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## **Neoliberal Policies and Women Slum Dwellers in Turkey**

### **Introduction: A Brief History of Internal Migration and Formation of Slums in Turkey**

The rural to urban migration experience of Turkey in late 1940s. In 1955, 1960, 1980 and 2002 the population of slum dwellers are 250.000, 1.200.000, 5.750.000 and 11.000.000 respectively. Although migration started in late 1940s, 1960s and 1980s were the critical periods for migration waves. So there are two waves of internal migration, 1960s and 1980s.

From the second half of 1940s, Turkish political economy shifted to a model which aimed at mechanization of agriculture based on foreign resources. This mechanization created surplus rural labour. 1960s were also marked by the dramatic changes in terms of transformation in urban areas (Zürcher 2008). Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) policy in urban production started to be implemented. It was aimed to scale up the national production through montage industry. The urban population was not enough to supply as much cheap labour as required by the newly-emerging industries. The migrant population was needed by the urban industry. So, increasing industrial job opportunities in cities and the surplus labour in rural areas were the prominent factor that pulled rural population to urban areas during first wave migration.

Despite the fact that rural-urban or international migration of single women is not unusual in many parts of the world, such as Iran (Velayati 2011), Mexico (Kanaiaupuni 2000) or the Philippines (Parrenas 2001), it was not common in Turkey. It was mostly the young, the most educated, skilled and shrewd male member of the family to migrate. In order to decrease the cost of migration, rural people migrated without their families. Single women among first wave migrants came to the city through their marriage to a man in the city from the same village. Pioneers built squatter houses quickly and without legal permissions on public lands since the available houses were not affordable for the new comers. In the first wave migration, married women among usually came to the city after their husbands had found a job or a place to build a slum house.

The early female migrants felt very lonely since they did not have friends or relatives in the towns and that they did not have the freedom that they used to have in their villages. Since they were not familiar with the city and knew nobody, they stayed at home for the whole day while their husbands were outside.

It was women's primary responsibility to make their scrappy houses into liveable places, and to transform these hovels into 'homes'. Due to the lack of infrastructure and services, they organized their courtyards to clean the dishes and clothes, and built

primitive ovens or heaters in the garden for baking bread. Additionally, it was also their duty to find water sources and to carry the water for their daily needs to the house. These water sources might be the nearest mosque or water fountain. Thanks to their skills, they made jars, tomato pastes and breads and sewed for the family. As a result, less of the main family income was spent on food, clothes and construction.

Male migrants were quite active in hometown organizations for networking, negotiating with local government and politicians. They were also visible in coffee houses in their neighbourhood and these coffee houses were central for the interaction and socialization among migrants. However, since it was not considered proper for women, especially migrant women, to be visible publicly, so they could not be as active as men in hometown organizations. Furthermore, coffeehouses were exclusive to men and there were no available special public areas in which slum women could gather and engage in social life. In order to compensate for this, women mostly designated the doorstep of the house as the public space in which they could gather with their neighbours and relatives. In due course, first-wave migrant women started to meet and build friendships with the other migrant women in their district. The doorsteps were the equivalents of coffeehouses for women. In these areas, they could both do some housework, such as cleaning dishes and clothes, hanging up washing and baking seasonal bread, and help each other and socialize with their neighbours at the same time. These places contribute to build and enlarge their social network with slum women. It can be claimed that this part of their houses was the first step for them to become visible in the public sphere. The longer they stayed in the cities, the more familiar they became with the public sphere through taking their children to school, shopping at local shops etc.

First wave migrant women rarely worked. My respondents in this category explained to me that their prominent reason for not working was because of the traditional attitudes towards women working. When the family thought that the family income was enough for their well-being, working for female members of the family could seem to them to be unnecessary and improper. Their husbands and fathers might not allow them to work, since they were new in Ankara and male members of the family were anxious about their safety outside the house (Hemmasi and Prorok 2002). They were also lack of skills and education level which might be required for the urban jobs. It is because the lack of education facilities and gender discrimination of families in terms of sending their daughters in rural areas where they came from.

### **Neo-liberalism in Turkey**

In late 1970s, Turkey's economy, as many other countries', was dramatically affected by the large imbalance of payments on current account (Stewart 1992:14). Turkey applied for funds of IMF and World Bank Funds were available after a series of agreements and the country agreed to apply an economic program determined by the funding institutions. A new package, namely 24 January decisions which had the

perspective of IMF's stability policy and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) (Boratav 2010) was prepared in early days of 1980. Due to the relatively powerful left opposition towards the implementation of neo-liberal policies before 1980, these decisions could only be implemented after a coup d'état in 1980 which harshly subdued opposing voices. This 24 January decision was an introduction to implementation of SAPs and it was Turkey's first step to the neo-liberal policies.

With these policies, the ultimate project was shrinking the state role in the economy and the integration with the global markets. Export was promoted by export incentives provided by the state (Boratav 2010 ) and due to the competition with the global markets the wages were sharply decreased. In domestic sphere these programs notably brought about privatization, devaluation, expansion of informal economy, deregulation, shrinking of public expenses (Davis 2006, Özar&Ercan 2004, Şenses &Taymaz 2003) and "improving incentives for the production of goods which are internationally tradable and to switch resources away from production of goods which are not internationally tradable" (Elson 1995:164). In terms of foreign affairs, especially the reduction of trade barriers was the issue.

In the framework of neo-liberal policies, state withdrew from the agricultural investments and shrinks the budget for the agricultural subsidies. This dramatically decreased the return of agricultural production for rural producers, especially the small producers. Moreover, the export oriented economy which was based on the labour intensive production and the aim of competing in the global market opened new job opportunities in urban areas. So, economic liberalization raised internal urbanization which meant flow of migrants from villages of Anatolia to industrialized cities (Dedeoğlu 2008).

### **Slum Women in Neo-liberalism**

When the general household income decreased with the introduction of SAPs, migrant households had to create their own survival strategy in order to deal with these conditions. Within this framework, it was nearly impossible for marginal groups to survive on one person's income. In many slum homes, the male head of the household tried to find a second job. Alongside the male's work, child and especially female labour grew to be valuable for families in terms of survival strategies. So, women in large numbers in squatter areas needed to work due to the economic necessity of the household although traditionally women's working was not perceived proper. This was not the usual case before the 1980s but women's participation to the labour force was the last and the nearly the only option for the slum households. Moreover, the more the migrant women stayed in the cities, the more they got used to city life and became more visible in public sphere and also more daughters were sent to schools by their parents. These two factors also contributed to slum women's participation to the labour force.

While the enlargement of the informal economy and the decrease in the household incomes, women's participation to the labour force and the employment increased. However, they were mostly concentrated in low-status and unsecure jobs (Ecevit 2007). Now, there are mainly four types of informal work which women in squatter areas engaged with: industrial home based work, domestic service work, unpaid family work and traditional hand craft act (Dedeoğlu 2008). In unpaid family work, women work in the small or large enterprises of their family members. Their labour is perceived as "help" both by themselves and the owners of these enterprises although they might work 12 hours a day. Especially in the crises periods and in the time when the enterprises could not find cheap labour, they ask for the "help" of female family members (Dedeoğlu and Öztürk 2011). When the enterprises overcome the harsh economic conditions or the cheap labour problem, female family members are sent back to the homes

In domestic service work, slum women work in middle and upper middle class houses at daily bases without any social security and they find these jobs through their networks. Although they earn more compared to the other informal jobs, this type of job is perceived the most inferior job among the slum women since it is considered as cleaning "the other's dirt". Their children usually tried to conceal that their mothers work as a domestic service worker.

Due to market conditions, lack of education, required skill and language, their traditional housewife role, the lack of public childcare facilities, discrimination against women in the labour market and the patriarchal social formation, women mostly preferred to work in industrial home-based jobs such as piece-work.

Home-based production is quite profitable for capital owners. They do not have to pay for a workshop or a working place for the production since women work at home. It is also not the enterprises' legal obligation to pay for the social security of the home-based working women since home-based working women are recognized as self-employed by the Labour Law and are responsible for their own social security. What is the most remarkable, the labour of slum women is quite flexible. They could finish the given work in a very limited time with the help of their neighbours, family members. In this sense, the social network among the slum women is quite important for the running of the informal production. For example, thanks to the home-based working, in textile production, 40% of the labour force is women. On the other hand, this type of employment do not challenge the persistent patriarchal family and society relations since it keeps the women at home and maintains the situation that women are in charge of household chores and caring affairs. It is always the mainstream discourse that this new type of production is very suitable for the women in slum areas, but the reverse is true that the unsecured position of slum women is suitable for the flexible labour need of export oriented and labour intensive production after 1980.

The relationship between the slum women's income-generating activities and the empowerment of these women is very problematic. As Erman (2001) claims, women who work in the informal labour market are aware of the fact that their economic contribution to the family is indispensable. While a significant number of the slum women are the main breadwinner of the family, in general their earnings comprise around 40% of the total income of the family (Ecevit 1998). They become more self-confident in this sense, and some of these women feel themselves to be freer since they do not need to ask for money from their husbands, and they can buy whatever they like for their children (Ilkkaracan 2007). On the other hand, this income-generation does not provide them more control over the family budget or more say in the decisions of the household. Their ability to make money cannot even help in reducing the incidence of domestic violence most of the time (Moser 1992). What I argue is that slum women's work is an extension of their gender roles.

With the state's withdrawal from social spending after the 1980s, women's domestic labour, home-based production of fundamental necessities and their caring responsibilities for children, the elderly and sick members within the family become more important. Women need to increase their input to caring facilities (Elson 1995). The time that women spent on these activities increase (Stewart 1992: 34). When a woman in a slum household start to work outside, other female members of the household, mothers, sisters and especially the elder daughters spend more time on household chores. It can be argued that the cut-backs by the state in public services and the increase in female participation in the informal economy, as outcomes of the implementation of SAPs, served to increase the time women spent on both paid and unpaid work (Elson 1995).

It can be suggested that slum women after the second wave are much more active than their male counterparts in terms of increasing the resources for their household through networking. Besides working, they put a great deal of effort into accessing the welfare distributed by the municipalities, NGOs, religious communities and some wealthy people who make contact with the local governors to help slum dwellers. Women register their family with the local authorities for welfare. For this registration, they collect documents from various formal institutions. In contrast to previous periods, now it is the women who make contact with local authorities in order to ameliorate their situation. Therefore, while it was the males who initiated the connections between local authorities and formal institutions, it is the females residents who have taken up this mission and are developing it. While this might show the empowered situation of women, it can also be suggested that, since seeking welfare is related to a family's low income, for male members of the household it is a kind of proof of their failure to fulfill their roles as breadwinner (Kalaycıoğlu & Tiliç Rittersberg 2001). So, the men pass this duty to the women because of their 'masculine honour'. Moreover, women try to make connections through their neighbours, bosses and colleagues – if they work – in order to

find jobs for their household members, the best school for their children and to be informed more about welfare and easy ways to access health and transportation services. However, the women can be easily accused by their husbands of failing to reach welfare or create networks (Kalaycıođlu & Tılıç Rittersberg 2001).

## Conclusion

It can be put forward that patriarchy is the prominent factor that determines the way that women, in our case slum women's participation to the labour force. When the incomes of slum households were shrank by the neoliberal policies, women had to work and this increased their participation to the labour force. However, patriarchal control over the women's labour directly affects the form and the value of women labour in labour market. Moreover, their income generating position within the family did not significantly challenge their lower status and this position is seen as an extension of their gender role.

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