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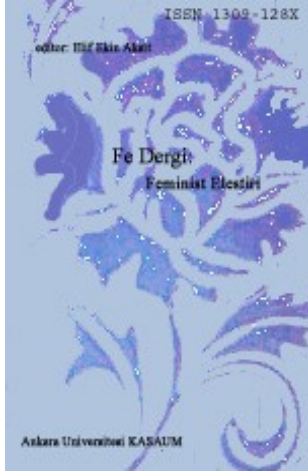
AUTHORS: Miki Suzuki HIM

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Adres: Kadın Sorunları Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi, Cebeci 06590 Ankara



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***A Paradox of Women's Employment and Empowerment in Flexible Capitalism***

*Miki Suzuki Him*

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### ***A Paradox of Women's Employment and Empowerment in Flexible Capitalism***

Miki Suzuki Him\*

*This paper discusses a paradoxical implication of employment for women's empowerment in flexible capitalism. Export-oriented factories employ women from the poorer sections of a society and their earnings make substantial contribution to poverty reduction at a household level. However, an implication of wage work for women's empowerment is contentious. Many socialist feminist critics highlight exploitative aspects of export-oriented industries. The micro-level studies point out women's empowering experiences through employment in daily life. Employing a materialist feminist perspective and Bourdieu's theory of practice, this paper examines the discussion on women's employment and empowerment in the past fifty years and attempts to understand women's multifaceted exercise of agency within patriarchal power relations and explain a paradox of exploitative employment and women's empowering experiences. It argues that flexible employment has empowered many women in the world, yet, in a way to serve flexible capitalism and patriarchy.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler: women's employment, empowerment, flexible capitalism, agency, patriarchy*

#### ***Esnek Kapitalizm Koşullarında Kadının İstihdamı ve Güçlendirilmesi Paradoksu***

*Bu makale, kadının esnek kapitalizm koşullarında istihdamının, onun güçlendirilmesindeki paradoksal etkisini tartışmaktadır. İhracata yönelik fabrikalar; çalışanlarını toplumun daha yoksul kesimlerindeki kadınlardan seçerler ve bu kadınların gelirleri, hanedeki yoksulluğu azaltmakta önemli katkı sağlar. Bununla birlikte, kadının ücretli işte çalışmasının onun güçlenmesindeki etkisi tartışmalı bir konudur. Birçok sosyalist-feminist eleştirel düşünür, ihracata yönelik sanayilerin sömürücü yönlerini vurgulamaktadır. Mikro düzeydeki çalışmalar, kadınların istihdam vasıtasıyla günlük yaşamdaki güçlenme deneyimlerine dikkat çekmektedir. Materyalist feminist bakış açısını ve Bourdieu'nün pratik teorisini kullanan bu makale, kadınların istihdamı ve güçlendirilmesi konusunda son elli yıl içinde yapılmış tartışmaları incelemekte; kadınların ataerkil güç ilişkileri içindeki çok yönlü faillik deneyimlerini anlamaya çalışmakta ve sömürücü istihdam koşulları ve kadını güçlendirici deneyimleri arasındaki paradoksal ilişkiyi açıklamaktadır. Bu çalışmada savunulan, esnek çalışma koşullarının dünyadaki birçok kadını güçlendirirken aynı zamanda, bu güçlenmenin esnek kapitalizm ve ataerkilliğe hizmet ettiği.*

*Keywords: Kadının istihdamı, güçlendirme, esnek kapitalizm, faillik, ataerkillik*

### **Introduction**

This paper attempts to explain a paradoxical implication of employment for women's empowerment in flexible capitalism. Global capital's search for locations with lower production costs has generated export-oriented manufacturing industries across the world and created unprecedented wage earning opportunities for low-educated women in developing countries since the late 1970s. Women's employment in export-oriented manufacturing is often welcomed by the governments of low-income countries as a good developmental opportunity for reducing poverty and gender gap in employment. It is generally the case that export-oriented factories employ women from the poorer sections of a society and their earnings make substantial contribution to poverty reduction at a household level (Kabeer and Mahmud 2004; Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2014).

However, studies in different geographical contexts indicate that an implication of wage work for women's empowerment is contentious. After Ester Boserup's pioneering work (1970), the first gender-sensitive

\*Asst. Prof., Ondokuz Mayıs University, Faculty of Arts and Science, Department of Sociology, [mikihim@omu.edu.tr](mailto:mikihim@omu.edu.tr), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1426-8695>, Yazı Gönderim Tarihi: 09.09.2019, Yazı Kabul Tarihi: 07.05.2020

approach to development, the Women-in-Development (WID), grew rapidly in the 1970s. The early WID studies had criticised women's exclusion from modernising economies and advocated women's participation in economic production. The WID approach, which is uncritical of modernisation in general, assumed that women's economic participation contributed to both economic growth and women's empowerment. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach was theoretically inspired by socialist feminism and emerged in the 1980s out of a critique of the WID's liberalist assumptions. The studies in line with this approach problematised not women's exclusion from but their integration into patriarchal capitalist systems which devalue and exploit women's labour (Gündüz-Hoşgör 2001; Bock 2006). In particular, they highlighted exploitative and non-transformative aspects of export-oriented industries – low wage, long working hours and irregularity (Elson and Pearson 1981; Elson 1999). According to Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson (1981: 87), it is not the number of women workers but “the relations through which women are ‘integrated’ into the development process that need to be problematized”.

A rise of female labour force participation in many parts of the world from the 1970s onward needs to be evaluated in the light of casualisation of labour and rising male unemployment (Elson 1999; Standing 1999). As men's earning capacity declined, more and more women has taken part in burgeoning insecure employment (Standing 1999). Low-educated women in developing countries are preferred as workers in global manufacturing not because of their natural suitability to jobs in light industry of garments, electrical goods and foods, which are typical products of export-oriented industries, but because of profitability (Elson and Pearson 1981). Women's labour are cheaper and more productive than men's because of their secondary position in labour market. Women's capacity to bear children, their domestic obligations, and a possibility of obtaining subsistence from men prevent them from acting as ‘free’ wage labour. Capitalist exploitation of women as wage workers is parasitic upon women's subordination in the private sphere, not to mention the insufficient regulatory protection for workers in developing countries. Therefore, according to many feminist scholars, women's employment in export manufacturing would not undermine gender subordination (Elson and Pearson 1981; Pearson 2004; Razavi 2007; Sodano 2011).

Meanwhile, micro-level analyses demonstrate more nuanced interpretation of women's work experience. Naila Kabeer (1997), for example, observed the mixed consequences of women's wage work to conjugal power relations in her study of the garment industry in Bangladesh. On the one hand, women's lives improved economically and socially. Some prepared a better life for their children. Some secured a firm place within the family. A few left abusive husbands. On the other hand, most of the women gave up control over their earnings, sought joint management of household budget and tried to maintain the male breadwinner model of marriage. They hardly attempted to alter power relations with their husbands. The overall situation was “the resilience of the pre-existing gender division of labor within the home, despite the altered gender division of labor in the market place” (Kabeer 1997: 297).

Since the early 1990s, a number of studies have been conducted on the newly emerged women's wage earning activities in Turkey. Like Kabeer's case in Bangladesh (1997), those studies found that women worked as if they did not earn money (White 1991), as part of domestic responsibilities as mothers (Bolak 1995), without disrupting gender power relations (Sarioğlu 2013), and carefully remaining in the conventional role of married woman (Erman et al. 2002). Saniye Dedeoğlu (2010) in her study of garment factory workers in Istanbul observed that married women sought to consolidate their roles as housewives and mothers rather than wage earners while young women obtained a certain degree of independence and bargaining power at home. Nonetheless, the women in those studies expressed a sense of empowerment. They positively evaluated their work experiences, economic contributions to their families and some changes in their lives: “a paradox of negative objective conditions and positive subjective evaluations” (Dedeoglu 2010: 23).

In 2013 and 2014, Gündüz Hoşgör and I conducted a research in the villages in Northern Turkey where many women worked at a sea snail factory as it had become difficult for the villagers to continue commercial farming due to such changes as a withdrawal of some farm subsidies and population decline. Technological developments, economic globalisation and socioeconomic restructuring enabled capitals benefit from disposable labour beyond borders. As we related elsewhere (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2018), sea snail production is part of the global commodity chain that emerged due to the demand for low-cost marine products in Japan and other East Asian countries in the 1990s. The production is considerably volatile because of its dependency on weather and foreign niche markets. The women were employed in this volatile production seasonally (spring, summer and autumn), flexibly (depending on weather and an amount of catches) and irregularly (payment on a

piecework basis without employee benefits) (Gündüz Hoşgör and Suzuki Him 2016; Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2017). Our analysis of a production chain of sea snail indicates that it is the flexible, irregular and cheap labour of rural women which made this volatile production grow into a profitable international trade (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2018). Nonetheless, the women factory workers we interviewed were more vocal about the benefits than downsides of the work. Many of them, especially married women, continued to do all the housework and subsistence farming. Most workers gave their fathers or husbands half or more of monthly earnings (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2014; 2017; Gündüz Hoşgör and Suzuki Him 2016). Despite the double burden and a little control over their own earnings, the women enthusiastically expressed their appreciation for that their labour was paid; they escaped rough village life and farm work; they socialised with other women; and they earned self-confidence and autonomy through the experience of earning money, making economic contribution to the family and forging a friendship with colleagues (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2017; 2019). Here is another example of 'negative objective conditions and positive subjective evaluations'.

Kabeer (2016: 300) observes in the various studies of women and employment "the resilience of certain aspects of patriarchy" across different geographies despite the endless cultural variety in the manifestations of gender inequality as well as the considerable world-wide political and economic changes over the last half century. For instance, unpaid care work continues to be almost universally assigned to women within the family regardless of their employment status. More and more women participate in labour markets and regain self-esteem while decent work is less and less available for women and men as the state-led import substitution strategies shifted to neoliberal economic policies in many countries. Now we have sufficient evidence of 'negative objective conditions and positive subjective evaluations' in women's flexible employment. How do we explain this paradox from a feminist perspective? How do we understand women's agency and empowerment without disregarding structures? How do we unveil patriarchal domination without disregarding women's agency? In order to explore a set of questions above, in the following pages, 1) the feminist critique of women's empowerment in development policy is examined, 2) the critical discussion of agency and resistance is shortly reviewed to help understanding an issue of women's empowerment, 3) an issue of women's employment and empowerment is evaluated in the light of materialist feminism's empirically grounded structural approach as an attempt to overcome the difficulties in understanding women's agency and empowerment, and then 4) it is argued that women are empowered through wage-earning activities in personal ways yet their empowerment through flexible employment serves patriarchy and capitalism rather than their own emancipation. This paper contributes to going beyond a conventional rationale that relates empowerment with emancipation as an inseparable pair and shedding light on the four-decades-long paradox in the feminist study of women's employment by unravelling how neoliberal economies empower women and benefit from their nonetheless cheap labour at the same time.

### **Feminist Critique of Women's Empowerment**

A celebrated concept of 'women's empowerment' has been scrutinised by feminist scholars in the last two decades. The concept was originally feminist and emerged as an alternative to the top-down approaches of development. Yet the feminist insights of transformative change for gender equality have lost as it is widely adopted in development policies (Parpart, Rai and Staudt, 2002). Mainstream development institutions have reduced women's empowerment to health, education and political representation for the sake of measurability and cross-cultural comparability (Kabeer 1999; Petchesky 2010; Harcourt 2010) or have elaborated, rhetorically and practically, as a tool to foster economic growth. The neoliberalising development discourse and practice have celebrated women's income generating activities, encouraged women's entrepreneurship and heroised women's self-empowerment "in such a way as to assist the market driven economy" (Ali 2014, 122). In her recent critical comment, Nancy Fraser (2013) articulates that the second-wave feminism has served a new form of capitalism unintentionally. Feminist criticism of welfare-state paternalism and a male-breadwinner model of marriage, for example, was turned into a justification of the neoliberal state's call for women's labour force participation and the two-earner family. Feminist claim for women's rights of autonomy and bodily integrity was blended into the neoliberalism's emphasis on self-reliance and identity politics. Feminist assertion for a recognition of housework and care work appeared to be responded by a proliferation of flexible forms of employment. A concept of 'women's empowerment' was appropriated by neoliberal politics.

Rosalind Petchesky (2010) declares her reservations about the term, 'empowerment', for its emptied significance. She says that gender equality would not be determined, for instance, by the number of women in

the parliament. 'Empowerment' requires a more nuanced and contextualised understanding. According to Wendy Harcourt (2010, 211-212), the policy of gender mainstreaming of many institutions (the UN in the first place) put women at the centre of developmental issues without doing "little to transform patriarchal gender relations". She (2010, 212) reminds us that "women are complex agents of change" like other social groups and calls for the recontextualisation and repoliticisation of 'empowerment' in real power structures. Hania Sholkamy (2010) points out the ineffectiveness of an instrumentalist approach of empowerment in the Arab context. Women's empowerment initiatives focus on women, tell them how unfair the social world is, and encourage them to strive for economic independence and empower themselves by, for instance, rearing chicks. This approach may help alleviating poverty. However, many women already know a fact that the social world is patriarchal and unfair, their labour is hardly visible, and their voices are difficult to be heard. Sholkamy (2010) claims that it is the major social, political and legal changes for enabling environment, not women's humble income generating activities, that would empower women. Andrea Cornwall and Nana A. Anyidoho (2010, 149) advocate the re-appropriation of 'empowerment' for emancipatory politics: "a feminist vision of empowerment ... is not so easily reduced to obedient women cheerfully shouldering ever more of development burdens".

Kabeer is one of the leading scholars who have been working on a nuanced and contextualized understanding of empowerment for a long time. Kabeer (1999; 2005) defines 'empowerment' as the ability to make choices. Kabeer explicates that the ability to make choices has three interrelated dimensions: agency, resources and achievements. Agency is a process of exercising choices, resources are the medium through which agency is exercised, and achievements are the outcomes of the agency exercised. However, the widely used scales of women's empowerment, such as infant survival and girls' education, are assumed to measure the achievements of women but as mothers for the children's well-being. Actually, it is not even known or ever considered how "to determine what women's 'real interests' are" (Syed 2010, 292). Resources are a measure of potential for making choices, not of actualised choices. In effect, a direction of human agency is open-ended and its consequence is unpredictable in most contexts. 'Empowerment' is actually a process, which is relational, contextual and constrained in a certain socioeconomic and cultural structure (Kabeer 1999; Syed 2010). Kabeer's elaboration of a concept of empowerment places 'agency' at the centre of the issue. Yet, before discussing the complexity of women's agency Scott's discussion of agency and resistance and the related debates are reviewed below for a more contextualised understanding of women's empowerment.

### **Subjectivity, Agency and the Romance of Resistance**

The conforming behaviour of the subordinate have been a central question in the discussion of relations of domination in the social sciences. A range of studies attributed such behaviour to "the inability of subordinate groups to *imagine* a counterfactual social order" (Scott 1990, 80, emphasis is in original) and saw them as "the unquestioning bearers" of tradition and dominant ideology (Raheja and Gold 1994, xxvi). While some neo-Marxist studies argued for a theory of false consciousness and attempted to show the effectiveness of state apparatuses for the active consent of the subordinate to an existing social arrangement (e.g. Althusser 2014), Antonio Gramsci stressed the naturalisation of power - the subordinate maintained their own cultural values but they were made convinced the inevitability of a state of their subordination through everyday practices (Gramsci 1971).

Based on his anthropological studies of peasant resistance in Southeast Asia, James Scott rejects the idea of a totalising power of hegemony. He argues that the subordinate *do* imagine the reversal of the dominant discourse within the seemingly inevitable situation of their subordination highlighting folk traditions (e.g. myths, songs and poems), or "everyday forms of resistance", which hint the people's subversive ideas (Scott 1985). Subversive expressions in apparently innocent folk cultures may seem to have mere cathartic significance. Yet, for Scott (1990), those traditions could be the communicative sites, or "hidden transcripts", where the subordinate share their feelings and understandings and foster alternative discourse which might help them to take more radical actions when they become plausible. Hidden transcript is both an achievement in itself and "*a condition of practical resistance rather than a substitute for it*" (Scott 1990, 119, emphasis is in original). The subordinate often speak in terms of the dominant discourse and misrepresent themselves as if they approve the relations of domination. Criticising Gramsci who concluded that the working-class consciousness was defined by the hegemonic ideology to account a lack of radical action by workers, Scott asserts that the subordinate silence and comply not only out of fear but also as a strategy; they use the dominant discourse but as a political resource; and they practice disguised resistance while offering a performance of deference. "The contradictory state of

consciousness” that Gramsci observed is a result of those façade that the subordinate strategically present (Scott 1990, 90).

Scott’s studies widened a notion of resistance and inspired a wide range of studies which attempted to recover the voices of subordinate groups which had been ignored or erased. Those studies tried to demonstrate the subordinate as the very agents whose practices historically constructed a social order along with the powerful. However, their enthusiastic search for the subjectivity of subordinates resulted in romanticising their dissent voices and decent resistance at times. Rosalind O’Halon (1988, 210) warned that the enthusiasm for finding the subjectivity of subordinates could make their voices heard but might render “their figures in the image of our own”. The romanticisation of subordinate groups blinds us from the heterogeneity of the subordinate, who in reality produce multiple discourses and multiple practices in multiple social contexts. It also prevents us from acknowledging the contingency of the subordinate as a social group (Kaplan and Kelly 1994). In their evocative ethnography of women’s subversive songs and narratives in North India, Gloria G. Raheja and Ann G. Gold (1994) mentioned the difficulty of finding a unitary female voice opposed to the dominant male discourse. Abu-Lughod’s study of Bedouin women’s resistance (1990) also shows the similar difficulty. Abu-Lughod observed the multiple forms of resistance against male domination among the Bedouin women she studied: the sexually segregated women’s world (where secrets and silence were used to their advantage); the objection to unwilling marriages (by crying, shouting and fasting); the sexually humorous discourse (such as making fun of men and manhood); and oral lyric poetry (which expressed sentiments different from those in ordinary conversations). However while the women cultivated a defiant attitude against men through those everyday practices, they simultaneously challenged the elderly of both sexes in alliance with younger men in some contexts, such as resisting the conventional Bedouin modesty. Probably, it is inadequate to speak of a subordinate group as a fixed category (O’Hallon 1988; Das 1989; Kaplan and Kelly 1994).

Feminist studies of women’s empowerment have also joined the attempt for de-romanticising women’s agency and resistance. Those studies demonstrate that agency can be exercised positively and actively to pursue one’s own goals even in the face of opposition from others, yet it can be exercised negatively to override the agency of others or passively when there is little choice (Kandiyoti 1988; Kabeer 1999; 2005; Parpart 2010). Negative agency includes women’s choice which is adverse to the well-being of other women. Passive agency includes women’s choice which is adverse for their own well-being. Both of them may serve to reinforce women’s subordination. Yet Kabeer (1999, 441) asserts that they are not ‘false consciousness but “a ‘deeper’ level of reality”, the kinds of choices women make nonetheless’. Kabeer and some other feminist scholars explain this ‘deeper level of reality’ in which women make choices by Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of doxa, or the subjective experiences of the naturalised social reality (Kabeer 1999; Syed 2010).

In later works (Kabeer 2005; Kabeer 2016; Gammage, Kabeer and Rodgers 2016), however, Kabeer argues for a transformative form of agency and distinguishes it from a compliant form of agency. Agency is consisted of consciousness, voice and action (Gammage, Kabeer and Rodgers 2016). For agency to be empowering, consciousness must be beyond the capacity to think, voice must be beyond the capacity to speak, action must be purposive. Agency that reinforces the status quo must be distinguished from agency that seeks to challenge the status quo. It is the latter that is empowering and transformative. An insistence of a transformative form of agency for gender equality is important in this neoliberal era. Yet this line of feminist argument could again risk making hierarchical distinction between the forms of agency, whose consequence is actually unpredictable, and rendering an active and vocal form of agency ‘in the image of our own’.

It is considerably difficult for women’s agency to be transformative power in patriarchal social relations, which are omnipresent and resilient. In the intersubjectively constructed social world, it is often negotiation and bargaining, rather than strong-minded individuality and subjectivity, that women find useful for pursuing their own goals (Kandiyoti 1988; Agawal 1997). It may be silence or compliance, rather than an open challenge, that is all a woman can do for maintaining her own integrity in certain circumstances (Parpart 2010; Ali 2014). It is indeed difficult to know what kind of agency to be emancipatory. Empowerment is a process but it is the process which is not always linear (Ali 2014). A form of agency which appears to be positive might result in serving patriarchy. The very action of active resistance often necessitates a deeper involvement in relations of domination and may strengthen an incorporation into an existing dominant structure (Parpart, Rai and Saudt 2002). As Scott (1990) claimed, a negative or passive form of agency may prepare radical actions that challenge patriarchy. If agency is relational and contextual and its direction is contingent and unpredictable, then it could be only analysed as a “diagnosis of power” as Abu-Lughod proposed (1990, 42). This approach would

help understanding women's agency without romanticisation, explaining the complexity of women's empowerment in a context of patriarchal capitalist relations of domination and putting 'power' back into a depoliticised concept of em(power)ment (Cornwall and Anyidoho 2010).

A realist examination of women's agency is requisite for explaining a paradox of women's exploitative employment and empowerment and this reminds us the significance of materiality in understanding the social world. A feminist sociologist, Christine Delphy (1980) pioneered a materialist study of patriarchy, or materialist feminism, as an attempt to move beyond Marx's historical materialism from an analysis of capitalist mode of exploitation to an analysis of patriarchal exploitation both within and outside market economies. The materialist feminism that Delphy proposed and practiced is an empirically grounded structural approach to patriarchal gender relations. In her approach, the 'material' is meant by economy in terms of not only monetary but also symbolic and emotional exchanges. Labour is not only economic and physical but also sexual, procreative and emotional work/service either paid or unpaid (Delphy 1980; Delphy and Leonard 1992). As feminist studies have "moved away from 'grand theory' towards empirically grounded work on specific issues and contexts" (Jackson 2001: 286), materialist feminism has increasingly examined the issues of subjectivity, agency and practice in line with what Delphy (1980 96-97) called "the materiality of ideology". Actually, it is "the economy of practices" in Bourdieu's sense (Bourdieu 1992: 123). The idea excellently grasps the dynamics of materiality which constitute and are constituted by social interactions. Bourdieu's theory of practice tells us that agents strategically and pragmatically exercise power while being defined bodily, consciously and socioeconomically within structures (Bourdieu 1977; 1992). Agents are determined by, utilise as resources and construct linguistic, economic, social or cultural systems simultaneously. Thus, social reality is "the objectivity of the subjective", that is, the result of pragmatic strategies of such agents, who act consciously or unconsciously (Bourdieu 1992: 135). In the next section, I attempt to re-read the paradox of women's employment in our study, which is resonated with the other studies mentioned above, with the understanding of women's agency and practice as a diagnosis of power.

### **Positive Power of Flexible Capitalism**

Bourdieu (1992, 125) wrote, "one has to take seriously the representation that the agents offer of the economy of their own practice when this is most opposed to its 'economic' truth". Examining the anthropological discussion of gift in terms of modes of domination, Bourdieu (1992, 126) argues that "to 'observe the formalities' is to make the way of behaving and the external forms of the action a practical denial of the content of the action and of the potential" exercise of power. Power is not always wielded in a unilateral flow and not always exercised in a coercive way as Foucault (1978, 95) famously wrote and Abu-Lughod (1990, 42-43) retorted "where there is resistance, there is power". A narrative of self-denial is a vital way of seeking self-interests without costly confrontation in resistance as well as domination. In ceaseless subjective struggles within asymmetric social relations, the most economical way of seeking interests is a conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital. In case of women workers in flexible employment, what those women commonly do is that, by taking up non-traditional wage earning responsibility as family contribution, giving earnings to the household head, fulfilling traditional domestic responsibilities and not claiming authority in the household despite their actual bread-winning role, they convert the earnings into 'gift', or debt which generates the relations of dependency. In exchange, they do not seek independence but guarantee protection.

There is a type of patriarchal society, which seems to be prevalent particularly in the Middle East and South Asia, where male social protection is made believe to be vital for women's honourable existence. In such societies, women avoid confrontation. Instead they bargain with patriarchy. Women seek male protection, rather than equality with men. Even when they have economic power, they underplay it. They pursue autonomy through the sexually segregated women's world rather than challenging male privilege publicly (Isvan 1991). By giving up a control over earnings, working as part of domestic responsibilities and remaining in the conventional role of daughter or wife, the women workers preserve social respectability as a woman and a right to be socially protected by male family members despite their ability to earn and perform as an individual in the public sphere. As a number of Asian scholars point out, the liberal bias which honours economic independence and self-reliance prevents us from seeing women's choice of male protection as an exercise of choice, or empowerment (Sholkamy 2010; Syed 2010; Ali 2014). This passive agency is a kind of women's struggle for symbolic capital in gender power relations. Wage earning is those women's new resource to bargain with patriarchy. It is empowerment nonetheless. Yet it is a kind of empowerment which reproduces patriarchal domination over women.



In a case of seafood-processing factory workers (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2017; 2019), for example, many women not only retained male protection and social respectability but also achieved an increased freedom of movement and marriage by choice in exchange of maintaining the conventional attitude of self-sacrificing daughter/wife. For instance, a daughter 'indebts' her father by helping him to support the family without displaying her contribution and challenging his authority as the household head. To observe the household head's traditional monopoly over the labour of household members masks the actual loss of his economic power. The daughter thus discreetly bargains with her father for some autonomy, some freedom of movement and a decision about her marriage. The father gives 'permission' to those requests because he is aware that the rejection would lead to a conflict which could result in a disclosure of his actual 'failure' as the household head. Giving away is a kind of euphemised exercise of power: "to be socially recognised, it must be misrecognised" (Bourdieu 1992, 126).

Meanwhile, the women's resistance to the traditional power relations in the rural patriarchal household meant their direct incorporation into exploitative capitalist relations. Within multiple social constraints, those women chose to work for wage instead of remaining as an unpaid worker of family farming. Their gender, place of living, and education as well as male unemployment made these women the flexible labour force suitable for volatile sea snail production (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2017). However, a circumstance of domination can be a setting of resistance at the same time (Foucault, 1978). Those women took advantage of wage work as an opportunity for an escape from the patriarchal household and the direct participation into labour market, consumer culture and the new social relationship (Suzuki Him and Gündüz Hoşgör 2019). They also capitalised flexible employment. Since the women were paid on a piecework basis and hence could turn up to work as they wanted, they regularly reported to their fathers/husbands a wage less than the amount they actually received. It was a common practice that the women 'threatened' their fathers/husbands in a subtle way by implying that they could quit or work less any time for a health reason or other culturally legitimate excuses when they got upset. Women perceived capitalist exploitation at the work place as rather insignificant and even as an opportunity for an escape from more intimate exploitation within the traditional kinship hierarchy (Suzuki Him and Hoşgör 2017).

A classic form of patriarchy (Caldwell 1978 cited in Kandiyoti 1988), whose authority derived largely from the household head's monopoly on the means of production, has been eroded in most parts of the world as capitalist relations penetrated everywhere. Many low-educated women in developing countries have finally refused total compliance with the old form of patriarchy by taking up the newly emerged opportunities of wage work outside home and expanding time, space and social network independent of the patriarchal household. Yet they did so without risking male protection and responsibility for the family. Thus, those women voluntarily exposed themselves to the exploitation of flexible capitalism and a new form of patriarchy because their wages were never sufficient for economic independence and earning social respect by itself. Flexible capitalism celebrates women's employment, recognises their double burden in the existing gender division of labour and welcomes their flexible cheap labour which pre-existing patriarchal systems institute. The household head 'permits', and benefit from, women's wage work outside home while controlling their economic, physical, sexual, procreative and emotional work/service paternalistically. Again, "to be socially recognised, it must be misrecognised" (Bourdieu 1992, 126). In the disguise of the progressive father/husband and the liberal employer, patriarchy and flexible capitalism generate the interweaving material conditions which make women's flexible work their 'choice' and even make those women perceive it empowering. The women's bargaining described above is an achievement, or a consequence of economic empowerment. However, this empowerment does not lead to change patriarchy, but eventually serves both the men who have lost earning power and the capitalists who avoid the commitment to workers.

### **Concluding Remarks: A Diagnosis of Power through Working Women's Empowerment**

Various case studies of women's flexible employment show a surprisingly similar process of empowerment, or a series of exercise of passive agency by women. At the micro-level, the new wage earning opportunities in export-oriented manufacturing help the low-educated women in developing countries leave domestic confinement, bargain with the family, and gain a little more control over their own lives. The women enjoy actively making choices: whether they work, how much of their earnings they give to the head of household, and how they spend the money they can keep with themselves. They see a range of choices widened, especially in comparison to other non-working women. At the macro-level, however, the "monotonous similarity" of

patriarchal constraints" persists across societies (Kabeer 2016). The women's position in production chains and in global economy is unequivocally insecure and poorly rewarded.

Flexible capitalism is an objective reality which has been constituted through a range of discrete processes of a rise of neoliberalism, global economic reforms, a shrinkage of decent work, a decline of men's earning capacity, an increase of women's participation into labour markets, and so on. In those processes, multiple agents have acted for different reasons and made discrete contributions to produce and reproduce flexible capitalism. A long struggle of feminism, and a perpetual public instruction of liberalism, have taught women independence and self-reliance as a goal. More and more women are educated in the last century. More and more women became familiar with modern aspirations. More and more women are convinced that employment is a necessity for survival, and maybe empowering, in capitalist society. More and more women find flexible employment as a pragmatic option in patriarchal society.

Historically and cross-culturally, women always exercised agency in any circumstances just as other agents in society. Women have used existing systems as resources, took available opportunities, explored informal resources and negotiated with patriarchal domination for personal benefits as Scott and the other scholars of resistance showed that the subordinates cultivated subversive consciousness, discourses and actions even in the most oppressive circumstances. Informal flexible employment is a resource among many that has become available for women for the last decades. Women have tried to take advantage of wage earning activities by developing multiple strategies not only for economic well-being of their families but also for dignity, respect and autonomy under multiple constraints of patriarchy and capitalism. Women empower themselves through employment. However, flexible employment empowers women in a way to serve flexible capitalism and patriarchy disproportionately. Women's flexible work allows men to afford not only staying unemployed or work irregularly but also doing very little domestic chores and care work. Double burden and a decrease of regular jobs are among the major factors which have a mass of women 'choose' flexible employment and provide cheap labour. Thus, flexible capitalism and patriarchy serve each other. Flexible capitalism exercises positive power over women by providing them wage earning opportunities without requiring conventional work disciplines, helping them avoid confrontation with patriarchal constraints, and giving them an opportunity of some empowerment while benefiting from a pre-existing patriarchal order which devalues women's labour.

Perhaps, women's empowerment through employment alone would not become a transformative power to challenge patriarchy. Capitalism is capable of making empowered women to serve itself and its ally voluntarily. Women's empowerment without feminist consciousness only assist patriarchal and capitalist exploitations. It may be a time for feminist scholarship to re-focus on a critical analysis of systems and policies, rather than burdening women even more by focusing on women themselves, and voice for systemic changes for enabling environments for gender equality.

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