

# **A Utopian Educator from Turkey: İsmail Hakkı Tongu (1893-1960)**

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## **Abstract**

İ. Hakkı Tonguç was undoubtedly one of the most gifted educational thinkers of his generation. As the architect of a short-lived but highly innovative experiment in the early 20th century Turkey, Village Institutes (Köy Enstitüleri), he certainly made an important contribution to educational theory and practice. On the other hand, despite his theoretical and practical innovations in the field of education, Tonguç still waits for well-deserved and long overdue international recognition. This article aims to introduce the reader to Tonguç. The first section of the article is about the idea of utopia and the need for an "educational utopia." I discuss utopia as an emancipatory practice and claim that it is impossible to make political demands on education without creating an "educational utopia." In the second part, I, present a biography of Tonguç and move into a general discussion about Tonguç's utopia of individual and society. The last part is to focus particularly on his utopia of education. In the article, I focus on Tonguç's radical critiques of traditional school directed at the unequal and alienating practices of schooling, and I draw attention to the similarity between his critiques and the tradition of liberatory pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Emancipatory education, educational utopia, Village Institutes, İsmail Hakkı Tonguç

## **Introduction**

Although there is a broad literature on Village Institutes, which were established in the 1940s and have, since then, been the most and only liberatory educational initiative in the history of Turkish Education, İsmail Hakkı Tonguç, their founding father, remains a mystery that was not sufficiently appreciated even in his own country. In that sense, Tonguç seems to have stayed in the background behind the magnificent gleam of his *opus magnum*: the Village Institutes. However, Tonguç's imagination of education is too

broad to be confined to the Village Institutes, which was an incomplete project launched with the imperative “to prefer the vital to the ideal” and embodies a future perspective that includes answers to contemporary questions in education. Therefore, any comment made on the Institutes without having enough information on Tonguç’s life and his intellectual personality is condemned to be false rather than deficient. Hence, trying to understand the Village Institutes through Tonguç rather than vice versa is a more appropriate approach.

Understanding such a historical figure like Tonguç by no means takes place once and for all. As it is possible to grasp historical realities through various standpoints, it is also possible to depict different profiles of Tonguç depending on where and how to look. Thus, the best approach to studying and understanding Tonguç is to consider him and his works as a historical text that every one can read and interpret in different ways-but as a text that has no innocent readings, as Althusser (1995, p.30) says.

When Tonguç’s works are approached as a whole in terms of content, context, and depth, it can be seen that they are universal and thus make a unique contribution to the liberatory pedagogical tradition. The works he produced in the first half of the 20th century inspired by thinkers of his generation, such as Dewey, Kerschensteiner and Pestalozzi, constitute one of the most creative, productive and original pedagogic theories and studies of his time. As I argue further in the following pages, Tonguç’s writings, like Illich’s, present a radical critique of the traditional institution of school. Like Freire’s pedagogy, Tonguç’s pedagogy is based on the principle of turning the oppressed into agents of transforming their realities. Finally, Tonguç’s approach to intellectuals’ political functions and their relations to society bears a resemblance to that of Gramsci and Foucault. Therefore, Tonguç’s pedagogy, I argue, embodies significant theoretical and practical implications for activists who dedicate their lives to the cause of education of the aggrieved, the oppressed and the subordinate. The main purpose of this study is to contribute to the attempts to give Tonguç the place he deserves in the history of liberatory pedagogy with his original contributions to pedagogical theory and practice.

Yet, the presentation of Tonguç to the English-speaking world in the existing literature seems to be not just insufficient but also problematic in many aspects. The rich pedagogic imagination in his works is mostly ignored, and the subjective comments on

the Village Institutes are defective in presenting him<sup>1</sup> Some critics even depict him as a person devoted to serving a technocratic and a totalitarian regime, and they miss his utopian vision concerning education.<sup>2</sup> It is essential but not enough to look into the Village Institutes in order to understand Tonguç. Before reaching a conviction about Tonguç it is necessary to take his life history and his distinguishing genius as an intellectual into consideration. With this study, I aim to draw attention to the prosperity of Tonguç's pedagogical thoughts and practices and arouse an interest in the English-speaking world to study him at first hand.<sup>3</sup>

Although the major axis of the questions that will accompany my pursuit of drafting the outline of Tonguç's intellectual world is the utopian vision in his pedagogic thoughts and actions, my main question will be about what specifically he contributed to the liberatory pedagogic tradition. While trying to respond to this question, I will try not to get lost amongst the conflicting conclusions reached about Tonguç's personality and pedagogy and the discussions stemming from these conclusions, and I will try to focus on some educational concepts and issues I find directly relevant.

## **EDUCATION AND UTOPIA AS A LIBERATING POLITICAL PRACTICE**

Whether or not to recognize Tonguç as a "utopian in education" is directly related to what is meant by "utopia(n)". I will begin with a discussion on the idea of utopia(n) and why we need an "educational utopia".

### **What is Utopia? Who is a Utopian?**

Kumar (2005) defines utopianism as a criticism against the dilemmas modern society faces and as a farsighted evaluation concerning how these dilemmas can best be resolved. In that sense, utopia is a means of critical analysis on the time and society we live in besides being a founding vision towards future opportunities. In this study, utopia is also considered as a process reconstructing itself again and again, rather than as a closed system defined once and for all. Utopia is not the description of a state; it is a process of critically defining what is supposed to be or what is better, compared with the

existing reality. It is not a longing for a pre-defined society and way of life, but a search for a way of life that enables people to decide together on where to place limits. It is the route, not the destination.

A utopia is an escape neither towards nor from the future. It is not a pipe dream that helps us get away from unbearable problems and flee to the future, nor a way of postponing current responsibilities. It is, in this article, taken as a “liberating political practice,” which is a means of thinking about the future to understand and change the present. For French philosopher Badiou (2003, p. 119), liberating politics is the politics that “always makes something declared impossible seem possible despite the given situation.” It is also a realistic political practice, which is best defined by Che as “desiring the impossible.”

Utopianism is interested in a “virtuous life” or “another world” and puts the emphasis on the emancipation of the individual. Besides, it functions as a purpose, a measure and an alternative paradigm. Taking a radical criticism against the existing social structure into consideration, a utopian, different from a reformist, does not try to amend, legitimize or excuse the existing structure. The utopian basically aims at establishing a different life based upon other principles and values rather than activating this structure by eliminating its failing and problematic components. In this study, the utopian is defined as a radical critic who defends his/her ideas from a “virtuous life” or “a different world” point of view and tries to encourage change through an alternative society project. Advocating, implicitly or explicitly, an alternative world composes the essence of this definition. Unlike the ruling groups that own their existence to the status quo, the utopian asserts that the existing society is not as it should be and is unjust. For the utopian, the status quo is not a natural phenomenon, nor has divine or moral sanctions. Thus, it is open to the individual’s voluntary intervention.<sup>4</sup>

A utopian thought is a form of thought that is not pre-defined and does not limit itself with the fear of applicability. It is not possible to disagree with Adorno regarding that an idea used merely as a means of action and taking its value only from its applicability will, like every instrumental reason, lose its strength.

Yet, there is a general tendency towards placing utopian thought and scientific thought at opposite poles. We cannot think of these two concepts of science and utopia

together as if they contradicted, since positivism, an infantile disease of science, has annihilated the utopian essence in the nature of science as if what is scientific cannot be utopian and vice versa. But, as Haraway also states, “science has always been utopian and visionary, which constitutes one of the reasons why we need it” (as cited in Ross, 1995, p. 21).

### **Why an Educational Utopia?**

Without deciding on what kind of education you desire, that is without creating an educational utopia, it is hard to make a political claim on education. If you do not know the destination, no way takes you there. If you know where to go to, there is always more than one route. In the absence of a notion regarding what ought to be, no assessment or comment can be made. “Alternative education” is only possible when you have an educational utopia and know what kind of education you desire.

To create a utopia means not to attend the existing educational realities and problems within the borders that the status quo defines and the context determined by the capitalist relations of production. It requires looking at all concepts, structures and processes concerning education beginning from its definition in the light of humanitarian purposes and aspirations and designing such structures of education that adapt to people rather than making people adapt to these structures. An educational utopia is to perceive education on the basis that “the emancipation of the individual is the prerequisite for the emancipation of society,” It is not a technical/bureaucratic process to foresee the future of current education, nor is it a speculation towards the future.

The way to overcome the damage given by neo-liberal counter-utopians to our perception of education and to think about future education with liberatory/egalitarian images by using our collective consciousness is to develop an educational utopia. Dealing with education without having a radical future perspective only benefits the existing social order. Lack of utopian consciousness, which is the critical consciousness that helps us step out of the reason creating current problems and producing future educational realities today, is the most important epistemological and methodological obstacle to understanding and making sense of contemporary problems of education.

Today's critic can envisage "a different education" only by contemplating education in a utopian way; only in this way can we contribute to the establishment of a collective will to realize this goal and thus can we become a revolutionary. When "utopian realism" (Giddens, 1998; Rancière, 2007) is pursued and a common faith and resolution are shared, the balance of political powers and opportunities in the struggle of right to education may change as well.

Mannheim (2002) claims that the main responsibility of intellectuals is to create utopias. The more impossible to realize these utopias, the more they reveal social conflicts and transformation, because the intellectual creating utopias cannot fulfill this task without escaping the limits of rationality and contemporary conditionings. Utopian thought is a form of thought that pays attention to historical determinations but since it does not limit itself with this, it always maintains its currency. Comprehending what happens today and criticizing the existing is possible thanks to our utopias. They are, like the North Star, guide us. In that sense, it is possible to regard the Village Institutes as a partial embodiment of Tonguç's educational utopia, who is "the architect and the canon" of this initiative. Like every individual, every society targets problems it can resolve. But the Institutes were a serious project that meant to resettle ancient issues (such as equality, liberty and justice) in education. They were closed in a short period of time because they were the outcome of a timeless project in terms of the values and goals they were built upon.

### **"FATHER TONGUÇ"<sup>5</sup>: AN ENGAGED INTELLECTUAL**

Tonguç was one of the rare thinkers whose life and intellectual activism perfectly overlapped. As can be understood from his life history, Tonguç was, in fact, not a scientist, nor a philosopher of education.<sup>6</sup> That he did not pursue an academic career, beyond doubt, posed an obstacle to systematizing his pedagogic thoughts and creating a theoretical totality. Nevertheless, he was an intellectual who did not confine himself to the ivory tower of university and did not approach the contemporary problems in education with the narrow-mindedness of expertise. For him, the relation of society to the problem of education was a matter of political engagement.

It should be taken into consideration that Tonguç, like other pioneers of the Village Institutes, was affected by the academic and pedagogic thought system of his time, and his perception of education was definitely limited by the specific conditions of the time and geography. He produced his works in the first twenty years of the Turkish Republic during a dusky period, in which the old ways were gradually disappearing; yet, there was nothing to replace them. Although he served during the single-party period, he was able to maintain some critical distance from the government and never gave up his independent intellectual personality. Besides, it cannot be denied that Tonguç's pedagogy was very distinguished from others. When analyzing educational issues, he not only brought about a change in the paradigm by correlating these issues with the democratic transformation of society<sup>7</sup> but also deconstructed the political grammar of his time applied in the analysis of education.<sup>8</sup>

It is essential but not enough to look into Village Institutes in order to understand Tonguç, as we see them. Tonguç never asserted that he was their founder and he always mentioned that they were the outcome of a collective attempt and attributing them to a single person would be a false approach and a misconception. That he underestimated his superhuman efforts in the establishment of these institutions is compatible with his modest character and perception of intellectuality.

### **Tonguç's Intellectual Power and Specificity**

Tonguç began to publish his theoretical works in 1925 and carried on his intellectual activities till his death. Expanding the borders of pedagogic vision regarding almost all issues of education,<sup>9</sup> Tonguç was a thinker that did not like abstract generalizations and scholastic discussions. He was directly interested in society and its concrete problems rather than vain philosophical discussions. Another thing that distinguishes Tonguç from the Turkish pedagogical tradition that preceded him is a deep social analysis forming his pedagogic theory. As of the 1930s, Tonguç dedicated all his labor to analyzing and solving the problems of peasants who had been living under primitive conditions in Turkish society and constituted the silent majority.

According to Tonguç (1946), “we need to determine the main principles of the measures to be taken for the solution of educational problems on the basis of reality rather than theory” (p. 307). This constitutes one of the reasons why he is criticized by some for being an “anti-intellectualist” (Karaömerlioğlu, 1998a, p. 67). However, he might also be considered as a representative of the “engaged intellectual” tradition on the brink of extinction. What Tonguç opposed was not intellectuality itself, but a certain type of intellectuality and intellectualism. Tonguç was neither a Spanish-chateau thinker nor an ivory-tower intellectual. He rebelled against speculative thought and schematic approaches and detested, with his own expression, the “so called” ulama theoreticians and self-righteous people alienated from their own people and society.

Tonguç’s intellectual power and specificity do not come from the brightness of his philosophical arguments on education, but from his capacity to raise the awareness of his people devoid of (self)consciousness in terms of social change. His extremely original ideas and activities went through such a hard and tough test that those who are more well-known would not have endured.

Tonguç, like Gramsci, does not define the concept “intellectual” in an exclusionary way, by attributing it as a privilege to a small group. When Gramsci (1959/1997) claims although everyone is an intellectual they do not fulfill the intellectual’s function in society, he points out the importance of the attempt the average man is engaged in so as to understand the world and the significance of the potential to become an intellectual that stems from this attempt. Thus, Gramsci confutes the idea that a small intellectual community that has the ability to better know their own reality will with their “true” consciousness ensure the masses that have “wrong” consciousness to see their truths by enlightening and bringing consciousness to these people. He defines the intellectual in terms of his/her guiding and organizing function and undermines the privilege of “expertise,” He takes the holy aura upon the “professional revolutionary” off and reveals the power relations embodied in these concepts. Tonguç epitomized the “organic intellectual”, in Gramsci’s words, with his life, and work training organic intellectuals of the peasantry via the Village Institutes.

Tonguç’s ideas on the political function of the intellectual are parallel to those of Foucault (2000). Like Foucault, who claims that the main problem is to change the

political, economic and institutional regime producing the reality rather than changing people's minds or consciousness, Tonguç insistently underlines that social change cannot be achieved through education by merely bringing consciousness to people. Arguing against the Republican elite's view of "for the people despite the people," Tonguç insisted that the intellectual cannot avoid not only reproducing the existing power relations but also being a part of these relations as long as he monopolizes the claim to the truth and reality and writes out a ready prescription to social problems. That the intellectuals self-authoritatively play the representative of the oppressed, define what is good and right for them and on behalf of them, and compel the majority to the truth and good they have produced by putting themselves at a privileged and pioneering position is exactly a striking manifestation of how power operates. Foucault (2000) defines the political function of the intellectual as the "struggle against the forms of power where it is both the object and instrument of these forms, rather than slightly coming to the fore or stepping aside to tell the truth about everyone that has not been manifested before" (p. 32). This is what Tonguç accomplished as an intellectual. According to him, intellectuals and politicians should fulfill the function of creating a space in order for people to talk, discuss, make decisions, and express themselves rather than telling them what to do by placing themselves at a privileged and superior position.

There also exists a consistency between the political function Tonguç attributes to the intellectual and the political role he assigns to education. Education, for him, must bring the silent majority the ability to express itself, enable the unheard to speak up, and ensure that the suppressed, forgotten and captured experiences of people appear and are remembered again during the process of education. This could be summarized as contributing to the transformation of the exploited from a "class in itself" to a "class for itself" through education. It seems that Foucault's work on the function of the intellectual below express what Tonguç tried to achieve in the field of education:

The voices of numerous agents speaking should echo and experiences beyond measure should be made speak... It is necessary to make any experience speak and to pay attention to the moribund, the outcast and the ones who lost the ability to talk, because we are outside; they are the ones who really face the dark and

desolated side of struggles. I believe that it is the responsibility of a philosophy practitioner living in the West to pay attention to all these sounds. (2000, p. 82)

For Tonguç (1947, pp. 43-45), it was necessary “to learn a lot from the peasant in order to teach him. (This is what distinguishes Tonguc from other intellectuals of his era and represents the organic relationship he established with his people):

Unless we willingly draw our blood and becket into the village and forty thousand villages have an intellectual’s grave stone, we cannot understand the secrets of the village. To understand... and hear the village(r), it is essential to come very close. It is essential to drink the water he drinks, eat the cracked wheat he eats, feel the secrets of the dried dung he burns and do what he can do. Heroes will first understand what our village is before outstanding scholars and artists and then tell it to them... He (the peasant) is to raise heroes out of himself. These heroes enduring all misfortunes, working despite all pains as if drinking poison and carrying a crown woven with the honor will speak out for the village... Then, we will hear new sounds. It is necessary to listen to these sounds without being appalled. It is necessary to greet the ones who bring new colors and sounds from the village with respect. Then we will understand the real village and our country.

In that sense, Tonguç’s political perception, which transcends the relations of representation that subject people to themselves, resembles that of Foucault. Accordingly, he had an understanding of education that transforms the victim into an agent.

### **Thinking about Tonguç: Beyond Idolizing and Demonizing...**

A critical analysis of different readings on Tonguç’s intellectual personality and his place in the history of pedagogical thought will give an idea about the epistemological and methodological approach adopted in this study.

Tonguç, with his critical approach to the settled frames of educational thought of the period and his revolutionary practice reflected by the experience of the Village Institutes is regarded as a breaking point in our history of pedagogical thought. On the other hand, regarding him as the agent of a revolutionary break would mean ignoring all his works and struggle. Instead, it would be better to position him by taking the political,

social and intellectual context of his time into consideration. He can only be understood when positioned in the tradition of pedagogical thought preceding him, as a thinker inspired by foreign representatives of this tradition such as Pestalozzi, Kerschensteiner and Dewey as well as local representatives, especially Ethem Nejat.<sup>10</sup> Tonguç was able to come up with an original synthesis of his own rather than being a simple imitator or follower of these people. By a single-party rule, he was also an outcome of a political atmosphere shaped by an intellectual climate that includes many different streams of thought ranging from progressivism to pragmatism and from nationalism to peasantism. Therefore, he was neither a start, nor a breaking point, nor an end in the history of pedagogical thought. He was not faultless; neither did he invent the whole of pedagogical theory. He was neither a self-styled agent, nor a representative of a given pedagogical movement or thought. We may perhaps only regard him as an intellectual who entered into a world set up before him, engaged in this world who tried to transform it by giving it a new meaning.

The only possible way to come to a coherent conviction on Tonguç seems to be having a strong “sense of history” (Hobsbawm, 1999). In this way, we can escape from the influence of our feelings towards and prejudices against him and analyze him as a historical figure or text. It would anachronistically be a false approach to understand him by isolating him from the historical and intellectual context he lived in. Anachronism, which can be simply defined as the lack of a historical perspective or a “sense of history,” is a fallacy of history that to a great extent mystifies historical figures like him. It is possible to put forth that idolizing historical figures with empty compliments or demonizing them with ungrounded criticisms results from the lack of a historical perspective. Idolizing Tonguç, who was an outcome of the circumstances and values of 1930s and 1940s, is as meaningless as criticizing him with today’s terms and principles. The main provision to understand him and establish a lively and actual relation to his pedagogical thought is to identify his theory and practice within its historical frames. Thus, we can release ourselves from a quasi choice of approving or confuting anything he wrote, thought about and did.

In dialectical approach to historical figures, accepting that historical personalities might seem different from people who try to understand them in accordance to who they

are and their political disposition, which means perspectival subject/factor, is important. It could be argued that most of the comments regarding Tonguç (including this study) provide information about the commentator and his/her relationship to Tonguç rather than expressing an objective reality concerning Tonguç. What depicts Tonguç, for instance, to some as a “pure Jacobin,” a “peasantist ideologue” or a “believer of Kemalism” whereas to others as a “revolutionary in the field of education” or the “Ataturk of education” is the ideologies adopted by the commentator; just like some regard Village Institutes as the “Trojan Horse of Kemalism in the village” (Karaömerlioglu, 1998a) while for others, it was an “exemplary school of proletarian regime that was able to combine discipline and freedom” (Duhamel, 1998). Prevailing readings on Tonguç seem to be invalid since they are based on subjective dichotomies, and thus conclusions derived are also subjective as the reflections of these dichotomies.

It will be wrong to classify Tonguç with a selective reading as if he were a representative of a coherent and integrative pedagogic or political stream of thought by putting forth some of his discourses and actions while ignoring some.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, overrating the intellectual, pegging him/her as an ideological figure, confining his/her thought and constructing him/her like a dull and dim statue is what Tonguç himself criticized the most. Unfortunately, he could not escape the same fate of being idolized and demonized after his death. Tonguç’s various statues appearing in front of us today are the products of this idolization and demonization. In some descriptions, he was a revolutionary whereas in others a Kemalist conservative. For some, he was nothing more than a simple ministerial bureaucrat. For others, he was a “Turkish Pestallozi,”<sup>12</sup> Yet, Tonguç was in fact none of these. Categorizing him as the follower of an ‘ism’, of an ideology, or of another pedagogue is perhaps the greatest injustice to his thought, labor and struggle.

Comparing Tonguç to other pedagogues or drawing parallels (i.e. “Dewey in Americas, Kerschsteiner in Europe and Tonguç in Asia”) will be an approach that exceeds its purpose even if meant to praise him. Identifying him with a foreign pedagogue may not certainly result in appreciation; on the contrary, it will mean restricting him with the proficiency of the pedagogue he is associated with. Rather than a pedagogue only handling technical problems in the process of learning and teaching;

Tonguç was a theoretician and practitioner in his field and was interested in educational problems with the perspective of democratization of society in general.

Advocates of Tonguç canonized him so much that there appeared an image of him to be preserved and defended against any criticism. The inevitable consequence of clearing prominent thinkers of their worries and ideals and freezing them is falling behind them, which means downgrading both these thinkers and ourselves. Pioneer thinkers like Tonguç are always open to multi-readings and they can only be preserved by transcending intellectual horizons. Such attempts to idolize and demonize Tonguç render impossible any effort to understand and criticize him. They constitute the main factor that condemns him to the faith and silence he never deserves as well as to being forgotten although there is still a lot to learn from him.

If desired, many politically naïve points vulnerable to conservative interpretations can be discovered in Tonguç's writings and deeds today. Yet, throwing him aside at one whack when criticizing the Village Institutes resembles throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Tonguç had an understanding of education that would encourage the oppressed and the exploited to transform the existing conditions they were born into. Moreover, he had a vision of building his theory and practice of education upon a future perspective. Therefore, I will define and refer to Tonguç, who has been identified and characterized by various titles and adjectives till today, as a utopian, keeping in mind that "every definition is at the same time a distortion,"<sup>13</sup>

The following quote from Tonguç (1998, pp. 32-33) on how to approach educational issues points out that a utopian approach to education is almost a necessity:

Education, art and science are -still- regarded to be accomplished only via schools in many societies. Therefore, they are not, in one way or another, dealt within the frame of the state's extensive and constructive culture policy. There are very few societies that have prioritized national education over contemporary social and economic politics. However, this should be achieved before anything else... It is futile to hope for help for education from opportunities brought about by time and phenomena. Like other issues, there is a need for systematic efforts for issues concerning education, art and science... Not to sacrifice educational issues to current temporary demands, traditions and imitating is one of the most important duties today.

In his work *Köyde Eğitim*, he addresses the century he lived in and the next centuries as follows:

The school in many societies in fact could not yet go beyond educating only a specific and privileged part of the society. Manners taught in the family and at work place are not of this character. They (the family and the work place) unlike schools do not aim at creating social layers by artificially over improving the abilities of some members of the society. The reason for the great difference between schools and work places is that schools do not appreciate the cultivating role of work and have not been able to embrace all members of society yet. Ending this disparity will without doubt be one of the most important responsibilities of our century and next centuries. (Tonguç, 1938, p. 166)

### **TONGUÇ'S UTOPIA: A CLASSLESS SOCIETY**

It is appropriate to describe Tonguç's utopia concerning individual and society in general in order to discover his utopia regarding education. Initially comprehending that his purpose was not composed of only "the village problem," "educating the village(r)" or "training teachers for the village" is a prerequisite for this:

All channels for life to stream are condemned to be blocked unless the relations between soil and individual, work and citizen, citizen and affluence are to be harmoniously constructed... Most of our fertile lands are in the hands of exploiters who cannot cultivate them and thus exploit peasants. The biggest problem the Republic has to solve is the land problem... The problem of ownership of waters, like the land problem, is among our national pleas that the state must absolutely take action and solve. (Tonguç, 1998, p. 29)

Critics on Tonguç present the Village Institutes as a typical "rural education project" by relegating Tonguç's expression of "canlandırılacak köy" (the village that is to be revitalized), which he consciously used, to "kalkındırılacak köy" (the village that is to be developed)<sup>14</sup> although he never made the claim of developing the village by means of education. Tonguç (1947, p. 85) clarifies his perspective towards problems of the village and of education in the village as follows:

The village issue is not a mechanical “village development” as some believe; it is about the “revitalization of the village inside” in a meaningful and conscious way. Peasants should be stimulated and brought consciousness in such a way that nothing and nobody can exploit them cruelly for their own account, treat them as serfs and turn them into work animals who work unconsciously without any charge... This is what the village problem is, including the problems of education in the village.

Tonguç’s argument is to “stimulate and bring the village(r) to consciousness through its own elements in itself,” It can easily be asserted that this argument includes a comprehensive criticism against the Jacobin tradition and understanding of social engineering that instrumentalize the village and the peasant, see their transformation with external interventions as the main aim of Kemalist revolution, and for this, need pioneers and leaders. According to him, neither the origin nor the aim of social transformation can be the states or state elites.

That Tonguç chose the village and the peasant to fulfill his utopia of education does not arise from the fact that he was a peasant or “peasantist,”<sup>15</sup> He realistically approached this issue and was never carried away by a village and peasant romanticism which was popular among the elites during the time. More than 80 % of the population was already residing in villages in Turkey of the 1940s.’ The existence of conditions of the society at the time were epitomized in the existence of conditions of the peasant in very inhumane forms. Tonguç observed that the only power that could rebel against this could be the peasants themselves. The peasants could only escape from serfdom by annihilating the conditions for their existence. When the discussions, policies and projects of the single-party period dealing with the “village problem” are examined in the light of a critical look, it can be concluded that Republican elites did not aim at peasants developing an autonomous initiative; they looked for ways to keep the peasant in the village (Karaömerlioglu, 2006). On the other hand, Tonguç (cited in Altunya, 2002, p. 2) saw the peasants’ salvation in their own power:

It is essential... to ensure the peasant’s participation in the administration of all state departments, beginning from the village to the parliament, without looking for any prerequisites other than the qualifications he has and... to raise the awareness of a Republican citizenship in the peasants to act.

When formulating his understanding of education, Tonguç treated the village and peasantry as data reflecting the environment, rather than as a purpose in its own right. Until *Köyde Eğitim* (1938), which sets the theoretical basis of the Village Institutes, he published books examining the theory and implementation of productive vocational training.<sup>16</sup> He believed that the village was the most appropriate environment to put the principle of vocational training into practice because, according to him, “we are witnessing in the village a deep-rooted working culture” (Tonguç, 1938, p.165). Despite the fact that knowledge can only be learned through experiencing and practicing, there was, according to Tonguç, “informationism,” in other words, information transfer practiced disconnectedly from life and nature in urban schools.

Another prerequisite to discover Tonguç’s utopia on education is to be aware of the limited role he attributes to education in social change. Although he gives importance to the village and village(r) education, he is aware that individual and collective life is a whole. If inequality and exploitation prevail in one of the realms of life, liberation is not possible in the other: “What could be achieved by accepting all these problems that shape our country’s life and our peasants’ as they are by only sending the peasant to school?” (Tonguç, 1998, p. 51).

First, the Village Institutes meant for Tonguç more than an educational institution, let alone being an institution training teachers for the village. That the Institutes are not institutions that merely train teachers for the village is resolved in the 1st article of Village Institutes Act: “The Village Institutes are established by the Ministry of Education in places where there is arable land in order to train teachers and other profession experts.”<sup>17</sup> Second, Tonguç never reduced the problem of education to a mere school problem, nor was he engaged in the struggle for accomplishing a distinctive educational philosophy in schools. This is one of the main differences that distinguish Tonguç from Dewey, by whom he was inspired. Dewey regarded the school as a place to reify a distinctive education philosophy as a “living reality,” he even founded a school with this purpose but failed. On the other hand, Tonguç never attempted to create an education philosophy first in his mind and then carry it out at school. He believed that the society could only redeem itself by itself although he shared with Dewey the idea that the

school could be employed as an important lever to transform society. The response that he gave to the survey question “Should the Village Institutes be reopened?” directed to him after their closure (Tonguç, 1998, p. 444) reveals that his main concern was not the Institutes:

If the goal of turning future schools into a heaven for children can be achieved, then, educational institutions that most fit our national character can be created by benefiting the values gained thanks to the Village Institutes experience. Then, we won't have a difficulty in finding a name that suits these schools.

Tonguç is also one of the distinctive thinkers who attempt to redefine the problematic of the transformation of education on the basis of society's goals of liberty and autonomy. He internalized the notion that the society would not change unless education changed, or vice versa. Therefore, he believed that it was necessary to create “a new human type” for this end:

The ones who fought the War of Independence would be remunerated. The ones who were capable and worked would get their dues... There would be no oppressive and oppressed, exploitative and exploited classes. This was what the Republic meant. The revolution was supposed to find out the most suitable conditions and create new human types. (Tonguç, 1947, p. 19)

Tonguç describes this new human type in his works as follows: “the one who is able to overcome nature and fate,” “to create new opportunities for life,” “who benefits society, is capable of standing on his/her own feet and is competent in his/her career,” “who did not break away from the peasant and nation in terms of life style, language, life philosophy and mentality,” “who neither oppresses nor is oppressed,” “who neither exploits nor is exploited,” Overridden by his desire for a world without exploitation, Tonguç sometimes set forth such naïve propositions that he even said he would add a class on ceasing the exploitation of man by man to all curricula if he had the opportunity.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Tonguç is his commitment to the idea of democracy. His approach towards education and democracy as well as the dialectical

relationship between the two precedes that of Dewey (1928), Russel (1984) and Chomsky (2007):

There are two kinds of democracy. One is formidable and real, the other is easy and fake. The former cannot be accomplished without distributing land to the landless, securing the worker's condition and training people thoroughly, and it needs a drastic change. This is formidable but real democracy. Besotted with demagogy, people whether literate or illiterate, whether landless and unemployed or not, go to vote. Thus, they are thought to govern themselves. This is a game, which is easy. (Cited in Başaran, 1999, p. 69)

In fact, Tonguç regarded democracy as essentially a problem of *demopedia* (with the combination of ancient Greek words *demos* and *paideia*), which means “popular education” According to him , “one of the greatest catastrophes a society can go through is the derivation and increase in the number of gods without believers amongst the members of this society and that people who compose the majority of the society turning into flocks by losing their personality and ability to work and achieve” (Tonguç, 1947).

Tonguç's utopia is different from a social design defined within the frame of high politics. The key criterion for a democratic society for Tonguç is the revelation of people's creative potential through their voluntary participation in social life and by working for the society's well-being. The society's awareness of its creative and founding willpower will enable it to overcome its alienation from its own institutes. This is the struggle of society to govern itself. Democracy and freedom are not intellectual constructs to be first created by intellectual efforts and then granted to people; they are the never-ending processes of people's (*demos*) self-creation and self-foundation. Revolution is the process of society's establishing institutions relevant for its transformation without being dominated by any kind of bureaucratic force and doing something for its own future. It is not only creating a new political manner but also criticizing the existing way of life and searching a new one. Instead of instrumentalizing education as a simple object of politics, Tonguç attributes a political meaning and value to it. Like politics, which we can define in the broadest sense as a process during which individual or collective agents on the basis of their own realities intervene in and

transform their living conditions, education is, for Tonguç, also a process of liberation and of becoming agents.

### **TONGUÇ'S EDUCATIONAL UTOPIA: EDUCATION AS PRACTICE**

A particular definition of humanity, the roots of which go back to Marx's development of individual consciousness and alienation theory, underlies Tonguç's perception of education practiced in the Village Institutes. All human beings are defined with praxis in Marxist theory; that is, they not only have the faculty to know but also are conscious and active agents. How is it possible for people who are victims of the conditions they were born into and deprived of their power to be the agents of their own history to redeem themselves from this alienating order? "Praxis" is Marx's response to this question. His conviction is that human beings can change society and their own consciousness through their liberating praxis. The only way for people to get out of this bog goes through practical experiences of their own struggle. Therefore, real emancipation is not "from top to down," It is the liberation of individual by him/herself. The concept of praxis (Marx, 1992) indicates the unity of action and philosophical thought that aims at not only understanding but also transforming the world. In other words, the unity of thought and action turns into praxis when motivated by the perspective of social transformation. Individuals lose their humane characteristics due to the lack of a correlation between consciousness and practice. Humanization and emancipation of the individual depend on s/he making her/his own decisions and shaping her/his own destiny, which also necessitates her/him being aware of the social forces and material conditions that determine her/his consciousness and ideology. Individuals, who are aware of these forces, can change themselves and contribute to social change.

Praxis is such an all encompassing concept that it is impossible to understand and interpret Tonguç's educational utopia without it. If his utopia were to be summarized with one word, it would be praxis. His understanding of education is based on principles and methods that develop action, knowledge and consciousness together and associate knowledge directly with social problems and their solutions: "Manual activity combined

with intellectual activity and thought altogether results in production. This is the case in the most primitive working life or in the highest culture” (Tonguç, 1938, p.166).

“Education as praxis” is a process in which “the other” is targeted as an autonomous being and regarded as the main agent of the development of his/her own autonomy. This was Tonguç’s pursuit\_ an education that reinforces the individual’s control over his/her own life and liberates his/her vision. In that sense, the Village Institutes can be regarded as an answer given under the limited conditions of the time to the question “how can an education project be a project of the liberation and autonomization for the oppressed?” This project had the pretension to turn education into liberation politics.<sup>18</sup> The Institutes do not represent an alternative pedagogy to be implemented at schools in the way they existed. Tonguç designed the Village Institutes as institutions that necessitated and made liberation politics possible, of which the instruments and purposes were liberating.

Tonguç is thoroughly a utopian due to his great cherished hopes for his people and their future, which will be their own achievement. Nevertheless, he did not envisage his utopia according to a sort of knowledge or on the basis of a social perspective that did not at all exist at the time. Knowledge expressed in Tonguç’s utopian vision does not belong to an ideal future. It rather belongs to the present. He never made any speculations regarding how education ought to be in an ideal life and society. If he had done this, that is if he had preferred speculating on the ideal education of the ideal society without being aware of the future potentially existing in the time and place he was living in, he could have possibly failed to identify himself with his people who would create such a future. But the Village Institutes did not remain as a Jacobin social engineering project they evolved into a “social movement” which included educational, social and cultural aspects, as Kirby (2000, p. 269) also notes.

Tonguç formulates his perception of education as the “education for creating a cultivated generation that has also trust in its work,” rather than simply as the education “for work, through work and in working life,” as is usually assumed. Statements that ignore any part of this formulation distort the essence of Tonguç’s perception of education. Tonguç’s “work principle,” which he developed with inspiration by Kerschensteiner but which also differs a lot from Kerschensteiner, is not a mere

pedagogic technique. The term “work” Tonguç uses is different from that of Kerschensteiner: “The word “work” for him should embody not only manual work but also intellectual activity (Tonguç, 1998, p. 102). Kerschensteiner's vocational school aims at training a labor force that will completely “comply with” the capitalist organization of production. This German pedagogue’s system of thought is based on the distinction between vocational/technical training and general training (Yılmaz, 1990). On the other hand, Tonguç by no means accepts such a distinction and asserts that individuals ought to be trained in multidirectional ways, rather than being simply brought up only according to their position in the production process.

According to Tonguç, knowledge that is worth learning is not something given. It is something internalized through practice. The individual, in Tonguç’s perception, is not the one who ponders on the solutions of the problems defined externally to him/her and who gets lost in speculations. S/he is an agent with functions useful for social transformation. Tonguç believed that an individuals’ self-consciousness is gained by confronting their thoughts with the social reality they live in could potentially turn them into an agent in the transformation of this reality. There is no room for theory and practice dichotomy in Tonguç’s pedagogy. His main principle is to set up the hegemony of unity of thought and practice in the process of education. He never attempts to balance practice with theory, nor does he add a practical dimension to theory. Yet, he develops an approach that assimilates practice into theory because theory is for practice. The discrepancy between theory and practice is unnatural, which can only be overcome if learning can be based on social practice. For him, learning that suits the individual’s living conditions and that is directly involved in her/his life process is meaningful and valid. Education in Tonguç’s pedagogy is a means of furnishing practice with consciousness, and this consciousness can contribute to the development of agencies capable of writing their own chronicles:

Children trained in Village Institutes were tried to be emancipated from the scholastic. Their culture is not the knowledge memorized; it is the general and pure knowledge learned through work at work. (Tonguç, 1947, 664)

Tonguç conceived education as a process that students shape according to their interests and orientations and participate in as an agent, rather than as something they are exposed to. Thus, he strictly opposed any sort of social exclusion and inspection mechanisms in education, he undermined the myths of ability test and success in education. Tonguç, who had a perception of education that appreciates the student's experiences and is aware of his/her needs besides serving the practical mind, emphasized the significance of how we learn as well as what we learn. He was always concerned with how to overcome the conflicts existent in the hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the learner in a liberating way; and he probed the possibility for agents in the process of education to learn together within a mutual and equal relationship.

Criticisms Tonguç directed to the traditional structure and function of the school in 1930s also became common subjects for the liberatory theories of education developed especially in the 1960s and 1970s (Spring, 1991; Illich, 1985, 1988; Turner, 1997). There is a great similarity between his criticisms against the school and those of Illich's. However, while Illich cannot propose an alternative for society other than a dream of heaven, in which no school and institution exist, Tonguç tries to prove how the school can be transformed into heaven in this world. According to him (Tonguç, 1938, p. 165), "schools were tried to be transformed into institutions that could resolve every problem," its "scholastic" (*kitabî*) character remained "irrational" and did not correspond to the realities in life. Tonguç's radical criticisms against the school underlie his conviction that "the most reliable educational institutions" are work and profession. Tonguç (1947) considers "education as life itself, not as a preparation for life" (p. 147). As is understood from this point, Tonguç is a utopian educator, who perceives life as a purpose in itself, rather than as a means; that does not try to turn life into a school.

## CONCLUSION

Today we witness the withering of educational utopias based on a political vision aiming at not only understanding but also changing the world and aspiring to an existence beyond global capitalism; an idea that presents itself to us as the only alternative. The alternative to this is undoubtedly not the nostalgic remembrance of an old school or education experiences. Such an approach will not result in a new and meaningful political project. Nevertheless, the fact that a thinker from the Third World “dared” to come up with an alternative to the dominant pedagogical conceptions and implementations seventy years ago provides us very important theoretical and practical clues to make sense of and resolve our problematics of education. To take the advantage of these clues is to show him the respect he has been denied for almost fifty years (by his proponents as well as his opponents) and to attempt to discover, understand, criticize and appreciate him when necessary.

Tonguç was a person, who established an educational utopia that would encourage the oppressed and the exploited to change the conditions they were born into. His utopia is radical in this regard. He does not promise us heaven on earth. His utopia is realistic and designed. His school is not celestial, it belongs to this world. It is not “liberal” but liberating.

Any theory and practice of education that transforms the oppressed into agents of history and aims at having them shape their own destinies is revolutionary and up-to-date. The Village Institutes were to cultivate, in the words of Gramsci, “organic intellectuals” and, in the words of Tonguç, individuals who can “overcome their destinies.” If the major responsibility of intellectuals is, as Bourdieu (2006, p. 114) states, “contributing to the creation of social conditions for collectively producing realistic utopias,” Tonguç successfully fulfilled this task.

Today, the world more than ever needs wise individuals who “are realistic and desire the impossible” and who in this way expand the borders of the possible, who criticize the existing in light of what is supposed to be and produce alternatives, soon, who “plant utopias and harvest realities,” just as Tonguç did. The world needs people who march on the paths that have never been set foot on and who risk their heads for thoughts that have never been thought before...

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1. In these works, the Village Institutes are generally depicted as “village schools founded with the purpose of developing rural parts of Turkey via education by training village children as teachers” and Tonguç as their founding father (Stone, 1974; Karaömerlioğlu, 1998b; Arayıcı, 1986; Yılmaz, 1977; Vexliard & Aytaç, 1964; Açıkgöz, 1995). For a collected assessment of foreign literature on Tonguç and Village Institutes, see also Benli (1990) and Erichsen (1991).
  2. For instance, in one of his articles in English, Karaömerlioğlu (1998b) presents Tonguç as a fanatical Kemalist and peasantist ideologue and the Village Institutes as “the embodiment of peasantist discourse. According to him, the Village Institutes, like Community Centers, are a means Kemalism used to incorporate masses into the regime.
  3. Intellectuals of Turkey are mainly responsible for Tonguç not taking the part he deserved in the history of pedagogic thought. But, the role of a “persistent tendency” which assumes that non-Western societies lack reformist and utopian resources and need the “West’s moral leadership” this cannot be ignored, either. Parekh (2002, p. 228) in another context claims that such a tendency exists in some parts of Western society, which act like “global missionaries”.
  4. For a broader and stimulating discussion on the concepts of “utopia” and “utopian”, see Ollman (2006); Mannheim, (2002). For unsound versions of utopianism and serious consequences of lacking utopias, see Eagleton, (1999); Wallerstein, (1997).
  5. The nickname “Father” attributed to Tonguç by Village Institution students and peasants due to his sincere fatherly manners towards them perfectly fits his personality and his life.
  6. The life history of Tonguç, who was the child of a middle-income peasant family, starts in a small village in Bulgaria in 1893. He was sent to Germany to study in 1918, after graduating from Istanbul Teacher’s Training School. He attended courses on painting-handicrafts, physical training and vocational training. He taught in teacher’s training schools as a painting-handicrafts and physical training teacher during and after the War of Independence until 1925. After 1926, he served in the position of Education Supplies and Materials Museum Director in the Ministry of Education. During this term, he founded the Department of Painting and Handicrafts at Gazi Training Institute in 1932. He was appointed to the position of General Director of Elementary Education in 1935 by Saffet Arıkan, the last minister of education of Ataturk’s government. Village Institutes were established during the period he served as the General Director for 11 years until 1946. The period after the transition to multi-party system, after the Democratic Party took power replacing Ataturk’s Republican People’s Party in 1946, was the period during which Tonguç was promptly suspended from ministry bureaucracy. At first, he was appointed as a member of Head Council of Education and Instruction; then, in 1949, as a painting teacher in Ankara Ataturk High School. In 1950, he was suspended from teaching, as well and a ministerial order on him was released. As a result of trails that lasted for years at State Council, the order was overruled and he retired in 1954. His 67 years of life, which started in a small village and occupied prompt ascents and descents in ministerial bureaucracy after a shiny professional

traininga career flourished with experiences abroad, ended in Ankara in 1960. For more detailed information on Tonguç's life, see *Köy Enstitüleri ve Çağdas Eğitim Vakfı* (1999); E. Tonguç (1970; 2007a).

7. The aim of the Republic's education project, beyond doubt, was to create a uniform man and a homogenous society based on the maxim of "classless society", which means that education is for the state, by the state and of the state. The Kemalist education project is total; no form or level of education was left outside this project and no social actor other than the state itself was entitled the authority and the right to speak and make decisions. The methodology adopted was "from top to bottom and from outside to inside". This understanding and methodology in education were in contradiction with Tonguç's pedagogic principles. Education in this project was not regarded as a value or an object in itself let alone being a liberating practice, and was seen as a means that serves the ends external to human beings. Such an education philosophy, which Tonguç claimed to be the source of educational problems, was definitely opposed by him. The principles of school autonomy and democratic localization of education systems, which Tonguç overemphasized and wanted to realize, have not still been put into implementation.
8. A class-blind approach was dominant in the analyses regarding education during the period Tonguç lived in. But still, he thought that society is composed of classes and education reproduced the existing class hierarchy. He (1938, p. 166) claimed that school had the purpose of "creating social layers by artificially overimproving the abilities of some members of society."
9. Tonguç published 15 books and hundreds of articles on education, they were anthologized into two volumes (*Köy Enstitüleri ve Çağdas Eğitim Vakfı*, 1997), this reveals the richness and validity of his intellectual background. Some examples from Tonguç's literature: *Is ve Meslek Terbiyesi* (1932), *Kerschensteiner* (1933), *Koyde Eğitim* (1938), *Ilkogretim Kavrami* (1946), *Canlandırılacak Koy* (1947), *Ogretmen Ansiklopedisi ve Pedagoji Sozlugü* (1952), *Mektuplarla Köy Enstitüsü Yillari* (1976).
10. Ethem Nejat, a pedagogue of the second constitutionalist period, is one of the earliest Marxists of Turkey. He, was amongst the founders of the Communist Party of Turkey and the first secretary general of this party, he was murdered with Mustafa Suphi and his 13 comrades in the Black Sea in 1921. Tonguç allocated a long chapter in his *Canlandırılacak Köy* on Ethem Nejat, who most inspired Tonguç.
11. Tonguç is usually depicted as the follower of Dewey and thus the representative of progressive pedagogy in Turkey. But Dewey was a thinker who insistently rejected confining himself to the narrow patterns of a pre-defined doctrine. Dewey (1966) advises "the ones heading for movements of education that are in parallel to a new social order needed to deal with education itself rather than some related 'ism's this includes 'progressivism'." He says that "we should dedicate ourselves to finding out what kind of circumstances must be employed for education to be a reality rather than an 'ism' or a motto."
12. The expression "Turkish Pestallozi" was ascribed to Tonguç by Hasan Âli Yücel (1897-1961), the Minister of Education at the time; and it was adopted by a Swiss historian Rufer, who was the author of one of the first articles written in Europe on the Village Institutes. German pedagogue Wiedman also identified Tonguç with Pestallozi and gave his article the title "Ismail Hakki Tonguç-ein türkischer Pestalozzi" (Benli, 1990).

13. Recognizing Tonguç as a utopian educator does not mean that the Village Institutes were a full-fledged utopia or these institutions were the ultimate embodiment of his educational utopia.
14. For example, according to Karaömerlioğlu (2008), “the apparent objective of the Village Institutes was to enable the structural transformation of rural Turkey through education by training teachers out of village children.” Such reductionist approaches to the Village Institutes are also common in national literature, as is the case with the foreign literature.
15. For an approach that defines Tonguç as a “peasantist” and treats the Village Institutes as a village education project condemned to fail from the beginning, see Karaömerlioğlu (1998a). For a response to such criticisms, see E. Tonguç (2007a; 2007b).
16. These works are respectively as follows: *El Isleri Rehberi* (1927), *Maarif Almanacağı* (1928), *Mürebbinin Ruhu ve Muallim Yetistirme Meselesi* (1931), *İlk, Orta ve Muallim Mekteplerinde Resim, Elisleri ve Sanat Terbiyesi* (1932), *İs ve Meslek Terbiyesi* (1933), *Kerschensteiner* (1933), *Almanya Maarifi* (1934).
17. The curriculum of the Village Institutes took into consideration, and was responsive to, the local conditions and needs, emphasis was placed on the unity of general and vocational knowledge in their curriculum. Fifty percent of the institutes' curriculum was devoted to "culture classes." The remaining fifty percent was divided into two. While twenty-five percent of the curriculum was reserved for agriculture classes, the remaining twenty-five consisted of technical classes. Each institute had autonomy in defining their weekly, monthly, yearly programs in accordance to their needs. The institutes were established in villages because an overwhelming majority of the population (more than 80 %) was, at that time, living in the villages. Second, the city had no real connection with the realities of the country, and the city schools, according to Tonguç, did not overlap with the realities of life. Third, the village life, Tonguç argued, comprised the elements of the true community life- of mutual help and friendly cooperation. The institutes were to be built upon, and make use of, these traditional collaborative relations called “imece.”
18. At this point, we might draw attention to the parallels between Tonguç's and Freire's pedagogy. Just like Tonguç, in *Pedagogy of Oppressed*, released almost ten years after Tonguç's death, Freire (1998) developed an education theory that would change oppressed people into subjects transforming their own realities. In that sense, there is a semantic similarity between Freire's perception of education he expresses with the concept “conscientização”, which is also alternative to banking education and Tonguç's thesis of “stimulating the village and the peasant with their own components inside and bringing them to consciousness.”

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