

FROM THE EDITOR

While the April 2024 issue of our Journal was coming out, one of the most important events that Turkey experienced was undoubtedly the local elections on March 31. Politics has again affected our lives as an important factor at every level. So much so that many comments were made about the local elections in Turkey, concerning not only national but also international relations. For example, it was said that the winner of the tense relations or war between the USA and the EU was clearly the EU. One of the main reasons for this was cited as the EU's support for Turkey, which acts as a buffer for immigrants. The loser was the USA, which, although first seeing Turkey as a strategic partner, later reduced it to the guardian of the Middle East due to its security-first policies.

The AKP government, which is close to the US and Israel alliance, was criticized radically by the right-wing parties, especially those fed by the National Vision, from which it emerged, and also attracted the reaction of conservative voters. As a matter of fact, discussions still continue that the 14 million voters who did not go to the polls were those who rejected Israel's violent practices, especially in Gaza, and who, according to some evaluations, had voted for the AKP in the past.

As I discussed in detail in our Journal published in November 2023 last year, the total number of Palestinians killed in Gaza by Israel, who were reduced to immigrant status on their own land, exceeded 33,000. Among them, nearly 16,000 defenseless children and young people were brutally murdered. The Government's pro-Israel policies, which are now known to everyone, and its economic and, in fact, commercial-based relations, have taken their place in current discussions and are heavily criticized. However, unfortunately, these continue to be ignored by the government. Everyone knows that the iron and steel exported to Israel are not used to make toys, but to make weapons that kill Palestinians. Many people and organizations are protesting against the government that does not prevent those who engage in this trade. The decision of the Ministry of Commerce to ban trade on 53 products dated April 9, 2024 is a long overdue measure. Moreover, in a sense, it cannot escape criticism as an admission of the support given to Israel so far.

In this context, while it becomes important to evaluate the effects of local elections on forced migrants, we must first look carefully at Turkey's socio-economic conditions. What is striking at first glance is the increase in deep poverty in cities, which is a factor that feeds hostility towards foreigners and immigrants. This actually means that children go to bed hungry, and their height becomes shorter because they cannot eat healthily. Even though livelihood problems are undoubtedly great in rural areas of our country and farmers are unable to produce, cities have priority. We know that there are approximately 20 million households in Turkey and the average household size is close to four. On the

other hand, 19 million citizens of the Republic of Turkey, most of whom live in cities, are trying to survive by receiving different forms of economic support from central and local governments. Unfortunately, the minimum wage rate, which is 9% on average in the EU, has reached 57% in Turkey. It is known that 16 million retired citizens, most of whom live in cities, are condemned to poverty with an average salary of 10,000 TL. In fact, there are reports that more than 10 million retirees work second jobs to make ends meet. On the other hand, the wages of employees and retirees have been deliberately reduced by manipulating inflation figures. So much so that, except for some high-income earners, our people have been officially impoverished within the framework of economic state policies. The purchasing power of the majority has been reduced to almost zero or non-existent. Many households are no longer able to pay their rent, which cannot be hidden. Many families migrate within or between cities while looking for more suitable and cheaper housing conditions.

On the other hand, the Kahramanmaraş-centered earthquake of February 6, 2023, which directly affected 18 million population by expanding the Disaster Area from 11 to 18 cities, has actually deeply shaken the whole of Turkey. Official authorities report that 2.2 million people migrated over various distances in the first week and 3.3 million on March 1, 2023. In addition, since the disaster area hosts the highest number of migrants under temporary protection in Turkey, their disaster-affected rate is more than twice the local population, at 47%. All active or passive local or foreign migrants, both intercity and inner city, are considered forced immigrants. Most of this population has been struggling for an unstable life for 14 months and is unable to make future plans. However, as of March 31, changes in political preferences observed in the provinces in the Disaster Region have emerged. Depending on this situation, if a more social justice-based local government approach can be implemented, there is a possibility that relations between the local population and immigrants will be positively affected.

Although economic conditions, hunger and poverty undoubtedly played an important role in increasing the opposition's votes, we have many other issues that can be interpreted with sociological concepts. One of these may be Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence. First of all, the government's slogan "No Votes, No Service" attracted the reaction of many of our citizens. In addition, to define it inspired by Althusser, AKP, that is, the party state, uses ideological devices, especially the media, education and family. In addition, there is a sudden decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention overnight, the suspension of the law, non-implementation of court decisions, and the appointment of trustees in place of many elected local administrators. All of this is actually a kind of symbolic violence, as Bourdieu defines it. It would not be wrong to say that the Party Presidential System, which has been replaced by a multi-party parliamentary system in Turkey since 2018, also paves the way for the frequent application of symbolic violence in many places.

In fact, those who come together are especially those living in cities, oppressed by poverty, criticizing the pressure on education by community-sect-trade alliances, intellectuals from both secular and conservative segments, laborers, retirees, young people, women or those with different sexual orientations. They are united for “democracy” and “prosperity”.

They took their place on the stage as a “historical bloc”, in Gramsci’s words, directly opposite the “organic intellectuals” community consisting of so-called artists, journalists and intellectuals who were the spokesmen of the government. Thus, in the last local elections, a unity of thought and action called the “city alliance”, that is, a “historical bloc”, emerged that went beyond the parties and their leaders.

In fact, here we have the opportunity to benefit from Jurgen Habermas’ concepts of “life world” and “consensus”. Large groups of people, regardless of the binary oppositions arising from being secular or conservative, Alevi or Sunni, Turkish or Kurdish, working or retired, young or old, male or female, have managed to take part in this city alliance, which is especially clearly observed in Istanbul. This situation is a joint movement of different socio-cultural and demographic identities, which do not create much impact when taken individually, in an intersectional and relational manner, as a historical block called urban or city alliance, and clearly caused the government to lose, but also gained to the opposition. As a matter of fact, very different groups of people warned the government by expressing their financial difficulties on the one hand and opposing the intervention in the life world on the other. The government’s labeling of citizens as terrorists by reminding the opposition of the Second Gezi Events is no longer taken seriously.

On the other hand, when we evaluate it in terms of the features that alienation theorist Melvin Seeman lists as components of alienation, March 31 is a turning point. It is time for the society, which continues to vote for those who have been rendered powerless, meaningless, or who see themselves anomically normlessness, to stop and think. Indeed, it seems more likely that Turkish people will be more sympathetic to immigrants who are not very different from themselves, who are escaping from oppression and violence, and who are fighting for their lives, and will stop marginalizing them. Because, as can be seen when explained better, it is a fact that immigrant labor is valuable in Turkey and makes significant contributions to many sectors, especially agriculture and animal husbandry.

On the other hand, it can be expected that the opposition components, which are now understood to emphasize social factors, will work to ensure social justice not only in production but also in distribution, within the framework of social democratic principles. Because, if the awareness of not discriminating between locals and immigrants can emerge in the organized struggle of labor, this is undoubtedly important as a gain for everyone. Unionization of local and immigrant workers, especially those with social security, has the potential to ensure labor peace

As a result, the Local Elections of March 31, 2024, which are argued to have the power to affect even international relations, are extremely important. It is worth investigating the possible effects on the domestic population, which is constantly on the move between cities or within cities or between countries, as well as the more than 10 million international immigrants living in Turkey, for economic, social and cultural reasons.

In this context, our journal, as always, has opened its doors to articles that examine and research immigration issues from multiple perspectives. On the other hand, we can also mention activist, immigrant-friendly Americans W.E.B. Du Bois and M.Burawoy here. They do “public sociology” to ensure social justice, which concerns all of us more today. The time seems particularly suitable for producing and publishing policy and problem-oriented studies. In this context, relational sociology sees non-essentialist differences as richness; studying liminal situations such as immigration and turning points such as March 31st, as well as uncertainties, and of course making publications, are priorities today, as always.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Mehmet Haberal, the Founding Rector of Başkent University, and hope that his versatile contributions that broaden our horizons will continue.

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