Are there Women in the Labor Market: the Role of State and Patriarchy in Neoliberal Turkey

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Abstract: Contrary to the feminization of informal sector in neoliberal developing countries, neoliberal Turkey offers a different case. There is a huge gender gap in the labor market of Turkey. There are two factors responsible for this distinct trend in the country—the neoliberal policies and the existing patriarchal norms. On the basis of the hypothesis—private patriarchy of household in addition to the public patriarchy of state limit opportunities for women and reduce their participation in the labor market, this paper tries to answer - why is it important to consider the issues of women workers? How do neoliberal policies and patriarchy determine the condition of women workers in Turkey?

Key Words: Private Patriarchy; Public Patriarchy; Turkish Economy; Gender Equality

I. Introduction

From the 1970s onwards, scholars and researchers working on issues of globalization and development started to focus on developing countries. Issues related to labor market regulation and flexibility are central to such research. They also noticed that with flexibility there are more women in the labor market. Termed as feminization, especially in the informal sector, scholars believe that market economy and regulation has opened up opportunities for women. However, developing countries across regions show disparity in terms of employing women in the labor force. This difference is apparent between countries in East Asia and Latin America on the one hand and those in Sub-Saharan-Africa, South Asia and the Middle East and North African region (MENA) on the other. In the former group of regions, even in the poor countries, women can assume economic roles comparable to developed countries according to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) publication of 2004. But the countries in latter regions have gender inequality. Even countries with high per capita income have such disparity between genders. This implies that policies of economic development in some countries might not consider women as important part of the process of developing; therefore, women face difficulty in assuming an economic position. This mainly happen because of the problems that they face in entering the labor market and utilizing economic opportunities.

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Approaches related to development and economic opportunities of women differ in many countries as well as in academia. One can identify three different schools of thought related to gender and development. According to the modernization-neoclassical approach, gender inequalities will likely decline as a country develops. The approach of Boserup, on the other hand, considers that development paves a U-shaped pattern. Initially, discrimination increases against women because of specialized skills in production is sought. However, the overall development of economy will offer opportunities to women later. Feminist Studies, comprising the work of Tinker and Semyonov, focus on institutions like patriarchal structure that perpetuates gender inequality. According to this school, development planning lacks gender-specific concerns. This article is also based on analysis of institutionalized social structures and their impact on the female labor market. For the purpose of this study, the case of Turkey is considered.

The MENA countries are mostly middle-income economies. Nonetheless, there are country-wide differences in terms of gender inequality. However, this research is limited to the case of Turkey. Unlike many MENA countries, Turkey is not an oil economy. After following Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model in the 1960s and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) of the World Bank and IMF, Turkey adopted Export Oriented Industrialization (EOI) in the 1980s. However, foreign investment has not increased the rate of employment as expected. The introduction of new technologies also reduces women’s employment in many factories as they are considered unskilled workers. Capitalism and technological innovation in the agricultural sector also reduce subsistence work, thus exerting a direct impact on women labor. Private patriarchy of household and public patriarchy at the societal as well as state level also influence women’s employment. Hence, being a member of the G20, OECD and aspiring member of European Union (EU), Turkey offers a compelling case to consider. With its economic history as backdrop, this article will consider the aftermath of the ISI model, its impact on the economy in the following years, i.e., in the phase of EOI. Within this time frame, the role of societal factors like patriarchy will also be considered.

This article is based on the hypothesis that the recent phases of the Economy of Turkey, coupled with societal norms in practice, like private patriarchy of household and

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public patriarchy of state mechanism, limit opportunities for women and reduce their participation in the labor market. In an attempt to support this hypothesis, the following questions will be answered in the article: why is it important to consider the issues of women workers? What explains feminization of the labor market in developing countries and how does Turkey offer a different case? How do neoliberal policies and patriarchy determine the condition of women workers in Turkey?

Methodologically, this article is a qualitative research. Chapters in books, peer-reviewed journal articles are utilized for this purpose. For primary source, statistical analysis and reports of some institutions including Turkish Statistical Institute (TSI), International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nations (UN), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and World Bank are considered.

The article is divided into two parts followed by the conclusion. The first part- I. Women in Labor Market, why it is a Cause of Concern-a Case of Developing Countries, will deal with the importance of participation of women in the labor market and feminization of the informal sector in the developing countries with special reference to MENA region and Turkey. The second part- II. Labor Market in Turkey: Impact of State Mechanism and Societal Norms on the Participation of Women will focus on the socio-economic condition in Turkey as well as on the private and public patriarchy and how these factors influence women’s participation in the labor market.

II. Women in Labor Market, Why It Is a Cause of Concern: A Case of Developing Countries

This section will briefly outline why the participation of women in labor market or to be precise, economic independence of women is important. This will be followed by an overview of the labor market, especially the informal sector in developing regions.

From the 1970s onwards, after the publication of Ester Boserup’s book Women’s Role in Economic Development and the four World Conferences on Women, the issue of women’s economic role started to gain prominence in intellectual discourse and studies of economics. As a result of these developments, the questions regarding women’s economic independence is raised. There are some crucial reasons given by many scholars to establish the importance of women’s economic role. First, economic independence is inevitable for women's empowerment. Participation in the labor market enables women to elevate their economic position and social status. Second, gender equality also contributes to overall development. On the basis of comparative studies across countries, many scholars found that inequality between genders hinders economic development. Third, women’s participation not only ensures higher utilization of present human capital but also future generations as they can play a crucial role in educating their children. Economically empowered women also have a voice in decision-making on important issues. Undoubtedly, joblessness or non-participation means wastage of human resources. These factors confirm

the importance of women’s participation in labor market and them having an agency in the process of development. However, to the despair of such analysis, gender inequality prevails in the labor market with varying degrees in region to region.

Comparison of labor market in different developing countries presents that disappointing picture of gender inequality in varying degree. However, if an overall picture is considered, women are numerically less in the labor market, except for the informal sector. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 2015, globally, the labor force participation rate, of those active in the labor market, in 2015, was around 50% for women whereas for men it was 76%. But when it comes to informal employment the rate of women is closer to 50%, while for men it is 44%. Thus if statistics are to be considered, women lag behind men in the formal sector, whereas in the informal sector their hold is stronger than that of men. The reasons for this feminization of the informal sector will be stated later.

According to the ILO’s definition, the informal sector refers to organizations, which are private unincorporated enterprises owned by individuals or households that are not constituted as separate legal entities independently of their owners, and for which no complete accounts are available, as well as the activities of firms in the formal sector that employ informal workers meaning-workers without a formal work contract and any formal safety net. From the 1970s onwards the size of the informal sector has been expanding in the developing countries. As a result, employment in this sector also registers a rise. Interestingly, informal sector was not recognized by economists till the 1970s. The ILO conducted in 1972 a systematic study on this phenomenon of the economy. It was actually Keith Hart who coined this term ‘informal sector’ in his study of Ghana’s economy in the 1970s.

As soon as the informal economy grabbed the attention of academia, various agencies and organizations, reports and statistics have been published periodically to understand the expansion of the same. With its growth, there is subsequent rise in the employment in this sector. According to WIEGO’s statistical analysis, the informal employment region wide between 2004 and 2010 was as follows:

| South Asia | 82% (62% in Sri Lanka to 84%)

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Informal sector offers employment opportunities to all. Because of the informal nature of hiring and work, it is easier to find a job in this sector compared to the formal sector. In fact, there is great amount of flexibility in this sector. Low skilled, less qualified work force is also accommodated. Especially, women workers throng in informal sector in majority.

There are many explanations for overrepresentation of women in the informal sector worldwide. The informal sector offers them opportunities as they can join in the form of self-employed workers, selling directly to the consumer; contract labor, producing for another organization regularly; casual labor, working on and off for other organizations; home based workers and also conveniently go for part time jobs because of their familial compulsions. The most common forms of work are street vendors or home-based producers in the informal sector.\(^1\)

The same statistical analysis of WIEGO between 2004 and 2010 presents the picture of women’s presence in informal sector compared to men in the following table.

**Table II Percentage of employment of women and men in informal economy (non-agricultural) region wide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East and Southeast Asia (excluding China)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban China</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although the informal economy provides women with opportunities, their role as self-employed, contract labor or casual labor does not actually usher in an age of gender equality. This is evident from the fact that women in informal sector are mainly involved in low skilled, low paid, non-permanent work. Moreover, women are overrepresented in informal sector.

equality in the labor market. They are not employed in quality jobs. There is segregation in terms of employment. While men are considered for “craft skill” acquired through internship or training; women are employed in unskilled work or the nature of their work is seen as unskilled. Based on this consideration there are two kinds of jobs: one, “progressive” which promises upward mobilization through promotion and are monopolized by men; the other is “static”, job carried out by women with low upward mobility and returns. Thus, women are in the lower segment of global supply chain in a globalized world even though there are economic opportunities for all.\(^1\)

Therefore, even after the increased participation of women in the informal sector, their condition has not improved as expected. Moreover, in the informal sector, there are many issues of concern like less job security, lower income and absence of social security benefits coupled with precarious condition of work.\(^2\)

Hence, the rise in the percentage of women in the labor market does not indicate any qualitative change in their plight. Yet, economic capacity in some form is better than none. However, developing countries in different regions present a different picture of employment of women. While women in other region are grappling with the reality that even after working in the informal sector in overwhelming numbers they lack economic agency, as seen in table II, the participation of women in the informal economy (non-agricultural) in MENA region is much lower at 35%, while men account for 47%. Remarkably in other regions the percentage of women is higher or similar to that of men, in the period between 2004 and 2010. This difference between other developing and MENA region necessitates attention to understand why participation of women in the labor market, even in the informal sector is low in the MENA region and especially in countries like Turkey.

In the MENA region, women face more challenges than men in accessing employment opportunities. Therefore, their employment rate is significantly lower there. According to Enterprise Surveys of the World Bank, women's entrepreneurship remains low in this region, compared to their male counterparts. In addition to that women face more hostile business environment even if the firms owned by them is not different from that of men. Therefore, they are underrepresented in the professional and managerial position. They mainly work in the informal sector.\(^3\)


However, according to another report titled, *Opening Doors: Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa*, the informal sector in the MENA region has failed to create enough jobs to cater to young jobseekers. Their number is large as well as increasing. As the opportunities are already less in the region, it becomes more difficult for the women to compete in the labor market on an equal footing. In addition to that women are subjected to discrimination through patriarchal norms which create obstacle for them. There are some prohibitions imposed on women in the region which makes it difficult for them to compete freely in the labor market.

The particular case of Turkey in the region exhibits many remarkable trends and developments. The share of women’s participation in the labor market is low in the country. The number of women above the age of 15 who are excluded from the labor market increased from 18.8 million in 2005 to 19.4 million in 2013. However, when the Justice and Development Party (Adaletve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) came to power, they had to take some measures to meet the crisis of unemployment in the aftermath of the global economic crisis of 2008. As result, AKP came up with a policy of paying an employer’s premium if they employ women or young workers. This led to a rise in the number of paid female workers. Because of this policy now there are 3.1 million female workers who have social security. Most of these women work in the retail, education, nursing, food and beverages, readymade clothes and food sectors. Although this shows a positive development, nearly 49% of women are working informally and without any insurance or social security. Occupations which offer social security are still dominated by men. In “Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum of 2014”, the rank of Turkey is 132 in terms of economic participation and opportunities, among 142 countries.

This low level of participation of women in the labor market has to be analyzed within the socio-economic circumstances that have been changing over the years. In the last three decades, socioeconomic life in Turkey has undergone various transitions. Education became widespread, and the middle class expanded and urbanization happened. Indeed, after urbanization, there was less subsistence work in agriculture. This eventually impacted women in the labor force. They had to face new challenges to enter the labor market. Therefore, an elaborate discussion on the socioeconomic conditions of Turkey would provide a better insight into the marginal presence of women in the labor market.

### III. Labor Market in Turkey: Impact of State Mechanism and Societal Norms on the Participation of Women

In this part, Turkey’s socio-economic condition and participation of women in the labor market will be discussed. The transition of the economy and its impact on the labor market and how social norms, coupled with the same constrains women’s entry into the workforce, will be discussed. For the convenience of discussion this part has been divided

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into two sub-parts; the first part will focus on the economic history of Turkey, which can be divided into different phases and how the recent phase exerts an impact on the labor market. The second part will deal with how societal dynamics exert influence on women’s economic position.

1) Economic History of Turkey-Neoliberalism and Labor Market

Turkey is a non-oil economy. To have an understanding of Turkey’s current state of the economy, a brief account of the country’s history seems relevant. The Republic of Turkey came into being in 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 1910s. Turkey, proud of its legacy but new as a Republic adopted western methods and institutions for political reconstruction. Immediately after its formation, the leadership faced difficulty in addressing the long neglected and war-torn economy. Two sets of problems had to be dealt back then. First, they had to renegotiate an enormous external debt; second, dismantle the remaining portions of the capitulations inherited from the Ottoman era. In this process, the capitulations granted foreign powers the rights to collect tax revenue and fix import tariffs. As a result, the newly formed state had limited domestic policy initiatives to reformulate its foreign trade and fiscal policy to enhance the management of the national economy. Involvement of the state was necessary to follow liberal economic policy. However, the task was not easy to transform an agrarian society to liberalism. Therefore, the economy underwent subsequent reforms and transition.

After this phase in the 1930s-1950s, liberalization became the model for the Turkish economy during the 1950s-1960s. Then Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model was adopted during the 1960s-1980s. The ISI phase came to an end in the 1970s. However, it left a severe balance of payments crisis as a legacy, and the government had to announce a stabilization program in 1980. Assistance from the Bretton Woods institutions initiated the process of the SAP. The then military government, which came to power after a coup, implemented the SAP until 1983. The goal of SAP was to reduce price distortions in foreign trade and factor markets, liberalization of the trade and capital accounts and minimization of the role of state-owned enterprises. The EOI model adopted around that time had to rely on a complete overhaul of the economy through continuous currency devaluations and export incentives as well as wage suppression supported by the military coup. SAP also exerted its indirect impact on labor markets through the reduction in the agricultural subsidies and privatization of state-owned enterprises. This eventually led to a loss of income in rural areas and contributed to massive migration from rural to urban areas. Another blow was remarkable job losses because of the privatization of state-owned enterprises. A resultant consequence was that the urban economy faced an increasing amount of surplus labor. Around 6.7 million people migrated during 1995-2000. The share of the urban working-age population increased from 51.1% in 1988 to 63.3% in 2006. However, the EOI model did not generate sufficient employment to absorb the surplus

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Macroeconomic strategies starting from the 1950s had initiated capitalist development; market relations and mechanization reduced subsistence production in the agriculture. Thus, the number of agricultural labor got reduced. In this context, women are the worst affected as they constitute a majority in subsistence labor in the agriculture. As mechanization disposed of manual labor women found it difficult to sustain through subsistence leading to loss of employment for them in the rural areas and agrarian sector.

Pushed out of agricultural production, women who migrate along with their husbands to cities, become the surplus labor. However, there are some unique particularities in the context of women’s migration. Migrated women are more likely married which also increases their prospects of being housewives. Interestingly, migrant women are educated compared to non-migrant, which improves the possibility of employment as well if their spouses allow them to join a job, an issue which will be discussed in the next segment.

At the same time, around the 1980s, the size of the informal sector expanded because of neoliberal policies and the public sector’s eventual withdrawal from the economy. Subcontracting and outsourcing became the trend of the economy. Like other developing countries, Turkey also witnessed a marginal rise of female labor in this sector. Statistically, women’s labor force participation is very low in Turkey at 32% compared to 76% men for men. According to 2014 data, 49% of women working in the informal sector are not registered with the state as employed. Among them, nearly 2,039,000 are unpaid workers in family enterprises and 955,000 are secretly employed without paying social contribution. However, without social security, employment in this sector is not empowering for women. Moreover, as mentioned before, male laborers get the progressive jobs and earn twice than that of females. But more importantly, the share of women’s participation is low even in this sector unlike developing countries in other regions. While economy of the country offers part of the explanation, socio-cultural practices and norms

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upholds the complete picture of women’s participation in the labor market.

2) Labor Force Participation of Women- Victim of Private and Public Patriarchy

Corresponding to the economic dynamics of Turkey, societal norms and institutions also play a defining role in the involvement of women in the labor market. Private patriarchy of the household and public patriarchy propagated by the state put constraint on women and limit their aspirations. Indeed, Turkey as a country is part of what has been called “patriarchy belt” by J.C. Caldwell in 1982. The state policies and frameworks also help to perpetuate patriarchy in the country. The ISI era strengthened the idea of male breadwinner family and other patriarchal norms, by turning women from agricultural labor to urban housewives. Indeed, patriarchy is so much embedded in Turkey and some of the MENA countries that the former appears to be a liberal society in terms of condition and rights of women.

Private patriarchy, referring to patriarchal practices of households and families define certain specific roles for women. According to those roles, women are mainly seen as someone who should perform domestic chores, provide care and take responsibility for the family. These kinds of work are gendered and women are considered as best suited to carry out such tasks. This division of labor mainly enables the society to control female labor.

This control over female labor gives the authority to the male members to decide whether women can participate in the labor market or not. However, the opinion varies among different socio-economic classes in the society. Women’s employment and out of home work is accepted in the traditional section of the society in case the male members of the family are unable to provide. In the case of married women, the permission of their husbands matter most, because the idea of male breadwinner is overwhelming in the society as propagated by the Turkish Civil Code of 1926. Thus, marriage becomes an institutional barrier to women’s labor force participation. In 2008, the share of participation of single women in the labor market was 36.5%, more than twice that of married women. Even when married women are allowed to join the labor force, their husbands do not like the idea of their wives working with other men (according to opinions of both husband and wife). It is considered that their wives earning will undermine their authority in the household. So, women are not allowed to work unless it is extremely necessary.

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While the private patriarchy limits women’s entry in the labor market from within, public patriarchy exercised by the state again discourage women workers. The state institutionalizes gender division in Turkey. The regulations and practices of the state affirm the secondary position of women in the labor market. Because of these women lose their bargaining power against employers as well as male counterparts. The legal and societal framework of the country is another testimony of gender discrimination. The Turkish Civil Code, until its reform in 2001, upheld the division between men and women as breadwinner and homemakers. According to the same Code, married women’s participation in the labor market depends on the approval of their husbands. Similarly, the social security system in Turkey is also biased towards men. The state provides benefit to individuals who are registered as labor market participants. As a result, women can only indirectly access the benefits as dependents of the men as wives, mothers and daughters.

ISI era was another blow to women beneficiaries as there was an attempt to reduce social security deficit by reducing social benefits.¹

The process preceding amendment of Code explicitly shows the dichotomous interface between the state and actors of civil society, particularly women’s organizations. Feminists in Turkey, both radical and liberal acknowledged the need for reform of the Civil Code. The Association of Turkish Women Jurists, Women’s Library and Information Center, Purple Roof Women’s Shelter Association, Women for Women's Human Rights and the Association to Support and Educate Women Candidates, played crucial role in raising demands like “Civil Country-Civil Law,” “Equal Rights-Equal Participation” and “Democracy in the Family, Democracy in Society.” Although the Civil Code was amended in 2001, the parliamentary debates regarding the same focused more on issues related to the national identity of Turkey and religion, to catch up with “contemporary world”, instead of demands for rights of women. In fact, Turkey’s bid to become a member of the EU has given a boast to women’s advocacy and subsequently pushed the country towards the democratization of legal system.²

The Islamic culture cannot be ignored in this context. Although Turkey is a secular country, the rise of rightist forces helps in the spread of political Islam (Islam in public domain). With the lift of ban on hijab and more and more university students donning the same exemplifies that. However, the role of Islam in relegating women’s position has always been a debatable issue. While Orientalism and Western feminism view veiling as an oppressive form, there is turbaned feminism, as depicted in the popular media, in metropolitan centers like Istanbul and Ankara. These women offer an alternative view and criticize objectification of women’s body and their sexuality in modern society. They view women in such societies as unhappy, subordinated, exploited and unfulfilled. Hijab is considered as a means to uphold their personality and not sexuality. The greater advantage that they consider is that while donning a hijab they can go to university and workplace and their privacy is maintained even in the public realm. These women consider Hijab not

as submission to patriarchy but a means of agency. Although women can use hijab as a symbol of their agency, the case of internalization of patriarchal norms among them and their subsequent support to the right-wing government is an issue of concern.

As mentioned before the AKP has given a boast to women’s employment by promising employer premier to tackle post 2008 economic crisis. But this right-wing government supports patriarchal norms. In 2010, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a meeting with women’s organizations expressed that he did not believe in the equality of men and women and considered that they were born with different natures. He is supported by conservative women’s organizations or rather women’s auxiliary of AKP. In fact, AKP came to power after the successful mobilization of women in the low-income urban neighborhoods. The majority of them are housewives and gender stratification is internalized among them. Their support for family-oriented policies of AKP helped the conservative party to come to power. The problematic aspect of political Islam and endorsement of hijab are apparent here. Because of the gap between the private and public domains, women have double burden of both spheres and are solely responsible for household work, which is beyond the concept of shared responsibility between male and female. As a result, many women started to refrain from the labor market. The feeling of unemployment and lack of economic agency is overshadowed by the praises offered by the Islamic order as good and nurturing homemaker.

Thus, private and public patriarchies strengthen each other and also work together to ensure subordination of women. Their cohesive effort is more apparent in the domain of education. Patriarchal norms prevent girls from accessing education even from early childhood. Lower income group households in both rural and urban areas do not prefer to invest in the education of girl child. Most of the time it is justified on the ground of higher expense related to education and customary trend of inculcating household responsibilities among girls. The state also exhibits its failure to provide education as neoliberal policies of downsizing public expenditure reduce adequate investment in the educational sector. If statistics are to be considered, in 2006, 80% of employed women had an educational qualification lower than high school. However, because of constrained investment, the male counterparts also did not fare well. In the same year 70% of employed men had a degree not higher than high school.

The macroeconomic policies not only proved to be detrimental to women’s economic opportunities but also downsized the public enterprises and subsidies, thus posing more challenges to the weaker section, in this case women. When choices have to be made in such condition women are left out under the patriarchal structure (just like education of girl child). Even though the informal sector offers them opportunities, patriarchy both in private and public spheres curtails their opportunities with conditionality like assent of

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male member of the family. Although the Civil Code has been reformed, this remains a cultural norm and not a legal provision.

IV. Conclusion

The preceding overview has tried to uphold a picture of women’s presence in the labor market of Turkey and how the institutionalized structure, namely, the state and society, and norms like patriarchy, play determining role. The relevance of this endeavor has been established by the fact that development needs to be engendered. If overall gender development is not considered, an economy is not viable for the long run. Women, who constitute a remarkable proportion of the world’s population, cannot be ignored. They indeed ensure utilization of human resources of the future generation. But it has been found that even after their fair share in the informal sector, they are at a disadvantageous position compared to their male counterparts because of the nature of their work.

More surprisingly, when the focus is narrowed on Turkey, it has been found that unlike many neoliberal developing countries where women’s participation in the informal labor market is on the rise, neoliberal Turkey shows a different picture. The reasons have already been established as the economic status of the country, private patriarchy of the household and public patriarchy of the state.

Therefore, within the broader spectrum of governance in Turkey, public and private patriarchy plays a dominant role in relegating women to a secondary position in the society. This also implies that women’s share in decision making is limited. The case of the Civil Code amendment also shows how government or state mechanism gives preference to other concerns and amendment for the benefit of women is more like a by-product of the reform. Thus, although the role of civil society is briefly analyzed in the article, it becomes apparent that women’s organizations have to advocate for their cause arduously. This is difficult as the present government upholds conservative views regarding women. Even patriarchy and acceptance of a secondary position in the society are internalized among many women. The women voters and women’s organizations who support the government testify to that. Ironically macroeconomic policies that limited women’s participation in the labor market ultimately helped the rise of conservative politics through unemployed women voters. Nonetheless, neoliberal Turkey and governance process of the country fail to provide opportunities to women for their individual betterment and overall development.

However, this kind of status of women bears implication for the future, not only in Turkey but also in the MENA region as a whole. Emphasis is laid upon women’s economic agency. Without economically empowered women a nation for future generation is not sustainable and viable. Turkey being a member of the G-20, OECD, Council of Europe and potential future member of the EU, needs to address this issue of lower participation of women in the labor market. Many countries in the MENA region share more or less similar cultural and social norms and condition which implies that they have comparable approach towards gender equality (inequality in this case). Thus, in the future they as a nation and their next generation will face challenges because of the biased attitude towards overall development. As in the geopolitical level Turkey is emerging as an important player in the Middle East, the country can provide roadmap in the region for women’s improved
position in the labor market. This will only be possible when socioeconomic and political culture of the country is evaluated in favor of women and subsequent measures are taken to ensure gender equality.