Women's work- men's work: a Turkish ethnographic study

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to discuss the place the distinction between women's work and men's work holds in work life. In the research, which may be deemed an ethnographic field research, participant observation, informal interview, filed notes and reflective diary have been used as data collection tools. As a result of the research, it has been deduced that the said professional distinction, which may be assessed as a part of historical process, has been taken for granted and supported by women side. It is a general view that such qualitative researches will contribute to the field particularly in the service sector, which is viewed as a women's sector, and in the tourism sector, where the number of women workers is high. We cannot generalize this research since it has taken a form with the effect of a qualitative research; but it may give us a significant point of view about relevant facts.

Key words: Women, work, feminist ethic, ethnography, culture, Turkey.

Introduction

If we make a sectoral assessment of the organizations of our time, we can conclude that the service sector has gained power to a significant extent. In addition, this sector is the working area, where the margin of women workers is the highest, and tourism sector is within the boundaries of this area too. Therefore, we can say that work to be achieved in the service sector in particular will make significant contributions to the area. Although this research was done in the industrial sector, which is out of the women's

work definition of the society in the sectoral sense, it is the opinion that it may give significant clues about self-assessment of women in the working area. It is for this reason that support to research by the sectors with high women population may result in major findings for the area and may provide the sector-based comparisons with an essential perspective.

If what we aim in the study is to focus on the issue of women, it would be better if we act with a background based on a woman's perspective. Assessment of the organizational

studies done on the 'woman issue' within the framework of feminist approaches matters for it contributes a woman's perspective to the issue. This study is based on feminist ethics for assessing woman's work as opposed to men's work, which is one of the many unethical kinds of attitudes developed against women, from an ethical perspective. Feminist ethics criticizes male-dominated values, which are taken as a basis in traditional ethics theories, and highlights that there exist ethical values on female matters (Jaggar, 1991; Wicks et al., 1994; Silvers, 1995; Walker, 1998; Hinman, 2003). Various researchers have argued that the ethical approaches, based on men's language from the past to the present, ignored the ethical structures of women, taking a form which has an effect on the responsibility areas of women and their many interests (Gilligan, 1982; Burton and Dunn, 1996). It is not surprising that a woman's perspective, based on areas of interest and responsibilities, differs from that of men (Sterba, 2000); but the ethical values it supports should not be differentiated (Scaltas, 1992; Dobson and White, 1996). Feminist ethical thinkers, who take this point as a start, made various statements based on care and justice ethics. Not so as to damage others, but to sustain relations, to give value and to remedy wrongs, are the basic steps of ethics of interest (Koehn, 1998; Porter, 1999; Jaggar, 2000; Rosenstand, 2003; Engster, 2005; Ciulla, 2009; Meagher and Parton, 2004; Doneleavy, 2007). It is important to understand the reason why values like home and child are important in the perspectives of women. Nevertheless if the matter is assessed as a whole, it should be borne in mind that society is represented at the macro level (Held, 1993, Nobbis, 2005), interpersonal relations are at the micro-level. The discussion of problematic matters like power, inequality and diversity on the basis of interest and justice at the macro-level may contribute to divergent perspectives in the discussion (Sevenhuijse, 1998).

It may be suggested that the motives of human beings, who rely on relations in their social life, like being protected and meeting others' needs may be assessed as a part of an ethics of interest (Dalley, 1992; Held, 1993; Tronto, 1993; Folbre, 2001; Engster, 2005).

Since to show care, responsibility, nourishment, compassion and to meet others' needs make up the traditional roles of women, their social and political priorities have to be developed to a significant extent to disseminate them to the whole community (Tronto 1993; Wood, 1994). One should remember that the ethical value of showing interest changes from person to person, as do their emotions and values. Care ethics was criticized by some thinkers for being hard to apply and they assert that it would be more reasonable to assess the application from the angle of justice ethics (Noddings, 1984; Burton and Dunn, 1996). It is possible to say that the justice ethics theorists, advocating that social equality can be founded on ethical values, aim to make a macro-level assessment on the issue (Schermerhorn, 1996; Pieper, 1999).

If we handle this matter from an organizational point of view, it becomes evident that approaches, which take interest as a basis for organizations within a wide network of relations, can become highly significant (Wicks et al., 1994; Philips et al., 2003; Borgerson, 2007; Machold et al., 2008). Strengthening of relations in the

organization matters for putting value in their integrated values and increases their efficiency (Gilligan, 1982; Wicks et al., 1994; Dobson and White, 1995; Dobson, 1996; White, 1999; Sterba, 2000). It cannot be denied that it would bring many benefits to organizations having relations with shareholders if they developed approaches, considering the opinions of women stakeholders within their group. But, the secondary position of woman in work-life, which assumes a form around male-dominated values, has a negative impact on efforts aiming at the improvement of these values. After explaining the reason why use was made of women's perspectives in assessment of woman within the basic structure of the research, it is necessary to make an explanation regarding sex-based discrimination in professions, which is the essential problem addressed in this study.

Sex-Based Discrimination in Professions

The division of work by sexes has been an institutionalized (Hartman, 1976) and a sustainable fact throughout history (Bielby and Baron, 1986). It is observed that sex-based discrimination between man and woman results in role discrimination in all societies, and woman is limited to home and private life as a result of this role transformation; on the other hand, man plays an active role as the bread winner and has the decision-making power. In other words, while the production function is assumed to be a masculine role, giving birth and motherhood as well as domestic chores are on the shoulders of women (Koptagel-Ilal, 1995; Koray, 2000, pp.211). This is one of the basic reasons why women act with due consideration of the above-said care ethics in mind. The Work-private area

discrimination has had an impact on the place women occupy in work life in Turkish society as well as in Greek and Levantine society in general, for that matter.

The reason why women with a higher number in working life due to historical transformation make up a larger population in specific areas is another matter for discussion. Women had a tendency to follow employment areas, defined traditionally as women's work by society, in order not to disturb the order of their responsibilities in their house/private life, which are their basic responsibility areas, which has led to discrimination in many professions (Koray, 1993). In this process, defined as *feminization* (and informalization) of the service sector, horizontal and vertical stratification shows itself manifestly each passing day: as a result of horizontal stratification, women's work stays as *women's work*; on the other hand, work including engineering, assembly line production, science/technology remain as *men's work*. The vertical stratification process shows itself as a 'glass ceiling' and continues as such (Ozkaplan, 2009).

In this study, conducted in Turkey, was observed that the distinction between *women's work and men's work* is common and that this system continues to be the vogue. If the work life, which is a part of society, is examined, it is possible to say that power-based management and leadership are viewed as *men's work* as a result of the above-said situation. On the other hand, while women have a tendency to occupy a place in professions like nursing, teaching, viewed as *women's work*, they are devoid of management opportunities (Arat, 1996, pp.46). This sexist process has an impact in selecting people to serve in various professions as well.

There is a tendency for women to occupy professions matching their qualifications and such a notion is supported and the said gender ideology maintains its place by strengthening the inter-professional distinctions along historical process lines (Ecevit, 1998, pp. 271). Other than that, biases, based on feminine qualities of women, also survive. There is an incorrect common opinion in society that by acting emotionality, acting without apparent reason at times, not being able to think from many angles and with a narrow capacity, and passivity, which are ascribed to women by some men, may have negative results in management. Unfortunately, unacceptable thinking that self-possession, rationality, to think from many angles, to prioritize organizational targets in decisions and organizational abilities, being able to turn money and raw material inputs to outputs in the form of goods and service most in the most efficient way, are only masculine qualities and such illogical thought is still observed (Demirbilek, 2007).

Child-care problems, the supposed lacking qualities of women for work life, the difficulty to find a right job due to education, profession and status, the low tendency in traditional society of encouraging a woman to take her place in work life complicates a woman's ability to step into work life (Ayaz, 1993, pp.179). It cannot be denied that the labour market has a competitive quality and that women may take a place in this market only if they can have higher educational levels (Ecevit, 1993, pp.24). "Emotional labor" is a term, which is particularly highlighted by feminists, and it is still a matter under great discussion. Since professions, defined as *women's work*, are viewed as a natural part of women, they are endowed with a lower wage.

Sex-based roles, expectations and emotional labour create increases and restructuring in the woman/man stratification and wage discrepancy issues (Ozkaplan, 2009, pp.21-22). How this subject matters is assessed by women in their professional lives based on cultural patterns and is the essential problem of this research. The use of ethnography as a research method for assessment of the culture issue has been found suitable. Therefore, we will give place to explanations regarding design and method before assessment of research data.

Methodology

After giving place to the main concern and theoretical framework of the research, we should explain the way the research is structured. In this research, which is done ethnographically, we meet 'the gatekeeper', who introduced the area to us and we gave all the information on the research to him. The researcher obtained official permission from his organization for staying within the boundaries of ethical rules and signed the information and agreement form together with the participants.

Interaction and observation plays a significant role in organizations in order to obtain reliable data in a full participation observation. Since the number of the white collars in the organization, where area research will be done, was not found to be adequate and areas, where the work was done, were detached, assessment of the blue-collar workers as a sample group was found to be more convenient in order to reach more participants and to communicate more easily. The period of staying in the research area was assessed with frequency of repetition of data and the time spent in the area

for the study and was deemed to be suitable at one month. The respondents numbered 172 people; but the actual participant number in data arrangement was reported as only 25. The names of participants and the organization for which the area of research was conducted were kept confidential as a requirement of qualitative research and the names to be used in analysis were determined by the researcher. Since the study took the events arising within the organization as its basis, statements concerning the private lives of participants were not taken into consideration at all.

There is not a standard data collection technique that can be made use of in ethnographic area research (Bernard, 1994). The tools, selected by the researcher for data collection, include participant observation, informal meeting, reflective diary and research notes. Area data were usually obtained from informal meetings and then were recorded as area notes. They were recorded in the reflective diary regularly to protect integrity and prevent data loss. The data, collected by the researcher, were thematised by way of re-reading and by taking into account the lines and the designated codes at the analytical stages. For validity and reliability of the research, an assessment by an authority experienced in the qualitative research area was required and the differentiating points were clarified by way of comparison of opinions. Consensus was reached on the determined points and the place they occupied in the area study was given with the line numbers. Codings used in the analysis and comparison of the results obtained matter for validity of the research. The researcher later compared these to the obtained results and performance calculated to

reliability and validity using Miles and Huberman (1994) formula (reliability=consensus/total consensus + difference opinion). The results obtained demonstrated a finding to 86% reliability as high and sufficient.

In the codings, given in the data analysis, OL represents events and the items by their side represent the line numbers in the reflective diary. The person, coded as MB, is the manager. As has been emphasized before, we cannot generalize the results of this research. Since it gives certain events within a specific time boundary from the eye of the researcher, it may form an opinion on women studies to be done in organizations. After giving the theoretical and methodological framework of the research, the data relating to the matter, which is the focus of attention, has to be carefully detailed.

Data Analysis

The women's work-men's work issue has been examined as sex-based discrimination in professions in the literature reviewed. As was stated before, some sectors and specific work require handicraft and certain other skills, and are viewed as suitable for only women as an outcome of social gender roles. If an assessment was made regarding this distinction in the research area, it was observed that work which usually required handicraft and certain skills, was imposed on women. This fact increased the women population in some minor machine operations, but it did not result in any changes in male-dominance in machine operating (being in charge of the machine).

The population of workers apportioned to each machine may vary; all blue-collar workers may have had

experiences with differing machines at the plant. But this may be observed as a mere replacement of women workers at machines with high women populations and the replacement of men workers at machines with high male populations. Additionally, if the number of people did not suffice at machines with high a women population, it was possible to complete the work cycle with men workers only. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that women took their place at machines requiring certain handicrafts, and men occupied some positions at women's machines (operating or packing). The researcher clearly stated it with the observations made in the area researched:

> (OL, 363-365) Assembling a cover was hard; you had to be careful and handy. Because it was pretty difficult to put the covers in the same direction and to do it fast with small covers.

Structuring at the establishment process of the plant had an impact on the way the above-mentioned conditions emerged. The said structural issue, which became a matter of concern during establishment of the plant, is described by the manager as below:

> (MB, 292-296) We had to select strong people for work at the structuring stage of K*. They had to provide the training for passage from the assembly stage going on for 15-20 hours to the production stage. During this period, a safeguard operated in Turkey in case the woman could not bear the supervisor, the woman could instigate a complaint. It was

planned this way to facilitate smooth operation.

Another reason for this distinction, which emerged at the establishment stage of the plant, was the encouragement given with supervisors being appointed to a plant in another city as a shift of the production place of the plant.

Although women workers were employed at the plant at the end of the process, the problematic issue started with the workforce structuring not having an impact on the desire to change dominant views that existed in the workplace concerning the role of women in general. Nevertheless, the manager said that he was not biased against employing a woman worker to any of the units which had not involved any women previously:

> (MB, 306-308) No, presently we accept women workers. We have added 3 women workers to our unit. We cannot take in any more. No, at first the work involved were the disintegration of machines, motor assembly etc. I decided to restructure. Otherwise, as I have just said, approximately 120-125 people work at a convertible-conversion unit. It would make no difference if all of them were women. We are not biased in this sense.

Nevertheless, workers support the view that no women worker is welcomed at this unit. It was observed in one of the informal meetings within the area that negative views relating to the matter were still dominant. The dialogue between the researcher and Mrs. Fahriye, one of the participants, is given below:

(OL, 386-392) She said that she would in fact be endowed with a permanent position, the paper unit was where she would work; but the manager of the paper unit did not accept it. He said that almost all workers at the paper plant were men and this was due to the fact that the job required physical power.

It can be stated therefore that managers and workers have differing opinions relating to the matter and it would be hard for women to occupy a place in the male-dominated working areas. Since this became an established fact at the plant, it is the considered opinion of the researcher that it will take time to shake this sexist idea off.

Another case observed at the plant was the fact that operating was viewed as masculine work. In the area research, which was done by the researcher with full participant observation, it has been concluded that on the machines, where a respondent worked as a blue-collar worker, he worked with a women operator only twice. This may be accepted as a glass ceiling, indicating that women have not reached a 'master level'; on the other hand, it may be viewed as a unique case, supporting negative biases against women in cultural patterns. Therefore, the distinction between women's work and men's work, for operating work to be done by women has to be assessed both in terms of the glass ceiling and cultural framework.

The researcher observed that while men were in charge of operating, women carried out work, apportioned to them on a social gender basis:

(OL, 319-323) Another point drawing my attention was that it was usually men, who were in charge of technical work, beyond the fact that the supervisor was a man. Although it was possible for women to respond issues relating to machine breakdowns, a man was placed in charge of the machine (operator) and while he performed his duties on the machine, women fulfilled their work role on the line requiring handicrafts jobs.

Another significant point recognized by the researcher during work was the emphasis placed on the distinction between women's work and men's work by women. Social gender-based roles as part of work life in a cultural foundation gives form to the system and it is structured with the impact of the given foundation (Özkaplan, 2009). In the studies, conducted on the basis of both subjective and objective indicators, it was noted that women had a minor position when compared to men. Plus, it was added that both men and women were usually aware of this fact and there were evidences of their acceptance of their distinct roles in the workplace (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1998:144).

The jobs requiring physical power or machine operating skills at the plant, were viewed as men's work. For women to get away from power or responsibility requiring physical work and for them to be led to other lerss demanding work was based purely on their gender. Social gender role differentiation shows itself as the society restructures the working conditions of the plant. It would also be incorrect to say that this statement can be generalized for all women. It was the result of some observations that

some women workers at the plant were eager to do certain types of work. But, since this number is relatively low according to the observations, it may be said that women are not eager to change the place occupied by them in the workplace given the distinction between what is considered to be women's work and men's work.

According to the observations of the researcher, the conversations of the women working at the plant provided a new meaning to the notion of women's work and the opinions of the observer relating to the matter are stated below:

> (OL, 544-548)
> Ceren (Woman): I cannot do heavy physical work, I cannot endure it, my body cannot handle it.
> Musa(Men): I can do it, what's the big deal?
> Ceren: But you're a man, I'm a woman.
> Musa: But there are women, engaged in such types of work.
> Ceren: It's not my type of work.

> (OL, 1019-1025) Ceren told Yelda (Woman to Woman): "Do not ever try to do palletizing. It is a man's work." This showed how strong the view "men's work" "women's work" is. It was clear that some women did not like to do heavy physical work and they stayed away from such work on purpose. They were of the opinion that it would be easier for them to serve according to their pre-specified roles.

> (OL, 497-499) a woman to the researcher, (Woman to Woman) "We used to do palletizing. It is a very hard work but sometimes we have to do it. In fact if you do

it once, they may later say that 'you have done it yesterday', therefore you will never get entangled in such work again".
Researcher: (OL, 501-506) In fact, I thought that much of the work in this place could be done by women but from what I saw the women's area of work was finer delicate types of work and that of the men was mainly heavy physical labor jobs, which signified a clear distinction between *women's work and men's work* at the plant. This distinction was supported by female workers. All of the jobs available were physically demanding to an extent but such a distinction had been generalized.

It was observed during the research by the researcher that the distinction between women's work and men's work was acceptable by men. It was recognized that they did not think that women had enough power for physical work, and they gave support to women in a friendly manner, which will be discussed in the context of informal relations, or they told them that they should not put pressure themselves so much:

> (OL, 1273-1277), Dialogue between Emin and the researcher at the work area; (Man to Woman)
> He said: "Stop! Do you want to develop muscles?" He told me to call him if I needed any help for lifting and I should not pressure myself. They do not want to use women for work, requiring muscle power. In fact, women do not want this either. It can be said that it is a mutually useful decision.

The points, highlighted above, make it evident that stratification in the distinction between women's work and men's work is supported by both men and women. The professions, which were found suitable for women as a part of their social role, was supported in a sense (professions like secretary-ship, nursing, teaching etc.) Koray, (1993) states that blue-collars, who had a place in production in working life, were encouraged to do the work, apportioned to them within the scope of women's work. As has been highlighted above, it was observed that women workers were appointed to work, requiring more delicate handicraft and skills on the working line, and the activities required to be carried out by women in private life (cleaning, tidying up the house and caring for the family) (Koray, 2000) maintained their place at the workplace. This became clear with the observations made by the researcher. Women take responsibility for tidying up and machinery cleaning after work is completed:

> Researcher (OL, 403-410) It was announced that women were not accepted for work requiring physical power; but both women and men workers did the packing work today. Then I had to work in the packing unit for a long time and it was really very exhausting. It required extreme physical power and I sweated a lot. It was a difficult experience to work here; because we did the cleaning in case of any machine breakdown and we were filthy from head to the toe. The fluids used in the machine were exhausted before moving on; so we interrupted the work and started to clean up the machine first.

Researcher (OL, 692-696); Another point, drawing my attention, was the cleaning of machines as soon as the work was over and of course it was mainly women who did work like sweeping the floor. Men were not involved in this since they viewed it as *women's work.* Therefore, tidying up was made an area of responsibility for women.

This case showed that master workers were eager to see women workers do such types of work once in a while. Because it was concluded at informal meetings that machinery and environment cleaning, was supposedly a woman's work, and if this was in any way undone in some way could lead to mobbing-type incidents.

> Researcher (OL, 784-787); A colleague working in this unit wanted me to start cleaning without delay. He told me that they would terminate my position here if they saw me idle and they could impose a heavier workload on me. And he added that even if cleaning was over, I had to pretend that I was working.

Another point highlighted during area work of the researcher was the continuing nature of male-dominance in operating (mastership in a sense) and the use of heavy equipment. It was a significant point observed in the area of work that men are dominant in the use of heavy equipment in particular specific areas. Although management announced that it would not discriminate against women qualified in the use of heavy equipment, there are rumours in the plant that the use of these machines was prohibited for women. It can be said that this came

about because the use of machines requires a compliance certificate and the said certificates required for machine use are not part of a woman's portfolio. As a result of the meeting the opinions of the manager on the relevant matter are as stated below:

> Manager (MB, 315-327) We cannot say that heavy equipment is prohibited. This is utterly incorrect. Heavy equipment requires a competence certificate. Why should it not be permitted if a certificate has been awarded? Can you drive a car without a driving license; you have to obtain a driving license to drive a car. I have not confronted any woman with a certificate. No one made such a demand. No one had a plan in his/her mind to obtain a certificate. But we have many workers. Almost one half of the drivers of the company vehicles are women. Why would we make it a concern if he/she has obtained a relevant certificate? But no such thing ever happened to us. And I have really never seen any woman using heavy equipment. Neither any certificated workers. Finally, I have to say that we are unbiased on this matter.

The management may be unbiased on this matter; but the present case at the plant is highly disputable. It is the opinion of the researcher that the reason why women do not obtain a certificate in this area is the demographical attributes like education, civil status etc. of the abovementioned participants; besides it may stem from their view that it is a men's work. The observations of the researcher at the plant are as below:

> Researcher (OL, 1398-1408) I was exhausted in this unit and then I was appointed to the labelling unit. Here I did labelling and accepted certain work in collaboration with Nermin (women) and Emin (men) for a time. Then one day, I said that I was curious about other work by pointing at the heavy equipment. They responded that it was not permitted for women to operate these machines at that plant. The more I said that I was curious, the more they repeated that it was only the work of men. Moreover, Emin (man) said: "Women and men are not equal in this place. Women's work and men's work are differentiated." Mrs. Zehra added that even if permission was given, many women would not be eager to do the harder work. She said: "No one would go to stores full of men to obtain heavy items. For instance, I personally would not prefer it." I have realized that this is very common here. The number of women, who want to do this work, is really very low. It is the women themselves who give the highest support to the barriers set against them.

We can say that despite the said view of the management, a part of the workers, who have a *permanent* position, have a growing tendency to exacerbate this matter but their numbers are low. This matter has been discussed at one session of the informal meetings made by the researcher during area work:

> Researcher (OL, 918-935) I asked why women could not use heavy equipment (by the way, both of them were permanent

workers); they replied that they could. Moreover, one of them said that she used chargeable equipment at the time of prayer that men utilized to worship, and added that she was curious about other machines as well. But one would need to obtain a license for their use. They advised me to give it a try but only if I had a license first. But they also gave the impression that continuous use of them was far from being a reality. In the meantime, they asked questions about my garments and guessed the name of our operator. They said that this domain was not his expertise anyway. I deduced from this conversation that in fact one side of the women's group was eager to take such responsibilities but was stifled. Even if a side wished to assume social gender roles and to leave heavy work to men, some were eager to take this responsibility, which pleased me.

Conclusion

As can be deduced from the research; the distinction between women's and men's work is supported by both sexes and is recounted. The boundaries set for women in private life for centuries and social gender issues are still prevalent in society. Therefore, separate roles of women at work and any environment are taken for granted, are supported by women and turns to a continuously renewable cycle.

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If we assess the case with the theoretical foundations of the research in mind, it may be concluded that the unique nature of women, which we have discussed considedring feminist ethics, is unacceptable; women, who make assessment on a relational basis, have developed defense mechanisms against men and the difference between women and men is supported by both sexes to a significant extent in organizational structures in Turkey. As we have highlighted in feminist ethics, ethical assessments of women and men may vary considerably. Organizations, having realized the relation-based tendencies of women, may derive important gains in the end. However, how both sexes view each other stays limited to a certain extent, and men have many negative biases and preconceived notions when it comes to women; as a result, it is very difficult to form opinions based on feminist ethics.

Unethical behavior targeting women in their work-life is not only limited to the distinction between women's work-men's work and may be assessed from many differing angles. It is the opinion of the researcher that conducting research on whether unethical behaviors are acceptable to women or not in sectors with high women population and other organizations (like tourism agencies) will give a different form to the issue. According to the feminist framework, in order for women to reach equality in their positions in work life, their differing and advantageous points have to be realized by both sexes.

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