

NEO-LIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY, NATIONAL BELONGING
AND ORIENTAL OTHERING:
A CRITICAL LOOK AT GENDER-BASED NGO PROJECTS IN TURKEY

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies

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Budapest, Hungary

2009

ABSTRACT

Neo-Liberal Governmentality, National Belonging and Oriental Othering: A Critical Look at Gender-Based NGO Projects in Turkey

This study questions the increasing cooperation between state and non-state entities, as well as discussing how discourses and practices of gender-based NGO projects have become areas for re-imagining the Turkish nation by acting upon women's bodies and conducts. It focuses on the narratives of volunteers/workers in the Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) in general, Functional Adult Literacy and Women's Support Programme in particular, and analyzes project reports and other written material on AÇEV's website. By providing a historical, institutional and discursive analysis, this study questions the discourses on education, motherhood, reproduction, literacy development, and gender equality throughout AÇEV's project implementation. It shows how gender-based NGO projects become the means of categorizing women, as well as (re)produce nationalism, ethnic discrimination, and orientalism in the discussions of gender. I argue that, within the scope of AÇEV's projects, the discursive features of gender equality and practices of empowerment pave the way to a development discourse, which end up producing new strategies of (neo-liberal) governmentality and obscuring structural inequalities and the state violence in Turkey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was produced not only in communication with other texts but also in communication with and in the company of other people. Therefore, I owe much to these companionships, although it is still not easy to express my gratitude.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Elissa Helms, for her guidance and support during the formation and writing of this thesis. I became aware of most of the key terms in this study, with the help of her direction and valuable comments. I am also grateful to Anna Loutfi, for her intellectual support, and I benefited greatly from her lectures, especially in forming the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Second, I want to thank my friends Gülen, Erdem, and Özde, for all of the unique moments we shared together and their patience in listening to my endless discussions about some of the things which are presented in this study. I would like to thank Defne, Andra, Oya, Deniz, Marija, Robin, and all of the other “Gender Kids,” not only for the valuable memories we collected together, but also for the critical yet amusing insights that they brought to a myriad of “personal” issues.

I am also grateful to Birgül, Öykü, Demet, and Ayşe, for their solidarity and thoughtful hosting during my research time. The sense of home was always possible with their feminist companionships. I would like to thank Martin for his help with the translations, and Kathryn for her help in correcting my sentences that were written using a Turkish grammatical structure.

I owe special thanks to my parents, Aysel and Mustafa, who supported and encouraged me throughout my life; their experiences enriched mine. My last and greatest debt is to the women in Zeyrek, and to AÇEV’s workers and volunteers, who made this study possible. Without their support and sharing, this study would never have been finished.

To the memory of my grandmother...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
DEDICATION	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION	1
Methodology and Entry into the Field	6
Organization of the Thesis	14
CHAPTER II – THEORIES OF (NEO-LIBERAL) GOVERNMENTALITY AND BIOPOLITICAL CONTROL	15
Governmentality and Biopolitical Control	15
Neo-Liberal Governmentality and Neo-Liberal Biopolitics	20
CHAPTER III – THE NATION AND ITS MOTHERS: AN ANALYSIS ON AÇEV’S DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE	25
Modernity, Kemalism and AÇEV	25
Educating Mothers, Educating the Nation	29
The Kurdish Issue and (Non)Proper Mothers	33
CHAPTER IV – BEYOND THE PROBLEMATICS OF LITERACY AND GENDER EQUALITY: AN ANALYSIS ON FALP’S DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE	40
FALP and Literacy as a Population Problem	41
Problematics of Gender Equality in ‘Tradition’ and ‘Culture’	44
Development Discourse and the “Anti-Politics Machine” in FALP	52
CHAPTER V – EPILOGUE	61
BIBLIOGRAHY	64

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2007, I volunteered for Women's Fund, an organization assisting local women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and initiatives in Turkey with resource and project development. Women's Fund organized monthly meetings with activists and project managers of various women's NGOs in order to determine the needs of these organizations. In each meeting, many women – who were developing various projects in their own organizations – sat around a table and discussed 'the other' women who were the target audience of their projects. Bearing in mind the arguments of Chandra Talpade Mohanty about construction of 'third-world' women in Western feminist scholarship,¹ I tried to understand the discursive constructions displayed around the table throughout each meeting. Every sentence began with "We, as feminists...", "We, as activists..." or "We, as volunteers of civil society..." Most of these NGO workers/volunteers were referring to an abstract category of woman somewhere out there (in the suburbs, local areas, working class or Kurdish regions) who benefited from these projects and who were 'dependent' upon them. To me, it seemed that without the discursive category of this 'other' woman, there wouldn't be any category of NGO workers/volunteers who were all sitting around the table.

Throughout that summer and in my later encounters with different NGOs implementing gender-based projects in Turkey, I listened to countless narratives about generating a liberal and/or civil society where the notions of rights, citizenship and education were crucial in the empowerment of women. In these narrations, state institutions were being drawn as a separate body of governors which were independent from these organizations themselves. At the same time, practices and discourses of the state were being taken and

¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Reina Lewis, and Sara Mills (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), 49–74.

started to be practiced by these NGOs implying a new modality of governing. Consequently, my initial interest in the anthropology of NGOs has grounded my desire to understand and analyze the multiplicity of discourses, strategies and techniques of governmentality and the constitution of subjectivities within the process of gender-based NGO projects.

In Turkey, the emergence of NGOs and the notion of projectization go back to the early 1990s. After this period, the number of NGO projects has increased dramatically and projects related to women's and gender issues have composed an important part of this number. In the world of projectization, NGOs have started to frame their activities and objectives around institutionally defined concepts and frame them as projects. In this way, they have professionalized the goal of 'social change' and turned discourses about the goal of change into projects in order to get funding. In this context, NGOs started to form alliances with state institutions, governments, quasi government organizations, and national and international donors in order to get funding for their projects even at the expense of reshaping activities, goals, and ideologies.

NGO projects can provide positive changes through local actors by empowering women in their daily lives; yet, they can also lead to the reintroduction of conventional hierarchies between women and end with far reaching consequences. Therefore, it is important to look at discourses and practices that operate through micro level relationships and negotiations of local conditions and meanings within NGO projects at the everyday level. This thesis is about one of these organizations, the Mother and Child Education Foundation (AÇEV), and its gender-based projects.

AÇEV is a local NGO which was established in Istanbul in 1993 under the leadership of Ayşen Özyeğin, member of a well known family that has investments in philanthropic works in the field of education in Turkey. AÇEV situates itself as a Turkish organization

whose main areas of expertise are early childhood and adult education.² It aims at reaching those who have limited access to educational and economic resources, stresses the importance of education for economic, cultural and democratic development, and also advocates for women's rights and empowerment within the projects.

The establishment of AÇEV was based on a research project carried out from 1982 to 1986 on the educational status of preschool-aged children. After the results which showed that early childhood education “was extremely inadequate and many preschool-aged children were unable to receive education in Turkey,”³ the AÇEV researchers started to develop and implement home-based preschool education programmes with the aim of filling the gap in preschool education. The first programme was the Mother Child Support Programme (MOCEP) which paved the way for the establishment of AÇEV in the following years. The programme received support both from the Ministry of National Education from the beginning and from the World Bank in later periods. In the following years, AÇEV started to develop a literacy programme for mothers. In later years, they began to develop a Father Support Programme based on requests made by the mothers who attended the trainings of AÇEV.

AÇEV's financial contributors now include national and multinational companies, individuals, multinational aid organizations, national and international NGOs, and national and local governments. National governmental partners are the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health which act as financial contributors of projects usually in terms of providing logistical support. AÇEV also has international partners in its projects such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, the European Commission, The World Bank and various international NGOs.

² The word ‘Turkish’ both refers to a citizenship category for people living in the territory of the Republic of Turkey and to an ethnic collectivity belonging to the ‘Turkish nation’. In AÇEV's website, it is used as a citizenship category since the word refers to this category in the political discourse in general.

³ Mother Child Education Foundation, <http://www.acev.org/> (accessed April, 2009).

Most of AÇEV's projects are developed with the aim of being implemented in Eastern and Southeastern parts of Turkey or in urban places where there is a flow of migration from the Kurdish regions of Turkey. Eastern and Southeastern Turkey compose the Northern part of Kurdistan, the homeland of the Kurds; therefore, these regions are populated mainly by Kurds that number between 18 and 20 million people.⁴ However, AÇEV never refers to these regions as Kurdish, neither in their website nor in their project reports. The ambiguity in their language related to Kurdish regions reflects the ambiguity held by the official state discourse of Turkey toward Kurds, which constantly avoided recognizing them as an ethnic community from the foundation of the Republic in 1923 until the end of the 1980s.⁵

Throughout the thesis, I will try to understand how discourses on education, motherhood, reproduction, literacy development and gender equality are articulated and how ethnic discrimination is (re)produced in the discussions of gender within the scope of AÇEV's projects. Furthermore, I will discuss where NGOs and the state link hands in the construction of women along the lines of Kemalist discourses on modernity and nationalism. I will ask what these tell us about the reconfigurations of strategies and techniques of governmentality within NGO projects.

In this regard, I take as my starting point the critical theories of governmentality with an emphasis on changes in the neo-liberal milieu. My research stresses the importance of taking the gendered notion of governmentality into account, which scholars of governmentality have largely neglected in their studies; therefore, I will employ the questions raised by feminist scholars about how women's bodily borders are constituted within the reconfigurations of sovereign power as well as discussing how motherhood and reproduction have been constructed as being within ethnic and national processes.

⁴ Kurds residing within the borders of Turkey have dispersed other regions of the country as well; however, population estimates are not accurate since they are not included in the census as Kurds, see Amir Hassanpour, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Michael Chyet, "The Non-Education of Kurds: A Kurdish Perspective," *International Review of Education* 42, no. 4 (1996): 367 –79.

⁵ I will discuss this point at length while analyzing the institutional discourse of AÇEV in CHAPTER III.

Neo-liberal policies promote alliances between the state, private companies, non-governmental organizations and citizens, and invite them to ‘share the burden of the state’ in issues related to welfare of the population. As Michel Foucault has argued, concern with the welfare of the population is the object of “governmentality” in the modern world:

Population is the central aspect that the government must take into account in order to be able to govern effectively. It may either act directly through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly through techniques that will make possible, without the awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing flow of population into certain regions or activities, etc.⁶

I argue that the increasing cooperation between these different actors not only (re)produces strategies of governmentality but also strengthens the hegemonic agenda and the power of the Turkish state towards marginalized and oppressed groups. In the context of Turkey, a hegemonic national identity was secured through notions of difference that is also constructed in gendered terms. Women’s sexuality, motherhood, reproduction and literacy development have thus become sites of control through state practices and discourses in order to reaffirm Turkishness. More recently, even NGO projects, dealing with women’s issues have also started to build their projects on trainings concerning motherhood, reproduction and literacy development as a supplement to state and governmental projects. In this way, NGO projects arise as new modes of governmentality imbued with state discourses rather than being alternative models for ‘social change’ which are independent from the state. When the practices of the state and the government are taken up by NGO projects, the assumption that the NGOs are independent from the government – as is implied by the name ‘non-governmental’ – becomes complicated.⁷ Therefore, looking at discourses and practices (re)produced through NGO projects opens a space to discuss the gendered strategies of

⁶ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104, 100.

⁷ For a further analysis on civil society, NGOs and state relations, see Gerard Clarke, “Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Politics in the Developing World,” *Political Studies* 46 (1998): 36–52; Thomas S. Popkewitz, “Rethinking Decentralization and the State/Civil Society Distinctions: The State as a Problematic of Governing,” in *Educational Knowledge: Changing Relationships Between the State, Civil Society and the Educational Community*, ed. Thomas S. Popkewitz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 173–199.

governmentality in the neo-liberal era by questioning the obvious link between the state, territory, sovereignty and governmentality.⁸

Methodology and Entry into the Field

My reason for choosing AÇEV as a case study for my research dates back to the summer of 2004, to the time when I volunteered for Women's Fund. AÇEV was one of the partners of the meetings with local women's NGOs and initiatives in Turkey in Women's Fund at that time. Workers and volunteers never situated AÇEV as a women's organization nor as feminists neither in that meetings nor during my later fieldwork. However; they usually talked through discourses of gender equality, empowerment of women and advocacy of women's rights. Furthermore, AÇEV was one of the most successful NGOs around the meeting table in terms of fundraising and forming networks in rural Turkey for their gender-based projects through alliances with governmental institutions. The director of Women's Fund, who became a close friend of mine afterwards, informed me that the reason it had been easy for AÇEV to implement their projects in various regions of Turkey was that they never confronted the state or governmental authorities in terms of the aims of their projects, especially in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. Education has been one of the most crucial tools of the Turkish state in the project of constituting 'modern' and 'Western' Turkish citizens beginning from the early Republican years in 1920s. AÇEV has always stressed the importance of education for economic, cultural and democratic development, which is also imbued with the state's discourse on development and progress.

My attempts to make connections in AÇEV date to the end of 2008. By using my own situatedness in the academy, I introduced myself as a former psychology student and a current

⁸ Women also possess strategic flexibility to actively use and transform the space of NGO projects – not only due to their standpoints and positionalities, but also to the conflicting and complex relationship of their different identities. Therefore, the strategies and techniques of governmentality are reshaped, resisted or hybridized with strategic positioning of subjectivities in relation to the issues of class, gender and ethnicity. However, resisting subjectivities and dynamics of agency of women are not within the scope of this thesis.

gender studies student who is quite interested in AÇEV's work and their interactions with migrant Kurdish women in urban Turkey via projects. I was aware that this position would be capable of opening a space for communication between AÇEV's workers/volunteers and me due to their strong affiliations with modern psychology theories.⁹ Upon contacting the organization, AÇEV's workers directed me to Hülya,¹⁰ the manager of the Gender Equality department within the NGO. Hülya was waiting for me in a meeting room that had a huge table in the middle and a number of plaques all around the walls. She was well-prepared and gave me all the information about the projects of AÇEV as well as booklets from various trainings. We decided that I could participate in the Functional Adult Literacy and Women's Support Programme (FALP) implemented in one of the districts in Istanbul populated mostly by Kurds who have migrated from Eastern and Southeastern parts of Turkey. FALP fit my criteria for helping me address my research questions about topics such as citizenship, mothering, sexuality, health care and family planning. At the end of our meeting, Hülya closed the conversation by stressing their projects' outstanding success in the context of Turkey in a self-confident voice staring at me from the other side of the huge table. At that moment, I realized that I was being constructed as a subject who was there to witness and record the success and glory of all their projects and work in NGO activism. My own narration of this study all depended on what I would do with this subject position, the position of a witness hereafter.

This thesis is mainly based on two different sources; the third chapter is based on the project reports and other written material on the website of AÇEV. As a part of the discursive analysis, I also included a recent speech of the prime minister of Turkey since it triggered some of the questions framed in that chapter. The fourth chapter is based on the website

⁹ The founder of AÇEV is an outstanding social psychologist and academic in Turkey and most of the projects are developed and implemented by social or clinical psychologists – some who were my professors in my undergraduate psychology study.

¹⁰ Throughout the thesis, I will use pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of people that I met and interviewed.

materials as well as ethnographic data including participant observation and interviews I conducted during my fieldwork in FALP. I attended the literacy trainings of FALP, which is being implemented as a one-year project, three times a week during April in a neighborhood called Zeyrek in Istanbul. When I started to participate in the trainings, FALP was in its second month in Zeyrek. Zeyrek is one of the historical districts in Istanbul which dates back to Ottoman and Byzantine periods. During the last ten years, the district received a number of economic, social and political migrants from other parts of Turkey, especially from Bitlis and Siirt, cities in the Kurdish regions of Turkey.

In the last week of April, after I became embedded in the relationships I developed within FALP, I conducted interviews in an unstructured format with both AÇEV's volunteer instructor and field supervisor, and migrant women who were going through the trainings. I conducted interviews in the last week of my fieldwork partly because I wanted to frame my questions by basing them on my participant observation and after I had become more familiar with the women at the trainings, but more because of my ongoing worries about my wording of questions. I was afraid of formulating 'wrong' questions which would direct me to 'wrong' answers. However, after one of my friends warned me that "there is no such a thing as a right question," I realized that my worries were already imbued with certain meanings, with a desire to reach the most 'real' information about women and their interaction with NGO projects, the knowledge which is 'out there'. Besides, I was worried about the limitations of my study as well, since my way of entry into the field was through the medium of AÇEV's workers. I thought that the migrant women would put me in a position as they perceived NGO workers and volunteers and all the stories that I would collect would be directed to that certain subject-position with whom they had already formed a (power) relationship and got used to interacting in an already established discursive space. However, as a researcher in the field, I would always be part of a power relationship with the women there since I was the one who

was going to write their stories and their experience with NGO projects. Therefore, it would never be possible for me to get into a ‘neutral’ position within the relationships I would form there since I hold a hierarchical position as a researcher who had “the desire to know (knowledge/power) that guides [my] ethnographic project.”¹¹ This hierarchical position would also result from my “editorial power,” the power to determine the wording of questions, the material which would be part of the thesis and the order of the material.¹² Being aware of this unequal power relationship and bearing in mind my friend’s warning about my concerns related to ‘true’ questions, I didn’t prepare any questions before the interviews but only had an interview guide in mind. Therefore, some of the themes in this thesis came up ‘on their own’ while I was conducting interviews. Furthermore, since the field experience itself directed me to different questions, I framed my further interview questions regarding the themes coming up both ‘on their own’ and from my participant observation. The fieldwork experience directed me to certain questions that I wouldn’t have been able to see before interacting with the field itself and formed the backbone of my fourth chapter.

I will use discourse analysis both with the project reports and other written materials and with the narratives that emerged from my fieldwork and interviews. The reason why I chose discourse analysis is because language is situated within power relations and the subjects construct their positions through the medium of language.¹³ Thus, in trying to look at discourses and themes produced within the texts, interviews and everyday narratives will show me how AÇEV constructs itself in relation with the subjects it defines as target audience. Discourses do not exist in simple binary relations of power and powerlessness;

¹¹ Claudia Salazar, “A Third World Woman’s Text: Between the Politics of Criticism and Cultural Politics,” in *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluck, and Daphne Patai (London/New York: Routledge, 1991), 93–106, 100.

¹² Marc Zimmerman, “Testimonio in Guatemala: Payeras, Rigoberta, and Beyond,” *Latin American Perspectives* 18, no. 4 (Autumn 1991): 22–47, 31.

¹³ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford/New York: Blackwell, 1987); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

rather they are “tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations.”¹⁴ Since alternative discourses also play a crucial role in subverting the hegemonic power, which in turn has the potential to produce new, resistant discourses, the method of discourse analysis will enable me to discuss the reverse discourses which challenge, negotiate and revise discourses of projects.

Women have found themselves in a new set of power relations with the process of NGO projects. In order to reveal the ways these new sets of power relations construct different subject-positions with the process of projectization, I will focus on personal narratives of women who work for AÇEV and migrant women who are being subjected to its projects. Personal narratives create an analytical space for revealing the tensions among different discourses and how these tensions are addressed, negotiated and resolved; therefore, not only the different contents the narratives but also the context within which the narratives are disclosed, the ways they are ended and the audience to which they are directed will be within the scope of interpreting these narratives.¹⁵

Feminist theoreticians have shown the various ways in which knowledge is contextually produced and socially constituted since the interaction between the researcher and the informants play a crucial role in the knowledge production.¹⁶ Since this relationship emerges from the position and situatedness of subjects to the knowledge they produce,¹⁷ my own presence in the field will form one of the crucial objects of study in this thesis as the content of what was told to me during the interviews depends on this presence. Therefore, my thesis is not only about discourses and practices that emerge within the scope of NGO projects, but also about my own experience in the field. Intersubjective knowledge produced

¹⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹⁵ Nazan Üstündağ, “Belonging to the Modern: Women’s Sufferings and Subjectivities in Urban Turkey” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2005)

¹⁶ Rahel R. Wasserfall, “Reflexivity, Feminism and Difference,” in *Reflexivity and Voice*, ed. Rosanna Hertz (London/New York: Sage, 1997), 150–166.

¹⁷ Joan W Scott, “Experience,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler, and Joan W. Scott (London/New York: Routledge, 1992).

by my situatedness in the field affected the ways in which I was rejected or allowed access to particular narratives. Thus, the means by which people situated me within and narrated their experience towards certain subject positions will be included in the scope of analysis as well in my thesis.

During the course of the fieldwork, I conducted interviews with six women. One of them was the volunteer instructor of FALP, another was the field supervisor of AÇEV, and the other four women were participants of the literacy trainings in Zeyrek. AÇEV's workers/volunteers were both Istanbul natives. Of the training participants, three women out of four were from the Kurdish regions of Turkey (from Siirt and Diyarbakır) while the other was from the Black Sea region (from Rize).

In my first encounter with the field supervisor of AÇEV, Necla, who was to introduce me to the women in FALP, she warned me about my questions that I would ask to migrant women. She gave a long speech about the topics that I should be careful about while talking with women. Her naïve attempt to care for migrant women possessed colonialist traces in which she was the protector of those women and I was the one who was there to collect stories and whom she should control. Necla introduced me to the volunteer instructor, Zeynep, and then I was introduced to the women participating in the trainings as a friend of Zeynep, and as a student working on migration in Istanbul.

During the course of the trainings, I was taking notes all the time in a hurried and uneasy manner, thinking that all the other participants felt uncomfortable with my presence there. In my first week, one of the participants came and asked me: "What are you writing?" I was a bit nervous with that question since I thought my presence would distract them and replied that I was taking notes. However, she repeated the question and later asked, "What did the instructor say?" She had come to the class late and wanted to know what the instructor had asked us to write in our notebooks for that class rather than asking me about my own notes

since she thought I was one of the students. I thought my presence as a researcher would affect all the other participants, but I didn't have that much of an important presence during the trainings. However, it was quite a different case with the interviews. Each time I put my tape recorder on the table and asked for permission, explaining it was only for remembering later and nobody else would listen to the interview; the women felt uncomfortable and didn't want to tell much about their lives. Our conversations mostly revolved around how much they were happy participate in FALP, how much they loved their instructors, how learning to read and write changed their daily lives, etc. Besides, at the end of our conversation, one of the women asked me what the instructor was thinking about them and whether she loved them or not. Most of their narratives ended up with good wishes and compliments both about the instructor and me. After having realized that they would give me only the information that they thought I – as a friend of the volunteer instructor – was willing to hear, I took the process of bringing the information together as more telling about how FALP constructed norms through which it could govern much easier. Both in the class setting and in my interviews, the volunteer instructor was always referring to their generosity in training women residing in Zeyrek since AÇEV's workers/volunteers were doing their 'jobs' on a voluntary basis. Migrant women frequently mentioned this 'generosity' in their narratives as well and mentioned how much they owed to AÇEV's workers/volunteers. In the narratives, women mostly constituted themselves as illiterate, ignorant and lacking the appropriate knowledge in comparison with AÇEV's workers/volunteers, whom they framed as literate and smart. After I realized that I inhabited the space of FALP within the norms of these already established relationships, I decided to focus on FALP's discourses and activities rather than concentrating on migrant women's narratives.

I was a former psychology student both for Necla and Zeynep, to whom they explained how much FALP engaged with psychology theories several times. They usually

referred to the scientific basis for FALP, how it was based upon psychological studies and also to the importance of ‘knowing psychology’ while implementing the trainings. Discourses related to the discipline of psychology such as “empathy,” “attachment” and “cognitive development” came up in their narratives frequently. ‘Knowing psychology’ was an important position according to them, a position of an expertise in the area. This ‘expert’ knowledge was a legitimization of the practices of FALP and showing their authority as AÇEV’s workers/volunteers, which they used in framing their relationship with me as well.

In the later phases of my fieldwork, for Necla, I became a prospective volunteer to whom she gave advice about making a contribution to education within civil society after I graduate. In our last meeting, the one in which we came together for the interview, she invited me to a university café near Zeyrek. This was the best place to meet according to her, since I was a university student and secondly she put great emphasis on education. We sat down and she started to explain to me why and how she became interested in the trainings of AÇEV. After she retired from her work in a national bank with a high position, she decided to contribute to education services as a volunteer, since she realized that education was still an unresolved problem in Turkey during her encounters with people from different regions. After being a volunteer instructor in FALP for many years, she started to work as a field supervisor where her main responsibility is establishing coordination between AÇEV, volunteer instructors and national education institutions as well as supervising the trainings during FALP. During the interview, I held the position for her of a future volunteer who would support the education services in parts where the state wasn’t able to do since I was interested in works of AÇEV. The importance of education and her experience as a volunteer in education services within civil society covered an important part of our conversation.¹⁸

¹⁸ On the construction of volunteerism and self responsibility within the neo-liberal discourse in Turkey, see Yasemin İpek, “Volunteers or Governors: Rethinking Civil Society in Turkey beyond the Problematic of Democratization” (master’s thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2006).

Organization of the Thesis

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will present a theoretical background on the studies of governmentality and biopolitics with a focus on changes with the neo-liberal milieu. I aim to provide a gender perspective on theories of governmentality by discussing how the construction of women's reproductive capacities and roles forms the backbone of governing populations. In this second chapter, I discuss theories of gender and nation as well as how they present me with most of the analytical devices that I have employed in interpreting my data. In the third chapter, I will analyze the institutional discourse of AÇEV about gender equality, motherhood and reproduction by looking at the website and project reports. I will relate my analysis to discourses on modernity, Kemalism and nationalism as well, aiming to show how these discourses overlap in certain points in (re)constructing motherhood in relation to the Kurdish issue in Turkey. And in the fourth chapter, I will analyze the discourses and practices of FALP by looking at the website, project reports, and the data from my fieldwork. I will discuss the how FALP ends up (re)producing internal orientalism, nationalism and developmentalism in the discussions of literacy, gender equality and education in the context of Turkey.

CHAPTER II

THEORIES OF (NEO-LIBERAL) GOVERNMENTALITY AND BIOPOLITICAL CONTROL

The concept of “governmentality,” after it was used by Michel Foucault in one of his lectures on the subject has evoked many other studies that deal with the understanding of power by the 1990s. It has provided social sciences with a major analytical tool that could be employed in different domains of political, social and economic analysis. In this chapter, I will provide information on the theories of governmentality and “biopolitics,” another concept that has emerged from the discussions of governmentality. Furthermore, I will discuss the gendered notion of governmentality and biopolitics in which women’s bodily borders become the predominant areas of power, by linking it to the analytical tools provided by gender and nation discussions. In the second section of this chapter, I will talk about the changes in theories of governmentality and biopolitics with the focus on neo-liberal rationalities of power and how the analytical distinction between state and non-state entities became blurred with this milieu. Finally, I will tie discussions provided by theories of (neo-liberal) governmentality to a critical analysis of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and discuss the ways of looking at strategies of sovereign power and governmentality, with a gender lens, in the context of contemporary Turkey.

Governmentality and Biopolitical Control

Michel Foucault, in his writings on governmentality, re-examines the discussion on the “art of government” which was presented in the middle of the sixteenth century as the questions about “how to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the

people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor.”¹⁹ He re-defines the “art of government” as the “conduct of conduct” as it corresponds to the political form of government in the eighteenth century and distinguishes it from sovereignty, since the art of government cannot be exercised through specific and autonomous modes of power as in sovereignty. This corresponds to a new regime of power in which concern for the welfare of the population becomes the object of governmentality necessary to be able to govern effectively in the modern world. New mechanisms of governmentality “act either directly through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly through techniques that will make possible, without the awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing flow of population into certain regions or activities, etc.”²⁰

Later, Foucault introduced the term “biopower” as the new technology of power used in the second half of the eighteenth century, which involved “a set of processes such as ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population and so on.”²¹ Before biopower, mechanisms, techniques and technologies of power were essentially centered on the individual body. As Foucault writes, “They include all devices that were used to ensure the spatial distribution of individual bodies (their separation, their alignment, their sterilization, and their surveillance) and the organization, around those individuals, of a whole field of visibility.”²² However, with coming of the nineteenth century and continuing until the contemporary era, state control of the biological transformed into “‘make’ live and ‘let’ die”²³ in which sovereignty is seen as the right to make live and to let die. In contrast to the previous disciplinary techniques of power, biopower emerged as another technology of power and transforms disciplinary mechanisms in which it addresses man-as-living-being but not man-as-body. The new technology tackled the multiplicity of man to the extent that they

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” 87.

²⁰ Ibid., 100.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, tran. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 243.

²² Ibid., 241.

²³ Ibid., 241.

formed “a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness and so on.”²⁴ Economic and political issues dealing with population had become “biopolitics’s first object of knowledge and the target it seeks to control.”²⁵ In this era, the population turns into a biological problem and biopolitical power focuses on the population and health of reproduction. Subjects become members of the population, rather than individual bodies, “in which issues of individual sexual and reproductive conduct interconnect with issues of national policy and power.”²⁶

However, Giorgio Agamben criticizes Foucault’s notion of sovereignty as an archaic form of power displaced by modern biopolitics and proposes that “the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power. In this sense biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception.”²⁷ Agamben argues that biopolitics operates in a state of exception, where the norm of law is always delayed “in order to make [the norm’s] application possible;” therefore, strategies of power that regularize mass bodies work as a “force of law without law.”²⁸

As Ruth Miller criticizes, the gender of the bodies is not brought to the foreground neither in Foucault’s nor in Agamben’s works. Miller adds another dimension to the debate and argues that we should look at the space where the decision over life and death emerges in order to provide a complete understanding of biopolitical power:

I (...) question Agamben’s choice of [concentration] camp as the fundamental biopolitical arena. More so than the concentration camp, I will suggest, it is the womb that has become the paradigm of this particular form of sovereignty. (...) The woman citizen thus in turn becomes the biopolitical subject and biopolitical setting.²⁹

²⁴ Ibid., 243.

²⁵ Ibid., 243

²⁶ Colin Gordon, “Government Rationality: An Introduction,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1–52, 5.

²⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tran. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford/California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6.

²⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, tran. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 38, 39.

²⁹ Ruth Miller, *The Limits of Bodily Integrity: Abortion, Adultery and Rape Legislation in Comparative Perspective* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 29, 30.

Miller sees the womb as a better space through which to talk about biopolitics since “it is women’s bodily borders that have been displaced onto national ones” and “it is women’s bodies that are and have been mobilized in the definition of biopolitical space.”³⁰

Furthermore, Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis argue that there is a special focus on women in national and governmental policies since they are seen “as a social category with a specific role,” with regard “particularly [to] human reproduction.”³¹ Therefore citizenship becomes a gendered space in which the link between women and the state is constructed differently than the link between men and the state in five major ways. As Anthias and Yuval-Davis write, women are treated as “biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities,” as “reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups,” as “participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture,” as “signifiers of ethnic/national difference,” and as “participants in national, economic, political and military struggles” in national processes.³² Therefore, inviting the “nation’s mothers” to regenerate the country’s population is also a common practice for states’ nationalist discourses. States also generate narratives of crisis which refer to the condition of national survival in order to make the invitation to the “nation’s mothers” to regenerate the country’s population legitimate.³³ As a result of this different positioning of women in the citizenship category as members who are responsible for the “reproduction of national, ethnical and racial categories,”³⁴ various forms of population control emerge as governmental practices in which the state controls the reproductive capacity of certain women while it invites others to bear more children.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., 149, 151.

³¹ Floya Anthias, and Nira Yuval-Davis, “Introduction,” in *Woman-Nation-State*, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis, and Floya Anthias (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 1–15, 6.

³² Ibid., 7.

³³ Geraldine Heng, and Janadas Devan, “State Fatherhood: The Politics of Nationalism, Sexuality, and Race in Singapore,” in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Routledge, 1992), 343–64.

³⁴ Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis. “Introduction,” 8.

³⁵ Geraldine Heng, and Janadas Devan, “State Fatherhood.”

Consequently, it is important to look at the practices of governmentality and biopolitical control in which women's bodily borders are used as the primary biopolitical space and to study gendered techniques and technologies of power that emerge through different mechanisms of power. The institutions that have emerged in the era of globalism and neo-liberalism have started to (re)produce new technologies of power within and across time and space that blur the obvious link between the state, territoriality and sovereignty. NGOs are among these institutions that have emerged with the political, social and economic changes in the world. They exercise new strategies and techniques of power while implementing their projects upon a subject or marginalized population. Most NGO projects claim to tackle problems concerning the welfare of the populations and women and their bodily borders compose an important part of the target group in the project implementation. In some cases, states form alliances with these NGOs and practices of governmentality are multiplied or taken on a new level in these NGO – state relations.

Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat propose shifting the ground for discussion of sovereignty from territoriality toward “internal constitution of sovereign power within states through the exercise of violence over bodies and populations.”³⁶ They suggest that sovereign power and violence should be studied as practices that range through and across societies since sovereignty is internally fragmented, unevenly distributed and depends on the repeated performances of violence and desire to govern. Therefore, in order to understand the notion of sovereign power, they propose to disentangle the debate from the state and to pay attention to sovereignty's violent desire to govern, and the notion of “bare life” – which they borrow from Giorgio Agamben – where sovereign violence always inscribes itself but also encounters resistance at the same time.³⁷ Rather than casting the state as the absolute

³⁶ Thomas B. Hansen, and Finn Stepputat, “Introduction,” in *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants and States in the Postcolonial World*, eds. Thomas B. Hansen, and Finn Stepputat (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–38, 2.

³⁷ Ibid.

sovereign, studying the techniques of governmentality at the everyday level also introduces a “critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experiences as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable.”³⁸

Neo-Liberal Governmentality and Neo-Liberal Biopolitics

Nikolas Rose discusses reconfigurations of governmentality within the scope of liberalism.

He argues that liberal strategies connect governmentality “to the positive knowledges of human conduct developed within the social and human sciences.”³⁹ He writes:

The activity of government becomes connected up to all manner of facts (the avalanche of printed numbers and other information (...), theories (philosophies of progress, conceptualizations of epidemic disease...), diagrams (sanitary reform, child guidance...), techniques (double-entry book keeping, compulsory medical inspection of school children), knowledgeable persons who can speak “in the name of society” (sociologists, statisticians, epidemiologists, social workers).⁴⁰

Rose also draws attention to “the authority of expertise” that attempt to utilize and instrumentalize forms of expertise in order to regulate economic, social and political domains which are cast as problematic “at a distance” instead of through state agencies.⁴¹ As Rose states, new strategies of governing cannot be understood in terms of a particular ideology. Rather, what we see is an emergence of a way of thinking about government and its execution as an “advanced” form of liberalism. What Rose calls “advanced” liberal strategies of government both generate autonomy and responsibility of subjects and multiply the agencies of government while concealing them within new mechanisms of control.⁴² New strategies of governmentality that are concerned with issues from health to education also constitute citizens as ideally and potentially active in their own governance, since in these new forms of

³⁸ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 20.

³⁹ Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies,” in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government*, eds. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (London: UCL Press, 1996), 37–64, 44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44, 45.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴² Nikolas Rose, “Governing Cities, Governing Citizens,” in *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City*, ed. Engin İşin (London /New York: Routledge, 2000), 95–109.

government the citizen also plays his/her own role in the game.⁴³ Here, civil society emerges as an area which is proposed as the site of freedom and individual autonomy in which individuals are welcomed to govern local problems themselves.⁴⁴

As is argued by James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta,⁴⁵ the move to neo-liberalism has resulted in the adding and replacing of governmental organizations with non-state entities, which are (said to be) autonomous from the state. In this way, practices of the state are taken and begin to be practiced by these entities. However, they argue that this does not mean an increase in governmentality, but rather it implies a new modality of governing. Based on their analysis of how the collapse of nation-states has impacted the emergence of new forms of power and authorities, they discuss the new entities in civil society such as NGOs which do not actually act as non-governmental. Ferguson and Gupta write, these are:

(...) political entities that may be better conceptualized not as 'below' the state, but as integral parts of a transnational apparatus of governmentality. This apparatus does not replace the older system of nation-states, (...) but overlays and coexists with it. In this optic, it might make sense to think of the new organizations that have sprung up in recent years not as challengers pressing up against the state from below but as horizontal contemporaries of the organs of the state – sometimes rivals; sometimes servants; sometimes watchdogs; sometimes parasites; but in every case operating on the same level, and in the same global space.⁴⁶

Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller claim that, in most of these discussions, “analytical language structured by the philosophical opposition of state and civil society is unable to comprehend contemporary transformations in modes of exercise of political power.”⁴⁷ The so-called distinction between state and non-state entities has started to dissolve and what we experience now is a multiplicity of actors that aim to discover the ways of “how to govern

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Yasemin İpek, “Volunteers or Governors?”

⁴⁵ James Ferguson, and Akhil Gupta, “Spatializing States: Toward an Anthropology of Neo-liberal Governmentality,” *American Ethnologist* 29, no.4 (2002): 981–1002.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 994.

⁴⁷ Nikolas Rose, and Peter Miller, “Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 43, no.2, (June, 1992): 173 – 205, 173.

others, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor.”⁴⁸

James Petras provides a critical analysis of NGOs in Asia, Latin America and Africa on the basis of Marxist analysis, which focuses on cooperation between NGOs, local governments and international capital.⁴⁹ He argues that NGOs establish a new class of professionals based on imperial funding, which uses the discourse of identity politics and human rights to channel popular movements into collaborative relations with dominant neo-liberal elites. Therefore, NGOs foster a new type of cultural and economic colonialism and demobilize, depoliticize and fragment the movements as well as erase class solidarity. Foster provides important insights on the NGOs role in mingling marginalized groups into neo-liberal state politics by emphasizing ‘self-help’ but not engaging with the social system that produces oppression in the first place. However, macro level critiques of NGOs as in Petras’ work also oversimplify and overgeneralize the interpersonal relations between the actors and undervalue the positive affects of NGO projects in everyday lives of people.

Nazan Üstündağ draws attention to the dangers of studying civil society and NGO projects only through the macro level since this framework prevents us from looking at the actors of projects and their impacts in local regions. She argues that NGO projects are sentenced to be unsuccessful as long as they do not possess the problem of conceptualization of disadvantaged groups, do not use their language, do not talk address the institutions which bring forth the disadvantages and put the ‘liberation’ on the shoulders of these groups only.⁵⁰

In the context of Turkey, the increasing numbers of NGOs and projects have opened a communication space between the state and ‘civil society’ since the 1980s. In this newly emerged space, changing relations have resulted in various changing practices and discourses

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” 87.

⁴⁹ James Petras, “NGOs: In the Service of Imperialism,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 29, no. 4 (1999): 429–40.

⁵⁰ Nazan Üstündağ, “Türkiye’de Projecilik Üzerine Eleştirel bir Değerlendirme [A Critical Evaluation on Projectization in Turkey],” *Amargi* 3 (Spring, 2007): 23–24.

between the actors of government and NGOs. Government institutions sometimes support and fund NGO projects and sometimes they sue these projects as a result of disagreements. This has resulted in “a profusion of shifting alliances between diverse authorities in projects to govern a multitude of facets of economic activity, social life and individual conduct.”⁵¹

In this process, it is important to contemplate new strategies of governmentality with reference to neo-liberalism, since it opens room for different social antagonisms and power relations resulted from the neo-liberal era to be taken into account. Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin Winckler stress the centrality of neo-liberal politics while they discuss the changing ways in which the population, as an object of state intervention, has played a central role in China’s governmentality. They argue that neo-liberal approaches to methods of birth planning involve indirect regulation by the state and self-regulation by citizens themselves and they refer to this process as “neo-liberal biopolitics.”⁵²

NGOs and their projects have become one of the authorities that deal with indirect regulations towards methods of birth planning and other domains of governing individual conduct in contemporary Turkey with the changes of the neo-liberal milieu. For instance, AÇEV’s trainings in the urban Turkey deal with conveying modern knowledge of birth control and family planning to women especially in areas where there is a flow of migration from the Kurdish regions of Turkey. In most of the project reports, higher birth rates and motherhood practices are considered to be problems where migrant populations reside. After casting these practices as social problems, new strategies of transforming and solving these problems emerge in the space of projects, which constitute different subjectivities as well. Thus, these projects become a field of biopolitics where migrant women are governed by neo-liberal discourses on self-responsibility and empowerment, rather than by domination and repression. Therefore it is important to look at how NGO projects dealing with issues of

⁵¹ Nikolas Rose, and Peter Miller, “Political Power beyond the State,” 174.

⁵² Susan Greenhalgh, and Edwin Winckler, *Governing China’s Population: From Leninist to Neo-liberal Biopolitics* (Stanford/California: Stanford University Press, 2005).

reproduction, health care, mothering and family planning are experienced and discursively constructed and what these constructions tell us about the reconfigurations of technologies of political power and governmentality within the process of neo-liberalism.

I argue that NGO projects targeting women can be interpreted as paradigms for sovereignty, biopolitical control and governmentality in the context of Turkey. When we think about the subject in relation to the Kurdish issue in Turkey, projects' debates/discourses on the welfare of the population construct Kurdish women as 'non-qualified' subjects and try to transform and adapt them to urban settings using trainings about issues such as motherhood, reproduction, health, literacy and gender equality. Casting these projects as having unilateral effects and intentions would erase the complex interplays between the actors of NGOs and the targeted audience of women; yet, taking them as mere empowerment practices would be a bit naïve. Therefore, we should look at the discourses and practices of project implementation with a focus on the interpersonal relationships that are specific to the context of contemporary Turkey.

CHAPTER III

THE NATION AND ITS MOTHERS:

AN ANALYSIS ON AÇEV'S DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

This chapter examines the construction of motherhood and reproduction as a space of intervention in the institutional discourse and practice of AÇEV, the Mother Child Education Foundation, with a focus on the historical trajectories of nation-building in Turkey. In the first section, after discussing how Kemalist discourse on modernity was articulated through gendered contestations in the making of the national(ist) subjects, I will analyze the institutional discourse of the AÇEV where it parallels earlier Republican periods in using motherhood as a tool for raising modern and proper Turkish citizens. The second section is dedicated to the role of education in the making of the “nation’s mothers” and how Kemalist and neo-liberal discourses are juxtaposed in AÇEV’s attempt to educate mothers. In this second section, I will also mention the role of ‘expert’ knowledge as a neo-liberal strategy to govern the subjects and to be governed in this process. Finally, in the last section, I will discuss how motherhood and reproduction are used as an ethnically constructed space as well in relation to the Kurdish issue in Turkey. This chapter’s effort to understand the articulation of motherhood and reproduction in the contemporary context of Turkey helps to reveal how the boundaries between the state and NGO projects are blurred in the differential construction of Turkish and Kurdish mothers.

Modernity, Kemalism and AÇEV

Modernization was a central aspect of Turkish nationalism during the course of the 19th century and onwards. Attempts at modernization and westernization date back to Ottoman reforms in the Tanzimat period (1839 – 76) where technical and administrative reforms in

education, health and military were implemented and, later, continued with additional changes in cultural practices from developments in the style of clothing to the switch to the Latin alphabet in the early Republican years (1920s).⁵³ Throughout the course of modernization in these years, there was an emphasis on women's rights in which discourses related to 'women's emancipation' demonstrated traces of the desire of 'achieving Western norms' in every day life.⁵⁴ While the West was taken as the basis for the development of a secular state,⁵⁵ the agenda surrounding 'progress' and modernity was often articulated through gendered terms. In this discourse a woman's body became the arena of discursive constructions and fantasies of the modernization and Westernization of Turkish society. The modernist male elite of the society drew "women's bodies, behavior and social conduct" as the arena where a "required and sufficient degree of modernization" was defined.⁵⁶ Atatürk supported the rights of women in getting education equal to men; yet, his strong advocacy in female education was dependent on his belief that should women participate in society side by side with their male counterparts, especially as the first educators of children. He stressed the importance of mothers in bringing up new generations since, for him, this was the path toward engendering the 'progress' of the nation.⁵⁷ Like many other colonial/postcolonial experiences of the world, 'education' was seen as a tool for achieving 'Western ideals' and modernization and, thus, the key to disentangling social problems.⁵⁸ Campaigns of literacy and mandatory primary school education for both girls and boys were important citizen-raising projects of the

⁵³ Eric Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London/New York: I.B Tauris, 1993).

⁵⁴ Deniz Kandiyoti, "End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey," in *Women, Islam and State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Macmillan, 1991), 22–47.

⁵⁵ For an analysis of how the concept of "West" constituted in a number of ways and fostered different representations, see Stuart Hall, "West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, eds. Stuart Hall, and Bram Gieben (Cambridge: Open University/Polity Press, 1992), 275–331.

⁵⁶ Ayşe Durakbaşı, and Aynur İlyasoğlu, "Formation of Gender Identities in Republican Turkey and Women's Narratives as Transmitters of 'Herstory' of Modernization," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 1 (Autumn, 2001): 195–203, 195.

⁵⁷ Ayşe Durakbaşı, *Halide Edip: Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm [Halide Edip: Turkish Modernization and Feminism]* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000), 125

⁵⁸ For an analysis of the role of education in constructing national and modern subjects in postcolonial settings, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Kemalist regime at that time.⁵⁹ The progress of the nation was seen to occur alongside the reforms related to establishing gender equality within the society. This view frequently arose in the speeches of Atatürk. In two indicative examples, Atatürk stated:

A civilization where one sex is supreme can be condemned, there and then, as crippled. A people which has decided to go forward and progress must realize this as quickly as possible. The failures in our past are due to the fact that we remained passive to the fate of women.⁶⁰

Our enemies are claiming that Turkey cannot be considered as a civilized nation because this country consists of two separate parts: men and women. Can we close our eyes to one portion of a group, while advancing the other, and still bring progress to the whole group? The road to progress must be trodden by both sexes together, marching arm in arm.⁶¹

Reformers believe that “increasing entry of women into higher education (...) helped to strengthen the rapid improvement in their conditions and achievements of equality.”⁶² In this respect, education was considered to play the most important role in gender equality and it was to be the key factor in ‘going forward’ and ‘progress’ for the nation, according to Kemalist discourse. The Girls’ Schools established in the Ottoman Tanzimat Period reopened as Girls’ Institutes after the proclamation of the republic, and they were expanded throughout the country.⁶³

State-supported female education within the context of nation-state building and modernization has been studied by various scholars.⁶⁴ Education and schooling are spaces for (re)constituting gendered, racialized and ethicized difference in which views of citizenship might be imposed or articulated. It is the space where “difference is discursively explored and

⁵⁹ Ayşe Durakbaşa, *Halide Edip: Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm*, 125.

⁶⁰ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books), 36.

⁶¹ Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner, 2003), 82.

⁶² Nermin Abadan-Unat, “The Modernization of Turkish Women,” *Middle East Journal* 32, no. 3 (1978): 291–306, 306.

⁶³ Ayşe Durakbaşa, *Halide Edip: Türk Modernleşmesi ve Feminizm*, 125.

⁶⁴ Deniz Kandiyoti, *Women, Islam and the State* (London: Macmillan Press, 1991); Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,” in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Macmillan Press, 1991), 48–76.

institutionally framed and reframed.”⁶⁵ Education is defined as “one of the main ‘public’ institutions where this ‘sanctioned’ gender difference may be contested. It is one of the first and most important ‘public’ spaces made accessible to women in the course of ‘modernization’ and is therefore important in defining the changing roles of men and women in society.”⁶⁶ Women’s bodies and minds became the focal points of this apparatus throughout the Turkish history, even today, since women are seen as the key participants of ideological reproduction of the collectivities and transmitters of its culture.⁶⁷

After the 1980s, civil society became one of the places for the articulation of Kemalist modernization discourse, which linked the discourses of ‘education’ and ‘progress’ to each other. With the increasing establishment of NGOs dealing with issues ranging from education to women’s rights, the Kemalist project on nationalism and modernization has started to be carried out by these organizations themselves.⁶⁸ AÇEV is one of these NGOs where the ‘achievement of civilization’ and Western ideals are thought to be passed through education. In their projects, they stress the importance of literacy education over the course of Turkish modernization:

Our most basic and indispensable goal in the near future, in order to secure the *creation of Modern Turkey*, will be to reach more people, illiterate people and increase the literacy levels of individuals, thus making them useful for both *their own and societal development*.⁶⁹

The “creation of Modern Turkey” is mainly depicted as something that will be built from the education of children, who will be the “future generations,” and their mothers who

⁶⁵ Elaine Unterhalter, “Citizenship, Difference and Education: Reflections Inspired by the South African Transition,” in *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis, and Pnina Werbner (London: Zed Books, 1999), 100–17, 112.

⁶⁶ Niloufar Pourzand, “Female Education and Citizenship in Afghanistan: A Turbulent Relationship,” in *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis, and Pnina Werbner (London: Zed Books, 1999), 85–98, 90.

⁶⁷ Floya Anthias, and Nira Yuval-Davis, “Introduction.”

⁶⁸ Yasemin İpek, “Volunteers or Governors?,” 93.

⁶⁹ This and all other translations from Turkish are mine unless otherwise noted. Emphasis mine. Aydın Yücesan Durgunoglu, and Banu Öney, “İşlevsel Yetişkin Okuryazarlığı Programı Uygulama ve Değerlendirmesi” (Nisan, 1997), 2. <http://www.acev.org/arastirmalarimiz.php?id=24&page=8> (accessed April, 2009).

are cast as responsible for “bringing up healthier generations”⁷⁰ in AÇEV’s works. Mothers gain crucial importance in the projects and trainings since the NGO casts mothering practices as important contributions towards the raising of younger generations:

In fact, the best predictors of a child's word recognition and vocabulary development were a mother's educational level and educational expectations for her child (for example, the grade that the mother expects the child to complete). Such data make *adult (and especially female) education a crucial factor in child education* and complicate the assessment of the costs and benefits of adult education.⁷¹

Educating Mothers, Educating the Nation

The work of AÇEV continues in four different areas at the moment. These are: “early education childhood programmes,” “family education programmes,” “functional adult literacy and women’s support programmes,” and “advocacy and awareness raising activities.” One of the projects they implement under the rubric of early education childhood programmes is the Mother Child Education Programme (MOCEP) in which the following objectives are set:

The program targets both mother and child, and has aims geared toward both groups; it aims to enrich children cognitively in order to boost school readiness and optimal psychosocial development, and to *create an environment in which children will be better nourished and healthier*. In addition, *mothers’ role in and knowledge of child development* is augmented, thus enabling mothers to feel *emotionally secure*, *grow more self-confident*, and *learn about family planning and reproductive health*.⁷²

The environment mentioned on AÇEV’s website and project reports as the place “in which children will be better nourished and healthier” corresponds to the nuclear family. In their annual report from 2007, they claimed to develop “childhood education models that strengthen the family and offer low-cost alternatives to center-based programs.”⁷³ In AÇEV’s work, strengthening and supporting the family means supporting mothers in their child rearing

⁷⁰ Translation in the original, Mother Child Education Foundation, <http://www.acev.org/> (accessed April, 2009).

⁷¹ Emphasis mine. Aydın Yücesan Durgunoglu, Banu Öney, and Hilal Kuscül, “Development and Evaluation of an Adult Literacy Program in Turkey” (Nisan, 1996), 3.

<http://www.acev.org/arastirmalarimiz.php?id=24&lang=en&page=8> (accessed April, 2009).

⁷² Emphasis mine, translation in the original, Mother Child Education Foundation, <http://www.acev.org/> (accessed April, 2009).

⁷³ Mother Child Education Foundation, “2007 Annual Report,” 14, http://www.acev.org/images/assets/files/acev_annual_report_2007.pdf (accessed April, 2009).

practices, and the family is designed to be a replacement of center-based programmes that might be developed by the welfare state.

The discourse of supporting mothers in their child-bearing practices with modern knowledge, and with the aim of strengthening the family juxtaposes the Kemalist discourse on family and nationalism with the neo-liberal discourse on family and empowerment.⁷⁴

MOCEP's discourse on the empowerment of mothers derives from neo-liberal politics, which assign women the responsibility of taking care of children, rather than calling upon childcare services from the welfare state. The programme also covers how "women can use their time effectively and generate an income from handicrafts" which aims at to "inform mothers how they can use their time efficiently, about work at a job where they can generate an income."⁷⁵

The subject position, which is constructed by these programmes, is obviously housewives whose first obligation is to stay at home and bring up children rather than become a part of the (paid) labor force. By this means, the state's lack of social services, such as childcare centers is supported and women are placed into home settings to replace the role of the welfare state. Thus, the family is supported and women's so-called role in the family as the caretaker is augmented via these projects.

In order to understand the link between the neo-liberal discourse and the earlier periods of nation building in AÇEV's projects, we should understand the dominant discourses on family and nationalism in Turkey. In AÇEV's discourse, like in the early Republican period, family is articulated in terms of the place where the making of modern and national citizens becomes possible. During the course of nation-building in Turkey, the new nuclear family gained importance in the discursive construction of the nation and was used to

⁷⁴ Yasemin İpek also mentions a similar finding in her study on TEGV (The Educational Volunteers Foundation of Turkey). She argues that what we see as the new "middle class" discourse in TEGV's work is a combination of "the Kemalist discourse on nationalism, enlightenment, Westernization and secularism with the neo-liberal emphasis on problem-solving and self-responsibility". However, she doesn't discuss the gendered aspect of this juxtaposition in her case study. Yasemin İpek, "Volunteers or Governors?," 7.

⁷⁵ Translation in the original, Mother Child Education Foundation, <http://www.acev.org/> (accessed April, 2009).

strengthen the commitment of national and ethnic collectivities to the nation-state. Mothers took the central position within the nuclear family since they were constituted as both the biological reproducers of the nation and also the bearers of future generations. Therefore while some women (from the elite group) were invited to be more involved in the “public sphere,” others were encouraged to stay in the “private sphere” and to participate in the mission of modernization by being housewives in a “Western style,” through which they conveyed “discipline,” “order” and “rationality” to the family.⁷⁶

Traces of the same ideology – imbued with the ‘expert’ language of psychology and neo-liberal discourse on empowerment – can be seen in the work of AÇEV. While they constitute the mothers of children as the first and most important caretakers, they place these women into the home environment where they become responsible for the better nourishment of their children and turning them into “healthier generations.” AÇEV also uses the following slogan: “Investing in children is an investment in a nation’s future, in human capital.”⁷⁷ Here, AÇEV’s objective of creating an “environment in which children will be better nourished” and “augmenting mothers’ role and knowledge in child development” is depicted as an investment in the nation’s future at the same time. In the annual report, the “AÇEV family” is portrayed as being “comprised of leading academics, expert staff members, teachers and volunteers who strive with unceasing commitment and enthusiasm to raise healthier generations and a brighter future.”⁷⁸ They use the slogan “for healthier generations” and continue:

The outcome of starting formal education earlier, increasing awareness among families, and providing adequate nutrition and health care will be *healthier new generations of children*. Society will be composed of healthier and more productive individuals, increasing the economic productivity, welfare and prosperity of society.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Yeşim Arat, “The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Özdoğan, and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

⁷⁷ Translation in the original, Mother Child Education Foundation, <http://www.acev.org/> (accessed April, 2009).

⁷⁸ Mother Child Education Foundation, “2007 Annual Report,” 5.

⁷⁹ Emphasis mine. Ibid., 28.

Another indicative point on AÇEV's website and in their project reports is the 'expert' language they use. All of the project reports are written by scholars and researchers, within the psychology discipline, or by practitioners working as psychologists. Therefore, these reports are all scholarly or semi-scholarly papers based on scientific research. While stressing the importance of early childhood and adult education in these reports, they borrow an "expert" language from the discipline of psychology. They frequently mention, for example, terms such as "cognitive development," "mediated learning approach" or "potential development" which give authority and legitimacy to the projects of AÇEV:

This program was developed based on the environmental approach that emphasizes the role of children's environment on their development. This approach underlines the significance of the interaction between children and their environment; it states that the content and quality of this relationship results in the possibility of risk or endurance for the child.⁸⁰

The Mother Child Education Program is holistic in its approach. It supports children's development as a whole; cognitively, emotionally, socially, and physically. It aims to provide education to children who have not had access to preschool education in any formal education setting in their home environment, through their mother.⁸¹

A mediated learning approach was adopted for the cognitive education program. Its aim is to increase children's level of school readiness via interaction with an adult who supports the child. In other words, mothers become the teachers of their children. Children's cognitive development is supported with the aim of boosting it to its highest level. (...) mothers help their children unify the determinants of cognitive development, and establish favorable conditions so that they can function within the area of "potential development."⁸²

All of these projects assume that the knowledge of these mothers – which they derive from their daily experiences – should be replaced with modern techniques of childcare. Through this particular expertise of psychology that is used within the scope of the training programmes, the motherhood practice of 'the targeted woman' has become the center for techniques of management and control for AÇEV's workers/volunteers. It is through this knowledge that their status as 'experts,' who are responsible for training the mother, is both

⁸⁰ Translation in the original, Mother Child Education Foundation, <http://www.acev.org/> (accessed April, 2009).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

created and linked to power over and control of the body of the participants.⁸³ The tools of education invite the authority of these expert discourses to modify the knowledge of the participants (about mothering, child-care, health care, etc.). These education tools, along with expert discourses turn these women into ‘not-good-enough’ mothers, ignorant of child care or lacking the proper and modern knowledge of child development.

The effectiveness of AÇEV’s programmes as a governmental technology relies on a combination of this external and internal subjection of the participants. Not only is control exercised through others’ knowledge of individuals, but there is also control through individuals’ knowledge of themselves.⁸⁴ By these means, women who go through these trainings are made dependant on the modern knowledge produced via projects in order to be able to raise “healthier generations.” Thus, they are controlled not only as objects of the training programmes, but also as self-scrutinizing and self-forming subjects.⁸⁵ As a result, mothers start to constitute themselves in terms of the practices and discourses of the trainings, “in terms of the norms through which they are governed.”⁸⁶

The Kurdish Issue and (Non)Proper Mothers

Benedict Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community” which is “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁸⁷ Since its members are always depicted as closely linked to each other, even in the case of suppression and inequalities, the representation of the nation as a “community” is articulated as a solid and undifferentiated

⁸³ Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” tran. Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge, 1981), 48–78.

⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Chris Shore, and Susan Wright, “Policy: A New Field of Anthropology,” in *Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*, eds. Chris Shore, and Susan Wright (London: Routledge, 1997), 3–34, 7.

⁸⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6

body, which moves forward in history.⁸⁸ In the context of Turkish nationalism, the Turkish nation was assumed to be a hegemonic entity, which was articulated through denial, oppression and assimilation, not only of Kurds but also of the many other ethnic collectivities in Turkey. From the 1920s to the 1980s, the Turkish state did not recognize Kurds as an ethnic collectivity.⁸⁹ Everyone residing within the borders of Turkey was presupposed to be Turkish and Kurds were regarded as “Mountain Turks” who, it was argued, had forgotten their ancient roots in Turkish ethnic identity.⁹⁰

The denial of the existence of Kurds in Turkish nationalism lead to an unspoken ‘Kurdish question’ as an ethno-political issue; yet, when the Kurdish issue entered into the agenda of the Turkish state, it was articulated through a discourse of ‘backwardness’ and being ‘uncivilized.’⁹¹ The official ideology of the nation was not only articulated at the expense of minority groups, as it sought to create a unified and homogeneous body of people and controlling the territory, but also at the expense of controlling the people residing within the borders of this community. Hence, population became a place of intervention and regulation where national ideology was articulated and rearticulated over time.⁹²

Imaginings and representations of nations, and thereby control over populations, are not only ethnically constructed but also gendered spaces of contestation. Women’s bodies become the area of control within national processes, since women are seen as the biological reproducing members of the nation and, the control over women’s bodies mostly involves and starts with pre-natal policies.⁹³ Therefore various forms of population control emerge as practices of power, in which the state controls the reproductive capacity of certain women as

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7

⁸⁹ Mesut Yeğen, “The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32, no. 2 (April, 1996): 216–29.

⁹⁰ Anna Secor, “‘There Is an Istanbul That Belongs to Me’: Citizenship, Space, and Identity in the City,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 94, no. 2, (June, 2004): 352–368.

⁹¹ Mesut Yeğen, “The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity.”

⁹² Özlem Aslan, “Politics of Motherhood and the Experience of the Mothers of Peace in Turkey” (master’s Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2007).

⁹³ Floya Anthias, and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Woman-Nation-State*.

well as calls for others to bear more children.⁹⁴ Regulations over the bodies of women are not just limited to the state, and they often include other actors and mechanisms that are articulating various strategies and techniques of power, such as NGO projects, as it is in the case of AÇEV.

Notions of ethnic difference are reinforced through women's education and reproduction in the Turkish nationalism by various actors and technologies of power. For instance, reproduction is one of the major areas that AÇEV deals with in its projects and programmes. "Reproductive health and effective contraceptive methods" are among the basic topics that are covered in their projects with the aim of informing "mothers about risky pregnancies" and "contraceptive methods and institutions that provide contraceptives."⁹⁵ The Mother Child Education Programme (MOCEP) also has a subsection in which information about "how pregnancy is prevented," "the concept of family planning"⁹⁶ and contraceptive methods are given to mothers who attend the trainings.

The first thing that should be mentioned about both AÇEV's website and its project reports is the background information about the economic and social environment of the targeted groups. Like the development projects implemented in Lesotho, analyzed by Ferguson, AÇEV's projects act as an "anti-politics machine."⁹⁷ The work of AÇEV takes attention away from the ongoing conflict between the state army and Kurdish guerillas in the Kurdish regions, by not mentioning it, and frames political and social problems as a technical process in which AÇEV's projects should intervene.⁹⁸

It is possible to say that AÇEV's projects are being held in cities where poverty rates are higher and there is a lack of state support in terms of education and health facilities. The

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Translation in the original, Mother Child Education Foundation, <http://www.acev.org/> (accessed April, 2009).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development,' Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

⁹⁸ This point will be elaborated more in CHAPTER IV.

first language of most women in these regions is Kurdish; however, neither the website nor the project reports explicitly mention this fact. These reports talk about how literacy education is becoming successful, but the violations of the right to education in one's first language are not mentioned. The authors of the reports, which are usually 'experts,' talk about the success in educating women in terms of health care, but the state's role in the lack of hospitals and the language barrier that Kurdish women face in health services does not appear in either of the reports.⁹⁹

In the "Southeastern Anatolia Mother Support Programme Evaluation and Research Report," which was published in August 2008, the authors talk about the results of health care, hygiene, sexuality and family planning trainings given to mothers.¹⁰⁰ In the conclusion section of the same report, the authors mention the success of the programme in terms of decreasing birth rates and raising consciousness in family planning. One of the conclusions in this report is that, compared to the mothers who did not go through the trainings, women who participated in the programme reported a higher use of contraception. In addition, women are depicted throughout the whole report as lacking knowledge of sexuality and health care. The results that came from the test "Woman's Self Concept" show that women began to think more negatively about themselves after the programme. These findings display that the programme makes the target group perceive themselves as unsuccessful after participating in the project:

In the evaluations committed both before and after the programme, we see that the control group has always better scores in "Woman's Self Concept" scale; however, interestingly, the average scores decreased in both groups in the last test and mothers started to think about themselves more negatively.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Since Kurds aren't counted as an ethnic minority in Turkey according to the Treaty of Lausanne, the state's official language policies aren't required to allow education in the native language for Kurds. This situation also means that Kurdish women who speak only Kurdish face difficulties in accessing state's social services due to the language barrier.

¹⁰⁰ Mother Child Education Foundation, "Güneydoğu Anadolu Anne Destek Programı Değerlendirme Araştırma Raporu," <http://www.acev.org/arastirmalarimiz.php?id=24&lang=tr&page=1/> (accessed December 10, 2008).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

In these reports, mothers in the Kurdish regions are depicted as uneducated and lacking the appropriate knowledge related to childcare, health and hygiene. Thus they are seen as a group which needs the trainings of AÇEV. In one of the project reports, the success of the education is repeated in several times in terms of turning the ‘wrong knowledge’ of these mothers into “true knowledge”:

Some of the most important results of the research conducted to evaluate the AÇEV-led Southeastern Anatolia Mother Support Programme found that, with the help of the programme, there is an increase in the environmental stimuli provided to the child after the programme, there is an increase in mothers reporting that they are working more independently now, there is a decrease in the negative response behavior directed to the child if s/he does something which makes the mother angry and that there is an acquirement of the knowledge related to health and hygiene provided to the mothers within the framework of the programme.¹⁰²

Apart from these three results, we can say that the changing of the mothers’ opinions and their attainment of true knowledge are other benefits of the programme trainings given in the topics of birth control, intermarriage, health and hygiene.¹⁰³

These women are constructed as ‘not-good-enough’ mothers, and hence they should be educated in order to be able to control their reproductive capacities. The language used in the project reports also coincides with public discourse in Turkey, in which Kurds are said to lack the cultural capital necessary to be a ‘real’ nation.

AÇEV’s programmes related to Mother Child Education and Mother Support are implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education and the Prime Ministry Society for the Social Services and the Protection of Children. These national governmental partners act as contributors to these programmes, usually in terms of providing logistical support. During the course of AÇEV’s projects, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of Turkey,¹⁰⁴ delivered a speech, directed at women, concerning family and childbirth at a panel held for March 8th, International Women's Day. This speech was delivered soon after Turkey’s launching of a series of air strikes on guerillas from the Kurdish PKK movement

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Erdoğan’s party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), became the only government party in the parliament after the elections in March 2003.

inside Iraq. The war between Kurdish guerillas and the Turkish military resulted in several deaths from both parties. Erdoğan, after stressing the possible dangers waiting for the Turkish nation in his speech, invited mothers to give birth to at least three children:

Western states have started to transfer their young population. Turkey should protect its young population. Today, the West is crying. Please don't fall into these traps. If it goes on like that, most of the Turkish population will be composed of people above 60 by the year 2030. *My dear sisters; today, I am speaking as a troubled brother with you, not as a prime minister.* Don't fall into this trap. We should protect our young population. The essence of an economy is the human being. Capital and labor are the followers of humans. If there are humans, then there is capital and labor. If there are humans, then there is success; if not, there are none of those. What are they trying to do? *They are trying to root out the Turkish nation.* What they did is exactly that. *Give birth to at least three children if you don't want our young population's decline.* I have experienced this, so I am speaking out of my experience and I believe in it. Dear citizens, the child means prosperity. We should know this as well. I have four children. I am pleased about that. I wish I had more. They all came with their own prosperities. Our population is young at the moment. However; if it goes on like this, it will become older in 2030 and this is dangerous for us. We don't want to experience this danger. We should compensate for this well.¹⁰⁵

First, the dramatic rhetoric of the speech should be mentioned. Erdoğan refers to a vague danger coming from outside which will cause the death of the nation. He repeats the word “trap” and insists that “they are trying to root out the Turkish nation.” The figure of ‘eternal danger’ coming from outside of the nation – mainly from the West – in order to defeat and destroy the essence of ‘Turkish nation’ is a common rhetorical tool employed in the national narrative of Turkey. In Erdoğan’s speech, the dramatic tone that warns against an enemy invites mothers to give birth to at least three children in order to prevent the death of the nation. Even though Erdoğan has stressed the Western society in several times in his speech, this enemy can be also read as the Kurds departing from the zeitgeist, since the speech was delivered at the time of the air strikes on Kurdish guerillas inside Iraq.

As mentioned by Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan, inviting the ‘nation’s mothers’ to regenerate the country’s population has been a common practice of states using nationalist

¹⁰⁵ Emphasis mine, from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/8401981.asp?m=1>, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOWf4K3xQDg&NR=1> (accessed October 29, 2008).

discourses in order to make this invitation legitimate.¹⁰⁶ In the prime minister's speech, there is a direct call for women to bear children both as a maternal and national duty. Bearing children is also painted as a military duty, in an implicit way, since it was the time of military operations against Kurdish guerillas.

When we consider the case of AÇEV in comparison with Erdoğan's speech, their practices and discourses about reproduction may seem totally different. While the prime minister supports reproduction, the projects of AÇEV work in the opposite direction by implementing birth control and family planning programmes. However, a deeper analysis can reveal that they speak to different mothers who are seen as reproducers of different ethnicities. In the prime minister's speeches, Turkish women are invited to give birth to 'Turkish generations' since providing citizens to the nation (which is usually referred to as the grand family) is seen as their crucial role as mothers, whereas Kurdish women are being 'educated' and 'enlightened' in terms of birth control and in the line with being 'good mothers' via the projects of AÇEV.¹⁰⁷ In this process, the government uses its own educational and institutional capital to ensure that Mother Support projects continue in the region. In the context of internal conflict, non governmental and governmental institutions form alliances in order to encourage Turkish women to reproduce soldiers for the Turkish army and Kurdish mothers to use more techniques of birth control and family planning in order to not reproduce guerillas for the PKK movement.

¹⁰⁶ Geraldine Heng, and Janadas Devan, "State Fatherhood."

¹⁰⁷ For an analysis how motherhood turns into a means of categorizing women and raising proper Turkish subjects in the context of Turkey, see Özlem Aslan, "Politics of Motherhood and the Experience of the Mothers of Peace in Turkey."

CHAPTER IV

BEYOND THE PROBLEMATICS OF LITERACY AND GENDER EQUALITY:
AN ANALYSIS ON FALP'S DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

In this chapter, I will discuss how the problematics of literacy are constituted discursively and put into practice, and what the effects are of the ideas about 'literacy development' in Functional Adult Literacy and Women's Support Programme (FALP), and the relationships formed during the trainings that are a key part of the programme. Rather than ascribing interests to the actors of the programme, my main aim is to discuss the discourses and practices that operate through a complex set of relationships between the volunteers/workers of AÇEV and migrant women residing in Zeyrek, one of the districts in which FALP is implemented. In the first section, I will analyze how literacy is constructed as a population problem in rural-to-urban migration in the institutional discourse of FALP, and also as a strategy of urban governmentality to 'manage' and 'control' migrant women. The second section is dedicated to a discussion on how the problematics of gender quality are tied to an orientalist discourse on 'tradition' and 'culture' and how 'the rural' and the 'urban' are discursively constructed in relation to each other in FALP. The last section of this chapter aims at revealing the ways in which the condemnation of gender inequality paves the way for a development discourse, which in turn makes FALP act as an "anti-politics machine"¹⁰⁸ in contemporary Turkey.

Whatever the interests of the volunteers/workers of AÇEV, the outcome of the programme is an alteration of the original intentions, and so, the aim of this chapter is to look closely at the operation of FALP. The programme reaches its aim in that it empowers programme participants in certain ways. For example, literacy development enabled participants to take the right bus without asking for help, to write their names when dealing

¹⁰⁸ James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

with bureaucratic issues and to find flats to rent by reading advertisements. By achieving its goals in certain areas, the programme still continues to be implemented in various regions of Turkey; yet, it has far reaching consequences as it works to produce an orientalist and development discourses.

FALP and Literacy as a Population Problem

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a flow of migration to the urban areas of Turkey not only due to forced migration¹⁰⁹ policies but also for different economic, social and political reasons.¹¹⁰ After this period, when migrant visibility in the urban area increased, NGOs and state institutions started to “call in former discourses of ‘underdevelopment’ and ‘backwardness’ to establish new strategies of governance in the districts where the Kurdish populations increase.”¹¹¹ This process also coincided with a period in which new geographies of governmentality were produced and the urban space became a site for governance not only locally, but also on a global level. The “advanced” liberal strategies of government within the scope of cities, as Nikolas Rose puts it, produce a new regime of the actively responsible self in which citizens become responsible in their own governance.¹¹² He writes:

Within this new regime of the actively responsible self, individuals are to fulfill their national obligations not through their relations of dependency and obligation to one another, but by seeking to fulfill themselves within a variety of micro-moral domains or ‘communities’ – families, workplaces, schools, leisure associations, neighborhoods.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ During the 1980s, when the internal conflict between the PKK (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* – Kurdistan Workers’ Party) and the Turkish army reached its peak, residents of Southeastern regions of Turkey were evacuated from their homes by the state army in order to remove local support for Kurdish rebels. Almost 5 million Kurds were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated to urban areas such as Diyarbakir, Adana, Istanbul and Izmir.

¹¹⁰ Anna Secor, “‘There Is an Istanbul That Belongs to Me’.”

¹¹¹ Nazan Üstündağ, “The Construction of Witnessing Voices and the Representation of Violence and Loss” (paper presented at the symposium “The Stakes at Issue with Turkey’s Application for Membership of the European Union,” Paris, October, 2004).

¹¹² Nikolas Rose, “Governing ‘Advanced’ Liberal Democracies.”

¹¹³ Ibid., 57.

I argue that AÇEV in general, and FALP in particular, can be read as such micro-moral domains in the context of rural-to-urban migration and in relation to the Kurdish issue in Turkey. FALP is an adult literacy programme developed by AÇEV with the aim of replacing the existing literacy education programmes, both on the governmental and nongovernmental levels. The important point is, as stated in its project reports, in 1995 the Turkish Ministry of Education gave AÇEV the task on establishing adult literacy classes (in Turkish) at several Public Education Centers (PECs) around Istanbul.¹¹⁴ The targeted audience of the programme is depicted as women from the age of 15 and above, with little or no schooling, who have migrated from rural areas to big cities. The final report entitled “Adult Literacy: Issues of Personal and Community Development” which was submitted to the Spencer Foundation,¹¹⁵ to one of the donors of FALP, introduces the aim and the targeted group of the programme as the following:

It primarily targets women who *have migrated to urban centers and find it difficult to participate in societal life due to being illiterate*. The program aims for participants to gain skills that would boost women’s status in society and the family, such as using literacy skills in daily life, benefiting from the right to lifelong education as an informed citizen, and understanding the importance of educating female children.¹¹⁶

The “Woman’s Support” section of the programme covers different subheadings such as “Girl’s and Women’s Right to Education and Gainful Employment,” “Health and Hygiene,” “Local Administrations,” “Division of Labor at Home and Supporting the Education of Girl Children,” “Nutrition and Health,” “Preventive Child Healthcare,” “Pregnancy, Childbirth, Nutrition for Infants and Infant Health,” “The Right to Motherhood and Family Planning,” and “Women and Reproductive Health.” That is to say, health is articulated as an important topic in FALP in dealing with migrant populations in urban Turkey. The significance of trainings in issues related to health can be traced back to the

¹¹⁴ Aydin Y. Durgunoglu, “Adult Literacy: Issues of Personal and Community Development” (August, 2000). <http://www.acev.org/arastirmalarimiz.php?id=24&lang=en&page=6> (accessed April, 2009).

¹¹⁵ Spencer Foundation is an international private foundation that “grants funds to support research which contributes to the understanding of education and improvement of its practice”, <http://www.spencer.org/>

¹¹⁶ Emphasis mine. Mother Child Education Foundation, <http://www.acev.org/> (accessed April, 2009).

theories of urban governmentality as well. Rose argues that a new image of city has emerged as a network of living practices of well-being, where health becomes a signifier of the obligation of citizenship within the new strategies of governing cities. Thus, the healthy city becomes is actively striving for maximization of well-being, against all that would threaten it. What's striking here is, in the name of well-being, the urban citizen is to be empowered so that they become responsible for their own personal health.¹¹⁷ In the trainings of FALP, an individual knowledge of health issues becomes an area of governance, where it is depicted as an obligation of citizenship in a responsible community. By this means, while conveying the knowledge of health becomes a responsibility of AÇEV's volunteers/workers, gaining and carrying out this knowledge in everyday life becomes the responsibility of the migrant woman.

In FALP's discourse and practice, literacy also emerges as an area of an active striving for the maximization of the well-being of the residents of the city. Lack of literacy is depicted as a problem in the context of rural-to-urban migration in various ways, one of them being a problem of adaptation to urban social life. Within this problematization, migrants are depicted as lacking the basic educational skills necessary to become a part of large cities:

With large scale migration from less developed and rural areas into the large cities and in particular the metropolitan centers, people find themselves in increasingly taxing situations in coping with the demands of urban lifestyles for which they lack the basic educational skills.¹¹⁸

Literacy development is also seen as a population problem since it is depicted as a crucial point in the 'democratization process' and the potential individuals to become full and active citizens depends on their level of literacy:

It has been assumed that a necessary association exists between literacy and the effective operation of democratic political systems. The individual attainment of literacy can be seen as a necessary condition for the exercise of full rights as a citizen,

¹¹⁷ Nikolas Rose, "Governing Cities, Governing Citizens."

¹¹⁸ Fatos Göksen, Sami Gülgöz, and Çigdem Kağıtçıbaşı, "Functional Literacy, Television News and Social Participation: Linkages between Mass Media and Empowerment of Women." (paper presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, Acapulco, Mexico, June 1–5, 2000), 2.

or it may be assumed that there is some critical mass level of societal literacy needed to assure democratic values and stability.¹¹⁹

Finally, literacy is depicted as a population problem – especially in the Kurdish regions of Turkey – since AÇEV frames the literacy development in childhood as a crucial factor in turning children into the literate/educated population of the future:

A significant problem posed by immigration and the closing of schools and in Southeastern Anatolia is that students aren't able to benefit from, or do not even enter into the, compulsory education system. Children who can't go to school for various reasons eventually end up joining the illiterate population.¹²⁰

The crucial role attributed to early interventions in literacy development also makes “adult (and especially female) education a crucial factor in child education and complicate the assessment of the costs and benefits of adult education.”¹²¹ The programme emphasizes the literacy education of women since they are seen as the first, and most important, caretakers of children, whose literacy levels are depicted as indicators of country's development level.

Problematics of Gender Equality in ‘Tradition’ and ‘Culture’

The final project report submitted to the Spencer Foundation discusses the reasons for school dropouts or individuals who never even entered the education system, since these groups are the particular targeted population of FALP.¹²² This report shows cases of women talking about the reasons behind their lack for schooling. According to AÇEV, the reasons for lack of schooling are varied among female participants, “but the major one is gender-related”¹²³

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 2.

¹²⁰ This and all other translations from Turkish are mine unless otherwise noted. Aydın Yücesan Durgunoglu, and Banu Öney, “İşlevsel Yetişkin Okuryazarlığı Programı Uygulama ve Değerlendirmesi” (Nisan, 1997), 6. <http://www.acev.org/arastirmalarimiz.php?id=24&page=8> (accessed April, 2009).

¹²¹ Aydın Yücesan Durgunoglu, Banu Öney, and Hilal Kuscul, “Development and Evaluation of an Adult Literacy Program in Turkey” (Nisan, 1996), 3. <http://www.acev.org/arastirmalarimiz.php?id=24&lang=en&page=8> (accessed April, 2009).

¹²² Here, it should be mentioned that this and many other project reports of FALP are written both in Turkish and English – even they are not submitted to the international grant agencies. The preference of publishing reports in both languages shows that the legitimacy of the projects is directed not only to a national but also to a universal public.

¹²³ Aydın Yücesan Durgunoglu, Banu Öney, and Hilal Kuscul, “Development and Evaluation of an Adult Literacy Program in Turkey.”

because many women were prevented from going to school by male members of their family. It is also mentioned that when the researchers “asked many women why they have not learned to read and write, the overwhelming majority of the responses indicate not being allowed to go to school (usually by fathers, grandfathers) and getting married quite early and raising children.”¹²⁴ The report clearly characterizes these reasons as stories of marginalization and oppression by continuing its argument as follows: “Every participant has her own story of being marginalized and oppressed.”¹²⁵ The report does not discuss the other factors that women mentioned in their narratives such as lack of schools or infrastructure in the Kurdish regions, where they left. What AÇEV calls “stories of being marginalized and oppressed” are summed up as stories of gender inequality in these project reports.

In the same report, there is a reference to differential treatment towards woman in the nuclear family unit, which indicates that these oppressive forces mainly come from gender inequalities within family and kinship systems:

Our participants, especially women, were reading their world very well. They were acutely, painfully aware of the social and cultural forces that limited their opportunities and ventures. They did not need to learn that. They wanted to gain independence, but very carefully treading on a potential minefield, not tilting the existing balances too rapidly. That's why, for example, some finished all housework before coming to class, so that their husbands will not use that as an excuse to forbid them to come to class.¹²⁶

When I interviewed some of AÇEV's volunteers/workers during my fieldwork, the most recursive theme of their narratives was the lack of gender equality within families in Zeyrek as well. They depicted gender inequality as the only factor preventing these women from getting a formal education during their childhood. The following quotations from the volunteer instructor and field supervisor of FALP in Zeyrek, Zeynep and Necla, reflect their thoughts on the reasons for the lack of schooling for migrant women:

¹²⁴ Aydin Y. Durgunoglu, “Adult Literacy.”

¹²⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 37.

Usually their parents make them do housework in place of going to school. One parent, for example, didn't send the child to go to school because the child helped do chores. (...) Sons have privileges all the time. Parents generally don't send the daughters. They'd rather them do housework and see schooling as useless for them. You can see this attitude even today. (Zeynep)¹²⁷

Father's don't send daughters go to school because of the belief that they're just going to get married. These are of course the one's who have a mentality that's similar to those of 20-30 years ago. Are their no youth? As we've said, there are young people; there are young women between the ages of 17 and 18. (...) And poverty is not the only cause. They can always send the sons to study, even if the last child is a son, for instance, he'll be sent to study. (Necla)

When I probed more deeply into what these volunteers/workers think about the origins of this gender inequality, they usually referred to the target groups' having migrated from 'the rural region.' As Zeynep said:

Sons have all the privileges all the time. Generally daughters aren't sent to school by the parents. They'd rather them do housework and see schooling as useless for them. (...) Because, they are always the immigrants from the rural areas. We'll see right? There even the work they do isn't valuable.

As emphasized in the above quotation, according to Zeynep, being from 'the rural region' is the most important reason for the gender inequality that these migrant women experience. In the narratives of both Zeynep and Necla, 'the rural' and 'the urban' are discursively constituted in relation to each other, not only geographically but also in a temporal and civilizational manner, as in cultural evaluation, in which 'the rural' becomes the site of 'underdevelopment' and 'backwardness.' Therefore having migrated from 'the rural region' was depicted as a problem since it was equal to 'carrying the same culture' to 'the urban' along with the migrant population. Nazan Üstündağ describes the role of this discourse on constructing migrants as improper citizens for the urban:

Indeed, hegemonic discourses that describe the experience of migration are ways in which the issue of cultural difference and modernity are posed, debated and resolved in Turkey. On the one hand, there is the discourse that depicts migrants as having rural dispositions, and as governed by traditional norms of conduct that make them different from modern citizens and render them unfit to acquire urban citizenship

¹²⁷ This and all other interviews are conducted and translated from Turkish by me unless otherwise noted, tape recording, Istanbul, Turkey, April, 2009. Emphasis mine.

identifications. According to this discourse, the cultural difference of migrants must be overcome by education and legalism.¹²⁸

As mentioned above, the emphasis on being from ‘the rural’ in both Zeynep and Necla’s narratives not only frames migrants as an inferior population but also legitimizes the intervention and the ‘civilizing mission’ of FALP on migrant populations.

When I asked about the most important problem that migrant women face in the urban setting, Zeynep answered me by talking about an ambiguous set of behavior patterns which was representative of the ‘migrant culture,’ according to her. In her narrative, these behaviors were depicted as deriving from ‘the culture’ which was closely tied to gender inequality within migrant families. Most of the problems of the migrant living in the city were attributed to coming from ‘the rural region,’ to ‘the tradition’ and ‘the culture.’ Therefore, the reasons why these women could not go to school dated back to an ‘ancient past’ where the roots of ‘culture’ could be found according to Necla and Zeynep:

When we look at the reasons that they don’t let women go to school, these date back to the stories of 50 years ago. (Necla)

The biggest problem is that they have come from the countryside; that they’re not able to adjust; that *they bring that same culture here*. However they lived in the countryside, they do the same here. What is shameful there is also shameful here; the norms there are also the same here. For example, the daughters aren’t schooled. You can’t change the aptitude of most of the parents. There are 14 year-olds in non-certified, unofficial marriages. *There are punishments for that, but they aren’t carried out. Because for them, customs and traditions are the law; the sayings and teachings of the elders.* (Zeynep)¹²⁹

In the following parts of our conversation with Zeynep, being from ‘the rural region’ turned into being from ‘the East’ more evidently. She attributed the practices of gender inequality to people who migrated from Eastern Turkey, in such a way that ‘the West’ of Turkey was a land of equality for the women before the migration, at least in her representation:

¹²⁸ Nazan Üstündağ, “Belonging to the Modern,” 42.

¹²⁹ This and all other emphasises are mine unless otherwise noted.

There are still people who don't allow their kids to get education. Even in Izmir¹³⁰, there was a village with only one educated person living in it. I even have the newspaper clipping of the story. One person attended the university; all of the others were married off. *Again, these are most probably people who migrated from the East.* When they immigrate they always come together and form a new village. *If they were to go to a new place, they'll meet new people, learn something new and progress.* "Look, the daughter of the neighbor got educated, how nice, she gained her economic independence and helps her family." How could she do it another way, there will be bigger problems. Is this burdensome to you, if she studies, grows stronger, works? She'll not only be able to help you, but when she gets a job she'll be able to support herself as well. (...) Since they are so accustomed to each other, they bring the entire village to Istanbul. They remain the same since they can't separate from their fellow villager.

When I asked each time who "they" were, the ones "carrying the same village to Istanbul," I got the same answer: "You know, people from the East." Zeynep never characterized this "people from the East" as Kurds in our conversations, but when I specifically asked if she meant Kurds, she replied, "Yes, people growing up in rural regions." The ambiguity in her descriptions reflected both her uneasiness to explicitly use the word Kurd and the homogenizing effects of her representation. For both Zeynep and Necla, being a migrant woman in one of the low-income districts of Istanbul, being from 'rural regions,' being from the East and being a Kurd were equal. In their opinion, migrant women in Zeyrek all represented the same picture of 'the targeted group' that needed FALP in order to 'progress' and adjust to Istanbul. Within this discourse, people who migrated from the Kurdish regions of Turkey appear as a homogenized body of people who act, feel and inhabit the city in the same way. The place that they came from is also depicted in a homogenized way, in which "the culture that they carry" is signified as the only reason behind social practices and relations inadaptable to the urban city.

During the course of my fieldwork, at the end of each training, Zeynep and I would walk together on the way to the bus station. On our way to bus stops, she always complained about the neighborhood, sellers on the street, men who could not find space in the mosque and

¹³⁰ Izmir is the one of the big cities in Western Turkey.

flowed into the streets during Friday prayer and the loud music coming from the shops.

According to her, these were all scenes which did not fit into the urban character of Istanbul.

Her experience in being a trainer for FALP in Zeyrek opened up a space for encounter with the ‘other Istanbul,’ the Istanbul, which is now ‘inhabited by Kurds’ and won’t be ‘the same’ again.

In most of the narratives of Zeynep and Necla, there was a sharp discursive distinction between being from Istanbul and being from rural Turkey. Necla stressed her Istanbul origins several times during the course of our conversation. For them, being from Istanbul was an important position to have, especially when talking about women who migrated to Istanbul from Kurdish regions. Being from Istanbul referred to being from a region which was ‘secure and pure’ and totally different from ‘the rural areas,’ from ‘the East,’ and from Kurdish regions. As a result of this sharp distinction between being from ‘the urban’ and from ‘the rural’ in their representations, Zeynep and Necla mostly talked about how they were surprised in the first encounters with migrant women:

I am a third generation Istanbul native. I mean, I really don’t have that many interesting remarks about the East. (Necla)

They live in a small room the size of a coal bin. Four children; why it is necessary I said, and what will you leave to them. Are you bringing them into this world to share the poverty with you? Four children... *This is Istanbul; how can something like this be happening?* (Zeynep)

I remember another trainer. We talked of course; she was a big city type, from Izmir. *I too am from Istanbul, but once you get into this work you get to see the behaviors of a different crowd of people, things come one at a time.* (Necla)

For me, maybe neither of them was surprising but it is of course different when you witness it. *Probably most of the people living in big cities are in the same situations I am.* Most of the places in Anatolia certainly witness these things or they may experience it themselves, *but people like us just hear of it; see it in the movies, newspapers or on the television.* That’s it. We didn’t get close to each other. We realized that there are many things to do when you form a relationship. (Necla)

In all of these narratives, the discourse of a backward other – who experiences gender inequality and inhabits the urban space with its culture that is carried from rural areas –

frames literacy trainings and volunteers' work in this process as important steps for the 'development' and 'progress' of urban spaces with regard to migrant populations. As Necla said:

Even though they are former districts of Istanbul, there appear always people who are potential to teach how to read and write. We are in Ihlamur for example, in the central part of Beşiktaş.¹³¹ We are giving trainings in an elementary school in Beşiktaş at the moment, which means Beşiktaş is still getting migration.

In the previous quotation, Necla's discourse reveals how the problematics of literacy are tied to not being from Istanbul because illiterate migrants always constitute the exceptional cases in the city. Therefore volunteers of AÇEV, who are from the big city itself, have the duty to intervene in the problem of literacy development on behalf of FALP, since there are always illiterate people "even in the center of the city".

In this modernist discourse, 'traditions' that lead the way to gender inequality and illiteracy are the backward practices of Kurds which need to be modernized. With that kind of representation of 'the urban' and 'the rural' cities, 'modernity' and 'tradition', the narratives come to point out ethnic discrimination. Literacy development becomes the way in which orientalism and ethnic discrimination are (re)produced in the discussions of gender equality within the everyday encounters of FALP with migrant Kurdish women.

While Edward Said argues that orientalism appears to define Europe by drawing an ahistorical, homogeneous and opposite other, I will argue that in the discursive formation of migrant women and 'tradition' which sticks to the body of Kurds, the construction of the civilized white Turkish citizens is achieved by means of attributing gender inequality and 'all kinds of violations of women's rights' to Kurds. The way to produce and constitute the knowledge of 'backward tradition' which is framed as the reason for the differential treatment of daughters and sons becomes the process of "knowing the Orient" which, in turn, is part of

¹³¹ Beşiktaş is one of the big and central districts in Istanbul.

the project of dominating it.¹³² Gender inequality is framed as a matter of ‘tradition’ in FALP’s discourse which is similar to the discourse on ‘honor killings’¹³³ in Turkey, in which crimes in the name of honor are again attributed to the ‘backwardness’ of ‘Kurdish tradition.’¹³⁴ While Dicle Koğacıoğlu analyzes the representation of ‘tradition’ in discussions on ‘honor killings,’ she draws attention to the discourse of “timeless tradition” and its outcomes:

When violence against women is framed as a matter of ‘tradition,’ a distinction is established between, on the one hand, traditions—which are seen to be native, timeless, and unchanging—and on the other, institutions—which appear as contemporary and timely. The utterance of ‘timeless tradition,’ in other words, serves to produce its other, the modern, enlightened institution.¹³⁵

Similarly, within the narratives of Zeynep and Necla, ‘tradition,’ which paves the way to gender inequality is articulated as timeless and unchanging, yet, the confrontation with and integration to the urban is framed as the solution for the modernization of ‘traditional practices.’ The rural becomes a site of backwardness and otherness, and the representation of Kurdish women as illiterate and oppressed by ‘tradition’ reinforces the self-perception of AÇEV’s middle class Istanbul women as sophisticated, modern and ‘Western.’ Through this means, in the gaze of the modern subject, the ‘uncivilized other’ that is constructed by “nesting orientalisms” appears as the Kurdish woman who comes from the inferior Eastern and Southeastern Turkey.¹³⁶

Chandra Talpade Mohanty discusses the ways in which ‘third-world women’ are constructed by Western feminist scholarship, and reveals the relationship of this knowledge production with colonial discourses. As Mohanty argues, the mere category of the ‘third-

¹³² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

¹³³ An ‘honor crime’ is defined as the murder of an individual by a family member, usually the woman, when the community believes that the victim brought dishonor upon or violated the name of the family or the community.

¹³⁴ In the knowledge production about ‘honor crimes’ in Turkey, violence in the name of honor are usually attributed to Kurdish population and to the ‘backwardness’ of Kurdish tradition which is seen as ahistorical, unitary and unrelated from the power practices of the state.

¹³⁵ Dicle Koğacıoğlu, “The Tradition Effect: Framing Honor Crimes in Turkey,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 15, no.2 (September, 2004): 118–52, 20.

¹³⁶ Milica Bakic-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalism: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54, no.4 (Winter, 1995): 917–31.

world women' is constructed as a homogenous group of women who are uneducated, religious and oppressed by the tradition and patriarchal culture of their own countries. She argues that constructing the third-world women as 'the other' who is an already defined, ahistorical and unitary group situated outside of the context of social relations also serves to construct the emancipated Western feminist woman identity.¹³⁷ Similarly, the construction of AÇEV's volunteers/workers depends on the construction of another category of women who should be enlightened via the knowledge production and the civilizing mission of FALP. In the end, the space of literacy education in FALP becomes a project that reflects and reinforces the hegemonic national agenda of the Turkish state, and is a tool for solving the issue of illiteracy, which is set as a development problematic. Framing gender inequality as a matter of 'tradition' and producing the modern and enlightened other is used as a funnel for articulating modernist ideals and a desire for achieving the 'progress' within FALP's discourse. Concurrently, literacy trainings are depicted as the means for empowerment of migrant women which is strongly tied to a development discourse which obscures the broader historical, political and social factors in contemporary Turkey.

Development Discourse and the "Anti-Politics Machine" in FALP

Throughout history, gender inequalities among marginalized populations have been used as a signifier of the backwardness of the whole society, and as a tool for legitimizing the colonial interventions of 'Western' or 'developed' countries in various contexts. For instance, Partha Chatterjee talks about the ways in which colonialism perceived itself as carrying out a 'civilizing mission' towards the inequalities imposed by 'traditions' on Indian women.¹³⁸ As Chatterjee argues, gender inequality was used as an indicator of the oppressive nature of the whole of India in the imagination of colonial elites and became a means of justification of the

¹³⁷ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes."

¹³⁸ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*.

colonialist discourse articulated around a project of ‘civilizing’ the Indian people. Similarly, Lila Abu-Lughod discusses the politics during the American intervention in Afghanistan, which evoked “the rhetoric of saving Muslim women” and became tools for legitimizing the attacks and bombings.¹³⁹ According to this rhetoric, women were freed from their prisons and became independent after American military intervention in Afghanistan since this intervention was also a “fight for the rights and dignity of women.”¹⁴⁰ What we see in both cases is an embeddedness of gender equality discourse within development discourse which, in turn, paves the way for the imagination of “white men saving brown women from brown men” as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has put it.¹⁴¹

Much of what I found during my fieldwork parallels the position of the literature in discussing the juxtaposition of gender equality and development discourse. For instance, Zeynep and Necla usually situated FALP as a first step of liberation from oppression and tradition for migrant women through which they could gain independence. In the project reports, the goal of FALP is stated as “to introduce the many dimensions of literacy and help the participants to use literacy to empower themselves.”¹⁴² Literacy development is seen as a “liberating force” and literacy programmes are defined as “liberating agents against the oppressive forces in the society.”¹⁴³ Both in their written reports and in the practices of FALP, gender equality discourse paves the way for a development discourse which creates an imaginary object, a ‘less developed group of women’ who are suffering in urban life because of illiteracy caused by gender inequality. The problems of literacy are severed from the politics underlying them and are presented as resulting from the differential treatments of men

¹³⁹ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” *American Anthropologist*, 104, no.3 (September, 2002): 783–90, 85.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 784.

¹⁴¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 271–313. Quoted in Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” *American Anthropologist*, 104, no.3 (September, 2002): 783–90, 784.

¹⁴² Aydin Y. Durgunoglu, “Adult Literacy,” 7.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

and women, which are issues that can be solved by the planned interventions of FALP in dealing with gender equality.

Many scholars have discussed the discursive features of development and practices of empowerment, which produce a world in and of itself and end up with effects reaching far beyond the social situations which they aim to transform.¹⁴⁴ John Tomlinson criticizes the “modernization theory” which frames the social processes inherent to post-colonial countries as the sole explanations for the economic ‘underdevelopment’ within these countries, disregarding the historical context of economic exploitation under colonialism. He writes:

Underdevelopment was therefore attributable to stubborn ‘traditional’ attitudes and cultural practices and the answer to the desperate problems of poverty, lack of social provision and political instability was in the ‘diffusion’ of modern attitudes via educational programmes and so on.¹⁴⁵

As Tomlinson argues, modernization theory has described a particular pathway for the so-called ‘underdeveloped’ societies to ‘develop’ to a level that has been set by Western categories.¹⁴⁶ Practices emerged after World War II under the rubric of global development and in the 1980s under the neo-liberal restructuring of the world economy where politics represents different forms of governmentalities in both: “‘development’ has operated as a hegemonizing discourse of national states to manage populations within their territories”¹⁴⁷ and became a regime of governance in itself.

Both the website of AÇEV and the project reports frequently emphasize the level of literacy development in Turkey. For example, the following excerpt from a paper based on a research study and presented in an international conference on behalf of AÇEV displays a set of statistics, which show how Turkey is ‘underdeveloped’ in terms of literacy – especially in ‘the rural areas’ – and how women make up a significant portion of illiterate population:

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

¹⁴⁵ John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 143.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Nilay Özok-Gündoğan, “‘Social Development’ as a Governmental strategy in the Southeastern Anatolia Project,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 32 (2005): 93–111, 93.

In Turkey, as in many developing countries in the region, formal education has not reached a significant proportion of the adult population, particularly in the rural areas. The average schooling of the adult population (over 25 years of age) in Turkey has been estimated as 3.6 years in the 1994 Human Development Report. This low level of schooling is due in large part to low education among women. The 1996 Human Development Report: Turkey shows current net primary school enrolment rates as 81.1% and 76.6% for male and female students, respectively. As for literacy rates of the adult population, they are 91.3% for males and 76.1% for females, the gender differential being marked.¹⁴⁸

In an earlier application and evaluation report of FALP which was published only in Turkish, with the aim of discussing the outcomes of the project and proposing further solutions for literacy development, Turkey's 'backwardness' with respect to literacy is stressed as follows:

Increasing the level of literacy has been one of the most important aims for the development of society from the first day of the establishment of the Republic. The progress from the adoption of the Latin alphabet until today can not be underestimated. However, (...) if we consider the task of improving literacy rates each day and the skills necessary for it, we notice that it's time for questioning our development in regards to literacy, and the time to create realistic and consistent solutions for surviving within society.¹⁴⁹

This evaluation report also refers to earlier Republican discourses on the necessity of increasing literacy rates for the development of the Turkish nation in order to legitimize 'the development mission' of FALP.

As Ferguson argues, 'development' is a concept or a value through which knowledge about impoverished regions of the world is produced and circulated by 'developed' countries.¹⁵⁰ Conditions of poverty and the powerlessness of the people living in these regions of the world are evaluated through this concept and seen as signs of the underlying conditions of being 'less developed.' Levels of birth and death rates, literacy rates, and the amount of nutrition per capita all become signs of the 'development' level of a country. Pictures of poor families in Asia, children with bloated bellies caused by malnutrition in Africa, and girls

¹⁴⁸ Fatos Göksen, Sami Gülgöz, and Çigdem Kagitçibas, "Functional Literacy, Television News and Social Participation," 2.

¹⁴⁹ Aydın Yücesan Durgunoglu, Banu Öney, and Hilal Kuscül, "Development and Evaluation of an Adult Literacy Program in Turkey," 6.

¹⁵⁰ James Ferguson, preface to *The Anti-Politics Machine*, xiii–xvi, xiii

looking after their siblings rather than attending school mark the stages of ‘underdevelopment.’ In all of these charts, statistics, images and indicators, “Third World nation-states and starving peasants share a common ‘problem,’ that both lack a single ‘thing’: ‘development’.”¹⁵¹ The word ‘development’ signifies different meanings in different contexts and by different actors, however, when it is situated as a problem – of and in Third World countries, ‘underdeveloped’ regions or impoverished lands, then it becomes a condition in which more ‘developed’ countries or regions should intervene.¹⁵² When we consider Ferguson’s critiques on development, it is easy to notice that the number of girls getting educated compared to the number of boys shows the same level of ‘development’ that FALP describes as ‘the rural culture.’ The existence of migrant women – who weren’t allowed to go to school by their fathers – in urban margins shows a common ‘problem’ that lacks a single ‘thing’ which is ‘literacy development.’

In his study, James Ferguson analyzes the development apparatus in Lesotho by applying Foucault’s discussion of the “instrument-effects” of political questions. Rather than focusing on the apparatus’ adequacy for the problems of Lesotho, he discusses the side effects of the project culminating with its “failure.” Within this larger logic, the side effects are “seen as ‘instrument-effects’ (Foucault, 1979); effects that are at one and the same time instruments of what ‘turns out’ to be an exercise of power.”¹⁵³ Following the arguments of Foucault in his analysis of the prison – which can not succeed in its objective of restructuring criminals but succeeds in producing a normalized and disciplined society – the development apparatus in Lesotho doesn’t reduce poverty, but rather strengthens and expands the bureaucratic state power, which obscures the causes of poverty and depoliticizes the question of poverty it says it attempts to solve. By turning poverty into a mere technical problem, the poor become an object which must be managed, educated and developed. “Under the cover of a neutral,

¹⁵¹ Ibid., xiii.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 255.

technical mission to which no one can object,”¹⁵⁴ the development apparatus in Lesotho strengthens and expands the power of the bureaucratic state and depoliticizes poverty and state power. Ferguson calls this “strategically coherent or intelligible hole” formed by the “development” project the “anti-politics machine.”¹⁵⁵

Like the development apparatus in Lesotho that was supposedly aimed at reducing poverty, but strengthened and expanded the bureaucratic state power, FALP obscures the reasons behind illiteracy rates in Turkey and depoliticizes the question of literacy development in which it aims to intervene. Besides, it reintroduces the hegemonic national agenda of the state upon migrant women in Zeyrek. As stated in the final report submitted to the Spencer Foundation, “in qualitative research what is not said is just as interesting as what is articulated.”¹⁵⁶ Even though the majority of the participants in FALP are Kurdish, there are very few references to the Kurdish language in the report. While introducing the participants of this particular FALP, the authors mention that Turkish is not the first language for most of the participants. For instance, the first language of Saniye, who was born in a village in “Southeastern Turkey” and migrated to Istanbul later, is mentioned as Arabic:

Her first language was Arabic. She says she can understand everything, but has difficulty in expressing herself.¹⁵⁷

Another participant, Saniye, who was born in a village in “Southeastern Turkey” as well and migrated to Diyarbakir later, experiences difficulty in reading comprehension due to a language barrier:

She has quite high levels of word recognition and spelling, and given those levels we expected her reading comprehension levels to be high. However, it was nonexistent. The reason became clear when we learned that Turkish is not Naime’s first language. As she said “I know very little Turkish and I’m coming to these courses to improve it (although the courses are not designed for that purpose).”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 256.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 256.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 33.

Male members of the families who took these women out of schooling have to be educated according to the language of FALP. Yet, the questions concerning the internal war for the last twenty years between the state army and Kurdish guerillas, the lack of infrastructure and schools in the Kurdish regions, and the violation of the right to education in one's first language lose their significance within the programme. However, there is always a reference to the lack of investments to the region in terms of schools and infrastructure as the narratives of migrant women in FALP's project reports illustrate. These women mention that there was no school in their villages, yet still the attention of the reports is only directed toward issues of unequal gender treatment, and thus depoliticizes the lack of schools.

With a similar process to the development apparatus in Lesotho, the FALP trainings attach primary importance to gender inequality while ignoring other factors such as the lack of schools, lack of transportation, unemployment, and education in another language. For example, as Handan Coşkun states, the language problem is an important part of the reason why Kurdish women can't read and write:

The language issue is one of the most important of problems. Men learn Turkish because they go to city centers from time to time when they are in the village, and especially learn it when they are in the military service; they learn how to read and write. However, young girls and woman use their first language in the home and in their daily lives much more. Women teach the first language to new generations. Children grow up with their first language, Kurdish. They don't know Turkish until they turn seven or they may only know some words. The sentence structure of Turkish and Kurdish is quite different as well. It is a difficult language for children to learn quickly. Therefore it affects their success in education as well.¹⁵⁹

In one of the trainings that I attended during my fieldwork, participants were talking about the Kurdish meanings of the syllables that were written on the blackboard in class. At the same time, Zeynep was trying to direct their attention to the other syllables and words; however, they continued to discuss the issue among themselves in a passionate manner. The

¹⁵⁹ Derya Demirler, "Zorunlu Göç ve Kadınlar: Diyarbakır Örneği – DİKASUM Koordinatörü Handan Coşkun ile Söyleşi [Forced Migration and Women: The Case of Diyarbakır – An Interview with Coordinator of DİKASUM, Handan Coşkun]," *Kültür ve Siyasette Feminist Yaklaşımlar [Feminist Approaches in Culture and Politics]* 3 (December, 2006).

behavior of Zeynep was very illustrative about the discourse and practice of FALP. First she tried to join participants' discussion by explaining what these words meant in French, but neither of the women were interested in the words' French meanings at all. Then Zeynep got angry and closed the discussion by saying that "Okay ladies, our lesson is not foreign language! Please turn back to our own topic." Here, even in the everyday encounter of FALP with Kurdish women, the Kurdish language was treated as a foreign language rather than considered to be their native language. Therefore, it had no right to inhabit the space of the programme, according to Zeynep.

During my interviews, I asked several times, to both Zeynep and Necla, whether low levels of literacy or school drop outs may be caused by the fact that people do not get education in Kurdish, which is their native language. Once Zeynep answered my question by referring to a memory of hers from when she was young. The closure of her narrative depicted how the everyday encounters of FALP with Kurdish women recalled nationalist discourses by trying to elicit national feelings about 'being under the same flag.' Her narrative also evoked one of the genesis stories of the Turkish nation, which shows how the national flag appeared in the history 'on its own:'

It doesn't have any influence; these people have been pre-conditioned. This language is our language, but they don't try to get used to this. I remember something in regards to foreign language as an example. I was taking a language test. My young friend was there, and she asked why they were having a French language test, "My foreign language is Turkish anyhow. My native language is Kurdish." So, they see it like this, they don't attach importance to it. This is not related to knowing language or not. People have been conditioned, "This is not our language." There isn't any obligation according to them. But, if we are living under this flag... Right? It is the most meaningful flag on the earth first of all. If we look at the other flags, they are all made up things. Ours is the most beautiful flag and it has a meaning, it has the moon and star reflected upon the blood of the martyr.

When AÇEV in general and FALP in particular situate migrant women as having problems in adapting to urban Turkey and literacy development as a problem of the process of rural-to-urban migration, they also start to generate discourses which construct migrant

women as objects of knowledge and management and begin to produce a body of knowledge around that object. Within this process of knowledge production, they cast themselves as the ‘experts’ who have the knowledge of how to deal with ‘the problem of illiteracy’ within this particular situation and context. All scientific studies, papers and the power derived from the ‘expert’ knowledge of pedagogy, psychology or cognitive science are used as indicators of AÇEV’s project’s reliability and expertise on the subject.

In FALP, discourses of gender equality and development are intermingled and there is a belief that educating, developing and modernizing the migrant population will solve the problem of gender inequality. The discourse and practice of the programme depicts cultural transformation and integration into the city as the only solution for gender inequality, yet, at the same time, it frames the culture of the ‘targeted group’ and the ‘mass population’ as homogeneous, ahistorical and not easy to change. ‘The targeted group’ becomes the object of education and training in order to change the ‘feudal and traditional’ gender relations.

Here, FALP itself becomes the development machine for implementing literacy trainings in urban Turkey. Illiteracy is seen as a population problem, but it’s only framed as the result of gender inequality, ‘tradition’ and ‘custom’ rather than the state’s language politics or the lack of schooling and transformation of infrastructure. Political and economic reasons for low levels of literacy are ignored and the ‘literacy problem’ is transformed into problems of ‘gender equality’ which is depicted as a natural and intrinsic characteristic of a group of people, an undifferentiated mass – which turns literacy development in a technical problem, depoliticizes the structural inequalities and opens a space of intervention for FALP’s ‘experts’ to govern Kurdish population.

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE

This thesis endeavored to understand how discourses and practices of gender-based NGO projects have become the areas for re-imagining the Turkish nation by acting upon women's bodies and conducts. Throughout the thesis, I have discussed trajectories of (re)producing the official state ideology within project implementation, which blur the philosophical opposition of state and civil society in relation to various historical and contextual factors specific to Turkey. By shifting the ground for discussion from state level toward interpersonal relations of neo-liberal milieu, I have provided a discussion of sovereignty, power and nationalism on the everyday level, and how women's bodily borders became the predominant area of governance within NGO projects. Focusing on the institutional discourse and practices of AÇEV in general, and FALP in particular, I have revealed how gendered traces of Kemalist discourse on modernity and Westernism are embedded in NGO projects with a combination of neo-liberal discourse on volunteerism, empowerment and 'expert' knowledge.

Historical conditions conjugated with global factors, such as Turkey's inclusion into the EU enlargement process, have paved the way to a mushrooming of NGOs and their projects, which are both locally and globally funded, in post-1980 Turkey. Gender-based projects compose an important portion of these NGO projects since issues related to women's rights, gender-based violence or girls' education became significant tools for acquiring funding. As a result of NGOs' rising influence in Turkey's civil society, scholarly research has inclined towards knowledge production about civil society with this process. During vernacular discussions in Turkey, NGOs are either criticized as depoliticizing social movements, eradicating class solidarity and legitimizing the state's withdrawal from social services, or they are depicted as democratization and empowerment agents that can annihilate

social inequalities within society. However, these discussions usually undervalue the effects of NGO practices in the everyday level, as well as disregarding NGOs' complex relationships with sovereignty and state power.

In order to reveal a complete understanding of the effects and outcomes of project implementation, it is important to examine NGO discourses and practices within the scope of interpersonal relations of actors. By problematizing NGO projects as cultural agents and governmentality technologies, and revealing their links to national, colonial and development discourses, I have offered another way of studying governmentality and state power, that is on a horizontal level. This thesis endeavored to disclose the strategies governing the “conduct of conduct” that is peculiar to the nexus of history and context of Turkey. Furthermore, some of the things that I observed in this study are part of a more global phenomenon since the ‘expert’ knowledge and discourses on volunteerism and empowerment are “free-floating and untied to any specific context” in the present neo-liberal milieu.¹⁶⁰

In this sense, AÇEV not only constitutes a significant ethnographic space for discussing the effects and outcomes of NGO projects that are specific to the ‘Turkish’ case, but also provides insights into a range of global issues. Throughout the thesis, I have demonstrated that AÇEV’s attempt to empowering women in their everyday life through motherhood, literacy and women’s support trainings results in (re)producing the nationalist and modernist projects of the state, which control women’s bodies, constitute them as the reproducers of the nation and assign them the role of carriers of culture. While doing this, AÇEV’s projects articulate a homogeneous picture of ‘target population,’ and ‘rural migrants’ in the everyday encounters of volunteers/workers with Kurdish women. Homogenizing effects of this representation give rise to condemnation of illiteracy and gender inequality, which is also intermingled with a colonialist and development discourse with reference to the

¹⁶⁰ James Ferguson, “The Anti-Politics Machine,” 259.

‘backwardness’ of the Kurdish regions. Hereby, AÇEV’s projects become not only gendered but also ethnically constructed “anti-politics machines” by depoliticizing the language barrier, redistribution problems such as lack of schools and infrastructure in the Kurdish regions, and political subjugation by the state. Framing ‘literacy development’ as a technical intervention problem and not considering other methods of ‘empowerment’ for women, projects re-introduce the hegemonic ideology of nation-state and sovereign power that imagines the country to be “progress through a homogeneous and empty time.”¹⁶¹ Hereby, discursive features of development and practices of empowerment within the scope of AÇEV’s projects obscure structural inequalities and the state’s ongoing violence in the region.

In conclusion, AÇEV’s (gender-based) projects affect an entire set of discourses and practices on a level of the relationships between workers/volunteers and participants of these projects. NGO workers/volunteers’ duty becomes educating and transforming the people into being ‘developed,’ whereas Kurdish women are subjugated to ‘attain’ the level of the ‘modern’ part of the country. During project implementation, discursive representations reduce structural causes of inequalities to the level of individual ‘values,’ ‘culture,’ and ‘tradition,’ and structural change is depicted as achievable only through ‘educating’ devalued populations, transporting modern knowledge of contemporary times and changing people’s minds. Consequently, effects of NGO projects end up producing nationalism, orientalism and colonialism; as well as creating new mechanisms of power for governing conduct and to be governed.

¹⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge/Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996–2003), 389–400.

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