Creating the Desired Citizen

For decades after the declaration of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the Turkish state promoted the idea of the desired citizen. The Kemalist state treated these citizens as superior, with full rights; but the 'others', those outside this desired citizenship, were either tolerated or considered undesirable citizens. And this caused the marginalisation of ethnic and religious minorities, religious Muslims and leftists alike. In this book, Ihsan Yilmaz shows how historical traumas, victimhood, insecurities, anxieties, fears and a siege mentality have negatively impacted on and radicalised the nation-building projects of the two competing hegemonic ideologies/regimes (those of Ataturk and Erdoğan) and their treatment of majority and minority ethnic, religious and political groups. Yilmaz reveals the significant degree of overlap between the desired, undesired and tolerated citizen categories of these two regimes, showing how both regimes aimed to create the image of a homogenous Turkish nation.

IHSAN YILMAZ is Research Professor and Chair of Islamic Studies at Deakin University, Melbourne, where his work focuses on Islam–state–society–law relations and ethnic–religious–political identities in Turkey, Australia, the UK and the USA. He is the author of *Muslim Laws, Politics and Society in Modern Nation States: Dynamic Legal Pluralisms in England, Turkey and Pakistan* (2005) among numerous book chapters and journal articles. He is also a public intellectual, and can be found on Twitter @ihsanylmz.

Creating the Desired Citizen

Ideology, State and Islam in Turkey

IHSAN YILMAZ
Deakin University, Victoria

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To my mother Ayşe Yılmaz and father Ali Yılmaz

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Preface

In late 2008, in much more sunny times, I left the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London to take up a position at a prestigious private university in Istanbul. In the United Kingdom, I had been working on Muslim minorities and the Turkish diaspora in the UK, Islam and secularism in Turkey, and the unofficial Muslim laws in the UK and Turkey. I was very glad to finally be back in my beloved Turkey, especially at a time of great progress and optimism. At that time, the issues I cover in this book were a remote concern – the Turkish state's insecurities, anxieties, fears; nation-building and homogenisation; and the creation of desired, undesired and tolerated citizens in both Kemalist and Erdoğanist eras. However, this was all to change.

A few months after arriving in Turkey, I was sitting in my colleague's office drinking Turkish tea and chatting. I saw Füsun Üstel's *Makbul Vatandaşım Peşinde* (In Pursuit of the Acceptable Citizen) on his desk. I borrowed it and read it in one night. Üstel had done an excellent job in setting out in great detail how the Turkish state has been using education as an instrument of social engineering to construct its 'acceptable citizens'. I realised at once that this resonated not just with my previous scholarly endeavours, albeit from a very different perspective, but also to a considerable extent with my lived experience since childhood. I had previously studied how nation-states, such as Pakistan and Turkey, attempted social engineering through the instrumentalist use of the law, and how the religious masses had responded by creating their own, unofficial, hybrid laws. I had studied law and was naturally drawn to examining politics and society through the perspective of the law. I had come to realise, however, that focusing on law alone provided only a limited perspective because a great diversity of nation-states around the world have been using not just the law but also a plethora of other instruments in their nation-building endeavours. And in so doing, they were committing all sorts of injustices upon their minorities. Turkey was no exception. I came

around to the idea of writing about Turkey's endeavours in nation-building but struggled to find an original angle. Something that remained clear to me, however, was that the approach that I took had to focus on Islam and the roles of Sunni Muslim Turks. This may have been simply a matter of self-centred subjectivity, or a result of the trajectory onto which my PhD work had set me. Nevertheless, these were issues that had come to occupy my thinking since the early days of my adult life.

During my undergraduate years in the 1990s, on the campus of Turkey's most liberal and tolerant university, Boğaziçi, I knew well what it was to be religiously observant in a staunchly laicist state that was not comfortable with religious expression in the public sphere. While studying for the English proficiency exam at Boğaziçi University's Prep School (which had originally been established by American missionaries as a college for the Ottoman Empire's Christian subjects more than a century before), several of our US-educated Turkish instructors would make a point of offering chocolate to students in class during Ramadan, so as to determine who was and who was not fasting. Those of us who quietly declined to eat as our classmates enjoyed the sweet treats felt anxious, as we feared that our grades would suffer as a result. All of this changed in 2002 when the new Islamic party, the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or Justice and Development Party), came to power. The AKP opened up a space in public life for religious Turks while simultaneously pushing through democratic reforms in a bid for Turkey to join the European Union (2003–2008).

During my time teaching in Istanbul from late 2008 until I was fired due to mounting government pressure in early 2016, I had the conviction that it was my responsibility to try to open my students' eyes to these issues. As a Muslim from the same Turkish Sunni background as those in power, I was secure in my identity and felt that I had the luxury of joking about these issues. I could easily say to students in my Turkish Politics classes that 'I am the son of a Greek', in order to make fun of the then Prime Minister Erdoğan, who was given to sardonically saying 'please excuse my language, they call me the son of a Greek' indicating his belief that being 'a son of a Greek' was equal to the most common insult in Turkish: 'the son of a prostitute'. I would explain to my students that, 'I am from Trabzon, whose population was 100 per cent Greek when it was conquered by the Turks in 1461. We did not

slaughter them like we massacred the Armenians in 1915. So, where did these Greeks go? They converted to Islam in time and assimilated to become Turks. In all likelihood some of my ancestors were named Constantine.' It was fun to watch my students' faces when, in only a few minutes, they had to contemplate two horror scenarios: that some of our ancestors had ethnically cleansed the Armenians, or (perhaps even worse) some of us could really be Greek. To confuse them further I enjoyed regaling them with my DNA ancestry results that showed that 60 per cent of my ancestry was from the Caucasus, 24 per cent Italian-Greek (i.e. the descendents of the Byzantines), but zero was from Turkic Central Asia. Fresh out of high school, Turkish students had never learnt these things since their history books were designed to teach them the heroic, militarist history of the conquest-loving Turkish race. They were raised on an educational diet dominated by the narrative of the national myth of a pure, noble Turkish people, a homogenous and distinct race, long-suffering in their anxious victimhood and proud of their resilience in the face of constant ferocious attacks from the evil Crusaders of Europe.

So long as they were only voiced in the classroom, my wryly provocative remarks did not cause me any great trouble. This began to change, however, when I had the audacity to voice these ideas on Twitter to tens of thousands of followers, and on television. I think it was in 2011, when I first tweeted about the state's ethnic cleansing of Armenians. My remarks clearly caught people by surprise. Only 'marginal' or socialist intellectuals, it was assumed, would care to talk about these issues. One evening, a live broadcast van belonging to Habertürk TV came to our campus to interview me on this. The next day, my friends and colleagues warned me that it can be very dangerous to talk about these matters on television, given the deep antagonism and animosity felt towards the liberal and democrat-minded people from the Kemalist establishment which was looking for excuses to demonise them. Their argument that we should not carelessly arm the Kemalists with material to act against the liberals and democrats was, of course, not without foundation. But at the time I was in no mood to back down. Like almost all liberal democrats in Turkey, I was convinced that we could not afford to shrink from the struggle between reactionary Kemalist authoritarians and progressive Muslim Democrats, i.e. the AKP.

At the time, my focus in the classroom (as online, in my regular newspaper columns and in my occasional appearances on television) was on the nation-building and citizen-engineering projects of the Kemalists. Little did I know that once the AKP had consolidated their hold on power, they too would pursue their own nation-building project with its own package of 'desired, undesired and tolerated citizens', along with all of the injustices that come with such projects. It was too late when I realised that my single-minded obsession with Kemalist injustices had left me blinkered and that I needed to objectively evaluate matters as a proper social scientist. In mid-2013, as Turkish politics heated up, I had largely failed to convince my especially practising Muslim students of the merit of my reasons for participating in (and being tear-gassed for my efforts) the Gezi Park protests. At the time most could not see why it was necessary to support secular elements in society against threats coming from the AKP government. It was obvious that many AKP politicians, and many of my students, had not truly internalised pluralism, and had not really learnt from the injustices of the Kemalist social-engineering and their own experiences of what it was like to be a victim.

I was upset with myself. The signs were there earlier but I did not want to see them. As a columnist, I remember starting to criticise the AKP in 2008 when they slowed down the EU process. But that was pretty much all that I had done. In my understanding at that time, whatever they did in the education sector and in other areas of life could be reckoned as understandable attempts to balance past discrimination and victimisation. During the 2011–2012 academic year, I asked my students to interview their AKP-affiliated parents, relatives, acquaintances or contacts about interfaith dialogue, Turkey–EU relations and so on, for their Turkish politics class project. Several of them told me that when responding to questions their interview participants made it clear that they could only be free to speak if it was off the record. Only then did these AKP politicians feel comfortable to speak from the heart and freely voice their Islamist, anti-Western, conspiratorial and anti-dialogue convictions. At the time, I thought that it was a matter of process, and that many in the lower echelons of the AKP had not yet internalised the new Muslim Democrat discourse set out by the AKP leaders. A little earlier, in 2009, I had published an academic journal article examining the development of democratic sensibility and moderation amongst Islamists through electoral

participation in Turkey and Egypt. But by 2013, it had become crystal clear to me that what was happening under the AKP in Turkey was about much more than merely redressing the balance and correcting past injustices, it was in fact a hegemonic project. I looked back on my 2009 article and saw how naïve and deluded I had been to imagine that all that Islamists required to become democrats was to be given opportunities for participation.

When reading Üstel's book in early 2009, I thought about my own personal experiences. Both of my parents are from a small village outside the town of Sürmene in Trabzon province. Like so many they migrated to Istanbul in the early 1960s, well before I was born, as a young couple in their twenties. When I was young, my mother would take me and my siblings with her back to her village, our village, during the summer holidays. There, we would harvest tea and hazelnuts with the help of the local labourers. My little drama would start at the end of each summer when we returned back to Istanbul in late August. Our friends in the neighbourhood would make fun of our freshly restored Black Sea regional accents, shouting 'Laz, Laz, Laz' at me and my brother, and laughing at our expense. The Laz are a small ethnic group from the Caucasus who speak an endangered language. There are now only about one hundred thousand true Laz left living in Turkey, but people from the Black Sea coast are commonly collectively referred to as Laz, as if that were something of which to be ashamed. I would tirelessly try to explain to my friends that we were not actually Laz, that we did not speak any other language other than Turkish and that we too were real Turks, but with no success. I remember hiding at home until we managed to shake off our 'stupid accents', and other Black Sea patterns of speech, so that we could safely start playing with our friends again.

I forgot this after I finished elementary school, as my mother was no longer taking us back to our village and my Istanbul accent was safe! In fact, I had forgotten all about this until I began studying at Boğaziçi University, where I listened in awe, admiration and horror to my Kurdish friends recounting their terrible agonies vis-à-vis Turkish nationalism: the state, security forces, the ban on the Kurdish language, forced migration from villages and the burning of entire Kurdish villages. While listening to my Kurdish friends, I also remembered with shame how I had treated my own friends from the Balkans at the high school. When, during break, they spoke with each other in

different Balkan languages, a few us, being jealous as we only spoke Turkish and did not understand what they were talking about, would remind them that 'This is Turkey, you should speak Turkish.' We were of course saying it jokingly and with a smile on our faces, and they would simply laugh at us. Nevertheless, it never occurred to me or my other 'Turkish' companions that in reality we were harassing our friends, since we never thought of them as different or inferior. Only when I met those Kurdish friends at the university did I realise how my school education at the direction of the Turkish state had turned this little 'Laz' into a latent Turkish nationalist, even in spite of me never liking the nationalist parties and never considering myself a nationalist. And I thought back on how it had taken me many years – and the experience of meeting Kurdish students at university who could openly say that they were Kurdish and share with me their experiences of persecution – to realise the error of my ways.

My latent nationalism during my school years was heart-breaking for another reason. I became a latent Turkish nationalist despite the good teaching of my uneducated parents. I never heard them talking belittlingly about our Kurdish, Tatar, Circassian or *muhacir* (Turks and Muslims from the former Ottoman lands who migrated to Turkey during and after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire) neighbours. I was about forty years old when I was shocked to learn that our beloved family doctor in Istanbul's Güngören was actually Armenian. My mum, sister, and all of us would go to him when we were sick and we were great friends with his grandchildren, but I had never heard my parents once talk about the fact that he was Armenian. Despite knowing his ethnic identity, my 'uneducated' parents never made a point of mentioning it, much less criticising him. Apparently, it takes years of study in the Turkish educational system for good citizens to learn to judge the ethnic and religious identities of their neighbours!

Üstel's book was not only such a page-turner that I could not put it down; it also triggered flashback after flashback, awakening my memories like Proust's *petite madeleine*, setting the course for my future academic research. I came to the realisation that I should henceforth fully engage with the issues of citizenship and nation-building, starting from my expertise on Islam and my experience of growing up as a Muslim Turk in Kemalist Turkey. This work is a product of years of interwoven experience and academic research. As someone who was born and raised in Turkey, and who was educated in the state

institutions until the age of twenty-four, this book is also deeply related to my own experiences. It represents a very personal quest to answer questions that have long bothered me, and, I trust, many others too. As one of the many million subjects of both Kemalist and Erdoğanist nation-building experiments, where relevant in the book I refer to my own experiences too. The politics of a country that a person was born and raised in becomes inevitably a passionate topic unless they are a robot. Thus, while I have done my best to be objective, I am not pretending to be an absolutely objective social scientist.

With all these thoughts, I dedicate this book to my mother, Ayşe Yılmaz, who was never sent to school despite the fact that her father was rich and had means for her to be formally educated. And to my father, Ali Yılmaz, who had studied just three years in elementary school when he was slapped by his teacher simply because he had forgotten to take off his prayer hat (*takke*) after he left the mosque and entered the classroom. My father never went back to school and my mother never even got to go in the first place. But because of them, I went to school and never left.

Acknowledgements

The research on which this book is based took about a decade. Thus, I am indebted to many individuals and organisations in many countries. Even though I will do my best to mention them, I am absolutely sure that I will fail, for which I sincerely apologise.

I am first grateful to my parents, Ayşe and Ali Yılmaz, who despite enormous challenges ensured that I went on to study in one of Turkey's best universities. I am also very grateful to my wife Arzu, my daughter Büşra and my sons Ali Rıdvan and Yasin who very patiently tolerated my gruelling work routine. Without their constant support, this study would not have been possible. I dedicate this book to all of them.

I cannot adequately express the depth of my gratitude to my new home in Australia, the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI) at Deakin University and its leaders, our (now former) Vice Chancellor Professor Jane den Hollander, our (now former) Dean Prof Brenda Cherednichenko and the Director of the Alfred Deakin Institute Professor Fethi Mansouri. My gratitude is not a result of my having lived in authoritarian environments long enough to give deference to the important people in the hierarchy of my workplace – far from it! It is due to my nature that I have always had problems respecting authority anyway. However, not only did Jane, Brenda and Fethi welcome me in one of the most difficult times of my career, they have since also weathered a number of challenges on my behalf. I will never forget their comforting and assuring meetings with me on the challenges we faced before and after I arrived at Deakin.

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This book started its journey as a journal article in *the Turkish Journal of Politics* on the Kemalists' desired citizen. Then, Onur Atlı of Ufuk Publishers encouraged me to expand it and publish as a book. I decided to make it a comparative study by adding the Erdoğanist desired citizen project which was, compared to the monograph before you, rudimentary when the book was published in 2015. Onur helped me a lot in publishing the book *Kemalizmden Erdoğanizme: Türkiye'de Din, Devlet ve Makbul Vatandaş* (From Kemalism to Erdoğanism: Religion, State and Palatable Citizen in Turkey), which focused on the desired citizen types of these two regimes. Dr Ahmet Arabacı, Professor Ahmet Kuru, Dr Erdi Öztürk, Dr İsa Eraslan, Associate Professor Şammas Salur, Professor Gökhan Bacık and Professor Savaş Genç provided me with valuable feedback during the publication of the book in 2015, and I am sincerely indebted to them. Since 2015, many developments have taken place in relation to the Erdoğanist-desired project, the Diyanet and the undesired citizens of Erdoğanism. Onur's comments on different drafts of this manuscript helped to expand, deepen and complexify my comparison of these two regimes' nation-building projects. For his tireless work, I thank him.

Over the last four years since joining ADI, Dr James Barry has been my fellow 'traveller' at the Chair in Islamic Studies. We have worked on many projects and publications together. I learned from him and benefited from his wisdom and feedback. Another fellow traveller has been Dr Galib Bashirov, with whom I have worked on several publications and projects. His sharp criticism, insights and challenging questions helped me to refine this book. Similarly, I have worked with Dr Erdoan Shipoli, Dr Mustafa Demir, Dr Ahmet Doğru, Professor Mehmet Efe Çaman, Professor Greg Barton, and Dr Zahid Ahmed on different pilot and/or publication projects that are related to the topics and themes of this volume. I have benefited from their collegiality and friendship during these ongoing projects. They have supported me at various stages of writing, and their comments and criticisms for different sections of this manuscript were invaluable. I am immensely thankful to them. At Deakin, my colleagues Dr Zim Nwokora and Professor

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In addition, I have presented some of the findings of this book as conference papers at the following institutions or conferences: Heidelberg University, The University of Melbourne, Deakin University, University of Münster, University of Turin, The Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (Thessaloniki, Greece), Queen's University Belfast, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, John Carol University, The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The World Peace Forum (Bogor, Indonesia), the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Annual Convention (New Orleans), The University of the Punjab (Lahore), Islamic University of Pakistan (Islamabad), Navy University (Karachi), The 2012 International Conference on Law and Society, Law and Society Association (Honolulu), The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Jamia Millia University (New Delhi), and the Establishing a Culture of Coexistence and Mutual Understanding Conference (Abuja, Nigeria).

I would like to thank the participants as well as the organisers of these conferences for their useful critical feedback.

Over the last decade, some of the arguments and concepts of this book were published in several journals such as *Third World Quarterly*, *the Australian Journal of International Relations*, *Democratisation*, *Turkish Studies*, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, the *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, the *Journal of Citizenship and Globalisation Studies*, *i Quaderni di Diritto e Politica Ecclesiastica*, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, the *Turkish Journal of Politics*, the *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* and *Pakistan Horizon*. I have received a significant amount of feedback through the publication process, and my ideas have been sharpened thanks to the generous time commitment of my anonymous reviewers. I am grateful to them as well as to the editors of these journals for providing me opportunity to publish my ideas.

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Needless to say, any mistakes, oversights or omissions are entirely my own.

Note on the Text

Turkish Orthography and Pronunciations

This book uses the modern Turkish orthography based on an adapted form of the Latin alphabet. The letters ç, ğ, ö, ş, ü, and İ are different from the English alphabet. Pronunciations of these letters and other vowels are below:

a, A: like *u* in 'jump'
e, E: like *a* in 'payday'
ç, Ç: like *ch* in 'China'
ğ: like *w* in 'newer'
ı or I: like *a* in 'among'
i or İ: like *ee* in 'feet' or *i* in 'bit'
o, O: like *ow* in 'low'
ö, Ö: like the German *ö* in 'Köln'
ş, Ş: like *sh* in 'sharp'
u, U: like *oo* in 'tool'
ü, Ü: like the German *ü* in 'München'

List of Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*)
AP	Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*)
ATV	Active TV (*Aktif TV*)
AYM	Constitutional Court (*Anayasa Mahkemesi*)
CAP	Centre for American Progress
CHP	Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress
DEVA	Democracy and Advancement Party (*Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi*)
DİB	The Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*)
DP	Democrat Party (*Demokrat Parti*)
DYP	True Path Party (*Doğru Yol Partisi)*
EC	European Community
EU	European Union
FP	Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*)
GM	Gülen Movement
GP	Future Party (*Gelecek Partisi*)
HDP	People's Democracy Party (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*)
IHS	Imam Hatip School
İYİP	Good Party (*İyi Parti*)
İYV	Foundation for Spreading Religious Knowledge (*İlim Yayma Vakfı*)
LAST	Laicist Atatürkist Sunni Turk Citizen
MGK	National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*)
MHP	Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*)
MI6	Military Intelligence Section 6
MİT	National Intelligence Agnecy (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*)
MNP	National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*)

MP	Member of Parliament
MSP	National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NOM	National Outlook Movement
ÖNDER	Association of Imam Hatip Schools Graduates (*İmam Hatip Okulları Mezunları Derneği*)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
ÖZDEP	Freedom and Democracy Party (*Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi*)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiye Kerkaren Kurdistan*)
RP	Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*)
RTÜK	Supreme Council of Radio and Television (*Radyo Televizyon Üst Kurulu*)
SETA	Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (*Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı*)
SODEV	Social Democracy Foundation (*Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı*)
SP	Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*)
TGTV	Turkish Foundation of Voluntary Associations (*Türkiye Gönüllü Teşekküller Vakfı*)
TİMAV	Turkey Imam Hatip Members Foundation (*Türkiye İmam Hatipliler Vakfı*)
TRT	Turkey Radio and Television (*Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyonu*)
TÜGVA	Turkey Youth Foundation (*Türkiye Gençlik Vakfı*)
TÜRGEV	Turkish Foundation to Serve the Youth and Education (*Türkiye Gençlik ve Eğitime Hizmet Vakfı*)
VP	Homeland Party (*Vatan Partisi*)
YTB	The Presidency for Turks Abroad (Yurtdışı Türkler Başkanlığı)