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Denationalization of Citizenship? The Turkish Experience¹

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ABSTRACT *Turkism as a political project aiming at the construction of a Turkish national identity was spelled out in 1904. The realization of this project included processes of assimilation and exclusion of non-Turkish and non-Muslim “others”. There was also an attempt on the part of the Republican elite to construct oblivion in the society about the multicultural Ottoman past in order to constitute a Turkish national identity. Hence, Turkish citizenship emerged as membership to a national state defined on the basis of a single religion (Sunni sect of Islam) and single language (Turkish). The increasing visibility of the non-Turkish and non-Muslim identities in the 1990s unleashed a process of denationalization of citizenship. Denationalization of citizenship gained momentum after Turkey’s official candidacy in the European Union in 1999. Many reforms were undertaken in the parliament towards the utilization of languages other than Turkish as well as the practice of multiple religions. These reforms were upheld by the activities of civil societal organizations in order to portray the presence of multicultural identities in Turkey. Unless reversed by a nationalist backlash, these processes point to the denationalization of citizenship in Turkey.*

Today, with the increasing importance of global processes, the notion of citizenship is getting divorced from its inherent association with the nation-state. The nation-state, the entity that once created the conditions for the entry of people into the political realm so as to determine their own destiny, has become an obstacle to political participation. What’s more, denationalization of citizenship has become a necessity for widening the basis of political participation. Nationalism has lost the vitality and dynamism that it once enjoyed in enhancing political participation. The nation-state has been transformed from an entity that facilitated political participation into an impediment to it. Hence, the democratization of citizenship practices has increasingly become connected to their denationalization.

Turkey became an official candidate for membership in the European Union (EU) at the Helsinki Summit of the EU member state and government leaders in 1999. Since this summit, the ongoing governmental measures and non-governmental initiatives towards democratizing the notion of citizenship have gained momentum. The following article is an attempt to portray such measures and initiatives in Turkey, which have the effect of democratizing the notion of citizenship via its denationalization.

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The theoretical framework presented in the first part situates the arguments in the article within the debates regarding post-national and denationalized citizenship. Accordingly, the possibility of envisioning Turkish citizenship as a concept that is not necessarily and exclusively attached to the Turkish national identity is considered. Such a possibility is referred to in this article as “denationalization”. The second part of the article traces the evolution of Turkish citizenship as membership within a national community along the path towards the formation of the Turkish nation-state. 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, etcetera. 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. This part, then, contains an effort to delineate these “others” of the Turkish national identity in an effort to portray the nationalization of citizenship in the Turkish context. The third part of this article contains various legal codes passed by the Turkish parliament as part of the EU accession reforms as well as certain non-governmental undertakings as possible indicators of a process of denationalization of citizenship in Turkey.

Denationalization of Citizenship: A Conceptual Introduction

In modern politics, people find themselves in a position to embrace national identities in order to have a bearing as a human being. Modern citizenship entails membership in a national community. In fact, it is common practice to use the word “citizenship” and “national identity” or “nationality” synonymously in referring to membership, loyalty and allegiance to a nation-state. The association of the concept of citizenship with national identity can be traced back to the French Revolution, when the nation emerged as the source of sovereignty of the state. It was at this time that the *people* became the *nation*. In Turkey, too, the notion of citizenship represents a higher status than the people. In a widely used expression in Turkey, it is commonly claimed that “the people have flooded the beaches, hence the citizens cannot swim”.²

Citizenship is most popularly crystallized in identity cards and/or national passports that one needs in order to cross national borders. Yet, defining citizenship through such certificates is inadequate since not all their beholders enjoy equal rights of citizenship. In fact, the definition of citizenship through such certificates in Turkey has made policy-makers blind to the inequalities among the Turkish citizens. In Turkey, issues of citizenship mainly contain claims of inequality of certified or card-carrying members of the Turkish Republic who are non-Muslims or of non-Turkish origin.³ It is the association of the concept of citizenship with national identity or nationality that is the main cause of such inequalities.

The emergence of citizenship studies as a *de facto* field in the humanities and social sciences in the 1990s prompted a definition of citizenship “not simply as a legal status but as political and social recognition and economic distribution” (Isin & Turner, 2003, pp. 1–2). The concept of denationalization is based on such an understanding of citizenship. It is used throughout this text in order to refer to processes that enable those legal Turkish citizens who are non-Muslims and who are not of Turkish descent to make legitimate claims about their different religious, linguistic, and cultural existence in the public realm within the territorial boundaries of the Turkish state. The legitimation of such

claims makes it possible for these “authorized yet unrecognized” citizens to enjoy equal rights (Sassen, 2003b, pp. 283–285).

The concept of denationalization was used by Saskia Sassen in order to underline the transformation of the national realm (Sassen, 2003a, 2003b). Sassen argues that denationalization and post-nationalism represent two different trajectories albeit not excluding each other. Denationalization “has to do with the transformation of the national, specifically under the impact of globalization and several other dynamics, and will tend to instantiate inside the national” (Sassen, 2003b, p. 286). Post-nationalism, on the other hand, makes references to new forms of citizenship such as European citizenship and city citizenship that are located outside of the national realm.⁴ In short, denationalization is still connected to the national albeit indicating new forms of engagement with it. Such a distinction of denationalization from the post-national enables democratization within the national realm by engaging “the global from within the national and through national institutional channels” (Sassen, 2003b, pp. 287–288). The concept of denationalization seems more appropriate in grasping the nature of the transformation of citizenship in the Turkish case.

Since the definition of the Turkish citizen has a religious (Sunni sect of Islam), linguistic (Turkish), and cultural dimension, denationalization of citizenship refers to claims of political and social participation on the part of Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Kurds, Arabs, Alevis, Circassians, Georgians, Lazes, etcetera, by retaining and claiming their differences instead of denying them. These non-Muslim and/or non-Turkish people who are legal citizens of the Turkish Republic mostly can speak Turkish yet may consider languages other than Turkish, such as Greek, Armenian, Kurdish, and Arabic, as their native language. Despite the fact that they are legal citizens of the Turkish Republic, they are deprived of those rights pertaining to a “different” existence such as education in a language other than Turkish.

In Turkey, civil, legal, political, and social rights were mostly given from above with the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, prior to an overwhelming societal demand from below. Citizenship was bestowed upon the people by the Republican elite as an instrument that kept the national community intact. The emergence of Turkish citizenship preceded the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the process of urbanization (Kadioglu, 1999). Turkish citizens became citizens prior to experiencing individuation and internalizing the meaning of “town air makes free” (Heater, 1990, p. 21).⁵ The Turkish notion of citizenship, when compared to its European counterparts, lacked a connection to the city. Instead, the achievement of national unity appeared to be the *raison d’être* of citizenship in Turkey. Therefore, the “rights” of citizenship were downgraded whereas the membership “duties” geared towards constituting the national unity were emphasized (Ustel, 2004). As the fundamental references of Turkish nationalism evolved from religious (1919–1923) to secular (1924–1929) themes and then became suffused by ethnocultural (1929–1938) motifs, the citizenship practices evolved in accordance with these core elements, respectively (Kadioglu, 1996, 2005; Yildiz, 2001).

Today, with the increasing impact of the processes of globalization, we are witnessing the rejuvenation of the notion of citizenship by virtue of an emphasis on its participatory qualities akin to the notion prevailed in the Greek city-states. That participatory element embedded within the notion of citizenship has yet to be fully realized due to obstacles imposed on it by national codes. Democratization of citizenship involves a transition from a notion based on an exclusive and obligatory membership in a national community

to a notion based on rights and participation. Since national identity and unity are highly celebrated notions in the Turkish context, democratization of citizenship is more likely to involve the possibility of generating voluntary forms of engagement with the national rather than post-national citizenship. Before turning to such possible indicators of denationalization in Turkey, it will be illuminating to portray in more detail the nationalization of citizenship in the Turkish context by underlining the “others” of the Turkish national identity.

The “Others” of the Turkish National Identity

One of the pioneer works referring to “Turkism” as a political project was penned by Yusuf Akcura, who was one of the ideologues of Turkish nationalism. The epoch-making article that he published in 1904 in Cairo, in a newspaper entitled *Turk*, was called “Uc Tarz-i Siyaset” (“Three ways of policy”) (Akcura, 1987 [1904]). In this article, Akcura pointed to the inadequacies of Ottomanism and Islamism in quelling the prevailing ethnic disturbances and in ensuring the unity of the empire. The publication of Akcura’s article signals the beginning of the emergence of Turkism as a secular political project that went beyond the effort of underlining common cultural traits of the Turks. It symbolized the emergence of Turkism as a political project opting for a modern nation-state.⁶

The year 1904 also signaled the Russo-Japanese war, which brought glory to Japan and shattered the racist myth about the second-class character of the yellow race.⁷ It is likely that this development lent credence to the moral legitimacy of the Turkist currents among the Young Turks at the turn of the twentieth century (Yildiz, 2001). In the ensuing years, the shapes and colors of the nationalist picture, which were still in its nascent form, in 1904, began to appear. The picture became quite distinct with the onset of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). It is at this historical juncture that the “others” of the emerging Turkish national identity were being defined.

It is possible to identify three sets of “others” of the Turkish national identity that began to emerge at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The first set of “others” include the non-Muslims, such as the Jews, Armenians, and Greeks, within the empire. The tensions involving them had begun with the onset of Westernizing reforms within the Ottoman Empire. Reforms geared at Westernization within the Ottoman Empire began during the Tulip Era (1718–1830). These reforms started within the military institution. There were also reforms in terms of city planning of Istanbul, arts and culture. The era acquired its name from the new fashion among the elite in Istanbul to grow tulips. This era points to the acknowledgement of the military downfall of the Ottoman Empire. Hence, a search for maintaining the *raison d’etat* by looking up to the West had begun. In the aftermath of this era, the West with its concepts and institutions became a role model for the Ottoman reformers.

The Westernizing reforms of the Ottoman rulers acquired some momentum at the turn of the nineteenth century and began to involve areas other than the military. The *Tanzimat* reforms, which were introduced by the *Tanzimat* Charter in 1839, involved a major reorganization at the levels of provincial administration, education and the judiciary. *Tanzimat*—as the term indicated—involved the restructuring and reordering of the fundamental institutions of the Ottoman system. The reforms pertaining to the equality of the Muslim and non-Muslim peoples (*musavat*) crystallized in the Reform Edict (*Islahat Fermani*) of 1856. According to Niyazi Berkes, the Reform Edict of 1856 involved more

concrete measures geared towards continuing a modernist trend that was set by the *Tanzimat* Charter (Berkes, 1998, pp. 152–153).⁸ The Reform Edict promised non-Muslims full equality, which included equality in liability for military service as well as entry to government positions and schools (Shaw & Shaw, 1994). Since such measures affected the day-to-day activities of the people, it generated a major uproar in the society. The Reform Edict of 1856 and its implications symbolized the deepening of a rupture between the Muslims (*millet-i hakime*) and the non-Muslims (*millet-i mahkume*) within the empire.

The reform measures prompted an uproar among the Muslims within the empire who felt that the ground beneath them was becoming increasingly more slippery and that they were losing their old privileged status.⁹ In fact, shortly after the Reform Edict, in 1859, a secret organization was formed in Istanbul challenging the terms of the Edict and opting for reinstating an order based on Islamic law.¹⁰ Such reactions revealed the tip of the iceberg of anti-Christian potential existed within the empire in the middle of the nineteenth century. The driving force of this anti-Christian potential was still Islam and it was still not decorated with secular elements of an ethnic Turkism. This potential began to be realized more as the empire disintegrated further at the turn of the twentieth century.

Some of the practices that contained an anti-Christian element were evident in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars in 1914. Initially, as the Ottomans lost territory to the Russians, Austrians and the Greeks, migrations of Muslims from these lands into the center of the empire started. These in-migrations of Muslims increased during the Balkan Wars. As the Bulgarian army made its way towards Istanbul, about 250,000 Muslim migrants from the defeated territories moved there (Aktar, 2005, p. 120). The hardening of the nationalist stance of the Young Turks organized around the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), coupled with the presence of these newly arrived Muslims in Istanbul, began to create an uneasiness among the Greeks living in the Western coastal towns of the empire. In fact, the first time a thought pertaining to the exchange of populations was entertained in 1914, at the end of the Balkan Wars (Aktar, 2005, pp. 119–122).

The outbreak of the First World War accelerated the reactionary movements within the empire towards the non-Muslim groups. Perhaps the most important measures during the war years involved the deportation and massacre of Armenians in 1915. This period, which is completely ignored in the Turkish historical recollection and not mentioned in the history books in schools, is only recently being discussed in Turkey. During the First World War, many Greeks fled the lands of the empire. The houses that they left behind were partly destroyed during the war. Yet, the onset of the Turkish War of Independence prompted further exchange of populations involving the Anatolian Greeks, and Muslims from the Greek lands. Between 1922 and 1924, about 1,200,000 Anatolian Greeks and 400,000 Muslims from the Greek lands were dislocated from their homes (Aktar, 2005, p. 125).

The dislocation of the Greeks from Anatolia was made mandatory via the Lausanne Accords pertaining to the exchange of populations that were signed between the Turkish and Greek delegates in 1923. The thought behind the accords was to create a nation-state with a homogenized population structure. Such groups as the Greeks from Karaman who could only speak Turkish, and the Muslims from Crete who only spoke Greek, did not want to be dislocated. Yet, they had to obey the accords and leave their homelands. According to Çağlar Keyder, an understanding of ethnic homogeneity weighed heavier than the principle of the self-determination of the peoples, in the eyes of both the Greek and Turkish policy-makers (Keyder, 2005, p. 57). The Turkification of Anatolia

via the exclusion of non-Muslims became official via forced exchange of populations after 1923. Accordingly, in 1913, in the lands that constitute today's Turkey, one in every five persons was a non-Muslim. At the end of 1923, this ratio was down to one in 40 (Keyder, 1989, p. 67).

Muslims within the empire who were perceived as different (non-Turkish) due to their language and the religious sects to which they belonged constitute the second set of "others" of the Turkish national identity. Anatolia was the home of various groups who were Muslims yet who were perceived as being of non-Turkish origin because of the language they spoke. The policy of exclusion *vis-à-vis* the Christians within the empire that culminated in mass deportations, massacres and exchange of populations was replaced by a policy of assimilation towards these groups, which included Kurds, Arabs, Slavic Muslims, Circassians, and Georgians. The Alevis among the Kurds and Arabs who pledged allegiance to a version of Islam that was non-Sunni were also perceived as "others" of the Turkish national identity. The Turcoman Alevis also faced discrimination by virtue of their loyalty to a non-Sunni sect of Islam.

Religious authorities in the Ottoman system were always tied to the state officialdom. In this structure, the state exercised its power by having monopoly over Ottoman lands and established itself as a central, despotic institution. The fundamental tension within the Ottoman state structure was the emergence of feudal tendencies in certain localities and the central state administration's determination to suppress them. The state realized such a repression not only via military means but also through exercising an upper hand over religion. Most of the local mutinies trying to acquire some autonomy from the central state were staged in religious terms.¹¹ The Ottoman rulers resorted to a rigid view of the Sunni sect of Islam that they embraced in order to suppress feudal tendencies. Hence, religion was used as an instrument in securing the central state administration, especially with the rise of local challenges against the central, despotic state system.

During the decline of the central Ottoman system in the face of the rise of Western technological advances at the end of the sixteenth century, religious authorities espousing religious law began to declare their independence from the central state system. In fact, in stark contrast to those analysis that took for granted the existence of a theocratic structure and a despotism stemming from religious dogma within the Ottoman Empire, other analyses maintained that it was rather the presence of religious law that played the role of delimiting the absolute authority of the Sultans. Accordingly, the notion of "justice" in the Ottoman system, for instance, was activated due to the presence and impact of Islamic thought (Ozek, 1986, p. 369). Such developments paved the way to the inculcation of a "discourse of the just", which was associated with Islam, in opposition to the central state apparatus, as well as the advent of the state officials as the patrons of an "unjust discourse" (Mardin, 1991).

Various measures that were geared towards secularization in the early years of the Republic ignited the fire of a process of centralization of the state administration at the expense of the ethnic, cultural and religious differences in the periphery.¹² The abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 put an end to the unifying power of Islam among various ethnic groups within the empire. The leaders of the Kurdish people who derived their legitimacy from the Caliphate found themselves pushed to the periphery of politics (Yegen, 1996). From that point onwards Kurdish rebellions were staged in religious terms and there was a convergence of the Kurdish and peripheral religious demands since they both came to represent an opposition to the unjust discourse of the central state.

In the aftermath of the abolition of the Caliphate, the formation of the Turkish national identity began to take place via the adoption of assimilatory practices towards the non-Turkish Muslims within the Turkish Republic. The adoption of such assimilatory practices such as restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language, names and traditional costumes as well as limitations on the utilization of the expressions “Kurd” and “Kurdistan” in history books and in daily language prompted various Kurdish rebellions against the center. The assimilatory practices took the form of national campaigns imposing the use of the Turkish language, such as the campaign of “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” (*Vatandas, Turkce Konus!*), which was unleashed in January 1928 by the student association of the Faculty of Law in Istanbul. Accordingly, languages other than Turkish were forbidden in such public places as movie theatres, restaurants, and hotels. Posters declaring “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” were posted in public transportation vehicles. These practices were accompanied by legal measures geared towards Turkifying names. There were also Turkification measures in the realm of education and economics via newly adopted legal codes making Turkish classes mandatory in minority schools and making the use of the Turkish language mandatory in economic institutions (Yildiz, 2001).

The third “other” of the Turkish national identity was the backward representations of its Ottoman past (Bora, 1996). The various reforms that were adopted in the early years of the Republic aimed at breaking with the Ottoman past and turning the face of the new Turkish nation towards the West. The Republican reforms were based on secular appeals. The Republican project of Westernization “showed a great distaste for religion” (Mardin, 1990, p. 21). The Republican elite was convinced that Islam was the cause of the backwardness of the Ottomans as well as the failure of the various attempts at Westernization. Therefore, secularization came to be regarded as a prerequisite for reaching the level of contemporary civilization. Accordingly, various measures opting for secularization were taken by the CUP as early as 1917.

Secularizing reforms were undertaken by the Republican elite at a faster rate in the aftermath of the proclamation of the republic in 1923. They have paved the way to a denial of the Islamic bond that kept the Ottoman society intact, coupled with an effort to create a secular Turkish nationalism. This could only be done by inflicting a state of amnesia in the psyches of the “new Turks” (Bisbee, 1951). Perhaps the most important mechanism detaching the “new Turks” rhetorically from their “backward” Ottoman past was inflicted with the adoption of the Latin script as part of the reform attempts in 1928. In the words of Feroz Ahmed, “At a stroke, even the literate people were cut off from their past. Overnight, virtually the entire nation was made illiterate” (Ahmad, 1993, p. 35). I believe, despite the continuity between the Ottoman and Turkish institutional structures, it is this element of “oblivion” which was engineered in the early years of the Republic that made it possible to exclude the history of the non-Muslim and non-Turkish peoples from official history books in Turkey throughout the Republican history.

In the end, primary and secondary school education has become the vehicle for the reproduction of oblivion in Turkey. This engineered oblivion has made “the new Turks” ignorant about the multi-religious and multi-ethnic history of the lands that they inhabit. It has paved the way to an official rhetoric of denial concerning the atrocities committed against these other inhabitants of this culturally enriched land, which became barren as a result of policies of homogenization. “The new Turks” of the land of oblivion have become ignorant about the extent of the impoverishment brought upon them on the road to a homogeneous nation-state.

A view of Islam as representing backwardness has paved the way to a fierce tension between the “new and Western” and “old and backward” symbols in Turkey. Women who choose to cover their heads with scarves are usually blamed for pushing Turkey backwards. They are denied entry into universities. In fact, in a peculiar case in 2003, a woman wearing a headscarf was not allowed to enter a court room in Turkey despite the fact that she was the accused person in the legal case (Kadioglu, 2006). Hence, women who have openly embraced these symbols of “backwardness” proved themselves unable to be full citizens of the Turkish Republic. Their fate has been similar to the aforementioned “others” of the Turkish Republic. In an article in which she elaborates on the “minority” status in Turkey, Fatma Muge Gocek, too, refers to the similarities among the status of the Islamic women and the Kurdish, Alevi, Armenian, Greek and Jewish minorities in the Turkish context (Gocek, 2006).¹³

There is an element of “Westernism despite the West” in the Turkish psyche. The clue, perhaps, to the nature of this trait lies in the oblivion about the past pertaining to Western traits while at the same time trying to inculcate Western habits. This paves the way to a strange mix of oblivion of the educated Turkish elite about the Christian populations who lived on this land at the turn of the twentieth century while at the same time finding it very natural to decorate Christmas trees and occasionally priding themselves in befriending Christian Westerners more easily than the Anatolian villagers. History cannot be kept in an antiseptic bottle. It somehow creeps into the psyches of the people despite the official rhetoric. The unwanted “imperialists” who were the enemies in the War of Independence were at the same time the Western role models whose civilized way the Turks were encouraged to emulate. This has created confusion in the psyches of the Turks and made them rather proud people despite the fact that they do not think very highly of themselves. This simultaneous existence of pride and dislike about oneself mirrors a native Orientalist perspective, coupled with a military and national arrogance.

Denationalization Practices

The nature of the processes geared towards the democratization of citizenship varies in different countries. In Germany, for instance, the terms of the Treaty on the European Union was instrumental in prompting such processes. The notion of German citizenship based on the principle of descent (*jus sanguinis*) was challenged in 1989 by the provincial assembly of Schleswig–Holstein. This was opposed by the Christian Democratic Party (CDU/CSU), which challenged the constitutionality of the law. The German Constitutional Court ruled against the law in October 1990. The court maintained that the law passed by the provincial assembly of Schleswig–Holstein was unconstitutional since “All state power (*Staatsgewalt*) proceeds from the people” and “Foreigners do not belong to it” (cited in Benhabib, 2004, pp. 203–204). Interestingly, the Constitutional Court’s decision became redundant when, in 1993, the Treaty on the European Union (Treaty of Maastricht) established European citizenship, which granted political rights in local and regional elections to citizens of all the signatory states, provided that they fulfill residency requirements in their host country. In the words of Benhabib: “In retrospect, this decision of the German Constitutional Court, written in 1990, appears as a swan song to a vanishing ideology of nationhood” (Benhabib, 2004, p. 207).

The changes in citizenship legislation that were finally made in Germany were facilitated as a result of its membership in a supra-national entity. This has made the

emergence of a vision of post-national citizenship possible in the German context. The notion of European citizenship constituted a prelude to the New Citizenship Law of 2000 which signaled a move away from the principle of descent in the legal definition of German citizenship. Despite the fact that facilitating naturalization does not eliminate discrimination in the society, there is no doubt that it constitutes a step towards the democratization of citizenship practices in Germany where non-assimilationist, exclusionary citizenship practices had traditionally been predominant.

The type of discrimination that exists in Turkey, on the other hand, deprives the “others” of national identity of political and social recognition as well as economic distribution. Participation in political, social and economic life is more than simply voting rights. It also involves rights about “being different”. These are rights that have to do with the freedom to use one’s native language, traditional costumes and religious insignia. Denationalization of citizenship in Turkey does not necessarily involve legal codes pertaining to the enlargement of citizenship to other nationals in order to guarantee their political participation in terms of voting. It rather involves the minority rights of peoples who are “citizens” in the legal sense and hence can participate in local, regional and national elections. Such minority rights, in so far as they refer to rights geared towards integration through the maintenance of religious, ethnic, and language-related differences, are called “multicultural rights”.

Multicultural rights are “intended to promote integration into the larger society, not self-government” (Kymlicka & Norman, 1995, p. 305). They portray a “willingness” on the part of the governments “not just to tolerate but to welcome cultural difference” (p. 307). Issues concerning bilingual education in schools, bilingual street signs and freedom to wear one’s traditional costumes and practice different religions are included among these rights. The multicultural groups in question seek to become a part of the host society while at the same time maintaining and not erasing their religious, ethnic, and language-related differences. The integration of such differences into the common culture poses a serious challenge to the prevailing notion of citizenship. It is such attempts towards integrating group differences into the common culture that prompted the notion of “group-differentiated citizenship” in the literature (Young, 1989, 1990; Kymlicka & Norman, 1995). Denationalization of citizenship constitutes a move towards group-differentiated citizenship.

The nationalization of citizenship in Turkey meant the erasure of religious, ethnic and language-related differences in the society. The Republic that evolved became a Republic of Turks at the end of the various policies of the homogenization of the population via exclusionary as well as assimilationist policies. Such a Republic of Turks ignored the presence of other religious and ethnic groups to the point of “forgetting” them. Rights pertaining to difference first and foremost require the acknowledgement of such difference. One important element of this acknowledgement is turning back the process of “forgetting” that has long accompanied the formation of the Turkish national identity.

There are two important acts of disclosure that promise to accelerate the denationalization of citizenship in Turkey. The first is an understanding of citizenship not just as membership in a community in which an individual is entitled a passport and the right to vote in national elections but also as a conception that is attuned to religious, ethnic and cultural differences. Citizenship involves a set of rights which is above and beyond membership. These rights include the right to be different from the national majority. Second, a major disclosure towards denationalizing citizenship is contained in the very act

of making a conscious effort “to remember” the past identities that enriched the Turkish territories prior to their exclusion and/or assimilation in the course of the formation of a national Turkish identity. In what follows, some of the new laws passed by the parliament towards the acknowledgement of differences in the Turkish society, as well as non-governmental efforts to remember the past, will be portrayed.

Some of the most important parliamentary reforms towards the acknowledgement of different religious and ethnic identities in Turkey were realized as part of the effort to join the EU. After Turkey became an official candidate at the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, the efforts to fulfill the promised reforms within the National Program (March 2001) gained momentum. There were significant constitutional amendments in 2001 and 2004, as well as various “packages” containing amendments of other legal codes.¹⁴

The constitutional amendments of 2001 contained provisions widening the scope of fundamental rights and freedoms in Turkey by reformulating the Article 13 of the 1982 Constitution. (Oran, 2004, p. 95). Another amendment (Article 26) broadened the scope of the “languages” with which people could express themselves in their daily lives. Freedom of expression was further widened by the deletion of the expression from Article 28, which stated, “There can be no activities of publication in languages that are forbidden by law” (Oran, 2004, p. 96).

The constitutional amendments of 2004 contained an addition to the Article 90 of the constitution concerning the ratification of international treaties. The addition stated that whenever there arises conflicts between international treaties pertaining to fundamental human rights and domestic laws, the articles of the international treaties should prevail. This has opened the door to the possibility to implement some of the articles pertaining to minority rights contained within the Treaty of Lausanne (Oran, 2004, p. 97).

In addition to these constitutional amendments, there were also various amendments of other legal codes. These included: amendments of the criminal code in order to make possible the incrimination of expressions that degrade the minorities. There were further ameliorations of the freedom of expression by opening up the possibility of broadcasting in radio and television in “forbidden” languages (26 March 2002), as well as lifting the ban on the teaching and learning of different languages (3 August 2002) (Oran, 2004, pp. 98–99).

There was also an amendment concerning the Law of the Foundations that facilitated the possibility of the non-Muslim foundations to own property in Turkey (2 January 2003). A package of amendments that were passed (19 June 2003) contained a change in construction law which made it easier to construct sites of religious prayer for all religions. There was also a change in legal codes that restricted the utilization of non-Turkish names (Oran, 2004, p. 99).

All of the above amendments contain changes pointing in the direction of the denationalization of citizenship. The amendments opt for the integration of the minorities without their assimilation into a uniform Turkish culture. They promise the adoption of a concept of citizenship that is above and beyond membership to a national unit and that embraces human rights. Still, there are various problems that are encountered in the course of the “implementation” of these legal changes. The difficulties that are encountered during implementation force the legislators to keep passing new laws on the issues of language education, broadcasting in minority languages in radio and televisions, and the property rights of the non-Muslim religious foundations. The years 2002–2005 witnessed an ongoing war waged between “legislators” and “bureaucrats” over the implementation of the amendments. The bureaucratic establishment resorted to its own rules and

procedures in order to delay the implementation of the amendments passed by the parliament. Still, the legal amendments laid a foundation for the possibility of the denationalization of citizenship.

In addition to these amendments that were passed in the parliament, there were various non-governmental efforts opting for the recollection and celebration of the country's multi-religious and multi-ethnic past. These include the publication of books, exhibits as well as academic conferences held in Turkey.

One such book, which contained motifs of a long-forgotten past, was published in 2004. The author, Fethiye Cetin, after discovering that her grandmother was Armenian, decided to write a book about her. The book that she finally wrote, titled *Anneannem* (My Grandmother), is her way of tracing the highlights of a forgotten past via the memoirs of her grandmother (Cetin, 2004).¹⁵

Another book, which was also published in 2004, is authored by Takuhi Tovmasyan. It is a cookbook-memoir titled *Sofraniz Sen Olsun* (May Your Table Be Jolly). It not only contains recipes but also photo-biographies of two Armenian families, covering the 1915 deportations as well as the difficulties endured during the imposition of the Levy Tax on the non-Muslim peoples during the Second World War.

Baskin Oran's book titled *Turkiye'de Azinliklar* (Minorities in Turkey) was also published in 2004. Not only is it an academic book, with structured information and insight about the minorities in Turkey, it also makes an important statement about the necessity to denationalize citizenship in Turkey. Oran argues that what stands in the way of democratization in Turkey is the 1982 Constitution. Although various amendments are being made, he thinks that there are two critical articles that still remain to be modified. First of all, in Article 3/1 of the Constitution, it is suggested that the "Turkish state is an indivisible whole with its country and its nation. Its language is Turkish." Oran argues that the expression "its nation" should be deleted from this article since it is "the indivisibility of the state" that should be maintained rather than "the indivisibility of the nation". The nation is comprised of various religious and ethnic identities and should not be the subject matter of an indivisibility. Second, Oran suggests that the expression "Its language is Turkish" should be changed into "Its *official* language is Turkish". This, he argues, would allow the flourishing of other languages in cultural activities and daily life while maintaining Turkish as the "official language" of the state. Yet, Article 4 of the Constitution maintains that the expressions within the Article 3 of the Constitution cannot be changed; and "no one can propose that they be changed".¹⁶ Despite the fact that they were headed by the government, Oran's suggestions and his insistence on the necessity to use the expression *Turkiyeli* (to be from Turkey—a territorial claim) rather than *Turk* (to be a Turk—an ethnic claim) received widespread media attention in Turkey in 2004.

There were two highly controversial exhibits in the year 2005 that pointed to the existence of multicultural lives in the history of the territories that constitute Turkey. One of these exhibits, which was opened in January 2005 at the *Karsi* Art Gallery in Istanbul, contained 800 postcards depicting Armenian life in Anatolia that were sent at the turn of the century. The earliest date on them is 1914. The title of the exhibit was in Armenian: *Sireli Yegpayris*, meaning "My Dear Brother". The curator of the exhibit, Osman Koker (2005), collected the highlights in a book that aspires to portray the extent of the Armenian presence in various parts of Anatolia.

The second exhibit at the same gallery in Istanbul opened on the 50th anniversary of the 6–7 September 1955 events which contained a massive vandalism of Greek-owned shops

in Istanbul. These events involved a major anti-Greek nationalist backlash. They are not covered in the official history books used in schools in Turkey. The exhibit, which was a first of its kind, was prompted by the memoirs of a military judge (Fahri Coker) who also had various pictures in his private files. He had given these to the History Foundation (*Tarih Vakfi*) in Turkey to be made public after his death. The exhibit contained these shocking pictures of vandalism in the streets of Istanbul.¹⁷

Perhaps the most important academic conference that contained an effort to come to grips with a multicultural past was held in Istanbul on 24–26 September 2005, in the aftermath of a postponement and a cancellation. It was titled “Ottoman Armenians during the Demise of the Ottoman Empire: Responsible Scholarship and Issues of Democracy” and was organized jointly by Bosphorus University, Sabanci University and Istanbul Bilgi University.¹⁸ The official line of the Turkish state on the Armenian issue is distinguished by virtue of its denial of the past atrocities. This conference was distinguished by virtue of offering a perspective that was significantly different from this official view. The conference had historical significance since it not only symbolized the expression of unofficial thoughts on this issue but also those views that disputed the nationalist discourse of the Armenian Diaspora. The conference showed the world that there are views other than the official Turkish stance in Turkey on the Armenian question. This point was important in the sense that it also portrayed albeit after various obstacles that there exists academic freedom in Turkey and scholars feel free not to embrace the state discourse. The nationalist groups in Turkey from both the Right and Left of the political spectrum demonstrated their opposition to the conference at the gates by throwing eggs at the participants and at times by singing the national anthem. The conference paved the way to the expression of the existing and forthcoming political strife in Turkey between those who support the construction of political, cultural and economic bridges between Turkey and the EU and others who embrace introverted, national themes. This strife cuts across the old divisions between the ideologies of the Right and the Left.

Conclusion

All the legal amendments passed by the Turkish parliament in relation to the EU accession processes point to the possibility of a denationalization of citizenship in Turkey, provided that the problems of implementation are overcome. They promise to contribute positively to the elimination of barriers to the expression of different languages as well as religious practices in Turkey. These developments, coupled with the efforts of the non-governmental agents towards remembering a long-forgotten past and enjoy its multicultural layers, have brought the country to an intersection. While it is possible to underline the difficulties of implementation, the resistance of the bureaucrats and the people in legal professions as well as the nationalist demonstrations against these acts of remembering, there is no doubt that a lot of changes have been undertaken since the Helsinki Summit of 1999. It is, in fact, possible to view these rather important changes as the precursors of a process of denationalization of citizenship in Turkey.

The EU processes have led to the decoupling of citizenship and nationality for the citizens of the member states at the local and regional levels. It is very likely that the EU accession processes will continue to have the same effect in Turkey via the recognition and extension of minority rights, provided that they are not curtailed by a nationalist backlash. Since Turkey is still not a member of the EU, Turkish citizens need visas in order to travel

to EU countries. Furthermore, the extent of assimilation and exclusion of the “others” in history portrays the strength of the bond between citizenship and national identity. These factors coupled with the predominance of a centralized state structure in Turkey makes it rather difficult to envision post-national forms of engagement such as European citizenship and city citizenship. The democratization of citizenship in Turkey is more likely to involve a transformation of the national from within. Hence, denationalization processes are at the heart of the reforms geared towards a decoupling of citizenship and national identity in Turkey. The legal reforms as well as the activities of the non-governmental organizations opt for encouraging more voluntary forms of engagement with the nation. They can pave the way to envision citizenship in Turkey as a notion that does not necessarily involve loyalty to the nation. This makes it possible to reconceptualize citizenship in the language of rights in Turkey. Yet, all these possibilities rest on a rather precarious and timid relationship between Turkey and the EU.

Denationalization of citizenship can enrich the cultural and religious landscape in Turkey. Nevertheless, an unwarranted emphasis on the part of the EU officials and the leaders of the member states on the inadequacy of the measures taken by the Turkish governments during the accession processes is likely to magnify the appeal of the nationalist ideologies in Turkey. Today, the division between those civil societal organizations that push for denationalizing measures and the rejuvenated nationalist groups in Turkey represent the most important political divide in the society. This divide is reflected in the position of political parties that contest the elections. The debates around the reconceptualization of citizenship constitute the cornerstone of the future political alignments in Turkey.

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Notes

- ¹ This article is dedicated to the memory of Hrant Dink, an Armenian Turkish journalist/writer who was the editor of the newspaper *Agos* and a beloved friend, who was assassinated in Istanbul on 19 January 2007. While his assassination is a signal of a nationalist backlash, about 100,000 people (mostly Muslim Turks) who marched in grief in his funeral portrayed the enduring possibility of rethinking citizenship in Turkey in denational terms.
- ² This expression was allegedly uttered for the first time by Fahrettin Kerim Gokay who was the governor and mayor of Istanbul between the years 1949–1957.
- ³ In pointing to such differences in terms of rights among certified citizens in the Middle East, Uri Davis benefits from a distinction made between *jinsiyya* (passport citizenship) and *muwatana* (democratic citizenship) in the Arabic political and legal language (Davis, 1997).
- ⁴ For post-national citizenship, see Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal (1994). City citizenship in Netherlands is emphasized in Benhabib (2004).
- ⁵ Engin Isin and Bora Isyar contest this view that underlines the lack of an urban dimension in modern Turkish citizenship by elaborating on the concept of “medeniye” as an evidence of a connection between the citizens and the city in the Ottoman empire (Isin & Isyar, 2006).
- ⁶ Akcura’s historically significant article raised some criticisms at the time of its publication. The criticisms that were written by Ali Kemal and Ahmet Ferit and published in the same newspaper

pointed to the dangers of prompting the nationalist feeling among the Turks since it was believed that this would have a domino effect on various other nationalisms and bring the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, the disintegration came not due to the Turkist political nationalism but as a result of various other nationalisms within the empire of both the non-Muslim and Muslim groups. The emergence of these nationalisms pointed to the inability of the Ottomanist vision to keep the empire intact and hence the inevitability of its disintegration (Yildiz, 2001, p. 72).

- ⁷ Such racial claims had already been rampant in late nineteenth century Europe. One of the pioneer works classifying the races was by Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) titled *Essai sur l'inegalite des races humaines* (1853–1855).
- ⁸ Berkes (1998) pointed to a continuity between the Tanzimat and the Republican reforms. The issue of continuity or rupture between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic produced a debate among the historians. This contested issue is particularly important for grasping the evolution of citizenship in Turkey. The “rupture” argument places too much weight on the liberating impact of the Republican reforms for the Ottoman subjects. The “continuity” argument, on the other hand, points to the inability of the evolution of a view of citizenship that is based on universal rights, both in the Ottoman empire and the Turkish Republic, due to a type of modernization “from above”. In pointing to the significance of the continuity/rupture debate for citizenship, Isin & Isyar (2006) refer to the works of Unsal (1998) and Aybay (1998) as representatives of a “rupture” approach coupled with an emphasis laid on the necessity of a Republican regime as a prerequisite of citizenship. Keyder (1998), Kasaba (1998) and Kadioglu’s (1995) approaches, on the other hand, underscore a continuity between the Ottoman empire and the Turkish Republic in terms of the evolution of citizenship “from above”.
- ⁹ The Reform Edict was prepared by a commission of representatives from England, France, Austria, and the Ottoman state. The issue of the equality of the Muslims and non-Muslims that was underscored by the Edict created a feeling of resentment among the Muslim populace and was expressed in the writings of the Young Ottomans who referred to it as the Edict of Privileges (*Imtiyaz Fermani*) (Turkone, 1994, p. 68).
- ¹⁰ The attempted coup, known as the Kuleli incident, failed.
- ¹¹ The first of such mutinies was led by Seyh Celal from Yozgat in 1519. It was prompted by an urge against the central taxation system and the corruption of the state tax collectors. It was realized in religious terms. It started among the Alevi-Turcoman peoples of the empire and then was extended to the Sunni groups in Islam. Although it was suppressed in no time, subsequent such attempts within the Ottoman empire that were against the central state administration and realized in religious terms acquired the name *Celali* mutinies (*Celali isyanlari*).
- ¹² The nature of the Republican reforms that were undertaken from above by the Republican elite carried traits of the centralized state system of the Ottomans. In fact, it is possible to refer to a “state in search of its nation” as a distinguishing feature of the Turkish modernization project (Kadioglu, 1995). In the words of Serif Mardin (1991, p. 196): “Mustafa Kemal took upon a hypothetical entity, the Turkish nation, and breathed life in it”.
- ¹³ The minority status is legally granted only to the non-Muslim groups, namely, the Greeks, Armenians, and Jews according to the 1923 Lausanne accords. Gocek thinks the exclusion of the Kurds and Alevis from the minority status was a major flaw of the Lausanne Accords (Gocek, 2006, p. 66).
- ¹⁴ The review of the constitutional amendment and the “packages” containing amendments of other legal codes in the following pages benefited from the detailed account of such amendments in Oran (2004, pp. 94–111) as well as Ozbudun & Yazici (2004).
- ¹⁵ Cetin’s grandmother Heranush was known to the family by her Turkish name Seher. She was adopted by a Muslim family when she was a child and her Armenian family faced deportation. She was born in a small village in Southeast Anatolia. Aysegul Altinay (2005), in her insightful paper into Fethiye Cetin’s and her grandmother’s story, reveals her personal interviews with Cetin. Altinay maintains that: “Fethiye Cetin believes that her grandmother had kept her ‘inner-voice’ alive for all those decades of silence, speaking only to herself”. Cetin’s conviction about her grandmother’s inner-voice stems from the fact that her grandmother could remember all the names of the people and places as far back as 70–80 years ago.
- ¹⁶ Baskin Oran in fact was part of a Commission on Minority Rights which was founded by the Prime Ministry in order to serve advisory functions. After the suggestions of the Commission akin to the ones that are contained in Oran’s book were made public, the government dissolved and disowned the Commission. Oran and other members of the Commission were acquitted of the legal charges that were

brought against them for “degrading Turkishness” through the content of their report. Recently, there were other similar legal suits brought against novelists such as Orhan Pamuk (2006 Nobel Award in Literature), Elif Safak and journalists for referring to past atrocities against the Armenians in Turkey.

¹⁷ Interestingly, the exhibit itself was vandalized on its opening day by nationalist groups. In addition to the exhibit, History Foundation devoted the September 2005 issue of its monthly journal *Toplumsal Tarih* mostly to these events.

¹⁸ The conference was originally scheduled to take place in May. Yet, a speech delivered by the Minister of Justice in which he blamed the conveners and participants for “stabbing the Turkish nation in the back” paved the way to its postponement. The Minister’s unfortunate choice of words was reminiscent of the dynamics in Germany in November 1918 and the *Dolchtosslegende* (*Dolchtosslegende* refers to a belief in Germany that became widespread in 1918 when the German government admitted defeat by signing the Treaty of Versailles; the widespread belief was that the undefeated German army was “stabbed in the back” at home by Jews and Communists who manipulated the government into signing the Treaty). The speech was powerful enough to cause a postponement of the conference since it raised doubts regarding the security of the conveners and participants. The second obstacle came the day before the new due date of the conference (23 September). In spite of the fact that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed opinions in support of the conference, this time the conference was cancelled as a result of an order of an Istanbul Administrative Court. The conveners were able to quell this obstacle and the conference, which became a first of its kind that is held within the boundaries of Turkey, was finally realized on 24–25 September 2005.

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