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THE JEWISH MINORITY IN TURKEY AT THE CULTURAL TURN OF CITIZENSHIP: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON THE EDITORIALS IN THE JEWISH NEWSPAPER ŞALOM

Abstract:

The usage of two oxymoronic words, citizenship and culture, together in political discourse is one of the most remarkable developments in recent socio-political thought. It indicates that the conventional understanding of citizenship – a nation state's citizenship- which remains one dimensional and inadequate in explaining contemporary citizenship practices, has left its place to cultural citizenship. The new concept of citizenship embraces cultural flexibility, and the reproduction of cultural, linguistic and class knowledge that build the cultural capital of social classes; it demands rights which preclude social injustice and alienation among ethnic or marginal groups of society. Cultural citizenship takes into consideration the components of citizenship besides the rights and duties, such as identity, belonging, participation etc. It (cultural citizenship) questions the main promise of citizenship, the equality, and suggests dealing with it from the perspective of the subcultures.

Departing from this theoretical framework, this paper aims to analyse how the Turkish Jewish population experiences cultural citizenship in Turkey. Accepting the idea that the perception of citizenship practices are reflected from/through discourse; the Jewish minority's newspaper Şalom has been chosen as the source of material for analysis.

Keywords:

subcultures, cultural citizenship, cultural flexibility, Turkish Jewish minority, Şalom Newspaper.

Introduction

Although the concept of cultural citizenship is a relatively new phenomenon that belongs to the early 90's, its roots can be traced back to the previous century. According to Del Castillo, cultural citizenship has been a part of a broader discussion on cultural pluralism that began in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since then, he argues that pluralism has undergone at least three noteworthy transformations: attempts to primarily preserve European immigrant cultures vis-a-vis the state; integrationist civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s; and the mainstreaming of difference and multiculturalism that began in the 1980s (Del Castillo, 2005). Focusing on the third transformation, in the 1980's *ethnicity* and *difference* became important factors in political culture not only in the United States, but in all of the Western democracies. Considering that "the conceptions of citizenship in modern liberal political theory have always, implicitly or explicitly, been affected by dynamics of political culture" (Oenen, 2009, p.293), the traditional understanding of citizenship has been affected by demands for the recognition of the equal worth of diverse cultures. Therefore, a new conception of citizenship called *cultural citizenship*, which not only includes political rights but it also has a cultural orientation too, has emerged from the political culture of the new period of time.

The term has been coined by the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, one can understand from his definition that cultural phenomena and issues of identity are privileged over the theoretical considerations of an individual only as a right holder. Actually, "cultural belonging, cultural rights, cultural voice and cultural inclusion for both individuals and groups are now claims that accompany the demand for economic, political and social rights"(Isar, 2014, p.22). In other words, the new claims of citizenship are still associated with classic notions of citizenship, thus "the cultural citizenship paradigm concerns a far more active engagement, one that is made up of rights as well as responsibilities, whether on the part of the individual or the group to which (s)he belongs" (Isar, 2014, p.22). That is to say, cultural citizenship is not exclusively about rights and freedoms, but it also concerns the articulation of identity/belonging and other components of citizenship that extend beyond nationality (Delanthy, 2002, p.66). In other words, it is about being, and remaining, a part of the mainstream national community.

Although there are many different reviews of and contributions on Rosaldo's understanding of cultural citizenship, it conveys the basic features of the new concept citizenship. In general, following Delanthy (2002), we could argue that there are mainly two conceptions of cultural citizenship in the literature: the first one is influenced by cultural sociology (Nick Stevenson's work), and the second is influenced by political theory (Kymlicka and Norman's work). While the sociological approach is about inclusion in the sphere of identity and belonging, the political approach is about extending an already established (more or less) framework to include excluded or marginalised groups (Delanthy, 2002, p.61). In regard to this theoretical background, one can make inferences about the basic principles of cultural citizenship: 1) it requires belonging; 2) it demands equity and first class citizenship, thus democracy is

fundamental for cultural citizenship; 3) it requires recognition by, and participation in, the mainstream culture.

Jewish Minority and Citizenship in Turkey

Although there is a semi-official estimated Turkish Jewish population of about twenty-three thousand, a more realistic figure is seventeen thousand to twenty thousand (Bali, 2007). The Turkish Jewish community is mainly Sefardic, and they emigrated from Spain during the last period of the 15th century. As Bali says on the Ottoman Empire, Jews, like Greeks and Armenians, lived as millets. Each millet was organised as a semiautonomous community that was represented by its religious leader. In this system, non-Muslims were accepted as dhimmis, "People of the Book" who were protected by their masters, the Ottoman Muslims (Bali, 2007).

This millet system offered non-Muslims "extensive cultural but few political rights" (Parekh, 2000, p.7) when compared with the republican years of Turkey. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, Bali says (2007) "the new republic raised the social status of its people from subjects to citizens, and the Constitution of 1924 extended equality to all citizens, thereby upgrading the social status of non-Muslims from dhimmis to citizens". To the young nation, the non-Muslim minorities' statuses were arranged by the Treaty of Lousanne in 1923 in the articles 37-45. In general, it could be said that the treaty basically places an emphasis on equality between Muslims and non-Muslim minorities, and it guaranties their political and civic rights. For example, according to the treaty "The Turkish Government undertakes to assure full and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants of Turkey without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion" (Article 38), or "Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities will enjoy the same civil and political rights as Moslems. All the inhabitants of Turkey, without distinction of religion, shall be equal before the law. Differences of religion, creed or confession shall not prejudice any Turkish national in matters relating to the enjoyment of civil or political rights, as, for instance, admission to public employments, functions and honours, or the exercise of professions and industries" (Article 39), or "Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Turkish nationals. In particular, they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein" (Article 40).

Beginning from the foundation of the new republic, the rights and freedoms of the minorities of modern Turkey are under full and complete protection of the law, according to Bali (2007), "Turkish society continued to perceive non-Muslims, including Jews as dhimmes whose loyalty to the fatherland was suspect" until 1946 when Turkey "started to experiment with true democracy by establishing multiple political parties" (Bali, 2007). After the reawakening of Islamic movements in the 1980s and 1990s, anti-semitism has risen again and it has targeted Jewish citizens in the country. Thus, the democratic

initiative process of Turkey, which was launched in 2009 with the aim to improve the standards of democracy, freedoms and respect for human rights, plays an important role to ensure the transformation of the citizenship status of the minorities (including Jews) in Turkey.

Data Settings and Analysis

As VanDijk (1995) argues, editorials operate as conveyors of opinions and ideologies that have prominent social political and cultural functions. Considering the discourse-cognition–society circle we assume that these sociocultural functions, structures and processes are, in turn, based on socially shared mental representations. Thus, social actors manage their social actions and act within social contexts as a function of their personal, as well as their socially shared, interpretations or representations of their social environment (Van Dijk, 1995). Following the ideas of Van Dijk, the Jewish minority's weekly newspaper Şalom, which was founded in 1947, has been chosen as the source of material for analysis. A corpus consists of editorials that have been collected over a period of six years – beginning from the democratic initiative process in Turkey to date.

Accepting the idea that the perception of citizenship practices are reflected from/through discourse, the editorials that may relate to cultural citizenship were chosen out of 378 editorials of Şalom. Also, considering that one of the two editorial writers, Yakub Borakas, is the chair of the board of Şalom and a very important leader of opinions in the Jewish community and the other writer, Ivo Molinas, is the Public Spokesman of the Turkish Jewish Minority, one can argue that their writing highly reflects the opinions and wishes of the Jewish Community in Turkey.

Belonging, cultural rights, representation, participation, ethnicity, discrimination and otherization are the key themes, or the starting categories, in choosing editorials. All of the editorials of the chosen period eliminated references to these key themes, and thus discourse strands have been coded. Afterwards, these themes were correlated to the three basic principles of cultural citizenship as we defined initially that of belonging, recognition, participation, equity and democracy in order to analyse the current cultural citizenship practices in Turkey.

1) Belonging to the Mainstream Society

Citizenship, as Rosaldo (2015) says, includes "a sense of belonging, of having a voice and being heard". It indicates a subjective feeling of identity and a social relation of belonging to a nation, to a state and a community. This sense of belonging is about the everyday politics that surrounds the citizenship practices, and the identity of their families and community members whose citizenship statuses vary. Thus, if there is otherization and discrimination in a society's everyday politics, it will not be possible to build the understanding of cultural citizenship.

Otherization and discrimination depend on the ethnic and religious backgrounds that the writers experience in the real world, these are mostly criticised in the editorials.

"The followers of the writer of these words know that he (refers the writer himself) is opposed to all kinds of positive and negative discrimination, ethnical and racial generalisations, and conspiracy theories. Because, the writer of these words believes that there are good and bad people no matter what religion or ethnicity they belong to" (Molinas, 2011).

"As it is very important, news agents emphasising that it has emerged that Lenin was Jewish. What change does it make to be Jewish? Or what does it mean not to be Jewish? Will anti-semitist leftists be sorry or anti-semitist anti-communists be happy? What about Jewish people? Should they feel sorry or happy about the news? Why are we still considering that much about people's religious beliefs? Isn't it the right time to say stop to this soft racisim?" (Molinas, 2011).

When analysing the editorials, it came out that Turkish Jewish people were facing a strong otherization through the anti-semitism of the national/mainstream society. There is an ongoing anti-semitist hate message that is mostly spread from the mainstream media and targets Jewish people in Turkey, and it is frequently debated in editorials:

 "Anti-semitism has reached its peak point lately in Turkey, especially in the media" (Molinas, 2014a).

"To stop the hate message in our daily life must be the essential pursuit of modern people. This World belongs to all of us (Molinas, 2012).

"'No Jews Allowed' signs and posters don't affect me these days, I have probably got used to them. However, I observe everyone in discontent, fear and panic" (Borakas, 2015).

"One of the most important social problems for Turkey is to find a solution to mistrustful and discriminative behaviour patterns based on hate messages" (Molinas, 2012a).

"The most important suggestion of the meeting (referring to a meeting focused on the media perception of non-Muslims that was organised by the journalists and writers foundation - Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı) was that the hate message that is produced by national and local media in Turkey, and targets non-Muslims, may be detected and prevented by self-control mechanisms within the media itself. Also, it has been suggested that legal arrangements must be made, and criminal sanctions must be designed, for the prevention of discrimination and hate messages" (Molinas, 2012).

Although they are equal citizens of the Turkish nation, they are mostly identified as Israeli people by the majority of the nation, and it feels like they are paying the price for Israel's policies. For example, Molinas refers to the political crisis between Turkey and Israel in an editorial by writing

"During those three years, the Turkish Jewish minority had the most anxious days of their history... If you ask the 20000 Jewish people in Turkey, what are the three things that you do not want to lose in your life? I claim that most of them will answer that they want to keep their health, family and a good fellowship between Turkey and Israel" (Molinas, 2013).

"Although the government says that they are against anti-semitism and the Turkish Jewish community do not represent Israel, there is still a continuous hate message in Turkey about Jewish people, which is very disappointing. But it is also promising that there are a large number of people in Turkey who are against racism and anti-semitism" (Molinas, 2014).

"I am worrying about the latest crisis between Turkey and Israel, I worry that it may cause a negative view of Israeli people and Jewishness, which already exists among some Turkish people, to become established"(Borakas, 2010).

The writers emphasis terms like dialog/communication, compromise, empathy etc., which can be considered as the opposite of discrimination and otherization. For example, referring to Habermas' communicative action theory and its emphasis on a mutual dialog process, Molinas (2013a) says "communication and dialog are the most important actions of the 21st century. As long as there are dialog and communication, we will manage to live together".

Again, referring to Obama's speech on an empathy deficit among Americans being more dangerous than a budget deficit, Molinas (2014b) says "empathy is very rare in Turkey, we should seek to find it".

In a similar manner, Borakas(2015) advises minorities to be more open to dialog instead of keeping quiet and to be patient about hate messages. According to him, now is the time to leave old habits and fears; the time to live with all differences.

Considering that, cultural citizenship as a learning process takes place in communicative situations that arise out of quite ordinary life experiences that are based on learning about the self and of the relationship of the self. Other (Delanthy, 2002) editorials emphasise that dialog and communication can be read as a demand for cultural belonging that has not yet been achieved.

2) Recognition and Participation

Cultural citizenship affirms the distinctive cultural identity of citizens and it asserts claims for the recognition and protection of that identity (Chidester, 2002, p.13). It can be described as cultural empowerment, namely the capacity to participate effectively, creatively and successfully within a national culture (Turner, 2000, p.12). Superficially, such a form of citizenship would involve access to educational institutions, the possession of an appropriate 'living' language, the effective ownership of a cultural identity through national citizenship membership and the capacity to hand on to and transfer to future generations the richness of a national cultural heritage (Turner, 2000,

p.12.). Recognition requires that we respect differences, and it also forms - in a Taylorian sense - our sense of who we are and the value accorded to us as individuals.

According to the editorials, a full citizenship which requires full recognition is not present yet. The Jewish minority is sometimes even obliged to conceal their identity which differentiates them from the mainstream culture. For example, Borakas (2015) says "sometimes we listen to Jewish pop music in our cars and we strive for it not to be heard from outside".

Molinas (2009) evidently describes this lack of recognition of difference by referring to Ataturk (the founder of the nation) when he aimed to build a national identity that was not depend on ethnicity and race. However, "later, this vision didn't work well. Even some *social and cultural rights* have been forgotten" (26.09.2009). In a very similar manner, Borakas (2013) says that, when compare with current law, the Ottoman Empire's arrangements on the political representation of minority groups were more participatory. Again, in an editorial, referring to one of Boris Vian's plays, Borakas (2015a) says to "hope to go beyond our habitat which wears thin day by day and reach those happy days in which different voices and different tones have control over".

According to the editorials, a democratic initiative process can be a starting point to gain those cultural and social rights to be recognised. However, the promises of cultural rights that indicate recognition are not functional unless they are supported by the practices of individuals and institutions. Referring to the democratic opening in Turkey, Molinas (2009) says "openings should be in the thoughts of the people not only in their discourse".

Also, when analysing editorials one can see that Jewish people don't feel that there is a complete participation of the national society at every level. The editorials highlight that there aren't even any Jewish members of Parliament, and one of the writers, Molinas (2015), referring to the forthcoming elections of those days argued that, "in this anti-semitic political climate of Turkey, a Jewish candidate would only be an inconvenience for his/her political party".

The editorials seem to attach a great importance on the relationship between the representatives of government and the Turkish Jewish community that relates to the official recognition of the community by the nation. Molinas often cites the affirmative speeches of governments on minorities. For example, referring to President Davutoğlu's positive speech on minorities, which was made in a meeting with minorities in Ankara Palas (a historical hotel in Ankara), he says that the president's statements on minority groups made history that night for "us who are accepted as foreigners, as the potential enemy inside for decades"(Molinas, 18.02.2015).

3) Equality and Democracy

As Rosaldo (2015) argues, "citizenship includes not only legal definitions or documents but also the extra legal elements of citizenship that we recognize in ordinary language phrases and which acknowledge matters of degree, such as first-class versus second

class citizenship". And again, according to him "in a democracy one wants to minimise second class citizenship and aspire to first–class citizenship for all" (Rosaldo 2015). Like Rosaldo, O'Leary (2014, p.134) says that "cultural citizenship, focuses on claiming or affirming first class citizenship – to have equal access to benefits that come from being a citizen of a particular country - without losing one's cultural identity/ies".

Equality requires democracy which the editorials of Şalom also questions. They demand more democracy, which is one of the three basic conditions of cultural citizenship:

"The reality of Turkey, which is called a conservative democracy, is that it couldn't manage to raise enough open-minded, indulgent and democrat people." (Molinas, 2015a).

A lack of democracy may cause a perception of an unequal society among minorities or marginal groups. For example, according to Borakas' (2014) writing, there is an ongoing uneasiness among Jewish people about their citizenship status that prevents the Jewish minority from feeling equal:

 "This citizen community (Jewish community) is anxious, uneasy.(...) Leaving the motherland to settle in another country is one's own choice... According to some of them what should be done is to write, to battle against hate crime and anti-semitism, to struggle to change the idée fixe, to convince them and to support the idea that Jews are individuals who have constitutional rights just as other Turkish citizens".

"Considering all of the hate messages and all of the kinds of discrimination, how much assurance can be provided to be an equal citizenship as a constitutional right? I question it, not only for myself, but for all of the *others*. Does the discrimination and intolerance of people who have a different language, religion and sexual preference or polarising society get on well with equal citizenship?" (Borakas, 2015b).

Therefore, the editorials often emphasise the demand for an equal citizenship that "should be our natural demand beyond controversy" (Borakas, 2012). However, they want it to be guaranteed, not only by law, but also in the democratic practices of the nation (Molinas, 2015b).

"It is important to refer to the democratic rights and equality among citizens without regard to their language, religion, race and sex, however this is not quite enough. Those principles should be guaranteed by institutions and the practices of society" (Borakas, 2011).

Conclusion

Depending on the analyses of the editorials of Şalom, one could conclude that:

-Otherization and discrimination, on ethnic and religious grounds that the writers experience in the real world, are mostly criticised in the editorials. Thus, it can be said

that that Turkish Jewish people are facing strong otherization as a result of the anti-Semitism of mainstream society.

-In Turkey, full citizenship, which requires widespread recognition, is not yet present. The Jewish minority is sometimes even obliged to conceal their identity which differentiates them from mainstream culture.

-The Democratic Initiative Process, launched by the Turkish government in 2009, could be a starting point to gaining recognition of cultural and social rights. However, Jewish people feel that the promises of cultural rights indicating recognition are not yet functional and will not be so unless they are supported by the practices of individuals and institutions.

-Equality between citizens requires democracy which the editorials of Şalom also question. The lack of democracy which exists in current society may cause the perception of an unequal society among minorities or marginal groups. Thus, the Jewish minority demand more democracy in order to feel equal which, along with belonging and recognition/participation, is one of the three basic conditions of cultural citizenship.

In general, while there is still a degree of uneasiness among Jewish people about their citizenship status, it is appropriate to argue that a comprehensive understanding of cultural citizenship in Turkey's political tradition has not yet been achieved. Therefore, one could say that currently, in the case of the Jewish minority, cultural citizenship practices in Turkey are not adequate.

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