Imagined families, contested childhoods: Doing gender as subversive deviances of children's agency

Ozan Can Yılmaz[1,2*]

[1] Faculty lecturer | İstanbul Okan University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, İstanbul - Turkey
[2] Doctoral researcher | University of Vienna, Department of Social & Cultural Anthropology, Vienna - Austria

* Sorumlu Yazar / *Corresponding Author*:
Ozan Can Yılmaz
İstanbul Okan University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
34959, Akfırat, İstanbul/ Turkey
E-posta/*E-mail*: ozan.yilmaz@okan.edu.tr

Abstract

Recent ethnographies of childhood have shown that the current politics of family and children led to new epistemological frameworks and intersectional methodologies. These scholarly works have broadened the scope of ethnographic inquiry beyond the household or caregiver level to encompass a wider socio-political and economic context. They consider the interruptions of state regulations and political economy on the welfare of children in examining the gendered parental practices of child-rearing. This critical review, first, seeks to explicate scholarly work on the intersectionality of gendered parenting and the embodiment of gender, which unveils the peculiarities and intricate nature of child-rearing practices in the Turkish context. Second, it distinguishes itself by drawing attention to children's agency as a locus of deviation and resistance vis-à-vis the moralizing ideologies and regulative discourses.

Key words: Anthropology of childhood, child-rearing practices, children's agency, gendered parenting

Çocuk failliğinin bir direnişi olarak cinsiyetin ifadesi
Öz

Yakın zamanda yapılan çocukluk etnografileri, aile ve çocuklara ilişkin mevcut politikaların yeni epistemolojik çerçevelere ve kesişimsel metodolojilere yol açtığını göstermiştir. Son dönemdeki akademik çalışmalar, etnografik araştırmanın kapsamını ev içi veya ebeveynlik düzeyinin ötesine taşıyarak daha geniş bir sosyo-politik ve ekonomik bağlamda ele almaya başlamıştır. Bu yaklaşım, çocuk yetiştirmenin cinsiyetlendirilmiş ebeveyn pratiklerini incelerken, devlet düzenlemelerinin ve ahlakileştiren söylemlerin çocukluğun regüle edilişindeki etkilerini göz önünde bulundurmaktadır. Bu inceleme makalesi, Türkiye bağlamında çocuk yetiştirme pratiklerinin özelliklerini ve karmaşık doğasını ortaya çıkaran, cinsiyetlendirilmiş ebeveynlik ve toplumsal cinsiyetin somutlaştırılmasının kesişimselliği üzerine yapılan akademik çalışmaları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın önemi, hegemonik ideolojiler ve düzenleyici söylemler karşısında bir sapma ve direniş noktası olarak çocukların failliğine yönelik yapmış olduğu vurgudur.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Çocuk antropolojisi, çocuk yetiştirme pratikleri, cocuk failliği, cinsiyetlendirilmiş ebeveynlik*

Introduction

Scholarly research on gender in Turkish research has delved into the entrenched forms of patriarchy and masculinist positioning of women and the ethnographic studies on the gendered parental practices and discourse surrounding them. It has resulted in variant "subjectivities and epistemology" for non-normative conceptualizations of Turkish families (Özbay & Öktem, 2021, p. 118). More recently, there has been a growing interest in intersectional research that seeks to address the identity crisis vis-à-vis the ongoing biopolitics of migration, displacement, and the socialization of those politically mobilized childhoods. Research into the contested arena of gender in making childhood identities has shown that children have been subject to neoliberal family-targeted policymaking and the policing discourses of political Islam (Yilmaz, 2015).

Gender has consistently been a contentious and contested terrain within the political dialogue in Turkey, serving as one of the primary sites for the dissemination of normalizing state narratives. Recent enforcement and policies have shown us that "collective moralities and neoliberal rationalities for the making of biopower" (Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2017) of the state have paved the way for further exoticization of the female presence into the thorny jungle of motherhood and care. Yet, resoundingly echoing in rallies, counter-rhetoric incongruously vilifies the West, an ambiguous other, the epicenter of the neoliberal wave, the ultramodern variant of Western ideology. In this moralizing state project of idealized nuclear families (Sirman, 2007, p. 189), a project seeking to restore the "moral fabric of the family" (Kocamaner, 2017), "crisis of the family or the deterioration of family values" (Kocamaner, 2019, p.

496), children's displacement from exerting their agency has been thrown under attempts to re-position them "as appreciative subjects of their benevolent protectors" (Babül, 2015, p. 117).

Amidst the political transformations and the reconfiguration of the welfare and the family, the discourse surrounding gender in Turkey has undergone significant transformations, shifting from discussions on honor and shame to regulating gender norms in child-rearing and new forms of parenthood. The research conducted in various geographic localities in Turkey is directed toward the intersectional analyses of the Turkish welfare systems in conjunction with regulated parental practices (Dedeoğlu & Elveren, 2012; Yazıcı, 2012; Zafer Kuş, 2012). The configuration of family structures in Turkey has been significantly influenced by the neoliberal-conservative welfare policies implemented by the current Turkish state, which are perceived to contrast starkly with the allegedly weak parental ties prevalent in the West (Yazıcı, 2012, p. 107). The current government assigns great importance to the family unit and has endeavoured to reintegrate children into parental care, thereby lifting the governmental burden of institutionalized care. Parents are urged to uphold local traditions and values to resist the perceived corrupt influences of the West (Yazıcı, 2012, p. 107). The current state apparatus has sought to instil national values and state ideology in children under residential care, thereby rendering the family unit an area of political discourse and regulative implementation. These regulative and discursive forces have created paradoxes between the sought-after modernity and the imagined moral transgressions of the West. It is noteworthy that divergent parental practices contest the ever-changing idealization of the family unit. In this sense, the "locally specific practices of selfhood and the dynamics of global positioning" (Lewellen, 2002, p. 94) are crucial constituents of variant parental forms.

The fluctuations between Kemalist and Islamist ideologies in urban Turkey have been addressed by various scholars (Navaro-Yashin, 2002; Özyürek, 2006; White, 2002). The discrepancies arising from divergent ideologies have resulted in the emergence of alternative modernities, which seek to oppose the hegemonic ideologies of the state. These alternative modernities are parallel to, reflective of, and often formed in relation to Western secular modernity. The Ataturk Revolution is enacted through the performance of fragmentation, class and status consciousness, and the unsettling and isolating feeling of not being quite modern enough and the need to catch up (Deeb, 2006, p. 33): "Whenever I sense the absence of Western eyes, I become my own Westerner" (Pamuk, 2004, p. 288). Thus, I consider the necessity of a more diligent consideration of the local's

reckless strive toward 'modernity as an ideal practice' through family structuring and child-rearing practices, which I address as "becoming their own 'Westerners'".

The present conservative discourse in Turkey is marked by the gendering of the 'strengthened family' project, which is discernible in the rhetorical language, the regulative policies implemented against the nuclear and secularist parental formations, and the globalized practices of the imagined Western modernities (Yazıcı, 2012, p. 110). The current state officials' rhetoric distances themselves from the early modernizers of Turkey and their ideology and, conversely, embraces a conservative discourse that advocates for three-generational family structures. This extended household model includes grandparents, where children are regarded as passive receivers. The state's ideological slogan of 'strong family, strong society' reinforces subordinating forms of gender normativity and conventional gender roles, which promote women's adherence to conservative positions within the household (Cindoglu & Unal, 2017).

Having explicated the contentious state of the child, the regulative moralities that encompass parental practices, and the normalizing discourses that fashion a non-agentive citizen-child model, I seek to examine foreign scholarship that demonstrates an expanded interest in ethnographic investigations into the less scrutinized, monitored, and regulated zones and moments of childhood, such as leisure and play activities. Such studies are critical in creating opportunities for a sense of children's subversive re-territorialization through non-constraining liberties that the child's agency may foster. To this end, I first present relevant conceptualizations of gender embodiment and performance that can navigate our anthropological inquiry, then provide an analysis of the anthropological concept of the family, referencing ethnographies from the anthropology of childhood. Subsequently, I aim to address emerging methodologies and alternative conceptualizations that place greater emphasis on children's agency. With these considerations in mind, I wish to offer a glimpse of the subversive potentialities and agentive possibilities that the idiosyncratic and unconventional expression of children's agency carries as a genesis of resistance and a birthplace for new forms of childhood in Turkey.

Gender embodiment in childhood

The anthropological inquiry into gender entails the utilization of multiple theoretical frameworks in conducting ethnographic research. One such framework posits that children, being highly receptive to social conventions, are socialized into gender roles, thereby perpetuating the transmission of cultural norms across

generations. Another framework emphasizes the mechanisms by which children internalize, enact, and reproduce cultural patterns pertaining to gender in their daily lives. Thirdly, the extent to which children become familiar with their culture is inextricably linked to the extent to which it is practiced within the practices of everyday life of their parents. Such routines, which encompass an array of activities ranging from mealtime and bedtime rituals to family visits and household chores, have been identified as "primary mechanisms bringing culture to and into the mind of the child" (Weisner, 2015, pp. 451-458). Last but not least, children's agency has become an emergent aspect of ethnographic research that requires new methodologies and *a turn into children's ontology.*

Gender embodiment is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing how individuals express their gender identity through bodily, behavioural, and social practices. Anthropological theories of gender strive to explicate how gender roles, identities, and relations are constructed, negotiated, and enacted in various cultural contextual settings. These theories foreground the social and cultural underpinnings that shape individuals' experiences and expressions of gender and the interplay of gender with other identity markers such as social class and sexuality. They underscore the embodied nature of gender, whereby individuals learn to embody and experience gender through their engagements with their bodies, physical surroundings, and social milieus. Gender embodiment encompasses the external performance of gendered behaviors and roles and the internalized sense of self and identity that individuals experience as gendered beings. Existing yet emerging theorizations advocate for deconstructing and contesting established gender norms to cultivate more diverse, inclusive, and egalitarian forms of gender embodiment and expression.

The social construction of gender has prompted scholars to investigate the social origins of subjective identities of men and women, particularly regarding the imposition of gender on seemingly sexed bodies. Despite the existence of non-binary expressions of gender throughout history, normative gender representations have long been dominated by binary oppositions that exclusively define male and female, masculine and feminine. The hegemonic understanding of gender serves as both cultural constraints and opportunities for the emergence of subjective identities that are both culturally bound and subversive to the existing normativity.

Being interested in the cultural construction of subjective gender identities around the dominant discourse that constitute knowledge and social practices, I would like to refer to several conceptualizations of gender based on how gendered culture comes into play practically. In light of this, I would like to refer to various conceptualizations of gender that explore how gendered culture operates practically. Different approaches have been adopted regarding the construction of gender; the Anglo-American and object relations theorists have focused on the impact of childhood experiences with parents, while the French School and post-structuralists have highlighted the centrality of language in communicating and representing gender. Jacques Lacan and his followers have emphasized the role of the unconscious in constructing subjective identities (Scott, 1996, pp. 152-180). Anthropologists who theorize the cultural and historical forms of subjectivity and identity have highlighted the physical body's role as a product of biological sex in cultural continuity. According to Rubin, this refers to social constructs and arrangements that transform biological sexuality into a product of human activity (Rubin, 1975, p. 159). In this regard, Rubin draws attention to the concept of the unconscious and how childhood experiences are channeled toward an essentialist discourse of heterosexuality. To analyze the social formation of gender, I suggest a complementary and multi-perspectival approach that considers the three different constructive dynamics of gender, which are *authentic experience, language,* and *unconscious dispositions.* In this sense, I refer to the concept of gender as "actions, behaviors, and gestures as both the result of an individual's identity as well as a source that contributes to the formation of one's identity, which is continuously being redefined through speech acts and symbolic communication" (Cavanaugh, 2015). I address the influence of the postmodern performance theory, which is remarkably important to see the direction that the theorization of gender takes. One aspect that needs to be elaborated on is that there is an intentional reason why I address the concept of the performativity of gender.

As explained by Kroløkke, Derrida's claim about the source of performativity is crucial; he sees the power of the performative as something that comes from their iterability, or repetitiveness in other words (Kroløkke, 2006, p. 38). Thus, a significant part of performativity, that is, "a ritualized production," depends on the repetitiveness of the acts (Butler, 1999, p. 60). Given the standpoint that gender is not a preexisting notion but rather a construct that is shaped by the performance of gendered behaviors, it is vital to recognize that the identity attributed to gender is not a fixed attribute but rather a product of the very acts that are conventionally perceived as emanating from it. This signifies that gender identity is not an autonomous aspect of one's but rather an outcome of the performative enactment of gendered behaviors (Butler, 1999, p. 33). In this

regard, Butler's conceptualization of gender concerning children is crucial; a child is either "girled" or "boyed" at birth, and such repeating "girling" and "boying" leads the child to explore which gendered group they belong to and what gendered norms exist for each group (Butler, 1993, p. 7). According to Butler, the repeated enactment of gendered behaviors plays a crucial role in a child's acquisition of gender knowledge, ultimately forming a gendered subject. Butler posits that one's constructed self is established through a network of embodied signs and discursive practices (Butler, 2014).

It is thus inevitable that the realization of gender norms in routine and commonplace activities is implicated in developing our sense of subjectivity, as "hegemonic social conventions and ideologies are continuously scripting our most personal gendered acts" (Felluga, 2011). In a parallel vein, by repeatedly engaging in gendered practices, gendered standards are reproduced, transmitted, and eventually revised. However, in addition to gender performativity, I wish to introduce the notion of subversion. This involves confronting the prevailing social conventions and ideologies of gender and then subverting them. While gender performance does not necessarily entail the inevitability of reproduction, it should be emphasized that the performance of gender itself is the conduit that enables subversion. The subversion of gender ensues upon the initial confrontation of pre-existing social norms and ideologies of gender, followed by the deliberate act of subverting them. The incessant reiteration of gendered practices in our everyday routines substantiates and perpetuates gender norms, ultimately resulting in their dissemination and eventual reproduction. Nevertheless, it is crucial to integrate the concept of subversion with gender performativity. Subversion materializes when individuals initially challenge and question prevailing social conventions and ideologies related to gender, followed by the disruption and upending of said norms.

Although gender performance does not automatically lead to the reproduction of societal standards, it is essential to note that performing gender itself creates the opportunity for subversion to occur. In other words, referring to Butler's argument on subversion, "I do think that for a copy to be subversive of heterosexual hegemony, it has to both mime and displace its conventions" (Kotz, 1992), I consider how subversion of normativities can be possible through children's exertion of agency as acts of resistance and co-creation to decenter and dismantle. The performativity theory is aptly positioned to tackle the issues of individual agency, presenting particular challenges in bridging the chasm between parental intentions and actions. Discrepancies may arise when parents aspire

for specific outcomes for their children, but their child-rearing practices and conduct may lead to consequences that oppose their objectives. Consequently, gender norms may be inadvertently reproduced through actions even when such actions are not intended. In such cases, parental practices can serve as both the effects and the reiterations of the same actions, leading to a vicious cycle. Only through children's agency can such a gendering cycle be disrupted.

A conceptual language allows the possibility for "negation, resistance, reinterpretation, the play of metaphoric invention and imagination" (Scott, 1996, pp. 152-180). Incorporating language and the body as embodied signs and discourse elements is a critical aspect of gender performativity. Exploring how gender performance is manifested through language and the body is essential to understanding the iterative nature of gender construction. In particular, language is a vital semiotic resource that facilitates the implementation of social sentiments, identities, and beliefs through gendered narratives and language ideologies. These elements are powerful tools for constructing and reinforcing gender norms (Duranti, 2003, 2004). Considering how performativity theory suggests copying or imitating gender, similarly, Jerome Bruner, in his *Life as Narrative* book, states that "Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative" (Bruner, 2004, p. 692). Likewise, anthropologists Ochs and Capps (2002) hold that the narrative and self are inseparable. The use of language suggests a broader context than being a mere verbal resource. For instance, body language through gendered gestures is crucial to language analysis in a social learning process. As a way of "permanent internalization of the social order in the human body" (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2001, p. 130), it is vital to consider the embodiment of these social orders within the confines of the movements and gestures of the body and how the body serves as an embodied social tool for the implementation of cultural orders (Marchand, 2010; Ingold, 2000). Inspired by Bourdieu and Giddens, Reckwitz emphasizes the significance of routines "social practices are bodily and mental routines" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 256) while he addresses the emergence of a crisis forming new routines. In light of the intricate relationship between gender performativity and daily routines, he contends that practice theorists have given inadequate attention to the individual's agency, particularly in deviating from established norms through new routines. He posits that a remarkable space exists for an individual agency that is not wholly determined by the influence of cultural agents. It is within the understanding that children can be re-conceptualized as crucial agencies and as the "crossing point of practices of bodily and mental

routines" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 256).

Sherry Ortner provides a subversive critique of the notion that culture is unchanging and solely replicated, positing instead that performativity can give rise to subversive and deviant forms. For example, Ortner contends that individuals can operate as autonomous agents, free from strict adherence to societal norms and able to transgress them. (Ortner, 2006). Similarly, Connell reminds us of the dialectical aspect of gender, as opposed to being passive receptors of gendering, in which the subject has the potential to constitute subjective forms of gender in return: "It has become increasingly clear that different masculinities are produced in the same cultural or institutional setting" and that "the relationships constructing masculinities are dialectical, not necessarily corresponding to the one-way causation of a socialization model" (Connell, 2005, pp. 36-37).

Hence, our research should explore the prospect of negation, resistance, and reinterpretation of social practices and the gendered habitus by methodically collating and examining information on how children actively acquire gendered dispositions in their language and body socialization through child-rearing practices. This necessitates investigating the culturally gendered narratives that foster the non-agentive and non-inclusionary perpetuation of gender performativities.

Navigating Complexities: Parents in Purgatory

The ambiguity zone, which is between an unquenchable ambition for emancipated forms of childcare and the ultimate wish to remain as the agents of cultural transmission and good citizens, calls attention to the need for a nuanced approach to child-rearing practices that acknowledges the complex interplay of political and cultural aspects that constitute variant parental child-rearing practices.

Anthropological scholarship regards the family as a crucial social and cultural agent that wields considerable influence over how individuals experience and express their gender identities. This is particularly pertinent regarding child-rearing practices, which significantly influence how gender is conceptualized, internalized, and enacted within divergent cultural and social settings. At the intersection of the intricate interplay between regulated parental practices and the biopolitics of children, anthropological research unravels the gendering child-rearing patterns that perpetuate from one generation to the next through the intermediary mechanism of parental transmission By conceptualizing the family as an ideological and symbolic construction that embodies a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, p. 545), families are recognized as significant social

actors that operate in conjunction with the extended kinship network of family members. Finally, the cultural routines practiced and transmitted by families establish the conditions for children to encounter and internalize patterns that shape their individual and collective identities.

Drawing on a comprehensive fieldwork study conducted in rural Vietnam, anthropologist Rydstrom (2006) documented the interactions of parents and grandparents with boys and girls, uncovering instances of severe physical discipline employed by some fathers and grandfathers towards boys. This research suggests that paternal upbringing reinforces the idea of men as dominant and powerful but prone to violence (Rydstrom, 2006, p. 343). Thus, by conceptualizing the family as a site where gender formation begins, mothers and fathers actively convey diverse gendered roles and behaviors. It is also crucial to emphasize that the notion of family encompasses a broad range of individuals, including grandparents, siblings, and other related individuals who may act as child custodians. Similarly, the involvement of diverse influential voices in a child's upbringing may give rise to conflicting gender ideologies and actions among household members, ultimately affecting the child's gender identity.

Culture is not acquired through a monodirectional process; children also contribute to the emergence of new cultural practices and the reproduction of existing ones. (Hirschfeld, 2002, pp. 611-627). Situated in the center of the contested politics of culture, Children possess the capacity to exercise agency and make informed decisions. Children may experience tensions with family members or interactions with non-parental figures that may compel them to shift their attention toward alternative definitions and practices, prompting them to exercise their agency selectively. Over the past decade, although not limited, social learning has emerged as a significant research concept in ethnographic studies, particularly in relation to the study of childhood. In 2010, Lancy and colleagues edited an extensive compilation titled *The Anthropology of Learning in Childhood* (Bolin, 2006; Lancy *et al.*, 2010). These studies show us that there has been a broadened understanding and affirmation of the child's agency in social learning (Gaskins, 2008; Lancy, 2012; LeVine, 2007). In Trawick's Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood, and Play in Batticaloa, she highlights her approach by emphasizing agency: "I had no special theory in mind, except that children exercise agency; they knowingly act on their worlds to change those worlds" (Trawick, 2007, p. 5).

Similarly, Kusserow's work among both upper and working-class in Manhattan and Queens communities explored the intersectionality of social class, normative

child-rearing practices, and children's agency (Kusserow, 2004). Kosminsky and Daniel (2005) conducted a year-long ethnographic study to explore the role of children's agency in the social construction of gender in a low-income urban neighborhood in Marilia, Brazil. They conducted interviews with the children and observed their play to gain a deeper understanding of how gender is constructed through children's actions while also recognizing the influence of parents and other relatives in shaping gendered play behaviors, such as mothers discouraging boys from playing with dolls while encouraging girls to do so. By examining leisure-time activities, ethnographies can offer new opportunities to explore children's agency. Street games, in particular, provide a valuable vantage point from which to observe the gender relations that emerge among children (Kosminsky & Daniel, 2005, p. 32).

The independent relationships that children form on their own accord possess the potential to either bolster the limits imposed by gender-based stereotypes or dismantle those very same boundaries. This duality can be attributed to the fact that children's interactions with one another are heavily influenced by various factors, including but not limited to the broader cultural values and social norms to which they are exposed, as well as their own experiences and beliefs. Therefore, these interactions can either solidify pre-existing gender roles and expectations or provide a means for resisting them.

A turn to ontology in childhood

Ethnographic work researching the worlds of children (see McCarthy *et al.*, 2003, Brembeck *et al.*, 2004; Lancy, 2008; Montgomery, 2009) shows a fragmentary history with insufficient yet emerging attention to children's agency (LeVine, 2007). Despite the renewed interest, ethnographic studies of childhood or child-rearing remain challenging (Froerer, 2009, pp. 3-27; for exceptions see Stafford, 1995; Morton, 1996; cf. Hirschfeld, 2002). The existing research shows us the variant practices in parenting but also reflects on the theoretical concerns over class and social inequalities, reminding us that parental approaches in child-rearing cannot be explored without a detailed understanding of the broader social and economic contexts in which they occur (Kusserow, 2004). An expanding body of academics in the field of childhood studies has called for a more critical examination and theorization of children's agency (see Esser *et al.*, 2016; Spyrou, 2018), a more diligent approach to its theoretical content, and its implementation as always being beneficial to analysis and practice (Sutterlüty & Tisdall, 2019, p. 183), new methodologies with a focus on relationality intersecting materiality and non-human agents (Prout,

2004; Gallagher, 2015; Gallagher, 2019; Sultan & Andresen, 2019), and lastly context-based and relational analysis of agency that "needs to be viewed as a relational concept, an effect of complex shifting social arrangements" (Wyness, 2015, p.13), acknowledging the intergenerational agents in the making of childhoods (Leonard, 2016; Punch, 2016).

For several reasons, the study of children's agency is significant in academic discourse. Firstly, it contests the conventional understanding that childhood is a phase characterized by passivity, dependence, and powerlessness. Secondly, it gives us a glimpse into how children negotiate their social and cultural environments, resist or conform to dominant cultural norms, and create new cultural practices and meanings. Thirdly, it highlights the social and cultural forces that mold the existence and perceptions of children, comprising how they are instructed, tutored, and assimilated into their respective societies.

In this regard, I would like to refer to the concept of "idioms of childhood" (Nolas *et al.*, 2018), which has significant implications for children's agency, as they shape children's perceptions of themselves, their relationships with others, and their possibilities for action. These idioms can enable and constrain children's agency, depending on how they are interpreted and enacted. Similarly, Clark (2017) emphasizes the importance of listening to children as a crucial aspect of understanding their experiences, perspectives, and agency. She argues that children's voices are often marginalized or ignored in societal discourses, policies, and practices, negatively affecting their well-being and development. To address this issue, Clark proposes a framework for listening to children that include four dimensions: respecting children's voices, understanding their perspectives, responding to their needs, and enabling their participation.

An emergent approach articulated within utopian studies holds particular importance in understanding how oppositional or divergent social practices can engender new or slightly modified social institutions that deviate from established conventions. (Levitas, 2013, p. 13). Utopian studies pertain to the scholarly inquiry of utopian contemplation and praxis, which entails envisioning and actualizing alternate societal constructs that are more equitable and gratifying. Levitas posits that utopian reflection and praxis are crucial in constructing a more democratic and inclusive society that fosters the agency and well-being of all its constituents, including children who participate in utopian thought and practice. She asserts that children possess a distinctive perspective on social and cultural existence, needing to be more indoctrinated into hegemonic cultural norms and practices. This exceptional viewpoint enables

children to conceive and actualize alternative visions of society that challenge and transfigure existing systems of power and inequality (Levitas, 2013).

Moss and Petrie (2002, p. 113) contend that children's agency, denoting their self-directed action and decision-making ability that impacts their lives, is closely intertwined with their spaces. To enhance children's agency, it is necessary to offer spaces that cater to their distinct requirements and interests, facilitating greater control over their physical environment. Moss and Petrie (2002) advocate for children's spaces that allow for diverse activities and interactions, inspiring their imagination, discovery, and independence. Empowering children to influence their physical surroundings, for instance, by shaping their spaces, can generate a sense of ownership and accountability, fostering their capacity to exercise agency.

The study of children's agency has been approached in various ways, including one that examines how their material and social environments influence their agency. This approach posits that the extent of children's agency is determined by the material and social resources available to them. Materiality, which encompasses the physical and social environment in which children exist, including the objects, spaces, and social relationships that shape their experiences and agency, is a critical factor in this intersectional perspective. This conceptualization emphasizes the importance of investigating children's material and social circumstances to gain insight into how their contexts enable or constrain their agency. To understand children's agency and how childhood and children are formed, scholars need to increasingly consider the materiality of children's lives (Spyrou, 2019, p. 318). Spyrou argues that childhood studies should adopt an ontologically orientated perspective, which focuses on the fundamental nature of childhood and child existence, to aid in comprehending the intricate and dynamic processes involved in the creation and experience of childhood. Spyrou suggests that an ontologically-focused approach should concentrate on three key areas. Firstly, it should consider the materiality of childhood, which includes the physical and social environments, objects, technologies, and cultural meanings that shape children's experiences. Secondly, it should consider the relationality of childhood, which refers to the social and cultural contexts and relationships that shape children's experiences of agency, identity, and belonging. Finally, it should focus on the temporal dimensions of childhood, encompassing the historical, cultural, and social contexts that shape children's experiences over time (Spyrou, 2019, pp. 316-323).

Conclusion

The heterosexual family ideal has been positioned as an ideological apparatus to uphold and perpetuate hegemonic moral discourse and normative frameworks. This has necessitated a meticulous approach to the interdependency of childhood and parenthood. Accordingly, ethnographies of childhood are directed to inevitably consider the contemporary cultural-political discourse on family while also exploring how those established normative child-rearing practices face resistance from the globalizing forms of both parenthood and childhood (Thelen & Haukanes, 2010).

Similarly, Prout, Spyrou, and Thomas open up non-categorical horizons in their ungendered conceptualization of children, underlining the agentive possibilities in unpicking culture-specific notions of gender and sexuality (Stryker *et al.*, 2019, p. 306). Accordingly, I contend that embracing such a theoretical position could unveil unmapped avenues for ethnographies exploring the fluctuant intricacies of gender and sexuality. The approaches proposed in this review study have the potential to uncover new research directions, providing insights into the complex and fluid condition of gender and sexuality. By emphasizing childhood ontologies and enhancing the scholarly research on children's agency, ethnographies on childhood and parental practices can contribute to the recognition of children as subversive agents vis-a-vis gendered inequalities and social relations.

A more extensive understanding of children's agency is capable of forming emancipatory and non-cisnormative methodologies in the examination of (a) parental attitudes towards the gendered socialization of children within the household and broader environmental and urban contexts, (b) alternative child-rearing practices in the cultural transmission of gender roles, and (c) the ongoing and potential subversive implications of such practices. By cultivating divergent modalities of citizenship that advocate for social justice and equality, children's agency creates the capacity to confront the exclusionary biopolitical and neoconservative policies prevalent within the Turkish family structure, as well as critically examine and contest androcentric regulatory frameworks and discursive ideologies. By exercising agency, children enable possibilities for challenging the exclusory forms of childhood and contribute to fostering an inclusive and egalitarian conception of citizenship that acknowledges the rights and needs of all.

Acknowledgements

supervisor, Dr. habil. Patricia Zuckerhut, for her invaluable guidance and unwavering support during my doctoral research. Her expertise and insights were crucial in shaping and navigating my future research.

References

Babül, E. (2015). The paradox of protection: Human rights, the masculinist State, and the moral economy of gratitude in Turkey. *American Ethnologist, 42*(1), 116–139. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12120

Bolin, I. (2006). Growing up in a culture of respect: Child rearing in Highland Peru. The University of Texas Press. https://doi.org/10.7560/709829

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex.* Routledge.

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity,* 15th edition. Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203499627

Brembeck, H., Johansson, B., & Kampman, J. (Eds). (2004). *Beyond the competent child: Exploring contemporary childhoods in the Nordic welfare societies.* Roskilde University Press.

Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research: An International Quarterly, 71*(3), 691–710. https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2004.0045

Cavanaugh, J. R. (March 10, 2015). Performativity. *Oxford Bibliographies in Anthropology.* Retrieved May 4, 2019, from https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199766567-0114

Cindoglu, D., & Unal, D. (2017). Gender and sexuality in the authoritarian discursive strategies of 'New Turkey.' *European Journal of Women's Studies, 24*(1), 39–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506816679003

Clark, A. (2017). *Listening to young children: A guide to understanding and using the Mosaic approach,* Expanded third edition. National Children's Bureau.

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities,* Second edition. University of California Press/Polity Press.

Deeb, L. (2006). *An enchanted modern: Gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon.* Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400840786

Duranti, A. (2003). Language as culture in U.S. anthropology: Three paradigms. *Current Anthropology, 44*(3), 323–347. https://doi.org/10.1086/368118

Duranti, A. (Ed.) (2004). *A companion to linguistic anthropology.* Blackwell Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470996522

Eriksen, T. H., & Nielsen, F. S. (2001). *A history of anthropology.* Pluto Press.

Esser, F., Baader, M. S, Betz, T., & Hungerland, B. (Eds.) (2016). *Reconceptualising agency and childhood: New perspectives in childhood studies.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315722245

Felluga, D. (January 31, 2011). Modules on Butler: On Performativity. *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory.* Purdue University. Received May 4, 2019 from https://www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/english/theory/genderandsex/modules/butlerperformativity.html

Froerer, P. (2009). Ethnographies of childhood and child-rearing, *Reviews in Anthropology,* (38)1, 3-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/00938150802672923

Gallagher, L. A. (2015). Theorizing identities in early childhood. In A. Farrell, S. L. Kagan, & E. K. M. Tisdall (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Research* (pp. 118–132). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473920859

Gallagher, M. (2019). Rethinking children's agency: Power, assemblages, freedom and materiality. *Global Studies of Childhood 9*(3), 188–199. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610619860993

Gaskins, S. (2008). Children's daily lives among the Yucatec Maya. In R. A. LeVine, & R. S. New (Eds.), *Anthropology and child development: A cross-cultural reader* (pp. 280–288). Wiley-Blackwell.

Hirschfeld, A. L. (2002). Why do not anthropologists like children? *American Anthropologist,* 104(2), 611-627. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.2.611

Ingold, T. (2000). *The perception of the environment essays on livelihood.* Routledge.

Kocamaner, H. (2017). Strengthening the family through television: Islamic broadcasting, secularism and the politics of responsibility in Turkey. *Anthropological Quarterly,* 90(3), 675-714. https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2017.0040

Kocamaner, H. (2019). Regulating the family through religion. *American Ethnologist,* 46(4), 495–508. https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2017.0040

Korkut, U., & Eslen-Ziya, H. (2017). Politics and gender identity in Turkey: Centralised Islam for socio-economic control. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315405384

Kosminsky, E., & Daniel, L. (2005). *Toys and games: Childhood in the Parque des Nações Favela in Brazil.* https://doi.org/10.1016/S1537-4661(04)10003-2

Kotz, L. (1992). The body you want: An interview with Judith Butler. *Artforum, 31*(3), 82–89. https://www.artforum.com/print/199209/the-body-you-want-an-inteview-with-judith-butler-33505

Kroløkke, C., & Sørensen, A. S. (2006). Gender communication theories and analyses: From silence to performance. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233086

Kusserow, A. (2004). *American individualism: Child rearing and social class in three neighborhoods.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Lancy, D. F. (2008). Recent developments in the anthropology of childhood. *Anthropology News, 49*(4), 9-9. https://doi.org/10.1525/an.2008.49.4.9

Lancy, D. F. (2012). Why anthropology of childhood? A brief history of an emerging discipline. *AnthropoChildren, 1*(1), 1-17.

https://popups.uliege.be/2034-8517/index.php?id=918

Lancy, D. F., Bock, J., & Gaskins, S. (Eds.) (2010). *The anthropology of learning in childhood.* AltaMira Press.

Leonard, M. (2016) The sociology of children, childhood and generation. SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529714494

LeVine, R. A. (2007). Ethnographic studies of childhood: A historical overview. *American Anthropologist, 109*(2), 247–260. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2007.109.2.247

Levitas, R. (2013). *Utopia as method: The imaginary reconstitution of society.* Palgrave Macmillan

Lewellen, T. C. (2002). *The Anthropology of globalization: Cultural anthropology enters the 21st century.* Bergin & Garvey.

Marchand, T. H. J. (Ed.) (2010). *Making knowledge. Explorations of the indissoluble relation between mind, body, and environment.* Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444391473

Moss, P., & Petrie, P. (2002). *From children's services to children's spaces.* Routledge Falmer.

McCarthy, J. R., Edwards, R., & Gillies, V. (2003). *Making families: Moral tales of parenting and step-parenting.* Routledge.

Montgomery, H. (2009). *An Introduction to childhood. Anthropological perspectives on children's lives.* Wiley-Blackwell.

Morton, H. (1996). *Becoming Tongan: An ethnography of childhood.* The University of Hawaii Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824840495

Navaro-Yashin, Y. (2002). *Faces of the state: Secularism and public life in Turkey.* Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691214283

Nolas, S.-M., Aruldoss, V., & Varvantakis, C. (2018). Learning to listen: Exploring the idioms of childhood. *Sociological Research Online, 24*(3), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780418811972

Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2002). *Living narrative: Creating lives in everyday storytelling.* Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674041592

Ortner, S. B. (2006). *Anthropology and social theory: Culture, power, and the acting subject.* Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388456

Özbay, C., & Öktem, K. (2021). Turkey's queer times. *New Perspectives on Turkey, 64,* 117-130. https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2021.4

Özyürek, E. (2006). Nostalgia for the modern: State secularism and everyday politics in Turkey. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388463

Pamuk, O. (2004). *Istanbul: Memories and the city.* Vintage International.

Prout, A. (Ed.). (2004). The Future of Childhood (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203323113

Punch, S. (2016) Exploring children's agency across majority and minority world contexts. In F. Esser, M. S., Baader, T. Betz, &

B. Hungerland (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing agency and childhood: New perspectives in childhood studies* (pp. 183–196). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315722245

Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices: A development in culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory, 5*(2), 243–263. https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310222225432

Rubin, G. (1975). The traffic in women: Notes on the "political economy" of sex. In R. R. Reiter (Ed.) *Toward an anthropology of women* (pp. 157-210). Monthly Review Press. https://philpapers.org/rec/RUBTTI

Rydstrom, H. (2006). Masculinity and punishment: Men's upbringing of boys in rural Vietnam. *Childhood, 13*(3), 329–348. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568206066355

Sirman, N. (2005). The making of familial citizenship in Turkey. In E. F. Keyman, & A. İçduygu (Eds.), *Citizenship in a global world: European questions and Turkish experiences* (pp. 147–172). Routledge.

Scott, J. W. (1996). *Feminism & history.* Oxford University Press.

Stacey, J., & Biblarz, T. (2001). (How) Does the sexual orientation of parents matter? *American Sociological Review, 66*(2), 159-183. https://doi.org/10.2307/2657413

Spyrou, S. (2018). *Disclosing childhoods: Research and knowledge production for critical childhood studies.* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-47904-4

Spyrou, S. (2019). An ontological turn for schildhood studies? *Children & Society, 33*(4), 316-323. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12292

Stryker, R., Boddy, J., Bragg, S., & Sim-Schouten, W. (2019), The future of childhood studies and Children & Society. *Children & Society, 33*(4), 301-308. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12345

Stafford, C. (1995). *The roads of Chinese childhood: Learning and identification in Angang.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511586347

Sultan, A., & Andresen, S. (2019). 'A child on drugs': Conceptualising childhood experiences of agency and vulnerability. *Global Studies of Childhood, 9*(3), 224–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610619860996

Sutterlüty, F., & Tisdall, E. K. M. (2019). Agency, autonomy, and self-determination: Questioning key concepts of childhood studies. *Global Studies of Childhood, 9*(3), 183–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610619860992

Thelen, T., & Haukanes, H. (2010). *Parenting after the Century of the child: Travelling ideals, institutional negotiations, and individual responses.* Routledge.

Trawick, M. (2007). *Enemy lines: Warfare, childhood, and play in Batticaloa.* The University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520938878

Weisner, T. S. (2015). Childhood: Anthropological aspects. In: J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences,* 2nd edition (pp. 451–458). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12032-X

White, J. (2002). *Islamist mobilization in Turkey: A study in vernacular politics.* The University of Washington Press.

Yazıcı, B. (2012). The Return to the family: Welfare, state, and politics of the family in Turkey. *Anthropological Quarterly, 85*(1), 103–140. https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2012.0013

Yilmaz, Z. (2015). "Strengthening the family" policies in Turkey: Managing the social question and armoring conservative–neoliberal populism. *Turkish Studies, 16*(3), 371-390. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2015.1067863