

# Algerian Women in Industry

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## Introducing her Study Fatiha Talahite said:

In this paper I will be dealing with Algerian women's employment in industry from 1966 to 1979. My purpose is to analyze why women enter the industrial sector and why they are excluded from it.

In addition, observations on women in the labor force should take into consideration:

The specificity of industrial development in Algeria.

The existence of a vast unacknowledged "informal sector" where women are employed."

But first I will report on some results of statistical investigation (official statistics):

On the average, the proportion of female labor with the total work force remains very small (6%). It increases or decreases irregularly by years.

Of course, the number of women in industry increased from 1966 to 1979 (from 4500 to 28,500), but this growth is still very weak compared to men, except in textile industries, and perhaps in some other industries where the number of skilled women workers increased (hydrocarbons, iron and steel, electric and mechanic industries),

What is striking is that the number of female workers increases the slowest in industries that traditionally employ a great proportion of women, such as leather and shoes, tobacco and matches industries.

Moreover, part of industrial female labor absorbed by the leather and shoe industries fell from 42% in 1966 to 2% in 1979; in the food industry it fell from 23% to 14%. In the textile industry it increased from 21% to 40%.

Thus we can say that Algerian women tend to be concentrated in a few industries, such as the textile one, and we can infer that the textile industry is going to absorb the largest number of industrial female labor.

Besides, textiles is the only industry where the

percentage of women in the labor force remains above the industry average. In 1968 it even exceeded it by 50%. In other industries, it is generally less than 10%, so women are always a minority compared to men.

The gap between female and male average wages per industry also indicates sexual differentiation that could, in a Marxist analysis, be interpreted as sex segregation in the cost of workforce.

But the study of wage gaps is not relevant unless we investigate the distribution of manpower according to skill levels, so that we can examine in depth sex differentiation mechanisms within the labor process.

For instance, in the textile industry, the most important gaps between male and female wages are noticed in the last two skill levels. And these two skill-levels which concern the semi-skilled or unskilled labor force) are the ones that include the greatest proportion of women.

However, in the whole industrial area at the same skill level, differences between male and female wages remain and even widen. For example, the proportion of the most qualified women (level 1) tends to increase, from 1967 to 1979, from 1% to 10%.

The same tendency is observed in the middle skill levels. According to another source of information, employed women are relatively more qualified than men.

These observations emphasize the hypothesis that the gaps between male and female wages are the manifestation of job segregation by sex.

The proportion of qualified women being greater than that of men means, most of the time, that women are employed only if they are qualified.

But workers may become skilled either through educational programs or by on-the-job training. Only the first are considered qualified because of their diplomas. If we evaluate the proportion by sex of skilled workers and then of qualified workers, the figures that are obtained in both cases are highest for women than for men.

Yet the difference is sharper as far as qualified workers are concerned. This is due to the fact that

more women have been able to acquire their training from experience. This does not mean that women do not have any professional experience. In my opinion, it means that the economic system recognizes and values men's experiences, while it underrates those of women.

Women are promoted much less frequently than men. In most cases they remain at the same skill level at which they have been taken on. As an example, I quote a factory manager (electronic industry). He said:

The male labor force is more unsteady than female labor force, but for different reasons. Men do not bear the constraints of manual labor and as they start working they generally ask for promotion. If this promotion is refused, most of the time it ends with a dismissal or a resignation; if it is accepted for the sake of peace and quiet, the worker will probably be incompetent.

On the contrary, women can remain at the same job without causing problems. When they leave, it is always for some extra-professional reasons, such as marriage or family obligations.

Most importantly, the relative over qualification of women vis-a-vis men concerns the whole industrial sector where women remain a small minority. Yet, if we now focus our analysis on the industries where female employment is either high or growing a reverse tendency is noticed: the proportion of skilled women among female workers is now smaller than the same proportion calculated for men.

Of course, this result that might seem misleading at first is specific to a few companies. But it could be significant over the long term to reveal the tendencies that would develop in the future if a pronounced expansion in industrial employment of women occurs.

#### Conclusion:

The data upon which my work is based concern a period of time that ends in 1982. Unfortunately, it was impossible for me to update them for this paper, since almost no study revealing new information has been published until now, except maybe a few monographs on some particular firms. This leads me to mention some of the problems facing researchers who investigate women's labor in Algeria:

1. Deficiency of institutions supposed to regularly publish global statistics on employment, and wages skills. The lack of available statistics is manifest for the whole

but is more striking as far as female employment is concerned. (They consider that it may be neglected).

2. This weakness is not exclusively linked to a problem of incompetence from the statisticians. They are themselves faced by the difficulty of collecting systematic and reliable information from the firms. The point that arises from this problem is the inefficiency of state control over industry. Of course, a bureaucratic and repressive control exists. But it is far from being scientific and rational. This situation exists even in the state-controlled sector of economy (for example, some managers do not even know the exact number of their workers) and more so in private and informal sectors.
3. This leads me to mention a last problem: the question of the informal sector.

It seems to me that one of the characteristics of third world economics is the existence of a vast sector that escapes state control and that evolves in the gaps left by the official sectors. No study has been done in Algeria on women's labor within the informal sector. However, it is a branch to be investigated.

I will conclude this paper by saying that the research on the informal sector requires the elaboration of a new framework of analysis.

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*Travail Domestique et Salarier Feminin: Essai sur les Femmes dans les Rapports Marchands – Le Cas de L'Algerie.* Mai 1983.