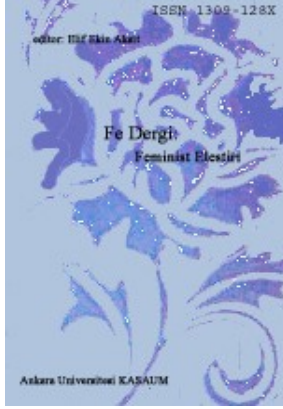


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**Digital Opportunities for Social Transition: Blogosphere
and Motherhood in Turkey**

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Digital Opportunities for Social Transition: Blogosphere and Motherhood in Turkey

Pınar Melis Yelsalı Parmaksız

Among the digital platforms, weblogs are popular narrative sources for both self expression and collective identification. Mommy blogs in that manner allows two types of self expression to come out individual and collective by means of bridging two forms of sociability: physical and digital. The aim of this article is then on the one hand to evaluate the opportunities the blogosphere offers for both self-expression and building up communalities for and among mothers and on the other hand to comprehend the identity formation for mothers through mommy blogs. The main aim in this article is to comprehend motherhood in transition in Turkey as represented and constituted through mommy blogs. This article is based on a research consisted of two stages of data collection: A conventional questionnaire send to the bloggers whose blogs were nominated in the categories of family blogs and women's blogs in the nationwide blog awards and a semi-structured questionnaire which circulated among the mommy bloggers as an "internet meme" in resemblance to the traditional snowball sampling method. The debates and the campaigns took place in and through mommy blogs were also regarded as part of the analysis.

Keywords: Blogosphere, Mamasphere, Mommyblog, Motherhood

Sosyal Değişim için Dijital Fırsatlar: Türkiye'de Blog Dünyası ve Annelik

Dijital platformlar arasında bloglar kendini ifade etme ve kolektif kimlik süreçleri açısından popüler anlatsal kaynaklardır. Bu açıdan anne blogları bireysel ve kolektif olarak iki tür ifade biçiminin ortaya çıkmasına olanak veren, bunu da toplumsallaşmanın iki farklı biçimi olan fiziksel mekanda ve dijital mekanda gerçekleştiren örneklerdir. Buradan hareketle bu makalenin amacı bir yandan blog alanının özellikle anneler için gerek kişisel ifadeyi mümkün kılan, gerekse dayanışmacı topluluklar kurmayı sağlayan özelliklerini değerlendirme, diğer yandan bu bloglar aracılığıyla annelerin kimlik oluşturma patriklerini incelemektir. Bu makale özel olarak, anneliliğin Türkiye'de değişen ve dönüşen anlamını anne bloglarından yola çıkarak analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu makale iki aşamalı bir veri toplama sürecine dayanmaktadır: İlk önce ulusal düzeyde aile ve kadın blogları kategorilerinde en iyi blog ödülleri aday gösterilen blog yazarlarına geleneksel bir soru kağıdı gönderilmiş, sonrasında yarı yapılandırılmış bir soru kağıdı anne blog yazarları arasında "internet mim"i olarak dolaşıma girmiştir; bu haliyle araştırmanın örnekleminin geleneksel kartopu yöntemini taklit eden bir tarzda oluşturulduğu söylenebilir. Söz konusu bloglarda yer alan tartışmalar ve başlatılan kampanyalar da ayrıca analize dahil edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Blog alanı, Anne alanı, Anne blogu, Annelik

Introduction

The campaign against the ban on BlogSpot in 2011 revealed the extent of the digital bonds among the internet users with wide varying interests. Among those internet users are the virtual community of mothers and children which was constituted through weblogs of blogging mothers. They had a big shock when they tried but could not access to their own individual blogs; but thanks to the DNS settings most of them could achieve to migrate the content of their blogs to some other servers; then they could get into connect with their virtual community again and supported the protest movement against the ban on blogs. In contrast to US or EU countries, statistical information on blog use, for example the number of the blogs in total and in categories as based on genres or the number of people who write or read blogs, is not available in Turkey. However, the statistics on the internet use might give some idea about the use of blogs in the general and place of the mommy blogs in particular in entire blogosphere. According to the official statistics (the latest is dated 2010) 37, 6 % of all population is using the internet with the following proportion: 51, 8 % is male and 31, 7 % is female.¹ Among the personal reasons frequency of using the internet for uploading text, image, photo, video, music, etc. made by user to any web site is 30 % of total internet use, that does not directly address weblogs, however among the other reasons for the

internet use, which does not contain the weblog as a category, it is the closest category to keeping weblog.² An independent research (dated 2009) denotes that 12, 7 % of total the users use the internet for keeping a weblog.³

Due to widespread network of internet, compared to the previous generation of women, the new generation of women of the post 1990s specifically become socialized more through digital environments. Without simply dividing it into public or private, they share a space, a virtual one. Interestingly enough, in the case of mommy blogs, it is very common that new mom starts launching a web blog in order to get over the isolation of new motherhood.⁴ With respect to the content of the web blog, mostly personal issues of the daily life become subject to public audience. The audience exists in the new media which not limited with the weblogs but includes internet forums or social networks does not act in isolation, but in highly intensified digital interaction that might connect distant geographies as well as immediate surroundings. In this framework, socialization of women on motherhood work cross over boundaries and by definition do not depends on the construction of the space according to social constraints. Thus, with respect to motherhood, mothers when compared to their own mothers might be expected to differ from regarding what and how to perceive. For that reason this article aims to understand how on the one hand women comprehend their identities as mother vis-à-vis both present and former generation of mothers; on the other hand to evaluate the opportunities the blogosphere offers for both self-expression and building up communalities for and among mothers.

Digital Opportunities for Social Research and “Internet Meme” as a Research Tool

The new media and digital forms of the “old media” are considered legitimate and helpful ways for doing field research as much as everyday life becomes digitalized.⁵ Thus, there already exist a large literature on transferring conventional research methods to online context and using the benefits of the internet for social research.⁶ Because of the fact that the application of the wide scale surveys, the storage, the classification and the analysis of extensive amounts of data became more manageable by using the internet as well as computer based digital technologies, quantitative researches on the one hand benefited more from the internet as a data gathering tool. As for qualitative research, on the other hand, the problem was about to decide how much and how far the internet methods were suitable for, interviewing, ethnography or focus group. Moreover, not only as new types of methods, but also the new expressions of overlapping forms of sociability, psychical and digital, the internet attracted social scientists. Among other social networking genres, weblogs provided researchers to access into autobiographical narrations collectively in a relative anonymity the internet offers.⁷ Simultaneously, because of considerably important scale of social interaction which is created in a relatively unprivileged and unmediated space, social scientists tended to identify blogosphere as public sphere.⁸

Blog is defined as “a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first.”⁹ What differentiates blogs from other web sites and makes blogs so much common is that it enables even someone who is less familiar with digital technologies to start and run a blog by using readymade weblog templates. A blog contains interactive components like comment bar and blog roll by that means also an interaction develops on and across blogs. As an interactive tool the comment bar is optional on blog templates which enable the readers to express their thoughts or feelings about a specific entry. As for the blog roll, it is a list of other bloggers the blogger follows which also includes links to these blogs that allows surfing the blogs. Generally, there exist a close relation between these two toolbars that once someone who also runs a blog starts to leave comments on a blog, he or she might expect to be listed in the blog roll, in other words, to become part of the online community of that blog.

In one respect, blog as a genre proximate to dairy writing though; even if a blog contains private expressions of daily life of the person who runs the blog, because of the interaction going on in a blog which comes out of the intention of the bloggers, it transcend the classical dairy writing. Mommy blogs in this framework are defined as “online journals written by women documenting the experiences of motherhood and motherwork.”¹⁰ The opportunities for autobiographical self expression and communal interaction are available to mommy bloggers that it is said to create mamasphere of mommy bloggers as inspired by the term blogosphere.¹¹ In this context, mommy blogs appear as available sources for collecting data for social researchers with diverse concerns. In addition to methodological concerns mentioned above, ethical concerns related both to privacy issues and to copyright laws which seem to limit researchers to conduct a scientific inquiry on the internet,

nevertheless, the general attitude about those “cautions” is that they complement the already existing guideline for doing “offline” scientific research.¹²

This article is aimed at investigating the role of the mommy blogs in definition and in practice of the motherhood in retrospect, thus since the subject matter is blogging, research methods are expected to fit into it. The research method was chosen as e-mail interview which is widely used by scholars for many years, yet it is used with some degree of modification. In other words, e-mail interview was conducted across mommy blogs by means of “word of mouth,”¹³ that is to say, the interview questions passed through blogs as an internet meme. The internet meme passed through from one to another mommy blog across the online community of mommy bloggers. The researcher was involved first by asking the initiator of the internet meme if she would like to start it and second by asking all respondents to send a copy of their responds to the e-mail address the researcher provided in addition to giving a place to the meme on their blog as an entry. By means of e-mailing with the researcher, some respondents had the opportunity to ask questions about either the research or the researcher.

This article is based on a research consisted of two stages of data collection: The first is a conventional questionnaire which was sent to the bloggers whose blogs were nominated in the categories of family blogs and women’s blogs in the nationwide blog awards. There were 37 nominees in total, out of which 19 nominees had contact information, so the questionnaire was sent to those 19 bloggers and nine of them returned the questionnaire. The questions in the conventional questionnaire were designed both to gather demographic information about bloggers and to test their willingness to take part in a further research. The second stage took the form of a semi-structured questionnaire and circulated among the mommy bloggers as an “internet meme”¹⁴ that in resemblance to the traditional snowball sampling method it eventually increased the responses. One of the respondents of the first questionnaire started the meme and asked those who would respond to send a copy of it to the e-mail address of the research project provided by the researcher. By means of tracing the meme in the blogs as well as by returning e-mails 27 responds were collected. That the numbers of the responds in the second questionnaire tripled that of the first questionnaire proved the speed and the volume of the content exchanged through blogs.

Defined Motherhood and Defining Mothering

Ever since motherhood is defined as more than reproduction, it has become to be conceived as grounded on social construction as well as being part of personal experience.¹⁵ Thus, motherhood is not only related to reproduction and nurturing of a dependent child but also a set of ideas and practices associated with mothering. Given that mothering work is done universally by women, mothering is associated with women.¹⁶ In this respect, it is intertwined with patriarchy in general, because motherhood is perceived as the outcome of prevailing gender system in society which dichotomizes public and private spheres according to essential role definitions for men and women.¹⁷

Relying on the distinction between motherhood as an institution and motherhood as an experience, maternal activists and feminists question the power imposed on women as mothers and to develop theories of maternal empowerment. In this framework, patriarchal motherhood is defined as oppressive for women and thus outlawed. Instead, “the outlaw motherhood” as it is defined or “empowered mothering” substitutes motherhood as based on idealized biological essentialism with motherhood as a socially and politically constructed institution. Hence, the aims of the outlaw motherhood are on the one hand, empowering mothers by means of bestowing agency, authority, authenticity and autonomy to them, and on the other hand degendering mothering in a way both to include men as active participants in social reproduction of households and to deconstruct idealized association the motherhood as women’s work.¹⁸

Motherhood as an institution is a patriarchal construction functioning power over women as mothers; henceforth, meaning of being a good mother depends on the time and place in which it is defined and practiced; thus motherhood is grounded on idealized notions related to motherwork in a specific social environment. For this reason, motherhood ideology accompanies motherhood as an institution that happen to determine “should”s and “shouldn’t”s of mothering in society. In this framework, motherhood in Turkey is to be perceived as the outcome both of social and historical processes and of accompanying ideas about being a good mother.

Motherhood in Turkey: Historical Construction of Motherhood as an Institution

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Ottoman Empire underwent a social and political transformation. When the Empire's military campaigns in foreign lands started to fall down and deepening backwardness of the country led increasing international interventions as well as internal pressure from its subjects, reforming the state become an inevitable need that the main intellectual endeavor concentrated on the question how to save the state (from collapse). Beginning with Tanzimat (1839) and continuing with Meşrutiyet (1908), education of was seen to be regarded as essential for women to become enlightened and better mothers, thereafter, especially during the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihat ve Terakki Cemmiyeti) reforming the family became an urgent need for social transformation. Popular periodicals of the time popularized the idea of abolishing the polygyny and restoring the family as a nuclear family composed of husband, wife and child(ren).¹⁹ Husband as the father and wife as the mother are assumed to hold complementary roles in the family and to nurture the child(ren) correspondingly. In that respect, motherhood is defined in terms of nuclear family that the mothers are told to nurture their child(ren) themselves, rather than either hiring a nanny for childcare or to nurture the child(ren) in the crowd of mothers and children as it was in the case of polygyny.²⁰ Subsequently, increasing nationalism of the intellectuals and the heavy consequences of the World War I resulted in outbreak of the National Campaign and then foundation of the nation state. In that manner, the ideas for reorganization of the family were inspired by the nationalist principles, so was the motherhood. Accordingly, it was defined as the first and the most important responsibility of a woman towards her country,²¹ thus women were seen as the mothers of nation. After the declaration of the Republic in 1923, marked the beginning of the state led modernization project in Turkey, uplifting women's social status was among the main areas of policy making. Social rights were granted to women in 1926 by the Civil Code and political rights in 1934, as the most urgent necessities of the modern Republic. In resemblance with the modernization movements in post colonial countries, during the first decades of the Republic, national independence and modernization were regarded almost as synonyms. Transforming women's status in society and constituting a new gender regime were considered accordingly. The new woman of the Republic was supposed to resemble to Western woman in terms of the way she looks, to have high education and get a profession and to stand in public life side by side with men; she at the same time was expected to be an enlightened mother. "[T]he woman of the Republic [were expected to become] doctor, judge, scientist, architect, engineer, politician, and deputy, but without losing her virtue as a Turkish mother."²² During the 1950s, at the same time that the Republican reforms were lauded for bringing women new equality and opportunities, a kind of backlash led to attributing renewed value to women's domestic roles. It was regarded that women's foray into the public realm, however, came, at the expense of their being able to provide quality mothering. In several women's magazines domestic responsibilities of women were overrated and working mothers were seen as responsible for a dissolving family or a criminal child.²³ The way magazines addressed women and the messages sent them at the time echoed Friedan's "happy housewife heroine", whose only destiny was to seek fulfillment as wife and mother."²⁴ Popularized because of the good relations with the U.S. and imitation of the American lifestyle, the "feminine mystique" was compounded by the mystification of the nationalist and the Republican ideals for women in Turkey in 1950s. During the 1970s the daughters of the first generation of the women of the new Republic became politicized in left wing groups. However, those women were expected to act as the same as their male fellows, that included refraining from romantic love, marriage or having a child, though their status in those political circles was secondary compared to men. Only towards the end of the decade, Progressive Women's Association (İlerici Kadınlar Derneği, İKD) would address women's specific needs and demand maternal leave or daycare facilities for working mothers.²⁵ Their political discourse in general terms was summoning the conventional perspective women as mothers; nevertheless, their political existence would end when the army seized the political power in 1980. In the following years, in a situation when all the pre-coup political movements were banned, feminism could rise as a political movement. The feminists highlighted the main topics common to the second wave feminism in the West and campaigned about for example sexual violence, wife-battering and unequal articles in the law. Feminist campaigns did not directly addressed motherhood, but questioned the nationalist-modernist ideal as emancipation of women and favored liberation of women from patriarchal constraints. Thus the result was devaluation of the traditional expectations related women as wives and mothers. In addition to that, as the popular media concerned women's magazines specifically, for example *Kadınca*, benefited from the popularity

of the contemporaneous feminist themes though; took a critical standpoint against the traditional value-judgments about women and favored independent role models for women; thus limited with the premises of liberal feminism, though, contributed to the feminist ideals for women. On the other hand, while the feminist themes were easy to be popularized by the media, they were still too radical for the state that the general approach towards the feminist movement was somewhat defensive so much so that both the Family Research Institute and The Directorate of Women's Status and Problems were founded consecutively in 1989 and 1990 as being responsible respectively for preserving and strengthening the Turkish family and for improving the status of Turkish women.²⁶ By means of that, the post-coup government took an official intervention by situating itself against the feminist movement that was in a similar line with neo-conservative policies in the West which stressed "the centrality of women's place in the home". Correspondingly, the Directorate acted for example to support TV programming to promote the idea that educated and working women as detrimental to the harmony and happiness of the family and the society or to propose to provide women with income-generating activities at home. As for the current situation, the tone of the political discourse concerning motherhood as an institution represents a religious and traditional standpoint. That Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister, addressed women on 8 of March in 2008 and wanted them to have at least three children²⁷ proves the proactive attitude of the conservative government. Later, Erdoğan argued that man and woman could not be equal; man is man, woman is woman, they rather complement each other.²⁸ He supported his idea with a religious maxim that the heaven lies beneath mothers' feet and added that it was because of the fact that compared to fathers mothers are full of care. Finally, in June 2011, the government replaced the Ministry for Women and Family with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies which meant a clear departure from gender equality policies. Similarly according to women's organizations which campaigned against the replacement and contented that this meant to assign woman into family and nothing else. All in all, as the Prime Minister explained this replacement on the ground of the need to prioritize family rather than gender equality²⁹ according to conservative democrat values of the existing government.³⁰

As a matter of fact, regardless of its ideological standpoint, each and every political power acted to constitute a specific gender regime and defined the motherhood accordingly. However, while the nationalist modernization defined motherhood in terms of nationalism, also provided women with an "opportunity space"³¹ from which women benefited for empowerment. The attitude of the present government is a clear departure from the modernization paradigm and in line with conservative, right wing politics that defines motherhood according to religious beliefs and traditional ideas that leads to an essentialist perspective based on biology which leaves hardly any room for empowerment for mothers. Although nationalist modernization paradigm has lost much of its hegemony in the past decades, yet, the conservative politics which the present government represents cannot be claimed to constitute a sole hegemony over political and social life. One of the spaces of public debate and of sociability is mamasphere which has the potential for creating solidarity among those women.

Mommy Blogs and Mamasphere in Turkey

Mommy blogs are defined as online journals written by women documenting the experiences of motherhood. When fathers become the writers of the blogs about nurturing and caring of a child, it is better to call these blogs as parenting blogs. As a matter of fact, this research has started as the one on parenting blogs. Among the respondents of the first questionnaire were there two "daddy bloggers", however, when the second questionnaire started to circulate as an internet meme, they fell out of the mommy bloggers' network. I know there is few of but not many of them, so daddy blogs might become the subject of a further research.³² In either way, blogs written by fathers do not seem to belong to the community of mamasphere. Demographic characteristics of the 27 respondents support the general characteristics as the majority of the mommy bloggers are ethnically homogeneous, middle class, married women.³³ 15 of them are currently employed in full time professional jobs, 9 of them do not work, the employment status of 3 of them is not known and all of them have only one child. Keeping in mind the gendered structure of the internet, all of the respondents seem to be able to afford computers and internet connection at home and also they seem to have some spare time that make us to think that they can benefit from child care opportunities somehow in order to be able to maintain keeping a weblog.

Mommy blogs are records of personal life of mother and child, moreover, they are at the same time sites of interactivity. This last feature differentiates the mommy blog in particular and web log in general from

traditional autobiographical writing.³⁴ Mommy blogs are written for many reasons like keeping an online diary of the baby, communicating with long-distanced family and friends, overcoming the feeling of isolation, celebrating the joy of motherhood etc. Whatever the reason, the outcome of keeping a weblog appears to be becoming a member of an online community. So, in accordance with the general motivations of writing a mommy blog, as for the respondents of this research, the mommy blogs serve chiefly two purposes: keeping the diary of the baby and sharing the experience of motherhood and mothering. The respondents mostly agree that mommy blogs replaced the diaries of the baby but they argue that they are not only about babies, but also about mothers. Thus, they assume that by means of keeping a mommy blog they find an opportunity for self-expression as mother. They also stress joined relationship between writing a mommy blog and reading them; and think that reading other blogs affect them in a positive manner. One of the leading positive effects of reading other blogs they say is getting and sharing information about childbearing and child caring. The second is the psychological effect that makes mothers to feel that they are not alone in the face of ambivalences of motherhood. Other positive effects of reading other blogs are defined by the mothers as getting different perspectives for dealing with the problems, achieving to be self-critical and being informed about new products. As emphasized in the literature about blog reading, emotional need for recognition or identification is a strong motive for reading other blogs in a way that identification with a blog post, then with the blogger and feeling as part of the mamasphere can be accepted to result in having the pleasure of finding themselves in another person, thus of relief. In general terms the blog readers are said to conceptualize an “identification based on identity in terms of gendered subject position and group belonging.”³⁵ When asked about specific contributions of the mommy blogs in their mothering practices the respondents of the present research referred to some particular practices as well as opportunities for empowerment as mother. Two of the respondents mention that they were informed about diaper-free baby by mommy blogs and achieved to give toilet training to their babies at a very early stage. Some mention about the book by Tracy Hogg which is a very popular manual for child care among the mommy bloggers. Much of its popularity partly comes from the fact that the translator of the book is a mommy blogger herself. Empowering contributions of the mommy blogs according to respondents included the support not only to resist superstitions about nurturing and caring for a child but also to seek mothers’ legal rights. One of the respondents, who keeps a weblog titled “Working Pregnant” asserts that if the mommy blogs did not exist at all she could have been more reluctant to defend her rights both during her pregnancy and afterwards. She notes on her blog that her blog is not a personal site, rather she imagine it as a platform for meeting and sharing, insomuch as to develop into a civil society organization.³⁶

The responds given by the mommy bloggers represent the way they perceive their social identity as mother vis-à-vis fathers and the mothers of the previous generation. Almost all of them challenge the idea that motherhood is a social role. The underlying motivation for them seems to defy external constraints intrinsic to motherhood as a social institution; for example a respondent argue “[i]t should not be considered as a social role, otherwise we would be stuck within social clichés”, or as another asserts, “[t]here are social meanings and stereotypes. We fall into those stereotypes sometimes”. They instead tend to define motherhood as an inseparable part of their personality. Here, the emphasis is not on biology, but on individual decisions for having a child at a specific moment of lifetime. Besides, the respondents refrain from associating motherhood with professional manners, either. They generally agree that motherhood is no way a profession. Two of them argue that when mothers abandon their professional life for the sake of mothering their children, then motherhood becomes the main profession for women. Nevertheless a common concern among the respondents is the necessity for approaching mothering of a child with the qualities and seriousness as much as the professional engagement would require. That the respondents seem to be confused in the way they conceive mothering pinpoints a chasm about regarding mothering either in terms of nature or in terms of profession. Even more, it seems so that natural mothering is something which is attained only if the most recent expertise on childcare recommended it.

As a matter of fact, there exist a tendency as the professionalization of motherhood which in combination with increasing medicalization of reproductive practices of women becomes apparent in mothers’ concern for having necessary knowledge about child care even before the birth of baby, questioning the plenty of approaches to find out the best way of doing something and thus refraining from making mistakes. As a matter of fact, it is supported by the prevailing gender regime and takes the form of a demand from mothers for intensive mothering and requires from professional mothers to conduct intensive mothering through organizing their time by means of appealing more to experts and of conducting intensive mothering by giving a special

attention to their relationships with child minders and of managing the relationships between the father and the child. In this framework, the internet as well as manual books and experts is considered a good source of information by those women. As for the relationships with child minders, those women seem to have developed employer-employee form of relationship with them.³⁷

Sometimes, the child minder is not a professional person but a close family member, mostly the grandmother. In a situation where affordable and safe childcare opportunities are scarce and responsibility of mothering a child is not shared with fathers, the grandmothers appear to compensate it. In Turkish case, when the grandmothers help their daughters for child caring, they do this in order to support them to take their places in public life as an independent individual according to modernizing concerns. However, such cooperation with mothers does not refer to inter women or intergenerational intimacy, but rather to a (gendered) generational gap. The grandmothers the most of whom formerly abandoned their education or profession for the sake of their families do not generally become role mothers for their daughters, but, the daughters rely on their maternal help in order to keep in step with modern values.³⁸ Despite the fact that new generation of mothers are able to seek for maternal support by grandmothers less due to some reasons among which are there for example old age or health issues of the grandmothers or the distance between the residences of the new mom and her mother or some women might simply prefer to hire someone to nurture the baby until the child starts attending preschool at the age of three, though, getting maternal help by the grandmother continues to be a common tendency. It is also possible to follow the traces of this tendency in the present research that when the respondents asked to compare the value of the knowledge and experience the grandparents have vis-à-vis the mamasphere, they agreed that while experiences of the grandparents are still valuable, the knowledge they have is mostly outdated and sometimes blended with superstitions. While helping the inexperienced mom especially in the first weeks was considered as a big favor by the respondents, the respondents seemed to prefer to put into practice the knowledge the grandmothers offered after checking it with the information given by the experts or found on the internet. As an example, the respondents mentioned that they revalued the merits of the swaddle not because their mothers told them, but because they were informed by the experts and the internet. The same is true for growing awareness about breastfeeding among mothers. Since the world has changed so the childcare, they argue, the mommy blogs instead offers lots of new information as well as rich source of experiences of other mothers.

It is stated above that the mommy bloggers are affected by the professionalization of the institution of motherhood. As a result, their efforts also include managing the relationship between the father and the child. In the framework of this research, the respondents were asked about their thoughts about how the mommy blogs affected the fathers. The respondents assert that their husbands support them to keep weblog but they do not generally read it. Instead, the mothers tell their husbands about their own weblogs and inform them about the other mommy blogs. A couple of responds illustrate the role of the mothers to manage fathers' relation with the child. A respondent mention that, by means of reading the weblog (of his own child written by his wife, the mother), he could follow and memorize the process of nurturing their child. Another respondent state that, because of the publicity of their private life with some degree on the blog, her husband is more careful if he makes any mistake as a father. Accordingly, although fathering experiences of men are in change due to the fact that they are not the sole breadwinner at home and they are expected to share childcare responsibilities with mothers, the relationship of the mothers with their husbands in this research reminds what is called gender legacy couples who do not refer to gender as the basis for their division of labor, yet operate with hidden gender-based power relations.³⁹ As a matter of fact, the mommy bloggers are said to be affected by the professionalization of the institution of motherhood; however, they do seem to represent the tendency.

As it is explained before, the sample of the mommy blogs scrutinized in this research are written generally for personal reasons; similarly, the future of these mommy blogs or in other words if these women will continue to keep weblogs is a question of which answer depends upon the motivation of these women to continue to write. When asked for how long they plan to write the mommy blog, they all agreed that they would continue to write the mommy blog as long as they could. Some stated that, may be not a mommy blog but they would keep a web log anyway.

As remembered that the chief outcome of keeping mommy blog is being part of an online community, moreover it is often a case that mommy bloggers make face to face contact with other mommy bloggers. The mommy bloggers in this research confirm the case that, when asked if the blogs were closed or banned somehow in the near future, what would happened to their relations established through mommy blogs, the majority of

them, 22 indeed, responds that they would stay in touch with each other either by e-mail or telephone. Some are well assured that their relationship would continue because they already know each other personally.

Notwithstanding, some of the respondents think that the effect of the mommy blogs is limited with its online community, some respondents stress that the mommy blogs enable mothers to organize if needed either for campaigns or as consumers to give the baby market a direction. Because mommies as consumers are attracting the market, thus mommy bloggers attract the advertisers as commodity auditors more and more; it brings into forth the issue of monetization of the mommy blogs which cause to debates concerning the conflicting questions whether to make money through blogging or to be able to keep the autonomy of the voice of the blog.⁴⁰ Since the discourse of motherhood in Turkey is closely associated with consuming practices for the child,⁴¹ in the near future the Turkish mamasphere can be expected to develop to attract the baby market more.

Before deciding if the mommy blogs affect the blogsphere, it would be useful to refer to about the capacity of the mamasphere to create a public debate. Here a campaign initiated and run by two mommyblog(er)s are worth mentioning as an illustrative example. The name of the campaign is "Reform for Breastfeeding" and it aims to raise the public awareness for breastfeeding. According to that, the goals of the campaign are to inform and support mothers to breastfeed their babies, to change prejudices or shame of breastfeeding, for example breastfeeding the baby in public places or in the presence of others, to overcome the problems the working mothers come across to continue breastfeeding their babies after the maternal leave. The campaign addresses the public directly; it has its own website; besides the campaigners give information about the campaign in their web blogs which are "Blogger Mom"⁴² and "Working Pregnant."⁴³ With its double goal, on the one hand to create an awareness about breastfeeding and on the other hand to overcome the legal barriers for breastfeeding the baby for at least 6 months, this campaign has the capacity to influence the policy makers as long as it continues to mobilize several groups of people with diverse interests around a single issue. The supporters of the campaign are counted as 4251 on the website of the campaign and as a hope for its future success national press is also interested that the newspapers report the campaign and publish interviews with the campaigners from time to time.⁴⁴

Conclusion

This article aimed to illustrate the main characteristics of the mommy blogs in Turkey and to comment on how motherhood is represented and constituted through mommy blogs. It is seen that the writers of the mommy blogs are at the same time readers of them that they together constitute an online community of mothers. Identification with others through mommy blogs appeared to have occurred on the basis of gendered subject positions, moreover, from an opposite angle, it might well lead to questioning and challenging existing gendered identities. As presented above, the mommy bloggers in the context of this research differentiate themselves from the former generations of mothers and search for alternative ways for mothering, in that case, going into an interactive relation with other mothers through mommy blogs can be regarded as a way for searching for an alternative. In a situation where conventional expectations from mothers are still high but necessary supportive mechanisms for mothers are inadequate, the mommy bloggers might potentially generate a political standpoint on the basis of their personal experiences; put it in another way, mommy bloggers can potentially enforce the boundaries between private and public lives⁴⁵ as the feminist motto personal is political suggests. The campaign "Reform for Breastfeeding" inspires such a potential which the mamasphere might bring into forth. Besides, it is good neither to over generalize the results of such a limited research, nor to romanticize the opportunities the internet offers, but to be aware of the power inherent within the mamasphere and to question why not diverse even "unusual" experiences of mothering to be able come out; only then radical political potential of mommyblogging can attain its function.⁴⁶ Mommy blogging is a new phenomenon in Turkey and yet to develop, but at the same time there are reasons to believe that the internet in general or mommy blogs in particular appears as and grows to be suitable channels for multiple individual experiences related to motherhood both to find an audience and merge with others.

- ¹ Bilgi Teknolojileri ve İletişim Kurumu, “Elektronik Haberleşme Sektöründe Tüketici Eğilimleri”, 2010, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/48060033/BTK-2010-Elektronik-Haberle%C5%9Fme-Sektorunde-Tuketici-E%C4%9Filimleri>.
- ² Bilgi Teknolojileri ve İletişim Kurumu, “Elektronik Haberleşme Sektöründe Tüketici Eğilimleri”, 36.
- ³ <http://www.interaktifturkler.com/IT2009rapor.pdf>.
- ⁴ May Friedman, “On Mommyblogging: Notes to a Future Historian,” *Journal of Women’s History* 22, no.4 (2010b): 197.
- ⁵ Dhiraj Murthy, “Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research,” *Sociology* 42, no. 5 (2008): 849.
- ⁶ See a selection of edited collections on using internet for social research: Batinic et.al. (2002), Coombes (2001), Dicks (2005), Hewson et.al. (2003), Hine (2005), Johns et.al. (2004) Jones (1999), Kozinets (2009), Mann and Stewart (2000).
- ⁷ Kavita Hayton, “New Expressions of the Self: Autobiographical Opportunities on the Internet,” *Journal of Media Practice* 10, no. 2-3: 204.
- ⁸ Andrew Ó Baoill, “Weblogs and the Public Sphere”, *Into the Blogosphere*. http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/weblogs_and_the_public_sphere.html.
- ⁹ Jill Walker, “Weblog,” *Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Routledge).
- ¹⁰ May Friedman “Internet and Mothering,” *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*, ed. Andrea O’Reilly London, Sage Publication, 2010a.
- ¹¹ Friedman, *On Mommyblogging*, 200.
- ¹² Nicholas Hookway, “Entering the Blogosphere: Some Strategies for Using Blogs in Social Research,” *Qualitative Research* 8, no.1 (2008): 170.
- ¹³ The term inspires the “word of mouth marketing” which rests on the interaction among the individuals in social media and commonly targets blogs, especially the mommy blogs for advertisement and marketing purposes.
- ¹⁴ Wikipedia defines the internet meme as follows: “An Internet meme is an idea that is propagated through the World Wide Web. The idea may take the form of a hyperlink, video, picture, website, hashtag, or just a word or phrase, such as intentionally misspelling the word "more" as "moar". The meme may spread from person to person via social networks, blogs, direct email, news sources, or other web-based services” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_meme).
- ¹⁵ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1976).
- ¹⁶ Terry Arendell, “Conceiving and Investigating Motherhood: The Decade’s Scholarship,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62: 1192.
- ¹⁷ Andrea O’Reilly, “Outlaw(ing) Motherhood: A Theory and Politic of Maternal Empowerment for the 21st Century,” *Hecate: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation* 36, no. 1(2010): 17.
- ¹⁸ O’Reilly, “Outlaw(ing) Motherhood,” 18-21.
- ¹⁹ Osman Fahri, “Aile,” *Arkadaş* 1, no.3 (1910a): 51-52.
- ²⁰ Osman Fahri, “Aile,” *Arkadaş* 1, no. 9 (1910b): 165-166.
- ²¹ Nezihe Muhittin, “Çocuklarımızı Nasıl Büyütmeliyiz?” *Türk Kadın Yolu*, no. 1 (1925): 7.
- ²² İffet Halim Oruz, “Cumhuriyetin Kadını,” *Kadın Gazetesi* 11, no. 530 (1958): 1.
- ²³ Aile, “Anneler Çalışmalı mı?” *Aile* 4, no. 16 (1951): 57.
- ²⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1971)
- ²⁵ Saadet Arıkan et.al, *Ve Hep Birlikte Koştuk: İlerici Kadınlar Derneği (1975-1980)* (İstanbul: Açık Yayınları, 1996).
- ²⁶ While the Family Research Institute was a separate initiative by the Government, the Directorate of Women’s Status and Problems had founded on the grounds of CEDAW which was ratified by Turkey in 1985.
- ²⁷ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr>, March 7, 2008.
- ²⁸ <http://www.haberturk.com>, July 31, 2010.
- ²⁹ <http://www.ucansupurge.org/turkce/index2.php?Hbr=197>.
- ³⁰ At the time of writing this article, Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that he was against the abortion and called for restrictive regulations for abortion. This declaration created a strong criticism, though, the law against abortion has not yet complete but is expected to be laid before the Assembly in June 2012.
- ³¹ Yeşim Arat, (1991) “1980’ler Türkiye’inde Kadın Hareketi: Liberal Kemalizmin Radikal Uzantısı,” *Toplum ve Bilim* 53 (1991): 79.
- ³² As for the work of parenting, Arendell (2000: 1198) notes despite that there is some change at men’s part and the popularity of the figure of nurturing and caring father accompanies this fact, women still appear as the main parent responsible for the nurturing and caring of child(ren).
- ³³ Friedman, *Internet and Mothering*, 2010a.
- ³⁴ For an analysis of mommy blogging as a genre see, Amiee Morrison, “Autobiography in Real Time: A Genre Analysis of Personal Mommy Blogging,” *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychological Research on Cyberspace* 4, no. 2 (2010). For a comparison between personal blogging and autobiography see, Hayton, “New Expressions of the Self.”
- ³⁵ Lena Karlsson, (2007) “Desperately Seeking Sameness: The Processes and Pleasures of Identification in Women’s Diary Blog Reading,” *Feminist Media Studies* 7, no. 2 (2007): 151.

³⁶ “Çalışan Gebe Kim?” <http://calisangebe.com/>.

³⁷ Özlem Kaya, *Mothering Experiences of Professional Women in Turkey: Child Bearing, Child Caring and Child Rearing* (Unpublished Master of Sciences Thesis, Supervisor Prof. Dr. Yıldız Ecevit, Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2008).

³⁸ Aksu Bora, “Türk Modernleşme Sürecinde Annelik Kimliğinin Dönüşümü,” *Yerli Bir Feminizme Doğru* ed. Aynur İlyasoğlu ve Necla Akgökçe (Ankara: Sel Yayıncılık, 2001), 90-91.

³⁹ Kaya, *Mothering Experiences*, 85.

⁴⁰ Lori Kido Lopez, “The Radical Act of ‘Mommyblogging’: Redefining Motherhood through the Blogosphere,” *New Media Society* 11, no. 5 (2009): 736-739.

⁴¹ Ayla Özhan Dedeoğlu, “Discourses of Motherhood and Consumption Practices of Turkish Mothers,” *Business and Economics Research Journal* 1, no. 3 (2010): 13.

⁴² <http://blogcuanne.com>

⁴³ <http://calisangebe.com>

⁴⁴ <http://emzimerereformu.com>

⁴⁵ Aimee Morrison, “Autobiography in Real Time: A Genre Analysis of Personal Mommy Blogging,” *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychological Research on Cyberspace* 4, no. 2 (2010): 5.

⁴⁶ May Friedman M, Shana L. Calixte, (2009) “Introduction,” *Mothering and Blogging, The Radical Act of Mommyblog* ed. May Friedman M, Shana L. Calixte (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2009), 30-31.

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