



The Official School Ceremonies in the Narratives of the Primary School Students in the 1970s' Turkey

Mehmet Sağlam*

Abstract

This study covers the narratives of primary school students about the official ceremonies in the 1970s' Turkey. The objective of the paper is to discover what they can remember about these ceremonies. While doing this, being loyal to their original expressions what they had lived during the ceremonies, what preparations they had done before the ceremonies and how these ceremonies had taken place in their minds are reflected. The students' narratives particularly present the 23th of April and 10th of November as ceremonies. Here, the oral history method performs an important function. We can have the opportunity of how the children occupying a significant part of a society and having limited information about only in the official documents have social events in their memories.

Keywords: Official ceremonies, primary school students, oral history method.

* Assist. Prof. Dr., Bozok University, Faculty of Education, Department of Prescool Education, Yozgat, Turkey.
E-mail: mehmet.saglam@bozok.edu.tr. , msaglam72@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to evaluate the narratives of 1970s primary school students by making use of the center-periphery variable. In this study, the center refers to the city centers, the periphery indicates the shanty houses called “*gecekondu*” (suburb of the city), small towns and villages. Even though the suburb areas are situated around the city centers they have similarities to the small towns and villages in terms of their social, cultural and economic features due to the migration accelerated with the agricultural mechanization since 1950s. It is because of this the suburb areas started to appear and surround the cities. As a result of this, the suburb areas particularly in the big cities still have had similar characteristics as those of the rural areas. (Can, 2007; Ertürk, 2008).

Here the decisive factor which distinguishes these two parts is that they have social, economic and educational opportunities which vary from each other. The remarkable difference is observed in the income levels of these two parts particularly. While the former one has a higher life standard, the latter has lowered one. Moreover, the educational opportunities differ from the center to periphery as well. That is, better educational opportunities are provided for the center first such as, schools’ physical conditions, the number of teachers appointed to the schools etc., then these facilities and opportunities are provided for the periphery if possible. This difference must have taken an important role in the later formation of the narratives of the students about their educational practices and experiences.

There have been some studies about the students educational experiences which reflect more than what we can learn about their education in the written documents. Thus their educational experiences become more important than it is expected in general. If I want to give some examples about the previous studies, I must refer to the study called *Cumhuriyet’te Çocuklar (They Were Children at Republic)* by Tan. It provides us a comprehensive perspective about the primary students’ educational experiences belonging to the onset of the Young Turkish Republic. (Tan, 2007) Moreover, Çameli’s work titled as *Çağdaş Eğitime Geçişin Tüm Aşamalarının Tanığı Hüsnü Ciritli’nin Yaşam Anlatısı ‘Cumhuriyet Nasıl Bir Adamdı ki?’ (The Witness of All Steps of Transition to the Contemporary Education Hüseyin Ciritli’s Life Narrative; What Kind of A Person Was Republic?)* displays what they had lived at school during the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. It presents vital clues and details about the daily life at the time of fast modernization process (Çameli, 2005).

Additionally, biographies including Kansu’s *Çocukluğa Yolculuk (Journey to Childhood)* and Öymen’s *Bir Dönem Bir Çocuk (A Period A Child)* informs us both about their childhood and primary school educational practices. (Kansu, 2002; Öymen, 2002) Despite the fact that there have been studies about educational experiences through oral history methodology, there haven’t been any studies done directly related with the official ceremonies via students’ narratives. With this study, to some extent I may contribute the previous studies by using oral history so that the voices of those who are ignored may be heard in educational studies. It includes the narratives of eighteen students of 1970s which show their experiences and feelings about the official ceremonies.

METHOD

In this study, oral history methodology is used in order to dig the memories of 1970s' Turkey's children regarding the official ceremonies at schools or performed by schools. It is oral history methodology that focuses on the narratives of ordinary people who have been ignored in scientific studies. (İlyasoğlu, 2006) Making history with someone sayings is worth for historical research deeply. History is the object of cultural formation, understanding this formation means understanding a lot of things about that culture. The most important feature of oral history is trying to hear the voices of those who have not had chance to create documents about their past. This also provides opportunity for the democratization of the nature of history. (Grele, 1991) Oral history methodology has a character of covering children like all other excluded people by the dominant historical understanding. It writes their history and relates them with great events. (Tan, 1998) Moreover, oral history has a critical and transformative approach. It cares about the life styles of individuals, groups and their interaction with each other. Thus, it plays a vital role in the democratization of history (Thompson, 2006, 1998).

I preferred using oral history methodology in order to highlight children's ceremonial experiences. It is because we have limited knowledge about these ceremonies through written official documents that do not have any approaches or experiences of the children taking part in the ceremonies. In order to fulfill the gap create as they lived these ceremonies and were not placed in written documents I used eighteen interviews performed before. They were nine women and nine men. At the end of the interviews, they were asked if they could allow me to use their narratives in scientific researches and their permission was taken. These people had their primary school education at different parts of Turkey and had different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The records of their narratives were put into writing forms and they were used in this study in their original forms. While answering my question that was about the official ceremonies they were in a mood as if they had been living those ceremonies in details. It was clear to understand this on their faces.

FINDINGS AND EVALUATIONS

When the students were asked about the ceremonies at school, almost all of the those who studied in the city center and periphery could remember the 23th of April called *the Children's Day*. They said they had been influenced a lot from that ceremony. They believe that the Children's Day was very entertaining for them. Another ceremony is the one which takes place on the 10th of November that is the date of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's death. They had felt pain and sorrow at his date.

“Of course we were mostly affected by the 23th of April. Colorful clothes were being worn. Our clothes were much cleaner. We were proud that we were going to show ourselves and be watched by the others, while passing in front of them, their claps. When our mothers and fathers were looking at us we were becoming more emotional.” Semih Kahraman

“I don’t know but I was very sad during the 10th of November. I was about to cry, our teachers were as well. Now I look at my children and don’t see the same feelings. The 10th of November wasn’t celebrated excitedly, no, namely we, I felt sad at that time. The 10th of November was something, an effective day for me. For me we were supposed to feel sad. The leader had died, Atatürk had died, the leader of Turkey. Now I can’t see that excitement from the children but were we right or are they? I don’t know it, I can’t judge it.” Özer Yıldız

“The most influential one was the Children’s Day; the 23th of April was affecting us. We were preparing a lot for that. Our clothes, we mostly came for dancing (folklör) on Saturdays. The other days were full. Then there was school until Saturday. So we were coming to school to exercise, we liked dancing. I don’t know it was beautiful since I was dancing as well.” Nadire Kaya

“The 10th of November was not a day for entertainment but it was rather a mourning day if we think it as a mourning day, it was. We couldn’t laugh, it was impossible. The white collars over our uniforms were taken off since people were to mourn, they were not being worn. The flags were hung at the middle of the pole. The poems about Atatürk were read, speeches were done, and our teachers were reading books. Today’s 10th of November is very different from that of that day. Our teachers were creating such an atmosphere that as if we had lost our mothers our fathers. Our teachers and we had such a mourning.” İsmail Y. Dağlı

According to the narratives of the children studying both at the center and periphery, it is understood that their families had either prepared special clothes or bought new ones for the ceremonies to have been worn. However, these clothes vary from the center to the periphery. Unlike the students who studied at the schools situated at the periphery, those who studied at the city center, as I call it center, celebrated the Children’s Day by performing richer and various activities and wearing various types of clothes. This indicates to which social and economic environment they belonged. The celebrations and games performed in the public schools and private schools at the center have the specialties or features of people having better life standards. For example, both Tansel Yörük and Nihal Asyalı who studied at private schools at center express both the preparations and celebrations for the Children’s Day as:

“I remember the 23th of April; we were celebrating it of course. For instance, our school garden was being decorated with balloons. As the school had the garden, the guardians of the children were coming and then flaky pastries and cream cakes were being cut. The school–family union had prepared a special cream cake, all the students were given from that cream cake. Also shows were done by the children at the end of the year. These shows were definitely presented in a hotel salon. Special clothes were made for these shows. Our hair was put into different forms. I still have my fourth and fifth grades photos, not the third grade ones.

There were 23th April balls. We had shows; we were playing games at these shows at that time. There were English theaters at that time, we knew songs in English, and we even could memorize songs in English.”
Tansel Yörük

Although the 10th of November is not celebrated it because it is the death of Atatürk but some of the students are confusing it with other celebrations like the 23th of April. They are unconsciously saying as celebration for the tenth of November.

“I remember well. For example, I was deeply influenced by the 10th of November and it was fully felt from heart and that day passed with our cry. Because this day was celebrated well, the whole city was going with roses at that day for example. All the school was passing in front of Atatürk’s bust with respect and leaving flowers there. After that there was the İstiklal Marşı (the Turkish National Anthem). Either at the previous or at the same day we were visiting Anıtkabir (The Atatürk’s Mausoleum). Therefore, I can remember that day well. I remember the 23th of Aprils, very beautifully, namely they were celebrated magnificently. All the classrooms were being decorated well. All the notice boards were prepared. Then special shows for that day were presented. There was a special chorus for that day. For that purpose, the preparations were starting one or two months ago. Then our things were beautiful. For instance, our reading festivals were also well prepared. That is, all the teachers, students, there was no student left at a corner who did not want to read. In other words, everybody was taking part by the teachers. Then our music teachers were very talented persons, for example we were really preparing for our music lessons by listening to classical music from the records, by hearing and seeing the notes and our teachers were busy and efforts were intensive for these rituals.”
Nihal Asyalı

The students who studied in the city centers express their clothes and activities as indicated below:

“I used to love the 23th of April. The 23th of April activities were great at our school. There happened the dance shows, the poems were read. Our dancing clothes were researched and we could find them with our opportunities of that time. Now everything is different. We could have beautiful clothes with the opportunities of that period. Things were tried to be searched and found in the Çıkıkçılar Yokuşu (the Çıkıkçılar Hill). Nice clothes were made. Well we were able to find beautiful poems, reading poems was something nice for us for example, that is, we read poems.” Gül Çağla

Moreover, Feyza Börekçi says that;

“All the ceremonies were celebrated. The saddest one was the Atatürk’s anniversary date but the most cheerful one was the 23th of April. It was probably the excitement of being child. We had clothes; different types of

clothes were worn by the students. The students' parents selected and sewed them. Since everybody wore these dresses we loved the 23th of April." Feyza Börekçi

Those who studied primary schools in the periphery had less choices and opportunities of the dresses they were wearing during the ceremonies. The activities taking place in the periphery vary from those of the center. The games and races performed in the periphery belong to the features of those which were more commonly seen in the rural areas. For instance, the races of these ceremonies were in the form of *eating yoghurt, breaking eggs*. Recai Öz recalls his memories like this:

"Among the ceremonies, I was mostly influenced by the 23th of April. Particularly the Opening of the Turkish Grand National Assembly was celebrated in good spirits at school. Of course we were very young at that time so it mostly had impact over us. Also the 29th of October, the Celebration of Republic, was important. Our school had such things. I best can remember the children ceremony. As they were playing very interesting games at that period; eating apple game, eating simit (ring shaped savory roll covered with sesame seeds), camel wrestling, yoghurt eating race, breaking eggs race, carrying an egg in a spoon in the mouth race. There were such races. Even after these races, a misket (local dance) and various types of dances were performed. They were celebrated in good spirits. These periods were blessing for us, I can remember them well." Recai Öz

"On the 23th of April, the Turkish National Anthem was being read. Then, we were boiling eggs and taking them to school, there were races at that time. The spoon was being put into mouth and there was an egg in the spoon, there was a distance to run for. You were expected to go to the determined point and come back. Then, we were putting ourselves into bags, there were such games. We were trying to attach the rope to the needle while running, such things. It was beautiful. It was more cheerful." Bediha Soylu

Additionally, the activities performed in the schools that were in the periphery have been found as important ones by the students and their families.

"Now, the 23th of April, the most, was seen as festival in the place where we were. Namely, by saying festival I mean it was like a great festivity, the festival performed in our place. The school had just been opened and thus nobody had seen anything, and the villagers knew nothing. From the children to the old people, everybody was gathering for the shows. And there were plays, plays as well. Then there were the bag races, egg race I mean. There was a prize for the races at that time the one who wins gets the prize. The simit race, bag races were all organized but it was passing like a festival, it was very different." Taha Koyuncu

“Yes, our 23th of April ceremonies were great. Since it was children’s holiday, since it was our holiday, we joined and celebrated it actively. There was the band, we had the band team. There were exercises and there was the march of the band in the main street in village, the band was walking through all the streets of the village. The sound of the band was very beautiful. The students were in line as two or three in the queue following the band with flags in the village. It was great. I best keep the 23th of April in mind, the ceremony I remember best.” İshak Y. Dağlı

“For example, on the 23th of April there was a beautiful ceremony. Even I danced, very nice entertainments, all the villagers gathered, such nice shows were performed. Then games were organized at nights, like plays, there were beautiful games.” İclal Çağla

“They are great... They were great. At our period, particularly at primary school, at high school we were competing. I can remember it well. At the 23th April ceremony we symbolized the ammunition carrying people. It was a great show. There was even an original tumbrel that is, ox cart with its oxen. People were carrying bullets with their play dresses. People were with beard, now I can imagine that day, it was great and in good spirits at that time. During the ceremony, whatever each school symbolizes, it was coming with that and in the end the best school was being chosen.” Ayhan Arı

Another difference appearing between the narratives of students studying in both the center and periphery is that they have negative narratives about the ceremonies. Unlike those who studied in the periphery and mention nothing negatively about the ceremonies, some of those who studied in the center are criticizing the ceremonies. This shows that the ideas (mostly the ideological values) which could be indoctrinated to the students both by the ceremonies and the activities done during them mostly are successfully given to the students. However, this does not happen all the time, it is limited in the center rather than the periphery. Therefore, some of the students at the center have critical approaches about the ceremonies.

Okan Özdemir who finds the ceremonies just as a duty to be fulfilled indicates that;

“I don’t have much about the official ceremonies, their activities, routine celebrations, some rituals and in my mind actually. We were not joining them for a purpose but just for a duty. We did not have much consciousness about them. I am saying it for the meaning and importance of the day. We are here, but what for? This was not very significant for us, it was just a ritual. We were just fulfilling the ritual.” Okan Özdemir

Besides, they say that they were standing for a long time during the ceremonies, thus the ceremonies were repellent to them. For instance, Fuat Karadeniz and Mahir Balkız’s narratives support the repulsiveness of the ceremonies for some students.

“I have always something to those ceremonies for a long time...they seem too far for me, and seem so cold. One of the reasons of this is that it was a cold day, now I do not remember which commemoration, which

ceremony it was. We were extremely; I have never been cold like that in my life. I thought myself how they brought and left us there for such a long time and left us standing there, a lot of students were waiting for the director of national education or the administrator of the city who was going to come. Each part of my body had been caught.” Fuat Karadeniz

“We were gathering on the 23th of April morning, there, we were going to the Eyüp Stadium. There were the ceremonies at Eyüp Stadium. But, what I remember is that I was bored at the ceremonies. Under the sun, I was feeling very tired. I remember my exhaustion. In other words, something else, I don’t remember that I enjoyed the ceremonies.” Mahir Balkız

Both Aydın Çobanoğlu and Ayla Arslan criticize what they had lived during the ceremonies.

“I can’t say that the official ceremonies created such an enthusiasm. Poems were read. The students were spouting the poems. As I said I recited once, once or twice. In order not to spoil my memorization, I got strained. I think everybody had such thing so as not to forget it or to keep it in mind. Namely, not forgetting the memorization, it wasn’t very comfortable. As I felt the other also must have lived the same difficulties. Yet, there was some pride. Of course, those ceremonial things, then at the end we were saying the İstiklal Marşı.” Aydın Çobanoğlu

“The most influential one, as it was the ceremony, I have the same idea now. It is a thought left from that day I think. I think the ceremonies are not being well-organized in Turkey. It is something left from the childhood. Because, the ceremonies days are something, complexity in our country. This is what I have felt since my childhood. I can’t say that there was a very influential activity which had impact over me unfortunately. As even I did not find the classroom order in the ceremony space, and it disturbed me.” Ayla Arslan

In addition to these examples, Nalan Dertli mentions that she did not understand why people were crying on the 10th of November at that time.

“Even Atatürk, the 10th of November had impact over me when I came Ankara. In İzmir there was no such cry, I don’t know I might have grown a bit more probably, We didn’t commemorate that much, but in Ankara everybody was crying on the 10th of November. Frankly speaking, I could not find peoples’ that much crying.” Nalan Dertli

CONCLUSIONS

Studying the 1970s’ primary school children’s narratives about the official ceremonies under the light of center-periphery variable has showed that the children of that time can particularly remember the 23th of April called also as the Children’s

Day and the 10th of November, the date of Atatürk's death and the 29th of October, the date of the foundation of Modern Turkey. While they were trying to recall the ceremonies, they were trying to give meaning to these ceremonies. This is what oral history methodology fulfills in historical studies. (Counce, 1994). Although their narratives have some similarities while remembering these ceremonies they also have differences in terms of being either at the schools in the center or being in that of periphery. The similarities are more about how happy they were on the Children's Day since it was their day. They can easily remember the activities they took part in, and the clothes made for them for that special day. Moreover they indicated their sadness on the tenth of November. Whereas, this sadness may vary from the center to periphery.

While talking about the differences, it is obvious to see that these ceremonies had more impacts on the students and parents in schools taking place in the periphery. It is because they think they were the only activities performed at the schools in the periphery. Another difference is observed from the clothes they were wearing during the ceremonies. The students studying in the center had more opportunities of having different types of clothes rather than those who were studying in the periphery. Also the students at the private schools situated in the center had more activities on the 23th of April and 29th of October. These schools could provide more activities for their students who could perform almost in all activities.

In spite of the fact that the ceremonies could be successful in terms of indoctrination of certain cultural and ideological values being reproduced by remarkable activities we can understand that some of the students in the center can criticize the ceremonies due to the fact that they had to stand for a long time during these ceremonies and were not aware of why they were there and waiting for a long time. We can't come across any critical narratives of those who were at the schools in the periphery in this respect.

After providing some remarkable conclusions derived from the narratives, it seems to be significant to indicate that doing more studies based on the narratives of primary school students about the official school ceremonies will help decrease the gap created as a result of the lack of written sources about what children feel about the ceremonies and to some extent these activities become attractive for the students. There are regulations how to perform these ceremonies and also these ceremonies have been performed for a long time however, there is a shortcoming on the side of primary school students' views about these ceremonies.

The more such studies are done the more we are able to be aware of the necessity of the idea of the children being excluded from the dominant way of doing scientific studies not only in educational but also in historical researches. Therefore, I strongly recommend to those having eager to study on children's history and their educational experience that they ought to be more sensitive to the voices of those who really occupy a huge part in educational activities and are form a great amount of the whole population. Apart from official documents which has shortage of knowledge about children and their education and also form the greatest part of educational studies, more attention is to be given to the oral history methodology to be more aware of what the children think about their educational experiences.

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1970ler Türkiye'si İlkokul Öğrencilerinin Anlatılarında Resmi Törenler

Özet

Bu çalışma 1970ler Türkiye'si ilkokul öğrencilerinin resmi törenlere özgü anlatılarını kapsamaktadır. Amaç, bu yıllarda ilkokulda okuyan öğrencilerin bu törenlerle ilgili anımsadıkları merkez ve çevre eksenlerinden değerlendirip ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bunu gerçekleştirmeye çalışırken öğrencilerin orijinal anlatılarına bağlı kalınarak törenlerde yaşananlar, törenlere özgü hazırlıklar, törenlerin onların belleğinde nasıl yer edindiği kendi ifadeleriyle yansıtılmaktadır. Öğrencilerin anlatıları özellikle 23 Nisan ve 10 Kasım törenlerini sunmaktadır. Burada sözlü tarih yöntemi, önemli bir işlevi yerine getirmektedir. Toplumun önemli bir kesimini oluşturan ve kendileriyle ilgili sınırlı ve sadece resmi belgelerde bilgiye ulaşabileceğimiz çocukların toplumsal olayları belleklerinde nasıl yer edindiklerini anlama olanağına sahip olabilmekteyiz.

Dönemin ilkokul öğrencileri 23 Nisan törenlerini gerçekleştirmiş oldukları eğlenceli etkinliklerle anımsar ve yeniden kurgularken 10 Kasım törenlerini de o dönemki hüznü halleriyle yeniden hatırlayabilmektedirler. O gün üzülmeleri gerektiğini düşünerek yaşadıklarını ve öğretmenlerinin onların üzerinde böyle bir etki yarattığını ortaya koymaktadırlar. Her ne kadar törenleri hoş etkinliklerle anımsayanlar fazla olsa da bu törenlerin onlarda bir eziyete dönüştüğünü belirten ve bunu eleştirenler de bulunmaktadır. Törenlerin onlarda bir görevden ileriye gitmediğini belirtenler de bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca bazı anlatılara göre, törenlerin bir tür egemen ideolojik yapının yeniden üretiminde önemli bir işlev gördüğünü söylemek yanlış olmasa gerek. Bunu belirtenler genellikle kent merkezinde ilkokulu okuyanlardan oluşmaktadır.

İlkokulu çevre olarak tanımladığımız kesimlerde okuyanlar, törenleri buldukları yerlerdeki en önemli etkinlik olarak görmekte ve öyle anılatmaktadır. Bu törenlerde yapmış oldukları yürüyüşleri, giymiş oldukları kıyafetleri, görevlerini heyecanla anılatmaktadırlar. Gerek merkez gerekse çevrede ilkokulu okuyanlar törenlerde aktif görev almışlarsa, o törenleri daha iyi anılatmakta ve duygulanarak yeniden kurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Resmi törenler, ilkokul öğrencileri, sözlü tarih yöntemi.