Industrial Policy, Flexible Work and Female Labour in Turkey

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the new millenium, Turkey has witnessed multidimensional transformations in industrial production. The last decade was characterized with high growth, increasing foreign trade, huge capital inflows and outflows, and Turkey turned into an important manufacturing country especially for the EU region. But industrial production is still low value added production. Therefore, the target of new era is put as increasing labour productivity.

As production has become more export oriented, competition has forced capitalists to increase pressure on labour. This process has resulted in higher unemployment and loss of rights on the side of the working class. New flexible labour processes have been introduced, and informal employment has become the “norm” as the World Bank has recently reported. Furthermore, these processes have been consolidated by new legal and institutional regulations.

High labour productivity is the target of new economic era and new strategies have been developed in order to increase labour productivity. What is the meaning of these strategies for female labour? In this paper, I will try to answer the question of “what is the impact of strategies designed to achieve this target, on female labour”.

I will argue that female labour became crucial in two regards, in the new economic era.

a. First, we see that flexible work dominates labour relations. Moreover, women are characterized as ideal candidates for flexible labour processes. In our contemporary patriarchal capitalist society, women care for and provide unpaid services to household. Hence, most women can not participate in the labour market. So, it is claimed that, flexible work is ideal for women because it does not effect their domestic duties.

b. Second, women are seen as ideal labour source for the growing export oriented and labour intensive industries, such as textiles. In Turkey, these sectors are expected to compete with China, India and Vietnam. Gender roles imply that women are obedient, calm and submissive. And moreover female labour is cheaper. As a result,
women are ideal for these sectors. We know that South Asian countries had experienced this during the 1980s and 1990s. In these countries usually women were employed in labour intensive export oriented sectors. Women worked for long hours in unhealthy and unsecure conditions, with low wages.

As it can be seen easily, the two roles proposed for women are based on patriarchal gender roles. In the first case, women provide a large labour pool for flexible work. Since domestic duties prevent women from participating into full time employment, it is thought that, women can perform flexible work together with their domestic duties. Secondly, female gender roles, such as obedience, make women ideal for export oriented industries.

Therefore, we can say that capitalists’ expectations from women are based on patriarchal norms. Patriarchy provides a favourable ground for capital accumulation. And, in response, capitalist accumulation strengthen patriarchy by reproducing the sexual division of labour in houses as well as in the labour market. Hence, as Sandra Harding (1981: 136) posits, “capital mediates patriarchy, and patriarchy mediates capital”.

In this paper, first, I will briefly deal with the accumulation process, more definitely the basic characteristics of the accumulation process in the 2000s. Second, I will point to the significant aspects of new industrial and labour strategies. And lastly, I will discuss the impact of those strategies on female labour.

1. Main Characteristics of the New Economic Era

Turkey has witnessed an important transformation in the last 10 years. What we have seen is:

- Strong Global Integration,
- Huge Capital Inflows,
- Rapid Growth.

We can see from Table 1 that there was an average 6.8 % annual growth between 2002 and 2007. Exports increased 2.7 times between 2002-2008. However, as exports increased, imports rose more rapidly and in the same period imports increased 2.9 times, reaching 202 billion dolars in 2008.
Table 1: Strong Global Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>GDP growth rate (%)</th>
<th>Exports (billion $)</th>
<th>Imports (billion $)</th>
<th>Foreign Trade/GDP (%)</th>
<th>FDI Inflows (billion $)</th>
<th>FDI Outflows (billion $)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>116.8</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>139.6</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>107.2</td>
<td>170.1</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>132.1</td>
<td>202.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
<td>102.1</td>
<td>140.9</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>113.9</td>
<td>185.5</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Turkstat, TCMB, EVDS

At the same period, we also witnessed,

- Low Real Wages.
- Long Working Hours.
- Losses in Labour Rights.

Rapid capital accumulation hasn’t made any significant improvement in workers’ life. On the contrary, as described in the Turkish Industrial Strategy Document, export success depended on cheap labour.

In this strategy document, the target is formulated as “being the production center of Eurasia in medium and high tech products”. However, export oriented production is still low value-added production in Turkey. Moreover, there are serious competitors in international markets, such as China, India and Vietnam. Therefore, labour productivity has to be increased more and more.

2. New Industrial and Employment Strategies

New strategies are developed in order to achieve this target. Three documents for industrial or export-oriented production were announced:

- New Stimulus Package.
According to the first two documents, i.e. *Turkish Industrial Strategy Document* and *National Employment Strategy Draft*, a dual policy for labour is introduced: Education / Training / Technology Policy and flexible work. On the one hand labour qualifications will be increased through education, training, R&D facilities, innovations and technology; and on the other hand flexible work will be generalized. These two policies are expected to increase labour productivity.

Education/training policy aims to increase the skills of labor-power so that she can perform more than one task. Second aim is to strengthen the relation between capital and the education system. It is thought that in order to increase labour productivity one should educate labour. Participation in occupational education is very low, 36.7 percent, in Turkey. But this ratio is on average 47.8 percent in other OECD countries. Therefore, new policies are introduced:

- Life long learning.
- Training - work life harmony.
- Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP).
- Project oriented innovation.
- Entrepreneurship.

The mission of education policy is defined as raising new generations that have the consciousness of an entrepreneur. This will be done by using public resources, according to the needs of capital, and under the control of capital.

When we look at the technological aspect, we see that developing a technological base in almost all production sectors is aimed. Introduction of advanced technologies and increasing the qualifications and the number of R&D staff and technical trainers are also planned. The most crucial point is the target of increasing university-industry cooperation.

Here I will not deal with the educational or technological aspects. I think flexible work is more important when women are considered.

Flexible work, such as part time working, teleworking, on-call working were introduced recently in Turkey. By flexible work, it is planned to make the labour market more flexible. Many forms of flexible work have already been introduced but the target is to generalize them. With flexible work, employment security has been put as an alternative to job security.
I think flexible work redefines the labour-capital relation, and hence the meaning of “work”. Flexibility means that, capitalists have freedom in determining the workplace, the working time, the duration of work, the number of labourers and the wage level. For the labourer the redefinition of “work” means: informal work without job security, longer working hours, and low wages.

It also redefines “unemployment”. According to Turkstat (TUIK), someone who has worked at least one hour in the last week is not defined as unemployed. This is in fact a redefinition of unemployment. Moreover, since flexible work is proposed as ideal for women, it also redefines the sex of labour power.

In sum, the first two documents are introducing flexible work, which is seen as ideal for women. In the Employment Strategy Draft, the female potential ready for flexible work is accepted as the great advantage of Turkey.

Now let’s look at the new Stimulus Package. This is a package that brings some new incentives for capitalists, and divides Turkey into six regions. One of these regions is the south-east kurdish region. Here labour-intensive investments are promoted. This region is especially expected to compete with India or China, by the use of cheap female labour.

Minister of Economy, Zafer Caglayan, recently announced the expectations from female labour: “Labour intensive sectors such as ready to wear are mostly female labour intensive sectors. We will reorganize eastern Turkey to make it competitive with China, India, Vietnam in those sectors” (Hurriyet Gazetesi, 2012).

3. Impact of the Strategies on Female Labour

The most striking results of this transformation process with regard to women are flexible work and the employment in export oriented sectors, especially in textiles.

It is accepted that “flexible work is ideal for women”, but we have seen that in fact women are ideal for capital accumulation. Because, in contemporary patriarchal capitalist society, those are women who care for and provide unpaid services to children, the ill, the elderly, and their husbands in the houses. Patriarchal norms reproduce the gender division of labour in daily life. That’s why most women can not participate in the labour market in Turkey. So, it is asserted that, flexible work will provide wage work for women, without reducing their domestic duties. According to a dissertation written for ISKUR, Turkish
Employment Organization, “women could more easily participate in employment and do their “duties” such as being mother or wife much better while working” (ISKUR, 2007: 123).

But flexible work lets capitalists free to decide the time, period, place of work and wage levels. Besides, in most cases, flexible workers are out of the social security system. Flexible work in fact means lower wages, informal employment and precarious work. Gender roles imply that women are obedient, calm and submissive, and female labour is cheaper. They are the ones who may accept flexible work due to their domestic obligations. In fact, under certain conditions, female labour is ideal for capital.

As a result, both patriarchy and capitalism have an interest in flexible work. Women play a great role in the social reproduction of a society by caring for children, ill and elderly. In addition, keeping women at home to do housework is a way of controlling women’s labour and body by men. Besides, putting those duties on women creates free time for men, to participate in wage work, cultural activities, art or scientific activities or leisure. Hence, by employing women in flexible work without reducing their domestic duties, capitalists will find cheap labour in a form they want, while patriarchal relations are also reproduced.

Women’s participation in wage work is very low in Turkey. This fact makes women a “fruitful” labour potential for capital. Women’s participation in wage work had decreased since the 1990s. It was 34.1 % in 2002, then it dropped to 26.9 % in 2002, and 25.4 % in 2004. However, it started to increase recently as we can see in figures. It became 26 % in 2009 and 27 % in 2011. Yet, it is still very low compared to European countries. In the EU 60 women out of 100 are wage workers, but in Turkey this figure is 27 (TUSIAD, 2011).

Moreover, female labour is mostly employed in agriculture or services. The composition of female employment in Turkey is: 42.4 % in agriculture, 15.9 % in industry, 41.7 % in services (Turkstat, 2010).

The most striking characteristic of female employment is that every two women out of three work informally.

Female labour is specific because it has a patriarchal aspect as well as a capitalist one. For example, housework and care work is the primary factor for not participating in wage work. According to the Household Survey, it is the main reason for women, with a ratio of 65 % (Turkstat, 2006). Also, having children, or giving birth may cause women to leave wage work. A survey done by ISKUR showed that the ratio was 70 %. However, capitalists may also lay off female workers with the reason of having children, or giving birth (ISKUR, 2007).
Time Use Survey’s records reveal the reasons behind with figures. This figures clearly show women’s domestic burden. According to the Time Use Survey of 2006 (Turkstat, 2007) women spend on average 5 hours and 17 minutes for housework and household care. But this is just 51 minutes for men. If the man is unemployed, the figure rises just to 1 hour and 11 minutes. That is only 20 minutes more than the average. When the woman is employed she spends 4 hours and 3 minutes for housework. Hence, housework is an important reason for women’s low labour force participation rate. And it is determined by patriarchal norms.

Finally, when thinking about female labour we must also consider the increasing conservatism in Turkey. I want to point out that there is a contradiction between new social policies and the female labour strategy.

New social policies aim to support not women but the family. The target of new policies seems to be “strong family”. “Strong” family means that women are kept in the houses, and they just care for household. The prime minister has recently “advised” women to give birth to at least three children. This is just the tip of the iceberg. While health services and social security system have been privatized, women were expected to fill the gap that this process creates. The insufficiency of public nursery and care institutions makes female unpaid labour much more vital.

Patriarchal control on women’s body and labour became more visible in the last assertions about abortion. Now, it is planned to ban abortion in the near future. Feminists and various women organizations have organized crowd demonstrations against this project.

As a result, on the one hand, by keeping women in the houses, it seems to be difficult to employ women in wage work, especially in export oriented industries; on the other hand, those conservative policies may be expected to support the ground for flexible work.

**CONCLUSION**

Hence, now we can answer the question: what will be the impact of industrial and employment strategies on female labour?

New industrial and employment strategies do not especially aim to increase female employment. But they may increase women’s participation in employment and I think they will. Because, capitalist accumulation in the new era needs female labour. However, as we have already seen, they will create informal, low waged, unsecure, flexible work for women.
Women are also expected to perform domestic duties. Then, we can say new strategies are designed to pull women into production without reducing their domestic duties. As a result we can conclude that new strategies aim to support the interests of both capitalism and patriarchy, however contradictorily.

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