

Understanding the Fight for “Right to the Gendered City”:

An Example from Ankara

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Abstract

In this paper, female activism will be discussed with Lefebvrain concept of “right to city” on the basis of gender. The right of the mothers to take child care services will be examined on a case study done in General Zeki Doğan Neighbourhood in Mamak district of Ankara city. In order to reach information a small interview was conducted with the school principle. Moreover, a conversation was set with the mukhtar, the head of local government unit called neighbourhood, and the members of this local female network who organized the press release and showed female activism. The hypothesis of this research is that women who demand child care services from public institutions due to the changing understanding of motherhood are able to satisfy their needs when they fight for and are decisive in taking their right to the city.

For that purpose, first, gender roles and their effect on women’s everyday life practices will be mentioned. This is important to show how socially situated understanding of gender shapes the space used by women, especially by mothers. Then, the changing meaning of motherhood practices with the economic transformation and increasing female participation in the labour force since 1980s will be elaborated in a global context. This transformation enabled women to raise their voice for their demands about their city which was designed with male domination. Next, Lefebvre’s concept “spaces of representation” and the relationship between “home” and “city” as scales will be put forward in order to analyze the gender roles and their reflection from “home” to the “city”. This reflection is crucial, since urban policies are made and implemented with the effect of gender relations at lower scales and women are the groups who suffer most from that situation. As the space implying a third aspect, patriarchal relations, city is like a laboratory to analyze gender differentiation in real life. Nevertheless, women have the power in order for opposing to their use of space restricted by policy makers. They have the ability to raise their voice and change urban practices by being aware of their “right to the city”. This concept refers to the right of mothers to

access child care center because of living in the city. Keeping in mind that streets belong to men who already attributed certain roles to women make policies according to that understanding, it is not easy, and sometimes possible, for women to produce an appropriated space. This necessitates local activism instead of staying at home and complaining about the reflection of patriarchal relations to the city, or showing individual resistance. It is not so difficult; on the contrary, there are many examples of local female achievement in different parts of the world to appropriate space.

The second part of the study will be on Turkish context. Female labour force participation and the reflection of gender relations to the streets in Turkish cities will be the focus of this part. After description of the profile of women living the above mentioned neighbourhood, the factors affecting mothers' demand for child care will be mentioned. Since women living in this neighborhood are adults mostly from low or lower middle class, accessing to affordable child care center becomes more and more critical for them, which requires policies supporting their activism in the labour force and in social life.

Towards the end of the paper, female resistance towards urban policies in order for changing the character of child care service will be elaborated. Despite being neglected in the urban policies and encountering police force, women resisted too much on their demand and demonstrated against urban practices. Due to their determination, child care service center has been built and mothers have started benefiting from that center. Though their movement was not a radical attempt to eliminate gender roles in the society, women achieved success that could express the ability of women when they get organized within the context of right to the city.

Keywords: Right to the gendered city, local female activism, General Zeki Doğan Neighbourhood.

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