understanding of the social, cultural, and educational contexts in which these textbooks are produced. Factors influencing the evolving content of social studies textbooks beyond the prescribed curriculum were explored. Design of contemporary textbooks is driven by ideological rather than academic motives, and these textbooks often lack comprehensive sources and evidence. These materials provide limited narratives on Turkish national identity, gender equality, and societal diversity. Additionally, these textbooks incorporate Islamic customs with conservative religious framing, which aligns with the Turkish Ministry of National Educations 2018 reforms. The promotion of new-Ottomanism and Islamic ideals aligns with the ruling partys discourses and the Republics Presidency. Ottoman history, unity around the Turkish-Islamic outlook, and pride in national traditions are emphasized, whereas the contributions of modern Turkish societys founders are neglected. Consequently, these textbooks reflect dominant rather than unbiased viewpoints, failing to foster critical thinking and impartiality.

Keywords: gender, policy, religion, social studies textbooks

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İsmail Güven, Professor, College of Educational Sciences, Ankara University.  
Tolgahan Ayantaş, Research Assistant, College of Educational Sciences, Ankara University,  
E-mail: ayantas@ankara.edu.tr

## 土耳其社會教科書的轉變—— 從性別、宗教與政策問題的角度分析

伊斯梅爾·古文 托爾加罕·阿揚塔什

本研究探討土耳其社會教科書中關於性別、宗教和政策議題的內容。以文本與話語分析釐清教科書中的文本與敘事架構，以探討教科書本身、主要訊息，以及其社會意涵，並加深對教科書所處的社會、文化和教育脈絡的理解。研究探討了影響教科書變化的因素。現代教科書的設計受意識形態影響，而非單純的學術動機，常缺乏完整的資料與證據。對土耳其的國家認同、性別平等與社會多樣性觀的呈現相當有限。此外，教科書納入伊斯蘭習俗，以保守的宗教框架進行詮釋，與2018年的課程改革相符。「新奧斯曼主義」與伊斯蘭理想的推崇，也與執政黨及共和國總統府的立場一致。教科書強調新奧斯曼歷史、土耳其—伊斯蘭觀點的團結及民族自豪感，卻忽略現代土耳其社會奠基者的貢獻。因此，這些教科書反映的是主導意識形態的觀點，難以培養批判性思維與公正性。

關鍵詞：性別、政策、宗教、社會教科書

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## 1. Introduction

Textbooks are used as a curriculum guide for teachers; containing the material necessary for them to organize what their pupils will be learning during the relevant school year (Herlinda, 2014). Textbooks are therefore seen as a primary teaching resource and a vital support aid to delivering the current curriculum (Murphy, 2017), and remain an important resource used by teachers in today's classrooms. Textbooks also contain elements of political and ideological ideas inherent within the dominant culture and society where they are situated. However, the dominant political trends and outlooks differ according to the country/region, which also shapes the national curricula and with it its components such as textbooks and other materials that are used in schools (Apple, 2004). Therefore, some are likely to include highly controversial and biased statements and depictions in terms of political ideologies of governments.

The social studies curriculum and textbooks encompass a myriad of examples of politically oriented instructional materials. Social studies textbooks serve to different aims of governments as the social studies area has different pillars such as history, geography, and civics. The dominant political power determines what is represented in the text of the resources and how various topics are placed within the curriculum; hence, textbooks are organized according to the expectations of those in power. The dominant political elite in various countries use textbooks to inculcate citizens to embrace their expectations, economic inclinations, and ideologies, and their cultural point of view (Giroux, 1997; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Kellner & Share, 2007; McLaren, 1995). Textbooks play a vital role in perpetuating the dominant narrative, and thereby impose supremacy, jingoism, privilege, patriotism, individualism, conservatism, and religious values (Kornfeld & Goodman, 1998; Lugg, 2003; Meyer, 2008; Wong, 1991). Textbooks in Texas, for instance, attract criticism for the views put forward of conservative activists that shape the history from which all American children learn. These activists have attempted to reshape the content of history textbooks by praising a heroic, skewed narrative (Savage et al., 2021).

Social studies, as one of the core traditional subjects, can transmit both political and civic, as well as other social values. As such, social studies are a highly politicized field that delivers upon three different pillars, as “civics,” “history,” and “geography.” Social studies curricula and textbooks are regarded as the most suitable forms of educational material to transfer different value codes such that may be classed as nationalistic, democratic, or religious. Textbooks not only support teaching but also serve to shape pupils’ ideas and behaviors, and to help create their identity in both educational and political terms (Berkeley et al., 2016; Rottensteiner, 2010). Many scholars have analyzed social studies textbooks, and primarily with a focus on history, such as *Lies my Teacher Told Me* by Fitzgerald (Loewen, 1995). These studies examined K-12 social studies textbooks only lightly and did not offer any significant level of detail. One of the most detailed analyses conducted to date was performed by Wade who highlighted their limitations by implying the use of weak frameworks and the personal perceptions of authors, as well as inadequate forms of analysis (Wade, 1993). Wade also paid special attention to understanding the function of social studies textbooks in creating a “common culture,” the ideological basis behind the use of social studies textbooks in society.

Textbooks are generally being criticized for being explicit and implicit messages about gender, religion, and politics (Carlson & Kancı, 2017; Kancı & Altınay, 2007; İnal et al., 2014). Wangdu (2020) reported that social studies textbooks in Tibet extensively emphasized the political and cultural elements that are dominant in Buddhist culture. Eriksen (2018) pointed out that the Sami people are systematically presented as “the other” in social studies textbooks in Norway. De Kort (2017) stated that a popular social studies textbook in the Netherlands provided inadequate or distorted information about human rights. One of other research a study examining fourth- and fifth-year social studies textbooks in Iran over the past 30 years, revealed that the textbooks were very weak in terms of developing critical thinking skills in pupils (Aghababaeian et al., 2017). Whilst in the United States, gender disparity and gender-based stereotypes can be found in some social studies textbooks (Brugar et al., 2014), as well as in Ethiopia (Dejene, 2017) and also Turkey (Karaboğa, 2020). Government interventions in textbooks on political, religious and gender issues can be known by

examining the implicit and explicit messages in textbooks (O’Keeffe, 2013).

Kırıkçı et al. (2017) revealed that Turkish social studies textbooks included biased ideas regarding minorities, whilst paying special attention to the Muslim identity, and that there were more religious facts contained in sixth-year social studies textbooks (Bastık & Parlak, 2018). Karacan (2018) stated that national values were included in almost every chapter in fifth-year social studies textbooks. Avaroğulları and Avaroğulları (2018) pointed out that some social studies textbooks reflected the Turkish-Islamic components more frequently than others did. Although the studies on textbooks, it is emphasized that textbooks are generally inadequate as a teaching tool in Turkey, implicit messages and visual-text relationships in textbooks are considered important (Açıkalın & Kılıç, 2017; Kepenekçi, 2010; Taşkın & Açıkalın, 2019). Akay Şahin and Açıkalın (2021) founded that there is a bias and gender inequalities in the actual elementary and middle school social studies textbooks in Turkey.

As seen in the findings of the exemplified studies, there have been changes in the appearance of social studies textbooks in Türkiye compared to previous periods. It can be noticed that these changes stem from the influence of the neo-Ottomanism movement, authoritarianism, and party-state approach. There is evidence suggesting that this movement has gained significant strength in Turkey in recent years. Neo-Ottomanism refers to a political ideology that emerged in Turkey, drawing inspiration from the historical Ottoman Empire. This ideology gained prominence particularly during the early 21st century, under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-AKP). The AKP marked a departure from the traditional secularist political landscape in Turkey. It represented a more conservative and Islamist-leaning political ideology, challenging the influence of the military and Kemalist establishment. The AKP government pursued an active and assertive foreign policy, seeking to enhance Turkey’s influence in the Middle East and beyond. However, this approach has also led to increased regional tensions and geopolitical challenges. The AKP is often associated with a form of political Islam that seeks to blend conservative values with democratic governance. Its approach to issues such as secularism, women’s rights, and religious freedoms has been a subject of debate and contention. While the

AKP initially pursued democratization, there have been growing concerns about a shift toward authoritarianism (Larrabee, 2010; Sayarı, 2013).

Neo-Ottomanism advocates for a renewed Turkish influence in the Middle East, Balkans, and other regions that were once part of the Ottoman Empire. It encompasses a combination of political, economic, and cultural dimensions, with an emphasis on Turkey's historical and cultural ties to its imperial past (Keyman & İçduygu, 2010; Kirişci, 2011; Öniş, 2012; Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009). Authoritarianism is a political system characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms. The party-state approach typically refers to a situation where the political party in power plays a dominant role in the state apparatus. In such cases, the ruling party effectively controls the government institutions, making it challenging to separate the party from the state. This approach is often associated with single-party systems or dominant-party systems where one political party maintains a strong influence over the government (Rose, 1999; Stenner, 2005).

In the early 2000s, Turkey had a predominantly centralized political system, with power concentrated in the hands of a few political parties. There were regular military interventions in politics, with the military playing a significant role in shaping the political landscape. Turkish society was undergoing a period of transformation, influenced by globalization, and increasing urbanization. Traditional values coexisted with the influences of Western culture, particularly in metropolitan areas. Turkey has undergone significant political shifts in the past two decades. The ruling AKP has been in power since 2002, initially introducing a liberal democratic agenda. However, over time, there have been concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions, increased concentration of power, and the state of freedom of expression and press in the country. Turkey's cultural landscape has continued to evolve, reflecting societal changes and global trends. There has been a revival of interest in Turkish arts and culture, and the country has gained prominence in the international film industry. However, there have also been debates and tensions surrounding issues related to social values, religious conservatism, and secularism (Bechev, 2022; Durmaz, 2016; Oğuz, 2023; White & Herzog, 2018; Yılmaz et al., 2020).

The transformation of Turkey's social studies curriculum textbooks portrays several significant shifts over time as depicted in the literature. Initially, the transition from a content-heavy approach to activity-based teaching in 2005 led to a fundamental change in history instruction by prioritizing essential skills and considering factors like children's interests and community background (Şimşek, 2020). Furthermore, the handling of migration and immigrant issues in Turkish textbooks has evolved to incorporate cultural competency and integration, contrary to the U.S. emphasis on the challenges and potential success of immigrants while maintaining their culture (Dündar & Kenyon, 2020). Additionally, a comparison of Turkish and Iranian seventh-grade social studies textbooks ascertains that while both underscore values such as scientificity, the Iranian textbooks emphasize religious aspects 30% more than the Turkish ones (Kaya, 2019). Moreover, recent social studies textbooks in Turkey exhibit a noteworthy expansion in the portrayal of family types, including extended family structures, and an evolution in the coverage of family-related themes (Osmanoğlu et al., 2022). Finally, the analysis of seventh-grade social studies textbooks according to different curriculum programs has revealed an increased focus on democracy, human rights, and family dynamics in more recent editions (Aydınlı-Aras & Hayır Kanat, 2020).

The current textbooks may exhibit an expansion in the portrayal of family types, including extended family structures, and may have an evolution in the coverage of family-related themes. Alongside these changes, a synchronic examination of social studies textbooks in Turkey may reveal the ideological influences shaping contemporary textbooks. These textbooks may lack comprehensive sources, offering limited narratives on Turkish national identity, gender equality, and societal diversity. Additionally, they may align with the Ministry of National Education's 2018 curricular reforms, emphasizing conservative religious practices and the promotion of new-Ottomanism. Consequently, these textbooks may reflect prevailing political influences and may fail to encourage critical thinking and impartiality. Therefore, the current textbooks may be differed from the previous ones in these respects.

A complex relationship exists between mandated curricula and textbook production and the educational aims or attainment targeted, and

as such, it is important to explore the role and potential impact of textbooks on pupil learning. It is clear that Turkey has undergone a great political, economic, social and cultural change in the last two decades. It is important to evaluate how all this is reflected in social studies textbooks. Therefore, the current study aims to examine the topic of political, religious, and gender disparity in Turkish social studies textbooks, and to interpret the hidden and open messages and components that they contain. By doing this, the current look of the social studies textbooks is released, and the findings are provided for future research.

## 2. Method

Textbook, content, and discourse analysis was performed to reveal certain components of the qualitative data in the current study, i.e., text and narrative of social studies textbooks in Turkey synchronically. The initial step in this research involved conducting a comprehensive examination of the social studies textbooks. The overall structure, content organization, visuals (including images, charts, and graphs), and text layout were meticulously analyzed. Specifically, scrutinized the selection of topics, language choices, and visual representations, aiming to identify both explicit and implicit political, gender, or religious messages conveyed within the textbooks.

The researchers examined the textbooks in terms of direct or indirect messages related to gender, religion, and political issues, and applied criteria such as the formation, originality, and reliability of the sources (Patton, 2004; Seggie & Bayyurt, 2015). First, the researchers checked the originality/authenticity of the social studies textbooks, after which the topics and sub-topics were classified. The authenticity of the documents has been verified through the webpage of the Turkish Ministry of National Education, confirming that the mentioned books are social studies textbooks taught at the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade levels. The preliminary examination reveals that while two types of textbooks are used in the seventh grade, only one type is used in the fifth and sixth grades. This indicates that these are the textbooks approved by the Turkish Ministry of National Education



for use in the relevant academic year.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this study examines all the textbooks used in middle schools during the specified academic year. To categorize the data into sub-topics, content analysis was performed. Revealing patterns of meaning and quotations that represent meanings are significant in content analysis (Silverman, 2018). In content analysis, researchers focus on analytical techniques to search for themes and patterns in the data, with codes grouped according to categories and themes (Glesne, 2016). Coding or breaking down text into manageable categories is the root element of content analysis (Ezzy, 2002).

In this research, it was initially considered to conduct coding as done in general content analysis method. However, since it was known that the textbooks were prepared entirely based on the expressions in the curriculum, the decision was made to forego coding and instead focus on the semantic content of the texts. Coding is not performed and added to this study as textbooks are cohesive to curriculum and coding may lead to misunderstanding. The attainments in curriculum are based for creating textbooks thus sometimes it is inescapable to decline some words such as war, religion, man, and women in the narrative. Therefore, content analysis was applied for distinguishing the meanings in the text instead of coding. At this point, the flexibility and uniqueness of the qualitative research approach have been utilized.

Discourse analysis is a research approach that focuses on the study of language in use, particularly within social contexts. It examines how communication shapes and reflects societal practices, power dynamics, and social interactions. Scholars analyze spoken or written texts to uncover underlying meanings, ideologies, and structures. The field of discourse analysis centers around the examination of language in practical contexts, with a particular focus on how language is employed to achieve social objectives and how it both influences and is influenced by social identities, relationships, and structures. Critical discourse analysis investigates the

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<sup>1</sup> In Türkiye, textbooks used in public schools are either written and published directly by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) or produced by private authors/publishers and later approved by MoNE. For instance, although Şahin (2018) was published by a private publishing house, it received official approval and has been distributed for use in state middle schools. Thus, citing such a source as part of the national curriculum aligns with the official textbook provision process in Türkiye.

perpetuation of power dynamics, dominance, and inequalities as they are manifested and communicated through written and spoken language (Fairclough, 2013; Gee, 2014). Discourse analysis provides an opportunity to go beyond the sentence level and give a framework explaining dominant ideology or politics reflected on textbooks as well. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the relationship between language, power, and social inequality. It aims to uncover hidden ideologies, power structures, and inequalities embedded within discourses, such as political speeches, media texts, and everyday conversations. CDA explores how language is used to construct and reinforce social norms, identities, and hierarchies, while also providing a framework for critical social analysis (Fairclough, 1989; Rogers, 2011; Van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Gender elements in a text refer to the representation, portrayal, and discussion of gender roles, identities, and stereotypes. They can be determined by examining various linguistic and contextual cues. Some ways to determine gender elements include analyzing the use of gendered pronouns (e.g., he/she), gendered language (e.g., words associated with femininity/masculinity), representations of gender roles and expectations, and the presence of gendered stereotypes or biases. Religious elements in a text pertain to themes, references, symbols, or discussions related to religious beliefs, practices, or institutions. They can be determined by identifying explicit mentions of religious figures, texts, rituals, or by analyzing religious metaphors, allusions, or ideological perspectives. Contextual cues such as religious vocabulary, quotes from religious scriptures, or interactions related to religious customs and traditions can also help determine the presence of religious elements in a text. Political elements in a text encompass references, discussions, or representations of political ideologies, systems, actors, or events. They can be determined by identifying explicit mentions of political organizations, leaders, or ideologies, as well as analyzing political discourse, propaganda, or persuasive techniques used in the text. Analyzing power dynamics, conflicts, advocacy for certain policies or governance systems, and engagement with political issues or debates can help in identifying political elements. To understand these elements, it is crucial to engage in critical analysis

and textual interpretation. Analyzing the language, themes, context, and underlying ideologies within a text can help identify and interpret gender, religious, and political elements. These elements often manifest themselves in different categories such as:

- Language Use: Examining the use of certain words, pronouns, or expressions associated with gender, religion, or politics.
- Representation: Analyzing how gender, religious, or political identities, roles, or ideologies are portrayed, reinforced, or challenged within a text.
- Symbols and Imagery: Identifying symbols, metaphors, or visual elements that represent gender, religious, or political concepts.
- Ideological Perspective: Analyzing the underlying beliefs, values, or biases related to gender, religion, or politics that are reflected in the text.
- Social Context: Considering the socio-cultural, historical, or political context within which the text was produced and how it intersects with gender, religion, or politics.

Textbook analysis has been utilized to examine the structure, content, and visual elements of educational materials for specific purposes or biases. Content analysis has been employed to quantify and categorize the presence or frequency of certain themes, concepts, or images within the texts. Discourse analysis has further delved into the linguistic features, rhetoric, and discursive strategies employed in the texts to identify underlying ideologies or power dynamics. By combining these approaches, researchers have gained a comprehensive understanding of the texts, their intended messages, the ways they shape social interactions, and the broader social implications they carry. This multidimensional analysis has allowed for a more nuanced and holistic examination of the texts and has contributed to a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, or educational contexts in which they operated.

Some studies demonstrated how discourse analysis and content analysis complement each other, with content analysis providing a quantitative understanding of the texts (e.g., themes, frequency), while discourse analysis offers a qualitative analysis of the linguistic, discursive, and ideological aspects of the texts (Baxter, 2019; Chernyavskaya, 2018; Komninos,

2023). In this study, four social studies textbooks of years five, six, and seven published in 2018 were selected that (i.e., after the 2018 curriculum update) for content and discourse analysis. The reason for selecting these textbooks is that they are currently used in social studies lessons in Turkey and are widely read by millions of students, thus having a broad impact. Additionally, social studies textbooks are inherently more susceptible to encompassing political, gender, and religious phenomena.

The guiding research questions used in the current study to determine the textbook discourse and content analysis are as follows. Answers to the following research questions were sought in the study:

1. How are gender elements portrayed in social studies textbooks in Turkey?
2. How are religious elements reflected in social studies textbooks in Turkey?
3. How are political elements included in social studies textbooks in Turkey?
4. What are the central messages that social studies textbooks convey in Turkey?
5. What are the reasons and possible consequences of the inclusion of religious, political, and gender elements in social studies textbooks in Turkey?

## **2.1 The Adopted Method of Discussion and Analysis in the Research**

This study engages in an analysis that delves into the intricate relationship between mandated curricula, textbook production, and their impact on educational objectives and student learning. The research recognizes the extensive political, economic, social, and cultural transformations that Turkey has undergone over the past two decades and seeks to assess how these changes are represented in social studies textbooks. The study thus endeavors to scrutinize the portrayal of political, religious, and gender disparities within Turkish social studies textbooks, aiming to uncover both overt and covert messages and elements within them. Through this exploration, the study not only sheds light on the current state of social studies textbooks but also furnishes valuable insights to guide future research in this area. Drawing on educational discourse, sociopolitical analysis, and gender studies, the research illuminates the role of textbooks in shaping students' perceptions and understandings of complex social and

political issues, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the broader educational landscape.

The critical education paradigm is a framework within the field of education that focuses on challenging and questioning existing power structures and social inequalities. It emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, reflection, and action in education to address and dismantle societal injustices. This paradigm seeks to empower individuals and promote social transformation by encouraging a deep understanding of complex social and political issues. It aligns with the goal of fostering a more equitable and just society through education and places a strong emphasis on advocating for social justice and liberation. In this research, the researchers have adopted the critical education paradigm's stance on discussion and analysis.

The critical education paradigm is a multifaceted and dynamic field that aims to empower individuals and bring about societal transformation through educational means. It places significant emphasis on fostering critical thinking, reflection, and action across diverse educational domains, ranging from sociology to Islamic education, as well as higher education and health professions education. This paradigm is defined by its critique of established power dynamics and its dedication to advocating for social justice and liberation. It recognizes the intricate relationship between mandated curricula, textbook production, and their influence on educational objectives and student learning within the context of extensive political, economic, social, and cultural changes in Turkey. This critical examination seeks to scrutinize the portrayal of political, religious, and gender disparities within Turkish social studies textbooks. This study shares a common focus on the impact of educational materials and practices in shaping individuals' perceptions, understandings, and societal contributions, reflecting a commitment to critically examine and improve educational processes for the betterment of society.

### 3. Findings

According to the research findings, the general characteristics of the examined social studies textbooks are as follows:

1. Cover a range of disciplines, incorporating elements of history, geography, political science, sociology, economics, and anthropology.
2. Present information in a chronological order, outlining historical events and developments in a sequential manner.
3. Consist of interpretations from secondary sources (historical analyses, scholarly articles) rather than primary sources.
4. Aligned with national educational standards to ensure that the content meets specific learning objectives and curriculum requirements.

### 3.1 Gender Elements and Messages in Social Studies Textbooks

There are expressions and images in which gender elements are repeated and traditional gender roles are normalized in these textbooks. For instance, in the social studies textbooks, gender issues manifest themselves at the fifth-year level in terms of the institution of marriage. The motherhood and privacy sphere are frequently mentioned in the Turkish social studies textbooks, with women displayed chiefly as being responsible for housework and the daily running of the home. It is also noteworthy that the traditional understanding of female characters is exemplified in professions traditionally associated with women (e.g., sewing, hairdressing, teaching, etc.), whilst men take part in higher-level positions such as school managers and therefore seen as representatives of authority. However, this portrayal of the ideal family (reflecting the conservative family structure) in the textbooks does not reflect today's society, such as the dress style of women, their role in society, and so on.

For instance, in the Social Studies fifth-year textbook, father is displayed to take the children to school and after school they go to the store to shop for school. "Child and father go home then pick up mother. Mother is depicted as in the role of housekeeper in private sphere" (Şahin, 2018, pp. 14-15). "Mother makes the shopping list and shopping" (Şahin, 2018, p. 144). "In the Social Studies sixth-year textbook, it is the mother who asks the child to carry out some errands at home" (Yıldırım et al., 2019, p. 16). "It is the mother who needs help and care and is supported by her son" (Yıldırım et al., 2019, p. 19). "In the Social Studies seventh-year textbook, the person who hears the voices of two siblings arguing at home and comes to talk to them is the mother" (Gültekin et al., 2019, p. 15). "Mother also

takes care of the housekeeping and reminds her child to take out the trash” (Gültekin et al., 2019, p. 211). “In the Social Studies seventh-year textbook, the person who prepares breakfast is the mother” (Açıl et al., 2019, p. 23). “Mother is depicted at home and meet female neighbors over for coffee” (Açıl et al., 2019, p. 30). “While discussing the impressions of a foreign traveler about the Ottoman Empire, it is noteworthy that it was emphasized that the bride had to meet with her mother-in-law before the wedding day” (Açıl et al., 2019, p. 81).

These findings are consistent with other studies in this area. It may therefore be inferred those social studies textbooks with texts, images, or examples that foster stereotyped roles impose male children as being mischievous, whilst female children are modest. For instance, in the social studies seventh-year textbook, the student who states that he does not harm the furniture in the school and keeps the environment clean is a female student and is reflected in an orderly and modest manner. “This example shows that the students who follow the rules in schools are mostly girls” (Açıl et al., 2019, p. 197). “There is similar depictions in the fifth-year social studies textbook” (Şahin, 2018, p. 23). In this example, the female student also emphasizes that she is courteous when talking to different people. This reinforces the message that girls are gentle and fragile. For instance, in the social studies fifth-year textbook,

the mother is the hairdresser and the father is the bus driver. It is clear that women’s hairdressers are much quieter places than the roads of big cities. Therefore, the boy’s mischief can also be considered as a preliminary preparation for the conflicted environment that awaits him in the future. Daughters, on the other hand, mean that a passive future awaits, not such a future. (Şahin, 2018, p. 18)

In the Social Studies fifth-year textbook, Newton’s life is discussed as follows: Newton’s father died. Upon this incident, his mother asked Newton to manage the farm. This reinforces the traditional importance given to the boy child. It is certainly important to provide accurate and factual information about Newton’s life in the textbook. However, the manner of expression is of vital importance. It is not a problem for Newton to manage the farm after his father’s death. The crucial aspect is how

this traditional role is exemplified and reinforced, whether willingly or unwillingly. It is evident that the textbook author should focus more on Newton's contributions to science rather than these types of details when discussing his life.

Gender bias is seen as very common in sixth-year social studies textbooks in terms of the professions and the division of labor. Female characters are depicted as teachers, which is considered as one of their traditional professions. Besides, women were otherwise depicted as given secondary or auxiliary roles such as a male doctor accompanied by a female nurse, a male engineer with a female assistant, so it is the male characters that are predominantly highlighted. Elsewhere, cooking and childcare were also seen to be emphasized among the traditional roles of women. At this point, the findings reflect that gender bias is directed by the systematic perception management of children (misdirection of children's thoughts) from an early age. For instance, on consumer rights, which normally specifies either gender or name, it showed a product bought by a female pupil as being defective. The perception management was that the woman was unable to make the correct choice of product, and are therefore open to manipulation and deceit, hence they are generally portrayed as the victims. "The person whose personal information was stolen on social media is the mother" (Gültekin et al., 2019, p. 30). As a result, it is reflected by children that their equality does not exist between the sexes, that the duties and fields of women and men do not intermix, that men are always strong and intelligent, and that women are always emotional and needy.

In the seventh-year social studies textbooks, gender elements were seen to be constructed around the message that men are superior in discourse. In addition to women being portrayed within largely traditional professions and social roles, a family was seen to move to a different city due to the father's job change, and even that the father had the say on what was watched on television through his use of the remote control. "The person who had to migrate to another city because of marriage" (Açıl et al., 2019, p. 108). The texts and depictions provide more superior male figures than female.



### 3.2 Religious Elements and Messages in Turkish Social Studies Textbooks

The examined social studies textbooks incline to form a distinct new Turkish-Islamic identity and culture that heavily identifies with Islam by following the attainments set out in the current curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018). For instance, in narratives about religious holidays, emphasizing the enthusiasm of the old times, glorifying the lifestyle and culture that predominated in the pre-republican period, advocating an old but calmer, calm, and religious life can be given as examples. It is clear that textbook authors would not include such explanations if there was no such context in the curriculum. Recently, Turkish-Islamic outlook principles have become central to the social studies textbooks used in Turkey. The Turkish-Islamic outlook, consisting of a mix of conservatism, nationalism, and gender segregation, dominates the textbooks and has therefore has been shaping the minds of Turkey's youth over the past two decades.

Social studies textbooks pay special attention to elements such as the notions of “unity and solidarity of the Islamic world” as well as “national, moral, and universal religious brotherhood.” Textbooks embrace controversial issues such as deism, agnosticism, atheism, nihilism, Satanism, reincarnation, and false prophets, according to the Islamic outlook. Here are some quotations:“... the religious holidays that we started to celebrate with Islam have led to the enrichment of Turkish culture, the strengthening of the social structure, and the strengthening of unity and solidarity...” (Yıldırım et al., 2019, p. 18).

Another quotation:

We also see the influence of Islam in our social activities. Wedding, circumcision etc. our joyful days or sickness, death etc. Our sad days are full of traditions bearing religious motifs. Helping and supporting the needy people around us is a duty imposed on us by our religion. As an example, zakat is a good example of social assistance and solidarity in society. (Yıldırım et al., 2019, p. 19)

Our religion has an important place in our gaining values such as love, respect, honesty, compassion, courage, benevolence, responsibility, being just, and love of country and nation. With the advent of Islam, our sense of

cooperation and solidarity has been strengthened. “He is not one of us who sleeps when his neighbor is hungry” (Yıldırım et al., 2019, p. 19).

The faded principles of Islam that considered valid centuries ago but now incompatible with modern life such as jihad, the era of bliss, stability, and national will also are paid special attention within the reviewed textbooks. Islamic tendency has come to increasingly dominate many topics, with social studies textbooks impeding the teaching of general social lessons by conveying only the perspective of progress according to national culture and Turkey’s Ottoman heritage; hence, it may be said that Neo-Ottomanism has emerged in recent school textbooks (see Social Studies textbooks for years five to seven, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [Turkish Ministry of National Education]). All these recently introduced changes have aimed to construct a new national identity according to the conservative view of the 19th National Education Convention that was held in 2014, which offered an even deeper view of the current tendency towards conservatism in education.

The most prominent characters and inspiring figures of Islamic tradition such as the prophet Muhammed, Sufi leaders Mevlana Jalāl ad-Dīn Mohammad Rūmī, Yunus Emre, Nasreddin Hodja, and Sheikh Edebali, an early spiritual figure of the Ottoman Empire, and their respective sagas are included within most Turkish social studies textbooks. The Conquest of Istanbul in 1453 and the attempted coup of July 15, 2016, are reflected as acts within a religious war or Islamic holy war (Jihad). A nationalist and Islamic outlook referred to as “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” is emphasized intensively and routinely in the reviewed textbooks. The textbooks widely emphasize nationalism and aim for pupils to gain deep nationalistic feelings and devotion to the state (Republic of Turkey). Therefore, it may be said that state, nation, and society have priority over the individual.

Religious festivals are used as an amalgam to create common feelings and thoughts among Turkish society. Here is a quotation from textbook: “Our religious holidays are examples of cultural habits that contribute to our living together.... religious holidays enable individuals to act with common feelings and thoughts. Our unity and solidarity, feelings of love and respect are strengthened this holiday” (Şahin, 2018, p. 45).

The effort to present the “Mesir Paste Festival,”<sup>2</sup> which is considered “one of the oldest activities” and which has continued for centuries and is normally regarded as a cultural element, together with religious rituals, phenomena, or events has also been elicited by religious-based tendency. This tendency also is renowned for portraying the stereotypical ideal family at this year level in a form that reflects the whole society (reflecting the conservative family structure). This type of family structure can also be found directly or indirectly on pages 19 and 52 of the Social Studies fifth-year textbook (Şahin, 2018), on the 23 and 208 pages of the sixth-year Social Studies textbook (Yıldırım et al., 2019), and on the 28, 82, 107 and 110 pages of the seventh-year Social Studies textbook (Gültekin et al., 2019). Even at the sixth-year, religious issues in Turkish social studies textbooks display the Islamic way of life as being ideal for the Turkish culture, and often provide some fancy wording so as to render Islamic life more appealing by including certain passages, proverbs, or behaviors of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>3</sup> For instance, it is emphasized that settlements are styled in line with Islam, that is, the placement of a mosque in the city center as being the “most ideal form of settlement.”

It was stressed at the seventh-year level that customary laws and rules are subject to Sharia law, rather than being against them. There were concealed messages that implied that Sharia law was superior to customary law. The direct use of the phrase *Service to the public is a service to God* (a slogan used by Turkey’s current ruling party leader and President of the Republic for many years) evokes both religious and political connotations. Efforts to highlight religious proverbs and idioms, which would otherwise normally be regarded as cultural elements, has also drawn attention. Examples of this may include not presenting the ideal family type in a form that reflects

<sup>2</sup> Mesir Macunu (Turkish pronunciation: [mesir madʒunʊ]) is a type of traditional Turkish sweet. Mesir paste is spicier rather than sweet, and reportedly has certain therapeutic effects. Mesir paste was first produced as a medicine during the Ottoman period, but later became an important part of local festivities in the city of Manisa (Isin, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information, one can refer to the general characteristics of Turkish Divan Literature. After the Turkic people embraced Islam, this situation turned against the Turkish language. Arabic words invaded state correspondences, literary understandings of the upper class, especially in the palaces of Turkish rulers and their surroundings. The prevalence of Arabic words in the speech of individuals with a Neo-Ottomanist perspective today is significant evidence of this phenomenon.

the whole society (i.e., only reflecting the conservative family structure) in seventh-year textbooks, emphasizing the sacredness of being a martyr to religion, presenting certain historical victories as religious victories, and placing emphasis on heads carved female characters and female pupils. Emphasis on religious rituals in textbook narratives regarding marriage and weddings also counts as among these other religious elements.

A unit of the sixth-year social studies textbook contain almost completely the “Birth of Islam” and “the life of Prophet Mohammed.” This section, which should be related to religion lessons, is a very important example of the being religionized of “social studies.” At the seventh-year level, the importance of religion and prominent religious persons in history is often stressed by the current government. For instance, Sheikh Edebali (1206-1326), who was a highly influential Ottoman Sunni Sheikh of the Ahi brotherhood, has been elicited in the textbooks as the sole Ottoman statesmen who shaped and developed the policies of the then rising Ottoman State. He was the first Qadi of the Ottoman Empire and is widely portrayed as such in the current social studies textbooks. This tendency, especially in the political sense, can also portray many religious meanings. At this year level, religious holidays are often described and visualized as they were celebrated in history, even though such content does not meet the conditions experienced by the children of modern-day Turkey. It was noted that the quantity and quality of the religious elements included in the textbooks generally increased in line with the year level targeted by the resource.

### 3.3 Political Elements and Messages in Social Studies Textbooks

The general discourse of today’s social studies textbooks in Turkey regarding culture focuses on obedience to the ruling power. For instance, the concept of the citizen’s “responsibility” is used rather than their “rights.” Visuals and narratives used throughout the textbooks also foster these views and perspectives. Current social studies textbooks only place slight emphasis on some of the more important citizenship concepts such as the culture of democracy, human rights, and freedom (See Table 1).

In the textbooks, the state’s rule-maker and punisher of those who choose not to obey the rules is often emphasized. The concepts of state,

**Table 1.** The Comparative of Citizenship Concepts

Current concepts	The concepts that should/ought to be/ideal
responsibility, duty to the nation, debt to the state, adherence to laws, respect for state institutions, oversight of citizens by the state, subjection to the state, instances where rights and freedoms can be limited	rights, responsibilities of the state towards citizens, laws being regulated according to the desires of citizens, culture of democracy, modern citizenship, activism, civil rights, citizens' right to scrutinize the state, freedom to seek justice, importance of rights and freedoms

government, and (political) party are presented as synonyms for each other in the textbooks, and in some parts of the textbooks, efforts are even made to prove that the government's actions are truthful and correct. The treatment of state traditions in Turkish society was also analyzed in the textbooks, with the Turkish Republic period and the Ottoman period often compared. With these comparisons, it is remarkable that the Ottoman period is generally shown as the more ideal, and in a more positive light than the Republic period within the discourse of the textbooks.

At the fifth-year level, citizens are depicted as subordinates to the state; thus, good citizens are expected to obey the orders of the state, to know their responsibilities as citizens, and to regard them as sacred. Contrary to the textbooks alleged sensitivity to human rights, many responsibilities and duties are emphasized as being against the state rather than the rights of the citizen, which is especially exemplified in how Turkish military service is offered in the militarist paradigm, and qualified as being some sacred act, and the issue of tax is presented as a state order rather than based on economic necessity. It is also emphasized that some social services that the state should provide free to their citizens, e.g., education and health, are already being offered free of charge.

The emphasis on family and kinship relations comes to the fore as the basis of Turkish society. Here, children have bestowed with the message that individuals gain meaning when defined in terms of their affiliation in society (family, kinship, etc.), rather than as sole entities. In this case, the administrative structure of Turkey's expanding authoritarian tendencies reflects the strengthening of the party-state approach. For example, a secondary school building was demonstrated according to the Turkish-

Islamic architectural style. There is a myriad of examples that can be said to subliminally render Islamic-based messages in Turkish social studies textbooks.

Whilst certain services and types of support are exemplified to embody the state, which would be considered an abstract concept for pupils at the fifth-year level, the investments made and the steps taken related to the economy in Turkey during the latter half of the 2000s are often overestimated in favor of the ruling party. The textbooks have repeatedly emphasized that during those years, the collective housing administration met the housing needs of the country's citizens that bridges were built, huge "City Hospitals" were established, and various complex structures such as the "Kulliye" (presidential palace) were created in order to meet the country's cultural, administrative, and religious needs. In addition, the textbooks explain by way of various examples that the health services system has been switched to an appointment-based system and that various complaint hotlines and application centers have been created. For instance, in a section, the textbooks are also highlighted to students free of charge. Highlighting those that have a political meaning or can be associated with some political phenomena, event, or people in the exemplified historical structures and objects mean that children are being exposed to numerous implicit and explicit political messages through the textbooks they use at school.

The density and quality of the political elements revealed in the sixth-year social studies textbooks imply the inclusion of more biased viewpoints. Although there may be many different reasons behind this finding, as the developmental characteristics and readiness levels of children increase, the aim may be to make political elements more tangible, accessible, and visible. These elements manifest themselves as highlighting activities carried out under the auspices of the Presidency, praising the power of the state and that of the President according to historical evidence (with the nationalist adaptation of militarism), and advertising the activities of certain ministries with an emphasis on increases in investment and support in recent years. The "Vision 2023 program" which is a propagation maxim of the ruling party in government was seen to be highlighted, the domestic automobile project and its partners were introduced, and information regarding

the TURKSAT satellite were mentioned to bolster Turkey's power of achievement.

In a section on space studies, a satellite worked on by Turkish scientists, but as yet not even prototyped, was shown along with a strong nationalist message about its build process. Interestingly, the image was of another country's satellite.

At the sixth-year level, political elements are consciously concreted, whilst popular projects and activities receive greater emphasis. It is notable that the examples most used for broadening the perspective on a subject include projects presented as showcase items by the ruling party. The emphasis on the projects in question are carried out with national means is another element that stands out. The same can be said for developments in the defense industry, which are presented in a militaristic atmosphere. It is claimed that the creation of new jobs and increased investments in recent years have helped reduce unemployment in Turkey. At this textbook, it is also notable that the attempted coup of July 15, 2016, has a special place, with presentation of the event in question as a religious war with both political and religious connotations. Because it is especially emphasized that people were invited to the streets with the Islamic call of "selah (similar to azan)" on the night of the coup. Therefore, the struggle against the coup is portrayed as a religious war. Numerous mentions were noted regarding the activities of the Presidency, for instance, press statements of the Presidency were included, the "July 15 Democracy watch," and statements highlighting the role of the President in this incident and praising his efforts.

In particular, the President's statements regarding support provided to asylum seekers in Turkey can be found in social studies textbooks. In addition, it was seen to have been emphasized that planned settlement in Turkey took place during the period of the current government. From here, it can be understood that the activities of the currently ruling party and the acts of the Turkish president have attempted to be embedded into social studies textbooks, and therefore to be legitimized by the pupils. The social studies textbooks play an important agent in legitimizing the Turkey's recent change to an executive presidential system, and in paying special attention to the "Turkish type of presidential system" in state administration. Many passages transmit messages about legitimizing the acts of ruling

governments as real democracy, and that these bring about an intervened democracy instead of universal or ideal democracy. The texts about democracy and civic values impose a Middle Eastern style of democracy based on “bossism.” The reckoning regarding the founding period of the Republic is also noteworthy. One of them was the Sheikh Said rebellion that occurred in 1925, which was presented as “an uprising in the east of Turkey” to introduce Sheikh Said and İskilipli Atıf without bringing their names to the fore, even though such characters are normally considered as traitors of the Turkish Republic.

Social studies textbooks in Turkey appear to stress conservative values on every occasion and attempt to disseminate conservative discourse even with regards to technology usage. Careful analysis of the text revealed an aim to warn pupils about the misuse of technology and its known harmful effects; however, the discourse bases that technology misuse in fact harms the unity and solidarity of society. There is a prejudice against technological developments and television, which places excessive emphasis on religious social life. For instance, some texts emphasized the need for a more religious style of social life, one which is relatively quiet, less reliant upon technology, and more akin to that of the Ottoman period. This way of life was found to be emphasized many times as being the ideal lifestyle,<sup>4</sup> and in diverse areas of the social studies textbooks reviewed in the current study.

The narratives are supported within the framework of the identity of “being a Turk and a Muslim” and with various examples. A contradiction in the context of nationalism was also encountered in expressions supported by certain nationalistic elements, characters, and concepts (combatants, hero saints, etc.). There are superstitions as well as supernatural and surrealistic components used to explain certain important events in Turkish history. There was also a notable tendency to ignore the Turkish liberation war and Gallipoli battles that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk won, and instead to overemphasize simpler battles fought during the Ottoman period. This is also an example of the incorporation of neo-Ottomanism into current school textbooks against the cadres of those who founded the Turkish

<sup>4</sup> In historical terms, life during the Ottoman period was considerably quieter compared to the present day. Social life, social classes, and speech and behavioral patterns were shaped by religious rules. This lifestyle is now highlighted as a calm and peaceful alternative to the chaos and problems encountered in major cities.



Republic. For instance, the comparison of Seyit Corporal, the great hero of the Gallipoli Victory, with the mythical creature of a dragon implicitly includes insults to national heroes.<sup>5</sup> Because imaginary heroes produced by computer technology cannot be compared with national heroes who save the country by putting their lives on the line. This is perhaps the first method that should not be preferred in order to convey the message that national heroes should be valued in the textbook.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The current study provides analysis of social studies textbooks in Turkey, and how they reflect the changing landscape in terms of gender, religion, and nationalism. Such analysis is significantly complex as it involves an intervention in their preparation. Not only do authors and/or textbook publishing companies determine the component elements of the books and their organization and presentation, but the dominant culture and ruling governments also significantly contribute to them, both overtly and covertly. Thus, the current study aimed to recognize and explain the reasons that lay behind the changing landscape of social studies textbooks in Turkey, beyond the scope of attainments in the curriculum.

Before the 2000s, social studies textbooks in Turkey reinforced Kemalist ideology at every opportunity, influenced by the prevailing emphasis on “secularism” in the curriculum of that period and the general political climate. Social studies textbooks produced today serve dominant sociopolitical agendas and are published almost exclusively based on ideological instead of academic motives. Social studies textbooks today seem less source-based and evidence-based, and in fact sometimes contain only very limited guiding narratives regarding Turkish national identity,

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<sup>5</sup> Although dragons are considered sacred in many cultures, in Turkish culture, they are regarded as mythical creatures. Comparing a war hero to an imaginary being created through computer technology indirectly implies a derogatory tone not from the perspective of societies that hold dragons sacred, but from the perspective of Turkish culture. In other words, it is the textbook author who compares a dragon with a war hero. While imaginary beings may take prominence in other cultures, in our society, real war heroes are highlighted to convey the message.

gender equality, and the diversity of Turkish society. In addition, gender and civic issues presented in textbooks place certain rituals consistent with Islamic customs and habits. Textbooks aim for pupils to learn religion or faith as a conservative way of life. This tendency became more visible in Turkey following the Ministry of National Education's announcement of new education curricula for secondary and high schools in 2018.

Social studies textbooks now appear more sympathetic to gender segregation, conservative Islamic values, and jingoism, and center on a more singular narrative of events. Social studies have changed into a subject in which information is delivered to pupils in order to enhance and serve a collective gender roles perception which is conservative, with a national identity referred to as "new Ottomanism," and with civic ideals based on the discourse of the ruling party of the Turkish government and the Republic's Presidency. Social studies textbooks in Turkey, therefore, emphasize the Ottoman past, the unity of Turkish society around the Turkish-Islamic outlook, and pride in the nation's traditions and heritage.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has significantly influenced Turkish society through its religious policies, particularly in terms of promoting Islam and emphasizing family, faith-based organizations, charities, and education. These efforts have led to societal divisions and a reconfiguration of the relationship between religion and the state, with Sunni Islam becoming a central focus of the regime. While the AKP has positioned itself as a "conservative democratic" party and sought to lift political restrictions, it has also introduced religious issues into the political arena, using religious discourse to reshape Turkey's national identity. It is thought that the AKP's policies have not led to a neutral secularism but rather to increased state control over religious matters. Additionally, the AKP's activities in the Balkans reflect a shift towards a Sunni Islamic orientation with ethno-nationalist policies, influencing the region's perception of Turkey.

The reasons that underlie the changing landscape of social studies textbooks in Turkey are both highly complex and multifaceted. Nevertheless, cultural, ideological, political, and economic factors that exist in Turkey today have influenced upon the interpretation of the country's past and in its relationship with other units. Furthermore, the current study

has demonstrated that social studies textbooks in Turkey are influenced as reflective of the dominant forces that shape their creation, rather than offering impartial, fixed, and unbiased views of Turkey. Overall, they are far from being judicious, critical, or truly informative.

These findings regarding social studies textbooks clearly show that textbooks with political, religious and sexist elements make it difficult to develop certain gains, values and skills in teaching processes. The implicit messages presented to the students contradict the scientific approach in social sciences on which the social studies course is based. Intense exposure of students to such content may cause them to develop subjective comments. The existing structure in the textbooks may cause students to break away from the main context of the lesson. The fact that students accept the information in the textbooks as indisputable correct information may cause them to develop wrong thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. Textbooks with strong sexist, religious and political elements harm the natural structure of the social studies field the most and may harm students' positive views about the course. These textbooks offer pupils a one-sided perspective on social and cultural phenomena, which does not enable them to think either critically or creatively for themselves, and often even attempts to manipulate them.

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