Research plan for my master’s thesis

Introduction

A wench, a home maid, a housekeeper, a domestic worker – there are many names for those women who have worked and served in households in different time periods. In this research plan I will call them home maids. The starting point for this study has been a writing competition which was organized by the Kotiliesi-magazine and The Finnish Literature Society. The competition produced 3267 pages of text consisting of the memories of 379 writers. The writers were women and men of all ages, some who wrote about their own experiences as home maids and some who reminisced about the home maid in their childhood family. In 2006 The Miina Sillanpää Foundation funded the publication of Minna Kilkki’s compilation “Kotiapulaiset - Muistoja sadan vuoden ajalta”. The data in my bachelor’s thesis data consisted of 13 writings published in the book. The writings are stored in The Folklore Archives in Helsinki and I intend to analyze them more thoroughly in my master’s thesis. In this abstract I will introduce my ideas for my master’s thesis. I’m very interested in this research theme because it combines the area of home economics science and history.

I concluded in my bachelor’s thesis that the roles and position of home maids in employer families can be interpreted dualistic. Some home maids were considered as members of the employer family or even standby mother. Other home maids were more employees and strangers passing through. The main task of the home maids was homemaking, in other words cooking and cleaning. While completing my bachelor’s thesis I also became more interested in the subject. At the moment especially the relationships between the family members and their home maids interests me.
I also believe that this theme is very important. There are not home maids anymore in Finland. Services provided by the welfare state left them “obsolete” in the 1960’s and 1970’s. There are fewer and fewer left of those women who worked as house maids. There haven’t been many studies made about the home maids in Finland, so this unique data allows us to peek in their everyday life and work.

Nowadays the Finnish home’s are outsourcing housework once again. The demands of work and people’s interest to invest into their spare time too have created the need to buy housework services outside. Buying your housework, for example cleaning services, will entitle you to tax deduction too. Studying the history may give us new view points to our everyday life.

**Aims and theme**

My master’s thesis concentrates on the time period between 1906 and 1945. In 1906 women were given the right to vote in Finland and first women were elected as MP’s the following year. Year 1945 marks the end of wartime in Finland. During this time period Finnish women encountered many changes. They were given rights as citizens but there were also public deliberations about the differences of men and women and their roles in society. In the beginning of the century it was argued that the sphere of responsibility for women was home and that public life was ment only for men. The wartime changed everything. Most of the men went to war and women were now responsible not only for the home but also for the support of family.

For my master’s thesis I intend to analyze writings which fullfill all of the following conditions:

1. Writings which cover the time period between 1906 and 1945.
2. Writings which discuss the lives of those domestic workers who not only worked but also lived fulltime in their employer families.
3. Writings which tell the story of a domestic worker working and living in the city or a big rular parish (excluding wenches who were employed to do farm work).
The main theme in my master’s thesis is power. I intend to analyze the data from the viewpoint of power and its different forms. In sociology power is seen as an ability to make someone behave in certain way. Power also has effect (and vice versa) in the social class structure of society and the economical inequality of people. In the early 20th century’s industrialized societies those who owned only their own manpower had the least power. (Sulkunen 1987, 130.)

**In the beginning** of the research the research theme can be reduced to the following research questions:

1. Who exercises power in the families (and is there a difference before and during wartime)?
2. How is it shown and experienced?
3. What kind of consequences the use of power has?

I am well aware of the fact that these questions may change as the research advances and concepts rise from the data. At the moment I have selected 22 writings from the data which I will analyze first.

**Method**

The method of analysis in this study is content analysis, which is a methodology used in the social sciences for studying for example the content of communication (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 16). With content analysis I intend to compare the use of power in the employer families before the war and during it. I’ll also intend to be open minded and let the research to be inspired by the writings rather than theory. In addition I will read literature which will help me to understand and describe the selected time period and also some older research concerning the working conditions of domestic workers. I will also use some manuals written for housewives and maids and historical and of course methodical literature.

I also have to consider the peculiarity of the data. The writings are memories, life stories or narrativies, in other words written from someone’s viewpoint. The data
is microhistorical and therefore I don’t expect to make any generalization from it but to tell a story about a group of women who are almost forgotten.

I will start the content analysis with reading the data thoroughly many times. First I’m going to reduce and roughly classify the contents with the help of the following tool:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME ↓</th>
<th>WHO USES POWER?</th>
<th>HOW IS IT SHOWN?</th>
<th>WHO IS IT EXPERIENCED?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEFORE THE WAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DURING THE WAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After this I’m going to further classify and conceptualize the data.

**What I’m going to do next is:**
- analyze the first 22 writings
- read more literature and those wonderful old manuals
- examine the concept of power and how I’m going to use it in my thesis

**Key words**
Domestic worker, domestic help, housewives, writing contest, content analysis, narrative, oral history.

**References**
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