Feminist and Psychoanalysis Perspectives in Public Administration

Gokhan Koca, PhD
Muhsin Celebi Mahallesi Sehit Yasar Gecgil Sk. No: 14/7 Aksaray, Turkey
gkoca68@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The dynamic structure of society has introduced new challenges for government at all level. There are several perspectives in Public Administration. This paper aims to analyze Public Administration theory and practice in feminist and psychoanalysis perspectives. A society without an opposition, Durkheim suggests that a society having the same culture neither will have crime nor will it exist by exerting that even within a small society there should be differences. Similarly, Socrates denies a life that “A life without critiquing itself is not a real life.” Marcuse (1964) asserts that if one group manages to take the control of social and economic dynamics of the society, it can enable to control the entire population.

Difference is valued and there is a valuable difference between men and women. Main idea of feminist perspective is “OTHERS” (Farmer, 2010). Feminism can be viewed as a diverse collection of social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies motivated by the experiences of women, and advocates for this movement can be found throughout history. According to Farmer (2010), feminism is the investigation of both the oppression of women and the liberation of women. In general, postmodern feminist theory is based on the basic assumption that the male/female dichotomy is the driving force of modern society. According to Farmer (2010), the unconscious is the dynamic root in psychoanalysis. However there are many other psychoanalytic and related models or systems, there are three important milestones studies about psychoanalytic perspectives. Those studies are made by Freud, Jung and Lacan. According to Farmer (1997), de-marginalizing the unconscious is in at least three respects in postmodern administration. “First the importance of the unconscious in administration should be clearly understood. Organizational thinking is very important. The second way of the de-marginalize the unconscious is to make acceptable the interpretations that grow out of the repressed unconscious. Thirdly, the mechanisms that are repressing the unconscious in the administrative setting should be brought into central focus.” According to Farmer (2010), there are many ways of looking at public administration thinking and practice. If we look at from feminism perspective, It is believed that public administration’s traditional account of administrative reality, as gender neutral must be replaced with one that reflects the knowledge and experiences of both women and men. Public administration, both as a field of study and an arena of practice, may learn valuable lessons from psychology.

Keywords: Public administration, feminist perspective, psychoanalysis perspectives, government, and bureaucracies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamic structure of society has introduced new challenges for government at all level. In this turnover, government found itself with the lack of capacity to meet all required responses in the 21st century.

Moreover, the developments in technology and the changing social structure have increased the complexity of the problems.

There are several perspectives in Public Administration. This paper aims to analyze Public Administration theory and practice in feminist and psychoanalysis perspectives.

2. FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

A society without an opposition, Durkheim suggests that a society having the same culture neither will have crime nor will it exist by exerting that even within a small society there should be differences.

Similarly, Socrates denies a life that “A life without critiquing itself is not a real life.” Marcuse (1964) asserts that if one group manages to take the control of social and economic dynamics of the society, it can enable to control the entire population. Difference is valued and there is a valuable difference between men and women.

Especially in the male dominated public administration, females are possible and useful source for deconstructing the area in a positive way (Hutchinson & Mann, 2004).

In western societies, men have dominated over women throughout the history, and the situation is even more significant in many Eastern societies. Even from the words itself (she, human, female, person) we can recognize men’s domination over women. From the time of the ancient Greek when men went to the market because respectable women stayed at home to this century when women in the United States gained the right to vote in national elections in 1920, there was a nearly unbroken social tradition according to which men were regarded as superior to women in power and status. This social tradition was reflected in the intellectual tradition, so much so that the exceptions to this tradition stand out.

According to Farmer (2010), two exceptional male thinkers on feminism were Plato and John Stuart Mill. Although many of his writings are otherwise, Plato seems to have made in the direction of feminism. He held that in an ideal state the rulers would be both men and women. Plato, speaking though Socrates, makes the similarity that if a man with as a full head of hair is known to be a good cobbler, it does not necessarily follow that a bald man is not suited to the same profession. In other words, he makes the distinction between mind, or
soul, and body. His claim is that the body is irrelevant to the nature of a person to be proficient in a profession, and thus concludes that a woman could be a philosopher as well as a man (Saxon house, 2002). In addition to Plato, Mill said in The Subjection of Women, “The principle which regulates the existing social relation between the two sexes... is wrong in itself, and is now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement... It ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality” (as cited in Tallen, 1980). In spite of these past feminist thoughts, much more common was the view that women should be obedient to their husbands. Sometimes there were even stronger anti-woman views.

Main idea of feminist perspective is “OTHERS” (Farmer, 2010). Feminism can be viewed as a diverse collection of social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies motivated by the experiences of women, and advocates for this movement can be found throughout history. According to Farmer (2010), feminism is the investigation of both the oppression of women and the liberation of women. To some scholars, feminism has three waves. First-wave feminism is the demand for equality of women and the inclusion of women within the norms and practices of reason between 1830 and 1920; second-wave feminism is the assertion of women’s specific and radical differences between 1960 and 1980; and third-wave is the postmodern feminism which is in the arena of the world after 1980 (Farmer, 2010). Numerous variations of feminism have emerged depending on how a person interprets feminism.

Liberal feminists think that women are suppressed in contemporary society because they suffer unjust discrimination. They do not seek special privileges for women and simply demand that everyone receive equal consideration without discrimination on the basis of sex (Rosser, 2005). Liberal feminists would seek to remove barriers that prevent equal access for women to provide access to higher-paying jobs for women. Unequal access has implications that go well beyond the composition of the workforce.

In contrast to liberal feminism, socialist feminism discards individualism and positivism. They have a Marxist approach that socialist feminist critiques and define all knowledge, including science, as socially constructed and emerging from practical human involvement in production. Since knowledge is a productive activity of human beings, it cannot be objective and value-free, because the basic categories of knowledge are shaped by human purposes and values (Hacker, 1981). Class and gender analyses document women's occupation of the worst-paid, most tedious and health-destroying segment of the labor market in electronics assembly-etching circuits onto wafers of silicon, dipping circuits into vats of carcinogenic solvents, and peering through microscopes for seven to ten hours a day to bond wires to silicon chips.

Just as socialist feminist theory provided insights into the gender and class distributions, African American feminists critique the place or role of race in the distribution. Racism intertwines and reinforces differing aspects of capitalism and patriarchy. For many women of color, their experience with racism is more visible, virulent, and more common than sexism. Feminists of color have contributed to the feminism movement by demonstrating that although “all women are women; there is no being who is only a woman”. Feminism should be defined as a commitment to eliminating all forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism (Spelman, 1988). Major goals include placing the standpoints of women of color at the center of inquiry, emphasizing the centrality of self-definition, and analyzing the interlocking aspects of oppression (Gay and Tate, 1998).

Radical feminism maintains that women’s oppression is the first, most widespread, and deepest oppression. Radical feminists reject most scientific theories, data, and experiments not only because they exclude women but also because they are not women-centered (Denny, 1994).

Postmodern feminists have built on the ideas of Foucault, de Beauvoir, as well as Derrida and Lacan. Although there is much variation in postmodern feminism, there is some common ground. Following Simone Beauvoir, postmodern feminists see female as having being cast into the role of the other. They criticize the structure of the society and the dominant order, especially in its patriarchal aspects. Many postmodern feminists, however, reject the feminist label, because anything that ends with an “ism” reflects an essential conception. Postmodern feminism is the final acceptor of diversity. Multiple roles, multiple realities are part of its focus (Giroux, 1990).

According to Dr. Farmer (personal communication, April 07, 2010), postmodern feminism stems from the work of the French feminists, the well-known of these being Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. These feminist writers and Foucault are informed by similar philosophical backgrounds and are positioned within a postmodern context, although Foucault did not consider himself as postmodern. However, his work would seem to fit within Sim’s (2006) definition of postmodernism as “a form of skepticism-skepticism about authority, received wisdom, cultural and political norms.”

In general, postmodern feminist theory is based on the basic assumption that the male/female dichotomy is the driving force of modern society. The structure of dominant society, which inherently essentially places men in roles of power, is called into question. According to Tong (1989), in contrast with liberal feminism and radical feminism, postmodern feminism accepts diversity and coexistence of many truths, roles, and realities. Thus, the focus is on female strengths rather than subjugation.
Cixous is a writer of prose who built on Derrida’s works to criticize the very nature of writing.

According to Farmer (2005), she argues that “some women are bad at feminine writing, and men are good at it.” Cixous also relates feminine writing to female sexuality and women’s body concepts. She thinks that the female body and female sexuality have been denied and repressed by centuries of male power. For her, a recovery of the female body is the main source of feminine writing.

She argues that the relationship between famine writing and the female body lies in the heterogeneity and multiplicity of female sexuality. Her idea is that development of this kind of writing will change rules that currently govern language and ultimately the thinking processes and the structure of society. According to Farmer (2010), the issue with feminism is cultural not natural. We cannot see our body except to admit our culture. For example, in some part of Africa women uncover their breast, but in the Western society women cover them. We can see that different societies have different ways of look. Farmer (2005) describes feminine writing, like somatic writing, “as writing from with my guts, from with my lived experience.” According to him, Cixous and other similar opinions do not proposes that in somatic writing there is any special method or date, but they talk about an attitude that demands attention to bodylines “even in purely verbal data.”

Luce Irigaray’s basic focus is to liberate women from men’s philosophies, including the ones of Derrida and Lacan on which she is building. Irigaray takes on Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of child development, and is one of the thousand who criticize the ‘oedipal complex’. According to Farmer (2010), she says the culture of the West is monosexual. Her goal is to uncover the absence of female subject position, the relegation of all things feminine to nature/matter, and ultimately the absence of true sexual difference in Western culture. In addition to establishing this critique, she offers suggestions for changing situation of women in Western culture. Her analysis of women’s exclusion from culture and her use of strategic essentialism have been influential in contemporary feminist theory.

The third postmodern feminist writer, Julia Kristeva, rejects that the biological man and biological woman are identified with the ‘masculine” and “feminine’. To insist that people are different because of their anatomy is to force both men and women into a respective structure. She openly accepts the label of feminist, but refuses to say there is woman perspective.

She sees the problems as other similar to the problems of other groups excluded from the dominant: Jews, homosexuals, racial and ethnic minorities.

The critics of postmodern feminism opposed that postmodernism in inadequate to the political needs of feminism. DiStefano (1990) argues that, if the postmodern project seriously adopted by feminists, it would make any image of a feminist politics impossible. To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or subject, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centered inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad-based organized movement dedicated to implementing the goals of such a constituency (as cited in Tuana, 2002).

3. PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

According to Farmer (2010), the unconscious is the dynamic root in psychoanalysis. Chessic (1993) asserts the same approach and he also claims that all psychoanalytic models use free association, all use transference and counter transference and also all view childhood and infant experiences as critical. Farmer (2010) also asserts that, psychoanalysis can be ranged from the purely mechanical to the no mechanical, from the purely medical to the philosophical also. Farmer (1997) defines the unconscious as a repressed – a suppressed- voice. The potential of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic insights are made possible by Freud in public administration. He made a great explanation on the nature and workings of the unconscious for the individual, for the group and for the civilization (Farmer, 2010).

However there are many other psychoanalytic and related models or systems, there are three important milestones studies about psychoanalytic perspectives.

Those studies are made by Freud, Jung and Lacan. Freud has a great approach about unconscious.

With his account of the dynamic unconscious perspective we have chance to better understanding about the human. Freud created a poetic science of the mind and expressed the importance of childhood experiences and sex. To Freud’s perspective each person has an unconscious and a psychic structure, and the important effect of unconscious is shaping and co-shaping a person’s thinking, feeling and acting. He also adds that psychoanalysis permits coping with the functioning of the dynamic unconscious. Freud also believes that people’s actions, feelings and thinking are shaped by unconscious desires, drives and memories (Farmer, 2010).

In Freud’s another pattern named structural theory of psyche, the pattern of unconscious elements are identified in three groups (Farmer, 2010). First there is an “id” or the “it”. Second there is the “ego” or the I. Third, there is the “superego” or the “over-I”. Farmer (2010) has some warnings about this description. To him, the unconscious is a repressed voice, widely mischaracterized and uncanny. He also adds that the unconscious cannot be distinguished between fantasy and reality.

Carl Jung’s studies were also important in this area. Jung was mainly focus on the collective unconscious. According to Jun’s explanations, the collective unconscious is not individual but universal and it has contents and models of behaviors can be seen nearly
the same everywhere and in all individuals. Jung defines the personal unconscious as a superficial layer of the unconscious and it is a deeper layer and it comes from born, not from personal experiences. According to Farmer (2010) archetypes are seen as the contents of collective unconscious. Because they are universal thoughts and charged with emotion (with universal symbolic meanings) such as mother, father, hero and God. Farmer (2010) explains the aims of the Jungian analysis for a person as what is understood as individuation.

In Jacques Lacan’s (1998) point of view, the unconscious is like a language, a discourse, and transpersonal rather than inside. He conceptualized unconscious by using linguistic metaphors. He also uses the unconscious as a kind of memory and unknown knowledge. To Lacan (1998) the definition of unconscious is the discourse of “Others”. He explains the “other” by distinguishing between little a and big A (Farmer, 2010). He uses the little a as a reflection of ego and in the realm of imaginary. On the other hand he explains the big A as radical alterity and inassimilable. Farmer (2010) asserts that Lacan’s ideas can be used in different areas such as feminism, the study of society and culture.

4. PRACTICE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY

Women are attending college and graduate school in greater numbers than ever before. In the workplace, women have made great advances: the vast increase in the number of women in the labor force; notable increase in the number of women in high-status, high income professions. In recent years women have also gained greater control over their bodies. Because of the feminist movement, women have greater understanding of how their bodies work, more control over their fertility, and greater participation in the process of childbirth.

Perhaps most important, many women recognize that they must make their own way in the world, that they must develop their own identity rather than acquire that identity through a relationship with a man. However, in other areas there has been little change, and some aspects of women’s lives have become worse. Women are still described in advertising, in films, on television, and by the fashion industry as sex objects. They are still encouraged to focus on their looks: their bodies, their clothes, their makeup, and their image.

In addition, Hutchinson (2001) argues that women have made improvements as important contributors in public administration, appearing in high level managerial and administrative positions in increasing numbers. Since late 1980, women’s scholarship has appeared with greater frequency in public administration journals with proportionate gains in permanent positions in academia. However, in practice, in most areas of professional life, she thinks women still are behind their male peers in both numbers and pay. Women remain underrepresented in the state legislatures and Congress, among senior executives in local, state and federal government, and in positions of power in most other areas of public life. In spite of theoretical postmodern feminist statements and greater improvement in this field, there is little evidence that masculine management ethic has changed. Women are still predominantly in low-wage, low-status, sex-segregated jobs, and male elites keep the best jobs for themselves.

Consider, for example, the fact that most secretaries are women and most executives are men, that most doctors are men and most nurses are women, and that most kindergarten teacher are women and most university professors are men. If we are asked to picture in our minds a nurse, a professor, or a secretary, we usually picture one of the “correct” sexes. We can also notice that in every case it is the “male” job that has the greater social prestige and the higher pay.

There is also a strong bond between public administration and psychoanalysis. Both of them are getting things done (or not) through the people. Public administration should work on the Freudian, Jungian and Lacanian approaches (Farmer, 2010). Freud identifies the defense mechanisms. This approach can help us to find out what a manager should do under stress. Jung’s description of the collective unconscious is very helpful to understand common sense, the hierarchy and the cult of leadership. Lacan sees the human subject as the subject of unconscious rather than the subject of conscious. McSwite (1997) suggests four implications about common sense in public administration. Those are in Farmer’s (2010) words; “the first is that truth is available only by admitting the unconscious into the realm of consciousness. The second is to deny economic epistemology for public administration; administrative man is not the economic man. Third, the idea of administration as the rational attainments of goals (should) be abandoned. Fourth, public administration has unwittingly tied itself to the assumptions of modernism.”

Lacan’s approaches not only help us understand such prescriptions but also they are vital to the condition of the human subject (McSwite, 1997).

According to Farmer (1997), de-marginalizing the unconscious is in at least three respects in postmodern administration. “First the importance of the unconscious in administration should be clearly understood.

Organizational thinking is very important the second way of the de-marginalize the unconscious is to make acceptable the interpretations that grow out of the repressed unconscious. Thirdly, the mechanisms that are repressing the unconscious in the administrative setting should be brought into central focus.”

Schott (1986) asserts that, unconscious in the individual and organizational life has become more important in today’s public administration. There are two major exceptions in the psychological aspects of
administration. First one was the Hawthorne studies about uncovered the influence of morale and emotional factors in work groups and the importance of informal organization. Second one was about the roles of individuals and groups in organizational dynamics and influenced by the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. This movement, focused on Organization Development, instead of the individual psyche (Schott, 1986).

The world we live in today is not the same as yesterday. Everything is changing very fast. People are expected to keep up with these changes if they want to survive and grow in today’s intensely competitive environment. However, at a time of rapid social and technological changes, individuals are also forced to stick up to the traditional modes. As each approach is worthless; even it’s the best one, unless there is the will to act it, David J. Farmer (2005), in his book named “To Kill the King” encourages us to cope with this bigoted understanding of classical-bureaucratic approach by introducing the “playful thinking”. As innovations come from the imagination, playful thinking enables us not to limit ourselves, and struggle with the idea of classical bureaucratic structure which defines human as a machine.

It is true that before something new begins, it’s required to put an end to what it used to be. We should say a sincere goodbye to the old and bored forms of classical-bureaucratic approach. If we fail to say goodbye to those what is considered to be tools of the past, we may have difficulty to engage in the new one. Fresh consciousness through poetic contemplation is another form of play. To Farmer (2005), post-traditional governance should have a fresh consciousness to eliminate the attitudes of traditional bureaucracy. Fresh consciousness is created by a poetic contemplation.

Unlike tinkering, thinking as play through poetic contemplation does not accept immediate resolutions.

Tinkering type of problem solving can be described as doing something in unskilled manner.

Fundamental problems of post-modern society, however, require more substantial resolutions. Traditional bureaucracy has many dead ends that yields large amount of social problems. Alienation and reification are two things that critical theorists pointed as the most significant problems of traditional bureaucracy. Bureaucratic type of individuals becomes an alien to the environment and this alienation makes them insensitive to everything beyond their immediate responsibilities. When they are talked about fundamental problems, they tend to reify by blaming the system. For those individuals who are entrapped by alienation and reification, only a fresh consciousness would prompt them, in Farmer words, for more service or for more justice or for more whatever job they are doing. To practice poetic contemplation, openness and attentiveness are two of the significant recommendations. In order to think openly, first of all individuals should be free from the traditional bureaucratic type of confinement such as a strict top-down hierarchy. Every individual should undertake a futuristic approach about the problems of their organizations which has a more flexible organizational structure.

5. CONCLUSION

According to Farmer (2010), there are many ways of looking at public administration thinking and practice. Through its history the public administration discipline has used number of different perspectives, and mainstream and other lenses have produced valuable insights and perceptions. Each of these perspectives can be enriching. A solitary lens can miss critical aspects; it can give only part of the picture.

Looking at public administration through variety of perspectives taken together and synthesized can deepen understanding. Public administration is a language (Farmer, 1995) that affects people’s lives, it is made in the name of the public in a legally mandated way and it uses public resources (Harmon and Mayer, 1986). Its actions and policies have consequences for the members of society, and groups. Harmon and Mayer (1986) mention that; public administrators’ decisions are responses to perceived problems from the society, group or individuals.

All these indicate that feminism exhibits an uncomfortable fit between theory and practice. Within the discipline of public administration, women’s scholars and experiences have remained largely on the outer border, with discussion limited to a narrow of topic such as equal opportunity, affirmative action, comparative worth, and numerical representation in public bureaucracies. These are important topics, especially because women are underrepresented in executive roles at all levels of government, receive lower pay and experience shorter career ladders. Nevertheless, other issues should merit attention as well. AsStivers (2002) notes, “feminist theory offer(s) new theories of power, virtue, of the nature of organization, and of leadership and professionalism….. Yet few if any of these ideas have made their way into conversations in public administration” (Public Administration Review, 1994).

In feminism perspective, it is believed that public administration’s traditional account of administrative reality, as gender neutral must be replaced with one that reflects the knowledge and experiences of both women and men. Postmodern feminism recognizes gender as an important analytic category with the potential for enhancing and transforming our understanding of social and political reality. It is the potential for enlarged understanding that makes the development of postmodern feminist perspective in public administration. Such a perspective offers a new view advantage point which is taken from postmodern theory and concept, as well as administrative reality itself. We should think how such a feminist perspective in public administration might be developed in practice.
Interpretive research can be useful for public administration. It can enable scholars to examine systematically the meanings, symbols, and language used by male and female administrators in the construction of administrative and organizational realities. It can enable to analyze day-to-day experiences of the sexes in the public sector. Also, it can help us to overcome institutional form of domination. This kind of domination is something that people do but they do not about it. Stivers (2002) argues that if the gender dilemmas of public administration are to be examined, then one must make “take into account everyday life practices.” This kind of thinking can be helpful to generate the grounded, contextual, comparative knowledge of women called in postmodern feminism perspective. Also, critical outlook can be important for public administration. Gender inequality is not simply a role problem but something that is constituted and maintained within a context of social practices. If public administration does not critically examine which public organizations are gendered hierarchies, then, the feminist perspective in public administration would be negligent.

Both methods should be used if postmodern feminism perspective in public administration is to be developed in practice. We should begin to uncover to what extent administrative women are both different from and similar to administrative men, as well as the extent to which gender is in the structures of public organizations and administrative life.

Public administration, both as a field of study and an arena of practice, may learn valuable lessons from psychology. Indeed, one of the most important approaches to the further development of the field and to a deeper understanding of administrative behavior is the further study of what in the 1960s was dubbed "psychological man. Farmer says that, “the big enemy of Public Administration is commonsense. Common sense is not a very good guidance. People speak so define and claim about things, but is this possible?” Public administrators, in a bureaucratic system, are surrounded with machines, and for many cases, they are not welcomed to express their own point and their behaviors are shaped by the system that is prisoner in a box. Farmer (2005) discusses that; the traditional public administration thinking has a bureaucratic characteristics which is primarily prescriptive and pragmatic. In Farmer’s words, prescriptive and pragmatic thinking is tinkering in nature.

The term tinkering refers repairing something in an unskilled manner or applying a particular technique selected from a fixed set of techniques. Thinking as playing also clears space for the individual self to achieve a self-actualization. Self is the person in-her-difference, not a team member, a customer, or an employee. In this kind of play, system is not privileged as in the traditional bureaucracy. I feel that thinking as playing can help to develop one’s fullest potential. By working at their maximum creative potential, employees who are self-actualized can be extremely valuable assets to their organizations. Individuals who have self-actualized can work at their peak and represent the most effective use of an organization’s human resources.

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