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Underemployment, Unemployment, Gender and Changing Conditions of (Non)Work under Neoliberalism

Eksik İstihdam, İşsizlik, Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Neoliberalizmde Değişen İş(Yokluğu) Koşulları

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Citation: Filiz, A. (2020). Underemployment, unemployment, gender and changing conditions of (non)work under neoliberalism. *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, 61, 341-353.<https://doi.org/10.26650/JECS2019-0082>**ABSTRACT**

Recent neoliberal restructuring of economies has reshaped conditions of work in various parts of the world. New forms of work demand employees to be flexible and able to adapt to changes in the labor market. Recent research has also demonstrated that neoliberalism not only reshapes conditions of employment but also of unemployment and underemployment. This article provides a review of the literature on the debate regarding the definition of neoliberalism and changing conditions of (non)work under neoliberalism. The paper aims to show that qualitative social science research can provide a fruitful base from which to analyze the way in which neoliberalism reshapes how individuals react to conditions of (non)work on the ground. For this, two examples of ethnographic studies are given which analyze local manifestations of changing conditions of (non)work under neoliberalism. The paper suggests that further research might do well to focus on reflections of these changing global circumstances in Turkey. Moreover, research conducted on how individuals adapt to changes in the labor market as well as the consequences of these changes for individuals' social lives, educational opportunities and their access to healthcare in Turkey could contribute greatly to the international literature on neoliberalism and new forms of work.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, unemployment, underemployment, gender, qualitative research

ÖZ

Ekonomilerin son dönemdeki neoliberal yeniden yapılanması Dünya'nın birçok yerinde çalışma koşullarını yeniden şekillendirmiştir. Yeni çalışma biçimleri, çalışanların esnek olmasını ve emek piyasasındaki değişikliklere uyum sağlayabilmelerini talep etmektedir. Son araştırmalar, neoliberalizmin yalnızca istihdam koşullarını değil aynı zamanda işsizliğin ve eksik istihdamın da koşullarını yeniden şekillendirdiğini göstermiştir.



Bu makale, neoliberalizmin tanımı ve neoliberalizmde iş (yokluğu) koşullarının değişmesine ilişkin literatürdeki tartışmalar hakkında bir derleme sağlar. Bu makale, nitel sosyal bilim araştırmalarının, neoliberalizmin bireylerin iş (yokluğu) koşullarına verdikleri tepkileri nasıl yeniden şekillendirdiğini analiz etmek için verimli bir temel sağlayabileceğini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunun için de neoliberalizmle birlikte değişen iş (yokluğu) koşullarının yerel tezahürlerini analiz etmek için iki etnografik çalışma örnek olarak sunulmuştur. Makale, ileride yapılacak araştırmaların bu değişen küresel koşulların Türkiye'deki yansımalarına odaklanabileceğini öne sürüyor. Ayrıca, bireylerin işgücü piyasasındaki değişimlere nasıl uyum sağladığına dair çalışmalar ve bu değişimlerin bireylerin sosyal yaşamları üzerinde, eğitim fırsatları alanında ve sağlık hizmetlerine erişimleri konusunda doğurduğu sonuçlar üzerine Türkiye'de yapılacak ileriki araştırmalar, neoliberalizm ve yeni iş biçimleri hakkındaki uluslararası literatüre de geniş biçimde katkı sağlayabilirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Neoliberalizm, işsizlik, eksik istihdam, toplumsal cinsiyet, nitel araştırma

1. Introduction

Even though there is an ongoing debate on how to define and study neoliberalism (Bourdieu, 1998; Harvey, 2005; Ong, 2006; Ward, 2007; Ward and England, 2007), the concept is frequently used to examine the recent retreat of the state from markets, flexibilization of jobs (for example, the increasing demand for employees who can work flexible hours) as well as the demand for individuals who can adapt to changing labor market conditions by being able to continuously acquire new skills and change jobs. In this sense, neoliberalism does not only reshape changing conditions of work but also the absence of it and the time period when individuals “work” to be employed at a later date. This paper emphasizes these (non)work-related aspects of neoliberalism. It suggests that qualitative social science research can help illuminate the experiences of individuals in relation to changing conditions of (non)work.

For this, the paper provides an overview of the debate on how to define and study neoliberalism and discusses the changing conditions of work, unemployment and underemployment initiated by neoliberal policies. Marxist geographer David Harvey (2005), for example, focuses on the political-economic aspects of neoliberalism and provides a historical account of neoliberal policies that uphold the market. On the other hand, Foucauldian researchers like Aihwa Ong (2006) shift the focus from state policies to a consideration of how individuals are shaped through neoliberal values and practices. Other scholars like Pierre Bourdieu (1998) focus both on neoliberalism as a “programme” that promotes flexibility and also on the insecurity workers find themselves in under neoliberalism. Considering Bourdieu’s emphasis on flexibility as crucial, this paper takes neoliberalism as a social, political and economic ethos that favors flexibility, inducing precarious conditions of work as well as unemployment.

The growing scholarship that places gender and work at the center of these issues within this literature is also examined (Chase, 2002; Clarke, 2008; Freeman, 2007; Rankin, 2001). This review demonstrates that neoliberalism is a highly-contested concept. Close-up studies of reflections of neoliberalism on individuals’ gendered (non)work lives can help better explain this highly-contested concept since such research provides a robust ground to see how global neoliberalism is experienced on the ground.

In order to support this argument, two ethnographic books are given as successful examples that analyze two different cases where neoliberal policies shape people’s relationships to work: firstly, unemployed, job-seeking middle class white collar individuals in Dallas in the U.S.A. (Lane, 2011) and, secondly, how young underemployed policy makers in Seoul shape neoliberal welfare policies and how these policies influence the subjectivities of individuals who lost their jobs in the aftermath of the financial crisis in South Korea (Song, 2009). These ethnographic works are discussed in relation to the broad scholarly concerns regarding neoliberalism. The article shows that the authors successfully demonstrate the consequences of changing (non)work conditions under neoliberalism and how individuals experience these changes in their daily lives.

A main objective of the paper is to show, through these examples, that qualitative research has great potential to unearth how macro-structural issues in the labor market and global neoliberalism reflect in individuals’ lives and how individuals shape macro processes in return. In addition to encouraging similar close-up studies of local manifestations of neoliberalism, the article also aims to demonstrate that neoliberalism is experienced in gendered ways. It intends to show that qualitative methods can help reveal these gendered expressions as these methods are particularly suitable for uncovering daily gendered manifestations that might get overlooked. The paper ends by encouraging studies into local gendered expressions of neoliberalism in Turkey.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Different Approaches Towards Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism began to appear as a global phenomenon following the 1970s, attracting intellectual attention from various social scientists working in different contexts. Even though the concept is casually used to refer to a retreat of the state from different realms of life, there is no agreement on what the concept means and how it should be analyzed as a subject of study. That is because it is used to refer to a variety of phenomena, including economic policies, public policies as well as ideologies. Moreover, the phenomenon affects different areas of social life varying from relations within workplaces to individuals' encounters with state institutions. In the following, I present different approaches used to analyze neoliberalism.

Many scholars have regarded neoliberalism as a phenomenon to be analyzed in terms of political economy. For example, Marxist geographer David Harvey understands neoliberalism as a series of "political-economic practices" shaped by a turn in policies initiated by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States starting in the late 1970s (Harvey, 2005, p.1-2). In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey (2005) presents a critical history of neoliberalism, which according to him emerged as a political-economic theory that relied on the assumption that the best conditions for progress and freedom could be sustained through a free market which liberates humans' entrepreneurial qualities (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Within this framework, the state provides the necessary conditions for the market to operate but does not generally intervene in markets (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

In this way, Harvey criticizes the understanding of neoliberalism as a continuation of liberalism and distances himself from scholars who analyze neoliberalism as an ideology. For Harvey, neoliberalism is not an ideology; it rather appeared as "a theory of political-economic practices" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2) which shaped policies pursued in various countries with different political stances such as the U.S.A., China, India, Sweden and Mexico to deal with varying economic problems faced. Harvey (2005) notes that these economic policy-making practices create deep inequalities.

Unlike Harvey, Prechel and Harms (2007) argue that understanding neoliberalism as a political-economic theory does not grasp the nature of neoliberalism. Rather, neoliberalism should be treated as a "*total ideology*" (Mannheim, 1936, p. 56 as cited in Prechel and Harms, 2007, p. 8) that, while presenting itself as natural, shapes political decisions on the assumption that humans are naturally competitive (Prechel and Harms, 2007, p. 8). In order to negate this political idea treating neoliberalism as a natural reality, Prechel and Harms (2007) exhibit the historicity of neoliberalism. As the authors argue, neoliberalism emerged within a specific historical period and space and it should be treated on those terms (Prechel and Harms, 2007).

Negating the idea of neoliberalism as a natural outcome of human nature, Bourdieu (1998) also analyzes neoliberalism as an outlook that is based on the idea of the market as built on the principles of competition and efficiency. Therefore, unlike Harvey (2005), Bourdieu (1998) conceptualizes neoliberalism as an ideology whose essence is the "reign of flexibility," resulting in more flexible forms of work. According to Bourdieu (1998), this individualistic ideology destroys collective forms of solidarity such as unionization at work. Bourdieu (1998) proposes that nation-states and organizations that have a broader impact compared to nation-states such as the European Union shall help protect the "public interest" and workers' rights against the effects of neoliberalism. As Bourdieu's and Harvey's accounts show, scholars might not agree about how to conceptualize neoliberalism, but they increasingly suggest that neoliberalism is destructive and needs to be gotten rid of (also see Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001 for a widely-read criticism of neoliberal policies).

Scholars have posited similar criticisms of neoliberalism in Turkey. Şenses, for example, states that neoliberal policies have not been successful in achieving a high “economic performance” in Turkey (Şenses, 2012, p. 11). Cam also argues that neoliberal policies have had devastating effects for employees in Turkey even though some suggest that neoliberalism is advantageous for workers (Cam, 2002, p. 89). Neoliberalism has harmed workers’ rights and increased “temporary employment” and economic inequality (Cam, 2002, p. 89). Candan and Kolluoğlu (2008), on the other hand, show that the effects of neoliberalism in Turkey go beyond the labor market. They demonstrate that inequality takes spatial forms which can be seen in the case of Istanbul; the “neoliberal restructuring” of Istanbul has created new forms of “spatial and social segregation” (Candan & Kolluoğlu, 2008, p. 5).

In addition to criticisms of neoliberal policies, the embracement of the concept of neoliberalism in academic works has also been widely criticized. For instance, Hoffman and colleagues question whether neoliberal politics have continued to be in place after the political leaders associated with neoliberal policies such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were replaced (Hoffman et. al., 2006, p. 9). Likewise, John Clarke argues that neoliberalism might have lost its value as an “analytical tool” (Clarke, 2008, p. 135). That is because neoliberalism appears to be ubiquitous and the cause of various phenomena (Clarke, 2008, p. 135). Clarke (2008) demonstrates that these problems with the conceptualization of neoliberalism prevent us from seeing relationships between phenomena that might demand new analytical tools.

An example of such phenomena that demand new analytical tools is the rise of business models that rely on virtual platforms and flexible labor. Researchers are studying the changing labor conditions generated by companies like Uber, which provide digital platforms that match consumers and service providers. Many scholars point out the precarious circumstances this form of work creates. Fleming, for instance, states that this process of “Uberization” results in “growing economic insecurity, low productivity, diminished autonomy and worrying levels of personal debt” for workers (Fleming, 2017, p. 691). Fleming conceptualizes this transformation as “the *radical responsabilization* of the workforce” (Fleming, 2017, p. 691, emphasis in original). This flexibilization of the workforce through digital tools coincides with neoliberalism, a phenomenon frequently associated with the retreat of the state from the market; however, recent research exhibits cases where state institutions influence these businesses. For example, urban studies scholar Shauna Brail’s research (2018) on “ride-hailing” in Toronto shows that municipalities help reshape this new industry. Moreover, recent legal developments such as court rulings in the United Kingdom and France which recognized Uber drivers as employees rather than self-employed individuals or contractors present cases that contradict neoliberal ideologies of flexibilization.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (2006) also problematizes the widely-used definition of neoliberalism as the exclusion of the state from the economic realm. Ong argues that neoliberalism can be understood as a process in which governance is carried out through knowledge production processes which are presented as “nonpolitical” and “nonideological” “technical solutions” (Ong, 2006, p. 3). However, as Ong shows, neoliberalism is actually intertwined with “regimes of ruling” which influence “citizenship practices” (Ong, 2006, p. 6). Ong’s Foucauldian lens shows that there are two pillars through which governmentality works within these interactions. Firstly, “technologies of subjectivity” ensure that individuals shape themselves in accordance with the neoliberal ideal of a calculating entrepreneurial individualism (Ong, 2006, p. 6). Secondly, “technologies of subjection” shape “political strategies” that aim at increasing the productivity of citizens (Ong, 2006, p. 6). Ong shows that everyday practices are important grounds to study these complex relationships and the formation of new neoliberal selves.

These criticisms encourage us to rethink neoliberalism as an analytical tool. They also point out the problems with understanding neoliberalism as a monolithic category, which in every part

of the world penetrates into every social, political and economic relationship in the same way. A qualitative social science approach, showing historical, geographic and cultural specificities, can help better explain the different forms neoliberal policies take in different contexts and how these policies are received by different communities and by different individuals within these communities. Work, family and romance relationships have emerged as major subjects of research in accordance with Ong's suggestion to study everyday life in relation to neoliberalism (see for example Hirsch, 2007 for a discussion of how the concept of marriage is reshaped in relation to neoliberal values). This focus on everyday life enables a close-up study of the complex encounters between local circumstances of work and global neoliberalism. In the next section, I will discuss how neoliberalism, gender and work have been studied together and what the benefits of regarding gender as an analytic category are while studying neoliberalism and (non)work.

2.2. Neoliberalism, Gender and Changing Relations of Work

Changing relations of work have been central to the literature on neoliberalism. One of the reasons for this overwhelming presence is that neoliberalism is marked with economic practices such as flexibility and offshoring that reshape workplaces and labor processes. Concepts like "flexible labor" and "temporary staffing" diffuse into labor markets of various nation-states, and relatedly, the literature on changing relations of work under neoliberalism. Social scientists have demonstrated that women and men can experience these changes differently. Accordingly, scholars have increasingly paid special attention to conducting a gendered analysis of work to understand how these neoliberal policies engage with local gender roles and the inequalities generated through this diffusion of neoliberal processes in local contexts.

These critical studies have examined the gendered ways through which individuals labor and how changing work relations shape individuals' daily lives in gendered ways (see for example Sodano 2011; Standing, 1999, 2009). For instance, Chase (2002) examines the gendered implications of privatization of state enterprises in Brazil. As Chase (2002) asserts, neoliberalization created a flexible and insecure labor market, which impacted women disproportionately. Chase's work successfully contributes to previous works on neoliberalism, gender and labor in Latin America, showing not only the impact of global neoliberal policies on local communities but also the influence of local circumstances in shaping neoliberal processes.

To illustrate, through her research on women working in a privatized company in Brazil, Chase shows that women have been able to control their reproductivity and lower their fertility to provide better for their children even though they do not have much control on the neoliberal policies that shape their workplaces (Chase, 2002, p. 136). Chase's research demonstrates the impossibility of generalizing about the implications of neoliberalism, emphasizing the importance of including regional and local factors in studies of neoliberalism.

Likewise, Freeman (2007) emphasizes the complex encounter between the overwhelming presence of global neoliberalism and its reflection on local workers' gendered lives. In her ethnographic study of middle-class women entrepreneurs of the Caribbean, Freeman (2007) challenges Bourdieu's (1998) definition of neoliberalism as "the absolute reign of flexibility" and illustrates that flexibility, which is regarded as central to the logic of neoliberalism, cannot be understood outside its local meanings. Accordingly, Freeman discusses the local and historical meanings of flexibility and the association of flexibility with "reputation" in Caribbean history. As Freeman shows, the phenomenon of flexibility in this context is only meaningful in its relationship to the colonial history of the Caribbean where resistance to domination was associated with flexibility

(Freeman, 2007, p. 252). Freeman's ethnographic research (2007) demonstrates that women's engagement with entrepreneurial businesses and flexibility in today's Caribbean cannot be understood purely as a result of the global reign of neoliberalism but rather it needs to be analyzed with attention to the local colonial history.

While rethinking the relationship between work, gender and neoliberalism, scholars have also focused on how women construct their subjectivities in relation to changing work conditions under neoliberalism. For instance, Rankin posits that microcredits, many of which are given to women by "subsidized 'rural development banks'" in Nepal, encourage "self-help," and thus promote neoliberalism (Rankin, 2001, p. 18). Unlike many other scholars who see microcredits given to women as empowering, Rankin argues that microcredit policies do not necessarily overcome gendered hierarchies; they might even reproduce these hierarchies (Rankin, 2001, p. 32). That is because the source of continuing gender inequality is persisting gendered hierarchies and not simply the "lack of finance capital" (Rankin, 2001, p. 32). Thus, Rankin (2001) challenges the literature that praises microcredits as freeing women of traditional gender roles.

On the other hand, Elisabeth Kelan's (2009) work on narratives of women employees in the ICT (Information-Communication-Technology) sector demonstrates how individuals craft themselves in relation to the discourses of neoliberalism that emphasize individualism and competitiveness. Kelan observes that many women adopt these neoliberal values and speak of their future selves in terms of "market-driven neoliberal subjectivities" while seeing instability and insecurity as a consequence of choosing these jobs (Kelan, 2009, p. 185).

Various scholars have also pointed out that studies of gendered consequences of changing labor market conditions cannot focus on singular contexts but need to consider the effects of globalization. Studies of global divisions of labor have started including women in their analysis to examine these effects; however, as Freeman (2001) argues, these studies need to go beyond collecting data on women and consider gender as a crucial analytical tool. This inclusion will not only deepen the analysis by bringing in different approaches to understand changing relations of work, but a gender analysis also has the potential to change our understanding of globalization (Freeman, 2001, p. 1008). For example, Freeman's ethnography on Afro-Caribbean women working in the informatics sector in Barbados (2000) demonstrates changing relations of work under globalization not only through production but also through consumption. Freeman's ethnography (2000) analyzes how women workers of the informatics sector construct their identities through their labor practices as well as through consumption and by managing their bodies.

Likewise, in *Genders in Production*, sociologist Leslie Salzinger (2003) elaborates on the encounter of the local and the global in gendered terms. Through her analysis of different labor practices in different factories in Mexico, Salzinger (2003) examines how global production processes generate gendered self-images for workers. Salzinger argues against the idea of already obedient and productive female workers. According to Salzinger, these female subjectivities are far from being already formed, on the contrary, they are produced through various shop-floor practices at women's workplaces. As this example demonstrates, globalization produces new gendered subjectivities in workplaces while presenting its products as "natural."

3. Ethnographies of Changing Relations of (Non-)Work Under Neoliberalism

Ethnographic work, which builds on a close-up study of local circumstances in relation to global processes, creates a rich potential to understand how relations of (non)work change under neoliberalism. Here, I present two ethnographic studies as examples that demonstrate how not

only neoliberalism reshapes relations of work but also how individuals react to precarity and unemployment initiated by neoliberalism. These ethnographic studies also show the potential of qualitative research in uncovering the various meanings neoliberalism takes on as well as the consequences of changing work conditions for individuals in different contexts of neoliberalism. The first ethnography (*A Company of One: Insecurity, Independence, and the New World of White-Collar Unemployment* (2011) by Carrie M. Lane) examines the embodiment of neoliberalism by job-seeking unemployed white collar individuals in Dallas in the U.S.A. whereas the second ethnography (*South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society* (2009) by Jesook Song) concentrates on “social engineers” (Song, 2009, p. xiii) who shape welfare policies that create governable subjects in South Korea.

In accordance with scholars who understand neoliberalism as an ideology, Lane’s *A Company of One: Insecurity, Independence, and the New World of White-Collar Unemployment* (2011) takes neoliberalism as assuming a belief in human agency and the free market and as praising individualism and career management. This ethnography concentrates on the labor side of changing relations of work under neoliberalism. The monograph analyzes how white collar individuals who occupy a prestigious place in society attained through merit, hard work and career management and who are frequently regarded as the winners of the system embody the logic of neoliberalism even as they experience the adverse effects thereof such as unemployment and insecurity. Although many criticisms of neoliberalism point out neoliberalism’s “failure” as “public policy,” Lane’s analysis demonstrates neoliberalism’s success in managing individuals’ lives (Lane, 2011, p. 4).

Lane neither takes these unemployed white-collar individuals as “victims” of the new neoliberal order nor as “empowered free agents” (Lane, 2011, p. 9). Rather, Lane (2011) elaborates on how existing neoliberal ideologies and discourses play into job seekers’ making sense of their own situation. Neoliberal discourses shape the work values of these individuals. As Lane shows (2011) these discourses influence the ways in which unemployed white-collar individuals naturalize short-term, contract-based employment and insecurity and give meaning to work as well as to lack of work. Through the discourse of career management, individuals are placed in a never-ending process of adapting to changes, competing with others and constantly trying to be “suitable” for different jobs. Thus, job-seekers in Dallas demonstrate an example of neoliberalism’s emphasis on flexibility described by scholars of neoliberalism such as Bourdieu (1998) presented in the earlier part of this article.

Corresponding to the embodiment of the neoliberal ideology, which presents individuals as “entrepreneurs” and as “compan[ies] of one” instead of employees (Lane, 2011, p. 45), Lane finds that unemployed white collars are not angry at the system (Lane, 2011, p. 12). Instead, they see their job search as “another form of work” (Lane, 2011, p. 71). Lane demonstrates that job seeking white-collar workers shape their unemployed lives in ways that look like “real” jobs, for example, by wearing suits, going out to public spaces to seek jobs on the Internet and by being inaccessible to family members during those times of the day that resemble “work hours” (Lane, 2011, p. 71-72). In this process, such job seekers continue to search for new ways to market themselves and act as successful entrepreneurs instead of joining in with other job seekers to, for example, demand “universal health insurance” (Ehrenreich, 2009, as cited in Lane, 2011, p. 152).

As Lane shows the emphasis on career management distances these individuals from the idea of collective action as they do not see it as a realistic solution. Unemployed white-collar workers perceive unemployment as a natural part of their professional lives rather than as an “anomaly” (Lane, 2011, p. 48). However, Lane asserts that the fact that job seekers do not protest the neoliber-

eral society they live in should not be understood as an adverse effect of the culture of career management (Lane, 2011, p. 130). Rather, it is an intended reaction by the neoliberal ideology to cover its failure in creating a secure environment for employees (Lane, 2011, p. 130).

Lane (2011) also demonstrates that the experiences of unemployed white-collar workers under neoliberalism are gendered. That is to say, women and men experience unemployment differently because the number of dual-income households is increasing. In addition, the meaning of job loss, as well as that of femininity and masculinity, is changing. Although it has not yet entirely disappeared, the stigmatization of unemployed middle-class men is decreasing whereas social pressure on unemployed women has not decreased (Lane, 2011, p. 122). Moreover, men may perceive being uncomfortable with their wives' financial assistance as a sign of weakness and therefore present themselves as comfortable with such assistance as the title of Lane's chapter "Man Enough to Let My Wife Support Me" illustrates (see Chapter 5 of Lane, 2011). As Lane shows in this chapter, although downward mobility is still seen as a failure for men, working in lower status jobs can be legitimized because men can present working in those jobs as a commitment to being self-sacrificing husbands or fathers. In other words, men are able to employ "alternative standards of masculinity" (Lane, 2011, p. 120). Lane's findings suggest that depending on a spouse's income can be emotionally much more difficult for women than it is for men. One of Lane's job-seeking female interviewees declares that she feels "needy" and under emotional pressure since she gets help from her boyfriend (Lane, 2011, p. 124). As this intimate example and Lane's deep ethnographic account of unemployed individuals' gendered experiences of job search show, qualitative research can provide a rich account of experiences of neoliberalism.

Likewise, in *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*, Jesook Song (2009) analyzes how a neoliberal society is formed and how individuals engage with this changing system in different ways depending on their future employability. For Song, neoliberalism does not only refer to political economic processes (in contrast to Harvey's conceptualization of neoliberalism) but also to a "social ethos" that shapes individuals (Song, 2009, p. x). Song draws attention to how "governable subjects," i.e. "deserving citizens" are produced through welfare policies. Song's discourse analysis shows the creation of the category of "the IMF homeless" in the aftermath of the crisis—those who are thought to deserve welfare aid since they have the potential to re-join the workforce—and the "undeserving" homeless who have been on the streets for long and cannot be easily rehabilitated and integrated into the new neoliberal order (Song, 2009, p. xi).

Song examines "social governing" practices of South Korea's neoliberal regime which includes governmental, non-governmental as well as quasi-governmental actors (Song, 2009, p. x-xii). Song interviews underemployed young adults as well as experts who work as state agents and shape public policies regarding welfare. In Song's account, young underemployed people appear as both those affected by the South Korean state's neoliberal policies and as those who shape these policies. Thus, Song shows that individuals are not simply pushed by the neoliberal system to jobs that they are too qualified for, but that this unemployed educated youth is also the producer of this system.

In accordance with the emphasis placed on the historicity of neoliberal contexts discussed in this article, Song (2009) presents a history of how both the labor market and the discourses on the self changed with the IMF Crisis and with Kim Dae Jung's policies. Thus, Song demystifies liberalization together with neoliberalism by challenging liberal criticisms of the latter. As Song states, neoliberalism is not a bad version of liberalism. Rather, the formation of liberal, individualistic agents created the ground for the neoliberal ethos in South Korea (Song, 2009, p. 134). Entrepreneurship and creativity presented as necessary and natural values in the democratic era

were carved into new governable subjects (Song, 2009, p. 136). As Song argues, the new language of neoliberalism which presents an ideal of a democratic society and liberal, self-reliant citizens was utilized both by the state which wanted to pursue neoliberal policies under Kim Dae Jung and by citizens who wanted to be free from the state (Song, 2009, p. 2-3). Nevertheless, instead of retreating from citizens' lives, the South Korean state in fact increased its impact on individuals' lives by partnering with non-governmental organizations. This meant that citizens faced a different form of governing instead of becoming free from state rule (Song, 2009, p. 13).

According to Song (2009), this new "deserving citizenship" discourse had gendered consequences as well. For example, men were frequently presented as breadwinners and accordingly, policy makers shaped welfare policies so that men appeared to be the deservers of welfare aid (Song, 2009, p. 75). Ironically, many activists who criticized neoliberal policies of the government also ended up proposing family values as the shield to the destructive effects of neoliberalism (Song, 2009, p. 49). In this sense, the existing gender roles and gendered division of labor were reproduced by both the state and the activists. Furthermore, homeless women were frequently presented as undeserving since they were violating the gender norms which place women at home (Song, 2009, p. 94).

In this ethnography, Song presents the histories that have reshaped South Korean society according to neoliberal ideologies. Thanks to her close-up analysis, Song demonstrates how individuals access welfare aid depending on their potential to adapt to a neoliberal labor market in South Korea. As Song shows, welfare policies, which are presented as outside the realm of neoliberalism, are in fact shaped by neoliberal discourses. By using qualitative methods, Song successfully problematizes the dichotomies between the state and civil society, between the state and the market, and between neoliberalism and welfare. Through this detailed analysis, she also provides a gendered analysis of local manifestations of neoliberalism in South Korea.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have reviewed the literatures on neoliberalism and the impact of neoliberal policies on work as well as the scholarship pointing out the importance of including gender as an analytical lens in these studies. In addition to the reasons stated in the literature review above, incorporating gender in the analysis of changing conditions of (non)work under neoliberalism is also crucial for displaying the historicity of neoliberalism and the possibility of change. Incorporating gender in social science studies of neoliberalism will help better explain how neoliberal discourses create subjects while engaging with patriarchal relations.

Regardless of the subject or approach of studies of neoliberalism—whether the concept is understood as ideology, economic theory or as public policy—qualitative research has potential in illuminating these encounters and layers of power relations. Qualitative research creates the means to uncover how macro-processes such as neoliberalization of labor markets are reflected in the experience of individuals. Everyday lives of workers, the unemployed and underemployed are where these complex relations are experienced, reproduced and challenged. In this sense, everyday life practices provide social scientists with a great deal of opportunities to understand changing conditions of work under neoliberalism.

The two ethnographies discussed in this article provide examples for this possibility. Both studies aim to present the consequences of changing economic conditions under neoliberalism. They present the accounts of different segments of two different societies that have experienced the adverse effects of neoliberalism: i.e. middle class high tech employees in the U.S.A. who recently lost their jobs, and those who have become homeless as well as those who have been employed in jobs they are too qualified for to shape neoliberal policies following the debt crisis in

South Korea. Lane (2011) examines how job-seeking individuals embody the principles of neoliberalism and how these principles shape the meanings they give to their job search. On the other hand, Song (2009) focuses on “social engineers” as one of the sources of the creation of neoliberal discourses who both determine social policies and are also subject to them.

Both ethnographies are informed by debates in the literature, which propose the relevance of a study of everyday life as well as the encounter between local particularities and global neoliberalism in explaining changing economic conditions. The monographs elaborate on the ways through which local meanings of (non)work interact with neoliberal policies and the restructuring of economy in two different contexts. Moreover, Song (2009) also considers and presents the historical processes that paved the way for neoliberal ideology to flourish in South Korea.

Lane’s ethnography (2011) on white collar job seekers in Dallas complicates—or, possibly, clarifies—our understanding of neoliberalism with regard to the encounter between “the local” and “the global.” The monograph negates the idea of neoliberalism as a pure reflection of American imperialism and as an unavoidable penetration of globalized American values in non-Western contexts. It does so by presenting the consequences of neoliberal policies for white-collar individuals in the U.S.A. Lane (2011) presents neoliberalism as an ideology governing individuals’ lives; however, an analysis of the role of the neoliberal state is not central to her analysis. On the other hand, for Song (2009), the ways through which states control individuals’ lives are central to understanding neoliberalism. In accordance with Ong’s (2006) account on the relationship between the definitions of citizenship and being eligible for welfare under neoliberalism, Song (2009) examines how definitions of citizenship are produced in relation to the place of citizens in the labor market.

An important common point of these two ethnographies is that both are curious about the possibilities of change. Song’s work is informed by her curiosity about change stemming from “individual”- as well as “national identity-based” struggles (Song, 2009, p. xiv). Lane (2011), on the other hand, examines the lack of faith in collective action among white collar job seekers as an obstacle to change. Both ethnographies also demonstrate gendered consequences of neoliberalism.

These examples show not only the changing conditions of work but also how these changes reshape other areas of life. Further research could analyze how similar processes take place in other contexts. While there is growing research on neoliberalism in Turkey (Akyol 2016; Kurmuş 2010; Polat & Basmacı 2018), further research could focus on manifestations of these changing global circumstances in relation to local particularities in Turkey. For example, research could be conducted on how individuals adapt to neoliberal changes in the labor market in gendered ways, how flexibilization of jobs influence individuals’ social lives, and how these changing circumstances influence educational opportunities and individuals’ access to healthcare in Turkey. Such research will contribute greatly to the international literature on neoliberalism and new forms of work by showing the encounter between global neoliberalism and local particularities.

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