

The Ruhnama in Citizenship Education in Turkmenistan¹

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study is to examine the "Ruhnama", a book written by Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, in the context of citizenship education. In this scope, it was aimed to determine what duties and responsibilities were attributed to the state and citizens within this book. The study was conducted in accordance with the qualitative research method, and the document analysis technique was used as the data gathering tool. Based on the findings, it can be stated that the republican understanding of citizenship is dominant in the Ruhnama, and the message that Turkmen citizens should have the purpose of serving their country and nation by defending their cultural identity is delivered. The basic duties of the state to its citizens are also shaped in the same direction; the understanding that the state is obliged to take all measures necessary for every individual of the Turkmen society to adopt the core values of its culture is dominant in the book.

Keywords: Citizenship education, Turkmenistan, Ruhnama, Turkmenbashi, Education.

1. Introduction

Citizenship education is one of the highlighted issues in many countries as an important element of building a national identity. Almost all countries set a mission regarding citizenship education partly due to the effect of their own socio-cultural development process and validity, and in the framework of this mission, they implement various practices in the educational process (Evertsson, 2015; Hung, 2015). In this scope, it can be stated the local dynamics are influential in the quality and contents of citizenship education to a large extent. Although the 21st century is described as the age of information and communication technologies, and it is claimed that a global world is inevitable, it would not be wrong to say that local dynamics are mostly at the forefront in issues such as building a national identity (Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007; Jacobs, 2013). Even though these local dynamics that are influential in the process of building a national identity vary across different countries, they can be regarded as in two dimension even one would categorise them in the basic sense: 1-National folklore, 2-Leader.

The issues that are evaluated within national folklore refer to the basic distinguishing elements of national self that societies have possessed within the historical process. People who come together around a certain cultural belonging, or are made to do so, have attributed a mission in this respect to education in terms of the internalisation of these elements of belonging by every individual of the society, and moreover, transferring them to future generations (Janmaat & Vickers, 2007). In this process that is described as cultural transfer, the primary objective of education, or in other words citizenship education, is to convey the cultural codes that the society has to new generations (Mori & Davies, 2015). Education is designed towards achieving this objective with all the instruments it has. Besides, the contents of curricula in the dimensions of knowledge, skills and values as well as teachers' and administrators' attitudes, behaviours and statements are all towards this objective. It is possible to encounter different examples regarding the practices in the scope of citizenship education. While a policy of citizenship education based on transferring pure national culture and belonging is implemented in certain countries, preparing the society to the unity that is politically accepted as the supra-identity is aimed in some countries in addition to national culture. For instance, the countries that established a political unity under the European Union add related contents to citizenship education to strengthen this unity even more and support it with the dimension of cultural belonging (Banjac & Pušnik, 2015).

Another dynamic that is influential in building a national identity is leaders. If a society is going through the process of building a national identity, a person who is accepted by the general public, and adopted as the leader mostly comes to the forefront. In determining the elements of the national identity that are being built or restored, the statements of these leaders are perceived as an important criterion, and are sometimes imposed on the society through various pressure tools (Polese & Horák, 2015). The leaders who aim to build the target identity through social changes and transformations have tried to deliver their thoughts on this issue to the society by various tools (Kuru, 2002). Books are the primary tools frequently used for this purpose (Horák, 2005). These guidebooks that are written in the form of basically describing the characteristics that the society should have as the intended population, setting the direction for the goals that should be achieved, and teaching the customary practices in terms of the method that should be followed are limited to students at school, and in order for the new ideology to reach a large segment of the society, significant efforts are made so that every citizen from young individuals to the elderly internalises the boundaries drawn within these books (Shnirelman, 2009).

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Another type of books that are employed for this purpose is the coursebooks taught to students at school (Yılmaz, 2012), in that those of the History, Social Studies and Citizenship courses have a particular importance in this respect.

In the recent history, one of the regions where the processes of political independence and then building a national identity have been intense is Central Asia. With the dissolution of USSR in 1991, great upheavals, both political-military and socio-cultural, were experienced in this region. As a result of this adversity, new political/social borders were drawn, and the countries that are known as the Central Asia Turkish Republics made great strides in becoming independent states by declaring their independence. The process of becoming an independent state being completed with their recognition by the United Nations was followed by their process of building a national identity (Kubicek, 1997). The societies of Central Asia who had lived under the USSR roof for a long time met a completely new process with the independence they gained in early 1990s. Building a national identity.

Turkmenistan is one of the leading countries that went through the process of building a national identity after the dissolution of USSR. As being one of the important countries in Central Asia with its surface area of nearly 500.000 kilometres square and population of about six million people, Turkmenistan got into a new process of socio-cultural structuring under the leadership of Saparmurad Niyazov in the aftermath of the independence decision in 1991 (Kiepenheuer, 2006). In the country that entered a re-structuring process en route to building a nation, a set of reforms were made to form and maintain national unity and belonging. In this process, President Niyazov had a great influence, in that the president's will definitely affected the developments regarding almost all national elements from coining to composing a national anthem (Denison, 2009). In this regard, a book named the Ruhnama was written by Niyazov who would start to be remembered as Saparmurat. The Turkmen identity is firstly described in the book towards building a national identity, and then, the duties of citizens in the new Turkmen state are listed in terms of both cultural and modern citizenship practices (Kurtov, 2007).

The book spread across the country within the course of time, and in addition to being the primary coursebook of students at schools, it was also read by adults through various practices developed. The driver's licence exam can be an example in this respect. In Turkmenistan, citizens who want to obtain a driver's licence are tested for Ruhnama in addition to the knowledge of vehicle/driving, and are qualified if they pass this exam. On the other hand, the squares of cities were adorned with the statues of the Ruhnama in order for the book to reach and be adopted by a wider population (Horák & Šír, 2009).

After the death of Turkmenbashi in 2006, Gurbanguli Berdimuhametov was elected as the president of Turkmenistan. This period of political power also brought changes in some policies that had been implemented in the country (Kunysz, 2012). The new president enacted various regulations in the education system by removing the Ruhnama course that had been taught to students as compulsory by Turkmenbashi, and re-shaped certain traces of the previous president in socio-cultural life in the framework of his political stance.

Although the influence of the book Ruhnama written by Turkmenbashi has decreased today compared to the past, it would contribute to the educational literature as an important experience in terms of citizenship education practices. In the literature, studies on the Ruhnama, and in this scope, citizenship education in Turkmenistan seem to be extremely limited. Based on this gap, the primary aim of this study is to reveal the dimensions of citizenship education in the book Ruhnama written by Turkmenbashi. In this respect, two research questions are addressed in the study:

How are the duties and responsibilities of Turkmen citizens described in the Ruhnama?

How are the duties and responsibilities of the state to its citizens described in the Ruhnama?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The study was conducted in accordance with the qualitative research method. In qualitative research, obtaining in-depth information about the research topic forms the basis, and the relationship of the data gathered with social reality is also of significance (Merriam, 2002). Since the citizenship approach described in the Ruhnama was aimed to be explained in relation to the social reality, qualitative research method and techniques were preferred as the research methodology.

2.2. Data Gathering and Analysis

Documentary analysis was used in the study as the data-gathering technique. In this regard, the Turkish version of the Ruhnama that was written by Saparmurad Turkmenbashi and constituted the basic data source of the study was examined.

In the data-gathering process, the document was read by the three researchers independently, and initial codes were determined in a way to answer the research questions. After the initial coding, the categories were formed. The codes and categories obtained in the process conducted by the three researchers independently were

compared to each other; while there were categories that were the same or like each other, there were also different codes and categories which were discussed to reach an agreement among the researchers, and the codes and categories were thus finalised. These categories were not described as incontestable or general facts considering the important role of the researcher in qualitative research, which is not appropriate to claim in terms of research methodology, either (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Another researcher can surely reach different categories by reading the same text. However, even though the categories were formed in a way that was open to the researchers' interpretation, the proportion of vague messages was low because the document that was analysed mostly presented clear messages. The researchers also paid due attention to consider the factor of socio-cultural context in the analysis of the text (May, 1998). The dimension of socio-cultural interaction was aimed to be highlighted in the discussion section of the study.

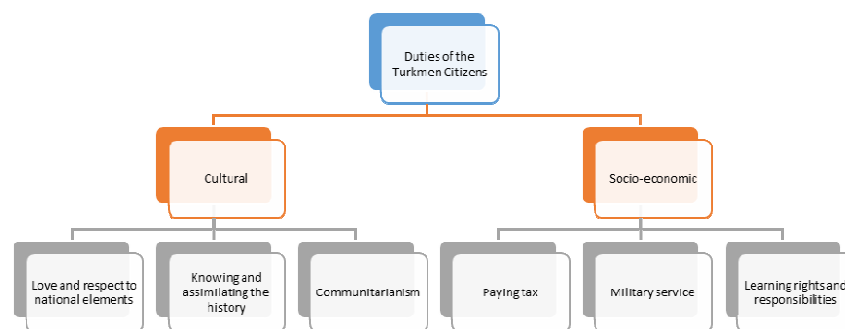
3. Findings

3.1. Turkmen Citizens' Duties to the State and Nation in the Ruhnama

In the Ruhnama written by Turkmenbashi, Turkmen citizens' duties to the state are explained in detail. However, before going into these details, there is a need to explain how the concepts of nation and citizen are used in the Ruhnama. This is because in the book the concepts of public/nation and citizen are used as equal to each other in some parts while they are used interchangeably with close meanings in other parts. For example, while address forms such as "my saintly people" or "Saintly Turkmen" are used in some parts of the text, other parts include a direct addressing in the form of a "Turkmen citizen".

The duties and responsibilities of the Turkmen nation/citizens are basically described in two categories: cultural and socio-economic.

Figure 1. Citizenship Duties According to the Ruhnama.



As is shown in Figure 1, although the citizenship duties and responsibilities are described in two basic dimensions, the emphasis is on the elements in the cultural dimension in most of the book. The socio-economic elements are mentioned only superficially and rarely. Therefore, it can be stated that the most important duties and responsibilities of the Turkmen nation/citizens are towards the dimensions under the cultural category.

The expectations defined as the cultural citizenship duties begin with the necessity that every Turkmen should firstly recognise him/herself and his/her nation. In this perspective that is formed based on the approach that "a Turkmen individual should learn well the achievements and virtues of the nation that he/she is a member of throughout its glorious history so that he/she can take lessons for the present day!", the individual, or the citizen, should dedicate his/her life to the Turkmen nation and country.

Learning about the life stories and legends of national heroes is also regarded as a duty for every Turkmen. The fact that the Turkmen who did not refuse to fight wars to protect their country and were willing to lose their lives for their country and nation in the past are/should be citizens who would do the same today is frequently emphasised in the book. In order for today's citizens to perform these virtuous acts, they are advised to learn their essence, or in other words their historical-cultural background: "My Saintly People! As the heirs of the Turkmen nation, we should recognise the historical heritage of our grandfathers, and know about our cultural richness. This is our duty of loyalty to the past." (p.98). Learning about the cultural heritage and protecting these values are also regarded as a duty.

My Reverend People! (...) We should learn the history of our ancestors and the states they founded as best as we can. History is the most valuable school of experience for us. It is our duty to learn our almighty historical values and maintain our moral values." (p.146).

Another citizenship duty of the Turkmen nation is to abandon individualism and exist for the society: "Individualism is the biggest trap for the philosophy of our time." (p.24). In addition to staying away from individualism, drawing a line under the tribalism debates is also stated as a citizenship duty since such debates would damage the unity and solidarity: "The idea of tribalism is temporary, it is a sub-step to reach national unity. Let's now drop the understanding of tribalism! Let the tribalism debates stay in the past, and let every

Turkmen struggle for not to have any tribalism debates. Turkmen are brothers and sisters.” (p.152). Maintaining the independence of Turkmenistan that declared its independence after a difficulty process and being aware of its value are accepted as a citizenship duty: “Turkmen, know the value of this fortune! Protect this day by leaning upon the God Almighty!” (p.153). Besides, maintaining the religion, traditions, customs and nationalism, and conveying them to future generations are also among the duties of citizens: “Turkmen individuals have a big responsibility in protecting our religions that the Creator loves, our faith, national sensitivities and national traditions, and conveying them to the new historical period without any change.” (p.206).

Preserving what belongs to the state and nation, and not consuming it without permission are seen as duties of the citizens: “You can return something that belongs to someone else and ask his/her forgiveness, but if you consume what belongs to the state and the public, how can you return it?” (p.184). This is why the Turkmen are expected to be sensitive to the state and the nation. “Being worthy of this great nation is every Turkmen's duty!” (p.200) and “every individual should make an effort for his/her spiritual and moral level to be the same. (...) For the individual, there is nothing more valuable than the nation and nothing saintlier.” (p.201).

The socio-economic duties, the second dimension of the citizenship duties asserted by Turkmenbashi, are mentioned in only few places of the book, and these issues are discussed more superficially compared to the cultural dimension. In this regard, there are three primary issues underlined. These are doing military service, paying tax and knowing duties-responsibilities.

The rights that the citizens should know are described as settlement, free movement, starting a family, electing and being elected, being a civil servant and selecting a job. By saying “Citizens' rights cannot be restricted and they cannot be deprived of their individual justice, the crimes committed and the punishments are determined only according to the law” (p.258), it is clearly stated that citizens should know about their rights as well as their responsibilities, and have a life accordingly; otherwise, they would be exposed to the sanctions foreseen by the law.

Protecting Turkmenistan and every man's doing his national service are seen as a debt: “Providing his service to the nation. Sustainment of the nation is only possible in this way.” (p.336). The issue that taxes and charges should be paid as another duty is mentioned on page 262 of the book: “Every citizen is obliged to pay the tax and chargers to the state as determined in accordance with the law.”

As a result, the duties of Turkmen citizens are examined in two dimensions including cultural and socio-economic in the *Ruhnama*, but the primary emphasis is on the issues under the cultural dimension. In this regard, assimilating the elements belonging to the national self and transferring them to future generations are on the top of the list of citizenship duties. In the socio-economic dimension, doing military service paying tax are listed as citizenship duties.

3.2. State's Duties to its Citizens in the *Ruhnama*

According to Turkmenbashi, the state's duties to its citizens are clustered in two primary categories. The first of these categories is the formation, design and improvement of its citizens' cultural identities, and the second is raising its citizens' standards of living. In other words, the state has the duty of strengthening its citizens' material and spiritual life.

The Turkmen state should pay its debt to its citizens along with protecting the independence obtains as a result of uphill struggles. A considerable part of this debt includes maintaining its title of an ethical society: “(...) It is our sacred debt to provide every citizen an opportunity to become a noble and honest person.” (p.28). “The state should be a school that places good morality and etiquette into life.” (p.71).

Seeing all nations as a brother, which is included among the characteristics of the Turkmen, is also regarded as a duty of the state. In the book, it is stated that there are other nations in the homeland of Turkmenistan, and they should be accepted as equal and free. In the framework of the Turkmenistan Constitution, everybody's right to be raised as free in terms of culture is guaranteed by the state in the Republic of Turkmenistan: “The Republic of Turkmenistan is a guarantor of the rights of all nations and people living on its lands to be raised as free culturally.” (p.50). It is stated that these rights and responsibilities are given to the citizens in the framework of law.

The state is obliged to protect all of its citizens without making any discrimination. “The state is responsible to every citizen, and provides the conditions necessary for the free enterprise of individuals. Citizens' lives, property, honour, independence, immunity, and invariable law justice have been protected.” (p.256).

The state protects all of its citizens both within and outside its borders. The citizens are given the rights to private property, the right to believe in any religion and freedom in life, equality before the law no matter what their religion and language is, the right to live, the right to have an occupation, immunity of the private property, the right to free movement and housing within the borders of Turkmenistan, equality among spouses in family relationships, the right to participate in the state government, equality in becoming a civil servant, the right to choose a job and occupation with free will and not to be worked with force, the right to receive a recompense for one's work, the right to leave and holidays, the right to benefit from social aids and free education, the right to

open private educational institutions, and the right not to be forced to plead and testify for one's own and relatives. (pp. 257-262). Because of the drastic changes made in Turkmenistan, it is stated that programs are formed in which mother and child health is protected, the rights of the youth, women and elders are guaranteed, and that aim to improve the social status of the people.

As for the duties of the president and administrators to the citizens and the state, protecting the benefits of the people and the homeland is mentioned as their first duty: "As the president, I need to be sure that the administrators assigned are individuals who care about the benefits of the people and the homeland, are trusted, and embrace their duty with all their heart and soul." (p.269). Besides, it is also stated that the problems that would arise in political, social and economical areas concerning the society should be resolved by the government in time to make the unity and solidarity permanent (p. 278).

In the state policies, a set of duties are indicated for the citizens based on the laws made. "For all Turkmen people, we provided gas, electricity, salt, land for agriculture, free housing in public estates, free flour for those who are in need, and all conditions necessary for you to continue your life in peace and work." (p.287). It is indicated that in the period until 2010, social policies aimed at the development of people and founding social facilities, and emphasised providing people natural gas, electricity, water and salt inexpensively (p. 282). Similarly, it is stated that the Amnesty Law was accepted on the occasion of the holy night of decree, and thus, death sentence was abolished. By saying "This practice enables people to choose the right path, and shape their lives through soul-searching, and shows our determination in applying the principles of hospitality, democracy, human rights and freedoms in practical life." (p.282) referring to this law, Turkmenbashi indicates the determination regarding the citizens' gaining the values stated, which can be said to be the state's duty to its citizens. In other words, it is aimed to ensure a good life for every Turkmen citizen: "Our goal is to make Turkmenistan a developed country, and ensure that it is a honourable and sacred home for every one of its citizens. All state programs of independent Turkmenistan aim to enhance the life standards of people and fully protect their rights." (p.282). In addition to the aim of leaving Turkmen citizens a homeland as a honourable and sacred home, the aim to educate individuals who can open a new window to the world, are sacrificing, courageous, and have big goals has also been a duty of the state: "The primary goal of our state is to raise the ideal person who is mentioned in the world literature, is great-hearted, sacrificing, courageous, and have big goals." (p.299).

As the person in charge of the state, Turkmenbashi indicates that he has duties to the people. He specifies a set of duties often by using words such as "we" and "our". However, when these statements are examined, it can be argued that they cover both the citizens and the state. By saying "It is our duty to visit and cheer up a patient." (p.352), Turkmenbashi may have accepted ensuring the happiness and peace of his people as a duty to the citizens. In a statement, Turkmenbashi says: "Today, I struggle with full effort day and night to make you smile and earn your gratitude." (p.342). In another statement, he makes himself responsible for ensuring that citizens have their daily bread and food, and making them rich: "Having your daily bread and being rich can be your desire. My only goal is to make sure that you have your daily bread and become rich. By combining our desires and goals, we can achieve what we aim." (p.370). In this way, the importance of the unity and solidarity expected from the citizens is also mentioned.

As a result, in the Ruhnama, Turkmenbashi states that as the citizens has duties and responsibilities to the state, the state/administrators have duties and responsibilities to the citizens. In this regard, as can be clearly seen in the first and second parts of the findings section, the main emphasis is on the issues related to the acculturation process of the citizens. The state should firstly focus on the Turkmen citizens' forming a cultural identity, and then, take measures for enhancing prosperity with respect to the daily life practices. The endeavours towards enhancing the citizens' level of prosperity are described within an identity framework, and it is emphasised that building a rich and prosperous Turkmen society would be the continuation of the superior success story written by their ancestors throughout the history.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the Ruhnama written by Turkmenbashi was examined in the context of citizenship education, and the perspective presented with regard to cultural/political definitions and duties was discussed in detail.

In Turkmenistan that gained its independence after the disintegration of the USSR, education is the primary instrument employed in the process of building a national identity. Following the independence, in addition to the formal education in all stages from elementary school to higher education, a citizenship education program was enabled in which people from all ages and socio-economic levels were determined as the target population. Such a mission was also attributed to education in countries that went through similar processes, and it seems that it is not possible to actualise the process of building national identity without designing the educational dimension (Tormey, 2006; Karaduman, 2010; Akinci, 2014). The political-cultural statements of Turkmenbashi as the founding leader played an important role in this process in Turkmenistan, and formal and non-formal education was re-organised with his designs (Peyrouse, 2012). The book, Ruhnama, was written as a step

complementary to these structural transformations in the education system, and the Turkmen society from the youth to elders was asked to take this book as a guide by including it all educational processes. In order to support this demand, people were ensured to have more contact with the Ruhnama in social life, the statues of the book were erected on the streets, and cities were adorned with the posters of the Ruhnama. As a result, it would not be wrong to say that from the period when the Ruhnama was written to the death of Turkmenbashi, the Ruhnama fulfilled an effective function as an important part of building a national identity in the Turkmen society.

In this study, it was aimed to reveal the paradigm of citizenship/citizenship education described by Turkmenbashi in the Ruhnama that has such significance for the Turkmen. Based on the findings obtained in the study, it can be stated that Turkmenbashi thought that every Turkmen should firstly learn his/her own historical and cultural past and elements of belonging well. In the scope of the sequence of historical development that goes back to Oghuz Kaghan, the historical/cultural development and transformation process of the Turkmen society should be known well by every Turkmen who should protect this heritage. This is also a citizenship duty (Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, 2006) because the balance of basic rights-responsibilities in the Ruhnama is built on responsibilities, and the basis of these citizenship responsibilities built is formed by transferring the cultural self-elements gained through protecting the cultural heritage to the new generation. Regarding this finding, it can be stated that the citizenship and citizenship education policies designed and implemented by Turkmenbashi is closer to the understanding of republican citizenship that has the aim of designing citizens in a way that features the state and the society rather than individuals (Oldfield, 1998; Miller, 2005), in that similar studies in the literature often refer to this aspect (Habeb, 2005; Kort, 2004; Şahin, 2012). This result that overlaps with other findings in the literature is consistent with Turkmenbashi's statements in many works, particularly the Ruhnama. Turkmenbashi states that it is too early for the Turkmen society to make a transition to democracy and the formation of national identity should continue towards the direction he draws under a single party regime for a while (Niyazov, 1994). However, there has always been a controversy regarding to what extent the existing administration mechanisms conform to individual justice of citizens in this and similar government processes (Beacháin and Kevlihan, 2015). It seems that there is a similar controversy for the Turkmen society as well. The role of founding leadership that Turkmenbashi had in the process of building a national identity, and the transformational processes that he actualised with the power he got from this role and an egocentric understanding are criticised by some authors and it is claimed that he exhibited a different version of the autocratic management style (Capisani, 2000) while other authors argue that his practices were in a more explicable direction (Erol, 2006; Akbarzadeh, 2010).

Another dimension revealed in the scope of the relationship between citizen-state duties and responsibilities as designed in the process of building a cultural identity consists of current life practices. In this regard, the state demands the Turkmen citizens to pay their taxes and do their military service. However, these duties and responsibilities should not be seen as merely legal duties, but should be evaluated as an opportunity to work voluntarily to take the Turkmen society further. Doing military service and paying taxes that are described here as citizenship duties are among those that has the longest continuity throughout the historical process (Penrose, 1951; Polat, 2011; Kızılay, 2015), and still keep their place among the basic citizenship duties in many countries today.

The duties and responsibilities of the state to its citizens are described in the Ruhnama although partially. When the data presented in the findings of the study are examined in this regard, it is seen that the basic responsibility Turkmenbashi attributed to the state is to support the process of building and protecting the cultural identity, as in the duties of the citizens. Besides, although statements on certain daily life practices are also included in the book, these issues do not constitute the primary focus of the messages that are aimed to be highlighted. The state is obliged to provide the basic needs of the Turkmen people in their daily lives for free, but this obligation and service should be towards contributing to revealing and reviving the cultural/historical past and accumulation of the Turkmen society as the ultimate goal. As is also stated by Sağır (2009), this is because the primary goal of the Turkmen society is to reform the spirit of solidarity around the core values.

As a result, it can be inferred that the Ruhnama written by Turkmenbashi who served as the founding leader has an important role in the Turkmen society who was/has been in the process of building and restoring a cultural identity, and according to the citizenship paradigm presented in the book and by Turkmenbashi in general, the primary goal of the Turkmen society and state is to learn and adopt its cultural/historical past and characteristics, and move this cultural richness inherited from the ancestors further by transferring them to life.

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