

Istanbul Bilgi University

Jean Monnet Chair of
European Politics of Interculturalism
Department of International Relations
European Institute

Jean Monnet Chair Student Workshop I
27 May 2013, Dolapdere, Istanbul

Questioning the Perception of Citizenship in Turkish Elite High Schools

Ahenk Anbar
Galatasaray University



*Jean
Monnet
Chair*



**Istanbul
Bilgi University**
LAUREATE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Questioning the Perception of Citizenship in Turkish Elite High Schools

The phenomenon of globalization which we have been witnessing recently has engendered the restructuring of the entire world. The unification of the economic markets has been accompanied by new adjustments in the other fields of social life. These macro changes on international stage also make themselves apparent inside the national boundaries and their economic, political, social and cultural domains. In consequence of this dual effect, the conceptualization of citizenship has been reconsidered by scholars in order to adapt it in this transformation period.

In general terms, the concept of citizenship involves two related meanings in itself. On the one hand it infers the membership “status” to a nation- state recognized by international law. On the other hand, it means a sense of belonging to a national community represented by a nation state¹. The former indicates a juridical and political relationship between the individual and the state by underlining certain charges in order to be admitted as a citizen of a state². Whereas the latter is about the sense of commitment a person has to the nation he/she lives within. This brings us to the emphasis on a certain national identity and its cultural community which resist in the content of citizenship³. This cultural aspect of citizenship has been taken in consideration by nation-states since the 19th century in order to manage the population on the basis of “correct” citizens of the nation⁴. Education, custom, language and religion have been the elements where the maintenance of the cultural lineage has been secured⁵. In this regard, it does not seem wrong to analyze a particular society’s norms, beliefs, values and practices in order to question their perception of citizenship as an attachment to a certain cultural community. That being the case, this second dimension of citizenship will be taken in consideration in this analysis which interrogates the new middle class families’ perception of citizenship in a globalized world.

As Anthony Giddens puts it; the globalization refers to “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are

¹ İçduygu, Ahmet (2009) Türkiye’de Uluslararası Göç ve Vatandaşlık Tartışması: Birey Düzeyinde Analiz. In:Keyman, Fuat and İçduygu, Ahmet *Küreselleşme, Avrupalılaşıma ve Türkiye’de Vatandaşlık*, İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları pp.233

²² Üstel, Füsun (2004) *Makbul Vatandaşın Peşinde*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları pp.95

³ İçduygu, pp.234

⁴ Miller, Toby (2002) Cultural Citizenship. In: In: Isin, E. and Turner, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*.London: SAGE Publications pp.238

⁵ ibid pp. 231

shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”⁶. Causalities of changes are no more limited inside the boundaries of nation-states, but on the contrary, we are facing an interdependent structure of the whole world including those tiny forms of our daily lives. The expansion of economic integration, development of technologies in transportation and communication, the circulation of people and goods and the rise of social networks are all those transformations which are converting world into a more concentrated place.

The other impacts of globalization such as deregulations and privatizations in economic fields and the rising international mobility have made changes in the position and institutional features of nation states⁷. In relation to this new world tendency, the emergence of multiple actors, groups and communities due to the opportunities provided by the progress in technology and communication, precisely the internet, has generated a new reference of identification for citizens outside the limits of nation states. Professional networks or political solidarity projects may be given as an example to these post national actors⁸. As a reflection of the period, the enhancement of a human rights regime which ensures a universal perception of rights and identities should be underlined⁹. In parallel with this grand wave of changes, the role of the nation states in defining citizenship is being questioned for several decades.

Regarding the question, transnational citizenship (Soysal, 1995) and denationalization (Sassen, 2006) constitute two outstanding concepts which can be mentioned. Both these approaches point to new entities of identification of citizens beyond the boundaries of the nation. According to Soysal, transnational refers to the new logic of the world where the citizenship is being more and more determined by politics, not with historical and cultural ties to the community lived within¹⁰. In other words, the nation is no more the defining actor of citizenship in a world where the personhood is replacing nationhood by the human rights principle. In return, Sassen proposes the notion of “denationalization” instead of transnational on the purpose of indicating the existence of nation state based formulations in defining citizenship even if it does not play the central role. Rather than focusing on the transformation which takes place outside the nation, Sassen prefers to take a deeper look at the

⁶ Giddens, Anthony (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press. pp.64

⁷ Sassen, Saskia (2002) Towards Post-National Citizenship. In: Isin, E. and Turner, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. London: SAGE Publications. pp.277

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Soysal, Yasemin Nuhoğlu (1994) *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp.142

¹⁰ *ibid* pp.3

transformation inside the nation by bearing in mind the identity aspect of citizenship¹¹. Still, we shouldn't fail to notice that in her formulation, Soysal accentuates that the transnational is more about the rights of citizenship, not the identity dimension it includes which still expresses particularities on a national level¹².

The sphere of education is also being highly affected by the impacts of globalization. "Global educational institutions" with their neoliberal character, have obtained a mission of going beyond the borders of the nation where they are situated. High level foreign language instruction and an educational vision shaped by global values constitute two major features strengthening this strategy. Increasing demand for private "elite schools" is generally from privileged families of the society, i.e. the well-to-do in terms of social, economic and cultural capital, because of these schools' expensive fees and high success requirements.

For this particular analysis, I have based my findings on the interviews which I have conducted in the scope of my graduation project. My aim was to examine the point of view of the new middle classes about the role of neoliberal educational institutions in "elite production". Throughout the study, I have restricted the field on three distinguished high schools in Istanbul (chosen among the first five most expensive high schools in Turkey) and I have conducted in-depth interviews with five families from each school and also interviewed student counseling departments of two of these schools. In light of the findings I have collected from these interviews, I have decided to reformulate the research problematic as "*How does global elite education effect the perceptions of citizenship*"?

Robert College, Uskudar American High School and Koc High School are those institutions which I have focused on in this study. Even if they are basically dependant to the curriculum assigned by National Ministry of Education, their difference, which is generally considered as their source of prestige, comes from additional opportunities that they provide. As mentioned by both counselors of Koc and Uskudar American High Schools, these schools are associated with the liberty of belonging to Turkey and also to other parts of the world. As we can see in the example of their membership to European Council of International Schools, educational visions they are conducting are not limited inside the national boundaries. The departments of international universities counseling in all these institutions can also be mentioned as a proof of this tendency.

¹¹ Sassen, pp. 281

¹² Soysal, pp. 159

According to the findings, two contradictory dispositions of families are seen concerning their perception of citizenship influenced by the global elite education. Primarily, we are seeing the importance of global values in their educational strategies. Nine out of fifteen families have indicated that the chance of studying abroad was the reason why they have chosen these schools. Furthermore, one of the parents said that she has gone to the USA to give birth to her children and she added that apart from the advantages in terms of rights her child would gain from the US citizenship, the benefit it would provide him in his future education was the main reason why she has done it. Why studying abroad? On the one hand, a diploma from a prestigious foreign university is seen as a license for a higher position in terms of social and economic basis. On the other hand, it is attached to the reason of changing social structure in Turkey. More than half of the families have underlined their discontent about the present political and social conjuncture by putting forward their inquiries about laicism and the future of the country. In this aspect, their desire to live in a “modern” and “laic” country explains this willingness to provide their children a chance of living abroad.

High level English instruction constitutes the other important aspect of global envisagement in these families. English was introduced in all interviews as a global language and as a condition to make contacts all over the world. The requirement of quality English in higher positions of multinational corporations is also mentioned by families to explain why they are seeing this quality English instruction as a must.

Thirdly, it is seen that an acquaintance with different cultures is being valorized in these families. The existence of foreign teachers in these schools has been put forward as an advantage which develops the world vision of their children due to their chance of seeing various points of views. Different social activities in these schools are also seen as a way of enlargement of students’ perspectives. To illustrate, MUN (Modern United Nations) is an activity organized by the participation of students all over the world and all these three schools are involved this activity each year. During interviews this activity was strongly underlined by families and counselors in order to draw attention how their children are gaining consciousness about the rest of world.

All these aspects may be considered as new middle class families’ enthusiasm in defining themselves in a broader territory than the nation-state. As previously mentioned, aside from this global envisagement of families, an emphasis on national values and structures in the discourse of families has been conceived during interviews. That is to say, a certain

reference to their national community is being underlined by families, especially in order to express their ideas concerning the living national culture in those global educational institutions.

Firstly, aside from all those appreciated global values and multicultural environment in these schools, a fear of the change in the culture of their children is conceived during interviews. To give an example, one of the parents has underlined their concern of cultural missionary activities in these schools via the influence of American way of life and popular culture among the children. This can be interpreted as a danger coming from the outsiders of national community. Similarly, another parent has talked about the habit of going to night clubs among the students in Private German High School as a disapproved practice which she sees as an influence of German students on the Turkish students in that particular school.

Secondly, a certain exaltation of national values among new middle class families should be mentioned here. Sometimes it is presented as a reason of admiration of foreign teachers to Turkey because of Turkish students' respectful character and the society's hospitable structure. Likewise, the importance of Turkish family structure as a source of solidarity for children has been underlined by families. Moreover, the lack of these accustomed values and structures in foreign countries constitutes the main concern of families about the difficulties that their children may face when they go to study abroad. According to parents, even if the children won't have problems in communication or in handling their daily problems, the adaptation process in another community might be the biggest reason of the possible inconvenience.

As explained in detail, defining the concept of citizenship in a globalized world constitutes an intractable issue nowadays. An overview of findings from the field study that I have conducted makes it apparent that the identity aspect of citizenship requires a deeper look while questioning the impact of globalization inside the national boundaries. In regards to this particular study, it will not be wrong to say that the values, norms and practices defined in the basis of national community still maintain their importance in the sense of belonging to a nation, as Sassen and Soysal have previously underlined. Even though a considerable eagerness among new middle class families to strengthen ties with the global system can be taken in consideration, the emphasis that they are putting on the distinctness of the national properties can be interpreted as the permanence of the nation in defining citizenship in a more relative way. That is to say, the effect of global elite education in the perception of citizenship

can be read in its dual aspect: the reinterpretation of citizenship by the rising global values without dissolving the role of belonging to a national community.

REFERENCES

- İduygu, Ahmet (2009) Trkiye’de Uluslararası G ve Vatandaşlık Tartışması: Birey Dzeyinde Analiz. In: Keyman, Fuat and İduygu, Ahmet *Kreselleşme, Avrupalılařma ve Trkiye’de Vatandaşlık*, İstanbul: Bilgi niversitesi Yayınları
- stel, Fsun (2004) *Makbul Vatandaşın Peşinde*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları
- Miller, Toby (2002) Cultural Citizenship. In: In: Isin, E. and Turner, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*.London: SAGE Publications
- Giddens, Anthony (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Sassen, Saskia (2002) Towards Post-National Citizenship.In: Isin, E. and Turner, B. (eds.) *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*.London: SAGE Publications
- Soysal, Yasemin Nuhoglu (1994) *Limits of Citizenship:Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*.Chicago: University of Chicago Press