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CONCEPTUAL COMPLEXITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON PRACTICE: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP

Nationalism, as a crucial problem, occupies the centre of the political agenda all over the world. Since misuse of the concepts causes problematic applications and controversies in theory and practice, definitions and explanations of the concepts must be expounded clearly, as far as possible, to discuss the nationalism issue in a philosophical way. Using the concepts of “national identity” and “citizenship” synonymously is one of important examples of this kind of controversies. In this article, the “national identity” concept as a central narrative in nationalism discourse and the relationship between this discourse and the citizenship notion are discussed. In this context, it is argued that even though the citizenship and the national identity concepts are not identical, in nationalist discourse they usually substitute each other.

Increasing concern on the notion of citizenship is quite new, and is related with a deficiency and complexity of existing application of the concept. Citizenship is one of the most problematic issues in political philosophy and political science in the last thirty years. Especially in this time period, there are several important theories of citizenship which have been effected in social science and politics, such as multicultural citizenship, post-national citizenship, European citizenship, denationalized citizenship, cosmopolitan citizenship, and so forth. In this context, I would like to ask what the common ground of all those theories is. What is the most significant shared position for these citizenship theories? I argue that, this common point or shared position can be shortened as “expanding the scope of citizenship”. Then we should ask the second question: What is the obstacle to expand the scope of citizenship? In order to explain and answer these problems, it is necessary to analyze the background of the citizenship notion at the first place. Because historical development and philosophical roots of the citizenship notion can be helpful to understand how and in which ways citizenship is encompassed with social structures such as race, ethnicity, nation, gender, or class.

In accordance with this purpose, the main problem of the article is the identification between citizenship and national identity which is analyzed in this study

as an essentialist assumptions have dissolved the possibility of making politics. Lastly, as an example to this kind of identification between citizenship and national identity in the context of Turkish citizenship and its reflections on the Sephardic Jews which is a minority group in Turkey, is discussed.

Citizenship and Essentialist Restrictions

The requirement of re-defining the subject of the collectivity and radical innovation regarding this requirement are synchronic with the emergence of the nation-state formation. In other words, it is not wrong or inadequate to argue that the birthplace of the modern citizenship is the nation-state (Isin and Turner 2002; Kadioglu 2007). The emergence of these two notions, the nation state and modern citizenship, can be dated back to French Revolution. According to Brubaker, French Revolution “invented not only the nation state but the modern institution and ideology of national citizenship” (Brubaker 1989: 30).

Isin and Turner distinguish two different understandings of citizenship as ‘early modern’ and ‘modern’ social thought. According to them, early political thought approached to citizenship concept from the perspective of “rights and obligations” (Isin and Turner 2007: 6). On the other hand, modern social thought has focused on the relationship between citizenship and social structures, such as gender, class, race (Isin and Turner 2007). We can add to this list another two important structures as well: ethnicity and nationality. In this context, it is possible to analyze the citizenship notion in two different aspects. First, “rights and obligations” axis which is defined by early modern social thought, and secondly, with their all modern and postmodern implications, social constructs axis. In this article, as an important social construct, national identity concept and its restrictive effects on the citizenship are discussed, and it is argued that national identity formation is based on essentialist, closed or impermeable assumptions. Following part of the article, it is aimed to discuss that how nationality effects the citizenship notion.

Nationalism as a Discourse

In this part of the article, the national identity conceptualization built by essentialist view is examined. In everyday life, when someone speaks about national identity, the first thing that comes to mind is usually its ethnic and racial implications. Having a national identity is understood as being, for example, German, Turk or Poles. In this respect, vague and obscure bounds between national identity and citizenship create a confusing and problematic area in social

and everyday life. As Craig Calhoun, an important scholar who works on discursive structure of nationalism issue, argues the conceptualization of the citizenship can “mask underlying commitments to particularistic cultural or racial definitions of what counts as a ‘proper’ or good citizen” (Calhoun 2007: 42). In this context, trying to understand how national identity or nationalism shape the citizenship notion and our everyday life, can give us a clear insight over the theoretical debates and practical approaches.

Craig Calhoun, asserts that nationalism is “embedded in our entire view of the world—organizing citizenship and passports, the way we look at history, the way we divide up literatures and cinemas, the way we compete in the Olympic games” (Calhoun 1997: 1). We can emphasize that Calhoun’s approach on nationalism as a discursive formation provides us an extensive understanding for the relationship between national identity and citizenship. Because, as Calhoun clarifies, nationalism is “not just a doctrine, however, but a more basic way of talking, thinking and acting” (Calhoun 1997: 11). With all its aspects and its discursive formation, nationalism surrounds almost all the conceptualizations regarding to citizenship and our daily practices. In this regard, nationalism as a discourse is “a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world, a frame of reference that help us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us” (Özkirimli 2010: 206). National identity constructs itself through nationalism discourse. But, how does this construction materialize? In order to explain this process, we need to know the key features of the nationalist perception and how nationalist discourse functions. Nationalist perception, as Özkirimli argues, “categorizes the world as ‘we’ and ‘they’, and as ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’; in all conditions, the interests of ‘we’ are more important than ‘they’; the interests of the nation are more important than every individual-collective interest; accepts nationalism as an absolute tool of legitimacy” (Özkirimli 2008: 14; see also Özkirimli 2010: 208).

Discursive formation of nationalism shapes the content of social integration in everyday life and politics. In such ways, being a citizen is being used synonymously with national identity which involves and is based on essentialist comprehensions. This synonymous usage of citizenship and national identity surround our life experiences, our understanding of the world and politics, our relationship with people who feel they belong to another identity group.

In this context, I would like to assert that the relationship between citizenship and national identity has caused a large number of conflicts and violence between different identity groups. Therefore, the nation narrative should indicate a kind of social dynamism, flexibility and permeability (of course, one can easily argue about that and s/he certainly will be right; if the nation narrative was constituted that way, it would not be a nation narrative anymore. Because, as we mentioned

before and by definition, the concept of nation has to be closed or to have impermeable borders). In this context, we need to redefine the concept of nation, and it needs to be differentiated from citizenship notion which also needs to be re-conceived as continuously changeable on global and post-national levels, but not as a proposal which considers the understanding of nation as a static and a constant structure. In the next part of the article, it is aimed to briefly analyze Turkish citizenship and its relation to a specific different identity group as a practical case for the theoretical part of the study.

Turkish Citizenship: An Exclusionary Application

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Armenians, Greeks, and Jews were accepted as minority groups in the Treaty of Lausanne which is known as the foundational treaty of the Republic of Turkey (Kadioglu 2008). Two groups, Armenian and Greeks, were excluded from the extent of Turkish citizenship at the first place, because they were seen as dangerous and problematic for the ‘national unity’ of the state. However, Jews were mentioned as a ‘loyal’ and ‘acceptable’ minority group. As a matter of fact, Jews were (and still are) really bound up with the state. They aimed to learn Turkish and to have good relations with Turkish sovereigns. In other words, they accepted being ‘assimilated’ almost voluntarily. We can see this situation in the narratives of a prominent members of Jewish community at the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, the story of Jak Samanon, a citizen of the Ottoman Empire, in Lis Behmoaras’ book *Kimsin Jak Samanon? (Who are You Jak Samanon?)* which is set in 1908, the heyday of Joung Turk revolution, could be seen as a quite interesting and proper example. Thrilled by the ideas of freedom, equality and justice promoted by the revolution, Jak Samanon believed that the new order (being a Turkish citizen in a new Republic) would not house subject categories as Jewish, Christian or Muslim. He had faith in the emergence of a new citizen bound to the state by one law and had the same rights with the rest of the people. Affected by this belief, Samanon was fervently preaching to the Jewish community that they should unite with the rest of the society and leave the community spirit. His faith in the new regime had separated him from his community which was fond of the old system. He felt a member of the emerging society. When I read the story of Samanon, I reflected on a man who had a hope for change along with pain for losing his old social bonds, on the community that he was a part of and on the roots of that community. This story displays us the widespread reaction and attitude of Jewish community at the beginning of the young Republic.

Particularly for Sephardic Jews Turkish sovereign was seen as a ‘saviour’¹ and Anatolia was accepted as a cultural centre. However, as a vulnerable minority group and as having a hybrid and multilingual² cultural background their population decreases in number by degrees. In this seemingly complicated story, the important point can be explained as follows: despite the fact that Sephardic Jews as a minority group were not a threat and that they had a motivation to be adapted through which categories have they been discriminated? As argued in previous section, the roots of this problem are based on the nationalist discourse and its effect on the citizenship notion. Discursive effect of nationalism causes a confined relation with the others even though they are in accord with the sovereign majority or group. For instance, even though Sephardic Jews were volunteer to being ‘Turkish citizens’, their acceptance of Turkishness as a form of social integration and their supportiveness for the Turkish Republic, discriminations against Jews in Turkey increasingly continue. Here, we can see a brief list of some implementations that took place in the republican era in Turkey:

- In 1920s and 1930s “Citizen! Speak Turkish!” campaigns were organized by the state. Non-Muslims speaking their languages on the street were interfered. Between 1925 and 1932 it was forbidden for non-Muslims to leave Istanbul by an administrative prohibition. This situation especially affected these non-Muslims who had commercial connections with Anatolia.
- At the end of 1925 the privileges of non-Muslims for their customs were prohibited (for example church wedding).
- As of 2008 there have been no non-Muslim state officers except for arts and sciences. The conditions for this situation were created by the definition of being ‘Turkish’ in the civil laws adopted in 1920s.

¹ As a result of the Alhambra Decree of the Queen of Castilla and Leon Isabel and Ferdinand II Jews were exiled from Spain. They were not allowed to take valuables with them and the opponents were executed. This order was put into action in Sicily in 1493 and in Portugal in 1497, resulting in the exile of Jews from these lands too (Goldberg 1996). Approximately 200.000 Spanish Jews were exiled and most of the Jews took refuge in the Ottoman Empire as a result of invitation. Sultan Bayezid II invited Sephardic Jews to the empire and took care of their proper reception. This historical fact is used to show the ‘hospitality’ and ‘generosity’ of Turkish sovereign, however, some scholars like Benbassa and Rodrigue (1995) underlines that the invitation of the Sephardic Jews to the Ottoman Empire is related to economic reasons more than humanitarian reasons.

² Their language Judeo Spanish (Ladino) is a combination of medieval Spanish. The language of those settling in Anatolia and Balkans created and adaptation with languages such as Turkish, Balkan languages, Hebrew, Italian and French. It is known that the Sephardic Jews settled in the Ottoman Empire adopted many Turkish words and idioms (Stillman and Stillman 1999).

- With the implementation of a legal code in 1929 the stock exchange firms and employees had to be Turkish.
- “Citizen! Use domestic products!” campaigns were to evolve into “Do not shop from who are not Turks” in the 1950s.
- In 1934, Jews in cities in Thrace were threatened and raped by the support of the local organizations of the only political party Republican People’s Party. They abandoned their houses and shops and fled to Istanbul. The harassments continued in Istanbul. There were attempts demanding that Turkish merchants struggle with Jewish merchants.
- Sephardic Jews, speaking their own language were accused of being ‘harmful people and spies’ with an official announcement (14th July 1934),
- The worst impact came from the ‘property tax’ implemented on 11th November 1942. As a result, the Jews’ incomes and properties were appropriated and transferred to Muslim merchants.
- In the events of 6th and 7th September 1955 non-Muslims, mainly Greeks, were attacked in Istanbul. The police force did not react to these events, including murder and rape, upon receiving orders (Oran 2005).

These and similar events give us enough reason to rethink the citizenship status of non-Muslim minorities and minority rights. In this context, I would like to argue that one of the most important sources for this kind of discriminative politics against the other identity groups in Turkey was based on the understanding and the structure of the citizenship notion. The notion of national citizenship emerged in the Turkish context via the exclusion and assimilation of various ethnic, religious, and language-related differences represented by Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Kurds, Arabs, Alevis, Circassians, Georgians, Lazes, etc. As in the formation of all modern national identities, the process of nation-state formation was accompanied by the constant definition and redefinition of the various ‘others’ of an aspired sense of a national being (Kadioglu 2007). In this context, Turkish form of the citizenship notion is an output of a struggle to create a homogeneous community of one nation.

At the foundation period of Turkish Republic and the following years, creating a homogenous society via suppressing different identities and assimilating others were the foremost aims and exertions of the young Republic. Turkish form of nationalist discourse based on the essentialist assumptions and impermeable structure is the most important tool in politics in Turkey. Against this effective tool, being loyal, being not dangerous or voluntarily assimilation were not enough and people could get hurt by discriminative acts, as well. As it may be seen in the some harmful assaults against Jewish minority group in Turkey, Turkish citizenship which is based on an essentialist understanding of the nation constitutes an impediment to the possibility of living together with ‘other’ identity group.

Over the years, the discursive formation of Turkish nationalism has shaped formation of citizenship in Turkey. The synonymous usage of citizenship and national identity influences and shapes our consciousness, and the definition of who we are. In today's nation states, the mentality which aims at creating a homogenous nation, keeps tons of the problem actual. Nationalism discourse is still the most effected social construct, and it shapes the politics and everyday life in Turkey and most of the countries. In conclusion, citizenship based on and confined with social constructs like national identity, led to an exclusionary and harmful structure and understanding of social integration in Turkey. Not only non-Muslim groups, but also different groups of demands and of identities have experienced a serious pressure. However, defining and redefining the concepts, criticising the essentialist homogenization towards identity groups may be a reinforced and solid starting point to struggle with the problems of today's politics.

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Summary

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Nationalism, as a crucial problem, occupies the centre of the political agenda all over the world. Since misuse of the concepts causes problematic applications and controversies in theory and practice, definitions and explanations of the concepts must be expounded clearly, as far as possible, to discuss the nationalism issue in a philosophical way. Using the concepts of “national identity” and “citizenship” synonymously is one of the important examples for this kind of controversy. In this study, the “national identity” concept as a central narrative in nationalism discourse and the relationship between this discourse and the citizenship notion, are discussed. In this context, it is argued that even though the citizenship and the national identity concepts are not identical, in nationalist discourse they usually substitute each other. In order to exemplify how the nationalism discourse forms the citizenship practice and how the concept of “national identity” substitute for citizenship notion, the nationalism discourse and its “favourite” enemy “Jews” in Turkey, are examined.