

Crisis and Transformation of the Public Sphere: A Study on Rights, Identities and Subjectivities

İbrahim Keş *

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Abstract: While identity imposes itself from outside and is a prerequisite for existence in the public sphere, it displays a structure that transfers most of its characteristics to the subject. As a result of the change in the social structure, the subject manifests itself as a social institution with autonomous and difference demands. In doing so, it uses democracy as the most important tool. Democracy and the emphasis on difference, which are the result of the effort to achieve the collective good, have become the subject's means of oppression. The aim of this study is to analyse the process leading towards a new human being with strong subjectivity and a new society accordingly. In this article, the literature on the subject is analysed on the basis of identity, subject and rights. It attempts to reveal the transition of rights articulated with identity to the subject. It also presents suggestions for solutions to the demands that will problematise existing practices of integration and coexistence in social life. Identity is a concept that has lost its popularity in scientific literature. This situation opens a field of inquiry regarding what has replaced identity. Our aim is to reveal how this has been filled with subjectivity.

Keywords: Public Space, Identity, Subject, Democracy, Rights.

* Doktora Öğrencisi / Ph.D. Student, Selçuk University, Konya/Türkiye, ORCID: 0000-0002-0892-0704 , E-mail: ibrahimkes@gmail.com

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Kamusal Alanın Krizi ve Dönüşümü: Haklar, Kimlikler ve Öznellikler Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Özet: Kimlik, kendini dışardan dayatan ve kamusal alanda var olmanın koşulu iken çoğu özelliğini özneye aktaran bir yapı sergilemektedir. Toplumsal yapıda meydana gelen değişim sonucu özne kendini toplumsal bir kurum gibi özerk biçimde sunmakta ve farklılık talepleri ile kendisini ortaya koymaktadır. Bunu yaparken en önemli araç olarak demokrasiyi kullanmaktadır. Kolektif iyiye ulaşma çabasının sonucu olan demokrasi ve farklılık vurgusu öznenin baskı aracına dönüşmüştür. Çalışmamızın amacı, yeni bir insan-öznelliği güçlü- ile buna uygun yeni bir topluma doğru giden süreci tahlil ederek açıklamaya çalışmaktır. Bu makalede konuyla ilgili literatür, kimlik, özne ve haklar temelinde incelenmiştir. Hakların kimliğe eklemli halinin özneye geçişi ortaya konulmaya çalışılmıştır. Toplumsal yaşamda var olan bütünleşme ve birlikte yaşama pratiklerini problemli hale getirecek olan taleplerle ilgili yapılabilecekler ve çözüm önerileri sunulmuştur. Kimlik bilimsel yazında artık popülerliğini yitirmiş bir kavramdır. Bu durum bize kimliğin yerine ne geçtiği konusunda bir problem alanı açar. Amacımız bunun öznellik ile nasıl doldurulduğunu ortaya koymaktır.

Keywords: Kamusal Alan, Kimlik, Özne, Demokrasi, Haklar.

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Introduction

The issues of identity and subject are inextricably linked to the discourses surrounding both public space and democracy. The problem of the public sphere has transformed from the struggle for the existence of different identities and cultures to the problem of the existence of different subjectivities. The former has a truly political purpose, whereas the latter is more of a non-political daily life routine. Strict pressure by the subject can be evaluated as a structure that emerges with the affirmation of subjectivity by the society or the approval of the current situation by remaining unresponsive. In this context, the private sphere has been transformed and publicised through disclosure.¹

The private has moved from the domestic sphere to the public sphere. Looking at the general structure, the aim of these discussions seems to be to create a new human being with a strong subjectivity and a new society accordingly. Considering that each individual is a different subject, it has been tried to reveal the obligatory link between the freedoms demanded for the subject and the demands for pluralism, as well as the demands for difference that manifest themselves in the public sphere and democracy debates. The subject has been approached from a traditional perspective, which may be defined as a starting point for change that is based on the past and used as a means of understanding the present. Rights, identity and subjectivities are used in a general sense and the emphasis is more on the political and social sphere. From this point of view, a right brings with it a positioning - positioning - socially at the same time. Identity is a concept that has lost its popularity in scientific literature. This situation opens a problem area in terms of what replaces identity. This article aims to reveal how this is filled with subjectivity.

1. Public Space

The public sphere is a concept that has always been on the political agenda and is the focus of debates. It is accepted that the concept, with its structure that emerged as a result of a certain process in today's societies, was first used in this sense by Habermas in 1962. "The theories about the public sphere can be listed as theatrical space where individuals can freely reveal their identities, equality and freedom of contract, and the right to speak

¹ For more detailed information, see Byung Chul-Han, *The Transparency Society* (Stanford: Stanford Briefs, 2015).

for collective political decisions'.² Theoretically, the public sphere is the space where everyone can participate and find the opportunity to be represented with equal rights.

The aim of Habermas's research is to 'analyse the typology of bourgeois publicness'³ and treats 'public' as a historical category. In the first period of this historical category, the focus of the debates on the public sphere is on what the private-public distinction should be or where the public begins and ends. 'The conceptualisation of the public sphere/private sphere created by Western modernity is incomplete and distorting in this sense. First of all, this distinction is too clear in the face of real life and expresses an understanding that is suitable for dualist reduction. It is unclear how and under what conditions one passes from one sphere to another, and how 'wide' the border line between the two spheres is'.⁴ In this sense, the formation of the boundaries of the public sphere and where its boundaries begin and end undergo change and transformation over time.

In this transformation, it can be said that the public sphere builds its existence through crises. This situation started in the West when the bourgeoisie demanded that they be granted the rights enjoyed by aristocrats, and continued with the labour and student movements.⁵ If we look at the issue from the perspective of Turkey, the debates on the public sphere began to occupy the agenda as a result of the emergence and discussion of issues such as the headscarf, that is, when they became crises, and continue with the current debates - with the demands of the subject of the article in public visibility. As mentioned above, the public sphere has undergone a transformation in the process. In the past, the public sphere was defined as the domain of free men and the private sphere as the domain of women. With industrialisation, the public sphere expanded as women entered the labour market and as a result, women's visibility in the public sphere increased.

The key point in the transformation of the public sphere is the inclusion of the family and women in the public sphere. As childcare and education, which are traditional

² Kerem Ünüvar, "Osmanlı'da Bir Kamusal Mekân: Kahvehaneler", *Doğu Batı Dergisi* 5 (2007): 206-207.

³ Jürgen Habermas, *Kamusal Alanın Yapısal Dönüşümü* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018), 9.

⁴ Etyen Mahçupyan, "Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Parçalı Kamusal Alan ve Siyaset", *Doğu Batı Dergisi* 5 (2007): 28.

⁵ Süleyman Seyfi Ögün, "Kamusal Hayatın Kültürel Kökleri Üzerine: Sennett, Habermas, Abdülaziz Efendi", *Doğu Batı Dergisi* 5 (2007): 56-58.

functions of the family, were met in the public sphere such as nurseries and schools, the private sphere was fragmented and the public sphere expanded. However, while this expansion was in favour of the private sphere in the first period, it has resulted in the transfer of the private to the public sphere as a result of new social movements and demands that have become social.

If we make an evaluation in terms of Turkey on the basis of women, who can be considered as the main determinant of the public sphere; ‘The Second Legitimacy period can be seen as the beginning of women’s gradual participation in the public sphere, their movement in urban spaces, their gaining “social visibility” ...’⁶ Of course, this situation also led to reactions. In the Republican era, progress was made in the public sphere with the granting of the right to vote and be elected, etc., and over time, the public sphere expanded with the participation of women in business life. However, in the general literature, the public sphere is referred to as a single-space public sphere through a determination on the ‘bourgeois public sphere’. In order to give a more democratic structure to public spheres, we can look at the existence of multiple public spheres or general public-sub-public spheres. ‘This public space is a place of appearance open to everyone. It will be a space that both brings people together and separates them into many sub-publics’.⁷ The general public can be metaphorised as the trunk of a tree and sub-publics as its branches.⁸ Sub-publics can be conceived as branches of ethnic or spatial segregation connected to the main trunk without complete segregation. In this way and at the same time, it also enables the closing of the gap between theory and practice in the idea of publicness and the democracy it is connected to. Of course, in this view, ‘How will the people of the new globalised society exist in the public sphere? How will the boundaries of this existence be determined?’ questions such as these need to be asked.

In the transformation of the public sphere, the borders or distinction has an ideological structure as a product of an understanding based on exclusion and has been

⁶ Nilüfer Göle, *Modern Mahrem Medeniyet Örtünme* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2011), 70.

⁷ İlhan Tekeli, *Katılımcı Demokrasi, Kamusal Alan ve Yerel Yönetim* (İstanbul: Demokrasi Kitaplığı, 1999), 9.

⁸ The tree metaphor is criticised by Deleuze and Guattari. ‘The tree and the root are seen as hierarchical structures compartmentalised on the basis of a centralised or compartmentalised higher unity’. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Volume 2: A Thousand Plateaus. Translated by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 16.

used as a field of power in determining whether an action or discourse, an idea is legitimate or illegitimate.

"Critical theory, in general, should approach the concepts of "private" and "public" in a stricter and more critical manner. These concepts are, after all, not only direct indicators of spheres of sociality; they are also cultural classifications and rhetorical labels. In political discourse, they are powerful tools used to delegitimise some interests, views and issues and to valorise others'.⁹

A criterion that can be given in the context of the boundaries or impact of the public, like the ripple of a stone thrown into water, is first a factor at the level of idea, then turns into discourse, and then becomes action. The determination that a phenomenon is public can be determined by the existence of its impact in social life. Just as an action or discourse spreads in a wavy way with the same metaphor, while the effect is first at the local or local level, if it is expressed with a current concept, it can be determined by the fact that it becomes an agenda and spreads to wide areas and affects the society. In a sense, this is also an example of publicity being seen as a process. In other words, when the impact of an action that is individual or belongs to the private sphere reaches the general and general social level, it leads to its inclusion in the public sphere. In this context, the intervention of the individual and even the subjective into the general social, that is, the public, has become more effective in today's societies.

Moreover, for the public sphere, first of all, in terms of its connection with the political, 'even if not all public things are political, every political is also public'.¹⁰ All political issues are related to the public sphere and their reflection corresponds to the public sphere as the place of demands and fulfilment. The public sphere defines the area where common values are shared and open to everyone. 'As a result, it can be said that when the number of people increased and a separate political structure - the state or corresponding mechanisms - emerged to provide order, a common space emerged between the individual and the political, and this secondary intermediate world, which is important for the individual, is called the public sphere'.¹¹ In terms of its connection

⁹ Nancy Fraser, "Kamusal Alanı Yeniden Düşünmek: Gerçekte Var Olan Demokrasinin Eleştirisine Bir Katkı", in *Kamusal Alan*, ed. Özbek Meral (İstanbul: Hil Yayınları, 2015), 126.

¹⁰ Mustafa Aydın, *Siyasetin Sosyolojisi*, (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2006), 102.

¹¹ Aydın, 102.

with the political, while establishing the connection of identity definitions with the public sphere, the main basis for the establishment of the subject is the private sphere, and by imposing itself on the public, it endangers the social consensus that exists there.

According to Todorov, who considers this situation as an internal threat to democracy, he assesses it through Condorcet as follows; ‘Condorcet is one of those clear minds. He realised that there was a demand for freedom that his contemporaries, his ancestors did not know; the demand for freedom to choose their religion, to seek the truth freely, to organise their private lives as they wished’.¹² This demand for freedom, seen as a public right - a right is ‘only proven to exist when it can be put into practice, it is never guaranteed in the abstract’¹³ - exists as it emerges and gains visibility. With the shift from identity and collectivity to the individual and the subject, ‘...in the liberal perspective, the individual is no longer considered as an element of a set, of society, but as an autonomous being whose social life is a situation like any other situation’.¹⁴ So, what will be the limits and scope or exclusivity of this new publicness and democracy?¹⁵

2. Identity, Individual and Subject

The public sphere appears as the place where the individual shows his/her existence in the modern times. However, in this defined public sphere, the individual exists rationally and in harmony with society. In this context, it can be said that identity is the individual-based and rational characteristics that are immanent and transcendent in oneself as a result of the formation of self-consciousness. By the immanent part, we mean personal characteristics, and by the transcendent part, we mean the identification of oneself with a higher authority to which one is devoted. Moreover, the components of identity change over time and this situation shows that identity is a dynamic element. Based on this first meaning, we can look at identity definitions. However, before moving on to the definition, it would be useful to mention the misuses in order to reveal this immanent and transcendental situation. In particular, we see that the concepts of identity and personality are wrongly used interchangeably.

¹² Tzvetan Todorov, *Demokrasinin Samimi Düşmanları* (İstanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2014), 82.

¹³ Don Mitchell, *Kent Hakkı*, (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2020), 16.

¹⁴ Todorov, 82.

¹⁵ Generally, discussions on democracy and the public sphere are theoretical and take the form of presenting an ideal.

"In the crudest terms, personality shows a process of development that is analysed by the psychological structure of the individual and fed by social factors. Moreover, the trajectory of personality is towards perfection (integration). In contrast to personality, identity, on the other hand, is present in a person in more than one form and consists of social markers such as religion, nationality, family, social class, occupation, education, etc. and different behaviours are exhibited according to each identity. In this way, identity contributes to the development of personality, but the true self disappears. The concept of self is related to the ontological field of the individual. The ontological field is explained by the imaginary field of existence of the individual."¹⁶

As for personality, it can be said that the unique characteristics of the human being exist in himself/herself and are the phenomena that he/she constructs his/her field of existence. Identity, which we can call the external reflection of personality, exhibits itself through behaviours in the public sphere. 'Identity is the way in which behaviour reflects the way a person responds to questions about who he/she is, how he/she is seen by others, his/her role, needs and value. Self-image, on the other hand, is shaped according to the reaction of others and our relationship with them'.¹⁷ In fact, while personality points to a private sphere, identity corresponds to people expressing themselves in the public sphere. We can also express identity as 'the roles represented in the public sphere'. Just as the roles represented are different, identities can also be different according to time and space. 'Indeed, people can give clues that they do not have a fixed identity design at different times and places, in different situations and encounters. For example, is there a difference between your attitudes and behaviours at work and at home?'.¹⁸ Here, the dominant identity perception identifies with the individual and defines itself around this identity. From the outside, people are defined and labelled with this dominant identity. The dominant identity is the identity that the person sees himself/herself as the most meaningful in the society or the identity that is most understandable by the society.

¹⁶ Edibe Sözen, *Demir Kafesten Plastığe Kimliklerimiz* (İstanbul: Birey Yayınları, 1999), 35.

¹⁷ Dilek İmançer, "Çağdaş Kimliğin Yapılanma Süreci ve Televizyon", *Doğu Batı Dergisi* 23 (2012): 237.

¹⁸ Aydın Uğur and Halil Nalçaoglu, "Kültür, Kültürel Haklar ve Toplumsal Kimlikler", in *Kültür Sosyolojisi*, ed. Ali Ergur and Emre Gökalp (Eskişehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012): 205.

In addition, if we look at history from this perspective, that is, from today's perspective, we can say that identity has existed in this sense since the first periods of history, as in many other concepts. 'The first attempts to acquire or have an identity started with belief systems. In written prehistoric societies, the meanings that were taken into social memory through magic and sorcery especially marked with which element of nature individuals were identified. For example, clan names were collectively valid for all members, that is, belonging was determined by the name of the clan'.¹⁹ These statements show us that although the modern period seems to deny the previous periods, it has in fact made a similar arrangement itself. The categories and hierarchical orders existing in the tradition have been transferred to the modern period in different ways without changing their basic characteristics.

'Identity has two basic components. The first is identification and recognition, the second is belonging. Identity, superficially, is, in short, the answers that individuals and social groups of various sizes and qualities give to the questions 'who are you, who are you from?'.²⁰ The answer to these superficially asked questions generally corresponds to ethnic identity and class.²¹ However, as mentioned above, the markers of identity are very diverse. In a changing world, the markers of belonging and identity have also changed and ethnic, religious, local and marginal identities have emerged. The subject, on the other hand, is a conceptualisation that is visible in the postmodern period based on the person who exists in the non-rational field.²²

We can define the subject as 'the "I" who is responsible for and influences his/her actions and discourses' through the fluctuation analogy we have given in the title of public sphere. Of course, the definition here covers identity, person and individual. Personality, which we can also call 'personal me', refers to the more intimate one that harbours the distinctive elements of character. The individual is the one who can

¹⁹ Aytunç Altındal, *Devlet ve Kimlik* (İstanbul: Destek Yayınları, 2010), 20-21.

²⁰ Suavi Aydın, *Türk Kimliğinin Yaratılması ve Ulusal Kimlik Sorunu Üzerine* (Ankara: Özgür Üniversite Yayınları, 2009), 15.

²¹ Even ethnic structure can be considered as a class. '...racial identity is a special case of the principle of social class constructed in the context of history. See Loic Wacquant, *Kent Paryaları: İleri Marjinalliğin Karşılaştırmalı Sosyolojisi* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), 29.

²² Although the literature on the subject and subjectivity has a long history, the subject we focus on in this article is the subject of the postmodern period.

incorporate some of his/her personality traits into his/her existence in the social sphere, but who is influenced by the society, or more precisely, what the society -modern society- constructs and creates. Identity is the public individual who emerges more purely through external identification. The subject is the 'I', which periodically embodies each of these in part or in whole, and which has undoubtedly existed throughout human history. Since the main comparison will be based on identity and the subject, we will exclude other intermediate forms to avoid confusion.

When we look at the historical process related to the subject, with the Enlightenment thought, reason came to the fore and everything that could be done was categorised and divided into classes. Within the social separation and categorisation, class membership and rationality were based on the individual. The criterion of rationality of the individual is determined according to the economic basis. As a result, the individual is transformed into a subject with the liberal economy and the associated understanding of freedom. The subject is primarily constructed by society. '...subjectivity is something that is not pre-given and originary, but at least to a certain extent constituted in the field of social forces.'²³ While sociology analyses society, it is actually subjectivity that is examined or that provides the transition to society. 'The founders of sociology confronted the question of society and the question of individualism at the same time'.²⁴ In order to create a certain point of stability in the face of change, society was brought to the fore as a safe harbour. However, the subjectivity, which is the starting point, is a subject that can exist together with society. 'There must be such a form of society that defends and protects the life and property of each of its members with all common power, so that each person there, although united with everyone else, remains under his own command, and is as free as before'.²⁵

As the social structure has changed, the view of the subject has also changed²⁶ and it has been stated that the subject is formed by social institutions, which are constructive

²³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *İmparatorluk* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2018), 204.

²⁴ Philippe Corcuff, *Bireyciliğin Meselesi* (Ankara: Heretik Basın Yayın, 2016), 16.

²⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Toplum Sözleşmesi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2022), 14.

²⁶ The influence between science and politics manifests itself more noticeably in the field of social sciences. While society and the individual were prioritised in social research and conceptual studies at the beginning of the modern period, today, studies that prioritise the subject are being carried out, and this situation is in line with the political structures of their own periods.

elements. According to Foucault, 'these (subjectivities) are the relations of power and obedience present at every point in every society'.²⁷ These forms of power and obedience make the individual a subject.

"This form of power directly intervenes in everyday life by categorising the individual, determining him by his individuality, binding him to his identity, imposing on him a law of truth that both he and others must recognise in him. This is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. The word subject has two meanings: The subject who is subject to another through control and dependence, and the subject who is bound to his or her own identity through conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings of the word suggest a form of power that subjugates and subordinates'.²⁸

The emphasis on intervention in everyday life is important, and in the postmoder period, the subject is shaped by a fiction through the practice of self-existence in a public sphere where there are no fulcrum points. "This is why we felt that we were adrift in the world, since the reference points provided by the most modernist humanism of the nineteenth century were no longer valid'.²⁹ The 'indeterminacy of the place of production of the socially produced subject corresponds to the indeterminacy of the forms of produced subject'.³⁰ This situation transforms the identity constructed through values into a subject constructed through emotion and desire. In a sense, emotion and desire correspond to the subject whose place of production is indeterminate.

To summarise and present a general contrast, while identity emerges in the public sphere with collective demands and needs where rights exist in the abstract, the subject demands concrete rights. While identity and society were sacred objects in the modern period, in the postmoder period it is now the subject that is sacred. The subject refers to the post-individual that emerged as a result of the emancipation of the individual, which is the product of liberal thought. In fact, this subject acts in an effort to make all of its subjectivity visible in the public sphere or with an attitude that does not care about the consequences of being visible. Even what is private in the home is carried to the public

²⁷ Nick Mansfield, *Özellik: Freud'dan Haraway'e Benlik Kuramları* (İstanbul: Babil Kitap, 2021), 82.

²⁸ Michael Foucault, *Özne ve İktidar* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2019), 63-64.

²⁹ Mansfield, 235.

³⁰ Hardt and Negri, *İmparatorluk*, 206.

sphere. In this context, while the struggle for public space began as a struggle for civil space against the state, it later became a struggle for subjective rights.. ‘...especially transitions within the framework of relations between I and we, individuality and solidarity, personal singularity and collective reference points’.³¹

Conclusion

As times change, so do people's views and understandings of life, and the rights demanded in the context of the public sphere transform accordingly. The right, which was discussed as the headscarf problem in our recent political history and demanded by a collective identity, exists in the public sphere today only as a clothing or a preference. What has changed here is the nature of becoming and being on the agenda.

As far as rights are concerned, how the processes from their demand to their transformation or circulation and how the boundaries of the public sphere are to be determined remain as a problem. The most fundamental question is how the social consensus, which is believed to have existed in the modern period, will be achieved in the postmodern period. Can the limits of the existence of subjective rights in the public sphere be guaranteed by a new intersubjectivity? Should the subjective right of one individual be limited by the right of another individual? Is there a need for an authority that can establish objective and impartial criteria? How will rational reason, which is supposed to exist in the public sphere, work for a solution?

First of all, in order for the rational reason believed to exist in the public sphere to function, there must be a negotiation environment and a minimum level of agreement - consensus - must exist. The rhetoric used for negotiation must be free from the drawbacks of being a party and serve the purpose of achieving the collective good. One of the main disadvantages of being a party is that since freedom ‘means a demand for freedom in terms of which power to make one’s own body the bearer of (...)’, postmodernism has ultimately reduced the modernist slogan of sexual freedom to the addition of freedom for homosexuals’.³² In this context, it is necessary to develop

³¹ Corcuff, *Bireyciliğin Meselesi*, 70.

³² Yasin Aktay, “İktidarın Kaynağı ve Nesnesi Olarak Beden ve Kimlik Politikaları”, in *Sivil Bir Kamusal Alan* (İstanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 2005), 77, 82.

methods that ensure pluralism in determination of decision-making authority for the collective good. While doing this, a minimum level of consensus should be achieved.

However, the question to be answered here is ‘what kind of a world we want to live in’ and the key to the solution can be determined through the answers to this question. The choice will again be made by the society and the subject, and this is a situation in which the ideas that naturally progress - not the nature of enlightenment, but the process - and spread, or the ideas that are strong and accepted will be effective in decision-making, and although the manipulation-orientation with a discursive structure that is open to manipulation works to a certain extent, there seems to be nothing to do but hope that the ideal point will be decided.

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