

Article

Religious Necropolitical Propaganda in Educational Materials for Children

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Abstract: Even though Turkey's ruling party's (Justice and Development Party, the AKP) nation-building and desired citizen creation policies have been studied, its use of necropolitical narratives and propaganda in education has not been investigated. This paper addresses this gap by examining how the Turkish state ruled by the AKP has propagated its religious necropolitical narrative through the national curriculum and Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in school textbooks, and magazines and comic books for children. The paper shows that these texts and comics try to indoctrinate children into a religious cult of martyrdom in different ways by encouraging them to view tragic death and getting killed for the nation as a positive event. This paper argues that these propaganda efforts are part of a religious necropolitical indoctrination campaign that seeks to create a new Islamist and jihadist generation of lifelong supporters of the AKP, which portrays itself in the educational texts as the embodiment of Islam, the Muslim Turkish nation and even the global Muslim community (ummah). This new religious generation is expected to believe that dying for the Islamist populist authoritarian regime is the greatest honour a person can bring upon themselves. This paper contributes to the necropolitics literature by showing that not only adults but also children have been targeted by authoritarian rulers' necropolitical propaganda attempts to create desired citizens who are ready to die for the regime, believing this is a religious obligation. Further research is needed to assess if and to what extent this propaganda has an impact on children.

Keywords: religion; Islam; Islamism; jihadism; populism; Diyanet; children; education; martyrdom; national curriculum; comic books; Turkey; Erdoğan; AKP



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1. Introduction

In the current expanded understanding of the term, *necropolitics* is the use of concepts of death and the dead to entice the masses, blurring the boundaries between a political community, national cause, and the production of collective memory (Bargu 2019). The fetishisation of death in order to procure a deep sentimental attachment from the mass population is a method of obtaining popular support and is used by many nations throughout the world. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Turkey would be among such nations. Previous research has shown that the current Turkish ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), has constructed a conservative, religious-political paradigm centred around the notions of strong nationhood and religious values.

Similar to many other historical and contemporary contexts, well before the AKP period, blood and death and martyrdom narratives had been used for political purposes in Turkey for myth-making, building a collective memory, inculcating the masses with the nationalistic emotions and fervour, militarism (Altınay 2004) and collective mobilisation (Azak 2007). This outlook has also been propagated and perpetuated by the AKP through national curriculum, media, popular culture, law and state-controlled religious institutions (Yanık and Hisarhoğlu 2019, p. 55). There are few scholarly studies of Turkey that investigate the relationship between democracy, biopolitics and sovereign violence in light of the

theoretical arsenal of the necropolitical problem (For recent examples, see [Ahmetbeyzade 2008](#); [Akıncı 2018](#); [Bargu 2019](#); [Islekel 2017](#); [Zengin 2016](#)). On the other hand, although the populist legitimisation of the authoritarian AKP rule, its nation-building and desired citizen creation (such as raising a pious generation) policies and its use of informal law to change state and society have been studied ([Yilmaz 2021, 2022a, 2022b](#)), the AKP's use of necropolitics in education has not been studied.

School education and textbooks are the significant and effective construction tools of nationhood used by the states ([vom Hau 2009](#)). New generations are socialised through the educational parameters of the government, which manipulates people based on its ideological paradigms. Turkish governments are not exempt from such statements. All governments of Turkey, in one way or another, have utilised the education curriculum as an ideological tool to construct ideal citizens, favouring the dominant perspective of their time ([Kaya 2016](#), p. 119; [Nahmiyaz 2018](#)). Even after the pro-EU reforms, the textbooks were “still imbued with an exclusive and narrow definition of nationalism and citizenship, backed by the myth of origin, ethnocentrism and essentialism” ([Çayır 2009](#), p. 39; see also [İnce 2012](#); [Çayır 2015](#)).

The literature has also shown that the use of textbooks and national curriculum by the government elites has gained both Islamist and anti-Western outlooks as the AKP veered away from democracy (as of the 2010s). A recent report on textbooks written before and after the 2017 curriculum reform analysed sixteen textbooks with a focus on secularism and gender equality and found that both the 2016 and 2017 textbooks were written from a Turkish–Islamic Synthesis ideology, but the 2017 textbooks were additionally “based on political-Islamist discourse and issues related to women and gender equality have been almost totally removed” ([Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2018](#), p. 3). Although both the 2016 and 2017 grade nine religious culture and morality textbooks are Sunni-centred and deny other sects and beliefs and values that are not religion-based, the 2017 textbook also has a predominant political-Islamist discourse ([Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2018](#)).

In this context, this paper will deal with the question of how the AKP has been necropolitically propagating Islamic concepts, such as jihad and martyrdom, within the national curriculum and school textbooks, including some of the kids' magazines and comic books prepared for the children by Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı).

2. Methodology

The literature on the AKP's authoritarianisation is in near consensus that, even though the AKP showed some authoritarian tendencies in its second term between 2007–2011, it was still engaged in pro-European democratisation reforms. However, after it managed to be rid of the Kemalist tutelage led by the army with a constitutional change referendum in 2010 and its third general election victory in 2011, the AKP took an authoritarian turn. This authoritarian turn became clearer when the AKP responded to the peaceful Gezi protests in mid-2013 with the police force and a populist conspiratorial narrative. Especially after the mysterious coup attempt of July 2016, the AKP's use of a necropolitical narrative has intensified. Thus, this paper looked at the period between 2011 and 2022, with a special focus on the post-coup attempt period since it provides rich empirical evidence. Even though the literature focusing on the AKP's policies on education in previous times will also be taken into account, this study scanned and collected data on the pro-Islamist changes that have been made in the country's education system since 2011. The legislative activities for these reforms, the AKP leaders' declarations and statements in favour of these changes, academic reports on the issue, evidence provided by civil society groups and the opposition figures on Islamisation, and the media reports on these changes were all collected and systematically analysed from the perspective of necropolitics. The issues, discussions, debates, polemics, messages, statements, policies, curriculum content and educational materials targeting children in relation to necropolitics, martyrdom, jihad, dying and killing for the nation, God, Islam, state and jihad have been carefully scanned in the collected

materials. This paper does not list all of these but presents a sufficient number of them to argue its case that, after its authoritarian turn and coupled with its strategy of raising a pious generation, the AKP has used education to target children with necropolitical content. This study has only investigated the supply side of the AKP's necropolitics, i.e., its content and propaganda, and does not aim to look at the actual impact this content and propaganda have had on society, especially the children. This is a matter that needs further research.

3. Necropolitics and Religion

Necropolitics was originally defined as the right of the sovereign to determine who shall live and who shall die (Mbembe 2003, 2019). Rulers who employ necropolitics decimate populations through massacres or commit populations to unliveable conditions in which they are destined to a death-in-life (Mbembe 2003, p. 21). To date, further studies have complicated the concept and offered new dimensions of necropolitics. For instance, one use of the term refers to how the realm of the dead can be a site of violence so that a frightening lesson is made out of the dead body for the living dissidents (Bargu 2016; 2019, p. 17). In this usage, necropolitics is not the reduction of the living to "the status of living dead" but "the dishonouring, disciplining and punishment of the living through the utilisation of the dead as postmortem objects and sites of violence" (Bargu 2019, p. 9). The term has also been used in examining how it is operative in courts, prisons, martyrdom, gender politics, collective memory, reparation claims and political cemeteries where either the noble martyrs are buried (Cemetery of Martyrs) or only the condemned dissidents' corpses are buried (Cemetery of Traitors) (Bargu 2019, pp. 5–6; Balkan 2019).

The term has also been applied to show how authoritarian governments employ different politicisations of death: they control the narrative around the news of death to maintain discursive hegemony regulating death; depoliticise death to eliminate the risk of dissident mobilisation after deadly incidents; normalise death as an inherent feature of some citizens' occupational, socioeconomic and—in some cases—gender position (Bakiner 2019, p. 26).

The studies on necropolitics are not limited to states. For instance, testimonies of individuals living in towns overrun by organised crime and resistance groups in Mexico (Emerson 2019) show another manifestation of necropolitics that decentralises death beyond the state to involve a range of actors (cartels, vigilante groups) that dislodge questions of administration.

The term has also been expanded to illustrate how the religious populist ruling party in Turkey fetishises death for the nation. The AKP has employed discursive and representational necropolitics that fetishises death for the nation and is fascinated with and champions death on behalf of the nation (Carney 2018, pp. 94, 101). While the counter-jihadist narrative of the right-wing populists in the west claims that the Western Judaeo-Christian civilisation is under existential attack by a totalitarian Other called Islam (Marzouki et al. 2016), the Islamist populist AKP has been mirroring this narrative and accusing the Crusader West of waging war against the Muslim World led by Turkey. Thus, the AKP has been trying to mobilise its supporters against the opposition with this civilisational populist narrative that encourages self-sacrifice, dying and killing in defence of the AKP especially since the Gezi Protests of 2013, as the party represents the people who are not only the citizens of Turkey but also all Muslims of the World.

For many centuries, nationalistic and religious rhetoric from many countries and cultures has expressed encouragement of self-sacrifice for a greater cause. The religions of Egypt, Mesopotamia and ancient Greece all had notions of heroic sacrifice (Szyska 2004). The martyrdom narrative is a very powerful tool and weapon of political action and is employed in politics to create and maintain popular support for nationalist and religious causes (Sluka 1997, p. 49). In many societies, martyrdom played several roles, such as forging authority, escalating the struggle, reinforcing the ranks, legitimising the alternative culture and creating a sense of differentiation and animosity against the enemy (Hatina 2014, p. 233). Martyrdom narratives have "functioned to forge a sense of solidarity,

enhance mass mobilization, and preserve the sacred values of the community". (Dorraj 1997, p. 489). Here, martyrdom has a dual role: it delegitimises the enemy and, at the same time, consolidates the status of the martyr's group (Klausner 1987, pp. 231–32).

Among world religions, Islam is most well-known for its emphasis on the "virtues" of martyrdom (See in detail Cook 2007; Hatina 2014; and Khosrokhavar 2014). Apart from a jihadist interpretation of Sunni Islam, martyrdom is also a central part of the narrative of contemporary Shia, Alevi and other sects in Islam within the framework of secularisation and modernisation (Khosrokhavar 1995, 2005, 2009; Varzi 2007; Shams 2019; Rolston 2020).

The notion of martyrdom in Islam underwent a number of changes in modern times and has been turned into a means for generating revolutionary (mass) mobilisation (Khosrokhavar 2014). This notion was revived, along with jihad, in the 19th century for mobilising the masses against the imperialist invaders (Khosrokhavar 2014, p. 169). In line with the revolutionary tendencies in the Muslim World in the 20th century, the notion of martyrdom became "a mass phenomenon related to the mobilisation of the people, mainly youths, by governments (in Iran the revolutionary government), as a means to accomplish their goals in their struggle against the enemy (the Iraqi Army in the long war between 1980 and 1988)" (Khosrokhavar 2014, p. 169). The major ideological contribution of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran "was a reshaping of martyrdom, claiming that to die as a martyr was an accomplishment promoting the worldwide Islamic Revolution" (Khosrokhavar 2014, p. 169). During the Iran–Iraq War, repeated invocations of martyrdom urged deadly or even suicidal behaviours and self-sacrificial violence (Khosrokhavar 1995, pp. 26–30). The promotion of self-sacrifice "evolved to serve the new martial circumstances; a mystical poetic militarization emerged, that sought to transform physical loss into spiritual gain" (Shams 2019, p. 11; see also Varzi 2007). The concept has also been used to create and mobilise suicide bombers "who enter the fray against an enemy who is technologically and economically far superior (usually within non-state networks, be they transnational, as in the case of al-Qaida, or national, such as the Chechen and Palestinian attacks against the Russian and the Israeli governments, respectively)" (Khosrokhavar 2014, p. 169).

In the Turkish case, since the 1980s, and even more so during the AKP period, the themes of martyrdom and blood have not only become more frequently invoked by the ruling elite but have also become everyday themes for other strata of society as well (See for example Bircan 2014).

3.1. The Necropolitical Use of Martyrdom in the AKP Authoritarianism

Erdoğan and AKP have consistently used the militarist, nationalist and necrogeopolitical culture of Turkey to rally the people around the flag. For example, in one case, when the tension and conflict between the Turkish forces and the Kurdish community were accelerated by the AKP for political ends, Erdoğan spotted a 6-year-old girl in the crowd from a stage where he was leading a rally. She was dressed in military-style camouflage and was wearing a maroon beret, and he asked for the girl to be lifted towards the stage to meet with him. However, she was shy and began to cry. After kissing her on both cheeks, Erdoğan turned to the flag-waving crowd and said:

"Look what you see here! Girl, what are you doing here? We have our maroon berets here, but maroon berets never cry. God bless her. Her Turkish flag is in her pocket. If she becomes a martyr, God willing, she will be wrapped with it. She's ready for everything. Isn't she?" (The New York Times 2018)

In addition to the formation of necropolitical spaces around Turkey, it has been argued by scholars that the AKP engaged in representational necropolitics that fetishises death for the nation and has shown a fascination with and championing of death on behalf of the nation, which has stark implications for everyday life and politics (Carney 2018, pp. 94, 101). Scholars note, especially following the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, the necropolitical narrative based on martyrdom has become a consistent and strong theme in the discourse of Erdoğan and the AKP (Yanık and Hisarlıoğlu 2019, p. 57; Baykan et al. 2021).

Of the 251 people who died during the failed 15 July coup attempt in 2016, 182 were civilians. The AKP declared that the fallen civilians were martyrs (Bakiner 2019, p. 29). As quickly as possible, statues of those martyrs were erected, monuments depicting that “bloody” night were built, and special prayer sessions were organised in memory of the martyrs. The names of the people who were killed during the coup attempt (the martyrs) were given to streets, parks and public transport stations, with a martyr (şehit) prefix to their names (Bişkin 2017). The first week of the school year has been officially dedicated to the subject of the “epic” of 15 July and the martyrs who fell that night, and all teachers have been obliged to fulfil this task by the government (Yanık and Hisarlıoğlu 2019, pp. 57–58).

The 2016 coup pushed such polarisation of society to the forefront of the contemporary socio-politics of Turkey. Religious notions of jihad, self-sacrifice and martyrdom, in particular, were used to mobilise the mass public against state enemies who, by correlation, were those against the state religio-political agenda—dividing them along the lines of pro- and anti-Erdoğanists (Yilmaz 2018; Yilmaz 2021). This not only set apart the anti-state groups but also the minority ethnic and religious groups. On one side of this narrative were “Sunni, Islamist, neo-Ottomanist, anti-Western, Turkish nationalist citizen” who were deemed to be pious and deserving, while on the other end of this barrier were secularists, Alevis, Kurds and Gulenists who were subjected to the treatment of “otherizing” (Yilmaz and Shipoli 2022). As most of the necropolitical propaganda discussed in this paper, such a state-enforced narrative was also perpetuated through the Turkish education system.

3.2. *Jihad and Martyrdom as Necropolitical Instruments in Education*

The Turkish education system, introduced by Kemal Atatürk, was fashioned into a Westernised education system designed to propagate Atatürk’s notions of the ideal modern Turkish citizen. Education was secularised, and the curriculum was formed to diverge away from traditional religious values—religion was distanced from the school curriculum, and education was made secular. The socio-political motives behind changing the education system at that time were to propagate Atatürk’s political motives, creating a platform for reinforcing his pro-Western, secular nationalist ideological vision for the country (Lüküslü 2016; Yilmaz 2018, 2021; Yilmaz and Albayrak 2022).

During the AKP period, religious schools were expanded through government funding and propagated into being the primary source of education for the Turkish youth (Butler 2018). Another similar religious education institute utilised to promote the “pious citizen” propaganda was the Diyanet (The Directorate of Religious Affairs). Amidst the expansion of religious education institutes, Diyanet maintained the supply of religious scholars and teachers that would go to such institutes to train the youth. They were responsible for hiring and sending imams, preachers and Qur’anic School Instructors to schools for “elective” religious courses such as the “Quran” and the “Life of the Holy Prophet”. Additionally, almost every mosque has been reshaped and extended to have a Qur’anic course saloon, which receives primary and secondary school children regularly derived from the schools in cooperation with the school management. Aside from supplying religious instructors, the Diyanet was also responsible for increasing the demand for religious education. Many critics, with the Republic People’s Party (CHP) at the forefront, deemed AKP policies to be influenced by ideological reasons rather than pedagogical ones. To such allegations, Erdoğan responded,

“We will raise a pious generation. Do you expect a party with a conservative democratic identity to raise atheist youth?” (Hurriyet 2012)

Well before the AKP, the textbooks were full of terms such as enemy, homeland and martyrdom. Narratives on the Turkish War of Independence and “love of the homeland and its flag as a defining characteristic of Turkish society as well as the willingness to die during military service are emphasized and presented as the ideal attitudes expected from Turkish citizens” (Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2019, pp. 22–23). The notion of death and blood is deeply ingrained in the minds of the youth populous by adding such religious connotations within their curriculum and reinforcing it through national outlets.

A prominent example of this is the mention of martyr blood on Turkish soil being glorified in the national anthem. Two stanzas within the full version of the national anthem written by Mehmet Akif Ersoy include, “*Turkish soil is unlike any other soil because Turks are sons of martyrs . . . and if one squeezes Turkish soil nothing but martyrs’ blood would come out*” (a rough translation provided by Yanık and Hisarlıoğlu 2019). This has intensified in the AKP period, and jihadist elements have been introduced.

The National Educational Ministry has added some Islamist terminologies to the new 2017–2018 curricula de jure beginning from the sixth grade (Bilefsky 2017). The new curriculum particularly includes necropolitical “values”, such as self-devotion, self-sacrifice and martyrdom under the title of national and religious values (Çepni 2018). It is especially significant that in the new curriculum, jihad has been placed as one of the essential pillars of Islam, along with prayer, fasting, etc. (BirGün 2017a). With the statements of the AKP deputy Ahmet Hamdi Çamlı, who is also a member of Parliament’s national education commission:

“Jihad is Islam’s most prior element . . . Jihad comes before prayer. When we look at Ottoman sultans, nearly all of them didn’t even go to hajj in order not to abandon jihad. Our ministry made a very on-point decision. If prayers are the pillar of the religion, jihad is the tent. Without the pillars, the tent is useless”. (Osborne 2017; BirGün 2017b)

For the AKP, jihadi knowledge is so essential in education that it also precedes any other scientific subject and education. For instance, Çamlı also stated that “there is no use in teaching math to a child who does not know the concept of jihad” (Osborne 2017). In the same sense, the minister of education, İsmet Yılmaz, explained that the concept of jihad must be introduced within the context of loving a nation to school children. Yılmaz said: “Jihad is an element in our religion. Our duty is to teach every concept deservedly and correct things that are wrongly perceived” (Altuntaş 2017).

Additionally, the schools have become a necropolitical setting for the AKP, in which death and martyrdom images, stories, corners, and conferences are regularly displayed and organised. Children are exposed to such indoctrination so that they become pro-supportive of the regime. Some of the exemplary figures, such as the family members of “martyred” ones, have been regularly invited to many educational conferences and events organised by the National Ministry in various cities around Turkey to address children and teachers on the importance of martyrdom to the homeland. For instance, a “martyred” governor, Fatih Safitürk’s father, addresses the youth by saying:

“We are sacrificing our children for the homeland. Not only our children, but also we are ready to die, we are continuously ready to join to the front line. Owing to the fact that we sacrifice martyrs, we can easily perform our prayers [at mosques], we sleep at home, and walk in the downtown and the in the market”. (AA 2018)

Erdoğan, in his addresses, wants pro-AKP students to carry the *struggle* right into the hearts of schools against the “other students”:

“The path of our youths means the path of our Turkey. If our faith is complete, if our belief is strong enough [. . .] then we can bring the great powers to heel. Today, it is time for struggle. You shall struggle at your schools, struggle at libraries, struggle at NGOs and at home. You shall struggle with your friends at your schools, especially in your friend circles through your ideas. In the same manner as you did in July 15, you shall struggle against the tanks, fighter jets, helicopters. As happening in the Euphrates Shield or Olive Branch [military] operations, you shall struggle with them, becoming their nightmare”. (Cumhuriyet 2018)

Upon Erdoğan’s speech, children begin to shout, “Reis! take us to Afrin” to fight in the military operation taking place in the north of Syria; Erdoğan suggests: “God willing, we will go together” (Cumhuriyet 2018).

This necropolitical use of jihad and martyrdom in education began with the cooperation between the Turkish national educational ministry and Diyanet in 2014–2015, under

the guise of Ottoman-modelled *Sıbyan Mektepleri* (Infants school), in which children between the ages of 4–6 years old are educated by the short-term certified tutors in the ministry's public education centres, as selected by the local authorities (Cumhuriyet 2017). It is reported that in Infants school, the children are heavily invested in the “beauties of the hereafter World” rather than the worldly life and glorification of death. Many cases reported that several families suffered from a heavy bombardment of necropolitical use of jihad and death by the regime apparatuses over their children.

There are also other ways of imposing necropolitics. For instance, during the Turkish military operations in the eastern part of the country and Syria, the children and parents in schools have been informed of an activity called “prayer chain” (orchestrated by the AKP regime), which is set for the military forces so that they kill and destruct all of their enemies (Gökdemir 2016). Additionally, in some of the schools, children are charged with other activities, such as “hatim chain”, by schoolteachers or the officials from the Diyanet in order to make the souls of the fallen restful. In the circles, some goals have been provided to the children and the parents, such as repetitively reciting specific Quranic verses during the given periods of the day (Gökdemir 2016). Without a doubt, these activities are meant to implement the notion of martyrdom and jihad in education to shape children's mindsets in a necropolitical environment. As a consequence of such heavy necropolitical investment and legitimisation of death in education, some children began to see death as salvation in that they were told that they would become sinful as they became older (Öztürk 2017) since it was propagated by the pro-AKP religious men on TV channels, in kids' magazines and at the Friday sermons that martyrdom cleans up all sins (Diyanet Çocuk 2016). It is also reported that some parents have complained that they began to receive questions from their children, such as “this world is much boring, when will we die” (Cumhuriyet 2017).

The intensity of the use of jihad and martyrdom within the necropolitical frame is much greater and more explicit in the İmam Hatip school since those children are already believed to come from pious families and Islamic environments, so they are ready to embrace such ideological tunes. These necropolitical themes are combined with the ultimate Islamist idealism, that is, to establish an Islamic state in lieu of a republican one. Accordingly, for instance, in a pamphlet named *İmam Hatiplilik Şuuru* (Consciousness of being an İmam Hatip student, released by the AKP-funded Ensar Foundation and written by renowned AKP mentor and theologian Hayrettin Karaman), it has been stated that a self-sacrificing population is required for the struggle of the Islamic State (Bulut 2017). This population, a constituent of İmam Hatip students, is called the “Ensar generation” by Karaman, whose aim is to establish an Islamic State (Bulut 2017). In the pamphlet distributed to the children in schools, it has been demanded of the students to give diligently, including their lives (Bulut 2017), and, according to Karaman, those teachers working in İmam Hatip schools are traitors if they neglect such Islamist principles to indoctrinate the students (Bulut 2017).

Similar to the “prayer chain” or “hatim chain”, where the children become a significant part in the creation of such a necropolitical mission, fourth- and fifth-grade students were sporadically assigned to write letters to “martyred” soldiers in the Gallipoli Campaign, or civilians who lost their lives during the failed coup, or the ones fighting in the South-eastern, Kurdish-majority parts of the country, or the Olive Branch Operation in Syria in order to create organic and sensual links between the martyrs and the school children (BirGün 2018).

The National Educational Ministry has added some of the heavily politicised Islamist terminologies, such as jihad, to the new 2017–2018 curricula de jure beginning from the sixth grade (Bilefsky 2017). The new curriculum also includes other “useful” values, such as self-devotion and -sacrifice, heroism, ummah, national conscience and martyrdom, gathered under the title of national and religious values (Çepni 2018).

Right after the coup, on 19 September 2016, eight-page booklets and in-class activities were organised in schools to teach children about the failed coup attempt. Constructing academic activities around “July 15 Victory of Democracy and the Commemoration of Martyrs”, “Martyrdom of democracy” for the national cause was glorified as students were expected to listen to seminars, write letters and read poems to glorify those who had

lost their lives in the struggle against government opposition (Akşam 2016). In this vein, Yilmaz and Erturk (2021a, 2021b) argued that the AKP government utilised the political polarisation around the 2016 coup to create a concept of martyrdom that includes civilians through perpetuating the notions of “sacrifice their lives for the leader’s political cause” and justifying violence and revenge against anti-state behaviours. Such tactics were described as “necropolitical acts”.

Contemporary Turkish and World History Books provided an in-depth explanation of the events of the coup, giving comprehensive information about the martyrs of the struggle. The religious text was cited alongside this to connect religious notes within the national struggle—quoting Surah Al Baqarah from the Quran (2:154):

“And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, ‘They are dead.’ Rather, they are alive, but you perceive [it] not”.

The curriculum textbooks also quote one of Erdoğan’s favourite poems, which he recites in public speeches broadcast live on almost all TV stations in Turkey. The poem by Arif Nihat Asya, entitled “The Flag”, is known for its militaristic language and glorification of martyrdom while expressing respect for the Turkish flag:

“O the white and scarlet adornment of the blue skies,
The bridal gown of my sister, *the shroud of our martyrs*,
Radiating luminous lights, undulating gracefully!
I read your epic and will write your legend.
I will dig a shallow grave for those
Who do not look at you the way I do.
I will ruin the nests of the birds
Who fly by without saluting you.
(...)
Just desire anywhere on earth!
I will hoist you
Wherever you wish!” (Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2019, p. 37, italics are ours)

“Heroism”, “martyrdom”, “veteran status” and “dying and shedding blood” for the homeland from the Kemalist times (Altınay 2004) have been expanded to include the 15 July mysterious coup attempt discussions in the textbooks and “dying for the homeland” no longer entails only fighting against external enemies, but also against traitors and internal enemies (Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2019, p. 24). The books draw an analogy between Turkey’s War of Independence and the 15th of July by using “visuals that accompany stories of 15 July and texts of martyrdom, veteran status, heroism, commemorations, and monuments aim to mythicize the day and transmit it to new generations as a landmark historical event” (Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2019, p. 25). This narrative presents “decent citizens” as those who risk their lives in the fight against treacherous others who attack the homeland and are willing to sacrifice their lives for the homeland (Aratemur-Çimen and Bayhan 2019, p. 26).

Self-sacrifice and death have become inseparable parts of AKP education in schools. In each school, especially after the July 15 failed coup attempt, martyrs’ corners were prepared and decorated with Islamic verses, hadiths and visual pictures depicting martyrdom, in which pupils were indoctrinated with the glorification of death. Even in the kindergartens, commemorative activities were organised; therein, children lie in front of the army tanks during the drama while the provincial directors of national education presented, in which bloody scenes depicting slaughtered bodies were flattered here and there and covered with Turkish flags (BirGün 2016).

3.3. Case Study of Kids' Magazines Prepared by the Diyanet

In accordance with the AKP government's radical necropolitisation of the education and curriculum with the hand of the Educational Ministry, Diyanet and the Directorate of Religious Affairs unprecedentedly have begun to disseminate radical Islamist values, such as death, martyrdom and jihad, to the children in Qur'anic courses and publications for children. These two institutions, the Educational Ministry and the Diyanet, have started to cooperate together on students and schools in parallel with each other. Significantly, the Diyanet has entered into the Educational Ministry's realm for the first time in Republican history, becoming the other pillar of student education. We witness this Diyanet's new role in the books it publishes and sells in Diyanet bookstores. It is possible to find radical, jihadi books in Diyanet bookstores as well as the replete necropolitical themes in the books it publishes. For example, in the comics published in *Diyanet Çocuk Dergisi*, a magazine published by Diyanet for children in April 2016, martyrdom and death were glorified and presented as something that should be desired (Diyanet Çocuk 2016; Cumhuriyet 2016). For example, some of the comics begin with a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, stating that "A martyr would love to return to the world again in order to be martyred 10 times more after the honouring and prestige he/she receive in the heaven" (Diyanet Çocuk 2016, p. 4). In another cartoon, a father says to his son: "How beautiful it is to be a martyr!" Seeing the son, he, therefore, asks, "Can we really want to be martyred ever, dad?" to which the father replies, "Surely son. Who on earth does not want to gain the right to go to heaven!" (Diyanet Çocuk 2016, p. 4). The comics continue with another hadith regarding the importance of martyrdom; according to the hadith in the magazine, "a martyr feels the pain when he/she was slaughtered as much as the one feels the pain when being pinched" (Diyanet Çocuk 2016, p. 4). The related comics are depicted between the father and his son again, during their visit to the martyrs' graveyard, ornamented with the Turkish flags, in order to urge the children that martyrs during the jihad is a sort of painless death:

"The son: Dad, who knows, how they suffered pain when they were being killed, didn't they?

The father: Martyrs do not feel the pain as you think son!"

In the comics, it is underscored that martyrdom is a manly Islamic duty. Hearing the conversation between the son and the dad, the little girl, who is making a solidier salute to her mother, says: "I wish I had been martyred". The mother replies that if she desires to be martyred from the heart, Allah will add this to her good deeds even if she is not martyred (Diyanet Çocuk 2016, p. 4). On the next page, another cartoon begins with a hadith, stating that "God deletes all sins of a martyr except his/her debts"; in this cartoon, a father figure states, showing the graves of martyrs, that "How beautiful, our martyrs resting purified from their sins". Then, the daughter figure asks, "Don't they have any sins?" to which the father replies: "God forgives all the sins of the martyrs, my daughter" (Diyanet Çocuk 2016, p. 4). The last of the cartoons opens with another "military" hadith as well: "the hell-fire cannot touch to the eyes of the ones, whom had stood sentry" (Diyanet Çocuk 2016, p. 4).

Along with Quranic and Prophetic citations on the benefits of martyrdom and death, which have been politicized in favour of the AKP government, Turkish and nationalistic motives have been employed as a secondary path as well in order to incite a nationalistic sense of the people where Islamist ones relegate. This is also the result of the AKP's coalition with the ultra-nationalist party, the MHP. In such necropolitical propagation on the children, the families are also tried to be included. For instance, the Mufti of the Konya Meram Province invites families and children to the organisation *Who is Next for Sentry Duty*, with the quotes of non-Muslim Turkish ideologue Nihal Atsız, stating that:

"A man grows within a cradle,
So as to lie within a grave.
And . . . Heroes die,
So as to keep the homeland alive".

As a result of such a heavy necropolitical investment and death glorification, a family health official employed by the AKP municipality in Istanbul noted: “We witness children between the ages of 4 and 14 frequently in two categories: Either they are acting extremely bold and aggressive in ways that could physically hurt themselves and those around them or they are on the other side of the spectrum with a sincere phobia what we call death anxiety” (Tremblay 2016). Given that the AKP has started to necropolitically indoctrinate education since 2010, this is a new phenomenon that appeared with the AKP government. The official reports several incidents noting that the situation is at an alarming rate; for example, some children were scared that their parents would kill them so that they become martyrs (Tremblay 2016).

4. Conclusions

Even though the AKP had some authoritarian tendencies in its second term between 2007–2011, it clearly took an authoritarian turn after the constitutional referendum in 2010 that helped it rid of the Kemalist secularist tutelage and its third general election victory in 2011. This authoritarian turn became clearer when the AKP responded to the Gezi protests in mid-2013 with police violence and a populist conspiratorial narrative that the protests were organised by the enemies of Turkey, Islam, the Muslim World and the AKP.

Especially after the coup attempt of July 2016, the AKP’s use of a necropolitical narrative has intensified. Thus, this paper has looked at the period between 2011 and 2022, with a special focus on the post-coup attempt period looking for pro-Islamist and jihadist necropolitical content in the legislative activities, the AKP leaders’ declarations and statements in favour of these changes, academic reports on the issue, the evidence provided by civil society groups and the opposition figures on Islamisation and the media reports on these changes. The issues, discussions, debates, polemics, messages, statements, policies, curriculum content and educational materials targeting children in relation to necropolitics, martyrdom, jihad, dying and killing for the nation, God, Islam, state and jihad have been carefully scanned in the collected materials.

This paper has only looked at the propaganda aspect of this phenomenon and argued that the AKP had utilised the national education system as grounds for harbouring its necropolitical propaganda. Within these changes, the most prominent and pressing is the importance of jihad within school textbooks. Jihad, as a religious concept of sacrifice, is altered to be interpreted as a sacrifice for the state, placing it as one of the essential pillars of Islam along with prayer, fasting, etc. The AKP uses jihad to justify a narrative around the glory of giving up one’s life for a cause that is manufactured to be one that reflects the AKP’s own political and ideological values.

The paper contributes to the necropolitics literature by showing that not only adults but also children have been targeted by authoritarian rulers to create desired citizens and raise a very loyal generation who are ready to die for the regime, believing that this is a religious obligation. Further research is needed to see if and to what extent this phenomenon can be observed in other milieus and polities. In addition, since this study has only investigated the supply side of the AKP’s necropolitics (i.e., its content and propaganda and has not looked at the actual impact these have on society, especially the children), further research is needed on this aspect.

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