Research Example

Cagla Cirikciel

 In this paper, I am aiming to contextualise, decontextualise and decontextualise my interview with Maltepe who is 45 years old women, married with a child, living in Fındıklı in Istanbul. In 2018 I was doing in-depth interviews for a research centre in Istanbul, and this interview was a part of a research project. At those days, we were researching a mother-support program of an NGO in Turkey called the Mother-Child Education Foundation (ACEV). This program was placed in different neighbourhoods of Istanbul which are regarded socio-economically poor areas of the city, and it was aiming to reach out to the mothers in neighbourhood who need free support as a mother. During the interviews, we were trying to discuss on almost 150 questions which are aiming to grasp an understanding of the participant’s demographic data, their gender identity, motherhood and finally of their expectation as a woman and a mother generally and as a participant of the mother-support program particularly. For this paper I specifically choose the interview with Maltese since now I realise that during our conversation I had not been dealing with the insecure meaning and I could not reflect these ambiguities on the question. Thus, I wish this paper will be another chance for me to deal with more insecure meaning within the interview with Maltepe.

 After the demographic and ice-breaking questions, I started to ask Maltepe the questions about her gender identity:

Cagla: What does mean being a woman to you?

Maltepe: Difficult…Conditions…It’s difficult economically. You are getting married, you are giving birth, but you cannot find anyone to look after the kid. You cannot take a day off in the work. If your child gets sick, or anything… But it’s not the same for a man. He can take a day off and leave. To me, being a woman is so difficult.

Cagla: What are the hardest part of being a woman?

Maltepe: You cannot go out comfortably in these days. There was this feeling in the past, too, but nowadays I feel like we are under pressure. For example, I cannot go out like that in Fındıklı (addressing to her clothes). You cannot feel comfortable, everyone is looking at you. For instance, we went to Antalya, Bodrum for holidays; you wear like this and anyone does not gaze you. But here, in Fındıklı, because everyone is veiled, being unveiled, putting on pants, or wearing makeup seem improper to the people. I do not know other places but this neighbourhood, this society cannot take it.

 During the first question, Maltepe was fluctuating to describe how this gender identity makes her feel. She was keen to address the disadvantaged parts but looking unsure what to talk about. Her class perception was intersected by her gender identity, and she was describing her gender by looking through her position in her domestic family as a mother and a wife. She described the gender identity within marriage which sounded like a frustration of her; establishing a family was not making her life easier but relocating the burden on her as a woman. However, even though she was pointing out to the dilemmas of being a mother in her economically unprivileged condition and addressing to the form of gender inequality she had gone through, I think I could not empathise with her enough to motivate her to dig down this dilemma. As a younger, single, middle-class woman, I was not understanding enough to see the complexity and intersectionality of her gender identity and experience. I was sympathising with her pairing ‘woman’ between ‘difficulty’, and although she was giving clues of the meanings of difficulty, I did not see her where she was taking the conversation and I redirected her to elaborate differently on difficulties by asking the second question. She changed her angle and started to elaborate on how she is getting uncomfortable with her body in her neighbourhood. I think of this switch on the topic as her invitation to share commonality on womanhood. Considering that from the very beginning she was narrating her experience with a second person pronoun, she was having distance with the meaning of the woman and thinking of a more collaborative experience than personal. Maltepe was more aware of the insecurity of womanhood over the conversation between each other and having more effort to create a dialogue. Mentioning how she had felt uncomfortable with her clothes and make-up (with second person-pronoun) in her neighbourhood, in Fındıklı which dominantly consists of the religious population, Maltepe addressed to her discomfort as an unveiled woman in a conservative and religious area. Even I was making sense of what bodily discomfort feels like as a woman, Maltepe and I had different experiences regarding our neighbourhoods, I had the privilege to inhabit secular and (semi) ’secured’ regions of the city which differentiate my daily perception on bodily discomfort.

 In conclusion, when Maltepe and I were speaking about womanhood and motherhood, we were having different standpoints within power relations. My privilege as a young, single, secular, middle-class woman was disabling me to address insecurities of the meaning of womanhood along with the interview between me and her. She was trying to give birth to her multilayered discomfort as a woman, but her social baggage was different from mine. When we were trying to understand each other, our dialogue led us to insecure meanings of womanhood and motherhood. Even our gender experiences are making sense to each other to an extent, how we mean those experiences were taking us to different spectrums of womanhood.