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Women's Empowerment and Emancipation Through Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia and Sweden

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Abstract

Critical perspectives have called for the study of women's entrepreneurship as a route to social change. This 'social turn' claims women are empowered and/or emancipated through entrepreneurship with limited problematisation of how these interchangeably used concepts operate. Using an institutional perspective in combination with a narrative approach, we investigate women entrepreneurs' life stories on their 'road to freedom' where entrepreneurial activity enables them to 'break free' from particular gendered constraints.Through juxtaposing women's narratives in the contexts of Saudi Arabia and Sweden, the relationship between empowerment and emancipation is disentangled and (re)conceptualised. The findings distinguish between empowerment narrated as individual practices to achieve freedom for the self within institutional structures, and emancipation as narrated as a wish to challenge and change structures of power and reach collative freedom. The yearning for collective emancipation propels women's stories of entrepreneurship by raising expectations for entrepreneurship as a vehicle for institutional change. Such stories may fascinate and inspire others to engage in entrepreneurial endeavours to become empowered, but whether they reach emancipation remains an empirical question to be answered. The performative dimension of entrepreneurial narratives is, however, their ability to turn emancipation into an (un)reachable object of desire, with a quest for even more individual empowerment and entrepreneurial activity, at the same time excluding other forms of human conduct as conducive for change.

1. Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship has been recognised for its importance in the creation of economic wealth in developing (Chamlou, 2008), transitional (Welter and Smallbone, 2008) and developed economies (Hughes, 2003). Recently it has been acknowledged that women are not only good for entrepreneurship, but that entrepreneurship can also be good for women. The potential of entrepreneurship to bring about social change has been emphasised (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2008) through paying attention to how entrepreneurship is stifled through gendered norms (Cálas, Smircich and Bourne, 2009) and to its broad potential of emancipating men and women to unleash their entrepreneurial ability (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). The 'social turn' points to how entrepreneurship has been coupled with its potential to implement a social mission - making society more equal through including more people in entrepreneurial activity or reducing poverty and increasing human wealth and health. Here, entrepreneurship

shifts from being a driver of economic growth to a driver of social change, which turns entrepreneurial activity into something that liberates humans from different constraints and releases their strengths and powers. The 'social turn' holds the assumption that both women and men benefit from entrepreneurship through their emancipation. We claim that this assumption calls for a critical approach, which views empowerment and emancipation not as remedies but as practices interleaved with, in particular, women's entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is argued to provide 'freedom', 'autonomy' and 'empowerment' for women entrepreneurs as they break away from male domination in work and society (Gill and Ganesh, 2009). Scholars have shown that women, in different contexts, embark upon self-employment to cope with male dominance (Marlow, 1997) and become empowered through entrepreneurship to change the conditions of their domination and subordination (Berglund and Johansson, 2007). In this vein, entrepreneurship helps women to emancipate themselves from poverty, and allows them to empower themselves within their community (Scott, Dolan, Johnstone-louis, Sugden and Wu, 2012) and therefore liberate themselves from subordination, patriarchy and labour market discrimination in both developed (Sundin and Holmquist, 1989; Raheim and Bolden, 1995) and developing country contexts (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010; 2012; Datta and Gailey, 2012). The conceptual pairing and interchangeable use of emancipation/empowerment has turned into an important concept conducive to studying women's entrepreneurship.

Studies investigating emancipation/empowerment of women through entrepreneurship have demonstrated the personal and financial gains of their entrepreneuring (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Al-Dajani, Carter, Shaw and Marlow, 2015; Goss, Jones, Betta and Latham, 2011) while emphasising the importance of context for the formal (e.g. policies, laws and regulations) and informal institutional conditions (norms and attitudes in society) surrounding the women entrepreneurs (Welter, 2011). Although entrepreneurship is generally seen to empower/emancipate women from oppressive systems in both the formal and informal institutional spheres, this has recently been questioned. Some argue that women's entrepreneurial endeavours are no more likely to change the status quo (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016) whilst others believe the women's efforts in fact perpetuate their oppression within the pervasive system

(Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn, Dey, Tedmanson and Essers, 2014).

Reviewing the debates around the bright and dark sides of women's entrepreneurship calls for an analytical distinction of the two-headed phenomenon of empowerment and emancipation that takes power, narratives and context into account. In this article, we adopt Inglis' (1997) approach to empowerment and emancipation to make this analytical distinction. We define empowerment as a means for people to develop capacities through which they can act successfully within the existing system and structures of power (e.g. entrepreneurial skills such as seeing opportunities to act upon). Emancipation, on the other hand, concerns a critical analysis of power that might bring about resistance through which existing systems of power can be subverted. This distinction makes it possible to interrogate what the 'social turn' may mean for women entrepreneurs and what the potential shortcomings of this turn may be.

Based on a narrative analysis of the life stories (Maitlis, 2012) of 26 women entrepreneurs, themes of subordination, empowerment and emancipation are identified. We followed a four-step narrative analysis, asking: How do women entrepreneurs feel about freedom, and how is empowerment and emancipation narrated in their stories? What the 26 women have in common is a quest for freedom and agency for themselves, and subsequently for other women. What separates them is that they operate in two very different contexts. Half of the women operate in the context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a country which adheres to conservative Islamic Sharia law, and where women have recently been encouraged into entrepreneurship by the government (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report, 2017) as part of the State Development Plans, yet continue to be constrained by blatant gender-discrimination laws (Chamlou, 2008; Amnesty International Report, 2017). The other half of the women operate in the context of Sweden, a liberal democracy which strongly advocates gender equality and where women are encouraged by the state to switch from wage labour to entrepreneurship and business (Ahl, Berglund, Pettersson and Tillmar, 2014). This provides contrasting national contexts, where some women carry out their entrepreneurship in a country ranked 141 on the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2016) and some in a context known as a forerunner of equality currently ranking 4th in the same Index. Yet the findings bridge this vast

numerical gap by juxtaposing the cases, thus bringing to light some stark similarities of the ever-continuing gender power struggles of egalitarianism. Before presenting the women entrepreneurs life-stories we introduce the theoretical framework and our ethnographic approach.

2. Emancipation and empowerment in women´s entrepreneurship

To disentangle the several theories of the conceptual pair of empowerment/emancipation, we begin by discussing how it has been researched in studies of (women's) entrepreneurship, focusing on the assumptions made and the problems stressed. To find a conceptual distinction that helps us to analyse the narratives of women entrepreneurs we then turn to Inglis' (1997) definition of empowerment emancipation. In combination with institutional theory, this provides an understanding of empowerment and emancipation as processes comprising everyday practices of power within formal and informal institutional structures in which women entrepreneurs operate. To summarise the theoretical framework, and to set the scene for the empirical study, the two institutional contexts of Saudi Arabia and Sweden are discussed from the position of the possibilities for women to break free from institutional constraints via entrepreneurial activity.

2.1 Emancipating or empowering whom – how – and from what?

The importance of the non-economic dimensions of women's empowerment through entrepreneurship has recently been put forward, stressing how entrepreneurship empowers women by providing a platform to participate in socio-political activities that would not have been available to them otherwise (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013). Furthermore, women entrepreneurs' perceptions of their empowerment have also been examined. It is found that across developed and developing contexts, women report the positive impact entrepreneurship has brought to their lives in the form of economic security, self-identity, challenging gender inequalities and patriarchal norms (Datta and Gailey, 2012; Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013), the ability to make decisions in contributing to the household and to mobilise themselves as a collective (Berglund and Johansson, 2007).

Rindova et al. (2009) depart from these approaches by suggesting a reconceptualisation of entrepreneurial activity - 'entrepreneuring as emancipation' - where the doing of

entrepreneurship is viewed through an emancipatory lens and seen as "change creation through removal of constraints" (p. 479). Rindova et al. (2009) articulate *seeking autonomy* as one of the main drivers for becoming self-employed and a goal of emancipation, defined as breaking free from the authority of another and removing perceived constraints in a variety of environments – economic, socio-cultural and institutional. The psychological benefits gained by emancipatory entrepreneurial endeavours are also supported elsewhere. Entrepreneurs who depart further from the constraints of their environments also tend to be more satisfied with various aspects of their lives (Jennings et al., 2016).

Whilst Rindova et al.'s (2009) framework does not directly address gender relations and forms of patriarchy, it strongly emphasises an appreciation for context and the deep social and institutional aspects of entrepreneuring in the entrepreneur's environment, which perhaps led to this approach being adopted and developed by gender and entrepreneurship scholars across various contexts (Goss et al., 2011; Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter, and Welter, 2012; Jennings et al., 2016; Verduijn et al., 2014; Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Montesano Montessori, 2016). These studies are, however, critical of the *empowerment* and *emancipation* concepts within the context of (women's) entrepreneurship, questioning the degrees of freedom one gains (Goss et al., 2011); the gendered relationship between entrepreneurs' motivations and empowerment beyond wealth creation (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013); and the contradictions in the oppressive and emancipatory potential of female entrepreneurship in both developed and developing contexts (Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2016).

Although it is acknowledged that women entrepreneurs can gain empowerment through their search/motivation for autonomy, the process of simultaneously experiencing empowerment and situational constraints may lead to a limited and fluctuated form of empowerment. Gill and Ganesh (2009) describe this as 'bounded empowerment', intersected by context and experience, which provides us with a more complex view of how empowerment works. Further, Al-Dajani and Marlow (2013) argue that whilst entrepreneuring has been seen to offer some potential for empowering subordinated women within classic patriarchal societies, the scope for such remains embedded within particular contexts, as it does not represent a fundamental challenge

to the pervasive patriarchal ordering. Another dark side of empowerment is reported in the context of female ethnic minorities where "entrepreneurship is at times romanticized in the way it is constructed as a "Holy Grail" of elevation and emancipation", but where the entrepreneurs may in fact be far less liberated than one might assume (Verduijn and Essers, 2013:100). Further, Jennings et al. (2016) question the idea of entrepreneurship as a means of emancipation and departure from the status quo within a developed economy context, and argue that since "entrepreneurship itself is institutionally embedded axiomatically most entrepreneurial endeavors will reproduce constraints rather than offer liberation from them" (Jennings et al., 2016:21).

Hence, there are different *results* reported with regards to women's possibilities for gaining agency and becoming 'empowered' or 'emancipated' from the shackles of oppression and domination. In addition, the very notion of becoming empowered is *problematised*, pointing to the complexity and instability of emancipatory endeavours. These critical insights have spurred us to reconsider how emancipation and empowerment can be analytically separated, as little attention has been paid to the relationship and distinction between these two key concepts.

2.2 Re-conceptualising emancipation and empowerment in women's entrepreneurship

Conceptualising empowerment and emancipation and their ethical impact on individuals and their communities has long been debated amongst scholars across the social sciences and development studies. Some do not see empowerment as the obvious way to freedom, but as a means to empower some whilst disempowering others (Gandz and Bird, 1996; Koggel, 2013). Some argue that the concept of emancipation is weakly or insufficiently conceptualised (Huault, Perret and Spicer, 2014), because the link between agency and empowerment is misleading and, therefore, problematic (Drydyk, 2013; Batliwala, 2007). To better understand the two-headed phenomenon of empowerment and emancipation, Inglis (1997) suggests starting with an analysis of power, which leads to the following distinction between the two concepts: On the one hand there is empowerment, which is seen as a means for people to develop capacities through which they can act successfully within the existing system and structures of power. On the other hand, emancipation concerns a critical analysis of power that could potentially bring about resistance and which challenges the system of power itself (e.g. the system of patriarchy, or the system of

capitalism). Inglis proposes that there is an over-reliance on the individual rather than on social movements "as the agency for social change", which simplifies and distorts the understanding of emancipation (1997:6). Inglis views power as endless and suggests freedom or emancipation comes from resistance and turning power back on itself.

In the context of entrepreneurship, Rindova et al. (2014) argue that if we view entrepreneurial projects as an emancipatory effort then this calls for a focus on "the factors that cause individuals to seek to disrupt the status quo and change their position on the social order in which they are embedded – and, on occasion, the social order itself" (2009:478). Scholars have therefore called for the use of institutional theory as a guiding frame of reference in entrepreneurship research because of its strong influence on the entrepreneur and social order (Welter, Smallbone and Pobol, 2015; Fayolle, Landstrom, Gartner and Berglund, 2016; Xheneti, 2017). The institutional context draws on the concept of formal and informal institutions, viewed as "the rules of the game of a society" (North, 1990:3), where formal institutions are the political and economic-related rules and regulations, and informal institutions include the norms, values and culture (Welter, 2011; Kalantaridis, 2014). Formal institutions therefore create the regulatory frame for legitimising entrepreneurship, while informal institutions "determine the collective and individual perception of entrepreneurial opportunities" (Welter and Smallbone, 2008:507).

For us, institutional theory helps to bring depth and nuance to Inglis' (1997) discussions of 'the system of power'. The institutional context provides us with a useful lens for analysing the institution and contextual embeddedness of the women entrepreneurs we met in our study (Welter, 2011; Amine and Staub, 2009; Azmat and Fujimoto, 2016; Berg, 1997). Examples of *gender-specific formal institutions* include the overall equal-opportunities constitution of the state with regard to its laws on gender equality in education, the labour market, family policies and property rights. Examples of *gender-specific informal institutions* include "religion and traditional gender norms, which might shape the standing of women in society and influence their economic function" (Welter and Smallbone, 2008:507). Whilst the informal institutions and traditional gender norms contribute to the prevailing challenges of female entrepreneurship, *institutional change* has demonstrated positive influence on

(female) entrepreneurship in transitional societies. This leads to the following line of thought: If institutional change influences women's entrepreneurship, can women's entrepreneurship influence institutional change? That is, can their entrepreneuring empower them within and/or emancipate them from the gendered formal and informal institutions inhibiting them? And how does this vary between country contexts?

The study of the interface between entrepreneurs and institutions is two-directional, and thus changing institutions is dependent upon power endowments, groups involved in the process and their position within the institutional arrangements. This raises the question of "how institutional change can occur when actors, and the activities that they engage, are defined by the prevailing rules of the game" (Kalantaridis, 2014:17) For example, how can women entrepreneurs, embedded within their context, change rules of gender injustices? Institutional change, it is argued, will occur only in those instances where the power of those pursuing change exceeds that of those opposing it (North, 1994) and resistance to change and conflict is inherent (Azmat and Fujimoto, 2016). That is, in order to take seriously the notion of emancipation as "setting free from power of the other" (Rindova et al., 2009), then the other's *power* to constrain must be conceived in terms of 'doing' just as much as the entrepreneur's *power* challenge; the act of *setting free* may require much greater effort from some than from others; and 'setting free' is not an all-or-nothing experience. Therefore, if the process of gaining freedom unfolds over time, it may be better to think in terms of gaining degrees of freedom and emancipation (Goss et al., 2011). Hence, changing 'the rules of the game' depends on the emergence, and size, of new entrepreneurial groupings, the evolution of the power endowments or interests of existing ones and support from others in power, which may only be an outcome of long-term processes (Kalantaridis, 2014) and constant power struggles (Inglis, 1997; Goss, et al., 2011).

The lack of critical analysis and clear differentiation between empowerment and emancipation has been recognised as inhibiting an understanding of the potential power of women to 'free' themselves via entrepreneurial activity. Therefore, we argue that building on Inglis' (1997) distinction between empowerment, as a means to develop capacities to act within structures of power, and emancipation, as a critical analysis of power to figure out ways that challenge structures of power, within an institutional framework (Welter and Smallbone, 2008; Kalantaridis, 2014) can further

our understanding of how gender and entrepreneurship operate. Entrepreneurial activity thus comprises both engagement in everyday empowerment practices and struggles of autonomy, and emancipatory activities that challenge broader socio-structural modes of domination. Whether both everyday empowerment practices and emancipatory activities are part of the narratives of women entrepreneurs is yet an open question. To lay a foundation for the narratives, the two institutional contexts will now be introduced.

2.3 The two institutional contexts: Saudi Arabia and Sweden

Considering the two contexts of interest for this study, entrepreneurship has been linked to the empowerment of women in Sweden (Bourne, 2010; Pettersson, 2012), and specifically immigrant women (Berglund and Johansson, 2007), but studies also report on the importance for women's entrepreneurship in changing institutional structures, such as public childcare, which have historically emancipated women (Ahl and Nelson, 2015). The emancipation and empowerment discourse also holds a positive relationship for women entrepreneurs operating in patriarchal Middle Eastern country contexts, even when obstacles are listed (Gray and Finley-Hervey, 2005; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). This is also evident in the few studies examining the context of Saudi Arabia, where the government's State Development Plans have called for economic diversification beyond its dependency on oil production, and thus strongly encourage women, who hold much of the wealth in the country, to invest in the private sector (Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010; 2012). However, unlike Sweden, this encouragement takes place while gender inequalities, such as the inability of women to drive, rent property or travel, or to obtain medical care in certain provinces, or to run certain aspects of their business without permission from a male guardian (Doumato, 2010) continue to be institutionally supported, both socially and legally (Almunajjed, 1997, 2010; Ahmad, 2011; Skoko, 2012; Yousuf Danish and Lawton Smith, 2012; Shmailan, 2014)[1]

Saudi Arabia is a Middle Eastern country known historically as the hub of Islam. It is classed as a developing country whose ideology is built on a tribal system and patriarchal structure which, amongst many customs, "accords a secondary role to

[1] On June 24th 2018 Saudi Arabia lifted the driving ban on women after this study had been completed.

women" (Niaz, 2003:174) and "sees women as subordinates to men" (Moghadam, 2004: 144), as men's power over women in the home and in society is enforced through a legal framework that it is claimed is based on Islamic Sharia law (Doumato, 1992). Due to the logistical difficulties of entering and conducting research in Saudi Arabia (Sadi and Ghazali, 2010; 2012), very little research has explored the entrepreneurial motivations and experiences of Saudi women, or indeed the experiences of Saudi women and work in general. Studies have revealed a surge in Saudi women's participation in the entrepreneurial force over the last decade (Skoko, 2012) with women entrepreneurs owning around 12% of the total registered businesses in the kingdom (AlMunajjed, 2010). However, the institutionalised patriarchal structures and tribal traditions have meant women's entrepreneurial opportunities are bounded and are not equal to those of men. Indeed, the organisational structure of women-owned businesses tends to be micro, small or medium in terms of size and they operate mainly in the retail and service sectors, such as fashion, jewellery and interior design, as these require little capital investment (Ahmad, 2011). Like many studies focusing on women's motivation for entrepreneurship around the world, Saudi women also sought work-family balance and to contribute to society, in addition to economic gains (Sadi and Ghazali, 2010; 2012). Yet the women's struggle with gender discrimination in obtaining funding, a lack of role models and society's association of entrepreneurship with masculine traits were particularly prevalent (Almobaireek and Monalova, 2012).

Sweden, on the other hand, is a Scandinavian country in Northern Europe that is internationally renowned for its gender egalitarian image, as it was placed first in the UNDP Human Development Index (Human Development Reports, 2015). The gender egalitarian system has entailed legislation for equal access to work, education and equal pay (Bourne, 2010), Pettersson, 2012; Ahl, Berglund Petterson and Tillmar, 2014). It also entails family-friendly policies such as publicly subsidised day care, which enhances the combination of family and work (Ibid). Whilst women's entrepreneurship is often seen as a solution to balancing both a working life and full responsibility for family and children, the Swedish welfare systems do not tend to pull or push women to start a business in order to have both a career and a family (Ahl and Nelson, 2015). Women in Sweden may, therefore, neither need nor desire to be(come) an entrepreneur to resolve their social situation. Despite this, policies have emphasised

women as important 'agents of change' (Pettersson, Ahl, Berglund and Tillmar, 2017). Research has also shown that women in Sweden have participated in entrepreneurship in all sectors for decades (Sundin and Holmquist, 1989), and that for more than two decades major investments have been made to support policies for women's entrepreneurship (Pettersson et al., 2017). Women make up around 30% of entrepreneurs in Sweden (Ahl et al., 2014) and the number of women-owned businesses has increased in recent years (Sköld and Tillmar, 2015). However, the gendered pattern of work has remained the same, since women started businesses in low-paid service and personal care sectors (ibid.).

Reflecting a traditional gendered division of labour, studies show Swedish women entrepreneurs, like their Saudi counterparts, continue to adjust their business activities to their family situation and responsibility for household work (Holmquist and Sundin, 2002). However, in Sweden this flexibility has been seen as a form of empowerment, as entrepreneurship promises women they can 'have it all'. Empowerment can be interpreted broadly in the stories told by women entrepreneurs, from becoming a self-employed blogger who provides women with housekeeping tips (Berglund, Ahl and Pettersson, 2017); to mobilising women who feel distanced from the entrepreneurial norm through social support (Berglund and Johansson, 2007). This flexible use of empowerment is echoed in many other western countries, which coincides with a major neoliberal transformation praising the primacy of the market and the opportunity and responsibility of the individuals to align with the new circumstances of the market, thus leaving the entrepreneur to navigate in these new terrains (Pettersson et al., 2017).

3. Method

3.1 A narrative approach through life stories

To explore the process of 'gaining freedom' we build on empirical evidence from cross-country ethnographic research, supported by an awareness of the intersection between gender, entrepreneurship and context (Berg, 1997). From Inglis' (1997) conceptualisations we are able to analyse how women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia and Sweden narrate empowerment and emancipation through their life stories. These narratives not only convey what they do in everyday entrepreneuring, but also show how they tend to live the stories they tell (Johansson, 2004), although women have

been reported to have difficulties integrating the persona of the entrepreneur in their narrative accounts (Berglund, 2006). Entrepreneurship narratives have thus been found to be gendered, favouring the male and marginalising the female (Ahl, 2007; Smith and Anderson, 2004; Smith, 2014). Since women entrepreneurs' narratives are often seen to lack some key 'ingredient', scholars suggested studying the narratives of successful women entrepreneurs and found that they integrated entrepreneurship with feminist aspirations in different ways (Berglund, Ahl and Pettersson, 2017). Yet despite extensive possibilities for using a variety of sources, life stories may not be so easy for the individual to change, but are instructive in the sense that we become the stories we tell (McAdams 1997). Sharing this perspective, we view life stories as performative. The life stories entrepreneurs tell thus make up instances of identity constructions, learning experiences, and are "closely related to how the entrepreneur makes sense of what (s)he does, and how (s)he relates to others, recognises opportunities and gains experience" (Johansson, 2004: 286). How women entrepreneurs integrate empowerment (everyday practices to deal with structures of power) and emancipation (activities that change structures of power) hopefully adds to building extant theory from narrative understandings in entrepreneurship studies (e.g. Downing, 2005; Down, 2006; Gartner, 2007; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Johansson, 2004; Larty and Hamilton, 2011).

3.2 Sampling process and collection of empirical material

The study is based on two studies consisting of 26 comprehensive life stories told by women entrepreneurs in the two national contexts of Saudi Arabia and Sweden (13 for each country). The studies are longitudinal and ethnographic, consisting of unstructured and semi-structured interviews, focus-group interviews, observations and participant observation (Mason, 2002) conducted between 2010-2016. A starting point for the article was when the two co-authors of this article came together to discuss our ongoing individual projects investigating women's entrepreneurship in each country context and our struggles in conceptualising empowerment/emancipation through entrepreneurship.

The Saudi study was a longitudinal study, initiated in 2010 and continued until 2016. The study followed the entrepreneurial experiences of 13 women in setting up and running their organisations, with an aim to understand the everyday opportunities and

boundaries that they were encountering, and explore their strategies in overcoming them. The study consisted of observations of the women in their businesses and 13 tape-recorded face-to-face interviews in Saudi Arabia. Follow up interviews continued after the visit via Skype and phone calls, due to the financial and practical difficulties in accessing the field on a regular basis as a non-Saudi (Chamlou, 2008). The Swedish study had been following a hybrid organisation that functioned as a network of mainly women entrepreneurs who wanted to develop their ideas and start up an organisation. The ethnographic study was initiated in 2012 and continued until 2016. The hybrid organisation ("Include") was the node through which the researcher came into contact with women entrepreneurs and those who wanted to pursue entrepreneurial activity but had faced difficulties in relating to 'malestream' descriptions of entrepreneurship. The study, which followed their entrepreneurial journeys, consisted of observations, ethnographic interviews, shadowing, three focus group interviews, 15 tape-recorded interviews and participation in twelve collaborative activities and public events.

After discussing and familiarising each other with the material in each context, 26 principal female respondents were purposefully selected from both studies (13 from each country) in order to juxtapose the cases as closely as possible and to focus on their narratives of empowerment/ emancipation. Conceptually, this sample comprised women entrepreneurs who declared themselves actively engaged in entrepreneurship in order to 'break free' from a gendered constraint and who also wanted to contribute to other women's lives in some way.

3.3 A four-stage analysis guided by juxtaposition

The analysis followed an iterative and interactive process of sifting through the empirical material, drawing together the more important elements, followed by searching for patterns and themes in the 26 stories (Mckeever, et al., 2015; Jack and Anderson, 2002). This process consisted of the following four stages of analysis:

The first stage saw us (as bilingual researchers) translate and transcribe the chosen interviews from Arabic and Swedish respectively into English and share their stories with each other. That way, we felt we were able to preserve the cultural integrity of the empirical material whilst understanding and reflecting on the limitations of the socially constructed situation (Temple, 2002). It also allowed us to exercise reflexivity

throughout the process, highlighting any sensitive power relations that inevitably occur between the interviewer and interviewee (Oakley, 1981; Essers, 2009).

The second stage followed a thematic analysis of the women's life stories (Hamilton, 2011), focusing on the implicit and explicit examples they used to describe struggles they faced and practices they applied in order to 'move on' in both contexts. During this stage we exchanged stories, and read and made comments linking back to our own study. We then followed up with a meeting to discuss these observations, returned to the literature to address our comments and then booked a new meeting. This reading/meeting process was iterated in three rounds, which was key to shelving the assumption of the Western entrepreneur as 'universal' (Gupta and Fernandez, 2011) or the norm, and thus appreciating the similarities of these women's journeys, rather than their differences, which is usually emphasised in cross-cultural studies and quantitative gender equality indexes (Global Gender Gap Report, 2016). This stage resulted in an understanding of the stories as containing a narrative structure where the respondents saw entrepreneurship as a means to 'break free' from something, and when they achieved this freedom they wanted to continue by freeing another woman. What the emerging themes in the narratives showed in our study reinforced the literature, as there was the initial need to break free from *gender-specific,* formal and/or informal institutional barriers (Welter and Smallbone, 2008), which we label *subordination* (Goss et al., 2011). This was then followed by *empowerment,* which circles around what they did in stretching the boundaries to overcome subordination and act successfully within the existing system that constrained them. Finally, *emancipation*, was propelled in their narratives after their perceived experience of empowerment, and revolved around their vision for what entrepreneurship could do, not only for them, but also for all women. The narrative structure we identified thus provided us with the following general themes and phases: Moving from subordination -> Empowerment of the self through entrepreneurship -> Emancipation for self and other women.

The thematic analysis of the 26 interviews was useful in breaking down their narratives into the three-stage process of subordination, empowerment and emancipation. However, in order to convey the journey and detailed nuances of the women's entrepreneurial experiences within their contexts, at *the third stage,* we selected two of what were felt to be the richest cases from each context, which covered the

overarching themes found across the 26 stories but also preserved the women's own life stories. In particular, both cases emphasised gratitude for the opportunity they were given through entrepreneurship and how they wished to 'help' other women through setting up organisations that supported women. This way, we were able to focus on the nuances of their life journeys (Essers, 2009) through their everyday micro and macro-orientated forms of oppression and their negotiation of the structures and practices within which they are constituted (Verduijn et al., 2014). This analysis stage led us to return to the two women for follow-up interviews to focus our questions on this particular study. For example, we were able to delve deeper into their childhood and relationships and reflect on how they may have shaped their entrepreneurial intensions and subsequent journeys.

At *the fourth stage* we turned to juxtaposition as an analytical strategy in order to avoid a comparison between cultures, whereby we might risk branding the Saudi women as 'the Other' - implicitly assuming that the West is to be mimicked (Mohanty, 1988). In juxtaposing the two cases the purpose is to "let the collision of the two items [cases] make the reader/viewer stand back and think anew" (Sørensen, 2014: 48). As the purpose of juxtaposition is not to compare the two cases, by putting the two cases next to each other and making one the exemplar, we focused on finding key themes and patterns in the respective stories. This made it possible for us to see one context *in* the other and vice versa, so that the familiar becomes unfamiliar (Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Sørensen, 2014). Through this process of defamiliarisation, the phenomenon of interest can be seen anew through discerning both new similarities and differences and in engaging "the reader in a prolonged, dialectic discourse about the open-ended nature of similarities and differences" (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 161). This stage of the analysis helped us to problematise the Western narrative of entrepreneurship as the ultimate change-maker and pay attention to how emancipation worked as an attractor of hope and desire.

This juxtaposing stage, reading the Saudi and Swedish cases "into each other" was particularly key in making us return to the interviewees with 'new' perspectives. For example, reading the Saudi familial struggles in their narratives guided us to return to the Swedish context and focus on understanding their (marital) relationships and the role of patriarchy, which the women did not discuss openly in the initial interviews, but

reflected on during the questioning (thus realising that this was indeed an issue). Another example, when learning about the formal structures legally enforcing the 'male guardianship' system in Saudi Arabia, requiring women to have their guardian's signature on various forms such as guarantees for rent and bank loans, provided us with a lens which highlighted how some informal structures hindered the Swedish women. For example, whilst applying for bank loans they talked about 'male followers' who accompanied them to the bank so they would appear more professional to the (male) bank managers. Reading the Swedish context on their gender-equality policies in work and entrepreneurship helped highlight the discrepancy in Saudi Arabia's recent policies encouraging (women's) entrepreneurship, and their actual ability to legally and socially engage in entrepreneurship in a manner that was equal to men.

4. *"The road to freedom"*: The journey towards emancipation through subordination and empowerment

The journey we call "the road to freedom", will first outline the general insights from the 26 interviews that formed the themes and illustrate the underlying structures of subordination, empowerment and emancipation in each context. These findings will then be exemplified and developed by focusing on two life stories - Rama in Saudi Arabia and Sandra in Sweden. The women's stories illustrate the gendered power struggles that Saudi and Swedish women face in their everyday lives and focus particularly on the constraints they faced whilst pursuing the freedom to work/run their ventures through three narrative phases: 1. subordination, 2. empowerment, and 3. emancipation. The focus of their stories is on the crucial parts of each phase and how it led to their desire for emancipation.

4.1 Subordination: constraining gendered-power relations within a patriarchal family structure

The notion of subordination was apparent across all narratives, where entrepreneurship was referred to as the means they had used (or looked forward to using) to overcome obstacles and break free from mainly gendered constraints. The women explained how they sometimes felt trapped in their family situation, for example because their husband/partner was developing his career, or they felt that the way back to work was difficult after giving birth, or they felt trapped by family and care responsibilities in the

home. Other examples focus on their current work place, which was seen as a constraint; for example, they faced the glass ceiling (Mattis, 2004; Weiler and Bernasek, 2001) with no hope from senior management of professional development. Other examples of subordination, which both spurred and hindered women in overcoming their subordination, were male-dominated markets, where they lacked encouragement to practise their skills, or, in the Saudi cases, could not participate in them as employees (for example, in engineering and oil production). One of the Swedish women expressed how she strategically searched for feminist entrepreneurs (women and men) to cooperate with in order overthrow a particular market she found to be deeply patriarchal, whilst one of the Saudi women illustrated how she was not allowed to attend senior management meetings as a woman, and thus knew she would never progress beyond her current position.

When we juxtaposed the stories at this initial phase, the stories told by both the Saudi and Swedish women expressed the wish to contribute to someone else. Indeed, several of the Saudi women had realised that the way out of subordination was to first focus on personal development, through education and gaining work experience through employment, before they could set up their own business. The Saudi and Swedish women also turned to education, but additionally engaged in political issues, working for women's rights and child support, and saw entrepreneurship as a means to leverage their engagement to 'do more'. However, during this phase their actions were entwined with their own sense of being 'trapped' in a situation where they could not realise their full potential. Rama's and Sandra's narratives describing their subordination phase emphasise these observations.

4.1.1 Rama's story of subordination

Rama (32) grew up in a typical patriarchal household, where her father was the head of the family and her brothers inherently exerted power and authority over their sisters and mother, who was a housewife (Moghadam, 2004). Rama attended a traditional conservative all girls' school, which was run by the General Presidency for Girls' Education (GPGE) under the Department of Religious Guidance[2]. The mandate of the GPGE was to design curricula which primed young girls to become good wives and

[2] Education for boys and girls was merged under the Ministry of Education in 2002. However, curricular and subject differences remained between the schools.

mothers and to prepare them for 'acceptable' jobs such as teaching and nursing, as these were deemed to "suit her nature" (Hamdan, 2005).

Rama's early years show all the characteristics of participation in a classic patriarchal society (Kandiyoti, 1988) where girls and women are treated as minors, specifically in relation to the choice of marriage partner (Goss, et al., 2011). Indeed, whilst Rama begged her family to allow her to go to university, within weeks of graduation, at the age of 17, she entered into a family-arranged marriage and quickly had two children. Yet Rama felt unfulfilled and yearned to develop herself beyond the role of "housewife" through pursuing higher education and a career. However, she was faced by an array of barriers from her husband, society and gender-discriminating laws. When she decided she wanted to study business at university her husband refused, claiming that he did not want her sitting alone in a car with a driver and it would be a burden for him to take her there every day. After much persuasion, he allowed her to work in the local hospital where he worked. Rama loved her job and was quickly promoted. This brought her great self-confidence and financial independence. Her husband, however, grew resentful of her success and pressured her to leave, on the grounds that she was falling behind in her primary job as his wife - taking care of him, their children and the domestic responsibilities (Moghadam, 2004). Rama, however, was unwilling to give up her newfound independence and believed that these chores could easily be taken care of by their domestic assistant, as in many households in the Saudi culture, even where women do not work. Eventually, her husband gave her an ultimatum: their marriage or her work. Rama chose her work, but paid a high price she did not anticipate: she ended up losing her children.

> You know the shock that I got when he first forbad me from seeing my children... (turns away and starts crying). I am not crying for him. I never ever regretted leaving him… But you know the children… They are my boys... My reaction when he forbade me was utter shock! He took my boys. He would not let me visit them. For five years I did not see them at all… The law is on his side. But our religion is not. The boys should have been asked after the age of seven [whether they want to live with their father or mother] but they were never asked. None of these procedures happened. The judge took it for granted

> that as I work, and I work in a mixed environment, I have no right to keep my children.

Rama's life story up until her divorce explicitly illustrates the interrelated levels of (patriarchal) gendered power relations, which led to her subordination and lack of 'freedom' in choosing her life path. That is, Rama's family steered her away from her ambition for higher education and led her towards marriage; her further education and opportunities for work were then controlled by her husband, and finally, she was 'let down' by the legal framework, which wrongfully (according to Islamic Sharia law) awarded her husband sole custody of her children. This highlights the paradoxes within the formal institutions of the Saudi legal system, and her powerlessness within it, as under the Ministry of Health, it is legal for men and women to work side by side in hospitals (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004), yet the informal institutions and cultural norm of work segregation led the judge to rule against her right to shared custody.

After the shock, Rama decided she did not want to lose her children for nothing. Her life's mission was to prove to her husband that she could be more than 'just a housewife' who cooked and cleaned for him and their children. She returned to live with her father over 1,000 km away from her children and enrolled at university to take a degree in Business Administration and Marketing.

4.1.2 Sandra´s story of subordination

Sandra (48) was brought up in the Swedish countryside. She went to the local school, known for its emphasis on providing an equal education to all citizens (Englund, 2005). Sandra's father is an entrepreneur and a farmer. Her mother works in elderly healthcare. She considered them her role models in terms of encouraging education, work and creativity equally amongst their children. Sandra worked in a bank, married her long-term partner in her twenties and started a family. Her husband introduced her to his 'entrepreneurial family', which consisted of men who do business and women who support them, and she became embedded within the family business. She set up her own accounting firm in order to support the family business, running it part-time with the help of her mother-in-law.

This gendered structure of the family business is not only about the gendering of occupational roles, but can also be recognised for bringing about particular forms of

control and resistance (Ainsworth and Cox, 2003). During this period, Sandra was politically engaged, as was her husband. However, she quickly hit the glass ceiling as she discovered that political life consists of a fraternity of men, where she never felt welcome. She dreamed of further education and a life of political engagement, but felt stifled by the lack of support both from her husband and, for women, from the state.

After eleven years, Sandra suddenly recognised how her life had become predetermined in several ways. Indeed, even though she had made a career at one of the large banks, she felt discontent and 'locked in' as the accountant of her husband's family business, which she continued to manage on the side. This role had been offered to her as a great 'opportunity' at the beginning of their relationship, but turned into a necessary, yet hidden, service. This revealed the (patriarchal) power relations she was implicitly subordinated to, as her work primarily benefited the men in the family business, allowing them "to do their business in peace and quiet".

Sandra decided to break away from the family business and move to the UK to study. Discovering she was pregnant, she returned to Sweden to continue her education, and excelled on the innovation programme, which subsequently led her to launch her own innovation consulting company. Her husband and his family, however, did not appreciate this, stating: "You could have done better if you'd stayed here". She explained they saw her as a threat and there was no acceptance for how she wanted to shape her life. She recalled:

> I remember the first newspaper article about my company where I figured as an entrepreneur. He [my husband] did not even want to look at it, and looked demonstratively away. But when he appeared in the newspaper, I was constantly expected to admire this. I realised this family wanted to control me. In comparison to my family, who have always said that 'we don't really understand what you do, but we are very proud of you', I never felt support to do the things I wanted. So I wanted to find my own way….

In 2005, having been part of her husband's family for twenty-two years, Sandra decided to file for divorce and follow her own path in life.

Rama's and Sandra's narratives thus far illustrate the first stage, where the women were implicitly or explicitly subordinated to patriarchal/familial control. Indeed, juxtaposing their positions, it is evident that regardless of whether the women exercised a 'freedom' in their choice of marriage partners, the gendered power struggles prevailed, as both women's career ambitions were stifled by their husbands. Interestingly, both women's power practices within this 'process to freedom' were to get a divorce and turn to education. This subordination process led to the next process of empowerment, towards their journey to 'freedom'.

Intriguingly, the women's subordination was not always discussed explicitly – but implicitly. Focusing on Rama's and Sandra's stories of divorce shows how this was explicitly the driving force behind Rama's turning to entrepreneurship, while in Sandra's case it was mentioned passively. However, they both utilised the entrepreneurship narrative in a way that did not tolerate this 'vulnerability', but as the driving force to empower themselves, followed by other women, which is outlined in the next two phases.

4.2 Empowerment: The individual's capacity to challenge power structures within the existing social system

This phase saw the women emphasise entrepreneurship as the space where they found their 'freedom' and a route towards emancipation. The women in both the Saudi and Swedish contexts emphasised the importance of family support and education during this stage, in addition to women's national and international entrepreneurial networks. The women in both contexts also called for a 'women only' (Saudi Arabia) or 'feminist' (Sweden) market in order to break down the power relations in male-dominated areas of business. These empowering practices guided the women towards self-employment and 'freedom' for themselves as well as decent employment for other women. The women felt energised by empowering other women through employing them in their enterprises, and this led them to mobilise a movement for social and structural change for women in their country. Paradoxically, however, the women also referred to men as an empowering resource. In Saudi Arabia many of the women's businesses were financially and emotionally supported by their male guardian, whilst in Sweden one network of women entrepreneurs offered their women members what they called 'male followers', who would escort the women and support their

'visibility' when they went to various networking meetings or to the bank to apply for capital[3]. Rama's and Sandra's narratives describing their self-empowerment phase emphasise these observations. Rama's story illustrates her journey to becoming a successful entrepreneur and her ongoing desire to empower other Saudi women in her country. Sandra's story illustrates her entrepreneurial endeavours, political ambitions and journey to setting up her own business aimed at women and disempowered groups in Swedish society.

4.2.1 Rama's empowerment

When Rama returned home to live under her father's guardianship, the dynamics of the patriarchal power relations changed within that context (Moghadam, 2004). Indeed, Rama gained some individual agency and the freedom she desired to attend university, work and obtain permission to rent premises for her business. This supportive platform empowered Rama with a space and an opportunity to pursue her ultimate dream, which was to be independent in running her own - all women - business. Rama started her own marketing business, in which her sister fully invested:

> After years of hard work I finally got my successful business *and now I'm free.* When I started it was a dream, and a goal, and I still have this vision that my business will be all Saudi girls, or any girls, because I have a strong belief in women and that girls' work is different… it is hard to have an all-women office right now because women are not as qualified and experienced as men are.

Rama perceived that her degree and work experience empowered her, and as a result she was "free". However, this was a period of fluctuating support that could have both created and limited Rama's capacities. Indeed, whilst it seems Rama felt empowered through her studies, work and setting up her own successful business, as the previous *gender-specific* formal and informal institutional constraints (Welter and Smallbone, 2008) she faced (such as lack of permission from her husband to study and work) were alleviated, the fact was that she was still vulnerable, as these opportunities continued under the guardianship of her father, who legally had the power to stop her from working and running her business at any time, for example by taking his name off the

[3] This network was however not "Include" but another netowork which also aimted to support women's entrepreneurship.

office space lease or not allowing her to travel alone to work and back. Rama later confessed that whilst her father was supportive, he was an old man, and if he passed away she would be transferred under the guardianship of her eldest brother, who believed she should not be working but should remarry to maintain the family honour. It can thus be deduced that Rama was empowered through familial support (mainly her father's) before she became an entrepreneur, even if it were in a "bounded empowerment" form (Gill and Ganesh, 2009), and was subsequently empowered after becoming an entrepreneur.

4.2.2. Sandra's empowerment

Around the time of her divorce, the university incubator and entrepreneurship promoter asked Sandra to take over the management of the programme. Given her personal situation she decided it would be good for her children's stability if she were to have a permanent job. Yet she continued to run her consultancy on the side, as she felt loyal to her customers and those working for her. However, after three years, Sandra longed for her freedom and decided to return to the company full-time. She eventually gained the confidence to engage in the political realm with other women, albeit specifically in the business realm. Entrepreneurship, she explains, is about breaking free:

> The feeling of being able to be *free* and to do what you want. *If* I want to work in Barcelona three days a week then I will do that. And *if* I want to work my butt off day and night for six months [in my company], then I do that. It's just the feeling of knowing that I can change my life if I want to. Usually I choose to work extremely hard, but just the feeling of being *able* to do what I want - that is invaluable.

The second stage in the empowerment process unveils a sense of recuperation rather than emancipation (Goss et al., 2011) as the women's attempts to be set free from the power of others are only partial and embedded within the institutional structures (Inglis, 1997; Welter, 2011). This means that Rama and Sandra did not achieve 'emancipation' during this stage. However, family support, together with education, employment and, thereafter, entrepreneurship empowered Rama and Sandra to act more successfully *within* the structures of their society (Inglis, 1997). Both women gained financial independence and political engagement, and fulfilled their dreams of

working alongside/employing other women. Both Rama's and Sandra's practices to overcome constraints at this stage were to maximise family support, which led them to become empowered and gain their desired independence and freedom in their work as entrepreneurs. Thus, it can be argued that their empowerment is 'fluctuated' (Goss et al., 2011) and 'bounded', as the sense of individual empowerment gained through the constraints-centered discourse did indeed bear traces of an emergent and collective notion of empowerment (Gill and Ganesh, 2009), which in return motivated both Rama and Sandra to make a change for other women.

4.3 Emancipation: mobilising resistance to the social system through collective agents of change

The empowerment of the self and other women through their businesses led the women to take steps to contribute to women's development, and therefore social change, at varying stages of their business development. Indeed, all the narratives discussed a form of 'giving back', 'freeing others' and changing social perceptions and work opportunities for women in their communities. The Saudi women in particular stressed that they wanted to set up businesses and employ other women in order to have a legitimate platform to push forward policies to support women's entrepreneurship through the Chamber of Commerce, as well as women's employment policies with the Ministry of Labor and Social Development. They also believed these steps could eventually pressure the Ministry of Education to adjust the curriculum to prepare young girls academically and socially for the workplace. The entrepreneurs in Sweden mirrored these sentiments in addition to other forms of emancipation and social change through seeking equality in general for local women, immigrants and refugees of all ages and sexual orientations. Many of the women clearly combined their income-generating activities with missions for social change; for example, one of the Swedish entrepreneurs ran a PR company and wanted to spur diversity and equality in Swedish societies, which led her to focus on commissions that had such a purpose. Rama's and Sandra's narratives laid a clear foundation for emancipation through initiating an organisation with that very purpose.

4.3.1. Rama's process for emancipation

After the success of her first business, Rama set up a production company which produces documentaries on women's lives in Saudi Arabia. Her first project was a

series documenting the journeys of successful Saudi female entrepreneurs. She explained she did it to inspire Saudi women:

> This is why I produced this programme… I want to empower Saudi women, encourage them to develop themselves, to believe in their abilities and work hard to achieve their goals, and show them that they can live their lives freely outside of the boundaries of the home… Truly my role is to support women in general and specifically Saudi women…The message I want to reach our society is that we women can do a lot of things and we are different from what other communities and countries think of us, even other Middle Eastern countries …The other goal is for my community's self development ... I want this to be in my role, developing the nation's young women who build our country.

Rama's consultancy, in which she aims to eventually employ only women, along with her production company, which produces documentaries about and for Saudi women, can be seen as constraint-breaking organisations. Furthermore, the sense of empowerment she gained through entrepreneurship led her to want not only to emancipate other women, but also to challenge the structures of power and social norms in society through women. Rama ended by stating that she was adamant that she would never re-marry and would never have another man control her life again. She hoped that that her story, projects and employment of women would encourage other women to be independent of controlling men in their lives. But the question remains how effective this 'emancipatory plan' can be in a society that continues to systematically place women in a secondary position in its formal and informal institutions.

4.3.2. Sandra's process for emancipation

Sandra continued to run and expand her innovation consultancy business, with the mission to train people all over the world towards a leadership that supports and enhances innovation processes. Whilst her business targeted all organisations interested in enhancing innovation processes, Sandra's political interests and concern for marginalised groups was still strong. Therefore, Sandra participated in setting up an organisation ("Include") that explicitly aimed at stimulating entrepreneurial activity among disempowered groups, focusing on women in general and immigrant women in

particular. This organisation was initially set up and run informally by a network of entrepreneurs. However, today it is run as a company, which is owned and managed by Sandra. This socially responsible organisation aims at strengthening the power of innovation among disempowered groups, and presents its vision, mission and basic values as follows on its website:

> The vision for [the organisation] is to be an equal inclusive project for the development of people, ideas and innovations. Our mission is to offer a welcoming inclusive development where we meet on the same wavelength. Together with our clients we develop new working methods and challenges, and improve existing support structures, which welcome women and diverse groups of people.

The purpose of this organisation is to explicitly include marginalised groups and create a space for individuals to empower themselves through entrepreneurship and innovation. They have worked to create awareness of women's struggles to view themselves as entrepreneurs and convince others of their capabilities to develop ideas, innovations and companies, and to afford them a stronger collective voice. Finally, they have cooperated with researchers, setting up a research council, to increase the competence in gender and innovation in the support structure.

Facing, negotiating and overcoming everyday micro/macro forms of oppression stemming from formal/informal institutional constraints (Verduijn et al., 2014) led the women to convey a sense of exceptional individual agency in running their businesses to empower themselves as well as other women within their societies. Their bounded view of freedom does indeed seem to capture what is intended by the notion of entrepreneuring-as-emancipation: the "pursuit of freedom and autonomy relative to an existing status quo… [seeking] to disrupt the status quo and change her position in the social order… and … the social order itself" (Rindova et al., 2009:478). The psychological benefits gained from the sense of individual empowerment (Rindova et al., 2009; Jennings et al., 2016) in successfully negotiating constraints within the social structures (Inglis, 1997) gave the women the ability to identify with other women with similar experiences of subordination and, thus, use a form of collective solidarity and 'recruitment' of other women as agents of change for the maintenance and

development of their personal resistance, which would arguably be impossible to achieve individually (Goss et al., 2011; Kalantaridis, 2014). Whilst none of the women's businesses illustrate a full frontal assault on local power practices restricting women, their stories do, however, illustrate different ways of providing support for women who want to work in female supported environments, achieve self-fulfillment and make a difference at work.

-Insert Table 1 around here-

The stories we have analysed clearly indicate the local embeddedness of women's entrepreneurship within their environment, "which is fragile in both institutional terms and dominated by traditions" (Welter and Smallbone, 2008; 518), and therefore draw attention to the complex socio-economic and political nature of women's entrepreneurship. In Table 1 we juxtapose these narratives and illustrate the stark differences and similarities between these contexts. Their stories also uncover the socio-structural modes of oppression through which the women felt subordinated, controlled and lacking in freedom in their everyday lives; and which thereafter made them turn to further education, divorce and/or rearrangement of family duties, and to move away from male-dominated organisations to empower themselves. They then set up businesses through which they experienced self-empowerment and, finally, empowered other women with an ambition to collectively achieve emancipation. This suggests that the women's stories of breaking free through entrepreneurship move into a sustained iteration of individual empowerment => collective emancipation, which propels entrepreneurship as social change. Next we will use Rama and Sandra as illustrative cases to discuss how this 'narrative logic' affects women who turn to entrepreneurship for empowerment, and how it impacts the relationship between entrepreneurship, emancipation and social change, as a way to institutional change of the systems of oppression.

5. Discussion

Narrating the stories of 26 women entrepreneurs, who enacted their entrepreneurship in different contexts, illustrated how the Middle Eastern and Western women crafted a complex process on their road to empowerment and freedom. Their journeys begin with a shifting of the 'status quo' (Rindova et al., 2009) as they experience

subordination to different forms of patriarchal orders either explicitly, by law, or implicitly, in male-dominated organisations and their family homes. The stories emphasise a desire to break free from these various expressions of a subordinating patriarchal order through empowerment within the system. Interestingly, aspirations for social change were emphasised early on in the women's stories, while 'feeling trapped' (subordination). That is, the women not only felt trapped in their personal lives, but also trapped in terms of changing orders, and viewed entrepreneurship as a path to 'do more' in terms of changing unequal societal situations. Finally, their stories illustrate a desire to include others in a collective emancipatory process, transforming and even subverting current power structures. The equation of 'entrepreneurship + women = empowerment + emancipation' can be refined through the women's stories as follows: 'subordination => individual empowerment through entrepreneurship => emancipation' through recruiting more women to view entrepreneurship as a path to reach collective freedom". This suggests that empowerment describes the practices used when individuals develop their capacities to act successfully within a system or to change from one system to another, whilst emancipation links to the collective challenge that follows from empowerment when entrepreneurs come together to change oppressive structures with the aim of achieving collective freedom (Inglis, 1997) and which leads to institutional change to 'the rules of the game' through new entrepreneurial groupings (Kalantaridis, 2014).

Despite the arguably paradoxical country contexts, juxtaposing the narratives identified similar patterns in the women's stories (Sørensen, 2014). As we read the life stories from Saudi women (Essers, 2009) in the stories of Swedish women entrepreneurs, and vice versa, the depths of the women's struggles surfaced. Although subordination and power relation struggles took a more subtle form in the Swedish women's stories, and were seldom explicitly expressed, but rather implicitly mentioned, they were made clear when we read one context's life stories in the other.

In Sandra's case, subordination within her marriage was much more implicit and could have passed unnoticed. However, when we juxtaposed her case with Rama's, we began to discern that both women felt oppressed by their husbands and their families, and thus found themselves stifled within the patriarchal system. This was a situation that both women wanted to break free from, and both turned to entrepreneurship as a

medium where they could empower themselves and alter the power structures. Therefore, the methodological approach of juxtaposition highlighted that both women were indeed entangled in the patriarchal system's web domestically, in organisations, and in society. It also illustrated that regardless of the women's empowerment and navigation practices within the oppressive system, they were institutionally embedded, and thus, their emancipation was bounded by the pervasive patriarchal structure, which prevailed explicitly and implicitly, and to varying degrees, across both contexts.

Juxtaposing the cases also allowed stark differences to be highlighted, which mirrors the varying degrees of patriarchal-familial control. Some women were empowered and supported by men in their family and entrepreneurial networks, whilst others were explicitly or implicitly hindered by these men through legal power or gendered social norms. In addition, whilst the Saudi Arabian women emphasised the need for women-only organisations, Swedish women searched for feminist actors (male and female) to change a particular male-dominated market. For Rama and Sandra the differences mirrored the social institution of marriage. Following a social norm of family-arranged marriages, Rama confessed to not 'really knowing' her husband before they wed; whilst Sandra chose to marry a man whom she loved and knew well. However, the clearest differences were the formal/informal institutional legal/cultural boundaries and opportunities they faced throughout their journeys as women and as entrepreneurs. Rama's divorce meant she lost custody of her sons because of the vague and subjective ruling which condemned her choice to work in a non-segregated environment, whilst Sandra did not endure this and was given shared custody with her husband. On the other hand, Sandra continued to struggle to find a healthy work-life balance for herself and her children.

These patterns were also evident in some of the other stories. Saudi women expressed their risk, vulnerability and hope for emancipation in their transition from family life to entrepreneurial life, whilst Swedish women's stories were built upon the notion that they could always do more, and reach further with their ambition to leverage empowerment to emancipation. Furthermore, whilst Rama's businesses are currently thriving, she will always have to depend on a supportive male guardian to sign her rental contracts and travel documentation permitting her to leave the country for essential business-related trips. Sandra does not have to contemplate such legal

constraints, but is conscious of the lack of adequate state support for her business' social ambition of emancipating working women on the one hand, and on the other, the difficulties in turning it into an economically sustainable business model that can meet market needs. Interestingly, both women failed to explicitly mention the continuous toll of legal constraints, grave losses and emotional distress that entrepreneurship had bestowed upon their desired journey to freedom. Whilst it is interesting to put forward some similarities and differences between the cases, the point has not been to compare them, which often falls back on the idea of one case being superior to the other. This proved to be a richer enlightening approach to understanding how empowerment and emancipation, in terms of Inglis' (1997) conceptualisations, are used by women when they narrate their entrepreneurial journeys.

Through engaging with the analysis of power through life stories, this study indicated that empowerment and emancipation could indeed be separated analytically. Empowerment (freedom for the self) is not about stories of radical economic, political or social change but about taking control of one's own life and environment within the structures in which they live (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013). The entrepreneurs gained independence and a sense of freedom they strived to include others in the practices of empowerment through entrepreneurship to reach emancipation and the changing of social structures that make up the patriarchal system both as and for the collective (Goss et al., 2011). Whilst it cannot be refuted that the women have succeeded in empowering themselves out of a subordinate position through starting an enterprise, have engaged with other women interested in working and pursuing an entrepreneurial career, and have called for changes to support working women, signs of emancipation, "breaking free from the power of the other" (Rindova et al., 2009) and instigating collective freedom, have yet to be achieved in their narratives. That is, the perceived freedom gained through their empowerment (Gill and Ganesh, 2007) led them to involve other women to extend their perceived change when it can be suggested that they have essentially reproduced the boundaries within the existing system. Therefore, rather than transitioning practices of empowerment into an emancipatory process, emancipation is not realised but instead is halted, whilst empowerment proceeds. Thus, empowerment through entrepreneurship turns into a consolidating narrative approach, which neglects and overlooks other forms of activity than entrepreneurship (e.g.

activism, politics, social movements, artistic avenues) that can be pursued to reach emancipation.

To reflect upon how empowerment drives women's entrepreneurship we turn to the concept of 'desire' to understand why entrepreneurial activity is consolidated in women's life stories of turning to entrepreneurship and using it to achieve social change. We suggest that emancipation emerges as an object of desire, which is defined as something that is "an unattainable and only vaguely specified object" (Jones and Spicer, 2005: 237) and to which desire is directed. Jones and Spicer also suggest that the entrepreneurship discourse "posits an impossible and indeed incomprehensible object at its centre" (2005; 236). In the women's life stories, this object is social change, or from a more systemic perspective - to subvert the patriarchal system. With a life story constructed as a fantasy that organises and drives entrepreneurship for social change, entrepreneurship is not one among many means of empowerment, but becomes the "only way" or "Holy Grail" of elevation and emancipation (Verduijn and Essers, 2013: 100), which women have and offer each other to overthrow an unequal/unjust society and subvert the oppressive system. Turning to entrepreneurship for social change seems to provide a more refined narrative structure that explicitly posits emancipation as the (im)possible object that can be reached through hopes and fantasies of 'breaking free'. When the business person can make plans for the future of developing a business, recruiting employees, growing an empire and acting upon this story to make her/his dreams come true (Johansson, 2004), approaching entrepreneurship as social change inevitably comes with a similar narrative structure, but with a blurred description as to how business principles and practices of social change can be executed within a pervasive patriarchal capitalist system that simultaneously upholds a malestream entrepreneurial system.

Whilst the idea of the heroic male entrepreneur is challenged in the women's life stories, they simultaneously build upon the idea of economic rationality and freedom as obvious values. Ironically, these liberal values reinforce male norms and values as universal, thus reproducing the rational autonomous male subject of liberal polity (Taylor and Vintges, 2004). If male norms and values drive empowerment through entrepreneurship, this path may invite women to fight fire (inequality) with fire (reproducing /sustaining inequality). Thus, the narrative structure in the life stories

identified in this article supports the sceptical view of the ability of empowerment to change the status quo (Jennings et al., 2016) and prevent the perpetuation of women's oppression (Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn, 2014).

Life story narrative approaches have mainly been used in developing a conceptual understanding of entrepreneurial learning (Rae and Carswell, 2000) and the construction of the (social) entrepreneurial identity (Jones, Latham and Betta, 2008). Therefore, further research focusing on how life stories are constructed retrospectively as well as for future ambition for social change would be useful. It would be interesting to study if and how provocation, which Berglund, Gaddefors and Lindgren (2016) found propels change in communities, could also navigate processes of individual empowerment into collective emancipation. Further, the narrative structure identified aligns well with the neoliberal shift, encouraging individuals to assume an entrepreneurial persona, offering entrepreneurship as an 'empowering route' for all and sundry. The shift towards neoliberalism has been seen both in Western and non-Western countries over the last few decades. We propose the conceptualisation of empowerment and emancipation suggested in this study could guide future research, and in particular narrative approaches, which are interested in how entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial practices unfold in neoliberal terrains.

Kalantaridis (2014) also holds a pessimistic view, but from another angle, with regard to the time horizon involved in the process of introducing change to prevailing institutions, even when rules/laws change (such as the explicit gender equality laws). He concludes change is the outcome of long-term processes or entrepreneurial groupings and actions endogenous to the system, where change in formal institutions occurs through an economic process and change in the informal institutions occurs through the political process. Institutional change will thus occur only in those instances where the power of those pursuing change exceeds that of those opposing it (North, 1994) and resistance to change and conflict is less inherent. Ironically these two critical turns inform us that turning to entrepreneurship as a saviour of all kinds may erode a culture of collectivity and satisfaction, which may delimit the political ambitions of reaching emancipation. Additional empirical research on the links between the formal/informal institutions and the links to empowerment and emancipation through an economic-political focus in the future would be useful in

highlighting the interlinks between the intensions between these concepts and their impact on institutional change.

The research has highlighted the theoretical shortcomings of coupling the concepts of empowerment and emancipation in the context of women's entrepreneurship. It has disentangled these concepts in a more nuanced manner differentiating the empowerment of the individual from the desire to emancipate disempowered people in their society. Through elucidating the concepts, we have been able to analyse the desires/motivations/expectations women narrate for empowerment and emancipation, and the dark sides of the 'practical reality' of achieving these through entrepreneurship. We believe the desire to 'break free' from constraints (e.g. organisational, societal, institutional) is not only held by female but also male entrepreneurs, yet little is known about male entrepreneurs' desire to 'break free' in mainstream 'gender-neutral' research. Therefore, future research using a gender-aware approach to life stories to analyse the entrepreneur's narrative and desire for empowerment or emancipation (e.g. through social entrepreneurship or social innovation) would be useful in furthering research on entrepreneurial motivations for 'freedom' pre-start up and thereafter. Furthermore, such research would be useful to prepare (female) entrepreneurs for the practical everyday challenges they may encounter, which they intend to 'break free' from but are deeply embedded within. Entrepreneurs search for freedom via entrepreneurship can thus be understood as a complex and dynamic process which unfolds over time, and therefore, may be better to think in terms of gaining degrees of freedom and emancipation. It therefore helps the entrepreneur appreciate how empowerment and emancipated are bounded, thus, guides them to recognise other forms of activities through which empowerment and emancipation could be approached and achieved.

6. Conclusion

Our study draws attention to the social turn in entrepreneurship, which follows a need to disentangle the relationship between empowerment/emancipation through entrepreneurship. Empirically, we contribute to advancing this equation through exploring these concepts in the context of women's entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia and Sweden. Whilst our aim was not to compare or generalise through these cases, using juxtaposition as our methodological approach allowed us to discern ingrained

patterns to the limits of entrepreneurship discourse in this cross-cultural study of 26 life stories. Our findings support studies that women's entrepreneurship is indeed a vehicle for women's empowerment within their contexts but also that this vehicle holds a dark side.

Our main conclusion builds upon the conception of 'entrepreneurship as social change' as a two-headed phenomenon comprising emancipation and oppression as forces that stand in a relationship of constant tension. We have also emphasised the importance of viewing women entrepreneurship in its social context and to listen to their life-stories. In this regard, the institutional lens applied contributes analytically to the scholarship on women's engagement in entrepreneurship by distinguishing between narratives of empowerment as practices to reach freedom for the self within the structures, and narratives of emancipation, as a process whereby the removal of structural constraints and freedom is extended by and to others in society. Whilst empowerment is stressed in the women's narratives, emancipation turns into an object of desire that propels entrepreneurship as social and institutional change. Whether this may lead to future emancipation remain an empirical question to be answered. What has been stressed here is that it may as well lead to the reproduction of the status quo in the pervasive social system.

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Table 1: Narrative themes in women's stories of gaining empowerment and researching emancipation though entrepreneurship

Narrative themes of	***Saudi Arabian context***	***Both contexts***	***Swedish context***
Subordination	Women *legally* excluded from working in 'masculine' industries and segregated in employment and senior management positions across various organisations	A mixture of formal and informal institutional boundaries Family and gendered household responsibilities Glass ceiling, particularly in male-dominated organisations	Women *socially* excluded in male-dominated industries and faced gender discrimination in reaching senior management positions across various organisations and in political engagement.
Empowerment	Creating women-only organisations Social change aspirations	Family support Education Journeys from employment to self-employment Women entrepreneur networks – international and national Employing other women Men's support (guardian and men within their network)	Social mission aspirations Women breaking into male-dominated markets Platform for change other than failed political avenues
Emancipation	Building women-only organisations Proving women's essential role in building the Saudi economy Pressuring the Saudi government to develop policies to support women's entrepreneurship and employment	Supporting women in business Supporting women through offering employment Coupling business ideas with a social mission aimed at emancipation from oppressive structures	Recruiting and supporting feminist and minority entrepreneurs to subvert a male-dominated market Working alongside community organisations to create 'bottom up' change with regards to developing norms and attitudes of entrepreneurship and innovation to become more inclusive