

Poverty and Citizenship between “Bare Life” and the “Political”: The Case of Kavakpınar in Istanbul

Meltem Ahıska, Zafer Yenal

1

I. Introduction:

The political-practical and conceptual aspects of “poverty” and their implications for discussions on “citizenship” in Turkey constitute the subject matter of this study. Here we develop two inter-related arguments. Firstly, we draw attention to “locality” as a mediator of experiences, and discourses and structures of poverty. We argue that the homogenizing concept of poverty should be re-thought in relation to locality and in its double articulation in the era of globalization. The concept of “locality” that appears in our discussion is doubly articulated in the following manner: On the one hand, it is a space over-determined by global structural tendencies of capitalism, shaped by the practices of the state and local governments, infused with various discourses on various issues including human rights, citizenship and identity. It transcends boundaries of the specific locality in that sense, and connects to wider networks of practices and meanings. On the other hand, locality is also the concrete place that is constructed and transformed by the experiences and agencies of the people living there; it has its own specific history. The second thesis we elaborate in this paper concerns another striking feature of this era, namely the growing inadequacy of the existing political authorities such as the state, political parties and trade unions not only in regulating the economic sphere but also in channeling the forms of being political. Therefore, we suggest that dealing with poverty in its widest sense has to take cognizance and care of new political forms that bind the “self” and the “community” in different ways. Here we should underline the crucial role that local governments play in producing and sustaining these new political forms that surpass the limits of national citizenship.

Thus the relationship between the experience of poverty and the locality and its implications for political processes is a complex question. In other words, a thorough examination of poverty calls not only for a detailed analysis of economic processes, both nationally and globally defined, which lead to material deprivation in terms of access to basic necessities of survival for certain household; but it should also entail a problematization of locality textured by various kinds of social hierarchies and tensions including class, gender and ethnicity and their political manifestations in relation to the experience of poverty. This point has wider implications in terms of the historical construction of citizenship and ensuing rights associated with it. In order to tackle this complexity, first we would like to point to certain themes that appear in our specific research, and which reveal the moments of contestation and tension between wider economic and political processes and political agencies. Then, we will reflect on the capacity of poverty as both an enabling and disabling concept for policy development in the light of our empirical findings. We hope that our discussion will contribute to current debates on the contemporary connections between poverty, human rights and citizenship.

II. The Setting

Drawing on the results of a larger research project², we chose to focus on Kavakpınar district in Istanbul to illustrate and develop our arguments. Kavakpınar, which is administratively part of Pendik local government, is a locality significant in many respects for discussing questions regarding poverty. First of all, Kavakpınar with a population of more than 100,000 people is a shantytown area with many “illegally” built houses which developed after the 1980s with the outward expansion of metropolitan Istanbul as a result of heightened waves of migration. However, what differentiates this area from some other shantytowns in Istanbul is the fact that it was designated as an “industrial area” in the city plan and consequently a multitude of industrial plants flourished in the district particularly in the 1990s. There is also a newly built airport since

¹ This article was commissioned by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) and published on their website. We would like to thank Meltem Ahıska, Zafer Yenal and TESEV for giving us permission to publish it again.

² Z. Yenal and M. Ahıska (eds.). 2004. *Hikayemi Dinler misin? Tanıklıklarla Türkiye’de İnsan Hakları ve Sivil Toplum*. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı.

2001. The close proximity of the residential areas to the industrial facilities ranging from small scale manufacturing enterprises to large-scale industrial plants owned by well-known national companies gives rise to severe environmental problems in the area. We will see that this conflict between the “industrial” and the “residential” use of the land also leads to serious political contestations between the local government and the people.

Secondly, Kavakpınar is a district populated by migrants mostly from the central and the eastern part of Turkey; the population is dominantly composed of Alevis and Kurds. The ethnic and religious identities in the area are evoked in the narratives and practices of the people not only in terms of stable “identities”, but also in their complex trappings of the marginalization of Alevis and Kurds, and their struggles against their exclusion in Turkish political history. Given the economic hardships and the low level of public services in terms of health, education and infrastructural facilities in Kavakpınar, the ethnic and religious identities find a fertile ground to be easily translated to issues of economic power, more specifically to the conflict between the “rich” and the “poor”. This point takes us to the third point that characterizes the social and economic setting in Kavakpınar, which is related to the patterns of employment in the area. This point is particularly important for revealing the major class and gender components of poverty. Most of the inhabitants of the district have not had access to formal education and are obliged to work in temporary and lowly paid jobs without any employment rights and security. The gendered aspects of employment are particularly significant given that in-house informal employment is very common in the majority of households in the area. Women mostly work at home producing or finishing commodities such as garments, matches and soap for national and/or global patrons. The use of child labor in these kinds of economic activities is also common in the area. It is especially striking that except for few men, people in Kavakpınar are not accepted as workers in the neighboring factories and cannot enjoy the relatively stable conditions of formal employment. Hence, majority of men in Kavakpınar is either unemployed or resort to informal income-generating activities of various sorts. This leads to further marginalization but also to searching new forms of political struggle. The fourth significant factor related to the above point then, is the specific forms of agency, especially of women, for being political. There is a women’s group in Kavakpınar which has been active in organizing meetings and street demonstrations struggling against local and environmental problems. These women have also been involved in creative practices, writing and performing plays mostly around women’s issues for long years. Women’s agency is worth analyzing to show what is at stake in the gendered constructions of national citizenship. It also reveals different conceptions of the self in relation to poverty and politics, to which we will come back in our discussion.

To sum up, the widespread existence of informal employment, the severity of environmental problems particularly including water and air pollution and existing ethnic and religious cleavages among the inhabitants are the major features that characterize the social and economic setting in Kavakpınar. We suggest that the complex interplay of these characteristics has important consequences for how poverty is experienced, expressed and defined in different ways by the local inhabitants. These factors are also important for the emergence of novel political forms of resistance and the development of oppositional discourses –articulated mainly around issues of human rights and identity politics– against the dominant power structures, which are instrumental in challenging the existing construction of national citizenship. Let us now try to give brief snapshots from the history and present of Kavakpınar to further discuss the above points and elaborate on these arguments.

III. Exemplary Cases of Social Contestations and Being Political

The first case that is related to the major areas of social conflict and subsequent instances of political mobilization concerns the ongoing political debates about the current state and the future of *gecekondu* settlements. The recent amendments in the penal law drafted by the AKP government attempts to regulate the very persisting and wide-scale problem of squatter houses in Turkey, particularly in Istanbul. These amendments should also be seen as part of the political and social reforms oriented toward accession to EU membership. The amendments prohibit the building of new squatter houses and lays out the procedures for the demolition of the existing

ones by the local governments. This has led to practices of demolition of houses by the police forces in different parts of the city recently. The new policy of demolition is differentiated from similar previous practices in Turkey by its new concept of either monetary compensation or re-settlements in new housing projects. However, it continues to generate conflicts between the inhabitants and local government actors. One striking example comes recently from a neighboring district to Kavakpınar in Pendik. In Aydos district, people have been opposing demolitions in an organized way. They have recently organized a representative neighborhood committee of about 20 persons, which, supported by the direct action of the population reaching to 2000 in number, was influential in confronting the local government practices of demolition. The struggle of the local people resulted in halting the local government's action in late October this year. Only 14 houses were demolished, the rest remained in place. Kavakpınar people whom we interviewed cited the "Aydos incident" which had wide media coverage³ as an important victory. They see it as a model to be followed to stop the already started demolition process in Kavakpınar too. In this regard, they particularly emphasized the role of the neighborhood committees in the coordination of resistance activities and mobilization of the people.

Our informants in Kavakpınar also noted that they have their own history of confrontation with the local government. They were involved in organized direct action to raise issues especially against the harming effects of the industrial plants in the area. They have organized several petition campaigns for sanitizing the stream running in the area polluted by the stinking wastes of factories. They also protested the bad smells coming out from the biscuit and confectionery factory. Many of them see the factories as the main sources for deteriorating the conditions of life in the locality. Furthermore, the existence of the factories does not contribute to their livelihood, since they do not have any job opportunities there. Instead, they are employed in temporary and lowly paid jobs. In fact, they initially had been thinking of protesting the installation of factories in this area, however, due to some people's expectations of possible employment (which was not met in the end) they could not have an organized movement for that end. Nevertheless, all the above-mentioned instances of organized protest bring the majority of community in direct encounter with the local government. In fact, according to our informants, despite the ongoing conflicts, the local government seems to be only accessible authority for making demands.

The strategic formulation of these conflicts and resulting confrontations with the local authorities are more than often embedded in the narratives of the rich against the poor. Here we should note that the conflict of the rich and the poor manifests itself in spatial terms. For example, the demolition of squatter houses in the neighboring districts and in Kavakpınar is interpreted by many of our informants as local governments favoring rich people and giving them a space for building their villas, while taking away the land from the poor. There is a long history of fight over land in Istanbul, with increasing commodification and speculation especially in the recent era of globalization.⁴ Very much informed by the trends of commodification, the inhabitants reclaim their history of once capturing the "valuable" land, and defending it against the rich. In this very process, they define themselves as the poor. So we see that the locality mediates the discourses and experiences of poverty.

The conflict ridden encounters between the inhabitants and the local government does not only evoke narratives of economic inequalities but also induce articulations around the tensions and conflicts between religious-ethnic identities. This is reflected in another important case of political struggle. The Alevi people, who comprise more than half of the population in Kavakpınar, have long demanded the establishment of a *cemevi*. The demand for *cemevi* has recently initiated a political campaign again directed at the local government. The main objective of the campaign is getting a specific place for founding and opening a *cemevi*. Some of Kavakpınar residents meet regularly to discuss various issues and strategies to this end. *Cemevi* in that

³ For example see "Pendik'te Yıkım," *Radikal*. October 28, 2004; "Söz verildi, eylem bitti," *Radikal*. October 29, 2004.

⁴ On the transformation of the real estate and housing market in the last several decades, see Çağlar Keyder, "The housing market from informal to global," in Ç. Keyder (ed.), *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1999.

respect is not solely regarded as a religious center, but rather more as a cultural center, in which the community can organize cultural events, start educative and training courses, and a kindergarten that would be open not only to Alevis but to all, as emphasized by many of our informants. Here we see that the strategic positioning of Alevi identity becomes instrumental in claiming rights in a specific locality, and hence practicing citizenship.

In fact, the political campaign for the establishment of a *cemevi* in Kavakpınar connects with the wider problems and demands of the *Alevi* community in Turkey about the recognition of their religious differences by the larger society and especially by the authorities. By making references to the history of the Turkish nation in which Alevi people were marginalized, our informants claim their rights as Alevis.⁵ Yet, they refuse to be labeled as a "minority" group – a term in the agenda nowadays due to the EU oriented initiatives of re-defining both Alevis and Kurds as minority groups.⁶ Their rejection of the minority status, despite the new rights that the status entails, shows that most Alevi people regard themselves as an integral part of the national community. Hence they seek sameness with the larger society as well as the acceptance of their specific differences. They also believe that they share common problems with the Kurds in the region as they are exposed to similar mechanisms of exclusion and injustice. However, the religious differences matter. Most of our informants privilege the Alevi identity as opposed to other political stances in the community, articulated by some socialist parties for example, that regard the whole community, be it Alevi or Kurdish, as oppressed people. The more desirable basis for politics for Alevis then is not the unified ground of being oppressed or excluded, but the religious-ethnic identity. This is not an essentialist and separatist definition though. One should be attentive to the strategic positioning of the identity *vis a vis* the locality. The way Alevis formulate their identity, and explain their demands, such as the opening of a *cemevi* in the district, are manifested as reclaiming a space in the locality. As in the words of one of our woman informants, "there is an ongoing fight to claim a space in this district, the opening of mosques one after the other is an indication of that. Why can't we also capture a space?"

Not only class and ethnic-religious identities but also gender identities emerge as a possible arena of social contestation where we encounter with new political forms grounded in the experience of poverty. The case we will now turn our attention is illuminating to explore this point. The informal global economy penetrates to the locality by soliciting cheap labor, especially from otherwise unemployed women. Women are approached by some representatives of big firms (who do not reveal the name of their companies or their global connections), and are given work such as knitting sweaters, embroidering garments, or making and filling matchboxes, to do at home. The work is labor intensive and very badly paid, as well as having no fringe benefits or long term security. Here it is interesting to notice how the informal economy reinstates the handcraft at the expense of the autonomy of the worker. What is even more interesting is to see how the flexible model of production of the informal economy inspired some women in Kavakpınar with the idea to be their own patrons by making similar kinds of handcraft products to sell in the markets. Although this did not turn out to be an economically successful venture, the very process of thinking about this project brought women together. The women's group established in that process, which we come to know during our fieldwork in Kavakpınar, deserves more analytical attention. This is a group of about 15 women who have been regularly meeting every Monday since the late 1980s until last year.⁷

Women in this group define themselves as Alevis, housewives and mothers with very little education and no political background. One woman says that they even had no understanding

⁵ On the question of *Alevi* community and their problems in Turkey, see for example, Fazıl Hüsnu Erdem, "Alevi sorunu üzerine bazı düşünce ve öneriler," *Toplum ve Bilim*, n. 90, 2001; Fuat Bozkurt, "Aleviliğin yeniden yapılanma sürecinde toplum-devlet ilişkisi," in *Alevi Kimliği*, Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1999; Murat Küçük, "Mezhepten millete: Aleviler ve Türk milliyetçiliği," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, v. 4, İletişim Yayınları, 2002.

⁶ The categorization of Alevi community as a minority group in the latest progress report, prepared by European Parliament's Commission on Foreign Affairs, on Turkey's accession to EU initiated a heated public debate about the official recognition of the Alevi identity in the country in November 2004. For example see, "Alevilik AP yolunda," *Radikal*, November 20, 2004; "Alevi tepkisi artıyor," *Radikal*, November 9, 2004.

⁷ Nermin. "Pazartesi Kadınları." *Pazartesi, kadınlara mahsus gazete*, July, 1995.

about politics or political parties before, and were told whom to vote by the men in their household. So in their gathering, women decided to educate themselves, reading books and articles especially about childcare. They were especially sensitive about environmental and health problems. They actively participated in the organization of struggles against the bad effects of pollution or thick layers of mud in the streets. They also discovered through television that the 8th of March was women's day. They planned special activities for that day, writing plays and performing them. The plays were mostly about women's problems, such as the problems of giving birth to too many children, the problem of infertility, the conflicts of mother-in-laws and young brides. They performed the plays in local venues in the district. The gathering of women, which found radical and creative expressions in the public realm, soon generated conflicts between men and women. Some leading women in the group were labeled as "prostitutes" who had bad influences over other women. Their husbands forbade some women to join the meetings. However, the unexpected success of the performances of women on stage had a positive impact on the community. Men eventually helped women to perform at other venues in different districts; some even had bigger ambitions of moving them into mainstream theater. The activities of women not only transformed the community giving them new hopes of being integrated to the larger society, but also radically changed women themselves. They narrate their experiences as providing them with new skills and self-confidence in public life, making them more powerful citizens. They are no longer afraid to go out alone in the public, nor discussing with authorities, such as the police or the doctor. They have also acquired useful skills in contacting the local government to put forth their demands. They are now active in calculating strategies to make their demands for *cemevi* accepted by the local government.

IV. Some Observations on the Conceptualizations of Poverty

The sites and themes of conflict discussed above raise several significant points and questions to discuss the concept of poverty. Our findings in Kavakpınar are mostly in line with what other studies on poverty in Turkey reveal. For example, in one of the most recent and wide scale studies on poverty which attempts to analyze the "cultural and social formation of urban poverty" through the narratives of the poor, Necmi Erdoğan shows that the "poor" is not a homogeneous entity⁸. Furthermore, he argues that the conditions of the "poor" cannot be known as such, since those people who may be objectively at the very end of the distribution of resources in this country are positioned differently within a variety of social and cultural settings. They are not only affected variably by their experiences of age, gender and ethnic identity; their own narratives about poverty also vary. Therefore, the study makes it very clear, that the aim is not to "know" poverty, as if it is an object to be known, but to "listen to" the poor, in order "to understand the political and cultural processes in which the poor are included/excluded; to understand how the poor are positioned in the social hierarchies and relations of power; and how they are represented and represent themselves within that process."⁹

Our aim has been very similar. Therefore, a comparative evaluation of our findings with this much larger scale study would be meaningful. Erdoğan points that representations of wealth/poverty has a much longer history compared to the recent conceptualizations of poverty in policy oriented reports of World Bank or NGOs or the new representations in media. He argues, with reference to Gramsci that "commonsense" images and feelings of poverty have residual "folkloric" and "utopian" elements that contribute to making sense of being poor. We may argue, then, images of the poor as contrasted to the images of the wealthy have been a major theme in many oral and written cultural representations in this country dating back to ancient times. These themes mostly relate to seeking justice, whether put in religious or secular terms. This ancient and hidden language of the poor has also been the subject matter of modern Turkish literature.¹⁰ However, the repertoire of the imageries is not fixed. They are mobilized and

⁸ Necmi Erdoğan. 2002. *Yoksulluk Halleri*. İstanbul: Demokrasi Kitaplığı.

⁹ Ibid.: 9.

¹⁰ The most prominent authors that readily come to mind about different representations and discourses of poverty in Turkish literature include Orhan Kemal and Latife Tekin. In various novels and short stories Orhan Kemal has dealt with the experience of poverty. Latife Tekin, on the other hand, particularly in two of her novels –*Berci Kristin Çöp Masalları*

utilized to make sense of the present conditions in different ways. And these very differences convey the sociologically significant and complex dynamics that structure poverty today. We can illustrate this point by returning to our informants' own representations of poverty.

The members of the women's group in Kavakpınar told us that poverty is basically about inadequate material conditions. It means not having enough money to take care of basic needs, such as food and health. It also means not being able to take good care of children. For example, one could not send her daughter to university –although she was successful in the exams – just because the family could not find the money to pay her fees. This statement dramatically reveals the extent of material poverty, given the fee for state universities is minimal in Turkey. However, just after these comments relating poverty to material conditions, the women proudly asserted that their "souls" are rich. The wealthy may have the means but they are less rich in humanly terms, they never share their resources with others. But the poor have always been generous and in solidarity with each other. This split made between the material and the spiritual resonates not only with the popular representation of poverty in films and media, but with also Erdoğan's comments on their study. They also have come across these kinds of remarks with spiritual overtones which emphasized that the poor have richer "souls" in their research. In these kinds of statements we can find the traces of the commonsense imagery of the rich and the poor, yet their meaning goes beyond commonsense.

The above examples point to a distinction in the subjectivity of the poor as well. This distinction can be conceptualized by marking the difference drawn between the "real self" and the "fluid self". The real self, according to Erdoğan is the site of imagined agency through which the poor person attaches morality to her deeds, justifying them in the more general meaning map of justice. The real self is evoked in spiritual terms and gains an imaginary substance. However, the fluid self is much more multiple, fragmentary and strategically positioned. The fluid self can only speak in the discourse of others; it is often self-contradictory. The poor people may blame their own ignorance for their poverty and thus reflect the other's point of view, or they may attempt to integrate themselves to hegemonic ideologies in various ways. While the real self posits difference from the wealthy, the fluid self tries to equip itself with discursive tools to eradicate the "hurting" difference. As Erdoğan subtly discusses, the "wounds of difference"¹¹ are socially inscribed on the bodies of the poor.

We find the strategic positioning of the subjectivities very important for our discussion. We furthermore argue differently from the above mentioned study on poverty that, individual narratives although important sources of knowledge, are not enough to understand the strategic positioning of subjectivities of the poor. As we have stated before, the positionings should be analyzed in relation to locality. Relational analysis is important at this point. The locality both produces positions for creative strategies of the self and confines the subjects to the rigid boundaries of the place. The general tendencies mapped onto the local, namely the growing power of local governments, the speculation of land, and the tendencies of informal economy situate the poor people in positions of conflict with the localized manifestations of power. As in the case of demolitions, or in the building of factories, mosques or villas in the area, the use of space becomes a site of political negotiation. The poor people adopt the positions opened in that negotiation to defend their own space and struggle to reclaim more space within the locality for their political and cultural activities. In this process they become active citizens and articulate their fluid subjectivities in globalized discourses about ethnic identity, citizenship and human rights. They speak as global subjects to make political criticisms in terms of environmental and health problems. But on the other hand the locality literally confines them. As our women informants told us, they usually cannot leave their neighborhood due to lack of money to travel to other parts of the city. "They cannot even go to Pendik" for leisure activities. Women are

and *Buzdan Kılıçlar--*, engage with the same issue. A recent example from Turkish literature on this point is Gaye Boraloğlu's *Meçhul*.

¹¹ "Yaşantımız sanki ateşten gömlek/İçimizden gelir bin defa ölmek/Hakkımız değil mi bizim de gülmek/Bizi bu fark yaraları öldürür." (Our lives are an ordeal/Many times we think of dying/ Don't we also deserve to be happy/ These wounds of difference kill us) From Müslüm Gürses's popular song "Fark Yaraları" cited by Erdoğan (2002:339)

usually confined to home and men can best go to the coffeehouses in the district. This makes the space even more significant in dealing with the conditions of poverty. For this reason, transforming the space, such as opening a *cemevi* as a cultural center, becomes an important political demand.

V. A Discussion on the Questions of Citizenship and Poverty

But how to explain women's more emphasized creative agency in Kavakpınar? This point brings us to the gendered construction of modern citizenship and its relation to social processes of exclusion and marginalization. In other words, if we are to avoid essentialist assumptions on gender, we should look for both the local and national dynamics of gendered citizenship and how they relate to poverty.

Questions of citizenship are usually posited within a discourse of civil society where individuals assume and enjoy their citizenship rights. In this perspective, the development of civil society is also considered as a key force that checks and safeguards the tacit contract between the state and the individual. Liberal theories that formulate citizenship and the ensuing rights within this kind of a formal model of contract are criticized for ignoring that the assumed individual is male. In other words, especially feminist scholars have criticized theories of citizenship for their male bias.¹² According to Pateman¹³, women have been subordinated to men in the conjugal contract and enter the public realm only through this subordination, which is rendered invisible within the category of the "private".¹⁴ The liberal theories do not only make the subordination of women invisible, but also miss the exclusions based on the substantive meanings of citizenship. Critiques of the liberal framework point to questions of identity and participation within a collectivity, national identity being the most significant collectivity among others. According to T.H.Marshall, citizenship is "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed."¹⁵ Once participation in a community is evoked as a norm of citizenship, then it is apparent that who do not have the status of full members would be excluded. Nationalization of citizenship, in this perspective, entail not only participation but also discriminations and exclusions of certain groups that are considered as lesser members of the national or moral collectivity, such as the poor, some ethnic groups, women, migrants, etc. Some of these discriminations and exclusions may have legal manifestations, as the current debate over "minorities" or gender in relation to legal reforms in Turkey show; however, some of the exclusions operate despite the law. They owe their legitimacy not to law but to cultural perceptions based on hegemonic nationalistic conceptions.

We would argue that citizenship, in its two separate yet interconnected meanings-the formal and the substantive- is based not merely on a logic of exclusion but a logic of alterity. We owe this term to Engin İşin's illuminating work on citizenship.¹⁶ According to İşin, logic of alterity is a dialogical relationship that simultaneously constitutes both insiders and outsiders. Logic of alterity would mean that the excluded others are not merely left out of the collectivity of "normal" citizens, but they are implicated as others in the constitution of the experience of citizenship, which is itself a space of political contestations and negotiations. For example, women's involvement in both civil society and nationalism convey the logic of alterity. Women are not only excluded but also included in the collectivity by their "difference". According to Pateman, "The creation of modern patriarchy embodied a new mode of inclusion for women

¹² For a general discussion on gender and citizenship, see Yuval-Davis. 1997. *Gender and Nation*, Sage and also Yuval-Davis. *Women, Citizenship and Difference*. Z Books.

¹³ Carole Pateman. 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Polity Press; 1989. *The Disorder of Women*. Polity Press.

¹⁴ Anne McClintock makes a similar argument based on historical analysis: "The Code Napoleon was the first modern statute to decree that the wife's nationality should follow her husband's, an example other European countries briskly followed. A woman's political relation to the nation was thus submerged as a social relation to a man through marriage." (1997: 91). " 'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race and Nationalism" in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. A. McClintock, A. Mufti, E. Shohat. University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁵ T.H.Marshall (1950: 14) *Citizenship and Social Class*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁶ Engin İşin. 2002. *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship*. U. of Minnesota Press.

that, eventually, could encompass their formal entry into citizenship. Women were incorporated differently from men, the 'individuals' and 'citizens' of political theory; women were included as subordinates into their own private sphere, and so were excluded from 'civil society' in the sense of the public sphere of the economy and citizenship of the state. But this does not mean that women had no political contribution to make and no political duty to perform. Their political duty (like their exclusion from citizenship) derives from their difference from men, notably their capacity for motherhood."¹⁷

Analyzing national framework of citizenship through its logic of alterity, shows that motherhood is a pivotal category through which women are ascribed a status in a collectivity, albeit not the same status with men in the civil society. This analysis would better illuminate the dynamics of agency of women in Kavakpınar. While being subordinated and dependent to men in their role as national citizens, for example in their voting decisions, women could become politically active by prioritizing their role as mothers. They have organized their group to learn more about "modern child care", to fight against environmental problems to create "healthy life conditions for their children" and earn money to take "better care of children". Erdoğan also mentions that the poor women in their study had a strong emphasis on the care for children. Motherhood does not only open a subject position for women to be active; it also provides a medium through which they become "modern" subjects by eradicating the "hurting" differences with the wealthy. Reading modern books and articles on childcare and health is an indicator of this. Furthermore, women in Kavakpınar told us that they have organized a series of "panel discussions" in their houses, inviting men and children to discuss "openly" about their problems in a "friendly dialogue". The impact of TV programs is clear. The way the self is posited in this new form conveys the aspiration and desire to be "modern". It is not only an imitation of others though. By actively using and transforming the space of locality, women attempt to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. They also fight against the "symbolic violence" that the labels, such as "ignorant", "uneducated", that are bestowed on them produce.¹⁸ Another striking example comes from their creative writing. An "advertisement" staged in the intermission of one of their theater performances, brilliantly plays with the "difference" and the desire to be the same. The "advertisement", which according to them "expresses poverty", shows to the audience that the poor people do not need washing detergents, since the stains are only caused by the food rich people eat (chocolate, oily food, etc) but "poor only eat bread and drink water." Here the contrast between the rich and the poor is sharply put. However, by playing with modern forms such as the "advertisement" women take place and produce within a symbolic language presumably shared by the whole society.

Women's desire to be integrated to the larger social community, and their ways of struggling surpasses the limits of national citizenship. They do not regard the existing political forms, such as political parties and the state as desirable means for being political. Women make it very clear that they do not trust either the existing (including socialist) parties or the state. Their only demand from the state is expressed in the words, "we do not want anything from the state, let it only accept us as citizens". They regard political parties as being harmful for the potential unity of the community, and criticize their politics as being abstract and blind to local problems. However, in making claims about their locality and their own position within it, women utilize the discourses of citizenship and human rights in different ways that connect to gender, ethnicity and the desire to be modern. We see an adoption of modern discourses, such as rights and citizenship by women in their mobilization; but we also see creative ways of performance to transcend the limits of the modern subject positions, and to establish communal forms of action and solidarity. We have argued in this paper that these new ways of being political have been made possible by the dynamics of global economical and political tendencies.¹⁹

¹⁷ Carole Pateman (1992: 19) "Equality, difference, subordination: the politics of motherhood and women's citizenship" in *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics, Female Subjectivity*, eds. G. Bock, S. James. Routledge.

¹⁸ They themselves give examples how these stigmatizing and discriminating terms are projected unto them in their encounters with authorities, especially medical authorities in hospitals.

¹⁹ Nazan Üstündağ deals with a similar question in a different conceptual frame. She argues that the "politics of universality" that the growing global capital introduces to heterogeneous real life temporalities within which governmentality operates, produces a tension that incites new political agencies to perform in the public sphere. She

In very general terms, parallel to the declining capacities of nation-states in regulating the economic and political field²⁰, local governments and their policies have increasingly gained more importance in terms of delineating and characterizing the parameters and the qualities of politics around the issue of poverty. It is not coincidence that the legal reforms that "prepare" Turkey for EU membership, tend to empower local governments. However, it would be naïve to think that the empowerment of local governments could devise efficient ways of dealing with poverty, given their limited democratic structure. They are still very much shaped by the centralized national party politics and its hierarchies that resonate with the logic of alterity that the hegemonic national community is structured by. Marginalized ethnic communities, women and the poor in general are excluded from participation in local politics, yet they are included as the necessary "base" for votes. The typical strategies employed in the political campaigns of mayor candidates demonstrate this very clearly. These campaigns invest in the needs of "bare life" to manipulate political decisions, and by distributing free basic goods to people try to "buy" their votes, as the current mayor did in Pendik.

The bare life in the form of bio-power has been the very ground for political power in modern societies.²¹ Governmentalization of basic human needs means constructing the docile objects of power and politically shaping the subjectivities accordingly. Thus the homogeneous category of the "poor" as the needy is created. The objectification of the poor in terms of "bare life" positions them as the victims whose needs will be catered by governments, i.e. local governments in this context. Yet, we argue that the growing importance of local politics designate locality as a significant site of political struggle. The subject positions opened up in that struggle contribute to new forms of agency that the poor utilize to assert their "humanity" in a globalized world, by claiming more space, by transforming the space and making it a culturally and environmentally a better place to live in. The poor never represent themselves in the terms of "bare life". Their subjectivities are split between positing the real "difference" of the poor and the desire to be same with others. The splits are meaningful for showing that the poor resist to objectification and victimization by adopting hegemonic modern discourses. This is nothing to be idealized or dismissed as mere ideology. It only shows that poverty apart from being a social problem, is a problem of socially and culturally positioned human beings.

VI. Conclusion

We would like to emphasize some points that we deem to be important in our discussion. Firstly, the question of poverty cannot be reduced to the process of material deprivation; it is a much more complicated process, which involves cultural exclusion/inclusion practices particularly on the basis of gender and ethnicity. The complex consequences of symbolic violence and the "wounds of difference" that marginalize the poor and the various forms of struggle against them should be integrated to the analysis of poverty. On the one hand, the locality opens up subject-positions for the poor to adopt and utilize various discourses for acting and speaking "politically", but on the other hand, the same locality imprisons and deprives people of means to transcend

furthermore emphasizes the new codifications that delimit the performance of these agencies in the neo-liberal regime. For example, the visibility of "the poor" in the public sphere "enables the sharing of time and space and the recognition of being in the same world. However, this recognition depends on the ability of new groups to talk about their difference in a certain coded language and through certain coded performances that make intelligibility possible." "The Role of the Dramas of Corruption and Poverty in the Constitution of a Neo-Liberal Regime in Postcolonial Contexts", unpublished paper, 2004.

²⁰ For a recent article on this issue, see Fernando Coronil. 2000. "Towards a Critique of Globalcentrism: Speculations on Capitalism's Nature," *Public Culture*. v. 12, n.2.

²¹ See Giorgio Agamben. 1998. *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. California: Meridian Press. See also Arturo Escobar. 1995. *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. NJ: Princeton University. Escobar, in this book, discusses the discursive formation of developmentalism in the post-war era. He underlines the importance of the "discovery" of poverty and various attempts on the problematization of poverty in the rise of developmentalism. He argues that "by turning the poor into objects of knowledge and management," the politics of poverty in this period served to the creation of new mechanisms of control and various techno-discursive instruments which would make the "government of the social" legitimate and possible both in national and international settings. In other words, invoking Karl Polanyi, Escobar tries to demonstrate "how pauperism, political economy and the discovery of society were closely interwoven" not only in the nineteenth century but also in the post-war period in the twentieth century. (*Great Transformation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1957. p.: 84)

their immediate “bare” life conditions. Secondly, the significance of the local governmental organizations as critical actors in the negotiation and the resolution of the demands and struggles concerning the human rights issues should be considered. In that context, the dynamics of the locality have to be rethought in connection to global tendencies. This could open a space for rethinking the question of citizenship beyond its conventional understanding; and contemplate about other forms of citizenship, such as urban citizenship. Last but not least, the environmental pollution as one of the defining features of our case study in Kavakpınar raises a number of questions about the relationship between the conception and the experience of poverty, human rights and the built environment. We propose that a thorough analysis of poverty should include environmental degradation and its implications for both the operations of exclusionary dynamics overriding the conditions of poverty, and creating subjectivities for the poor in combating them.

The self-narratives of poverty evoke residual worldviews and “real” experiences that cannot be contained in the representations of poverty that tend to objectify the poor in general terms. Hence the importance of listening to the poor. An old Alevi man asked us in the beginning of our interview whether we were journalists. Learning that we are university professors, he said, “it would be better if you were journalists. We want to be heard”. Then, it is a real challenge for us academics who want to study poverty to learn how to listen to the poor and create new ways to make them heard.