

Cultural Aspects of Being Poor

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Abstract

Poor people are those who are far below the average regarding the income necessary for a living. Poverty represents a severe form of deprivation from many material goods as well as services, which the rich or the middle classes can easily afford. The psychological state is deeply affected by the harsh reality of scarcity; thereby leading to the development of common traits, all of which eventually contribute to the formation of a sociological situation easy to recognize. The appropriate name for this phenomenon is the culture of poverty, which stays embedded in the behavior patterns even long after material well-being is somehow actually acquired.

Key words: Poor; Poverty; Culture; Money; Income; Rich; Middle class.

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INTRODUCTION

It is inexpensive or low-prices places where I really feel in my element. When I frequent an expensive mall; I invariably think of my own humble budget and I feel upset

among so many people around with higher¹ purchasing power. What gives me some relief is the fact that there are other people with low earnings present around and so I am not absolutely alone. Namely, all the employees are there, to reckon with.

Some customers who think they get ripped off at such expensive places despite their richness; on the other hand; take the personnel as a target, or rather as scapegoats (*bouc emissaires*) and direct their revenge and grudge to those very innocent people, by omitting their well-earned tips. I personally would never ever stoop to such a practice!²

When I was working as a receptionist at a touristic hotel; we were once transferring the restaurant bills onto the room-accounts. A certain client had devoured a lobster, the most expensive item of the hotel's eatery, among other dishes.

My left-wing oriented chief could not help uttering a

¹ At a pedagogical seminar we had a hickish but brilliant classmate, a share-holder of a provincial collective private course establishment. Relying on his practical mind, he once said that in this country [Turkey], in actuality, nobody was a culturally real fit for luxury shopping places but they all would pretend to be so. He said he hates affecting ways and airs and he would step into an expensive eatery while tapping his belly and confessing aloud that he was hungry as a wolf. His earnings at the collective private course institution were good and he was at peace with himself as well as all expensive places, despite his lack of city politeness and good manners. As a matter of fact; he indeed was quite content to be the newly-rich he was.

² The protagonist of a novel by Wambaugh (1983) is a patrol policeman on the verge of retirement. He has an enormous appetite. He eats a mighty amount of food when he visits a restaurant. (He takes care not to visit a certain restaurant often; instead he makes a distribution in his mind). The shop-owners waive the account, trying to please the law-enforcer, who, potentially may be resorted to for a favorite in coping with an eventual trouble. Cop-Morgan however always leaves a tip for the serving waiters themselves.

swear-word with his full mouth. Then, recognizing that his behavior was totally against our work-ethos; he glanced at me sideways and as if in search of a culprit, he inquired:

—“Well, what would be *your* verdict regarding their life styles?”

As for me; I was so grateful for having found a summer job that I merely kept silent. Just a few months ago, some socialist opinions had been swirling in my mind, too; but now I had my own little share off the capitalist world and my previous hostility was long subdued.

Indeed; most of the employees at high-priced institutions either internalize the prevailing norms or at least stop worrying about philosophical questions about the economical mechanism’s rotating wheels. They simply feel at peace with the system in a fully resigned manner, I would think.

1. HOPE IS A MEDICINE OR AT LEAST A SORT OF PLACEBO, FOR THE POOR

Karl Marx, as it is known, draws a resemblance between the institution of religion and narcotic substances. No doubt, sometimes devout religious tendencies must have been actually aggravated by certain government agencies in poorer societies, to replace worldly needs and aspirations with promises of rewards in the after-life. Nevertheless, in history it usually proved to be useless to appease large masses through similar political tricks.

During the first multi-party era of the republican Turkey (following the Ottoman sultanate days and the early single party years), *one political party with the name of Nation Party praised religious values in its propaganda campaign. In the elections, even though it strongly supported by the Islamic Press; this party gained only a quarter of a million votes out of a total of eight million votes. Employing religion in an abstract manner as detached from social and economic realities could not suffice to mobilize the citizens. As Maxime Rodison puts it in his work (Islam et capitalism, p.235); the poor classes firstly need hopes regarding life conditions, whether or not accompanied with Islam* (Ağaoğulları, 1979, p.172).

For many political focal points in the third world; socialist consciousness of the masses used to be considered dangerous and prone to lead to social upheavels. Football, carnival and bull fights were devised as safe outlets for otherwise would-be-troublesome young-energy, for the case of some Latin American countries.

On an individual basis; many poor people are bursting with vindictive feelings against the well-to-do people. Many display open animosity at the slightest pretext.

Hope³ directed towards the future, also seems to be a proper temporary respite for alleviating hostility against the “capital”, on the part of a poor individual poor. I remember an interesting scene at a coffee-house in the Covered Bazaar in Istanbul from previous years. A star-student of economics was reviewing the exam scope for his classmates, while enjoying the ordered teas, which he drank with a slurping sound on their cost.

Friends were building him up and he was talking on and on with great enthusiasm, providing probable hints for the upcoming exam in Economics. An obviously poor young man in his shabby clothing, he was a vicarious boss in case histories that he was continuously devising in his imagination. He would give examples using the first person pronoun:

—“In that particular situation, I would come up with a wrong decision as a bank director and loose so many millions”, he would say, on one occasion.

—“Under such unfavorable market circumstances, I’d rather temporarily constrict my production in my plant” he would vicariously decide, on another occasion.

Future hope and the belief in postponement of good days ahead keeps a poor individual “in line” regarding “subversive” opinions targeting wealth and the wealthy.

While studying chemical engineering, I used to dream about owning a fruit-juice plant. At times, in dormitory bull sessions, I would even propose future vacancies to my best friends in my would-be chemical factory!

As a military service comrade of mine once narrated, the Commandant of a Petty Officer Preparatory School in Anatolia used to say:

—This school is in a sense an orphanage and we, the officers in the faculty, represent the hopes of the poor folk. “The Scarlet Baron” was the nickname of this colonel. For all his harsh disciplinarian ways, he had a good heart inside his chest, obviously. He felt pity for his cadets, almost all of whom came from very humble backgrounds.

I have been told that the aunt of a newly recruited cadet knocked on his door and notified him that the *enrolled student had been confined to her by his dying mother*. She said she was a sick relative of the mother and would also die soon; so she would like to confine the boy to his care. The commandant accepted the “consigne” readily. When he got promoted the rank of brigadier general, before his departure, he further confined the above-mentioned cadet to the other officers.

³ As the famous poet Nazım Hikmet puts it:
*The great humanity is the third-rate passenger in the train
And the deck-voyager in the ship
Bread suffices for all except for the Great Humanity
Sugar and clothing material, as well.
But the Great Humanity possess hope.
One can not survive hopeless!*

2. GENERATION GAP IN TOLERATING ONE'S MISERY

Usually, the previous generation; having seen worse times and having learned to reign feelings of jealousy and ambition; are better able to endure deprivation, with respect to the new generations. The young are prone to compare themselves with richer layers or the society or even with children of wealthy nations. Accordingly, they indulge in complaints and protest frequently. Even in the military this can be observed, despite the so-called severe discipline prevailing:

Graduates of the Faculty of Political Sciences used to keep mumbling about the bad dwelling and food conditions at the reserve officer school [during their compulsory service]. This attitude eventually finds its way to the Vatan [Country] newspaper in July 1946. President İnönü visits the military institution, accompanied with his wife. He offers some of the food boiling in the kitchen to his wife. His wife tastes the soup and proclaims it to be very tasty. The President turns towards the cadets waiting at standstill (halt position) and starts speaking:

— We coped with hunger and poverty during the War of Liberation, just for you and for the sake of your comfort. But you! You are spoiled, ungrateful and incapable of appreciating certain virtues!

At that moment the cadets rub their soles on the ground and cause a dust cloud to rise up. The disturbs visibility and the President deems it appropriate to leave on the spot. He gets on his official car with his wife and rides away within the dusty ambiance. (Dirks 1977, p.264, by reference to the work of M. Taylak titled *Öğrenci Hareketleri* [Student Movements])

Interestingly; one of the doyens of Turkish Industry, Vehbi Koç, was reported by an interviewing journalist as a smoker of a local humble cigarette brand, Maltepe, at his old age. He could have offered Havana cigars or anything. But, for him, despite his wealth, it would be a waste to smoke expensive foreign tobacco.

Today, even in shanty towns the most contented people who can cope with poverty psychologically, are the first-comers. They are free from destructive insatiable passions and can adjust to new conditions of scarcity, thanks to their memories of much worse conditions, back in the village.

3. POVERTY IS FUNCTIONAL, AS WELL!

In many cases, it is the poor people who bear the burden of economic and social problems on a national scale. Indeed, sociologist Gans emphasizes the desired existence of the poor population from the outlook of the better-off folk: Why does the American society actually need the presence of poor people within the population?

First, every society has physically dirty, dangerous, undignified jobs [to be done]. Second, the poor ensure a variety of economic activities that benefit the affluent: Domestic workers make life easier for affluent women and liberate them for professional, cultural, civic activities. Third, poverty creates jobs: Penology would be minuscule without the poor, as would the police. Other activities

are the numbers game, the sale of cheap wines and liquors, faith healers, prostitutes, pawn shops,⁴ and the peacetime army, which recruit men mainly from among the poor. Fourth, the poor prolong the economic usefulness of certain goods: Day-old bread, stale fruit and vegetables, secondhand clothes, deteriorating automobiles and buildings. They also provide incomes for doctors, lawyers, teachers who are too old, poorly trained or incompetent to attract more richer⁵ clients. (Gans, 1971, pp.20-21)

The Germany-born sociological theorist then goes on to enumerate the social and political benefits which emerge in the American society [and for that matter, in any western country in general] thanks to the poor population:

Fifth, the poor can be identified and punished as alleged or real deviants. They are more likely to be caught and punished.⁶ Sixth, the poor offer vicarious participation to others in their assumed uninhibited sexual, alcoholic, and narcotic behavior, which, they are thought to enjoy more. Seventh, the rich often collect artifacts from extinct folk cultures of poor people; and almost all Americans listen to the blues, Negro spirituals, and country music. Eighth, poverty helps to guarantee the status⁷ of those who are not poor. Ninth, the poor also aid the upward mobility of groups just above them in the class hierarchy. Tenth, the aristocracy must have the poor to demonstrate its superiority over other elites who devote themselves to earning money. Eleventh, the poor, absorb the costs of change and growth. They are easy to deplace: Universities, hospitals, and civic centers also expand into land occupied by the poor. Twelfth, the poor facilitate and stabilize the political process.

⁴ Poor people are obliged to buy their needs at cheap prices. They do not care about quality. They may easily resort to second-hand goods if ever available. *Turhan Yörükan* (1998, p.440) relates that [in early republican days, in 1930s] certain peasant men from villages around Ankara used to wear trousers, jackets and coats from the flea market: *To observe those village men choosing their clothing from second-hand stands, one just needs to visit the Old Bazaar quartier of Ankara or the peddlers around. One can not spot a single underwear or shirt without a patch on those miserable villagers.*

⁵ Western technical experts who work in the "third world" countries are also those considered second-rate in their homelands. While I was working for a state-owned fertilizer plant in Anatolia, a vast rehabilitation process was under way. German engineers and installers were called in. An American senior engineer was employed to check and balance their technical consulting and performance. A former warrior in World War II, he took extra joy in diagnosing any German mistakes. The witty man's way of defending the interests of the "Turkish Republic" with his fist posed on his heart would amuse me enormously. Relying on our friendship, once in a depressed mood, the elderly engineer confessed to me that he would have never obtained a proper job in America. He and even his boss placed in Ankara, the capitol of Turkey, could only be good for a so-called developing country!

⁶ In other words; the poor are the scapegoats of the more affluent sections of the society in criminal and legal issues. It is a known fact that in America, the population of Black inmates is disproportional to their numbers in society. Blacks represent the poor in addition to the disadvantaged race.

⁷ When "Owkies"—originally meaning "from Oklahoma", even this phrase picked up a demeaning connotation in a short time in other states of America—began to move towards California to work in the fields and fruit gardens; the status of the lowest Californian got raised, as depicted by Steinbeck in the superb novel *Grapes of Wrath*.

Because they vote and participate in politics less than other groups, the political system is often free to ignore them. Thirteenth, an economy based on the ideology of *laissez faire* requires a deprived population that is allegedly lazy or inferior because it must accept charity or welfare. [In this manner] the moral pressure on the political economy to eliminate poverty is reduced and socialist alternatives look unattractive. (Gans, 1971, pp.21-22)

Cultural deprivation (which has usually correlation with low financial income) may also, for that matter, indirectly work to the detriment of an individual, on many occasions all over the world. Even the casualty rates in wars are related to socio-economical status. As *Schaefer and Lamm* (1983, pp.200-201) let us know; *a research carried out in 1973 in the State of Wisconsin confirms this idea: 15% of the fathers of all highschool seniors were poor. But, 27% of the fathers, who had lost sons in Vietnam were poor. The casualty of the poor were disproportionately higher. Hault (1979), Mayer (1955) and J. Willis (1975) arrived at similar conclusions in their work. Sons of well-to-do families would usually end up as officers and be less exposed to dangers than the enlisted men.*

4. POVERTY IS DIFFICULT, EVEN HUMILIATING

Contrary to a formerly common theme in soap operas and melodramatic movies; it is a fact of life that spouses come from similar economic and socio-cultural backgrounds, in real life. Turkish lyric poet Cezmi Ersöz once said on the TV screen that a high-society woman in love, can not even pass a single night in the slum-house of her handsome lover (*Liebhaber*). “At best” he said, “she calls a taxi at about 4 a.m. and returns to her own rich neighborhood”. He talked as if from personal experience and I was impressed as a listener.

I still remember vividly the following incident at the tailor shop where I worked as an apprentice in summers, in my puberty years: One day a tired-looking young man came to us. He said he was a construction-laborer and his linen pants’ back seams had ripped. Our craftsman (shopkeeper-*Meister*) told the worker to take off his pants and stand behind the counter. Then he handed the pants over to his journeyman (*Gehilfe, Geselle*) at the sewing machine, whispering him to charge so many *piastres* for the service and left for the nearby *Sokullu Pasha Mosque* for the afternoon prayers.

Meanwhile the worker put on his newly-mended dirty pants with a pleased smile on his face; came off the counter into open space, thanking the journeyman and just while stepping outside, he notified us that his wages had accumulated without a penny being yet tossed into his hands by his bidder-boss.

The journeyman then burst into an almost hysterical laughter-fit, sporadically asking me for confirmation:

—Now, what could you possibly charge from such a person? He sure is broke, man! What would you get from him? Perhaps his balls?

It is the poor who leave their homelands and endeavor long journeys in search of jobs and new opportunities. Indeed, in the case of Turkey, immigration to Germany (as guest workerks) and from rural areas into cities (where one can be at least gain some money by peddling cheap merchandise as an itinerant seller) gave considerable economic impetus to those staying beyond:

“Household ties are maintained with urban and overseas migrants, whose remittances add to the family income and enable them to purchase land and to acquire or rent machinery” (Pevsner, 1984, p.14).

In America during 1930s, it was the poverty-stricken Oklahoma farmers, who were forced to move to California to work as wagers on vineyards and orchards; as depicted by *John Steinbeck* in his unforgettable work, *The Grapes of Wrath*. (On the other hand; in his novel *The Tobacco Road* *Erskine Caldwell* talks about small farm-owners in strict poverty who, nevertheless, stubbornly cling to their land and stay aloof from integration onto the capitalist urban world).

Daniels (2000, p.789) notes that in environmental issues, too, it is the poor neighborhoods which get hit worst: *The first environmental justice protest took place in 1982 in Warren County, North Carolina, where the state proposed to build a landfill for the disposal of hazardous chemicals. This was a poor, mostly black, rural community. Why had this community been chosen to receive the landfill ? [After all] More affluent communities have more resources to draw on and thus they are better able to control pollution problems through the political and regulatory processes.*

It is a tragedy that in Germany many unemployed guest workerks (mostly Turks) *volenteered* as test subjects (“guinea pigs”) for research on new medicaments, when this possibility emerged as the only employment possibility in hard days.

A Turkish author living in Germany mentions about those testpersons in Germany in his humorous satirical work as follows: [After losing his job, the guest-worker finally applies for a shady pharmaceutical company as a testperson].

— From now on your name is unimportant and you are known to us simply as Number 267. Here you shall get free food and drink and you stay overnights if you wish. But let us first fill the questionnaire, peacefully. You should not be afraid of the administering of our new medicament into your body. After all; compared to traffic accidents, we have fewer death cases over here.

—I understand, Mr. Doctor.

—Number 267. To save you some work, I already filled the questionnaire. Just sign it. You namely affirm that you volunteer for all the experiments. For any eventual health hazard, naturally we can accept no liability.

—I see.

—You foreigners are so suitable for our research firm. You don't harass us with so many sill questions and you do not display signs of fear! You are tough and so much better than those soft German citizens. With you, we can test high doses of new stuff in serial experiments! You should have seen what a scene we had with those three German bums recently. They willingly swallow liters of alcohol each day in bars but here they keep inquiring about the side effects of test pills until the smallest details! I would not exchange a single alien with ten German citizenz!

—You are a good friend of foreigners. (Engin, 2002, pp.89-90).

A Turkish proverb⁸ says *shun the poor on your way! Go ahead and touch the rich on your way!* One might as well admit that some poor people *do* prove to be a real nuisance on occasion. Once I was visiting the sacred tomb of a Moslem Saint and while concentrating for a pious praying for the sake of the holy dead's blessed soul, a cantankerous voice smashed the serene spiritual ambiance. Just outdoors, at the gate, the elderly female tomb-keeper was quarrelling with the leaving visitors over the issue of tips (*pourboire*). She was objecting to the small coins and forcing the visiting women to offer bigger amounts of alimony for her keeping services.

5. A CULTURE RELATED TO MISERY MAY BE DESCRIBED

It should be pointed out that bad hygiene used to be correlated to ignorance (lack of knowledge on microbes) whereas in reality the insufficient infra-structure gave the people little choice for being meticulous about cleanliness. No doubt, the immune system of the poor got stronger over generations, too.

One can easily infer that the degree of cleanliness is closely matched with material possibilities as well as a consciousness rooted on socio-cultural habitudes. Culturally deprived people are usually worse off in hygiene matters. The difference between old settlers' and new immigrants' dwelling places is a typical example. A rich private-school's well-ventilated dormitory sharply contrasts with a state-boarding-school's stuffy dormitory, as a typical example.

I remember that after returning home from a week-long-journey I detected a foul atmosphere in the house (my wife had kept the windows shut due to her cold spell) and I broke out bluntly:

—It is the odor of sheer poverty which reigns in here!

I then explained to my astonished-looking-spouse that I, during my childhood, had sniffed that very same stench

⁸ The original wording in Turkish relies on rhymes, thereby intensifying the message and making it easier to retain in the memory. (*Fakirden sakın da geç; zengine dokun da geç!*). (Turks love poetry. Almost everybody knows by heart certain stanzas from his / her favorite poets. Rhymes facilitate memorization immensely. Late poet Atilla İlhan once said that *if a certain wording sticks to your memory spontaneously and without striving for it, then it is a piece of poetry.*

in a poor household which we had shortly visited on the way to the market with my grand mother.

Styron in his historical novel (1972, p.170) describes the black slaves' cabins from the mouth of his chief character: A house-Negro, Nat, says that *despite master Samuel's efforts to teach his negroes cleanliness; in their huts; the smell of sweat, lard, urine, rubbish, unwashed hair and armpits, bundles of straw mixed with baby vomit was awfully unbearable.*

The so-called culture of poverty is usually defined from a western point of view in textbooks and other literature, which has its own cultural shortcomings to be reckoned with:

The culture of poverty can be defined by various factors which include the lack of betterment expectations (especially in slums), finding food on a daily basis and consuming it on a daily basis, crowded families, lack of privacy, changing jobs often, living on low wages, having no spare food supply at homes, the tendency to spend off the money if it ever is available, pledging the household commodities from time to time, resorting to physical violence on occasion, instable family life. One should thus differentiate the culture of poverty from sheer poverty itself. The culture of poverty is a form of deviation from the mainstream society (Türkdoğan, 2011, p.12).

As Playwright George Bernard Show emphasizes through the mouth of his character, dustman-Doolittle, the father of the heroine, the flower-girl, in *Pygmalion*; in Anglo-Saxon society the middle class morality actually does represent the standard code of ethics. The poor, on the other hand, allegedly have loose morals. (Doolittle himself is ashamed to keep a mistress after getting some money and he seeks a formal marriage).

Nevertheless; some very poor Turkish families are deeply devout Muslims and their strong creed makes them conservative folks clinging to the family values insistently.

As a matter of fact; the typical low-income Turkish-Moslem family unit is a buffer protecting the members from all kinds of financial and social shocks and upheavals, unemployment being an important one. Thrift, patience and hard manual work are virtues indoctrinated to the new generations. Waste is a horrible habit close to sin.

Young or old people sometimes can not possibly bear to wear a precious new piece of clothing, a hat, a shawl or a pair of shoes. Ironically; the new items may even get wasted by being forgotten in closets or the child's feet outgrowing the shoes or moths destroying the wooly material. The pre-occupation with attrition of commodities or buying something where it is most inexpensive is so strong that football is forbidden by parents to prolong the life of the shoes, for instance.

In poor peoples' homes one can see very many old-fashioned items not possible to find elsewhere. Some such items are machines of some sorts and they are

still properly functioning. They had been maintained in good condition with the utmost care of the household. Moreover, conforming to the new fashions and yielding to advertisement is a thing that a poverty-stricken conservative Turkish family would refuse absolutely. Children appreciate even the cheapest toys. They don't mishandle or break the puppets or plastic cars. On the contrary, they handle toys cautiously as if holding the most delicate objects of the world in their tiny hands! Frayed shirt collars are reversed. Even socks pierced by toes are mended, not simply thrown away.⁹

A famous Turkish proverb asserts that the Englishman says: "I am not rich enough to buy cheap things". If one buys a cheap item, he usually has to throw it away and buy another or else get it repaired. Thus, in the longer run, the cheap item costs more than an initially high-priced one. Many people are aware of this fact through personal experience or hearsay. Still; instead of parting with a substantial lump sum of money all of a sudden, they deliberately prefer to give out more money in installments. This comes to their advantage, as an interesting paradox.

Unfortunately many senior citizens in any country are known to constitute part of the poorer people. After all, pensions are always lower than working-wages. Health spendings are higher and insurance policies can not cover all the details even if available. It is an unfortunate fact that lack of means keeps many aged people mentally busy with calculating numbers and drawing continuous price comparisons¹⁰ in their heads for a better bargain.

An anthropological report dating back to the previous century provides a "national trait" explanation for a certain island-people in Pacific. The author emphasizes the non-existing feelings of competition and ambition:

While living among the hybrid Papuan-Melanesian people of a small group of islands in the Torres Straits, I was much struck by the marked weakness of the impulse of rivalry among them. I failed completely to get the boys to take up various English games, and the failure seemed due to the lack of the impulse of

⁹ Years ago at a cafe in Chicago I opened up my cigarette-case for a smoke and a shabbily-dressed elder citizen came over and wanted to buy a few cigarettes from me, holding his coins ready in his hand. I donated him half the case and felt my soul at ease. Later at the lobby of my cheap hotel, another senior citizen sitting next-by said incidentally that a bottle of coke from this vending machine costs such-and-such cents, whereas the market at the corner sells a six pack of them and each comes out half as cheap as the vendor-price.

¹⁰ An honest artisan named *Gültekin* runs a repair shop in Istanbul where he mends watches, eye-glasses, umbrellas and other accessories. Once he told me that he made most of his gainful business during the (Turkish) economical crisis of the year 2002. During that difficult year he had many clients coming to get their things fixed. Indeed, in poor places repair activities blossom while in rich places malfunctioning items are just discarded and replaced.

As a perfect contrast to the frugal life style; a rich contractor I knew once said to me:

—When my car-engine starts "coughing" I simply replace my car with a new one. I do not even like to lift the engine-hood and search for the cause of an engine-trouble!

rivalry. The same defect or peculiarity seemed to be responsible for the fact that the people were so content with their equality in poverty that, although opportunities for earning high wages in adjacent islands were abundant, few could be induced to avail themselves of them! (McDougall, 1919, p.58)

6. POVERTY AND EDUCATION

The current strive for the world in education is to propagate it widely (so as to reach out to the poor, deprived and oppressed social layers) on one hand, and to democratize it on the other hand. In former eras it used to be the privilege of the males, the aristocracy or the affluent to attain an education. However, it is a sad reality that poor's share of the educational activities is still much smaller than those of the rich, in many parts of the world (Çaya, 2011a)

In an old black-and-white American movie I once watched, a church-pastor says to a school-teacher that a problematic child in school might be going out without having a breakfast in the morning. He asserts that the secret beyond the misbehavior could possibly be this simple fact and he knows it from personal experience in his own childhood days.

One of my former literature teachers once said in his class that when he was a freshman at a state university; for the entire winter season he kept his coat on in his Turcology classes, just to conceal the patch on his trouser-knees.

Years ago, in an official meeting, the dean of students of a War College years ago said in a meeting that there are some cadets who send some of their student allowances home by post (The monthly student pocket money issued to cadets by the government is a very small sum. Families of cadets of officer schools are somewhat better off economically and socially than those of petty-officer schools. In the civilian world; the counterpart of petty-officer schools is represented by vocational schools like technical lycées, nursing schools, agriculture schools etc. there, parents are poorer than those of classical highschools).

It is interesting to note that in Istanbul, there is a very old boarding private school run by a charity foundation ever since the late-Ottoman times. Their policy is to enroll exclusively poor—and-orphan students. Primary school graduates meeting those two conditions (very little family income and deceased father) may apply to sit the entrance exam. For the winners immense opportunities flourish. The medium of education for science courses is English for decades. Among graduates one can encounter business men, surgeons, academicians and generals.

In this very special and highly reputable educative institution, it is a mere penalty (!) (and not a prerogative) for the student to go home (or rather to be *sent* home) for the weekend. He/she is forced to go home on weekend as an attonement for a misdemeanor and thus get

confronted with difficult family circumstances again, if only for Saturday and Sunday; whereas within the school food and dwelling conditions (like warmth in winter) are far superior.

7. POVERTY AND THE DISPLAY OF PRIDE

We said that vocational schools' student bodies comprise children of poor backgrounds. Indeed; once in a boarding vocational secondary school in Anatolia, an arrangement was thought up by the administration for the betterment of the students in need: For those who could not afford it, extra money was pooled in by the teachers secretly for passenger bus fares for the winter and summer vacations. The project failed immediately. The secrecy deteriorated like a bursting balloon. Everybody became aware and everybody volunteered as a candidate. They regarded it as part of the rightful fringe benefits of being a student there. Nobody made an issue of pride out of it.

In the above example the students were almost entirely from poor origins. As a collectivity, they had no reason to deny or to hide this fact of their lives. Let us note that within the mainstream society, many poor students are too proud to admit¹¹ their needy situation, vis-à-vis the other ones.

Poor people who had seen better days suffer more in their later-encountered days of deprivation. In 1923 the former Ottoman Dynasty were expelled from the republican Turkey. The dynasty members used to live in the Palace. They were generous people used to spending gifts for their henchmen and butlers (eunuchs and concubine-girls in the case of harem-womenfolk nobility). Many of them incrementally sold their personal jewelry¹² while abroad, in order to survive. Many faced tragic ends eventually. Female French author Kenize Murad, granddaughter of Ottoman padishah Murad the Fifth, mentions their stories in her documentary novels, fluently.

Mustafa, a scholarship student from the Anatolian city of *Aintab* came to *Robert College Lycée Prep class* at the same time with me. The notables of the city considered him as a representative in *Istanbul* (a successful and worthy compatriote / Landsman) and accordingly they "submerged" him with gifts of all kinds (clothing, laundry,

stationary and an expensive bed-couch) on his departure to the big city.

They praised his achievement and urged his success. I personally admired or even envied his situation at first glance, as another scholarship student from a western region, left all alone and ignored by *his* own homecity. (The solidarity feelings and identification with one's soil, as a feudal custom, is strong in the eastern regions and much weakened in the western regions, in Turkey). But I later saw that he was coping with crushing feelings of gratitude.

The poor boy was really subject to considerable social pressure, at least as he himself perceived it. On one occasion when he took a low grade, he could not help saying:

— What possible explanation shall I now present to my benefactors in my homecity? To those honorable persons, who had been so generous, so kind to me? I am so thankful for those people and I shouldn't disappoint them! (Pointing to his suit on his body) What shall I say to the real owners of all those good things? I really didn't deserve all those gifts!"

He sometimes went without the free meals supplied to full scholarship students in the school-refectory. He did this as a means of self-punishment or mortification. Some were even teasing him, repeating his constant rhetoric "I don't deserve this goodness and I don't deserve that goodness".

CONCLUSION

Poverty is a relative concept and it is naturally more appropriate to talk about comparable material possibilities of nations or regions or households or individuals; if we are to supply a deeper social understanding of the topic.

A sheer economical approach would attempt to quantify the incomes per capita or mention about certain indexes employed to measure the degrees of the so-called poverty levels. Moreover; a historical cross-section would involve another dimension to be added to the probable arguments related to being poor. Some of the "poor" of today, may in fact be living a higher quality life or enjoying a more comfortable existence in some specific respects pertaining to technology, medicine, and modern ways.

From a cultural viewpoint, which is tinted with behavioral tones, in a given society, or for the case of our own society; poor people are usually defined as a disadvantaged social layer whereby restrictions prevail in a much marked manner with respect to the others constituting the surrounding majority.

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¹¹ As a matter of fact; in the glorious days of the Ottoman State, Charity Stones were used where money was inserted by rich Moslems. The needy would get them from the Stones and not get confronted with the giver. In a similar manner, charity-eateries were distributing hot soup behind partitions where only the hands of the cooks were visible.

¹² The dissidents of the new regime, including the Ottoman generals who had joined forces in the War of Salvation against invading forces in the aftermath of World War One were also "liquidated". Kazim Karabekir Pasha survived with his family by selling the jewelry of his wife. (Rings used to represent wealth as well as prestige. In the Biblical story when the prodigal son returns home in a miserable condition and repents, his father's heart softens. He orders him to be fed and clothed and a ring slipped to his finger).

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APPENDIX: VISUAL SUPPLEMENT



Figure 1
A Hospice (Armenhaus) for Poor French People Living in Istanbul.
The Location Is Bomonti (Photo by the Author)



Figure 2
Second-Hand Shoes and Clothing for Sale on a Flea-Market Stand in Istanbul,
Waiting for Buyers From Underprivileged Social Classes (Photo by the Author)



Figure 3
A 63-Year-Old Wooden Box Offered to a First Lieutenant, My Own Father, at the Time, by a Plain Conscripted-Soldier, a Carpenter by Profession. In Accordance With the *Frugality Principle of Mediocre Income*, the Officer Never Parted With That Box (Scanned by the Author)



Figure 4
Adana Train Station Building (Courtesy of Geography Teacher F. GÜNDAR, a Relative of the Author). State-Owned Railroad Fares Being Smaller, Many People With Little Income Prefer to Travel by Train, If the Route Is Passing by the Destination

(a)



(b)



Figure 5
Views From the Repair Works in the Bathroom of a House Bought Second Hand at a Fairly Cheap Price (Photo: Courtesy of Geography Teacher F. GÜNDAR, A Relative of the Author)



Figure 6
An Old Fashioned Coffee-Grinder (Hand-Mill) in a Relatively Poor Household (Scanned by the Author)

A fairly common market deception had been “cutting” genuine coffee by powdered chickpeas. Thus, many coffee-addicts used to grind their own coffee beans in hand mills, to escape the possibility of drinking impure coffee. Even though such hand-mills had long ago fallen into oblivion, they are still available in some low-income houses, in accordance with the principle of a frugal life style, which is totally indifferent to or frightful of or even hostile to the new ruthless consumption modes. Moreover; “rituals” pertaining to coffee in those knittly-closed mediocre family circles are so important that a suitor (gentleman-caller) initially judges a would-be bride’s worth as a housewife, from her sheer coffee-making talent.