

COPING STRATEGIES OF THE KURDISH WOMEN TOWARDS DEPRIVATION SITUATIONS AFTER THE CONFLICT-INDUCED INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN TURKEY

Ceyda KULOĞLU-KARSLI Ph.D

Research Assistant, Communication Department
Baskent University, Ankara-Turkey
E-mail: ceyda.kuloglu@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

There is an ongoing internal armed conflict in Turkey between the state security forces and the non-state armed group, Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) since 1984. This paper explores and critically analyzes the experiences of the Kurdish women in Turkey after they have been displaced from their villages to the city centers by the state security forces. In-depth interviews have been conducted with 30 Kurdish women in three different cities; Istanbul, Mersin and Diyarbakır that Kurdish population mostly live after the displacement. Women and children have always seen as the main victims of the conflicts in the literature but in this paper, I explain how they may transform their victimization into empowerment. In this context, internally displaced Kurdish women's experiences are analyzed according to the coping strategies that they have discovered in order to survive both their own and their family's lives. Some of these strategies are, learning the pervasive language that is used among Turkish citizens in the cities (Turkish), learning how to read and write, dealing with the governmental agencies, working in low-paid jobs, searching for the humanitarian aids, etc.

Keywords: Internal Conflict, Displacement, Kurdish Women, Coping Strategies

1. Introduction

The aim of the study is to explore and critically analyze the experiences of internally displaced Kurdish women in Turkey. "Conflict-induced internal displacement" through 1990s is focused in this study. The results in this paper are some of the findings of my Ph.D thesis¹, which is based on in-depth interviews with 30 Kurdish women, in 3 different cities, Istanbul, Mersin and Diyarbakır. These cities are among the cities that Kurdish population mostly live after displacement. In the study, conflict-induced internally displaced women's experiences are focused instead of economic migrants' experiences. Internally displaced women's experiences are based on the formation of the ethnic Kurdish identity, which is raised upon a collective trauma that Kurds have faced since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Kurdish women in the study belong to the groups, which may be summarized as "female head of households", "working women", "women who are active in Kurdish and women's NGOs and Pro-Kurdish political parties", "young women who mostly work in informal sector (mostly displaced when children)" and "housewives (does not work, does not actively participate to the NGOs or political parties)". According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (2001), Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are defined as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internally recognized state border". There are two important points in the definition of internal displacement: first; there should be a force or obligation and second; the move must be within the boundaries of one country (TESEV 2007: 34). Remaining within the borders of the same country makes internally displaced people different from refugees. Besides, although refugees are protected by international laws, internally displaced people are still under the control of the government which sometimes is the reason of the displacement. There are basically three types of internal displacement. "Disaster-induced internal displacement" is because of natural and human made disasters and defined as the "situations arising from natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, volcanoes, or soil erosion and human-made disasters such as radioactivity, nuclear leaks, and industrial accidents" (TESEV 2007: 80). The second type is "development-induced internal displacement",

¹ Kuloğlu-Karsli C. (2012). Marginalized or Empowered? Conflict-Induced Internally Displaced Kurdish Women's Experiences in Turkey. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. Middle East Technical University, Sociology Department. Ankara, Turkey.

which refers to “the displacement of persons living in a particular inhabited area, in accordance with sufficient advance planning, and on the basis of a development project” (TESEV 2007: 80) and “conflict-induced internal displacement” refers to the “displacements occur as a result of the direct or indirect pressure exercised by governments or by the groups in conflict with the government (TESEV 2007: 81).

2. Background of the Internal Armed Conflict and Conflict-Induced Displacement in Turkey

There is an ongoing internal armed conflict in Turkey since 1984 between Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan – Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), the non-state armed group and the state security forces, which mostly implies Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) because of the reason that the conflict usually occurs in rural parts of the East and Southeast regions of Turkey. State security forces rarely refers to the Security General Directorate (police) (SGD) because sometimes PKK organize attacks towards civilians in the cities. The consequences of the internal armed conflict in Turkey are various. The excessive number of battle-related deaths is one of the outcomes of the conflict. There are also lots of people who have been disappeared. Another direct result of the conflict is the “internal displacement” from East and Southeast regions to the city centers. As it is well known, there is a direct and linear relationship between conflict and displacement. As more people are affected by the conflict, more are displaced as a consequence of it (Kälin 2010).

Before exploring the consequences of the internal displacement for women, it is better to explain the reasons of the internal armed conflict in Turkey very briefly. In the Turkish case, it is known that, internal armed conflict is not a reason but a result of the ongoing Kurdish issue since the beginning of the Turkish Republic history. Kurds had relatively autonomous administration and rights in the Ottoman period, especially in the border zones of the Empire. The starting point of the Kurdish question can be said the beginning of the Turkish Republic because the “nation (millet)” phenomenon was rapidly changed in this period (McDowell 2004: 265). Before the Republic, nation referred to the Muslim people within the Empire (Lewis 1991: 333) but in the Turkish Republic, nation refers to the people who are ethnically Turkish, so the Kurdish population was excluded from being a member of the nation in the first place, which does not mean that they were exiled from the country but it means that their distinct ethnic identity was overlooked and rejected and they were all counted as Turkish.

The assimilation and discrimination history of the Republic against Kurdish population shows that the Kurdish question in general and the internal armed conflict in Turkey in particular have not been started with the establishment of the non-state armed group. This fact has been overlooked since the beginning of the Turkish Republic and has been named such as the demand for Sultanate and Caliphate (Yeğen 2009: 129), tribal resistance (Yeğen 2009: 139), bandit problem (Yeğen 2009: 144), foreign incitement (Yeğen 2009: 150) and regional backwardness (Yeğen 2009: 159), in other words, the problem was named as everything other than the Kurdish issue. This intentional deny of naming the problem and the effort to solve the Kurdish issue only with the military operations have caused many damages for people living in Turkey, not only for Kurdish population, but also for Turkish population. Thousands of people died, millions of people displaced and billions of dollars have spent for the defense budget.

Total number of deaths since 1984 is 42.044. 6.653 of them are from the state security forces and 29.704 of them are from the non-state armed group. 5.687 people are civilian victims of the internal armed conflict in Turkey (Hür 2010) and the number increases every day.

In order to overcome the attacks of the PKK, in 1987, Turkish Government announced a Decree of Law for State of Emergency (Olağanüstü Hal – OHAL) totally in 13 cities (Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Hakkari, Mardin, Siirt, Tunceli, Van, Adıyaman, Bitlis, Muş, Batman and Şırnak) in East and Southeast of Turkey which was lasted until 2002. With the start of the OHAL, the governors gained extraordinary authorities, including evacuating, joining and even condemning the villages and hamlets. After OHAL was initiated in these areas, torture and bad treatment complaints started and also the village guard system was developed which in turn caused increase in killings, usurpations, burning the villages and rapes. 4000 village guards have been sentenced because of these crimes (Türker 2009).

After developing village guard system, in which the objective was to armament of the villagers in East and Southeast of Turkey in order to protect the villagers from PKK, in 1987 PKK killed most of the village guards and

killed some of their families including women and children. Until 1990s, PKK burnt down villages and schools in the region and killed 128 teachers in this period. With the counter-insurgency strategy of the TAF, the villages became targets again and evacuation of the villages and hamlets was seen as a part of the solution, which aims to purify the region from local Kurdish people in order to cut off the logistic support of the PKK by burning down villages, evacuating the settlements, killing the livestock and enforcing embargo on food. In this displacement process, Turkish Government did not provide any plan or program for the resettlement of the villagers and it also did not support the internally displaced people during and after their migration and left them to their own fate (Mutlu 2009: 24).

According to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey Research Commission 1998 report, there have been 3.428 settlements and totally 378.335 people have been evacuated. One of the latest research (HÜNEE) shows that the number of the displaced people is between 950.000 and 1.200.000 and according to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) there are 2 million people who have been internally displaced. But according to the Turkish Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) reports, the number of people is over 3 million. The numbers of internally displaced people in Turkey vary according to the each source and the highest number comes from the NGOs because they also include economic migration from the region as a result of the security reasons and consider this type of migration as forced. On the other hand, the number of displaced people is controversial because the practice "was carried out without any scheme" and even any records were not kept on the number of internally displaced people (Mutlu 2009: 25).

3. Experiences and Coping Strategies of the Conflict Induced Internally Displaced Kurdish Women in Turkey

Kurdish families, living in the East and Southeast of Turkey, mostly earned their living with agriculture and animal husbandry before they were displaced. They could make their breads, milk, butter, cheese, etc. by themselves easily at home and had always meat to eat as they owned animals in the village. Besides, because they were doing agriculture they never had difficulty to have vegetables and leguminous seeds at their homes. After their immediate displacement, they lost all of their fields and husbandry and they had no time to convert their property holdings into cash before they were settled down in the cities. In other words, yesterday's "rural rich" people started to be the "urban poor" in the cities.

In this section, the experiences and the coping strategies of the Kurdish women will be explained. These experiences are based on the poverty that they live in the cities and also changes in the living style of the displaced families.

3.1. Female Head of Households as a Consequence of the Internal Armed Conflict

Female head of households have to overcome emotional and psychological pain of the lost of their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers and also have to take care of the economic need of the households and look after the dependent family members such as children and elderly (UNRISD 2005: 214). Loss of the male head of households and forced migration, which usually brings the loss of the contact between family members, increased the women and children headed households and most of these women are war widows because adolescent and adult males (and sometimes females) usually participated in or died or imprisonment as a result of the conflicts (Mazurana et. al. 2005: 6).

With the loss of the male head of household and with the destruction of family income, women and children undertake new economic roles. Women's workloads as providers and caregivers increase as they have new economic roles. Women are the first ones that become unemployed and underemployed in times of conflict. This situation puts women and girls in a risky position and makes them easy targets for prostitution, trafficking and beggary (Mazurana et. al. 2005: 5-7).

In order to cope with the situation of the loss of the male head of the household, women, who mostly do not have adult sons, start living with other relatives, mostly in father-in-law's or brother-in-law's houses. This may be because of the traditions of the families and/or because Kurdish women do not usually work outside the house and would not be able to look after their families. But in some cases there can be some incoherence within the family members and female head of households and/or widows have to work outside home in order to look after the dependent family members. They mostly work in uninsured and low-paid jobs, such as seasonal workers or daily servants, because of their lack of education and lack of Turkish knowledge. Sometimes they have to search

food in the garbage containers or wait until the street market closes in order to collect smashed or rotten vegetables to feed their children.

As one of the respondents mentions; "When I came to İstanbul and moved to this neighborhood, there were no other Kurdish families. I rented a basement in a building. Our relatives did not help because they were afraid of us as they also had problems with the state security forces. One of my children was disabled because of the fire in the village. I was leaving my children in the basement and went out to search jobs. I was working in a chocolate factory, but I could not eat lunch because my children were hungry at home. I was crying a lot. One day a young man saw me and asked why I was crying. I told him I had nothing at home. No pillow, no cooker, nothing. He told me he was also Kurdish and patriotic for Kurdish nation. He helped me; he gave me the leftovers everyday to take for my children. One day I got sick and he took me to the hospital. The roof was streaming and there were rats in the house. He told me to go to the pro-Kurdish political party but I was afraid for my children and did not go. When I was sick at home, a gang leader from Diyarbakır saw my daughter and asked her house. He came to our house and saw its condition. He rented us a normal apartment, a small television, he brought us some food. He gave us money, bought my medicine. He also told me to go to the pro-Kurdish political party and I started to go. They also helped me. He gave my rent, etc. Before that, I was collecting bread from streets. I was looking after poor people in the village. I was giving each of them a sheep. Now I am the one who is desperate in the city" (In her house, İstanbul, 14.05.2010).

3.2. Working in Low Paid and Uninsured Jobs

As mentioned before, Kurdish women traditionally do not work outside home if their husbands are alive or are not sentenced and if they have adult sons who may work outside home. Only some of the internally displaced Kurdish women work with their husbands in the agriculture fields out of the city centers as cheap labors on daily based salary, in order to cope the situation of poverty that they live. Men on the other hand, mostly work in unqualified and low-paid jobs like construction workers in the cities because they are specialized only in animal husbandry and agriculture, which they mostly perform in village life. Because of this unemployment situation, almost all of the displaced families, who were living in wealth in their villages, have to live in extreme poverty in cities.

Some of the families even do not live in a house but in a shed and do not have vital household stuff such as, refrigerator and washing machines in their homes. They live in poor neighborhoods, mostly composed of slum houses after the migration flows. These problems are also shown as the reasons of increased suicide rates among Kurdish women in the region in some other studies on Kurdish issues (Halis 2002: 36)

As an interviewee explains; "When we came to Mersin, we had no money, nothing. We came even without shoes. Kurds were giving me small things. I collected bread from the garbage, washed and fed my children with them. I put some water in the pan and acted like cooking something. My children were waiting for the food, but always slept hungry. People in the neighborhood sometimes helped on Fridays (as it is the holy day in Muslim societies). We were living in a shed that had no house stuff in it. I was collecting carton papers for my children to sleep on and picking grass and filling sacks with them to use them as comforters. I had to stay all nights long awake in those years because rats were coming in and out from the so-called roof of the shed (In her house, Mersin, 27.05.2010).

Internally displaced Kurdish children cannot continue their education in the cities mostly because of the extreme poverty that their families experience. In order to cope with the families' poverty situation, boy children start working as street venders and girl children usually work in the textile industry. Kurdish girl children start working in the textile industry in their early ages like 8-10 in bad conditions with long working hours. They have to work 10-12 hours in the confection ateliers and face physical and sexual abuse from the other workers or from their bosses. Traditionally like women, girl children cannot work outside the home in the Kurdish culture but the families had to let their children work in the textile industry because of the poverty.

Most of the Kurdish displaced women place in the urban poor category when the illiteracy and linguistic barrier combine with the unemployment problem which in turn force young Kurdish women to do forced prostitution in the cities. They are mostly forced by the economic deprivation that their family live and/or by their male members in the family. Some of the young women have joined into the branches of PKK just because they are forced to do prostitution by their families (Sümbül 2005: 18-19).

As Mukaddes Alataş (Head of the Kardelen Solidarity Organization in Diyarbakır – personal communication on 22nd of June, 2010) mentions, “There was a woman whose husband forced her to do prostitution with many men for 10 TL (which is approximately 6 Dollars), she burned her hand by herself just to make men reject to have a relation with her”.

3.3. Dealing with Healthcare

Because neither their husbands nor women can work in insured jobs and because they are working mostly in low-paid jobs, Kurdish women also face inadequate health care both for themselves and for their children. In some situations, because the family does not have any health insurance, their children die in their mother’s arms because of the inadequate health care. One of the interviewees mentioned that, “My younger daughter got very sick and I took her to hospital by foot. I had very little money. I wanted to buy medicine with this money. We did not need insurance or green card² in the village. The officer told me that the number for the row is 50 kuruş (approximately 25 cents), I only got 26 kuruş. I begged them to give me the number and told him that I don’t have my husband with me. He asked me why my husband was in jail. I could not answer because I did not know that much Turkish. I could understand but could not reply. I told them they (state security forces) took my husband from home and then burned down my house. He told me we were fighting against the state and then came and begged help from the state. And told me I could not get a number. I had to take my daughter back home and bought some simple medicines from the pharmacy. In three days, unfortunately my daughter died in my arms” (In Peace Mothers NGO, Diyarbakır, 25.06.2010).

In order to cope with their own health care needs and those of other family members, displaced families mostly apply to the “green card” system. Most of the families who have gained the right to have a “green card” mentioned that they were threatened by the state authorities, that if they participated in demonstrations of the PKK, their green card would be cancelled. Some of the families could get a green card in the later years of their displacement. Some women do not have green card and mentioned that they go to the doctors if they have money and they do not go if they do not have enough money, although some of them have serious health problems.

3.4. Searching for Humanitarian Aids

Because displaced families have to deal with the extreme poverty problems after displacement, some of the women have to find solutions to support their families. One of the major coping strategies of internally displaced Kurdish women for dealing with the poverty that they experience in the cities is to get humanitarian aid, like clothes, household stuff and food especially on special days like bayram (religious holiday), from municipalities and subsidiary companies of the municipalities. They usually use their social networks to learn the ways of getting help and these connections are mostly constituted in the neighborhood. Women are the ones that mostly write their names into the lists of the aids and follow the consequences because as Mukaddes Alataş (Head of the Kardelen Solidarity Organization in Diyarbakır – personal communication on 22nd of June, 2010) mentions, “Women are the ones who mostly (97%) get the aid for the family because men get embarrassed when the subject is getting aid for the family. In these situations their manhood suffers because they think everybody considers that they are not men enough to look after their families”.

3.5. Learning Turkish and Being Illiterate

The first problem that displaced Kurdish women face in the cities is the language problem. The majority of the displaced women did not know Turkish because they could not attend schools in the villages. It had two reasons. First of all, there are no schools in some of the villages and students have to go to the closest village or to the residential schools to be educated. Secondly, even the village had school, it was unnecessary for Kurdish female children to be educated because of the early marriages and these children were needed for the domestic duties to help their mothers in the crowded households. Kurdish women are, on the other hand, traditionally obedient first to their fathers and then to their husbands at age of 13-15, hence, the female children’s education was unnecessary. Although Kurdish men could not go to school in their early ages, in the conscription period, it was obligatory for them to learn Turkish and how to read and write during their military service.

Most of the displaced Kurdish women have learned Turkish from their children who attend to schools and/or from their neighbors. Language barrier cause many problems for these women. They cannot go somewhere by

² The green card system is a law in Turkey that is applied to poor people for free health care.

themselves, they cannot explain their health problems to the doctors, which is also a reason of the discrimination against the Kurdish women and cannot communicate with other people in public. They are always dependent to someone who knows Turkish. Some of them do not speak Turkish although they know how to speak, because of the Turkish hatred and the rest of them did not choose to learn Turkish, on the contrary, it was such a forced language education, in other words, coercion for them in order to survive in the cities.

As one of the respondents mentions; "I always go to hospital with my daughter because my Turkish is not enough to explain my health problems. I also always do my shopping from Kurdish owned markets in the neighborhood. I never go out from the neighborhood and if I have to, I can never go out alone" (In her house, Mersin, 05.08.2010).

Most of my interviewees are not illiterate and this is one of the major problems in displaced women's lives. They mentioned that, they are not free in the cities because they even do not know which bus they should take to go home. That is why they usually shop from the markets in the neighborhood, which are owned by Kurdish men, and which is a "neighborhood imprisonment" for these women for the rest of their lives in the cities. Coping strategy for some of these women in order to get free from this lifelong imprisonment is to move collectively under the coordination of the pro-Kurdish NGOs and/or political party and go everywhere as a group of women. Sometimes going out from the neighborhood is the only reason for these women to attend to a demonstration that supports PKK.

3.6. Dealing with the Governmental Agencies

Although most of the displaced women are illiterate and do not have adequate Turkish skills to deal with the governmental agencies, it is still mostly women's duty to solve the governmental issues. For instance, women are the ones who deal with the issues in their children's schools, because although they are in the cities, it is women's duty to look after their children and take care of their problems. This is also another place for women to be discriminated against by the Turkish teachers because of their Kurdishness, as they do not know Turkish. The more displaced women struggle, the more they may find coping strategies to survive. In other words, these struggles are making them somehow empowered. They are struggling collectively as women in a neighborhood and they are also supported by "neighborhood council" of the pro-Kurdish political party and/or NGOs.

As an interviewee points out; "I am the tutor of my daughter for years. Not a single day her father has gone to her school. The first years when we came from the village, the tutor of her was my oldest son. Then I became her tutor. I sat quietly in the tutors meeting and did not say anything; even I thought the ideas of the other tutors were wrong. I could not represent myself, I was very ashamed. Then the more I attended to the pro-Kurdish political party meetings, the more I started talking in the meetings. The more I talked in the meetings of the party, the more I started taking promise in the tutors meetings. The party was very influential on me" (In her house, Istanbul, 11.05.2010).

3.7. Dealing with the Violence against Women

There are various ways that women are victimized and/or marginalized in times of conflict and displacement. Ertürk (2008) argues that, "displacement and dispossession caused by conflict and war alters everyday life, manipulates identities and sanctions, making women and girls subject to rigid patriarchal control and vulnerable to domestic violence, incest among others" and also sexual violence. One of the common experiences of women in times of conflict is gender-based violence. Violence against women is a "more and distorted" problem especially during and after conflict times (Ertürk 2008). One of the most "notorious" and "brutal" impact on women in times of conflict is rape as a weapon of war (Amnesty International 2004: 6).

In the homelands of the internally displaced people, the attitudes of the state security forces towards the villagers vary as the interviewees mentioned. According to these expressions, the attitudes were mostly negative and include violence. According to the women in my study, it is mostly men who faced brutal violence from Turkish commanders and soldiers. If the family had children in the PKK, the violence that they face increased and lasted a long time as evidenced by the torture experienced by those held in custody, sometimes as long as a month. In this process, state security forces were visiting the houses of these families and women told me that, they had to face some humiliations, insults and abuses because of their Kurdishness and their family's support for the PKK. Women also pointed out that the violence of the state security forces sometimes reached to physical and a threat of sexual violence. As my respondents told me, they never faced sexual violence but they were

always afraid of it because there was sense of the threat of it. As mentioned before, sexual violence or the threats of it have been used as one of the weapons of war to victimize women directly and men indirectly by destroying their honor.

Helal, from one of the villages of Mardin exposed that, "They stepped on our bread, they wrote defamations on our beds, on white sheets. We could not understand the writings but our men could. They were giving messages to our men. Those were very extreme defamations. That is the reason that the youth went to the mountains" (In Peace Mothers NGO, İstanbul, 22.07.2010).

As it is known from the literature, violence against women also increases in the internally displaced women's own family and/or community because violence is seen as the restoration of the manhood. Domestic violence is the most observed gender based violence in times of conflict because the legitimized violence in conflict reinforces the normalization of domestic violence at homes (Ertürk 2008). Domestic violence is increased in conflict times because of the presence of weapons, violence experiences of the male family members and the reflection of it to women and children, lack of jobs, shelters and basic services and economical difficulties. Because men perpetuated and witnessed violence during conflict, they continue to perpetuate violence in their homes towards their family members after the conflict (Rehn, and Sirleaf 2002: 16-17).

After displacement, in the cities, this violence, oppression, and control on some of the women may increase as a result of being in an alienated environment. It is possible for men to control their wives and other female relatives more because unlike their villages, cities are "full of danger" and except some of the relatives and friends in the neighborhood, nobody knows each other as well as people in the villages. It is more likely for the husbands of the displaced Kurdish women use the mediums of patriarchy, such as violence, oppression and control over women and the other family members in order to hold the power on the family members after displacement process. It was mostly mentioned that, husbands perpetuate increased domestic violence when men themselves face violence from the state security forces. They define this situation as reflecting men's stress towards the women and the children within the family. This can be well defined by the concept of "continuum of violence" (Al-Ali 2007: 46).

Women's coping strategy with the domestic violence is to complain about their husbands to the pro-Kurdish political party, Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party – PDP). Interviewees mentioned that they never go to the police station because they think police never help them. According to them, police can never be an option to demand help because police beats their children, husbands and themselves. In other words, they always see state security forces as the enemy of the Kurdish population. There is a committee that deals with family issues in every neighborhood in the structuring of the PDP that includes female and male party members. The committee usually solves the problem by negotiating with the wife and husband. Because the respect towards the party is beyond debate, wife and husband usually listen to the advices of the committee and the problems are solved. If the problem between the husband and wife is unsolvable, then the advocates take the issue and open a court for divorce. But usually the problems do not reach to the point of divorce, especially among the elder population, because of the strong traditional relationships.

3.8. Political Engagement of the Displaced Kurdish Women

As it is known, non-traditional experience of women's coping or reacting strategies may potentially connect them to the feminist agenda. Kurdish women's movement is similarly started in early 1990s, as the internal armed conflict between the state security forces and PKK started. The violence is normalized in everyday life of these women as they were coming from the conflict zones and there are a lot of women's organization members in the region who have started helping other women in special issues like domestic violence and/or humanitarian aids for poverty from their personal victimization experience. These developments also affect the political life of the Kurdish women and unlike their Turkish counterparts they have captured a greater space in local administration and in the pro-Kurdish political party (Ertürk *forthcoming*). According to Ayşe Gökkan (Mardin-Nusaybin Mayor, personal communication on 26th of June, 2010), the political party has always followed the implementations of the PKK. After women's special armed group developed within the non-state armed group, women in the political party also decided to constitute special branch for women. This situation is a consequence of both the Kurdish movement's dominant ideology that is based on gender equality and the Kurdish women's attempts to be subjects instead of passive symbols in the Kurdish struggle. It can be argued that, although internal displacement is a victimization process for women from the very beginning, it may also be a potential empowerment process for women in different perspectives. Empowerment is a process and in this process

"some (women) join their 'comrades in arms' others are mobilized into self-help groups, resistance or peace movements" (Ertürk *forthcoming*).

For example, Peace Mothers Initiative is a Kurdish women's NGO. These women are directly and indirectly are affected from the conflict situation in Turkey and many of them are forced to migrate into the cities. They are at the same time, the mothers of the Kurdish guerillas who have died or still fighting in the non-state armed group. They all suffer because of this situation and this suffering situation brought them the *power within* in order to realize and be aware of the power in themselves. When they forced to migrate to the cities, they came together and started to share experiences, this brought the *power with* other mothers. Coming together is no doubt happened with the help of pro-Kurdish NGOs, parties and PKK, who have worked hand in hand in order to make Kurdish women active by mostly "itching the wound" of the guerilla mothers. But these mothers finally gain the *power to struggle* for peace. "Power with" refers to the collaboration of women working together to achieve success, "power within" means the spiritual strength that women find in themselves and "power to" is the form to resist or change the ongoing structure (Rowlands 1997: 13).

"Peace Mothers Initiative" is constituted in 1996 as a branch of the Pro-Kurdish political party and then separated as an entity. The initiative is a very active organization which you may see in every protest meetings about Kurdish struggle. Although these women were just housewives in their villages, in city centers they have became the most active protestors and strikers. Although they never crossed the borders of their villages before, they have started to travel in the cities, to the other cities and also to the other countries in order to announce their political issues. Although they were voiceless in their homes under controls of their male family members, they have an ability now to request a meeting from the Turkish president. These mothers have transformed their pain into a politicized attitude, which in other words, the situation may turned these grieving mothers into political subjects by using their "mourning" situation and turned the feminine powerless into political power and empowered these women to negotiate with the state. "Grieving mothers have for the expression of their maternal grief and anger that has allowed them to constitute themselves as political antagonists of the state" (Rajan 2010: 173).

4. Conclusion

Displacement itself is a form of victimization for women because these women not only lose their homeland by displacement, but also they lose the feelings of belonging to a community and being in a secure environment, these feelings can be best described with the concept of "deterritorialization". But because conflicts themselves create class, ethnicity and gender dislocations, it may cause "shifts and raptures in pre-war relational hierarchies" (Ertürk *forthcoming*). Because of these dislocations, patriarchal relations may also shaken by the displacement and this may spark potential for empowering women and women's agency. Ruptured patriarchal structure provides women with expanded autonomous space. But it may not always the case; threats on group boundaries and masculinities may at the same time subordinate women and cause further marginalization of women in the cities after displacement.

There are some coping strategies that women use in order to struggle against the negative consequences of the displacement. These women can be described as "empowered to cope" (Ertürk 2010) to survive in the cities. As mentioned above, in the cities after their displacement, they first cope with the situations of the loss of male head of household, even they do not lose the head of the household, they have to cope with the situation of poverty and try to find a low-paid job in order to feed their children. Kurdish women's first and foremost obstacle in the cities is the language barrier and their illiteracy. After they cope with these primary problems, they may start dealing with the public sphere problems, such as dealing with the governmental agencies, which can be described as secondary problems. After they solve their primary and secondary problems they may gain more self-confidence and may become more empowered to help other women as for example, working in the NGOs and pro-Kurdish political party.

In sum, it can be argued that the situation for the displaced Kurdish women after displacement has different stages that include some problems in different degrees. The coping strategies of these problems may have a potential for their empowerment. The more they cope with the problems, the more there is a potential for them

to transform their victimization into empowerment, which seems to be a different process for different groups of displaced women.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the interviewees that have participated into the study, to my husband Kadir KARSLI and to my mother N. Ayşen KULOĞLU.

References

- Amnesty International, 2004. *Lives Blown Apart: Crimes against Women in Times of Conflict*, London: Amnesty International Publications.
- Al-Ali NS, 2007. Gender, Diasporas and Post- Cold War Conflict, in H. Smith and P. Steres (Eds.), *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace Wreckers?*, Toronto: United Nations University Press, pp. 39-61.
- Ertürk Y, 2010. Women's Empowerment and Human Rights, Symposium on Promoting Empowerment of Women in Arab Countries: 5-6 October 2010; Tunis.
- Ertürk Y, 2008. Gender-Based Violence in Armed Conflict, Statement Presented at SIDA Conference: 12 September 2008; Stockholm.
- Ertürk Y, *Forthcoming*. Gendered Trajectories of Conflict, Violence and Peace.
- Halis M, 2002. *Batman'da Kadınlar Ölüyor*, İstanbul: Siyahbeyaz Yayınları.
- Hür A, 2010. 'Şehitler' ve 'Etkisiz Hale Getirilenler', *Taraf Newspaper*, 27 June 2010.
- Kalin W 2010. Internal Displacement in Peace Processes, www.brookings.edu/speeches/2010/0325_Internal_displacement_kalin.aspx (reached on 16 June 2010).
- Lewis B, 1991. *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu.
- Mazurana D, Raven-Roberts A, Parpart J and Lautze S, 2005. Introduction: Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping, in Mazurana, D., Raven-Roberts, A. and Parpart, J. (Eds.), *Gender, Conflict and Peacekeeping*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, pp. 1-26.
- McDowell D, 2004. *Modern Kürt Tarihi*, İstanbul: Doruk Yayınları.
- Mutlu Y, 2009. *Turkey's Experience of Forced Migration after 1980s and Social Integration: A Comparative Analysis of Diyarbakır and İstanbul*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, Ankara: METU.
- Rajan SR, 2010. From Antagonism to Agonism: Shifting Paradigms of Women's Opposition to the State, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp.164-178.
- Rehn E and Sirleaf EJ, 2002. *Women, War, Peace*, New York: UNIFEM.
- Rowlands J, 1997. *Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras*, Oxford: Oxfam Publications.
- Sümbül A, 2005. *Güneydoğu'da Fuhuş: Olaylar-Belgeler-Röportajlar – 1*, İstanbul: Elma Yayınları.
- TESEV, 2007. *Coming to Terms with Forced Migration: Post-Displacement Restitution of Citizenship Rights in Turkey*, İstanbul: TESEV Publications.

Türker Y, 2009. Köy Korucuları Neyi Korur?, Radikal Newspaper, 30 March 2009.

UNRISD, 2005. Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World, Geneva: UNRISD.

Yeğen, M., *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu*, 2009, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.