



**"And now I'm free"
Women's Empowerment and Emancipation Through
Entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia and Sweden**

Journal:	<i>Entrepreneurship & Regional Development</i>
Manuscript ID	TEPN-2017-0404.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Paper
Keywords:	Women's entrepreneurship, Life stories, Empowerment and emancipation, Institutional change, Narrative approach

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3 *"And now I'm free"*

4 **Women's Empowerment and Emancipation Through Entrepreneurship in Saudi**
5 **Arabia and Sweden**
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8 ***Abstract***

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

39 Women's entrepreneurship has been recognised for its importance in the creation of
40 economic wealth in developing (Chamlou, 2008), transitional (Welter and Smallbone,
41 2008) and developed economies (Hughes, 2003). Recently it has been acknowledged
42 that women are not only good for entrepreneurship, but that entrepreneurship can also
43 be good for women. The potential of entrepreneurship to bring about social change has
44 been emphasised (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2008) through paying attention to how
45 entrepreneurship is stifled through gendered norms (Cálas, Smircich and Bourne,
46 2009) and to its broad potential of emancipating men and women to unleash their
47 entrepreneurial ability (Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). The 'social turn' points to
48 how entrepreneurship has been coupled with its potential to implement a social mission
49 - making society more equal through including more people in entrepreneurial activity
50 or reducing poverty and increasing human wealth and health. Here, entrepreneurship
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3 shifts from being a driver of economic growth to a driver of social change, which turns
4 entrepreneurial activity into something that liberates humans from different constraints
5 and releases their strengths and powers. The 'social turn' holds the assumption that
6 both women and men benefit from entrepreneurship through their emancipation. We
7 claim that this assumption calls for a critical approach, which views empowerment and
8 emancipation not as remedies but as practices interleaved with, in particular, women's
9 entrepreneurship.
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15 Entrepreneurship is argued to provide 'freedom', 'autonomy' and 'empowerment' for
16 women entrepreneurs as they break away from male domination in work and society
17 (Gill and Ganesh, 2009). Scholars have shown that women, in different contexts,
18 embark upon self-employment to cope with male dominance (Marlow, 1997) and
19 become empowered through entrepreneurship to change the conditions of their
20 domination and subordination (Berglund and Johansson, 2007). In this vein,
21 entrepreneurship helps women to emancipate themselves from poverty, and allows
22 them to empower themselves within their community (Scott, Dolan, Johnstone-louis,
23 Sugden and Wu, 2012) and therefore liberate themselves from subordination,
24 patriarchy and labour market discrimination in both developed (Sundin and Holmquist,
25 1989; Raheim and Bolden, 1995) and developing country contexts (McElwee and Al-
26 Riyami, 2003; Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010; 2012; Datta and Gailey, 2012). The
27 conceptual pairing and interchangeable use of emancipation/empowerment has turned
28 into an important concept conducive to studying women's entrepreneurship.
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39 Studies investigating emancipation/empowerment of women through entrepreneurship
40 have demonstrated the personal and financial gains of their entrepreneuring (Al-Dajani
41 and Marlow, 2013; Al-Dajani, Carter, Shaw and Marlow, 2015; Goss, Jones, Betta and
42 Latham, 2011) while emphasising the importance of context for the formal (e.g.
43 policies, laws and regulations) and informal institutional conditions (norms and
44 attitudes in society) surrounding the women entrepreneurs (Welter, 2011). Although
45 entrepreneurship is generally seen to empower/emancipate women from oppressive
46 systems in both the formal and informal institutional spheres, this has recently been
47 questioned. Some argue that women's entrepreneurial endeavours are no more likely to
48 change the status quo (Jennings, Jennings and Sharifian, 2016) whilst others believe
49 the women's efforts in fact perpetuate their oppression within the pervasive system
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(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

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3 entrepreneurship is viewed through an emancipatory lens and seen as “change creation
4 through removal of constraints” (p. 479). Rindova et al. (2009) articulate *seeking*
5 *autonomy* as one of the main drivers for becoming self-employed and a goal of
6 emancipation, defined as breaking free from the authority of another and removing
7 perceived constraints in a variety of environments – economic, socio-cultural and
8 institutional. The psychological benefits gained by emancipatory entrepreneurial
9 endeavours are also supported elsewhere. Entrepreneurs who depart further from the
10 constraints of their environments also tend to be more satisfied with various aspects of
11 their lives (Jennings et al., 2016).
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18 Whilst Rindova et al.’s (2009) framework does not directly address gender relations
19 and forms of patriarchy, it strongly emphasises an appreciation for context and the
20 deep social and institutional aspects of entrepreneuring in the entrepreneur’s
21 environment, which perhaps led to this approach being adopted and developed by
22 gender and entrepreneurship scholars across various contexts (Goss et al., 2011;
23 Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter, and Welter, 2012; Jennings et al., 2016; Verduijn et
24 al., 2014; Al-Dajani et al., 2015; Montesano Montessori, 2016). These studies are,
25 however, critical of the *empowerment* and *emancipation* concepts within the context of
26 (women’s) entrepreneurship, questioning the degrees of freedom one gains (Goss et al.,
27 2011); the gendered relationship between entrepreneurs’ motivations and
28 empowerment beyond wealth creation (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013); and the
29 contradictions in the oppressive and emancipatory potential of female entrepreneurship
30 in both developed and developing contexts (Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn et al.,
31 2014; Jennings et al., 2016).
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42 Although it is acknowledged that women entrepreneurs can gain empowerment
43 through their search/motivation for autonomy, the process of simultaneously
44 experiencing empowerment and situational constraints may lead to a limited and
45 fluctuated form of empowerment. Gill and Ganesh (2009) describe this as ‘bounded
46 empowerment’, intersected by context and experience, which provides us with a more
47 complex view of how empowerment works. Further, Al-Dajani and Marlow (2013)
48 argue that whilst entrepreneuring has been seen to offer some potential for empowering
49 subordinated women within classic patriarchal societies, the scope for such remains
50 embedded within particular contexts, as it does not represent a fundamental challenge
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3 to the pervasive patriarchal ordering. Another dark side of empowerment is reported in
4 the context of female ethnic minorities where “entrepreneurship is at times
5 romanticized in the way it is constructed as a “Holy Grail” of elevation and
6 emancipation”, but where the entrepreneurs may in fact be far less liberated than one
7 might assume (Verduijn and Essers, 2013:100). Further, Jennings et al. (2016) question
8 the idea of entrepreneurship as a means of emancipation and departure from the status
9 quo within a developed economy context, and argue that since “entrepreneurship itself
10 is institutionally embedded axiomatically most entrepreneurial endeavors will
11 reproduce constraints rather than offer liberation from them” (Jennings et al., 2016:21).

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

2.2 *Re-conceptualising emancipation and empowerment in women’s entrepreneurship*

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23 Conceptualising empowerment and emancipation and their ethical impact on
24 individuals and their communities has long been debated amongst scholars across the
25 social sciences and development studies. Some do not see empowerment as the
26 obvious way to freedom, but as a means to empower some whilst disempowering
27 others (Gandz and Bird, 1996; Koggel, 2013). Some argue that the concept of
28 emancipation is weakly or insufficiently conceptualised (Huault, Perret and Spicer,
29 2014), because the link between agency and empowerment is misleading and,
30 therefore, problematic (Drydyk, 2013; Batliwala, 2007). To better understand the two-
31 headed phenomenon of empowerment and emancipation, Inglis (1997) suggests
32 starting with an analysis of power, which leads to the following distinction between the
33 two concepts: On the one hand there is empowerment, which is seen as a means for
34 people to develop capacities through which they can act successfully within the
35 existing system and structures of power. On the other hand, emancipation concerns a
36 critical analysis of power that could potentially bring about resistance and which
37 challenges the system of power itself (e.g. the system of patriarchy, or the system of
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3 capitalism). Inglis proposes that there is an over-reliance on the individual rather than
4 on social movements “as the agency for social change”, which simplifies and distorts
5 the understanding of emancipation (1997:6). Inglis views power as endless and
6 suggests freedom or emancipation comes from resistance and turning power back on
7 itself.
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12 In the context of entrepreneurship, Rindova et al. (2014) argue that if we view
13 entrepreneurial projects as an emancipatory effort then this calls for a focus on “the
14 factors that cause individuals to seek to disrupt the status quo and change their position
15 on the social order in which they are embedded – and, on occasion, the social order
16 itself” (2009:478). Scholars have therefore called for the use of institutional theory as a
17 guiding frame of reference in entrepreneurship research because of its strong influence
18 on the entrepreneur and social order (Welter, Smallbone and Pobol, 2015; Fayolle,
19 Landstrom, Gartner and Berglund, 2016; Xheneti, 2017). The institutional context
20 draws on the concept of formal and informal institutions, viewed as “the rules of the
21 game of a society” (North, 1990:3), where formal institutions are the political and
22 economic-related rules and regulations, and informal institutions include the norms,
23 values and culture (Welter, 2011; Kalantaridis, 2014). Formal institutions therefore
24 create the regulatory frame for legitimising entrepreneurship, while informal
25 institutions “determine the collective and individual perception of entrepreneurial
26 opportunities” (Welter and Smallbone, 2008:507).
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38 For us, institutional theory helps to bring depth and nuance to Inglis’ (1997)
39 discussions of ‘the system of power’. The institutional context provides us with a
40 useful lens for analysing the institution and contextual embeddedness of the women
41 entrepreneurs we met in our study (Welter, 2011; Amine and Staub, 2009; Azmat and
42 Fujimoto, 2016; Berg, 1997). Examples of *gender-specific formal institutions* include
43 the overall equal-opportunities constitution of the state with regard to its laws on
44 gender equality in education, the labour market, family policies and property rights.
45 Examples of *gender-specific informal institutions* include “religion and traditional
46 gender norms, which might shape the standing of women in society and influence their
47 economic function” (Welter and Smallbone, 2008:507). Whilst the informal
48 institutions and traditional gender norms contribute to the prevailing challenges of
49 female entrepreneurship, *institutional change* has demonstrated positive influence on
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3 (female) entrepreneurship in transitional societies. This leads to the following line of
4 thought: If institutional change influences women's entrepreneurship, can women's
5 entrepreneurship influence institutional change? That is, can their entrepreneuring
6 empower them within and/or emancipate them from the gendered formal and informal
7 institutions inhibiting them? And how does this vary between country contexts?
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12 The study of the interface between entrepreneurs and institutions is two-directional,
13 and thus changing institutions is dependent upon power endowments, groups involved
14 in the process and their position within the institutional arrangements. This raises the
15 question of "how institutional change can occur when actors, and the activities that
16 they engage, are defined by the prevailing rules of the game" (Kalantaridis, 2014:17)
17 For example, how can women entrepreneurs, embedded within their context, change
18 rules of gender injustices? Institutional change, it is argued, will occur only in those
19 instances where the power of those pursuing change exceeds that of those opposing it
20 (North, 1994) and resistance to change and conflict is inherent (Azmat and Fujimoto,
21 2016). That is, in order to take seriously the notion of emancipation as "setting free
22 from power of the other" (Rindova et al., 2009), then the other's *power* to constrain
23 must be conceived in terms of 'doing' just as much as the entrepreneur's *power*
24 challenge; the act of *setting free* may require much greater effort from some than from
25 others; and 'setting free' is not an all-or-nothing experience. Therefore, if the process
26 of gaining freedom unfolds over time, it may be better to think in terms of gaining
27 degrees of freedom and emancipation (Goss et al., 2011). Hence, changing 'the rules of
28 the game' depends on the emergence, and size, of new entrepreneurial groupings, the
29 evolution of the power endowments or interests of existing ones and support from
30 others in power, which may only be an outcome of long-term processes (Kalantaridis,
31 2014) and constant power struggles (Inglis, 1997; Goss, et al., 2011).
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46 The lack of critical analysis and clear differentiation between empowerment and
47 emancipation has been recognised as inhibiting an understanding of the potential
48 power of women to 'free' themselves via entrepreneurial activity. Therefore, we argue
49 that building on Inglis' (1997) distinction between empowerment, as a means to
50 develop capacities to act within structures of power, and emancipation, as a critical
51 analysis of power to figure out ways that challenge structures of power, within an
52 institutional framework (Welter and Smallbone, 2008; Kalantaridis, 2014) can further
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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 Pettersson 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

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3 been reported to have difficulties integrating the persona of the entrepreneur in their
4 narrative accounts (Berglund, 2006). Entrepreneurship narratives have thus been found
5 to be gendered, favouring the male and marginalising the female (Ahl, 2007; Smith
6 and Anderson, 2004; Smith, 2014). Since women entrepreneurs' narratives are often
7 seen to lack some key 'ingredient', scholars suggested studying the narratives of
8 successful women entrepreneurs and found that they integrated entrepreneurship with
9 feminist aspirations in different ways (Berglund, Ahl and Pettersson, 2017). Yet
10 despite extensive possibilities for using a variety of sources, life stories may not be so
11 easy for the individual to change, but are instructive in the sense that we become the
12 stories we tell (McAdams 1997). Sharing this perspective, we view life stories as
13 performative. The life stories entrepreneurs tell thus make up instances of identity
14 constructions, learning experiences, and are "closely related to how the entrepreneur
15 makes sense of what (s)he does, and how (s)he relates to others, recognises
16 opportunities and gains experience" (Johansson, 2004: 286). How women
17 entrepreneurs integrate empowerment (everyday practices to deal with structures of
18 power) and emancipation (activities that change structures of power) hopefully adds to
19 building extant theory from narrative understandings in entrepreneurship studies (e.g.
20 Downing, 2005; Down, 2006; Gartner, 2007; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Johansson,
21 2004; Larty and Hamilton, 2011).

3.2 *Sampling process and collection of empirical material*

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

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52 The Saudi study was a longitudinal study, initiated in 2010 and continued until 2016.
53 The study followed the entrepreneurial experiences of 13 women in setting up and
54 running their organisations, with an aim to understand the everyday opportunities and
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3 boundaries that they were encountering, and explore their strategies in overcoming
4 them. The study consisted of observations of the women in their businesses and 13
5 tape-recorded face-to-face interviews in Saudi Arabia. Follow up interviews continued
6 after the visit via Skype and phone calls, due to the financial and practical difficulties
7 in accessing the field on a regular basis as a non-Saudi (Chamlou, 2008). The Swedish
8 study had been following a hybrid organisation that functioned as a network of mainly
9 women entrepreneurs who wanted to develop their ideas and start up an organisation.
10 The ethnographic study was initiated in 2012 and continued until 2016. The hybrid
11 organisation (“Include”) was the node through which the researcher came into contact
12 with women entrepreneurs and those who wanted to pursue entrepreneurial activity but
13 had faced difficulties in relating to ‘malestream’ descriptions of entrepreneurship. The
14 study, which followed their entrepreneurial journeys, consisted of observations,
15 ethnographic interviews, shadowing, three focus group interviews, 15 tape-recorded
16 interviews and participation in twelve collaborative activities and public events.
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27 After discussing and familiarising each other with the material in each context, 26
28 principal female respondents were purposefully selected from both studies (13 from
29 each country) in order to juxtapose the cases as closely as possible and to focus on
30 their narratives of empowerment/ emancipation. Conceptually, this sample comprised
31 women entrepreneurs who declared themselves actively engaged in entrepreneurship in
32 order to ‘break free’ from a gendered constraint and who also wanted to contribute to
33 other women’s lives in some way.
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40 3.3 *A four-stage analysis guided by juxtaposition*

41 The analysis followed an iterative and interactive process of sifting through the
42 empirical material, drawing together the more important elements, followed by
43 searching for patterns and themes in the 26 stories (McKeever, et al., 2015; Jack and
44 Anderson, 2002). This process consisted of the following four stages of analysis:
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49 *The first stage* saw us (as bilingual researchers) translate and transcribe the chosen
50 interviews from Arabic and Swedish respectively into English and share their stories
51 with each other. That way, we felt we were able to preserve the cultural integrity of the
52 empirical material whilst understanding and reflecting on the limitations of the socially
53 constructed situation (Temple, 2002). It also allowed us to exercise reflexivity
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3 throughout the process, highlighting any sensitive power relations that inevitably occur
4 between the interviewer and interviewee (Oakley, 1981; Essers, 2009).
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7 *The second stage* followed a thematic analysis of the women's life stories (Hamilton,
8 2011), focusing on the implicit and explicit examples they used to describe struggles
9 they faced and practices they applied in order to 'move on' in both contexts. During
10 this stage we exchanged stories, and read and made comments linking back to our own
11 study. We then followed up with a meeting to discuss these observations, returned to
12 the literature to address our comments and then booked a new meeting. This
13 reading/meeting process was iterated in three rounds, which was key to shelving the
14 assumption of the Western entrepreneur as 'universal' (Gupta and Fernandez, 2011) or
15 the norm, and thus appreciating the similarities of these women's journeys, rather than
16 their differences, which is usually emphasised in cross-cultural studies and quantitative
17 gender equality indexes (Global Gender Gap Report, 2016). This stage resulted in an
18 understanding of the stories as containing a narrative structure where the respondents
19 saw entrepreneurship as a means to 'break free' from something, and when they
20 achieved this freedom they wanted to continue by freeing another woman. What the
21 emerging themes in the narratives showed in our study reinforced the literature, as
22 there was the initial need to break free from *gender-specific*, formal and/or informal
23 institutional barriers (Welter and Smallbone, 2008), which we label *subordination*
24 (Goss et al., 2011). This was then followed by *empowerment*, which circles around
25 what they did in stretching the boundaries to overcome subordination and act
26 successfully within the existing system that constrained them. Finally, *emancipation*,
27 was propelled in their narratives after their perceived experience of empowerment, and
28 revolved around their vision for what entrepreneurship could do, not only for them, but
29 also for all women. The narrative structure we identified thus provided us with the
30 following general themes and phases: Moving from subordination -> Empowerment of
31 the self through entrepreneurship -> Emancipation for self and other women.
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48 The thematic analysis of the 26 interviews was useful in breaking down their narratives
49 into the three-stage process of subordination, empowerment and emancipation.
50 However, in order to convey the journey and detailed nuances of the women's
51 entrepreneurial experiences within their contexts, at *the third stage*, we selected two of
52 what were felt to be the richest cases from each context, which covered the
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3 overarching themes found across the 26 stories but also preserved the women's own
4 life stories. In particular, both cases emphasised gratitude for the opportunity they were
5 given through entrepreneurship and how they wished to 'help' other women through
6 setting up organisations that supported women. This way, we were able to focus on the
7 nuances of their life journeys (Essers, 2009) through their everyday micro and macro-
8 orientated forms of oppression and their negotiation of the structures and practices
9 within which they are constituted (Verduijn et al., 2014). This analysis stage led us to
10 return to the two women for follow-up interviews to focus our questions on this
11 particular study. For example, we were able to delve deeper into their childhood and
12 relationships and reflect on how they may have shaped their entrepreneurial intentions
13 and subsequent journeys.
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22 *At the fourth stage* we turned to juxtaposition as an analytical strategy in order to avoid
23 a comparison between cultures, whereby we might risk branding the Saudi women as
24 'the Other' - implicitly assuming that the West is to be mimicked (Mohanty, 1988). In
25 juxtaposing the two cases the purpose is to "let the collision of the two items [cases]
26 make the reader/viewer stand back and think anew" (Sørensen, 2014: 48). As the
27 purpose of juxtaposition is not to compare the two cases, by putting the two cases next
28 to each other and making one the exemplar, we focused on finding key themes and
29 patterns in the respective stories. This made it possible for us to see one context *in* the
30 other and vice versa, so that the familiar becomes unfamiliar (Marcus and Fischer,
31 1986; Sørensen, 2014). Through this process of defamiliarisation, the phenomenon of
32 interest can be seen anew through discerning both new similarities and differences and
33 in engaging "the reader in a prolonged, dialectic discourse about the open-ended nature
34 of similarities and differences" (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 161). This stage of the
35 analysis helped us to problematise the Western narrative of entrepreneurship as the
36 ultimate change-maker and pay attention to how emancipation worked as an attractor
37 of hope and desire.
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50 This juxtaposing stage, reading the Saudi and Swedish cases "into each other" was
51 particularly key in making us return to the interviewees with 'new' perspectives. For
52 example, reading the Saudi familial struggles in their narratives guided us to return to
53 the Swedish context and focus on understanding their (marital) relationships and the
54 role of patriarchy, which the women did not discuss openly in the initial interviews, but
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3 reflected on during the questioning (thus realising that this was indeed an issue).
4 Another example, when learning about the formal structures legally enforcing the
5 'male guardianship' system in Saudi Arabia, requiring women to have their guardian's
6 signature on various forms such as guarantees for rent and bank loans, provided us
7 with a lens which highlighted how some informal structures hindered the Swedish
8 women. For example, whilst applying for bank loans they talked about 'male
9 followers' who accompanied them to the bank so they would appear more professional
10 to the (male) bank managers. Reading the Swedish context on their gender-equality
11 policies in work and entrepreneurship helped highlight the discrepancy in Saudi
12 Arabia's recent policies encouraging (women's) entrepreneurship, and their actual
13 ability to legally and socially engage in entrepreneurship in a manner that was equal to
14 men.
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24 **4. "The road to freedom": The journey towards emancipation through** 25 **subordination and empowerment**

26 The journey we call "the road to freedom", will first outline the general insights from
27 the 26 interviews that formed the themes and illustrate the underlying structures of
28 subordination, empowerment and emancipation in each context. These findings will
29 then be exemplified and developed by focusing on two life stories - Rama in Saudi
30 Arabia and Sandra in Sweden. The women's stories illustrate the gendered power
31 struggles that Saudi and Swedish women face in their everyday lives and focus
32 particularly on the constraints they faced whilst pursuing the freedom to work/run their
33 ventures through three narrative phases: 1. subordination, 2. empowerment, and 3.
34 emancipation. The focus of their stories is on the crucial parts of each phase and how it
35 led to their desire for emancipation.
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45 *4.1 Subordination: constraining gendered-power relations within a patriarchal family* 46 *structure*

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48 The notion of subordination was apparent across all narratives, where entrepreneurship
49 was referred to as the means they had used (or looked forward to using) to overcome
50 obstacles and break free from mainly gendered constraints. The women explained how
51 they sometimes felt trapped in their family situation, for example because their
52 husband/partner was developing his career, or they felt that the way back to work was
53 difficult after giving birth, or they felt trapped by family and care responsibilities in the
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3 home. Other examples focus on their current work place, which was seen as a
4 constraint; for example, they faced the glass ceiling (Mattis, 2004; Weiler and
5 Bernasek, 2001) with no hope from senior management of professional development.
6 Other examples of subordination, which both spurred and hindered women in
7 overcoming their subordination, were male-dominated markets, where they lacked
8 encouragement to practise their skills, or, in the Saudi cases, could not participate
9 in them as employees (for example, in engineering and oil production). One of the
10 Swedish women expressed how she strategically searched for feminist entrepreneurs
11 (women and men) to cooperate with in order overthrow a particular market she found
12 to be deeply patriarchal, whilst one of the Saudi women illustrated how she was not
13 allowed to attend senior management meetings as a woman, and thus knew she would
14 never progress beyond her current position.
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24 When we juxtaposed the stories at this initial phase, the stories told by both the Saudi
25 and Swedish women expressed the wish to contribute to someone else. Indeed, several
26 of the Saudi women had realised that the way out of subordination was to first focus on
27 personal development, through education and gaining work experience through
28 employment, before they could set up their own business. The Saudi and Swedish
29 women also turned to education, but additionally engaged in political issues, working
30 for women's rights and child support, and saw entrepreneurship as a means to leverage
31 their engagement to 'do more'. However, during this phase their actions were entwined
32 with their own sense of being 'trapped' in a situation where they could not realise their
33 full potential. Rama's and Sandra's narratives describing their subordination phase
34 emphasise these observations.
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4.1.1 Rama's story of subordination

44 Rama (32) grew up in a typical patriarchal household, where her father was the head of
45 the family and her brothers inherently exerted power and authority over their sisters
46 and mother, who was a housewife (Moghadam, 2004). Rama attended a traditional
47 conservative all girls' school, which was run by the General Presidency for Girls'
48 Education (GPGE) under the Department of Religious Guidance². The mandate of the
49 GPGE was to design curricula which primed young girls to become good wives and
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55 ² Education for boys and girls was merged under the Ministry of Education in 2002. However, curricular
56 and subject differences remained between the schools.
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3 mothers and to prepare them for 'acceptable' jobs such as teaching and nursing, as
4 these were deemed to "suit her nature" (Hamdan, 2005).
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8 Rama's early years show all the characteristics of participation in a classic patriarchal
9 society (Kandiyoti, 1988) where girls and women are treated as minors, specifically in
10 relation to the choice of marriage partner (Goss, et al., 2011). Indeed, whilst Rama
11 begged her family to allow her to go to university, within weeks of graduation, at the
12 age of 17, she entered into a family-arranged marriage and quickly had two children.
13 Yet Rama felt unfulfilled and yearned to develop herself beyond the role of
14 "housewife" through pursuing higher education and a career. However, she was faced
15 by an array of barriers from her husband, society and gender-discriminating laws.
16 When she decided she wanted to study business at university her husband refused,
17 claiming that he did not want her sitting alone in a car with a driver and it would be a
18 burden for him to take her there every day. After much persuasion, he allowed her to
19 work in the local hospital where he worked. Rama loved her job and was quickly
20 promoted. This brought her great self-confidence and financial independence. Her
21 husband, however, grew resentful of her success and pressured her to leave, on the
22 grounds that she was falling behind in her primary job as his wife - taking care of him,
23 their children and the domestic responsibilities (Moghadam, 2004). Rama, however,
24 was unwilling to give up her newfound independence and believed that these chores
25 could easily be taken care of by their domestic assistant, as in many households in the
26 Saudi culture, even where women do not work. Eventually, her husband gave her an
27 ultimatum: their marriage or her work. Rama chose her work, but paid a high price she
28 did not anticipate: she ended up losing her children.
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43 You know the shock that I got when he first forbad me from seeing my
44 children... (turns away and starts crying). I am not crying for him. I never ever
45 regretted leaving him... But you know the children... They are my boys... My
46 reaction when he forbade me was utter shock! He took my boys. He would not
47 let me visit them. For five years I did not see them at all... The law is on his
48 side. But our religion is not. The boys should have been asked after the age of
49 seven [whether they want to live with their father or mother] but they were
50 never asked. None of these procedures happened. The judge took it for granted
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3 that as I work, and I work in a mixed environment, I have no right to keep my
4 children.
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8 Rama's life story up until her divorce explicitly illustrates the interrelated levels of
9 (patriarchal) gendered power relations, which led to her subordination and lack of
10 'freedom' in choosing her life path. That is, Rama's family steered her away from her
11 ambition for higher education and led her towards marriage; her further education and
12 opportunities for work were then controlled by her husband, and finally, she was 'let
13 down' by the legal framework, which wrongfully (according to Islamic Sharia law)
14 awarded her husband sole custody of her children. This highlights the paradoxes within
15 the formal institutions of the Saudi legal system, and her powerlessness within it, as
16 under the Ministry of Health, it is legal for men and women to work side by side in
17 hospitals (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004), yet the informal institutions and cultural norm
18 of work segregation led the judge to rule against her right to shared custody.
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26 After the shock, Rama decided she did not want to lose her children for nothing. Her
27 life's mission was to prove to her husband that she could be more than 'just a
28 housewife' who cooked and cleaned for him and their children. She returned to live
29 with her father over 1,000 km away from her children and enrolled at university to take
30 a degree in Business Administration and Marketing.
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35 4.1.2 Sandra's story of subordination

36 Sandra (48) was brought up in the Swedish countryside. She went to the local school,
37 known for its emphasis on providing an equal education to all citizens (Englund,
38 2005). Sandra's father is an entrepreneur and a farmer. Her mother works in elderly
39 healthcare. She considered them her role models in terms of encouraging education,
40 work and creativity equally amongst their children. Sandra worked in a bank, married
41 her long-term partner in her twenties and started a family. Her husband introduced her
42 to his 'entrepreneurial family', which consisted of men who do business and women
43 who support them, and she became embedded within the family business. She set up
44 her own accounting firm in order to support the family business, running it part-time
45 with the help of her mother-in-law.
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54 This gendered structure of the family business is not only about the gendering of
55 occupational roles, but can also be recognised for bringing about particular forms of
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3 control and resistance (Ainsworth and Cox, 2003). During this period, Sandra was
4 politically engaged, as was her husband. However, she quickly hit the glass ceiling as
5 she discovered that political life consists of a fraternity of men, where she never felt
6 welcome. She dreamed of further education and a life of political engagement, but felt
7 stifled by the lack of support both from her husband and, for women, from the state.
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12 After eleven years, Sandra suddenly recognised how her life had become
13 predetermined in several ways. Indeed, even though she had made a career at one of
14 the large banks, she felt discontent and 'locked in' as the accountant of her husband's
15 family business, which she continued to manage on the side. This role had been offered
16 to her as a great 'opportunity' at the beginning of their relationship, but turned into a
17 necessary, yet hidden, service. This revealed the (patriarchal) power relations she was
18 implicitly subordinated to, as her work primarily benefited the men in the family
19 business, allowing them "to do their business in peace and quiet".
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26 Sandra decided to break away from the family business and move to the UK to study.
27 Discovering she was pregnant, she returned to Sweden to continue her education, and
28 excelled on the innovation programme, which subsequently led her to launch her own
29 innovation consulting company. Her husband and his family, however, did not
30 appreciate this, stating: "You could have done better if you'd stayed here". She
31 explained they saw her as a threat and there was no acceptance for how she wanted to
32 shape her life. She recalled:
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39 I remember the first newspaper article about my company where I figured as an
40 entrepreneur. He [my husband] did not even want to look at it, and looked
41 demonstratively away. But when he appeared in the newspaper, I was constantly
42 expected to admire this. I realised this family wanted to control me. In
43 comparison to my family, who have always said that 'we don't really understand
44 what you do, but we are very proud of you', I never felt support to do the things I
45 wanted. So I wanted to find my own way....
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52 In 2005, having been part of her husband's family for twenty-two years, Sandra
53 decided to file for divorce and follow her own path in life.
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3 Rama's and Sandra's narratives thus far illustrate the first stage, where the women
4 were implicitly or explicitly subordinated to patriarchal/familial control. Indeed,
5 juxtaposing their positions, it is evident that regardless of whether the women
6 exercised a 'freedom' in their choice of marriage partners, the gendered power
7 struggles prevailed, as both women's career ambitions were stifled by their husbands.
8 Interestingly, both women's power practices within this 'process to freedom' were to
9 get a divorce and turn to education. This subordination process led to the next process
10 of empowerment, towards their journey to 'freedom'.
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17 Intriguingly, the women's subordination was not always discussed explicitly – but
18 implicitly. Focusing on Rama's and Sandra's stories of divorce shows how this was
19 explicitly the driving force behind Rama's turning to entrepreneurship, while in
20 Sandra's case it was mentioned passively. However, they both utilised the
21 entrepreneurship narrative in a way that did not tolerate this 'vulnerability', but as the
22 driving force to empower themselves, followed by other women, which is outlined in
23 the next two phases.
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30 *4.2 Empowerment: The individual's capacity to challenge power structures within the* 31 *existing social system* 32

33 This phase saw the women emphasise entrepreneurship as the space where they found
34 their 'freedom' and a route towards emancipation. The women in both the Saudi and
35 Swedish contexts emphasised the importance of family support and education during
36 this stage, in addition to women's national and international entrepreneurial networks.
37 The women in both contexts also called for a 'women only' (Saudi Arabia) or
38 'feminist' (Sweden) market in order to break down the power relations in male-
39 dominated areas of business. These empowering practices guided the women towards
40 self-employment and 'freedom' for themselves as well as decent employment for other
41 women. The women felt energised by empowering other women through employing
42 them in their enterprises, and this led them to mobilise a movement for social and
43 structural change for women in their country. Paradoxically, however, the women also
44 referred to men as an empowering resource. In Saudi Arabia many of the women's
45 businesses were financially and emotionally supported by their male guardian, whilst
46 in Sweden one network of women entrepreneurs offered their women members what
47 they called 'male followers', who would escort the women and support their
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3 'visibility' when they went to various networking meetings or to the bank to apply for
4 capital³. Rama's and Sandra's narratives describing their self-empowerment phase
5 emphasise these observations. Rama's story illustrates her journey to becoming a
6 successful entrepreneur and her ongoing desire to empower other Saudi women in her
7 country. Sandra's story illustrates her entrepreneurial endeavours, political ambitions
8 and journey to setting up her own business aimed at women and disempowered groups
9 in Swedish society.
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14 15 4.2.1 Rama's empowerment

16 When Rama returned home to live under her father's guardianship, the dynamics of the
17 patriarchal power relations changed within that context (Moghadam, 2004). Indeed,
18 Rama gained some individual agency and the freedom she desired to attend university,
19 work and obtain permission to rent premises for her business. This supportive platform
20 empowered Rama with a space and an opportunity to pursue her ultimate dream, which
21 was to be independent in running her own - all women - business. Rama started her
22 own marketing business, in which her sister fully invested:
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30 After years of hard work I finally got my successful business *and now I'm free*.
31 When I started it was a dream, and a goal, and I still have this vision that my
32 business will be all Saudi girls, or any girls, because I have a strong belief in
33 women and that girls' work is different... it is hard to have an all-women office
34 right now because women are not as qualified and experienced as men are.
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39 Rama perceived that her degree and work experience empowered her, and as a result
40 she was "free". However, this was a period of fluctuating support that could have both
41 created and limited Rama's capacities. Indeed, whilst it seems Rama felt empowered
42 through her studies, work and setting up her own successful business, as the previous
43 *gender-specific* formal and informal institutional constraints (Welter and Smallbone,
44 2008) she faced (such as lack of permission from her husband to study and work) were
45 alleviated, the fact was that she was still vulnerable, as these opportunities continued
46 under the guardianship of her father, who legally had the power to stop her from
47 working and running her business at any time, for example by taking his name off the
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56 ³ This network was however not "Include" but another network which also aimed to support women's
57 entrepreneurship.
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3 office space lease or not allowing her to travel alone to work and back. Rama later
4 confessed that whilst her father was supportive, he was an old man, and if he passed
5 away she would be transferred under the guardianship of her eldest brother, who
6 believed she should not be working but should remarry to maintain the family honour.
7 It can thus be deduced that Rama was empowered through familial support (mainly her
8 father's) before she became an entrepreneur, even if it were in a "bounded
9 empowerment" form (Gill and Ganesh, 2009), and was subsequently empowered after
10 becoming an entrepreneur.
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16 17 4.2.2. Sandra's empowerment

18 Around the time of her divorce, the university incubator and entrepreneurship promoter
19 asked Sandra to take over the management of the programme. Given her personal
20 situation she decided it would be good for her children's stability if she were to have a
21 permanent job. Yet she continued to run her consultancy on the side, as she felt loyal to
22 her customers and those working for her. However, after three years, Sandra longed for
23 her freedom and decided to return to the company full-time. She eventually gained the
24 confidence to engage in the political realm with other women, albeit specifically in the
25 business realm. Entrepreneurship, she explains, is about breaking free:
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33 The feeling of being able to be *free* and to do what you want. *If* I want to work in
34 Barcelona three days a week then I will do that. And *if* I want to work my butt
35 off day and night for six months [in my company], then I do that. It's just the
36 feeling of knowing that I can change my life if I want to. Usually I choose to
37 work extremely hard, but just the feeling of being *able* to do what I want - that is
38 invaluable.
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45 The second stage in the empowerment process unveils a sense of recuperation rather
46 than emancipation (Goss et al., 2011) as the women's attempts to be set free from the
47 power of others are only partial and embedded within the institutional structures
48 (Inglis, 1997; Welter, 2011). This means that Rama and Sandra did not achieve
49 'emancipation' during this stage. However, family support, together with education,
50 employment and, thereafter, entrepreneurship empowered Rama and Sandra to act
51 more successfully *within* the structures of their society (Inglis, 1997). Both women
52 gained financial independence and political engagement, and fulfilled their dreams of
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3 working alongside/employing other women. Both Rama's and Sandra's practices to
4 overcome constraints at this stage were to maximise family support, which led them to
5 become empowered and gain their desired independence and freedom in their work as
6 entrepreneurs. Thus, it can be argued that their empowerment is 'fluctuated' (Goss et
7 al., 2011) and 'bounded', as the sense of individual empowerment gained through the
8 constraints-centered discourse did indeed bear traces of an emergent and collective
9 notion of empowerment (Gill and Ganesh, 2009), which in return motivated both Rama
10 and Sandra to make a change for other women.
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16 17 *4.3 Emancipation: mobilising resistance to the social system through collective agents* 18 *of change*

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20 The empowerment of the self and other women through their businesses led the
21 women to take steps to contribute to women's development, and therefore social
22 change, at varying stages of their business development. Indeed, all the narratives
23 discussed a form of 'giving back', 'freeing others' and changing social perceptions and
24 work opportunities for women in their communities. The Saudi women in particular
25 stressed that they wanted to set up businesses and employ other women in order to
26 have a legitimate platform to push forward policies to support women's
27 entrepreneurship through the Chamber of Commerce, as well as women's employment
28 policies with the Ministry of Labor and Social Development. They also believed these
29 steps could eventually pressure the Ministry of Education to adjust the curriculum to
30 prepare young girls academically and socially for the workplace. The entrepreneurs in
31 Sweden mirrored these sentiments in addition to other forms of emancipation and
32 social change through seeking equality in general for local women, immigrants and
33 refugees of all ages and sexual orientations. Many of the women clearly combined
34 their income-generating activities with missions for social change; for example, one of
35 the Swedish entrepreneurs ran a PR company and wanted to spur diversity and equality
36 in Swedish societies, which led her to focus on commissions that had such a purpose.
37 Rama's and Sandra's narratives laid a clear foundation for emancipation through
38 initiating an organisation with that very purpose.
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53 *4.3.1. Rama's process for emancipation*

54 After the success of her first business, Rama set up a production company which
55 produces documentaries on women's lives in Saudi Arabia. Her first project was a
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3 series documenting the journeys of successful Saudi female entrepreneurs. She
4 explained she did it to inspire Saudi women:
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8 This is why I produced this programme... I want to empower Saudi women,
9 encourage them to develop themselves, to believe in their abilities and work hard
10 to achieve their goals, and show them that they can live their lives freely outside
11 of the boundaries of the home... Truly my role is to support women in general
12 and specifically Saudi women... The message I want to reach our society is that
13 we women can do a lot of things and we are different from what other
14 communities and countries think of us, even other Middle Eastern countries
15 ... The other goal is for my community's self development ... I want this to be in
16 my role, developing the nation's young women who build our country.
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24 Rama's consultancy, in which she aims to eventually employ only women, along with
25 her production company, which produces documentaries about and for Saudi women,
26 can be seen as constraint-breaking organisations. Furthermore, the sense of
27 empowerment she gained through entrepreneurship led her to want not only to
28 emancipate other women, but also to challenge the structures of power and social
29 norms in society through women. Rama ended by stating that she was adamant that she
30 would never re-marry and would never have another man control her life again. She
31 hoped that that her story, projects and employment of women would encourage other
32 women to be independent of controlling men in their lives. But the question remains
33 how effective this 'emancipatory plan' can be in a society that continues to
34 systematically place women in a secondary position in its formal and informal
35 institutions.
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45 *4.3.2. Sandra's process for emancipation*

46 Sandra continued to run and expand her innovation consultancy business, with the
47 mission to train people all over the world towards a leadership that supports and
48 enhances innovation processes. Whilst her business targeted all organisations
49 interested in enhancing innovation processes, Sandra's political interests and concern
50 for marginalised groups was still strong. Therefore, Sandra participated in setting up an
51 organisation ("Include") that explicitly aimed at stimulating entrepreneurial activity
52 among disempowered groups, focusing on women in general and immigrant women in
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3 particular. This organisation was initially set up and run informally by a network of
4 entrepreneurs. However, today it is run as a company, which is owned and managed by
5 Sandra. This socially responsible organisation aims at strengthening the power of
6 innovation among disempowered groups, and presents its vision, mission and basic
7 values as follows on its website:
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12 The vision for [the organisation] is to be an equal inclusive project for the
13 development of people, ideas and innovations. Our mission is to offer a
14 welcoming inclusive development where we meet on the same wavelength.
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16 Together with our clients we develop new working methods and challenges, and
17 improve existing support structures, which welcome women and diverse groups
18 of people.
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24 The purpose of this organisation is to explicitly include marginalised groups and create
25 a space for individuals to empower themselves through entrepreneurship and
26 innovation. They have worked to create awareness of women's struggles to view
27 themselves as entrepreneurs and convince others of their capabilities to develop ideas,
28 innovations and companies, and to afford them a stronger collective voice. Finally,
29 they have cooperated with researchers, setting up a research council, to increase the
30 competence in gender and innovation in the support structure.
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37 Facing, negotiating and overcoming everyday micro/macro forms of oppression
38 stemming from formal/informal institutional constraints (Verduijn et al., 2014) led the
39 women to convey a sense of exceptional individual agency in running their businesses
40 to empower themselves as well as other women within their societies. Their bounded
41 view of freedom does indeed seem to capture what is intended by the notion of
42 entrepreneuring-as-emancipation: the "pursuit of freedom and autonomy relative to an
43 existing status quo... [seeking] to disrupt the status quo and change her position in the
44 social order... and ... the social order itself" (Rindova et al., 2009:478). The
45 psychological benefits gained from the sense of individual empowerment (Rindova et
46 al., 2009; Jennings et al., 2016) in successfully negotiating constraints within the social
47 structures (Inglis, 1997) gave the women the ability to identify with other women with
48 similar experiences of subordination and, thus, use a form of collective solidarity and
49 'recruitment' of other women as agents of change for the maintenance and
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3 development of their personal resistance, which would arguably be impossible to
4 achieve individually (Goss et al., 2011; Kalantaridis, 2014). Whilst none of the
5 women's businesses illustrate a full frontal assault on local power practices restricting
6 women, their stories do, however, illustrate different ways of providing support for
7 women who want to work in female supported environments, achieve self-fulfillment
8 and make a difference at work.
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14 *-Insert Table 1 around here-*
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17 The stories we have analysed clearly indicate the local embeddedness of women's
18 entrepreneurship within their environment, "which is fragile in both institutional terms
19 and dominated by traditions" (Welter and Smallbone, 2008; 518), and therefore draw
20 attention to the complex socio-economic and political nature of women's
21 entrepreneurship. In Table 1 we juxtapose these narratives and illustrate the stark
22 differences and similarities between these contexts. Their stories also uncover the
23 socio-structural modes of oppression through which the women felt subordinated,
24 controlled and lacking in freedom in their everyday lives; and which thereafter made
25 them turn to further education, divorce and/or rearrangement of family duties, and to
26 move away from male-dominated organisations to empower themselves. They then set
27 up businesses through which they experienced self-empowerment and, finally,
28 empowered other women with an ambition to collectively achieve emancipation. This
29 suggests that the women's stories of breaking free through entrepreneurship move into
30 a sustained iteration of individual empowerment => collective emancipation, which
31 propels entrepreneurship as social change. Next we will use Rama and Sandra as
32 illustrative cases to discuss how this 'narrative logic' affects women who turn to
33 entrepreneurship for empowerment, and how it impacts the relationship between
34 entrepreneurship, emancipation and social change, as a way to institutional change of
35 the systems of oppression.
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50 **5. Discussion**

51 Narrating the stories of 26 women entrepreneurs, who enacted their entrepreneurship in
52 different contexts, illustrated how the Middle Eastern and Western women crafted a
53 complex process on their road to empowerment and freedom. Their journeys begin
54 with a shifting of the 'status quo' (Rindova et al., 2009) as they experience
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3 subordination to different forms of patriarchal orders either explicitly, by law, or
4 implicitly, in male-dominated organisations and their family homes. The stories
5 emphasise a desire to break free from these various expressions of a subordinating
6 patriarchal order through empowerment within the system. Interestingly, aspirations
7 for social change were emphasised early on in the women's stories, while 'feeling
8 trapped' (subordination). That is, the women not only felt trapped in their personal
9 lives, but also trapped in terms of changing orders, and viewed entrepreneurship as a
10 path to 'do more' in terms of changing unequal societal situations. Finally, their stories
11 illustrate a desire to include others in a collective emancipatory process, transforming
12 and even subverting current power structures. The equation of 'entrepreneurship +
13 women = empowerment + emancipation' can be refined through the women's stories
14 as follows: 'subordination => individual empowerment through entrepreneurship =>
15 emancipation' through recruiting more women to view entrepreneurship as a path to
16 reach collective freedom". This suggests that empowerment describes the practices
17 used when individuals develop their capacities to act successfully within a system or to
18 change from one system to another, whilst emancipation links to the collective
19 challenge that follows from empowerment when entrepreneurs come together to
20 change oppressive structures with the aim of achieving collective freedom (Inglis,
21 1997) and which leads to institutional change to 'the rules of the game' through new
22 entrepreneurial groupings (Kalantaridis, 2014).
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37 Despite the arguably paradoxical country contexts, juxtaposing the narratives identified
38 similar patterns in the women's stories (Sørensen, 2014). As we read the life stories
39 from Saudi women (Essers, 2009) in the stories of Swedish women entrepreneurs, and
40 vice versa, the depths of the women's struggles surfaced. Although subordination and
41 power relation struggles took a more subtle form in the Swedish women's stories, and
42 were seldom explicitly expressed, but rather implicitly mentioned, they were made
43 clear when we read one context's life stories in the other.
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50 In Sandra's case, subordination within her marriage was much more implicit and could
51 have passed unnoticed. However, when we juxtaposed her case with Rama's, we began
52 to discern that both women felt oppressed by their husbands and their families, and
53 thus found themselves stifled within the patriarchal system. This was a situation that
54 both women wanted to break free from, and both turned to entrepreneurship as a
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3 medium where they could empower themselves and alter the power structures.
4 Therefore, the methodological approach of juxtaposition highlighted that both women
5 were indeed entangled in the patriarchal system's web domestically, in organisations,
6 and in society. It also illustrated that regardless of the women's empowerment and
7 navigation practices within the oppressive system, they were institutionally embedded,
8 and thus, their emancipation was bounded by the pervasive patriarchal structure, which
9 prevailed explicitly and implicitly, and to varying degrees, across both contexts.
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16 Juxtaposing the cases also allowed stark differences to be highlighted, which mirrors
17 the varying degrees of patriarchal-familial control. Some women were empowered and
18 supported by men in their family and entrepreneurial networks, whilst others were
19 explicitly or implicitly hindered by these men through legal power or gendered social
20 norms. In addition, whilst the Saudi Arabian women emphasised the need for women-
21 only organisations, Swedish women searched for feminist actors (male and female) to
22 change a particular male-dominated market. For Rama and Sandra the differences
23 mirrored the social institution of marriage. Following a social norm of family-arranged
24 marriages, Rama confessed to not 'really knowing' her husband before they wed;
25 whilst Sandra chose to marry a man whom she loved and knew well. However, the
26 clearest differences were the formal/informal institutional legal/cultural boundaries and
27 opportunities they faced throughout their journeys as women and as entrepreneurs.
28 Rama's divorce meant she lost custody of her sons because of the vague and subjective
29 ruling which condemned her choice to work in a non-segregated environment, whilst
30 Sandra did not endure this and was given shared custody with her husband. On the
31 other hand, Sandra continued to struggle to find a healthy work-life balance for herself
32 and her children.
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45 These patterns were also evident in some of the other stories. Saudi women expressed
46 their risk, vulnerability and hope for emancipation in their transition from family life to
47 entrepreneurial life, whilst Swedish women's stories were built upon the notion that
48 they could always do more, and reach further with their ambition to leverage
49 empowerment to emancipation. Furthermore, whilst Rama's businesses are currently
50 thriving, she will always have to depend on a supportive male guardian to sign her
51 rental contracts and travel documentation permitting her to leave the country for
52 essential business-related trips. Sandra does not have to contemplate such legal
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3 constraints, but is conscious of the lack of adequate state support for her business'
4 social ambition of emancipating working women on the one hand, and on the other, the
5 difficulties in turning it into an economically sustainable business model that can meet
6 market needs. Interestingly, both women failed to explicitly mention the continuous
7 toll of legal constraints, grave losses and emotional distress that entrepreneurship had
8 bestowed upon their desired journey to freedom. Whilst it is interesting to put forward
9 some similarities and differences between the cases, the point has not been to compare
10 them, which often falls back on the idea of one case being superior to the other. This
11 proved to be a richer enlightening approach to understanding how empowerment and
12 emancipation, in terms of Inglis' (1997) conceptualisations, are used by women when
13 they narrate their entrepreneurial journeys.
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22 Through engaging with the analysis of power through life stories, this study indicated
23 that empowerment and emancipation could indeed be separated analytically.
24 Empowerment (freedom for the self) is not about stories of radical economic, political
25 or social change but about taking control of one's own life and environment within the
26 structures in which they live (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013). The entrepreneurs gained
27 independence and a sense of freedom they strived to include others in the practices of
28 empowerment through entrepreneurship to reach emancipation and the changing of
29 social structures that make up the patriarchal system both as and for the collective
30 (Goss et al., 2011). Whilst it cannot be refuted that the women have succeeded in
31 empowering themselves out of a subordinate position through starting an enterprise,
32 have engaged with other women interested in working and pursuing an entrepreneurial
33 career, and have called for changes to support working women, signs of emancipation,
34 "breaking free from the power of the other" (Rindova et al., 2009) and instigating
35 collective freedom, have yet to be achieved in their narratives. That is, the perceived
36 freedom gained through their empowerment (Gill and Ganesh, 2007) led them to
37 involve other women to extend their perceived change when it can be suggested that
38 they have essentially reproduced the boundaries within the existing system. Therefore,
39 rather than transitioning practices of empowerment into an emancipatory process,
40 emancipation is not realised but instead is halted, whilst empowerment proceeds. Thus,
41 empowerment through entrepreneurship turns into a consolidating narrative approach,
42 which neglects and overlooks other forms of activity than entrepreneurship (e.g.
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3 activism, politics, social movements, artistic avenues) that can be pursued to reach
4 emancipation.
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8 To reflect upon how empowerment drives women's entrepreneurship we turn to the
9 concept of 'desire' to understand why entrepreneurial activity is consolidated in
10 women's life stories of turning to entrepreneurship and using it to achieve social
11 change. We suggest that emancipation emerges as an object of desire, which is defined
12 as something that is "an unattainable and only vaguely specified object" (Jones and
13 Spicer, 2005: 237) and to which desire is directed. Jones and Spicer also suggest that
14 the entrepreneurship discourse "posits an impossible and indeed incomprehensible
15 object at its centre" (2005; 236). In the women's life stories, this object is social
16 change, or from a more systemic perspective - to subvert the patriarchal system. With a
17 life story constructed as a fantasy that organises and drives entrepreneurship for social
18 change, entrepreneurship is not one among many means of empowerment, but
19 becomes the "only way" or "Holy Grail" of elevation and emancipation (Verduijn and
20 Essers, 2013: 100), which women have and offer each other to overthrow an
21 unequal/unjust society and subvert the oppressive system. Turning to entrepreneurship
22 for social change seems to provide a more refined narrative structure that explicitly
23 posits emancipation as the (im)possible object that can be reached through hopes and
24 fantasies of 'breaking free'. When the business person can make plans for the future of
25 developing a business, recruiting employees, growing an empire and acting upon this
26 story to make her/his dreams come true (Johansson, 2004), approaching
27 entrepreneurship as social change inevitably comes with a similar narrative structure,
28 but with a blurred description as to how business principles and practices of social
29 change can be executed within a pervasive patriarchal capitalist system that
30 simultaneously upholds a malestream entrepreneurial system.
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46 Whilst the idea of the heroic male entrepreneur is challenged in the women's life
47 stories, they simultaneously build upon the idea of economic rationality and freedom
48 as obvious values. Ironically, these liberal values reinforce male norms and values as
49 universal, thus reproducing the rational autonomous male subject of liberal polity
50 (Taylor and Vintges, 2004). If male norms and values drive empowerment through
51 entrepreneurship, this path may invite women to fight fire (inequality) with fire
52 (reproducing /sustaining inequality). Thus, the narrative structure in the life stories
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3 identified in this article supports the sceptical view of the ability of empowerment to
4 change the status quo (Jennings et al., 2016) and prevent the perpetuation of women's
5 oppression (Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Verduijn, 2014).
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9 Life story narrative approaches have mainly been used in developing a conceptual
10 understanding of entrepreneurial learning (Rae and Carswell, 2000) and the
11 construction of the (social) entrepreneurial identity (Jones, Latham and Betta, 2008).
12 Therefore, further research focusing on how life stories are constructed retrospectively
13 as well as for future ambition for social change would be useful. It would be interesting
14 to study if and how provocation, which Berglund, Gaddefors and Lindgren (2016)
15 found propels change in communities, could also navigate processes of individual
16 empowerment into collective emancipation. Further, the narrative structure identified
17 aligns well with the neoliberal shift, encouraging individuals to assume an
18 entrepreneurial persona, offering entrepreneurship as an 'empowering route' for all and
19 sundry. The shift towards neoliberalism has been seen both in Western and non-
20 Western countries over the last few decades. We propose the conceptualisation of
21 empowerment and emancipation suggested in this study could guide future research,
22 and in particular narrative approaches, which are interested in how entrepreneurship
23 and entrepreneurial practices unfold in neoliberal terrains.
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35 Kalantaridis (2014) also holds a pessimistic view, but from another angle, with regard
36 to the time horizon involved in the process of introducing change to prevailing
37 institutions, even when rules/laws change (such as the explicit gender equality laws).
38 He concludes change is the outcome of long-term processes or entrepreneurial
39 groupings and actions endogenous to the system, where change in formal institutions
40 occurs through an economic process and change in the informal institutions occurs
41 through the political process. Institutional change will thus occur only in those
42 instances where the power of those pursuing change exceeds that of those opposing it
43 (North, 1994) and resistance to change and conflict is less inherent. Ironically these
44 two critical turns inform us that turning to entrepreneurship as a saviour of all kinds
45 may erode a culture of collectivity and satisfaction, which may delimit the political
46 ambitions of reaching emancipation. Additional empirical research on the links
47 between the formal/informal institutions and the links to empowerment and
48 emancipation through an economic-political focus in the future would be useful in
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3 highlighting the interlinks between the intensions between these concepts and their
4 impact on institutional change.
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8 The research has highlighted the theoretical shortcomings of coupling the concepts of
9 empowerment and emancipation in the context of women's entrepreneurship. It has
10 disentangled these concepts in a more nuanced manner differentiating the
11 empowerment of the individual from the desire to emancipate disempowered people in
12 their society. Through elucidating the concepts, we have been able to analyse the
13 desires/motivations/expectations women narrate for empowerment and emancipation,
14 and the dark sides of the 'practical reality' of achieving these through
15 entrepreneurship. We believe the desire to 'break free' from constraints (e.g.
16 organisational, societal, institutional) is not only held by female but also male
17 entrepreneurs, yet little is known about male entrepreneurs' desire to 'break free' in
18 mainstream 'gender-neutral' research. Therefore, future research using a gender-aware
19 approach to life stories to analyse the entrepreneur's narrative and desire for
20 empowerment or emancipation (e.g. through social entrepreneurship or social
21 innovation) would be useful in furthering research on entrepreneurial motivations for
22 'freedom' pre-start up and thereafter. Furthermore, such research would be useful to
23 prepare (female) entrepreneurs for the practical everyday challenges they may
24 encounter, which they intend to 'break free' from but are deeply embedded within.
25 Entrepreneurs search for freedom via entrepreneurship can thus be understood as a
26 complex and dynamic process which unfolds over time, and therefore, may be better to
27 think in terms of gaining degrees of freedom and emancipation. It therefore helps the
28 entrepreneur appreciate how empowerment and emancipated are bounded, thus, guides
29 them to recognise other forms of activities through which empowerment and
30 emancipation could be approached and achieved.
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46 **6. Conclusion**

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48 Our study draws attention to the social turn in entrepreneurship, which follows a need
49 to disentangle the relationship between empowerment/emancipation through
50 entrepreneurship. Empirically, we contribute to advancing this equation through
51 exploring these concepts in the context of women's entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia
52 and Sweden. Whilst our aim was not to compare or generalise through these cases,
53 using juxtaposition as our methodological approach allowed us to discern ingrained
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3 patterns to the limits of entrepreneurship discourse in this cross-cultural study of 26
4 life stories. Our findings support studies that women's entrepreneurship is indeed a
5 vehicle for women's empowerment within their contexts but also that this vehicle
6 holds a dark side.
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11 Our main conclusion builds upon the conception of 'entrepreneurship as social change'
12 as a two-headed phenomenon comprising emancipation and oppression as forces that
13 stand in a relationship of constant tension. We have also emphasised the importance of
14 viewing women entrepreneurship in its social context and to listen to their life-stories.
15 In this regard, the institutional lens applied contributes analytically to the scholarship
16 on women's engagement in entrepreneurship by distinguishing between narratives of
17 empowerment as practices to reach freedom for the self within the structures, and
18 narratives of emancipation, as a process whereby the removal of structural constraints
19 and freedom is extended by and to others in society. Whilst empowerment is stressed
20 in the women's narratives, emancipation turns into an object of desire that propels
21 entrepreneurship as social and institutional change. Whether this may lead to future
22 emancipation remain an empirical question to be answered. What has been stressed
23 here is that it may as well lead to the reproduction of the status quo in the pervasive
24 social system.
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Table 1: Narrative themes in women's stories of gaining empowerment and researching emancipation through entrepreneurship

Narrative themes of	Saudi Arabian context	Both contexts	Swedish context
Subordination	Women <i>legally</i> 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 <i>socially</i> 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