

Chapter 5

Women's Entrepreneurship in Patriarchal Societies: The Case of Women's Cooperatives in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the limits of and prospects for women's entrepreneurship in patriarchal communities. The chapter investigates the patriarchal institutions and societal norms which work against women's entrepreneurial activities and women's presence in socioeconomic life in general. It also delves into women's strategies to bargain, deal, and cope with patriarchal norms and institutions. The research is based on an extensive fieldwork on the case of Turkey, a country replete with patriarchal norms and institutions. The author conducts in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of women's cooperatives throughout Turkey to better understand and explain the obstacles against women's entrepreneurship in patriarchal societies and how women deal with these obstacles in their daily, entrepreneurial practices. In light of the fieldwork findings, the chapter concludes with policy implications and recommendations for more egalitarian and prosperous societies.

INTRODUCTION

Women are consistently and considerably behind men in the world in the degree to which they have access to resources and with regard to the standards of living and personal and political freedoms. Overall, women have access to a narrower variety of jobs, get paid less than men in the same sector jobs, and have higher unemployment rates than men in all educational background categories (Sen, 1992; Almeleh, Soifer, Gottlieb, & Lorraine, 1993; Abadian, 1996; Ross, 2008; Caraway, 2009). Throughout the globe, men overwhelmingly dominate economic decision-making bodies such as corporate boards, central banks while women are typically excluded from these positions. Furthermore, women continue

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to constitute less than 20% of the members of legislative assemblies, almost 130 years after women first achieved suffrage in a nation-state (Phillips, 2012; Chant, 2013; True, 2013).

One of the most successful ways in women's struggles toward a more egalitarian society is making sure that women participate more in economic activities. When higher number of women partake in economic transactions on their own, they are more likely to exchange information and overcome their collective action problems, they are more likely to mobilize politically, and to lobby for more rights and to gain more representation in political assemblies (Ross, 2008, p.107), and the most importantly they are more likely to resist patriarchal norms and institutions that put them in a subordinate position. Women's entrepreneurship is hence at the heart of steps toward a more egalitarian world. This chapter explores women's entrepreneurial activities in male-dominated, patriarchal societies.

In essence, patriarchy refers to the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination (Stacey, 1993; Cindoğlu & Toktaş, 2002). Patriarchal societal norms and institutions translate sexual differences into socially defined gender roles, which manifests itself in a way women and men are unequally positioned in society, both in spatial and economic terms (Buğra, 2014, p.153). Patriarchy is based on a system of gender-based hierarchies of power, which reproduces male domination and female subordination in several forms even under different societal contexts vis-à-vis class, time, and culture (Kandiyoti, 1988; Erman & Hatiboğlu, 2017). In many instances, patriarchal norms, structures, and practices replicate themselves in different forms and dimensions (such as from household to workplace suppression of women), rather than totally being eliminated (Moghadam, 1996, p.5). Hence, it is vital to contextualize women's struggles in patriarchal societies to better understand which societal and institutional obstacles still linger and in which areas women progress for a better future.

The focus of this chapter will be the case of Turkey, a typical case replete with patriarchal societal norms and institutions. Turkish society is a patriarchal society, in which male domination manifests itself in many aspects of social life as well as political institutions (Kandiyoti, 1988; Cinar & Ugur-Cinar, 2018). Earlier efforts of visionaries in the first years of young Turkish Republic in the early 20th century, first and the foremost Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, resulted in suffrage rights for women, elimination of polygamy, and more public visibility for women. Despite these revolutionary changes which were a quantum leap from the submissive position of women during the Ottoman Empire, patriarchy has been left intact in many areas. Even as of today, women's primary role in the society is seen in the private sphere as being good mothers and obedient wives (Dedeoğlu, 2013, p.10; Alemdaroğlu, 2015, p.55; Akşit, 2015). As Kandiyoti (1987) aptly remarks, many women in the Turkish society have been "emancipated but unliberated".

Almost a century after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, Turkey is still miles away to ensure gender equality. As of 2017, Turkey ranks 131th (out of 144) in the World Economic Forum's gender gap index, a significant drop from an already woeful 106th rank in 2007. Turkey falls behind many countries especially in the areas of women's economic participation and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2017). According to the most recent (2017) ILO (International Labor Organization) statistics, the female labor force participation rate is merely 32 percent, which means that more than two-thirds of women do not participate in the formal labor market at all. Accordingly, Turkey suffers from what is called "feminization of poverty" (Pearce, 1978), in which increasing number of women and their children fall below the poverty line (Gökovalı, 2015, p.65). In the political realm, only 14 percent of the MPs are women (79 out of 550).

In addition to the persistence of patriarchal norms and practices, the rising tide of religious conservatism in Turkey (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009) has reinforced the expectation that women be obedient

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