

BOOK REVIEW

GREEK GODESSES AND OTHER WORKING GIRLS INSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

Silvia Gherardi: *Gender, Symbolism and Organizational Cultures*. Sage 1995. 202p.

There are three books of feminist research on organizations that are above others and among them is Silvia Gherardi's book. The two books preceding Gherardi's are *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* by Kathy Ferguson (1984) and 'Sex' at 'Work' by Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin (1987). Each of the three books has contributed something completely new and astonishing to the study of organizations at the time of their publishing. Kathy Ferguson is a (leftian and feminist) political scientist who focuses on gender, hierarchies and power in organizations. She has been inspired by Weber and Marx. Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin, a male sociologist and a female social-worker, have written together a coherent book, which goes through all the sociological research. They find out and wonder why all research concerning organizations is so completely ignorant of working people having a sex, or rather a gender. This book by the British sociologists is like Gherardi's, it is made in the spirit of cultural studies, which means that ideas to their interpretations are borrowed from different disciplines. In this particular case from sociology, business management, literary criticism, art history and (Jungian) psychology for example. All the three books differ from each other like day and night, which is an indication that much has happened during the last ten years in social sciences as well as in the field of womens'/feminist studies concerning organizations. All the three books are also a very clear token of the fact that feminism is not one but there are many feminisms.

The starting point of the book I am reviewing here is quite obviously in the French (or rather Italian ver-

sion of French) feminism, which is based on the idea of sexual difference. Behind the notion of sexual difference is the willingness to get rid of dichotomies or hierarchies in the society (and hence organizations) based on the hierarchical relationship between men and women. The plural in the title of the book, 'organizational cultures', is one way of stressing the differences, men and women, even in organizations, are all very different, have different tasks, take different roles and especially make different combinations together.

The starting point of the book is that in the western societies, and hence organizations, there is an unspoken or a silenced contract called sexual contract. The contract concerning gender relations is not an agreement made by equal partners as the dominant story of political science tells us. This sexual contract covers all the institutions of the society. In the marriage it prevents women to have their bodily rights and makes them do housework without payment or fixed working hours. In the labourmarket the contract dictates that women do nursing, caring and social tasks with lower pay than men who concentrate on making money in business, law and manufacturing etc. The sexual contract is also behind the division of the tasks into men's and women's jobs inside the workplaces.

The relation ??? between women and men is confined in the straitjacket of the sexual contract which sees the male sex as the primary sex and women as the second. The idea of a contract conceals the fact that a conflict is at stake. Instead of going through all the harms and wrongs that women experience in the working life, Silvia Gherardi is trying to find out a policy that would change this unhappy situation. She is not doing it by writing a political programme, but by using new kinds of symbols, metaphors (and words). The policy of Silvia, as I have understood, is to show the richness that grows from the fact that there are also women inside different organizations and at different hierarchical levels of the organizations. In this book the women and men of the organizations are not the men in grey suits but a big group of multi-colouredly dressed people.

In the book the metaphor of alchemic wedding is used as a counter metaphor for the straitjacket of the sexual contract. The marriage,

the union of male and female is the archetype of the unity. The sexual contract expresses separation and conflict, whereas the alchemic wedding contains an idea of the union (of contraries). The alchemic wedding is used to explore the archetypical models of femaleness. Or rather the point is about how a certain type of femaleness activates certain kind of maleness. The archetypes of femaleness are used to find out diversity or multiplicity of women. This kind of policy (the policy of difference) is quite different from the present line in feminist studies that has focused on looking for difference between men and women.

Silvia Gherardi finds archetypes from Greek mythology, especially female and some of the male divinities. In my mind the most interesting part of the book concentrates on showing how the goddesses and gods correspond to specific embodiments of femaleness and maleness in modern organizational cultures. The empirical data, the surveys, interviews and observations of different organizations that are interpreted with the help of the Greek mythology are familiar from several previous studies conducted by the writer. This means that in addition of being a specimen of feminist study, the book is also an example of how previous studies can be recycled.

The Greek female deities represent different roles taken by women in the working life and they are of two different categories. There are the ones called the virgin goddesses (Artemis, Athena and Hestia) and the ones called the vulnerable goddesses (Hera, Demeter and Persephone).

The virgins are the ones who are not manipulated by men, neither by social and cultural expectation nor by judgement. They are the females with no relationship with the males, they are not abducted or raped. The most typical role taken up by women is that of the spinster aunt, represented by Hestia in the Greek mythology and Vesta in the Roman mythology. Hestia, the quiet and modest goddess of the fire or hearth, the spinster aunt seems to be the favourite of the writer of the book.

The vulnerable goddesses are related to the male world as wives, daughters or sisters. Quite often these deities are in the midst of the big (or small) battles of the workplace, supporting or opposing their

male colleagues. All in all, the Greek goddesses are analogous to the different roles women have in the family. There are the roles of a mother, wife, daughter of the mother or the father, (twin) sister, sister of a brother or a sister, spinster aunt etc. All these different roles of the family can also be presented in the organizations.

"We can view organizations as constituting so many small Olympuses, each populated by goddesses who engage in great battles, form alliances, wage vicious vendettas and achieve peace. Strong emotions and stable affective bonds tie this large and quarrelsome family together" (72).

I liked the idea that was taken up in the book, that there are several roles that women can take in different working settings or organisations as well as other arenas of their lives. In your parents house you are supposed to be either the daughter of the mother or the father, in your marriage you can choose to stress either the role of the wife or the mother. Of course one can not choose freely, but there are varieties, or at least one can point out some features of certain roles/archetypes to be more prominent than the others.

The idea of choice or varieties of behaviour comes out from the book so strongly that the experience of reading is quite fascinating. Sometimes I had the feeling that I would like to participate in (Italian) working life even without pay because it seemed so exiting. There might also be a cultural difference at stake between the southern and northern and catholic or protestant mentality. The work described in the book is not only exiting but also fun, or

rather, it is a kind of pleasure or privilege unlike the northern and protestant work which is more serious and mainly a burden.

I also had the impression that the archetypes resembled quite a lot of roles, but on the other hand Gherardi is arguing against the sociological notion of roles. Anyhow, I would like the sociologists to take up roles into an open debate from the lapse of memory or rather from criticizing the roles on wrong premises. What I mean is this: The previous sociology concerning roles did try to explain people only through one role, whereas nowadays the role theory should lean on the idea that people have several roles, even at one time. Silvia Gherardi is for example leaning on the ideas of Ervin Goffman who has, similarly to other representatives of symbolic interaction, taken up the idea of role playing, or presentation of the self as a role. Even though an architect may be a professional devoted to an organization, she might just as well be a good sister for some of her female colleagues, or if she gets better along with male colleagues (or if she is the only woman) she may found a clique with the male colleagues. But if a new female architect is employed the next day, she may feel like a twin sister to her or find her to be like a mother-in-law.

The Greek mythology made my thoughts to wander to our own. The narratives of Kalevala could be found from Finnish organizations. There are several big epic narratives like ours, where there is a big fight, a battle between the good and the bad, us and them, the south and the north, the intruders and the natives. But unlike other big fights

known in the western mythology, our fight is between a man and a woman. The troops of the natives, them (the people of the Lapps/Samean) are led by the Mistress of Northland. She is also a mother of attractive young daughters, who are the objects of different males from the other land. When having such an uncommon mythology we may also have uncommonly harsh relations between men and women of the companies. What I mean is that maybe women are still considered to be quite powerful enemies. Is the Finnish sexual contract more like a constant fight? Is this the reason for the fact that there are very few workplaces with equal amount of both sexes, unisex teams, unisex organizations etc.?

I have met Silvia Gherardi twice in short conferences and have hence heard her to speak. When reading the book I could hear Silvia's voice in the text. This is quite rare in my life, it only happens in very few occasions. I can hear the writer's voice in the text when some of my very good Finnish friends write in some exceptional tone, when they are very angry, annoyed, anguished, or amused, but not otherwise. Regarding from the Finnish social scientific as well as feminist point of view, Silvia Gherardi's own view or own voice is quite strong and exceptional. I am personally very fond of this kind of presentation, it is epistemologically grounded and it adds the pleasure of reading this exciting book. I warmly recommend this book to everybody who wants to take a break from the routines of organizational lives.

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