

Abstract

Poor Enlighteners: Pedagogy, Politics, and Elementary School Teachers in the Early Republican Era

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This study examines the relationships between elementary school teachers and the early republican regime in Turkey between 1923 and 1940. Unlike the educational history literature in which the teachers are figures in the shadows, this study seeks to answer the question of how elementary school teachers made sense of the partnership between the teachers and the new regime and how they appropriated and recreated the republican ideology in their local contexts.

In this study, the relationship between elementary school teachers and the republican regime is examined on three levels. First, the economic and institutional aspects of the relationship between the teachers and the republican regime are investigated. Second, the pedagogy of the early republican period and the transformations in pedagogical literature are explored as factors that shaped the relationship between teachers and the republican regime. Finally, the concrete manifestations of this relationship, as recalled by the teachers themselves, are examined.

This study demonstrates that the state did not present a homogeneous unity in the field of education during the early republican era, and that the relationship between the teachers and the regime was more complicated than the teachers' being merely obedient servants of a unified ruling cadre. They were social and political actors who adopted the regime's principles and educational policies in their local contexts, and their relationship with the new regime was characterized not only by compromises but also by conflicts and tensions.

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