

FEMINIST RESEARCH IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Özet

Bu makale, feminist araştırmanın ne olduğuna açıklık getirerek sosyal antropolojinin feminist araştırma alanında kullandığı yöntem ve araştırma tekniklerini ele almaktadır. Makale, feminist araştırmacıların kadınların da araştırmaya katılımıyla daha müreffeh bir toplum için hangi yöntemleri kullandıklarına odaklanmaktadır. Bu analiz, kadın çalışmalarının kadınlarca kadınlar için kadın bakış açısıyla ele alınması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Feminist araştırma, başka kadınlar için feminist bir bakış açısına bürünen araştırmacıların kadınlar üzerine bir odaklanmasıdır. Erkil nicel araştırma yöntemleriyle, kadın nitel araştırma yöntemleri arasında bir farklılık vardır. Feminist araştırma, politik bir söylemle, kadınların yaşayışlarını değiştirme iddiasındadır. Bu sebeple, makalenin amacı cinsiyet kavramını bir toplumsal sınıf olarak ele alarak feminist araştırma ve onun yöntemleri üzerine açık bilgiler vermektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Feminist Antropoloji, Kadın, Cinsiyet, Feminist Araştırma, Yöntem

Abstract

This essay explores methods and methodologies utilized in feminist research in the social anthropology by explaining what feminist research is. It is about the ways in which feminist scholars have conceived their studies in order to conduct research that is for the emancipation of women and a more egalitarian society. This analysis suggests that the feminist research is done by women for women with a feminist world view. Feminist research was defined as a focus on women, in research carried out by women who were feminist, for other women. There is a distinction between 'male' quantitative methods and feminist qualitative ones. Feminist research is overtly political in its purpose and committed to changing

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women's lives. For these, the aim of this article is to give a brief opinion about feminist research and its methods by trying to clarify gender as a social class.

Keywords: *Feminist Anthropology, Women, Gender, Feminist Research, Method*

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology as a social discipline, has tried to scope on "the others" with their differences (Trouillot, 1991: 23). Most feminist researchers have long since agreed that there are no specifically feminist research methods. The expression of "feminist research methods" is therefore used as shorthanded for methods used by feminists in the field research.

Feminist research methodologies are based on women's experiences in patriarchy. It is about women's everyday life with a social, political, cultural standpoint. And due to that this kind of research teaches us, not only about gender relations, but also about society as a whole. It does not mean that men are not the mirror of the society, and culture where we live. But upon women places, social rights, and lives we can understand as quickly as possible the culture that we want to know. In other word, doing feminist research is to analyze the whole society just by interviewing women. At all we cannot really say what feminist research is, but we can clarify it by saying what it is included in it. For this I have to cite the feminist critique on feminist research. There are three important feminist critiques:

The first one is about its audience: Liz Stanley and Sue Wise defined the feminist research as a focus on women done by women for other women (Stanley and Wise, 1990: 21). This explication is the most important thing to know about feminist research. The researcher is a woman, the researched is a woman, and the aim is to inform the other women. Feminist researcher aims is to develop theories that explain the world from the position of women. This research should reflect women's interests and values and draw on women's own interpretations of their own experiences, relating them to the way in which society we live is constructed. Reflexively, feminist research includes the researcher in all stages of data collection and data production.

Secondly it is about the research method: Feminist research uses as method the qualitative research. Here there is a distinction between male quantitative research and female qualitative one (1990: 21). While many feminist sociologists seem to favor qualitative research, Sandra Harding claims it is not the method that makes feminist research different from what she terms 'malestream' research, but

the alternative origin of the problems, which concern women rather than men; the alternative hypotheses and evidence used; the purpose of the inquiry, which is to understand a woman's view of the world and assist in the emancipation of women and the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the so-called 'subjects' of her inquiry (Harding, 1987).

Third, the feminist research is overly political in its purpose and committed to changing women's lives (1990: 21). Thus the feminist research has got a political aim which is to "change" in a political, social, and cultural dimension women's lives and give them the right of equality in the men's world. Thus, the feminist research has got an important difference in social science. Normally to do science has to be something scientific and objective and not political. But as it is seen in feminist research, the purpose has got political and subjective standpoint over women.

Feminism was used in monolithic terms without fully exploring the academic implications that exist between "feminism" and "women". So, it is necessary to know if the feminist research is done for women or if it is done for feminist social science researchers and its audience. My possible answer is that feminist research is done both for feminists and women because in its nature women are a different social class. All women share -because of being women- some similar experiences. My focus is not only about the biological fact but about women's common experience of "oppression." As it is known woman is a socially and politically constructed category. It does not mean that all women share totally the same experiences but because of oppression their political and social silence is nearly common. Of course from culture to culture, country to country, class to class and even woman to woman there are many differences but the main thing is their "silence". To be able to say 'I' and express themselves is a very difficult thing for women writes Berkta, because the dominant culture recognizes little right for the woman to be an active and an autonomous subject. Woman continues in this (any patriarchal) culture, it is difficult for the woman to be the symbolizer, the representer because she herself is the symbol. The power to symbolize, to name and to define is traditionally in the hands of the man; and he transforms the woman into a symbolized object. The historic silence of women in social life and women attempts to gain a voice in politics and literature, have been major themes of recent feminist scholarship. It has become clear that gender relations are created not only by a sexual division of labor and a set of symbolic images, but also through contrasting possibilities of expression for men and women (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985: 11, 26).

Feminist researchers have to do their researchers in some rules as deductivism or inductivism. Deductivism, treat experience as a kind of test for the previous developed theory but theory cannot perfectly unfold itself on behalf of material experiences. On the other hand in inductivism theory derives from research experience, often referred to as grounded theory (Wise and Stanley 1984, 1987). Here the handicap is that the researcher does not always go to the field with empty heads. The researcher herself may have her own opinion and belief and political argument about the topic. To be honest, is it possible and do we always have about all things really objective argument and do we always go to the field with empty heads? For my part I can easily say of course not always. Unfortunately but truly!

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise locate five related sites of the feminist researcher's behavior and analysis: in the researcher-researched relationship; in emotion as a research experience; in the intellectual autobiography of the researchers. It is about "who is the researcher"; therefore in how to manage the different 'realities' and understandings of researchers and researched; and thus in the complex questions of power in research and writing. In this principle we have to ask these questions: Are we writing as an author, or as an anthropologist? For whom, who and why are we writing? Because the nature of knowledge tells us about how this knowledge will look like in practical sets of research (1990: 23). Those five epistemological principles are the identity of the research as a whole. As it was written we have to underline that the research is as important as by whom and why it is done. To design a perfect research does not mean a perfect research! As it is pointed out, academicians may write and talk a lot but it does not resolve the critiques. Because it does not mean "doing something and act to the action with a reaction."

Vickie Routledge Shields and Brenda Dervin (1993) summarize four feminist perspectives that methodologies used in feminist research have strived to incorporate.

1. Experience: feminist research is based on women's experience of their social and personal world; it treats women's experience 'as a scientific resource' (Harding, 1987). Feminist scholars can bring their own subjective experience to the project researched.
2. Gender: feminist research recognizes gender and gender relations as social constructions. For Goffman gender is a 'sex-class'. It means that it is not something biological but sociological. Gender is a 'way of characterizing

society'. To be a woman in a physical way has got a physical aspect but to live or act as a woman has got a social effect (Goffman, 1987: 53).

3. Reflexivity and inter subjectivity: feminist research places the researcher on the same place as the researched. We are what we study: the reflection upon and the acknowledgement of one's own objectives and biases therefore become part of the research findings.
4. Emancipation: by providing women with the information they need, research for women must be emancipatory. This is linked to consciousness-raising, and the researcher can bring a 'double vision of reality' (Stanley and Wise, 1983).

Theory is above all things. Over many arguments we shall define what feminist theory is. In a simple way we can say that the feminist theory has got a subjective nature. By saying this let's repeat that all social sciences have got a subjective dimension in it. As social science, the feminist anthropology has not got a "holly book" and especially due to that it is not something untouchable. The researcher can add her/his world view in a subjective way with her/his experiences, feelings, knowledge.

The feminist theory is defined as:

- Theory derived from experience analytically entered into enquiring feminist
- Continually subject to revision in the light of that experience (done by women for women)
- Reflexive and self-reflexive accessible to everyone (the whole society)
- Not treated as sacrosanct and enshrined in texts (1990: 24).

As many scholarships, Stanley and Wise (1990: 26) scope about the feminist method. "Is there a feminist method?" or "Is there a purely feminist method?" No. There is no very purely method as a feminist method. Method is the techniques that the researcher uses to get information from the researched. Surveys, interviews, ethnography are some methods/techniques that social science researcher (as anthropologist) utilize. We can easily say that there is no one purely method for feminist anthropology (as for anthropology).

Sandra Harding (1987b) set differences between method, methodology and epistemology. Method is a technique. While feminist methodology is a perspective such as structuralism, functionalism which may or may not specify its appropriate

research methods. Epistemology is a theory of knowledge such as questions and answers about the research. Who can be a knower? What can be known? What constitutes and validates knowledge? What is or should the relationship between knowing and being?

To achieve a feminist standpoint one must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see natural and social life from the point of view of what that disdained activity which produces women's social experiences instead of from the partial and perverse perspective available from the 'ruling gender' experience of men. (Harding, 1987b: 185)

By Harding's explication we understand that feminist standpoint epistemology still produces a "successor science". Feminist standpoint epistemology does not have a pure theory. It is only a successor. There is a common argument: Only women can understand women. To say that is to classify women over or under or out the social class.

What does it mean by "silenced feminist standpoints?" Silenced could be explained as invisible. There are two main groups: Black feminist women and lesbian women. These two groups have got a common point: being different from the general (by per cent) social class. Feminist scholarships view the silence (of women in social life) as a gender problem because speech on the other hand is a symbol of social identity. What we think and what we feel are both important. Thus the silence is an area to explore. For this, learning to listen and learning to ask and learning to analyze the silence of the researched may be a great interview analyses. For the narrator the interview provides the opportunity to tell her own story, in her own terms. In other word, to interview this silence means that the researcher gives voice to the narrator's silence (Anderson and Clark, 1998: 157).

Silence is the result and the symbol of passivity and powerlessness. Silence is a kind of power especially in certain intuitional settings such as religious confession, modern psychotherapy. But what do we mean silence in feminist research? We mean that gender relations are created not only by a sexual division of labor and a set of symbolic images but also through contrasting possibilities of expression for men and women (Gal, 1991: 175).

There is a close link between silence and gender; the use of speech and silence; the exercise of power and silence. Gal tries to show that there is a link between linguistic practices, power and gender. Those are culturally constructed (1991: 176).

Shields and Dervin (1993) have tried to give the definition of feminist methodologies across many social science disciplines as the field of communication.

Feminist researchers are divided in two about these questions:

1. Feminist theory should develop its own methods.
2. Feminist theory should continue to revise the androcentric assumptions of existing methods.

The main point of the feminist methodology is to differ the feminist research from patriarchal research. An interdisciplinary view of feminist methodology reveals that a plurality of methods is utilized. For example in-depth interviewing, ethnography, life histories, story telling and consciousness raising groups. These themes are seen the unifying feature of a feminist perspective to research. Some claim that a collaborative participatory research should not be seen as the absolute model for all feminist empirical studies. In the feminist theory, researchers have developed many research projects with a variety of methods, approaches and methodologies. Dervin's methodology is the type of research approach but there are some critiques about these methodologies. Some researchers think that there is no one absolute model for all feminist empirical studies. Those researchers have developed alternative approaches. On the other hand some researchers as Dervin with his sense-making methodology offers feminist scholarship methods that are true to the deals of feminist perspectives. Shields and Dervin explore the ways in which feminist scholars have conceived their studies in order to begin conducting research that is truly for the emancipation of women and the accomplishment of a more egalitarian society (1993: 70).

For Liz Stanley, "woman" is a necessary category because all woman share similar experiences. These common and similar experiences could be vary from culture to culture, from women groups to others etc. not because of biological facts but also because women's common experience of oppression. As it is underlined, to be a woman isn't a biological fact but it is a social and political construction that human world view had built over times as a set of experiences.

Marililyn Strathern (1987) argues that the relation between feminism and anthropology is very strange. Strathern differs anthropology from feminism because the feminist anthropology couldn't give a response to the colonialism and also because their aims/purposes are different from each other.

Clifford said that there is no feminist writer. It means that if there is no this kind of research, there is no a feminist research, too. But in my opinion it is clear that

there is no one kind of feminist research (or method) since feminist scholars are hard at work in all the traditional disciplines. In feminist research we use as methods the qualitative methods: in life history, oral history, textual analysis, ethnography, interviews, participant observation. So it has got a particular view. On the other hand the feminist methodology is different from "patriarchal scholarship" or "male-dominated research". Thus there is a development in the feminist anthropology. The feminist research must be grounded in female culture and experience. So we cannot totally agree with Clifford's argument.

Stanley and Wise argue that feminist methods must take on board the necessity to challenge the power relationship between researcher and researched (with the former being the more powerful). The feminist research must be qualitative, action-oriented, and reflective of women's experience. Sue and Wise are interested in feminist theory and methodology, new social movements, social justice, children's right, and how to develop feminist epistemology (1990).

We know that there is no a pure feminist research method but there are many differences between traditional research and feminist research. Because the traditional research: begins in isolation; begins with questions from others "theories"; reproduces others methods to collect data; use others analysis schemes to reduce data; summarize at the end; the results take a standard format; only significant result is reported; change in researcher not reported.

On the other hand feminist research: begins in convention; begins with observation of own experience, discovers own voice theory; notice where personal theory and standard classroom image; clarify differences by gathering info; create tentative new classroom image to incorporate focused data; suspend image and allow it to shift dialectically; listen to alternative theories; data coded by incorporating personal and alternative theories; data interpreted within school, social and political contents; continuous re-imaging and summarizing; results are tentative an non-prescriptive; results help clarify personal voice and others in multiple form; personal transformation is important result.

By this explication we can talk about learning to listen. Oral history interviews offer to us many insights about women's experiences. This kind of interview gives to both researchers and narrators the possibility of freedom and flexibility. Because the interviews give for the narrator the possibility to tell her own story with her own words and views. Here the liberty of being the narrator is gorgeous. Because the interviews gives for the researcher the possibility to compare, check and find new

results. Oral interviews are valuable for understanding women's world views. Due to that the oral history interviews are unique and it has got a dynamic and interactive form. In this kind of interview, the researcher must always be attentive to the moral dimension of interviewing. The researcher must also always remember that she/he is there to follow the narrator's lead (Anderson and Clark, 1998: 158). The feminist research has got an open-ended mature. It is not a research in a total isolation but a discovery of silenced voice.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what do I understand by feminist methods? Methods are approaches. Methods are informed by methodology. Methodology has got two issues to achieve: What are the appropriate means for discovering/producing knowledge? How valid is the knowledge produced by the use of different methods? And what do we understand by methods? Methods are the actual tools that we use to do research. We can give as methods employed:

- Face to face interview;
- Survey;
- Unobtrusive observation;
- Participant observation;
- Experiment;
- Secondary data.

Methodology determines which methods will be most appropriate. Many researchers employ structural methodologies, and thus use methods that permit them to collect and analyze data about social patterns. And many researchers employ social constructionist methodologies, and thus use methods that permit them to collect and analyze data about the social construction of reality. As it is seen in social science...

Social sciences require methods that are valid and reliable. Validity because it tries to understand if the method capture social reality and reliable because it tries to understand if the method produce replicable results. As a result methodologies and methods may differ by discipline as social sciences, physical sciences, humanities...

The goal of methodologies and methods is to get knowledge. This goal is shared across disciplines but scholars use various means for achieving this goal and may define knowledge differently.

Feminist methods are informed by feminist methodologies. The feminist methods try to:

- Seek to reveal and overcome andocentric biases in research:

Methods must involve women (not men alone) as participants; women's experiences within social hierarchies. In depth interviews with women that reveal women's understanding of power structures in workplace, family etc.

- Seek to create social change:

Methods must involve and respect participants as agents of change. Participatory action research; Performance ethnography.

- Seek to represent human diversity:

Methods must acknowledge that not all women (and not all men) experience social world in the same way. Interviews (data collection) and life history analyses that examine unique life experiences of Jewish, Catholic and Muslim men (and women). Statistical methods that examine how sex category interacts with religious practice in their effects on individual outcomes.

- Acknowledge the positionality of the researcher:

Methods must acknowledge that the researcher's positionality shapes the research process. What she or he view as important topics for study? How participants respond (in face to face interviews)? How she or he interprets data?

Most any method of research can be used to attain feminist (gender justice) goals.

Methods depend on specific methodology and research questions.

Feminist methodologies and methods assume that knowledge is socially constructed. Developing the most accurate and complete knowledge requires use of methods that reveal and embrace diversity of social experience.

Despite the worries of some researchers, feminists have not tried to "methodological essentialism" in social research, but have instead developed numerous approaches for undertaking studies on women and gender (Martin, 1994: 3). And is there feminist methods? Sure there is because the feminist method is different from patriarchal research just because in the first one woman is the research's center but on the other hand it is not. So feminist research with it is political view has got a social female aim.

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