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Gender Barriers at Work: A Comparison Between Women Train Drivers and Women Garage Mechanics in Spain

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Citation: M. del Mar Maira-Vidal (2018) Gender Barriers at Work: A Comparison Between Women Train Drivers and Women Garage Mechanics in Spain. *Cambio* Vol. 8, n. 16: 167-181. doi: 10.13128/cambio-23519

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Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Abstract. Occupational segregation persists despite continuous promotion of equal opportunity policies. This article describes various barriers that have stood in the way of women train drivers' and women motor vehicle mechanics' entering and remaining in employment. The results are based on case studies of these two occupations in Spain and primarily on the analysis of in-depth interviews of female and male employees in these occupations. The comparison is justified because of the companies' similarities in terms of underrepresentation and yet their dissimilar organisation in terms of both size and management style. The findings indicate the presence of at least two types of obstacles: 1) *explicit barriers* related to personnel selection and the material characteristics of workplaces; and 2) *implicit barriers* associated with attitudes and practices in the relationships between the minority of women workers and the male majority.

Keywords. Male-dominated occupations; segregation; gender barriers at work; Spanish women train drivers; Spanish women garage mechanics.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last five decades, the Spanish job market has experienced major changes, one of which is the gradual entrance of women. In 1980, the *female economic activity rate* was 27.1 per cent (Puy 2000). Thirty-five years on, in 2015, this same indicator has doubled (53.7 per cent, INE 2015). Several factors have impacted this change: changes in labour legislation; equality in accessing education (MEC 2016); improvements in job opportunities; and a change in mindset, such as women's desire for independence through employment and cultural changes involving women's disposition to hold jobs (Prieto 2007). However, this does not mean that equality has been achieved.

Occupational segregation tenaciously endures, particularly in certain niches of employment. Thus, there are several occupations where either males or females heavily prevail no matter what country is examined

(Hegewisch *et alii* 2010; Ibáñez 2008). In aggregate terms, males continue to reign in the economic spheres whose social and monetary recognition is the highest while occupations that are considered “male” offer the highest salaries due to their “superior” management or technical skills (Fagan 2010). Occupations where women prevail are those that offer lesser opportunities for promotion (Rosenbaum 1985; England 2010) and more modest remuneration (Levanon *et alii* 2009).

Understanding why this occupational segregation endures is an important matter for at least two reasons. First, failure to foster equal opportunities, one of the causes of inequality between men and women, is of concern for governments and social institutions because it is associated with labour market rigidity and causes economic inefficiency (Anker 1997). Secondly, women continue to bear an unfair subordinate status owing jointly to redistribution, i.e. economic policies, and recognition, i.e. cultural androcentrism (Fraser 2007).

This article presents a comparative analysis of two extremely masculinised occupations. Railway driving in Spain accounts for a mere 1.5 per cent of female workers¹, while female employment of motor vehicle mechanics or machine adjusters stands at 3.7 per cent².

Several factors pointed to examining these two occupations jointly. First, the characteristics of the companies in rail transport and vehicle reparation are very different in terms of both their size and their types of organisation. Yet the occupational segregation effect is similar. It also seemed of interest to examine whether there were any commonalities between the entrance barriers found by women in obtaining and remaining in these jobs.

Diverse sources of information consulted by the researchers included specialised literature, labour statistics, company reports, and so forth. Perhaps potentially of greatest value was the production of a set of oral documents generated between 2012 and 2014 through individual in-depth interviews using a similar script.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the 1960s, various social sciences have gradually begun to devote attention to labour segregation by gender and gained an interest in identifying entrance barriers faced by female workers seeking or attaining employment in occupations where males prevail has gained ground. The main androcentric arguments justifying occupational segregation can be grouped into three inter-linked categories: 1) “women aren’t able”, 2) “women don’t want to”, and 3) “women can’t take it”.

1) *Women aren’t able* refers to the effects of a division of labour by gender and its resonance in subjective perception when attributing skills to men and women. While males will be socialised to develop their strength and command of technical and leadership skills, virtuous women must cultivate sensitivity, emotion and household-based skills involving cooking or supervising meals, bringing up children and caring for family members (Kmec *et alii* 2010; Waite, Berryman 1985). These stereotypes regarding the male and female essence continue to hold and have a significant bearing on people’s choices in education and jobs (England 2010).

2) *Women don’t want to* is revealing of conflicts in availability and gender hierarchies in assigning roles. Women’s confinement to private, domestic spheres involves socialisation of femininity that pre-establishes the essential priority of the home. Not fulfilling or poorly fulfilling that role in the face of demands on the job, therefore, would unleash symbolic violence requiring female workers to relinquish what is secondary, i.e. work outside the home, and a return to their natural “habitat”. Impacts on time/availability conflicts, perversely known as work-life balance, continue to prevail when women choose their employment (Jacobs, Gerson 2004; Percheski 2008). Throughout the world, statistics prove that women continue to devote most of their time to taking care

¹ See Renfe Grupo (2013). These dismal figures repeat themselves in highly developed Western countries such as: France, 5 per cent (Blandin 2013); Norway, 5 per cent (ITF 2010); the United Kingdom, 5.2 per cent (Robinson 2012); and the USA 2.8 per cent (Starustka 2013).

² The figures in regard to the occupation are no more encouraging in other European countries. In France only 18.7 per cent of the mechanics were women in motor vehicle maintenance and repair garages in 2014, while the figures from Germany were 16.1 per cent and Sweden 12.8 per cent (EFT, Eurostat).

of their homes and families, which in turn proves that the gender division of labour ideology maintains its hold (Sayer 2005).

3) *Women can't take it*: the time and effort that “rough” “man's” jobs require is the rationale behind the normalisation of gender-based labour spheres. Any transgression of this division would initially create problems for women to be accepted and integrated into masculinised occupations (Kanter 1977; Moore 1988; Pesce 1988; Maume 1999; McPherson *et alii* 2001; Taylor 2010). Opposition and harassment are among the causes for certain women to drop out in these occupations (Torre 2014).

There are different theories that have tried to explain gender occupational segregation in the last decades, among others, for example, the Human Capital Theory (Becker 1987), that points out factors as the employment guidance or the individual preferences; the Labour Market Segmentation Theory (Doeringer, Piore 1985), that focuses in companies' characteristics; or the Labour Queue Theory (Thurow 1975), that emphasises the influence of social stereotypes in the employers' personnel recruitment and retention. In any case, segregation, by its very nature, has a host of causes whose factors vary over time and, of course, have not disappeared. Gender-driven socialisation, organisations' lack of information, female workers' lack of visibility in male-dominated occupations, barriers to obtaining jobs in certain occupations, and a mistrust of women's competence and continuation on the job all come into play. They are all factors that contribute to the fact that only 23 per cent of the existing occupations were not segregated by gender and 50 per cent of female workers were concentrated in 13 out of the 169 occupations of the Spanish National Occupation Classification List in 2011 (Census 2011). In reality, there are quite a lot of occupations in the Spanish labour market that are practically closed to women: pilot, bricklayer, train driver, garage mechanic etc. (Ibáñez *et alii* 2017; Aguado *et alii* 2018).

Anyhow, it is important to highlight that occupational segregation implies not only inefficiencies in assigning available resources, but it also perpetuates a context of discrimination against women, thereby maintaining the “male” privilege for certain jobs.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

This article is based on two case studies about the barriers that women garage mechanics and women train drivers usually face in two masculinised occupations: garage mechanic and train driver. These case studies implied qualitative fieldwork that was carried out in different cities of Spain between 2012 and 2014. We conducted six individual in-depth interviews to women and men garage mechanics; five in-depth interviews to women and men garage supervisors, managers and owners; nine individual in-depth interviews to women and men train drivers; and twenty-one e-interviews (by e-mail) to women and men train drivers based on a structured guide. We used the structural sampling technique to choose workers with different labour trajectories. It was not difficult to contact women and men train drivers through the Spanish state-owned company Renfe, but was rather problematic to find women mechanics in garages, which are most micro businesses (with nine or less employees) in Spain (97 per cent) (see Table 1)³.

Table 1. Interviews by occupation.

| Occupation | Individual in-depth interviews | e-interviews based on a structured guide |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Women and men garage mechanics | 6 | – |
| Women and men garage supervisors, managers and owners | 5 | – |
| Women and men train drivers | 9 | 21 |

Source: Project results MICINN-12-FEM2011-25228.

³ See Annex, for the socio-demographic characteristics of persons interviewed.

WOMEN MOTOR VEHICLE MECHANICS AND WOMEN TRAIN DRIVERS. A BRIEF CHARACTERISATION

Motor vehicle repair and train driving are highly masculinised occupations for which technical training, ability in handling tools and specialised machinery and strength are touted. These trades may appear to be “dirty” given that handling of lubricants stains one’s clothing and body. This strays considerably from the expectations generated by traditional female socialisation. In our societies, gender stereotypes attribute certain skills to women such as care, treating others well, meticulousness and cleanliness while males are attributed physical strength and handling manual tools, machinery and technology (Daune-Richards 2000; Cáceres *et alii* 2004). Thus, cleaning work in general and body cleanliness more specifically are categorised as feminine. By working in certain professions, women break a negative gender stereotype establishing that they are not willing to get themselves dirty on the job. And this stereotype has acted as a significant access barrier to many occupations.

Furthermore, there are certain myths hinging around male and female physiology, and it is assumed that males are endowed by nature with physical strength while females are not. What is not conceived is that strength is developed and is to a great extent a fruit of bodybuilding, which both men and women can do. Gender socialisation and social disapproval prevent women from developing their strength, leading them to believe it is unattainable (Brace-Govan 2004).

There is often a mystification of certain masculinised occupations that work as a barrier to women’s entry. This often occurs with many women in industry and construction (Paap 2006). It is assumed that masculinised occupations are much more physically and psychologically demanding than feminised occupations are, while the hardship of feminised occupations is slighted. Yet, certain research has blasted these myths and has underscored the severity of certain feminised occupations in health care where far more weight is lifted in highly uncomfortable positions when patients must be moved, where many hours are spent standing, where work is done on night shifts and at weekends, and where the emotional load is heavy. It is thus common for both the qualifications and the roughness of feminised jobs to be undervalued. According to the *Safety and Health and Work Survey* (2007) published by Germany’s Federal Institute of Safety and Health at Work (BAuA), a significant percentage of workers in the health system lift more weight, day in and day out, than construction workers (Schneider 2015).

It is interesting here that on the job, when males cannot lift a certain weight or perform a given task due to hardship, they turn to others without problematising the situation. Yet when women cannot, they are singled out because it is attributed to their weakness. In this androcentric world, males stand as ostensibly neutral figures serving as a point of reference for normalcy (Maira-Vidal 2018; 2017a; 2017b; 2016; 2015).

What follows is a succinct description of the sub-sectors and occupations analysed in this article.

1. Women garage mechanics

In motor vehicle maintenance and repair in Spain, there is significant fragmentation among companies. 97 per cent are micro-businesses with nine or fewer workers. Indeed, in 2014, 42.8 per cent of the companies in this sub-sector had only one or two salaried workers while 35.5 per cent had none.

Furthermore, over time, women’s underrepresentation in industry has been noteworthy, particularly in the automotive industry and its various subsectors: manufacturing of motor vehicles, chasses, components, spare parts and accessories; and motor vehicle and motorcycle sales, repair and maintenance. According to figures published by Spain’s *Encuesta de Población Activa* (INE – Labour Force Survey), women’s employment rate in the motor vehicle and motorcycle sales, repair and maintenance subsector was 14.5 per cent in 2014, and many women had administrative or sales positions. The proportion in the motor vehicle manufacturing subsector is even lower, and female occupation is estimated to stand at 23.9 per cent. In fact, according to Spain’s census, only 4.9 per cent mechanics and adjusters were women in 2001, and by 2011 this percentage had sunk to 3.7 per cent.

The female occupation rate in the motor vehicle sales, maintenance and repair subsector in Spain is very similar to that of the European Union, which was 16.1 per cent in the third quarter of 2014 (EFT-EUROSTAT). No

significant variations are to be found between a member state and another. The rate is very low across the board. Slovenia has the highest percentage of female workers, 21.2 per cent, while Poland, with 10 per cent, has the lowest. Therefore, it can be concluded that this subsector is highly masculinised across the European Union.

The prevailing industrial relations system in the motor vehicle maintenance and repair shop subsector in Spain is known as the “low-road type”, based on on-the-job training, subcontracting and a lack of job stability, as opposed to the “high-road type” characterised by formal worker qualifications provided through educational credentials, good working conditions and job stability. Trade unions usually play an important role in this last type, as they are involved in the design of the educational credentials and guarantee formalised procedures and protocols in the personnel recruitment processes (DYNAMO 2007)⁴. Access to a job in the motor vehicle maintenance and repair shop subsector comes through contacts made in informal networking⁵. Most often, for hiring workers, private micro-businesses in Spain invest very scant amounts in resources, infrastructure and personnel. Hiring is done by the business owner or manager who usually has neither human resource training or objectivity to ensure that the principle of equal opportunities between men and women is upheld, as required by legislation. This type of access to employment significantly harms women since a tendency to reproduce staffing patterns can be seen. Employers tend to hire males both out of gender prejudice and given their conviction that including women may jeopardise group cohesion.

Thus, in Spain, women are faced with great difficulties in obtaining jobs as garage mechanics because their hiring depends on individual managers who tend to rule out potential workers who do not fit the social stereotype. This holds particularly true in small businesses that prevail in the sector. Major or expanding companies are generally subject to greater changes and at times tend to take atypical decisions, although this usually occurs during expansive economic cycles (Devine 1992; Baron *et alii* 1991; Bygren, Kumlin 2005).

2. Women train drivers

Rail transport began to develop in Spain during the second half of the 19th century. Five major private equity companies controlled the business (Ballesteros 2015). After the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), railways were nationalised by the dictatorship, and a single company was formed in 1941: Renfe, *Red Nacional de los Ferrocarriles Españoles*. In addition to cleansing the company of “disaffected workers”, the military regime transferred recruiting and training military workers over to the army. For this reason, until the first democratic constitution was approved in 1978, women were side-lined from access to railway driver employment.

In Spain, at the end of the 1970s, feminist movements had attained the power of public representation and had staked claims for equal opportunities (Scanlon 1990). Furthermore, over that same period, the country underwent a severe crisis, unemployment was rampant, and everyone, especially the younger generations, applauded any job opportunity. Between 1979 and 1981, these circumstances fostered several dozen young women’s applying for jobs under three different calls for employment made by Renfe for driver’s assistants/second men. Since then, this public company’s industrial relations have since been characterised by providing workers stability and opportunities for promotion, and by selection processes done according to a formalised protocol⁶.

⁴ The “low-road” type of industrial relations is more widespread in Mediterranean countries while the “high-road” type prevails in Nordic and Germanic countries. The “superior” industrial relations model is more inclusive of women and involves formalised hiring procedures following protocols and criteria that attach value to acquired qualifications, and it has less horizontal gender segregation. Personnel screeners are usually instructed to reduce or minimise subjectivity in their choices and potential prejudice (Devine 1992).

⁵ Data and statistics in this section provide information on the motor vehicle sales, repair and maintenance sector overall. We have not had access to disaggregated statistics that would allow us to exclude sales and make reference to only the garages that do exclusively motor vehicle maintenance and repair.

⁶ The research enabled the identification of a number of women who became drivers during this period: 12 in 1979; 16 in 1980; and 14 in 1981. A further 11 women must be added to this minority, because they were promoted to drivers as station agents or specialised workers in Renfe.

After three decades, most women who joined Renfe as assistants between 1979 and 1981 continue to be active train drivers (71 per cent). This high remain rate could serve as evidence that the process achieved optimal integration, unlike Great Britain, for instance, where the dropout rate of the first train drivers was very high (Wojtczak 2005). Therefore, it is as important to examine the female dropout pace and rate for these occupations as it is to examine the rate at which women accessed these jobs (Jacobs 1989; Torre 2014).

Working conditions for train drivers have their advantages and disadvantages. On the downside, the job involves shifts, including a night-time shift, and may require nights spent away from home and in certain cases moves in the event of a promotion. On the positive side, the job is stable, affords opportunities for promotion, high wages and social prestige.

In addition to bearing the same working conditions as men, most women train drivers in Spain became mothers. While they report that bringing up children was difficult, they were able to lean on family networks and partially externalise care. It can, therefore, be said that Spanish women train drivers' labour integration has been optimal. Nevertheless, this positive experience did not eliminate occupational segregation for train drivers. Again, in Spain, women hold only 1.5 per cent of these positions (Renfe Grupo 2013). According to the annual report published by the company Renfe-Operadora (2015), out of 4,887 drivers, only 85 were women. This figure speaks for itself in illustrating the effective discrimination in women's obtaining positions as train drivers.

BARRIERS FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE. ANALYSIS

The term "barriers" is used here to refer to what prevents or thwarts women both in obtaining and remaining in certain jobs, thereby leading to occupational segregation. The barriers are challenges faced by women in their attempt to successfully integrate into workplaces dominated by men because of both organisational considerations and social and cultural factors in companies and in households and society.

This section presents two factors to be taken into account when analysing the persistence of a segregated labour market: 1) mechanisms coming into play in accessing a given occupation; 2) women's integration into masculinised occupations.

1. Mechanisms involved in access

In this comparative analysis between women garage mechanics and train drivers, we have signalled that the type of "access barrier" is highly related to organisations' characteristics including their size and management style. While the women train drivers joined a large company whose industrial relations conforms to a "high-road" type, women garage mechanics were inserted into a business fabric woven by very small productive units normally lacking formalised structures and standard procedures, which can be considered a "low-road" type.

The bureaucracy examined by Weber (1922) boasts a rational, efficient, success-oriented model where objective standards and impersonal rules ensure an organisation's reliability and predictability. "Theoretical bureaucracy" knows nothing of gender or ethnicity and therefore has no scope for discrimination. Nevertheless, bureaucratised organisations have been denounced on occasions for gender discrimination (Ferguson 1984; Tanwir 2014).

In Spanish railways, job recruitment is formalised and involves an application process, aptitude testing and meeting certain social and demographic criteria that may vary according to the job in question (Ballesteros 2016). In Spain, until the 1978 Constitution was passed, this bureaucratic model explicitly excluded women from all railway occupations because it was the army that selected workers⁷. With the advent of democracy, Renfe had to accept women's applications, and between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s the entry of women into

⁷ Except for the divisions handling administration, cleaning and oversight of railway crossings.

jobs in track maintenance (specialised workers) and as train drivers (Aguado, Ballesteros 2018) stands as a fact. Yet, this opening up to women stalled, as was also observed by Paula England (2010), on the United States job market.

The current inequality balance owes not to direct but to indirect exclusion mechanisms. At present, as opposed to being legal or administrative in nature, the factors preventing women from choosing employment in railways are associated with several processes acting jointly. First of all, avoidance in the dissemination of information or publicity regarding job offers must be cited. Railway companies are not transparent in their job offerings and have come up with inventive procedures to keep the sector a male preserve. Since 1989, Renfe has made no external job offer for drivers and has met its needs through in-house job offers. The internal market rationale prevailed where jobs are off-limits for those outside the organisation and expectations for an in-house career generate both cost-savings and worker loyalty.

Secondly, an endogamic culture maintains workers' notion of their "entitlement" to pass down a trade (Dex 1991). For five decades, Renfe had transferred job recruitment to the army and, in addition to standing as a mechanism that excluded women, this fostered the passing down of jobs from fathers to sons. It is standard for railway workers to boast of a family history in the trade. This lends them an identity and leads them to stake a claim for this privilege. Over Spain's forty years of democracy, the company management has made no effort to modify this androcentric culture, and despite the manifest gender inequality among its personnel, it has implemented no active policies to reduce discrimination that makes the occupation remain a "boy's club".

Spain's business fabric, woven of small and medium-sized entities in garage mechanics, does not allow for formalised job selection processes. Selection is therefore heavily influenced by the subjective, personal criteria of shop managers or owners. Experience takes precedence over qualification when hiring in the motor vehicle repair and maintenance subsector. This is one of the main characteristics of an "inferior" industrial relations system where the training that entrepreneurs appreciate is mainly on-the-job experience and not so much training courses in schools. In this subsector, informal networking prevails over formalised job selection processes. Both have a negative bearing on women. Women mechanics are not taken into account in the personal networks that these businesses turn to (Marsden 1999; Dainty *et alii* 2004; Byrne *et alii* 2005; Berik, Bilginson 2006). It is important to remember here that employers' decisions are impacted by the degree of their gender stereotypes (Todaro *et alii* 2001; Maruani 1993; 2002). Garage owners and managers do not trust women's professionalism and consider them unable to hold masculinised jobs (Davies 1996). The garage owner and supervisor interviewed referred, in the following quote, to the alleged poor quality at an ITV⁸ garage located in the Madrid metropolitan area, where there are only female employees:

In fact, there is an ITV on Avenida de Andalucía (Madrid), and all of the women who work there... they're women! This ITV used to be number one, it's true that there used to be only two ITVs, and since they went with all women, it hasn't worked the same, it's gone down a whole lot (...) Because of the women and because there were also more ITVs. Now, we have about thirty ITVs in Madrid. But I also think it's because of the women. And you should know it's the ITV where they give you the least hassle to pass. There they're more lenient. (I9, garage owner, manager and supervisor, age 47)

Really, if you went to a garage and you knew that the one working on your car was a woman, you would think twice. You would. (I9, garage owner, manager and supervisor, age 47)

Having said this, the strategy to overcome access barriers to the occupation that women mechanics who do not work in the subsector face has been to invest all they can in getting solid formal training. But their results have been frustrating. Therefore, one of the strategies that some of them consider in the medium term is self-employment, to set up their own garage. However, these women normally do not have the capital to realise the project. Many are unemployed or have been working at other occupations for a long time, so in a way, they are losing the skills and experience they acquired during their training.

⁸ *Inspección Técnica de Vehículos* (ITV- Technical Inspection of Vehicles) performed as provided by law by garages authorised by Spain's Regions (*Comunidades Autónomas*).

These two case studies corroborate the fact that while in the subsectors and occupations examined there belong to two different industrial relations systems, one “high” and the other “low”, horizontal gender segregation continues to hold its grip both in publicly owned companies and in various private branches and sizes in Spain.

2. *Women's integration into masculinised occupations*

Women's access to male-dominated jobs is not the end of a journey, but a mere phase along the way. Being a minority in a male-dominated sphere means experiencing estrangement, voids, indifference, questioning, mocking, insults, and in the worst of all cases, harassment.

In performing masculinised jobs, women face many types of barriers put up by their bosses or co-workers. Particularly noteworthy is that fact that women's entry into masculinised occupations implies greater competition for male workers who at times consider their jobs or promotions may be jeopardised. Males also generate part of their own identity in contrast to female identity and, just as women do, base their identity on their profession. Therefore, in certain cases, they may feel a jolt to their identity and may seem reluctant or even violent when women workers access spheres they consider to be their own (Akerlof, Kranton 2000).

Difficulties cited by women entering male-dominated working spheres can be placed in two different categories: a) *explicit barriers*, inappropriate space and a misfit in terms of clothing not fitting women's bodies; b) *implicit barriers*, attitudes and relations between men and women. A third dimension related to work-life balance conflicts could also be cited, but will not be addressed in this article.

2.a. *Explicit barriers*

When women enter a male dominated workplace, they discover there are no gender-specific toilets or dressing rooms. This is something they often cite as uncomfortable or unpleasant and has been signalled in other case studies on women train driver's working conditions (Wojtczak 2005; Starustka 2013).

It is also very common for regulated work attire to be made for male anatomy. One-piece work overalls are barely, if at all, functional for women when they need to go to the toilet since taking off their overalls leaves them half naked. Furthermore, available shoe and uniform sizes are generally too large, forcing women workers to uncomfortably improvise with the oversized garments that were not designed for slim petites:

The work overalls were huge on us, we would wear a belt and underneath a T-shirt and joggers. After two years working there, they started to bring us two-piece suits. (EI3, woman train driver, age 51)

This experience was related by British train drivers. English train driver Anne Winter, for instance, associated the company's lack of response to overt scepticism towards women and expectations that they would leave:

Being new, and as a woman in the industry, it took many years for me to feel I could request my rights and so I was rather a down-trodden member of the grade. The general attitude was that, as a female, I would not be around long enough to warrant the expense of toilets or regular uniform issue.⁹ (Wojtczak 2005: 320).

A great deal of symbolic significance can be attached to the fact that there is no specific space or work clothing suited to female workers in masculinised productive sectors and occupations. The implicit message is that these women are not where they should be, that they are misfits, that there is no place for them in these sectors and

⁹ At the commercial tailor's they explained to this worker that the company had doubts about how much longer she would remain on the job and had, therefore, agreed not to make any additional garments to replenish the clothing when she was hired but postpone making the garments, if need be, until the annual order that was to be placed in the future.

occupations and, in short, that they are out of place. These are barriers, or dissuasive or expelling mechanisms, which together with others, make women feel uncomfortable and hamper them in remaining in these jobs.

2.b. *Implicit barriers*

Because most of our behaviour involves what is predictable, attempting to infringe a social norm is received with incredulity at best. Most men perceive the mere fact that women purport to penetrate “men’s work” as a folly. When certain women turned to railway organisations to see how they could access employment, their requests were received as a folly and, more often than not, the intention behind their request was distorted. When in the summer of 1979, Anne Winter, the first English train driver, went to a *British Railways* delegation to ask about how she could become a train driver, she met with hysterical laughter (Wojtczak 2005). Sylvie Gueudeville, the first French female driver of a high-speed train, was accused of wanting to enter the traction service with the intention of finding a husband¹⁰. Analogously, women mechanics have withstood explicit barriers when seeking employment and have been overtly excluded because of their gender. It is far easier for males to find employment as mechanics:

You go to a garage to give them your CV, and they say: «We don’t need cleaning ladies, or secretaries...». There are all sorts of reactions. The other day I went to leave off a CV, when it’s a woman who takes it from you, they are usually more cheerful «Hey look, a woman mechanic», but the other day I went to leave off a CV at a garage where they were looking for mechanics, and the guy’s whole facial expression changed. (I3, mechanic, age 20)

The workers concurred in citing that their arrival was received with hostility. They said they felt incessantly observed and had to prove the skills they had obtained just like their male counterparts in the same courses. «A man is accepted from the outset and then judged. A woman is received suspiciously and then has to prove her worth» (Renfe 1983: 12-14). The female workers were subjected to on-going evaluation of their skills that forced them to make more of an effort than their male counterparts to make sure these skills were apparent (Kanter 1977).

I have felt observed, but it’s because there are so few of us. I’ve felt under a lot of pressure, because of the “on-going exam” I’ve been exposed to. My feeling was that I had to give 120 per cent in order to be acceptable. Over the years this feeling has evaporated. (EI7, woman train driver, age 53)

Estrangement does not only occur in the workplace per se, but also is perceived through users, i.e. passengers (in the case of train drivers) and customers (in the case of garage mechanics).

The confusion generated when they saw women on the tracks was contested not only by railway workers but also by passengers on the train¹¹:

I can’t believe that a woman is driving the train! (EI5, woman train driver, age 52)

When I was working on the engines (1982-1988), some users, especially the passengers, didn’t like it for a woman to be driving the train. (EI2, woman train driver, age 53)

¹⁰ Sylvie Gueudeville became a train driver after several years in the company. When she was 19 years old and had a degree in electro-mechanics she requested a position as an equipment technician at the (SNCF) workshop in Périgord, and she was told «It wasn’t appropriate to hire a woman». Availing herself of a push for change begun by Simone Veil to feminize masculine bastions in the labour market, she threatened to file a complaint for discrimination and obtained a post as a cashier in the commercial service (*Les infos*, Journal Interne de la SNCF, 27 April 2007).

¹¹ Stéphanie Larcier, an SNCF train driver since 2002, asserted in the magazine *L’Express*: «When customers discover that a woman is the train driver, they are often very surprised. The group currently has 1 per cent of women train drivers but my experience proves that women can access this type of job without any problem. And the company is very much in favour and I confirm that there really is room for women in this trade» (*En ligne avec Stéphanie, conductrice de train à la SNCF*, 04 November 2011, http://www.lexpress.fr/emploi/en-ligne-avec-stephanie-conductrice-de-train-a-la-sncf_1047631.html#mazHZPzwivPTBPMk.99, accessed in June 2014).

Also significant are fears on the part of garage employers and managers regarding customers' potential reaction should they hire female mechanics understanding this would hurt business. Here, we should point out how hard it has been for women who have accessed the occupation to have clients (particularly men) accept their skills and trust their professionalism:

Interviewee: It was time for me to get down to work, to get my hands on a car and of course the customer couldn't be standing there over me, of course, «How is a woman going to fix a car?». And it's taken me a lot to prove that I can do that. For the car owner to admit that I could do it just like a man could. It was hard. It was hard. It wasn't easy. In the end, I was able to, sure. I did it. But it wasn't at all easy.

Interviewer: Was that fact that you were the one who fixed the car initially kept from the client?

Interviewee: Yes, it was. In fact, I stayed on, I closed the garage and continued to fix this and that until midnight or one in the morning (...). They would say to me: «But are you going to fix it yourself?». «Yeah». «Well, I don't know, you know...». And then my father (the owner of the garage) would come out and stand next to me and say: «Don't you worry. I'll be watching over all of this, okay?». (...) «Don't you worry, I'm going to be on top of this. Don't you worry, there'll be no problem...». And little by little people started accepting it. (I1, female garage supervisor and mechanic, age 62)

Discrimination and harassment have been or continue to be fairly more common barriers for the motor vehicle mechanics than for the Renfe train drivers. There are situations in which their co-workers and/or bosses have isolated them socially both in the workplace itself and in informal meetings or events organised outside work. The women have been deprived of information important to doing their work, or have been denied help or support, or have been denied the clothing and tools they need for their work. They have received contradictory requests; they have been continuously reprehended and not congratulated on their successes; they have been given different treatment than their male counterparts; their self-esteem has been degraded and undermined to the point of generating major occupational health problems; they have been made the butt of mockery, jokes and comments, at times sexual, or have been prevented from or thwarted in keeping their jobs or getting promotions.

I got there on a Monday (the first day of work), no one gave me overalls or work gloves, no one showed me where anything was in the garage (...). I didn't know any of the co-workers, or what there was in my toolbox. I didn't know anything. (I3, woman mechanic, age 20)

These situations are particularly harmful in many ways, both psychologically and socially and also occupationally speaking, where there is a negative impact on the chances for remaining on the job or being promoted (Kanter 1977; Dainty *et alii* 2004).

Dropouts are more common among mechanics given that high salaries for female train drivers serve as an incentive to endure the hostile attitudes from workmates, as explained by England (2010).

DISCUSSION

Labour statistics confirm that occupational segregation persists, and with it, mechanisms triggering and upholding inequality. The comparative study of the two different occupations allows us to conclude that because the androcentric cultural model discriminating against women endures, barriers to equal employment opportunities remain irrespectively of differences in size, type of industrial relations and business management style.

The barriers identified in both of the occupations analysed have elements in common, such as the lack of trust in women's professional skills on the part of bosses, co-workers, users and customers. Although certain differences can be noted, in most males, this generates hostility vis-à-vis the female minority. While the railway companies maintain a "high" system ensuring formalised personnel and protected working conditions that have enabled women train drivers to solve their work-life balance conflict, this has not spared the sector from remaining a male preserve due to indirect mechanisms such as internal promotion competitions for train drivers. Meanwhile, motor vehicle maintenance and repair garages have a "low" system hampering women who aspire to a job opportunity although their skills from formal training are accredited.

As things currently stand, and as Margareta Kreimer (2004) has asserted, any equal employment opportunities policy must be combined with policies to reduce gender segregation. This remains something that neither companies nor labour authorities pursue. How much longer will we need to wait for male privileges to be broken?

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ANNEX: INTERVIEWEES' SOCIAL AND OCCUPATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Table A.1. Individual in-depth interviews with women garage mechanics (2012-13).

| Code | Gender | Age | Current job status | Highest professional category attained |
|------|--------|-----|------------------------|--|
| I1 | F | 62 | Retired | Garage manager |
| I2 | F | 37 | Active | Garage manager |
| I3 | F | 20 | Active (as a waitress) | Mechanic's assistant |
| I4 | F | 21 | Active (as a waitress) | Studied mechanics and has not found employment as a mechanic |
| I5 | F | 20 | Unemployed | Mechanic's assistant with no employment contract (black economy) |
| I6 | F | 40 | Active | Head panel beater and painter. |
| I7 | M | 32 | Active | Subordinate |
| I8 | M | 22 | Active | Mechanic apprentice |
| I9 | M | 28 | Active | Head mechanic |
| I10 | M | 47 | Active | Garage owner and manager |
| I11 | M | 50 | Active | Garage owner and manager |
| I12 | M | 50 | Active | Cooperative member and garage manager |
| I12 | M | 40 | Active | Sales representative for products sold in garages |

Table A.2. Individual in-depth interviews with train driver workers (2013-14).

| Code | Gender | Age | Current job status | Highest professional category attained |
|------|--------|-----|--------------------|--|
| I13 | F | 57 | Active | Railway manager |
| I14 | F | 57 | Active | Train driver |
| I15 | F | 24 | Inactive | Driver's assistant |
| I16 | F | 42 | Active | Train driver |
| I17 | M | 48 | Inactive | SEMAF trade union member |
| I18 | M | 46 | Inactive | SEMAF member |
| I19 | M | 57 | Inactive | SEMAF member |
| I20 | M | 71 | Inactive | Retired |
| I21 | M | 47 | Inactive | CCOO trade union member |

Table A.3. E-interviews based on a structured guide on train driver workers (2013-14).

| Code | Gender | Age | Current job status | Highest professional category attained |
|------|--------|-----|--------------------|--|
| EI1 | W | 55 | Active | RENFE nurse |
| EI2 | W | 53 | Active | RENFE salesperson |
| EI3 | W | 51 | Active | Train driver |
| EI4 | W | 56 | Active | Train driver |
| EI5 | W | 52 | Active | Train driver |
| EI6 | W | 52 | Active | Train driver |
| EI7 | W | 53 | Active | Train driver |
| EI8 | W | 52 | Active | Train driver |
| EI9 | W | 55 | Active | Station master |
| EI10 | W | 50 | Active | Train driver |
| EI11 | W | 54 | Active | Train driver |
| EI12 | W | 59 | Active | Train driver |
| EI13 | M | 48 | Active | Train driver |
| EI14 | M | 52 | Active | Train driver |
| EI15 | M | 58 | Active | Train driver |
| EI16 | M | 53 | Active | Train driver |
| EI17 | W | 34 | Active | Train driver |
| EI18 | W | 57 | Active | Train driver |
| EI19 | W | 38 | Active | Train driver |
| EI20 | M | 53 | Active | Train driver |
| EI21 | W | 54 | Active | Train driver |