BETWEEN OVERSEXUALIZATION AND MOTHERHOOD:
DIVORCED MOTHERS' NARRATIVES ON WOMANHOOD, MOTHERHOOD,
AND SEXUALITY

by

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Submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
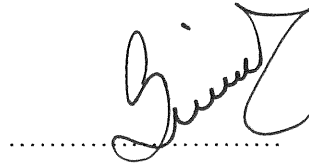Master of Arts

Sabancı University
June 2016

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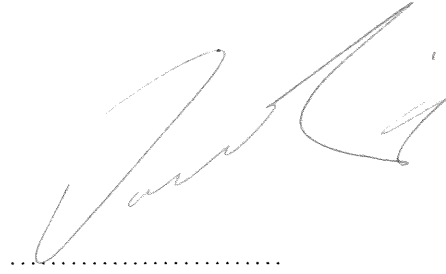## DIVORCED MOTHERS' NARRATIVES ON WOMANHOOD, MOTHERHOOD, AND SEXUALITY

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Date of the Approval
4.5.2016

ABSTRACT

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M.A. Thesis, June 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Ayşe Parla

Keywords: *Divorce, motherhood, womanhood, empowerment, marginalization*

The term oversexualization, as I call it, refers to the stigmatization of divorced women as 'seductresses' who are 'in need of sex' and thus as 'dangerous' to other couples. This thesis explores how divorced mothers experience and define womanhood, motherhood, empowerment, and happiness within a context of oversexualization. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with thirteen middle class divorced mothers were conducted in Muğla and Istanbul through the snowball sampling method. The thesis reveals that for middle class divorced women in Turkey (1) oversexualization leads to a negotiation between the stigma and one's self image, (2) the culturally and linguistically specific notion of *güç* renders the performance of gender and empowerment ambivalent, and (3) motherhood provides one of the most intimate sources of moral support despite that fact that it simultaneously exacerbates women's gendered tasks. While the constructions of womanhood, motherhood, and sexuality are all similarly instrumentalized by dominant public discourses to reproduce the oppression of women and the marginalization of divorce, within the prevalent feminist literature, motherhood remains less reclaimed in comparison to womanhood and sexuality. Moreover, oversexualization is almost entirely overlooked. This thesis thus emphasizes the political significance of the nuances between conflicting and/or similar narratives of struggle, intimacy, emancipation, and oppression, while questioning how the existing feminist and academic literatures correspond or fail to correspond to these nuances.

ÖZET

AŞIRI-CİNSELLEŞTİRİLME VE ANNELİK: BOŞANMIŞ ANNELERİN KADINLIK, ANNELİK VE CİNSELLİK ÜZERİNE ANLATILARI
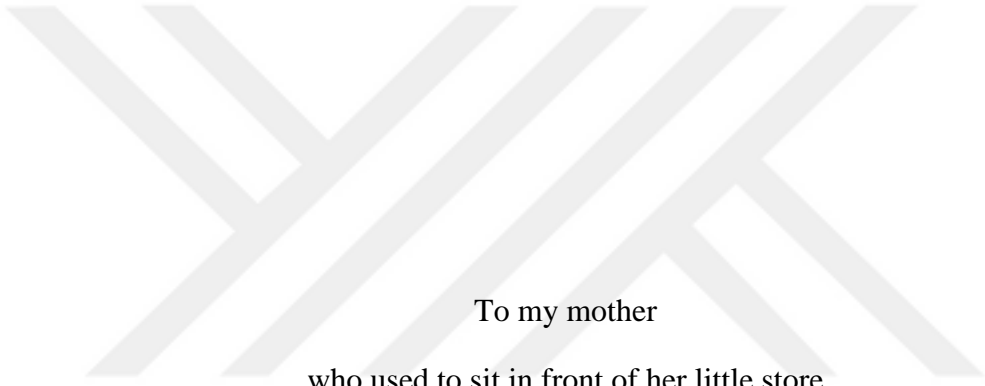
ÇİÇEK A. UYGUN

Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Haziran 2016

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Ayşe Parla

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Boşanma, annelik, kadınlık, güç, ötekileştirme*

Aşırı-cinselleştirme olarak tanımladığım olgu, boşanmış kadınların 'ayartan' ve 'cinsel birlikteliğe ihtiyaç duyan,' bu nedenle de diğer çiftler için 'tehlikeli' olarak damgalanmasıdır. Bu tez, aşırı-cinselleştirilme çerçevesinde, boşanmış annelerin kadınlık, annelik, güç, ve mutluluğu nasıl tanımladıklarını ve deneyimlediklerini incelemektedir. Kartopu örneklem metodu kullanılarak, Muğla ve İstanbul'da toplam on üç orta sınıf boşanmış anneyle yarı-yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Tez göstermiştir ki Türkiye'deki orta-sınıf boşanmış anneler için (1) aşırı-cinselleştirilme sosyal damga ve öz-imaj araşında bir müzakereye yol açmakta, (2) Türkçe'deki güç kavramı toplumsal cinsiyeti ve İngilizce'deki güçlendirilme anlamına gelen *empowerment* kavramını belirsiz kılmakta, ve (3) annelik en içsel manevi desteklerden birini sağlarken, aynı zamanda da kadınların cinsiyetlendirilmiş gündelik işlerini artırmaktadır. Kadınlık, annelik, ve cinselliğin inşaları, cinsiyet eşitsizliğinin yeniden üretimi ve boşanmanın ötekileştirilmesi sürecinde baskın kamusal söylemler tarafından eşit derecede kullanılmaktadır. Feminist literatür içerisindeyse, annelik, kadınlığa ve cinselliğe kıyasla daha az sahiplenilmekte ve aşırı-cinselleştirilme neredeyse tamamen göz ardı edilmektedir. Bu araştırma, mücadele, manevi yakınlık, özgürleşme, ve baskı üzerine benzer ve/veya çatışan anlatılar arasındaki nüansların politik önemini vurgularken, feminist ve akademik literatürlerin bu nüanslarla ne kadar örtüşüp örtüşemediğini sorgular.

To my mother

who used to sit in front of her little store

and dream about the future

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this work is to elaborate on divorce in general and divorced mothers in particular without diverting the discussion to other spheres such as family and marriage. As I have been interested in the topic of divorce for six years, one prominent pattern has attracted my attention during my conversations with divorced women, academic and activist journey, literature reviews, and preliminary research on the legal and historical background. The topic of divorce becomes ghostlike in academic, feminist, and governmental texts since it is almost always rendered secondary or trivial to other issues if not completely overlooked or avoided.

Divorce is an underrated issue within the scholarly literature, in that, it is usually analyzed through quantitative research while even the existing qualitative research mostly dwells on topics such as depression, the development of children, its effects on remarrying, and its negative effects for the society. In other words, divorce is contextualized as either a cause of various problems, or an anomalie which is caused by various problems, rather than a marginalized phenomenon in itself. Correspondingly, when we look at the public discourses and social policies, divorce is reconstructed as a disaster for the wellbeing of the society and thus something to be eliminated. While there are few works which explore the phenomenon of divorce without marginalizing it, divorce is not the main concern of these works. Lastly, the feminist literature in Turkey does not completely dismiss the dynamics and the experiences of divorce, however, the feminist discussions tend to shift their focus, yet again, to the discussions on family, marriage, and the undervalued labor of women. I will provide a detailed analysis of this existing framework of divorce and divorced motherhood, as well as the method of the research and my notes on the fieldwork in this introductory chapter.

1.1. Fieldwork

1.1.1. Research Participants

The research was conducted with 13 middle class divorced mothers. In order to provide a comfortable setting during the interviews, the anonymity of the participants was strictly observed throughout the research. While the names of the participants are kept confidential, I do not replace nicknames with the participants' actual names since a body of narratives clustered around one name can yet again reveal that person's identity. Therefore, I will provide a general information about the participants instead of introducing them separately. I am aware that such anonymity harbors the dangers of essentialization and generalization which I try to overcome by focusing on the differences as well as the similarities between the narratives.

The age range of the participants varied between early thirties to sixty: four participants around their thirties, six participants around their forties, two participants around their fifties, and one sixty-year-old participant. All of the participants were working divorced mothers even though two of them were housewives during their marriages. One participant is a high school graduate, one participant had a two-year major, eight participants had four-year majors, while three participants have university degrees yet whether they had two-year or four-year majors is unknown. All of the participants stated that they got divorced based on their own decisions, however, one participant decided to get divorced after ex-husband wanted to separate, and one other participant ended their continuing relationship nine years after her ex-husband divorced her. Two of the participants were re-married —one of whom divorced again. Even though their stories of togetherness vary, all of the participants had spent at least two and at most twenty three years as lone divorced mothers by the time of the interviews. Lastly, four participants had two children while the rest had one.

1.1.2. Method

The participants of this research were reached by using snowball sampling method. In total, 18 hours of semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted with 13 middle-class divorced mothers. While snowball sampling method led me to available contacts in the cities of Muğla and Istanbul, a research area was not pre-determined for two reasons. Firstly, marriage and divorce have the potential of being two major factors that change women's lives in terms of residency or occupation in Turkey. The participants experienced the divorce period usually in a city other than where they lived at the time of the interview. Overall, their stories were set in Ankara and the cities to the west of it. Secondly, the areas were primarily determined on the basis of the availability of social networks, as building intimate connections was the upmost priority of the research for the participants to be able to share their stories of divorce and marriage as comfortably as possible.

Since income as the mere measure of class would not suffice to define a research sample within such a large research area, social, economic, and cultural capitals of the participants have been taken into consideration. Bourdieu (1986) defines three forms of capital which can be converted into money 'as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility.' In this respect, the participants have the necessary social and/or family affiliations to access jobs, housing or help in taking care of the child, at least one income from a paid job, retirement or alimony, and hold at least a high school degree. I use the term middle class to indicate that even when the participants had their times of financial difficulties, they also had the cultural and social capitals to manage the obstacles for the sake of themselves and their children. Similarly, when they felt inadequate in terms of cultural capital, they had the necessary social and economic capitals to get by until they could secure a more stabile life standards (a job, an income). Consequently, the main issues of this research such as oversexualization, sexuality, and gender, will not fall completely trivial when compared with the struggles of divorced mothers to ensure their children and their own basic needs and livelihood.

1.1.3. Self-Reflexivity

Having been raised by a divorced mother since the age of one, this research was a very intimate journey for me. However, as a first-hand witness of my own mother's life as a divorced mother, I initially interpreted the differences between the participants' life stories and my mother's life story as a failure of my fieldwork. Unlike my mother, several participants received immense support from their parents, had been in solidarity with their ex-husbands, re-married, or claimed not to be marginalized. Upon my various disappointments throughout my fieldwork, I realized that I was unknowingly looking for participants who were in the exact conditions as my own mother had been in. As a consequence of my unintentional obsession on collecting a homogenous body of life stories and my not-surprising failure, this thesis is the product of my attempt to make sense of and interconnect the differences as well as the similarities between divergent narratives of divorced mothers.

1.1.3.1. A travel between being a 'daughter' and being an 'expert:' "You know better"

Since I grew up among not one but many divorced mothers, I have always been seen as a daughter or a nephew by the divorced mothers around me. I have been used to hearing life advices, intimate complaints, or funny sexual jokes which led me to think that such a position would be an advantage during my fieldwork. These intimate connections provided a vast network for a snowball sampling method, yet, surprisingly I was not a nephew or daughter anymore —not even to those with whom I was closely acquainted. All of the participants put me in the place of an expert on divorce and divorced motherhood. Even when they were very friendly to me, my position as an expert during the interviews did not stem from formality but rather I was seen as an experienced researcher and I had fulfill that expectation because they took the interviews seriously. This was a problem for me in a few of the interviews where I felt the need to fulfill their expectations from an expert —such as knowing exactly what I was doing in terms of my questions, methods, and approach. Sometimes, I did not have

to try accomplishing a performance as a skilled researcher as one participant even used the phrase "you know better." Yet again, such utterances led me to constantly be self-conscious about the importance of the interview to the participant I was interviewing with.

One interview was peculiarly memorable to me. The participant was one of the youngest ones and therefore closer to my age. She both saw me as an expert on the issue and also conversed very friendly. At one point in such context, she became heavily touched by the idea of me —as a daughter of a divorced mother— doing a research on divorced motherhood, and asked whether her little daughter would be questioning her experiences as well when she grows up. I quickly changed the topic and did not probe her intense moment any further. In her case, and in many other participants' such intense moments, I always chose to change the topic and usually shared my own stories and opinion after the interview. Not only the participants with little children but also the participants whose children are already successful adults often had second thoughts about their past choices or the future possibilities. While I was sharing my own stories and "de-marginalizing" divorce, divorced motherhood, and having divorced parents, in a way, my position in relation to divorced mothers actually changed in that I was not the one hearing the advices, complaints, or jokes.

1.2.   Situating the Literature on Divorce

1.2.1.   Legal and Historical Background

Feminists in Turkey have long been disclosing how women's identities are continuously reconstructed as good wives and sacrificing mothers. The increasing emphasis on family and motherhood in Turkey both dates back in the early years of the Republic and also holds sway in public discourses and social policies at the present. During the establishment of the Republic of Turkey women were portrayed as good mothers who were responsible for bringing up their children in the light of the Kemalist reformist ideologies, and educating the nation (Tekeli, 1986; Gulendam , 2000; Sirman , 1989; Parla, 2001; Kadıoğlu, 1994). According to Kerestecioğlu, values and perceptions on family have shifted from the social sphere of education, media, literature, and cinema into the political sphere of the legal and bureaucratic regulations with the recent AKP

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regime (Kerestecioğlu, 2014). Since the first years of their governance, the AKP government attempted to protect and reinforce the institution of family in Turkey. In 2004, adultery was tried to be included as a crime in the Penal Code during the preparation of TCK (Turkish Penal Code). In 2008, the Prime Minister of the time and the current President of the Republic, advised women to have three children. Besides the clear statements of the government ("We are a conservative democratic party, we have to strengthen our family structure"), the policies prioritized family over women. In 2010, the Family Ombudsman was established under the Directorate of Religious Affairs to reinforce the institution of family by visiting houses one by one (Aile Dışında Hayat Var!, 2013). In 2008, with the Social Security and General Health Insurance Law, women were tied to their husbands and fathers (Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2014). In 2011, the name of the Ministry Responsible for Women and Family was changed into the Ministry of Family and Social Policies by the removal of the word "woman" completely (Aile Dışında Hayat Var!, 2013). Similarly, the former law No.4320 in 1998 and the current law No. 6284 in 2012 both of which include the laws on violence against women, were both entitled as the Law on the Protection of Family as well as taking violence against women as an issue of security rather than inequality (Karınca, 2012). Despite the insistences of feminist and LGBTQ groups on including classes on gender in formal education, Ministry of Family and Social Policies rather published family education programs (Aile Dışında Hayat Var!, 2013) whereas Mother Universities were established by the collaboration of municipalities, universities, and associations beginning in 2012 ("Anne Üniversiteleri: Masumiyetten Uzak Bir Adım", 2014). Besides these classes, the ministry had agreed to the decisions of the International Family Conference which included the articles of discouraging divorce as a means of protecting the younger generation, preventing sexual intercourse outside the family, protecting children's psychological development by banning broadcasts which undermine the family (Kerestecioğlu, 2014). As conceptualized in these articles, divorce is politically perceived as something to be eliminated while family structures which are alternative to the heterosexual nuclear family are not even recognized. Considering the prevention of sexual intercourse outside the family, I would also like to draw attention to how family is often used instead of marriage in Turkish. The marriage certificate is addressed with the term "the family certificate" in the Family Law, Article 143, even though it is commonly known as the marriage certificate. If marriage is certificated with the term family, consequently, divorce ends not only the marriage but also the family.

Therefore, the families which include divorced parents are reproduced as 'broken families.'

In February 2012, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies funded the social welfare for 150.000 women whose husbands are dead (a financial support worth 300 lira), excluding 20.000 divorced women who were equally in need according to the results of the research conducted by the collaboration of the ministry and Bogazici University. The ministry accepted to provide financial help for only the women whose husbands are dead by claiming that "it would incite people to get divorced and that would undermine the family" (Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2013). Before this social welfare policy, social institutions were already aware of the needs of such women, yet there was not a single policy about them. Women found their own ways to access other forms of aid; however, they could reach the institutions often months or years after the necessity occurred, with no guarantee that the aid will be regular and/or enough. While the phrases of "having the right to the aid" and "to really need the aid" are constructed as opposites by these institutions, the women who receive aid are strictly under surveillance to be sure whether they are not misusers (Nihai Rapor, 2011). Likewise, both the ministry's social welfare and the alimony regulations in the Article 176 of the Family Law require women to have a "dignified" life and not to live "as if they are married." The ambiguity of the definitions works in a way that it completely disregards women's free will over their lives. In other words, women gain some rights in exchange for others (Özar, Yakut-Çakar, Yılmaz, Orhon, & Gümüş, 2012).

In 2014, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies introduced the Family and Divorce Process Counseling which was started as a pilot scheme in 2012 ("Aile ve Boşanma Süreci Danışmanlığı", 2016) and was speculated to be obligatory for the divorcing couples (Tahaoğlu, 2013). The Government plan for 2016 has pointed out that amendments have been made with regards to the law No 6284 which concerns violence against women and the National Action Plan for Social Gender Equality, including the measures for all programs on the media to be in conformity with traditional family values. The measures referred to the negative effects of the media on family and reminded the importance of Family and Divorce Process Counseling ("Criteria of 'Conformity with Traditional Family Values' for Media", 2016). More recently, the Parliamentary Commission for Investigating Divorce Cases and the Negative Factors Effecting the Integrity of Family and for Designating the Necessary Precautions to Reinforce the Institution of Family was established in 2015 ("Meclis Boşanmaları

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Araştıracak", 2015), yet in February 2016, a women's rights activist Hülya Gülbahar was attempted to be dismissed from the Commission by Sait Yüce, a member of the Commission and the ruling party ("AKP'li Vekilden Kadın Avukata: Ben Sana Haddini Bildirmeye Çalışıyorum", 2016).

Turkey has had an approximate divorce rate of 1.6 for the last five years according to TUİK and the UN statistics (Evlenme ve Boşanma İstatistikleri, 2016; Demographic Yearbook, 2014) and had the 27th lowest divorce rate among 85 countries around the world in 2013 (Demographic Yearbook, 2014). Despite the divorce rate has been 1.6 for the last five years, the increasing number of divorce has been agitatedly denounced by various newspapers. The newspaper *Sözcü*, for example, recently wrote about CHP's (Republican People's Party) critique of the current AKP government's social policies for the last 13 years by presenting the increased divorce rate alongside the increased rates of drug addiction, child abuse, and murder ("Toplumsal bozulma 13 yılda dibi gördü", 2016).

1.2.2. Literature Review

Women and Children Last: The Social Situation of Divorced Mothers and Their Families provides a critical overview of the literature on single mothers in 1974, drawing attention to invisibility of divorced mothers in these researches. Brandwein, Brown, and Fox emphasize the importance of distinguishing between divorced motherhood and single motherhood by briefly mentioning their problems with the state, over-sexualizing and de-sexualizing discourses, obstacles of being a divorced mother. (Brandwein *et al.*, 1974).

The oversexualization of divorced women and particular obstacles of divorced motherhood find place in the literature however they are either instrumentalized in the marginalization of divorce, or rendered as secondary issues. The edited version of an experience sharing meeting in *Feminist Politika* titled "Boş Anlardı Evlilik, Boşandık!" (Yıldız, 2010), exemplifies the discourses which I call oversexualization, and the stories of divorce very similar to the narratives analyzed in this thesis. The four women in the text, realize the marginalizing perceptions of the people about their divorce through "nettlesome insinuations" which are received not through "concrete examples" but rather "feeling them inwardly." Divorced women explain the way people think about

them such as "ooh, is she looking for someone?" whenever they pay a little attention to their beauty, or the ways in which married men —for whom divorced women "become favorite"— try to "take their chance on them." The text also mentions the ways married couples marginalize divorced women, as if they can "seduce someone anytime" which consequently stigmatizes divorced women as "dangerous." However, I would like to draw attention to how this text shifts its focus from divorce to more on family, marriage, violence by claiming that "We suddenly realized that we were actually talking about marriage rather than divorce. Obviously, we —as feminists— still need to talk about marriage." While the text does not discuss divorce in particular, it does not divide between divorced womanhood and divorced motherhood either. Therefore, all the specific experiences of divorce, divorced motherhood and womanhood dissolve in a critique of patriarchy in general.

In *Is a Different Family Concept Possible?,* which was published after the conference with the same title, family, marriage, divorce, and parenthood are discussed from various approaches. Sevgi Adak provides a legal, economic, political framework of family in Turkey (Adak, 2014) in her paper about *The Socialist Feminist Collective*'s campaign "There is Life outside Family." Similarly the other papers in *Is a Different Family Concept Possible?* discuss the effects of demography, social policies, and the market on women's oppression. Overall, the texts of the law and the state on the issue of violence against women are all using a language of security, protecting the family, and the wellbeing of the society. Feminist texts, on the other hand, try to defamiliarize the familiar by limiting their discussions to violence, marriage, and family. Therefore, particular problems of divorced motherhood, in a way, remain marginalized in both forms of text.

Moving on to the academic literature, I will dwell on three main research conducted within the last decade in Turkey which were conducted with the collaboration of either the Ministry of Family and Social Policies or the General Directorate of Family and Social Research: *Boşanma Nedenleri Araştırması* (2009)*, Tek Ebeveynli Aileler* (2011), and *Eşi Vefat Etmiş Kadınlar İçin Bir Nakit Sosyal Yardım Programı Geliştirilmesine Yönelik Araştırma Projesi*[1] (2011)*. The government's approach to these research regarding divorced womanhood and motherhood gives us an idea about how divorced mothers can be violated even based on various research that

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[1] *Research on Causes of Divorce, Single Parent Families,* and *Research Project to Develop A Financial Aid Program for Women Who Lost Husbands*

include their problems and narratives. Both *Boşanma Nedenleri Araştırması* and *Tek Ebeveynli Aileler* were published with prefaces which define divorce as one of the biggest threats to society; the former is written by Aliye Kavaf —the Minister Responsible for Women and Family between 2009 and 2011— and the latter is written by Associate Professor Ayşen Gürcan. Even though both of the projects reveal the problems of divorced women and mothers, first, these problems were not the main objects of these works, and second, these problems were addressed through an attempt to reinforce family. *Eşi Vefat Etmiş Kadınlar İçin Bir Nakit Sosyal Yardım Programı Geliştirilmesine Yönelik Araştırma Projesi* on the other hand, particularly analyzes the difficulties being a divorced or widowed woman. However, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies decided to provide financial aid only for widowed women whereas the research sample also included divorced women who were in the same situation with the widowed women (Özar & Yakut-Çakar, 2014).

In addition to the literature in Turkey, there is a large international literature on single motherhood. While the literature on single mothers does not distinguish between divorced mothers and single mothers, it mainly explores welfare reforms and its effect on the mothers' choice between whether contributing to the labor market or choosing the welfare assistance (Kimmel, 1995; Berger and Black, 1992; Edin and Lein, 1997a). Some of these works focus on the financial hardships of single motherhood and the importance of the availability of support through social network. Single motherhood is, therefore, usually taken as a matter of survival within this literature (Polakow, 1994; Edin and Lein, 1997b; Swain and Howe, 1995), whereas, the psychology literature mostly dwells on the correlation between single motherhood and depression/stress (Brown & Moran, 1997; Cairney *et al.*, 2003). The majority of these works concentrate on single motherhood in relation to the government policies such as welfare reforms (Gordon, 1994; Harris, 1993), tax credit (Meyer and Rosenbaum, 2001a; Meyer and Rosenbaum, 2001b), health insurance, Medicaid, childcare subsidies, and allocations (Gordon, 1994; Harris, 1993; Hays, 2003). Another body of literature on single mothers revolves around the children of single mothers in terms of the behavior problems, parenting quality, children's success or health (Garfinkel and McLahanan, 1987; Jackson *et al.*, 2000). There are a few examples of research on condemnation, social control, community which burdens a single mother (Little, 1998) or single mothers' opinions on re-marrying (Brodsky, 1998; Edin, 2000). The international literature particularly on divorced mothers puts much more emphasis on children compared to the

literature on single mothers. Similarly, the main issue is mostly the effects of divorce on children, or on the relationship between divorced mothers and their children (Arditti, 1999; DeGarmo *et al*., 1999; Whitbeck *et al.*, 1994). Stress, depression, and parental practices are again forms a wide literature on divorced mothers (Colletta, 1983; Tein *et al.*, 2000; Lorenz *et al.*, 1997).

1.3. Outline

In this research, I try to analyze divorce, womanhood, motherhood, and sexuality by capturing the distinction of divorced motherhood within the framework of oversexualization of divorced women. The next chapter, "Negotiating between Oversexualization and Self-image the Politics of Passing and Selfhood," focuses on what I call oversexualization, a particular form of everyday violence encountered by divorced women. The chapter discusses the divorced mothers' diversive approaches to oversexualization and how these various approaches relate to each other and the politics of passing and the self. Chapter III, "Ambivalent Intersections of Womanhood, Empowerment and Happiness," is about how the divorced mothers conceptualized womanhood, and what their conceptualizations of womanhood tell about empowerment, gender, and happiness. Chapter IV, "Threatening and Embraced: Reclaiming Motherhood, Womanhood, and Sexuality Equally," examines the notion of motherhood within the divorced mothers' narratives, and how the feminist politics in Turkey correspond or fail to correspond with these narratives. Overall, the research does not try to answer why divorce is marginalized. Instead, it reveals the dynamics of this marginalization and by doing so; it attempts to compensate the longstanding neglect on the issues of divorce and divorced mothers.

CHAPTER 2

NEGOTIATING BETWEEN OVERSEXUALITAZION AND SELF-IMAGE: THE POLITICS OF PASSING AND THE SELF

> *"Freedom is not doing what you want to do,*
> *it is the luxury of not doing what you do not want to do.*
> *I'm free…"[2]*

2.1. Introduction

'As soon as the ring is off' a woman becomes exposed to eyes, words, and bodies according to the participant women whose lives underwent a gendered shift after divorcing their spouses. "[My friend] told me that I was no longer a normal woman" said a divorced mother (age: mid-thirties, number of children: two, divorced for: 3 years), who had not expected such a drastic change when she got divorced at her early twenties. Having their image rendered marginal by the rather unforeseen aspects of divorce, several participants of the research stressed a very specific 'reason' for this shift. The widely-held belief suggests that if they were once married, women will have cultivated a need for sexual experience, which supposedly leads them to 'crave and search for' the means to satisfy their sexual needs once they are divorced. During the two stages of her separation and divorce, she (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) had been even warned by one of her male friends saying "you'll want to have man in your life, and we [as the guys around you] will try to be that man."[3] Following the mentality, a divorced woman's assumed desire for heterosexual intimacy is described as a need, which becomes a void to be filled by the male acquaintants. As she bursts into laughter upon hearing her friend's 'warning,' another participant (late forties, one, less

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[2] One of the participants: "Özgürlük insanın yapmak istediğini yapması değil, yapmak istemediğini yapmama lüksü. Özgürüm."
[3] "Bi erkek olsun isticeksin hayatında işte biz de o erkek olalım diye peşinde dolaşcaz"

than 10 years) who never gave up on following her sexual desires launches into a rant in reaction to the suggestion that '[she] would have some *needs*:'

"Let's say I *do* have a need, am I supposed to soothe it with *you*?!"[4]

In this chapter, I will dwell on a peculiar form of oppression that I call oversexualization, and three patterns in which divorced mothers narrated oversexualization and their stances regarding oversexualization. Oversexualizing discourses stigmatize divorced women as seductresses who are in need of sex and hence dangerous to other married couples. Almost all of the participants being divorced without a child is not different from merely dating and breaking up. Hence, oversexualization creates another dimension of struggle in the context of motherhood. While they are the ones being stigmatized as 'dangerous,' divorced mothers often find themselves in a situation where they have to balance between fending off sexual harassments and gossips —which also may harm their children—, following their own desires for sexual intimacy —which are strictly controlled around the idea of mothering. In response to this image forced on them, divorced mothers pass for married to maintain their relatively comfortable lives for themselves and their children, they continue to be who they are despite the discourses over their identities, or they construct stories of safety in which they are exempted from oversexualization. These three non-exclusive narrative patterns, namely 'passing for married,' 'being oneself,' and 'the stories of safety,' are in dialog not only with each other but also with the feminist and academic literatures on passing and the self. While it is not my aim to discuss the possibility of an authentic self through this research, I will explore how these narratives interact with each other in relation to the politics of passing and selfhood, and analyze the significance of this interaction for the literature on passing and the feminist perspectives on the self.

2.2. What is Oversexualization?

Even though a wide range of people take part in the oversexualization of divorced women, many participant women remarked that they attracted the attention of, specifically, married men varying from friends and colleagues to bosses and

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[4] "Varsa da var, senle mi kapatcam!"

government officials. Indeed, friends may call more often than usual, bosses and colleagues may come up with more tasks to work on together, or similar work related harassments may take place even during the job interview once a woman is known to be divorced. One participant (late fifties, one, more than 20 years), who was divorced due to being physically and psychologically violated for years, points out the hypocrisy of this increased attention. She questions the sincerity of compassion she received from a close friend, upon his so-called polite request to keep their conversation as a secret from his wife. Similar attempts to be 'the man to satisfy a divorced woman's sexual needs' are also revealed in sexual jokes, or references to her "loneliness" and "wasted youth and beauty."

While oversexualization manifests itself in a major part of a divorced woman's life, a considerable number of people begin to presume and act upon the existence of her need for heterosexual intercourse. Assumptions on divorced women's desires and sexuality reconstruct their bodies, as a participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years), indicated that a divorced woman becomes a sexual object. Divorced women's portrait as sexual objects is metaphorized by another participant (mid-thirties, two, less than 5 years) whose job requires visiting stores mostly run by men, as "For them, I'm like… You know, as if the spotlights shine when I enter [the room.]"[5]

Oversexualization does not only involve the objectification of divorced women but it also pictures them as dangerous. "While men see us as potential lovers, women see us as potential rivals"[6] said a divorced mother (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years) who had to deal with the consequences of oversexualization both for herself and also for her teenage son. As the obstacles exceed the limits of sexual harassment, even if a divorced woman is accompanied by a married man who is not molesting her, she often feels afraid, yet again, because of the possibility that his wife might react upon the two of them spending time together. A married woman, in this respect, is expected to reproduce the prevalent mentality of the aphorisms "dişi köpek kuyruk sallamasa erkek köpek gitmezmiş" and "ateş olmayan yerden duman çıkmaz."[7] Many participants followed similar stories with slight differences in wording such as "you are seen as a

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[5] "Yani ben onlar için şeyim böyle hani girdiğimde ışıklar falan yanıyodur eminim."
[6] "Erkekler potansiyel sevgili olarak görüyo, kadınlar potansiyel rakip olarak görüyo."
[7] The former means "the male dog won't follow unless the female shakes her tail" and the latter means "there's no smoke without fire".

threat [by their wives], as if you are going to steal their husbands"[8] or "you might be misunderstood by their wives."[9] Likewise, a young woman (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) summarized the gist of oversexualization that "everyone wears the same thing but your clothes are interpreted *wrong,* everyone laughs the same but yours get interpreted *wrong.*"[10] In other words, oversexualizing discourses move bodies in ways that, on the one hand, they draw people away from divorced women, and on the other hand, they become the means of approaching a divorced woman even against her will.

Lastly, the exposure of divorced women's sexuality may also function as surveillance. One divorcee (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years) stated that "a new period [after divorce] begins [for women] that, socially, everyone's gaze turns on you."[11] Another participant (mid-forties, two, more than 10 years) expressed how she felt as if everyone looked at her when she walked on the street after she got divorced. Feeling the gaze of the community thus makes her feel guilty even if she acknowledges that she is not. The gaze does not only cover the neighborhood but also inside her home. One of the participants (late forties, one, approximately 20 years) whose time of delayed young girlhood began after the divorce, defined 'flirting at the age of 28 instead of 18' as 'going against the societal expectations'. Having a boyfriend after divorce is considered as a challenge to social norms and thus requires extra energy to deal with the single details such as whether the charwoman realizes that the big size slippers have been used. She tells her story about how her ex-husband knew about her boyfriend by talking to the charwoman working at her house. She figures out later that the charwoman left the man slippers upside down before leaving her house. Since the slippers were moved when the charwoman came back the other day, the charwoman concluded that there has been a man or men coming to her house. Once home also becomes a site of contestation, such an exposure may also derive from the need to 'protect' the divorced woman. One story follows that everyone around the participant (early fifties, one, more than 10 years) thought that she must have a secret lover as the reason of her sudden decision to divorce, because —as many others also narrated— a woman's will to get divorced is unintelligible if her husband is not physically violating her, cheating on her or failing to earn enough money to look after her. While her divorce

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[8] "Tehdit oluyosun o zaman, kocalarını ellerinden alcakmışsın gibi"
[9] "Onların eşleri tarafından da yanlış anlaşılabileceğimi düşündündüm."
[10] "Herkes aynı kıyafeti giyer senin giydiğin yanlış yorumlanır, herkes aynı şekilde kahkaha atar seninki yanlış yorumlanır."
[11] "Toplumsal olarak herkesin bakışlarının size çevrildiği bi dönem"

had a very simple explanation of being unsatisfied with her life as a housewife and her mediocre marriage, social pressure takes a form of protection in this case that her family and friends try to understand her 'problem' and convince her to turn back to the so-called safety of marriage. When they are convinced that she has no secret affair, her family insisted that she must be going through a depression; whereas she noted, "everyone was unhappy, but I was happy."[12]

At this point, I would like to draw attention to the importance of talking divorce per se. The unintelligibility of ending a marriage under ordinary circumstances, in my opinion, resonates with the feminist insistence on talking marriage in Turkey. The power relations working within marriage and family in Turkey are crucial as they are well discussed by the feminist literature. However, repeatedly discussing marriage and the nuclear family overshadows the discussions on divorce and alternative families just as the institutions of marriage and nuclear family overshadows the ordinariness of divorce and alternative families. In other words, de-familiarizing the familiar results in repeating the mainstream concepts and, in my opinion, reproduces the position of the less-familiar or unfamiliar concepts as alternatives to the mainstream. In the special issue of *Feminist Politika* on divorce, Candan Yıldız (2010) writes "Boş Anlardı Evlilik, Boşandık!" based on the conversations of four divorced women with a preface that says "We suddenly realized that we were actually talking about marriage rather than divorce. Obviously, we —as feminists— still need to talk about marriage." Yet the conversations provide a rich source of narratives on oversexualization such as "my clothes are misinterpreted," "they thought I was trying to attract some attention," "the sexual harassments of male government officials," "you are seen as a threat for married couples, or couples in general," "there are [men] who say 'I'll take my chance on her'," "there may be disturbing insinuations sometimes." One of these four women, Hale, also tells how her ex-husband complains by saying 'Am I a gambler; do I beat my wife; am I a sort of guy to be divorced?' I try to highlight here that oversexualization and the marginalization of divorce are as structural, as patterned, and as common as the power relations reproduced through marriage and family. Yet, the existing literature attempts to analyze these patterns through other forms of oppressions.

Even if marriage, family and divorce are all phenomenon which are deeply interlinked, an analysis of marriage is inadequate to explain the oversexualizing

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[12] "Benim dışımda herkes mutsuzdu, ben de mutluydum"

discourse residing in Müge Yetener's essay "Bambaşka Biri" in the exact same issue of *Feminist Politika*. While she criticizes beauty standards and patriarchal capitalism, she generalizes the experiences and identities of divorced women by saying "divorced women have the potential to leave the role of modest woman," "divorced women who are financially and socially disadvantaged, see the problem in themselves, so, they try to be more attractive and desirable by auto-controlling and changing their bodies," "while mother-wife role does not require flamboyant costumes, self-esteem costumes are being prepared for independence" (2010). Considering the feminist marginalization of the social marginalization of divorced women, I deliberately limit the focus of this chapter on the dynamics of oversexualization only, and how divorced mothers negotiate their self-images in relation to oversexualization. Overall, the question of divorced motherhood is still left unanswered and even rendered more intriguing since Yetener claims in *Feminist Politika* that the costumes for a mother role and an independent divorced woman are different in a dichotomous way. One the one hand, motherhood is criticized to be the imprisonment of womanhood and female sexuality —which I will dwell on in detail in the Chapter 4— and on the other hand, oversexualized images are attributed to divorced women yet again without their consent. However, when she is expected to be ready to have sex with any man, one participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years) launches into a rant in reaction: "So is this it? I mean, wait a second, let me demand it first!"[13] Her emphasis on her demand is significant as another (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) participant also criticizes the expectation of an asexual life from lone mothers:

> Is it possible? For god's sake, Çiçek, we are humans after all. People need to love, to be loved. (…) One needs the attention of the opposite sex. I may not need it now, but it is because of my last horrible relationship. But I haven't closed the doors, if a man comes and makes my heart flutter, I may flirt again.[14]

She sees sexuality as well as any form of togetherness and love so crucial that she correlates sexuality with living, with corporeality, with body. Therefore, everyone should have a sexual life and no one should give up on it:

> Time passes. What do we do? Give up on life? (…) Why would you forget about it, why not use your right arm? I mean, you have ten fingers. What's

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[13] "Bu mu yani dur bi dakka ben talep edeyim!"
[14] Böyle bir dünya olabilir mi? Allah aşkına, Çiçek, insanız en nihayetinde. İnsanların sevmeye sevilmeye ihtiyacı var. (...) Bi karşı cinsin ilgisine ihtiyaç duyuyo insan. Ben şu aralar duymayabilirim ama bu en son yaşadığım ilişkinin çirkinliğinden. Ama ben kapatmış değilim, bi adam gelse böyle kalbimi titretse ben yine flört edebilirim."

the meaning in living as if you lack three fingers, forcing yourself to use only seven when you have ten?[15]

2.2.1. The Ambiguity of Oversexualization

Oversexualizing attitudes towards divorced women are often —as in many cases of sexual harassment— difficult to explicitly oppose and immediately deal with. A participant (late fifties, one, more than 20 years) who usually prevents harassments by benefiting from being older than most of the people around her, thinks that if she asks an annoyingly pert friend "what do you mean by that?" the answer will instantly be about her own "malice" and "depravity" for misinterpreting a "normal question" of her friend. There is a prominent effect of vagueness in many participants' narratives in a way that these routinized forms of harassment, insinuation, and stigmatization are frequently experienced yet at the same time mostly intangible. In cases where the worries about being marginalized are not realized, there is even a slight tone of surprise in the narrative of one participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), who had a few years to think before divorcing her husband:

> A very close friend of mine is married, married to a very narrow-minded man. I mean, I thought [her husband] wouldn't let me see [my friend]. It's something constructed in my head… She might envy me and say "look, she went and built her own life there." (…) One of my friends, for example was single, her father is narrow-minded too. I said, for sure, [her father] would never let [my friend] see me again.[16]

When I asked her why she had expected such distancing attitudes, the answer was some judgments or perceptions due to hearing and encountering the experiences of other divorced women and being affected by them. Such concerns are narrated by several other divorced mothers as instinctual, sensual, something inward, something that can be sensed but also —as the oversexualization often is— intangible.[17] As Veena Das phrases such insinuations, they are "communicated through veiled speech and an aesthetic of gesture," in that, utterances get meaning from the context (Das, 2000: 211).

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[15] Ee zaman da geçiyo. E napalım? Yaşamayalım mı hayatı? (...) Niye unutacaksin ki? Niye sağ kolunu hiç kullanmayacaksın ki? Yani on parmağın varsa, üç parmağın yokmuş gibi yaşamanın, yedisiyle hareket edeyim diye zorlanmanın ne anlamı var?

[16] Yani benim çok yakın arkadaşım evli, [kocası] da dar görüşlü bir adam. Hani ben [kocasının] beni [arkadaşımla] görüştürmeyeceğini düşünmüştüm. Kafamda oluşan yargı… Bana özenebilir bak gitti orda hayatını kurdu. (…) Bi tane arkadaşım bekardı mesela, onun babası da dar kafalı bir adam dedim ki [babası] kesin [arkadaşımı] benimle görüştürmez.

[17] The words used by the participants: iç-duygu, hissetmek

In other words, there is always a fear of misinterpretation due to the vague air of impressions which most of the participants had never encountered before getting divorced, therefore they usually decide to stay away from married people in general. One participant (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) who feels rather helpless in the face of this gendered shift caused by her recent divorce summarizes the ambiguity of oversexualization as she says "there is nothing tangible when you look at it, yet there are those constant disturbing insinuations."[18]

For the attitudes of people towards divorced women are almost never undoubted, the ambiguity of oversexualization is critical for analyzing what I call the stories of safety in detail. Stories of safety are threatening to the narratives about the experiences of oversexualization, because the stories of safety defend the possibility that oversexualization is simply the reflections of inner insecurity, paranoia, and ill-intention. This interaction between different narrative forms, therefore, reveal the main question in the cultural analysis of oversexualization is not whether it really exists or whether the narratives are reliable. But rather, it signifies a broader political framework of oppression, responses to oppression, and the disavowal of oppression.

2.2.2. Me and Them: The Singularity of Divorced Woman

During our conversations with divorced mothers, one prominent division stemmed out of the narratives in which women often mentioned themselves with the singular "I" which separates them from the oversexualizing "others." While discussing the sexual objectification of divorced women, a participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years) who protects herself by being aggressive to people around her described her situation as being the "sexual object of *others*." In other words, their stories of isolation and marginalization are widely articulated in this linguistic structure in a way that this structure singles out the participant instead of forming a group of "us" as divorced mothers. Therefore, it is not *my* intention to generalize the case either for divorced women or the people who reproduce the oversexualization of divorced women. Rather, the binarization and the generalization of subjects flow out of the narratives such as saying "*they* try it once in any case"[19] to refer to the men around a divorced woman (late

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[18] "Fiili bişey baktığında yok ama ama var rahatsız edici bi şey"
[19] "Deniyolar illaki"

fifties, one, more than 20 years). This generalization and 'othering' of the men who try their luck on a divorced woman is very common in the narratives of sexual harassment as well as the generalization of the spouses who push her away from themselves. Married people who are drawn away from divorced women, people who are harassing divorced women, people who see them as a threat to their family, in short, all those people that over-sexualize divorced women are 'all those people' not in my own words but in the eyes of divorced mothers who participated in this research. Indeed, the gendered shift caused by oversexualization is drastic as it is also made sense of only gradually. In Das' chapter *The Event and the Everyday,* she conceptualizes the critical and traumatic event as "always attached to the ordinary as if there were tentacles that reach out from the everyday and anchor the event to it in some specific ways." In a way, for Das, the everyday becomes 'eventual' through the attachment of the violent event to the everyday and 'a descent into the ordinary' (2007: 7). However, in the context of oversexualization, there is not one big event that turns the everyday into eventual. In this case, divorce is not the traumatic event that causes an ordinary violence but rather the accumulation of instant and ambiguous encounters with oversexualization is what makes the everyday eventual. Singular instances of marginalization and stigmatization accumulate over time, building up a group of oversexualizing people (*they*) whereas the object of this peculiar everyday violence remains singular (*I*) in her attempts to negotiate between oversexualization and her self-image.

I find this use of singular "I" significant in considering that divorced woman is often singular whereas womanhood easily finds its correspondence in plural "us." As seen in the Chapter II, the notion of womanhood leads to a narrative of empowerment whereas the notion of divorced womanhood leads to a narrative of rupture. Despite its ordinariness and mundaneness, oversexualization occasionally creates a drastic separation between oversexualizing people and divorced women, between one's life as a married woman and as a divorced woman. And this singularity of the divorced woman resonates in the instrumentalization of the self within divorced women's narratives. Additionally, since divorced motherhood requires struggling not only for the singular self but also for the child(ren), the moral support gained through the intimate relationship between the divorced mother and the child might be so significant (see Chapter 4) also due to this "me and them" opposition.

2.3. Navigating through Surveillances, Discourses, and Harassments

Overall, seven women out of thirteen stated a clear difference between having a ring on the finger and not. "When there is a ring on your finger you're respected. But once you take it off, 'ooh, available… how nice!'"[20] says a very friendly and extraverted participant (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years). She thus describes the difference between a married woman and a divorced woman as the former being tolerated in a way that even when a married woman is more intimate with others her intimacy is not necessarily interpreted as a sexual act. In this respect, she portrays the life of a married woman as more comfortable. Considering this debatability of divorced women's sexuality, various emotional outbursts took place during the interviews, some indicating fear and some indicating anger or hatred. A participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years), who enjoyed her new active sexual life after divorce, encountered sexual harassment countless times due to being a divorced woman. However, she told how she went through a severe panic after her first encounter with sexual harassment as a divorced woman at her workplace, thinking "will it always be like this from now on?"[21] and changing her job immediately. Another divorced mother (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) described her first encounter with oversexualization as something 'happening to [her]' for the first time, making her feel the need of protecting herself especially at her workplace.

Within this cluster of gazes, words, and bodies, there are several narrated responses to oversexualization. These different approaches and actions towards oversexualization formed three prominent patterns during the interviews which I will address as passing for married, being oneself, and the stories of safety. Overall, seven women explicitly confirmed the existence of oversexualization, while two participants explicitly disavowed the existence of oversexualization. Four participants constructed narratives which recognize oversexualization and followed the pattern of being oneself to struggle against oversexualization, while one of them also mentioned passing. One participant recognized oversexualization yet her narrative did not include any of the three patterns. Two participants recognized oversexualization yet also provided stories

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[20] "Yüzük varken parmağında gayet saygınsın yüzük çıkınca aa available ne güzel hazır"
[21] "Ciddi paniğe sürüklenmiştim yani bu iş hep böyle mi olacak bundan sonrasında böyle şeyler mi yaşıcam"

of safety by claiming that they encountered oversexualization rarely compared to other divorced women. Two participants who disavowed the existence of oversexualization also followed a narrative pattern of being oneself, however, one of them also included passing. One participant constructed a story of safety without disavowing oversexualization, yet her narrative did not include any emphasis on being oneself. Two participants recognized oversexualization yet claimed that they never encountered firsthand. And lastly, one participant's narrative only included passing. Even though these three patterns are not mutually exclusive and several narratives included more than one approach to oversexualization, I find it important to explore these three patterns with regard to their not exclusive yet distinctive integrities. I argue that separate analyses of these patterns allow us to see the dynamics between these positions, and hence, come to a deeper understanding of the significance of their combinations and conflicts.

2.3.1. Passing-For-Married

Very much concerned about oversexualizing discourses which materialize in the form of gossips, a divorcee (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) prefers to keep her divorce as a secret as much as it is possible. "Everyone talks recklessly about these kinds of things. I can't control everything that's said. Which one can you correct? You hear some of them but some you don't. It's such an open topic to be gossiped about."[22] Therefore, she passes as married intentionally for the first couple of years after her divorce.

Valorie Rohy explains the term passing as a performance of presenting oneself as what one is not, a performance that is usually imagined to be along the lines of race, gender, class, or sexuality (1996: 219). Lola Young, as Sara Ahmed quotes in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*, similarly argues that 'the notion of racial passing, as a sign of duplicity, threatens to undermine the stability of racial categorization' and thus transgresses racial boundaries. Ahmed criticizes such theorizations of passing which generally focuses on how it destabilizes the system of knowledge and vision, on which subjectivity and identity rest on. Instead, she suggests

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[22] "Çünkü insanlar bu tarz konularda ağzı olan konuşuyo, kimin ne söyliceğini de toparlayamam, hangi birini düzeltesin, duyduğum var duymadığım var, çok da dedikoduya açık bi konu..."

that we should shift our focus from transgression and destabilization to how relations of power are secured and the differences are recuperated through this very process of destabilization (2000: 125). She mentions various aspects of passing and highlights how each of these aspects make a difference to the politics of passing. She builds her main argument on one of these aspects —the question of who is passing for what— while I find it particularly important to elaborate on another aspect of passing —intentionality in passing— which she discusses yet does not go further in depth in her analysis.

The participant I mentioned above told how she continued to wear her wedding ring for a time being after her divorce and told her colleagues that her husband would come to pick her up. For a few times, her ex-husband actually comes to pick her up after work, which collaboratively helps her passing-for-married. The visibility of the ring is, on the other hand, described as "quarantine" or a "bell glass" in her narrative, making others be careful when approaching her.[23] Her intentional passing for married, therefore, reproduces the safety of a married woman from oversexualization and contributes to her own oppression. Yet, there is a crucial tone of agency in her narrative that adds a nuance to this quarantine, in that, she is not stuck in the bell glass but she builds it; and the very effort of building her safe space is conceptualized as "struggling immensely" and "growing up."

Another participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) does not care about the public opinion on her sexual life and deals with the harassments without passing for married. On the other hand, she leaves the decision to her two children on whether to introduce her boyfriend as her husband to their classmates to prevent any possible problems to emerge at their school. Besides the school of their children, the workplace becomes an area of obstacles for several participants as all of the participants were once or are still working divorced mothers. The participant who chooses to pass for married (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), criticizes how the question of what her husband is doing for life pops up very often during job interviews; "I don't have a husband, umm but please let no one know about it. That's always my second sentence during job interviews."[24] She learns how to handle the questions on her family posed by the colleagues as well:

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[23] "Yüzükle kendimi karantinaya aldım, bir fanusun içinde olduğum için insanlar daha dikkatliydi"

[24] "Eşiniz ne yapıyo? Yok, eee, ama lütfen kimse bilmesin, ikinci cümlem budur."

> Are you living with your family? Yes, I have a child. My child [is my] family too, neither 'yes' nor 'no'. Yes, I live with my child. Why do you keep pushing it, asking whether I have a husband on top of that?[25]

Here, I am not trying to romanticize the agency in passing. The participant is also aware that adapting her body and her visuality according to the over-sexualizing discourses is a form of "auto-control." Nevertheless, whether the subject passes intentionally or unintentionally makes a difference to the politics of passing as Ahmed also points out. While keeping the ring on is not common for all thirteen women, several participants mentioned how they often did not felt the need to reveal their divorce to their outer social circle, thus unintentionally pass for married as some people are unaware of their divorce and thus continue to think that they are still married. Ahmed mentions how passing is intelligible only in relation to a complex set of social antagonisms, for example, at the level of the intentional subject —who tries to pass for what one is not, to secure something that is otherwise unavailable to them— or passing may take place as misrecognition of others on the identity of the subject without the subject's intention or awareness. Similarly, we should also take the question of 'who is passing for what' into account before theorizing passing simply as a form of transgression (2000: 126-127). Ahmed draws her argument primarily on the latter when she analyzes the social differentiations embedded in racial passing. Accordingly, a white person's passing for white is not the same with a black person's passing for white due to the structural differences in their already assumed images. In this research, the question would be whether it is a married woman or a divorced woman who passes as married. However, I suggest a return to the question of intentionality in one's struggle within the power relations, specifically because the very intention in deciding whether to pass or not constructs a political framework of passing and selfhood around the three narrative patterns provided by the divorced women. As Ahmed's discussion of the intentionality is secondary to the discussion of the assumed identities, her definition of intentional passing is also limited. In this chapter, I use the terms intentionality as the whole effort one puts in to secure an image by also acknowledging the risks of not securing or failing to secure this image. The women who pass or do not pass for married in this research are all divorced; hence for all the participants, their already assumed images (divorced) and the image yet to be assumed (married) are different. On the other hand, their

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[25] "Ailenizle mi yaşıyorsunuz, evet kızım var (Gülüyor) Kızım da bi aile çünkü. Hayır değil evet de değil. Evet kızımla yaşıyorum, onun üstüne eşin mi var daha niye zorluyorsun."

approach to passing and even to the necessity of passing are different, and this very difference is why I prefer to analyze these approaches separately.

Garfinkel (1967: 118) uses the term passing for "the work of achieving and making secure their rights to live in the elected sex status while providing for the possibility of detection and ruin carried out within the socially structured conditions" in his chapter about an "intersexed" person. Unlike Rohy's, his framing of passing allows room for Ahmed's discussion on passing, in that, it accounts for passing within socially structure conditions to secure one's rights under passing's potential for failure. Therefore, passing is not a mere transgression of socially formed categories but also a political struggle which yet again reproduces these categories. In the context of this research, however, passing by itself is a mere repetition of this literature on passing, which is why I re-emphasize the intentionality in passing since it intentionality is the gist of the dialog between the different approaches of passing, being oneself, and the stories of safety.

Anthony Appiah highlights in *But Would That Still Be Me: Notes on Race, Gender, Ethnicity as Sources of Identity*, that if one fails to pass, she will most probably be seen as inauthentic since she does not acknowledge something she has to acknowledge about herself. But if she successfully passes, she is not only considered inauthentic but also dishonest (Appiah, 1990: 498). The imposition of inauthenticity and dishonesty on those who pass is the most prominent tension between the narratives of 'being oneself' and the narratives of passing or married. Yet again, for a passing person to be seen as dishonest by other non-passing people, one should put an effort in passing for married, precisely to gain the privileges of being married. Considering some of the views included so far, a divorced woman who intentionally passes by wearing her wedding ring can be easily fall into the category of *şerefsiz* (dishonorable) in the eyes of another participant who is even against the hesitations on having a man in the house under the gaze of her neighbors. However, when the stories of safety are introduced to this picture, the one who passes as married is not only inauthentic or dishonest but also paranoid, insecure and ill-intentioned.

2.3.2. Being Oneself

Criticizing the prevalent expectations from lone mothers to remain single (not precisely in legal terms) until their children grow up, a divorced mother (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) asks "Can you experience something again after taking a 25 years of break?"[26] Yet, regardless of her desire to maintain her love life as a divorced mother, any accompaniment of a man is exposed, surveiled, and oversexualized:

> Is it a crime to have a child? Is it a crime to be a widow? The society calls you a 'whore.' [But they] will say that anyway, even if you don't do anything to deserve it. How would the next door know that [the man who visits me] is my cousin? Is it written 'cousin' on his forehead? [Some women] don't take men in their houses. But your cousin comes; he is male… I talk to other divorced people, [they say] 'oh, I'm afraid to have men in the house, what would the neighbor say?' *Ulan, şerefsiz* (dishonorable)! Doesn't your uncle drop by your house alone? Is it written [uncle] on his forehead? No, you tell them that he's your uncle. So it's something inherent. People are afraid of themselves. Those widows are afraid to find themselves in that situation. They feel like that because they don't know their capacity. It's not the society that makes them feel like that.[27]

Her quote conceptualizes being oneself as following the usual course of her life and relationships in spite of the surveillance. However, a widow's attempt to change her routine in accordance with the societal expectations from a widowed mother, in other words, acting with the fear of stigma signifies an inherent inability to fulfill one's capacity. Therefore, such narratives of being oneself always followed an idea of self-image, one's own opinion of herself, and the insistence on preserving this image when faced with oversexualization.

Similar to the use of '*şerefsiz*' in the quote which renders 'not being oneself' as being 'dishonorable' and 'undignified,' another participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years) claimed that it would be shame[28] if she behaved like someone that she is not. Therefore, she prefers to be herself even though her first encounters with oversexualization led to fear since her marriage once provided her a safe space of work,

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[26] 25 yıl ara verdiğin bi şeyi tekrar yaşayabilir misin?

[27] "Çocuğunun olması bi suç mu? Dul olmak suç mu? Toplum öyle demiş orospu demişler sen yapmasan da dicek adam diyo ki bunu. Ya benim buraya kuzenim gelsin yan komşu bilcek mi? Kuzen mi yazıyo anlının ortasında? Eve erkek almıyorlar, kuzenin geliyor eve erkek. Boşanmış insanla konuşuyorum, 'ay eve erkek girmesinden korkuyorum yan komşu ne der', ulan şetefsiz amcan dayın gelmiyor mu tek başına evine. Yazıyo mu lan alnında, kuzen diyosun. İnsanın içinde o içinde. İnsan kendisinden korkuyo. O dul kadınlar o duruma gelmekten korkuyo. Seviyelerini bilmedikleri için öyle hissediyolar. Toplum öyle hissettirmiyo."

[28] "Kendime karşı ayıp gelir"

family, and social circle. Since she considers herself as a social and unconventional person, she tries to preserve her self-image through 'an invisible glass around her, just like a thin wall based on how she is sympathetic and respected.' She does not know how she builds and maintains this wall, whether by how she dresses, how she works, or anything else. She passes through that wall, shows her intimacy and comes back inside the wall.[29] Another metaphor she used was to take her friends' harassments, melt them in a 'friendly pool' and reflect back very well.[30] In other words, 'being oneself' is not a state of inaction or indifference upon encountering oversexualization but rather it is basing one's struggle on her self-image. So, there is a difference between how the aforesaid 'bell glass' in the previous section and the 'glass wall' in this last instance function in divorced women's narratives. 'Being oneself' is reclaiming one's adjectives —not 'whore' but 'honest,' not 'distant' but 'friendly'— so that the very claim of friendliness might function as a divorced woman's struggle against harassments and disturbing insinuations. Indeed, even being distant, aggressive,[31] and less friendly[32] towards other people can be a part of preserving one's ideas about who she is, simply because these are conceptualized as opposite to being sorrowful and weak.[33] Besides the difference in their function, a glass wall and a glass bell —in other words, being oneself and passing-for-married— are similar in terms of intentionality. Whether they adapt to a different image or try to maintain their self-image, the glass that they built similarly requires the acknowledgement of the difference between being inside and outside the glass, and the intentional effort to secure that glass.

While being oneself opens up a space in which participants have relatively more control over their intimate relationships and be less concerned about the gossips and harassments, surely, the obstacles of oversexualization does not only include negotiating between stigma and self-image for the sake of a divorced mother's own intrinsic satisfaction. Even if a divorced mother maintains her friendly and romantic relationships confidently, the stigma does not only harms her but also those around her.

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[29] "Gerçekten görünmeyen bi cam vardı etrafımda, bunu nasıl yaptığımı çok bilmiyorum ama, ee işimle gücümle kıyafetimle bilmemne (...) ama bi sempatik ve saygı kazanmakla ördüğüm bi incecik duvar vardı ona güvenerek ben aşıp o duvarın dışına çıkıp samimiyeti gösterip sonra duvarın içine dönebiliyodum."

[30] "Çok güzel yansıttım ben onları yani çok arkadaşça bir havuza alıp orda eritip"

[31] One of the participants was constantly talking to me as if I was a camera through which she reached to other women, she thus kept giving advices to those women who are divorced or mothers.

[32] The words used in Turkish: mesafeli, izole

[33] "kendimi kahretmiyorum"

Now, if I go there and have a cup of coffee with my close friend who is like a brother to me, my customers over there will question, 'is there something going on between these two?' – but this wasn't a problem when I was married. It doesn't matter for me, but it matters for my friend. It's a pity that it matters for him, isn't it?[34]

As her friend's situation is just a nuisance, her two children's happiness becomes a greater issue. Another participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years) who did not have a boyfriend by the time, told how her child was questioned by her co-workers to find out whether she was seeing anyone. She says "Let's say you want to have a relationship. Even if your child is ok with it, you're still defensive against other people."[35]

In her critique of passing as 'a logic of the subject,' Sara Ahmed converses with the psychoanalytic literature on identity formation. Ahmed points out the already assumed identity's importance in the politics of passing and problematizes Carole Ann Tyler's shift from her conceptualization of passing as 'a politically viable response to oppression' to the argument that 'all subjects therefore are passing through the signifier which represents them for another.' Every identity involves a form of passing since every identity belongs to the Other. However, Ahmed says, such theorization of passing does not allow us to account for the structural social antagonisms that reside in the politics of passing (2000: 126-127). Following Ahmed's argument, a theoretical approach which claims that even the narratives of being oneself involves passing, does not help us explore the political dialog between the narratives of passing and the narratives of being oneself. Yet, my theoretical framework differs from Ahmed's in that she bases her argument on passing for white or black identities which are *structurally* constructed as different if not contrary. Whereas, in the narratives of being oneself and passing for married, the other-identity of married (which is the image yet to be assumed) is not being divorced (the image already assumed). Being oneself corresponds not to a structural identity but rather to a *personal* identity, in participants' words, to something "inward" such as being friendly, intimate, honest, aggressive, and dignified. Claiming that every identity includes a form of passing, is politically insufficient to understand the tension between passing and being oneself, both of which are equally

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[34] "Şimdi gitsem o zaman çok yakın arkadaşım olan M. Abi'yle yine kahve içsem bu sefer ordaki müşterim dicek ki – evliyken sorun yoktu ama, ulan bunların arasında bi şey mi var diyebiliyor insan evladı. Benim için önemli değil de M. Abi için önemli. Yazık değil mi şimdi M. Abi'ye?"

[35] "Diyelim ki başka bi ilişki yaşamak istiyosunuz bunu çocuğunuzun kabul etmesi dışında en önemli olmasına rağmen çevreye karşı da daha savunmacı bi pozisyona geçiyosunuz"

political responses to oversexualization yet in conflict as one renders the other as inauthentic and dishonest.

As passing for married is considered to be inauthentic, psychoanalytical literature by itself is not comprehensive in understanding the conflicts between these narrative patterns. Being oneself corresponds to a wider literature of authenticity and selfhood which also includes psychoanalytic approach to identity to some extent, and the politics of passing in this research cannot be understood merely through the question of who is passing for what. The politics of passing, here, rest more on the intentionality in passing and it is highly articulated with the politics of selfhood.

In *The Feminist Perspectives on the Self,* Cynthia Willett, Ellie Anderson and Diana Meyers outline a brief history of feminist approaches to the self. Feminists have long been criticizing the modern philosophical construct of the rational self (particularly by dwelling on the Kantian ethical subject and homo economicus), reclaiming the women's agency and feminist identities, and furthermore, reconceptualizing the relational self. While harboring divergent views on the feminist subject and the idea of an authentic self, the feminist literature opposes the modern philosophical rational subject which assumes a self that is immune to social influences, oppression (as well as internalized oppression), emotions, etc. Several feminists, like Meyers, Cudd, and Friedman, account for a more contextual and layered autonomy rather than binding it with hard-line descriptions. Such feminist framework acknowledges that women's sense of self and agency is not isolated from their oppression, and it also reckons in self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction skills (as cited in Willett *et al.,* 2015). As modern philosophical construct of the self is denounced to be androcentric, sexist, masculinist, elitist, heterosexist, transphobic, racist, ethnocentric, ableist, classist, speciesist, feminists have tried to reconceptualize the relational self in various frameworks from classical psychoanalysis, object relations theory, and post-structuralism to biological, biosocial, and intersectional theories (Willet et al., 2015). Overall, all these feminist perspectives claim that the very conceptualization of the self is political. Just as the theorization of passing as intrinsic to every identity formation is inadequate in understanding the politics of passing for Ahmed, I suggest that the dialog between these narratives moves beyond the theoretical debates on the possibility of an authentic self. They refer to a politics of selfhood in their utilization of the idea of the self rather than contributing to the theorization of the self. As all three patterns are

constructed upon an idea of personal identity, the ways in which the participants instrumentalized their personal identities within their narratives reveal the ways in which they try to cope with their structural oppression as well as reproducing each other's structural oppression. Hence the functions of personal identity in narratives influence the structural identity of divorced motherhood.

2.3.2. The Stories of Safety

Besides the narratives of oversexualization, some divorced mothers themselves disavowed the experience or even the existence of such oversexualization through what I call 'stories of safety.' These stories construct a narrative on 'safe' spaces of exemption in various ways so that, some participants acknowledged oversexualization while also claiming that they did not experienced it first hand, whereas some other exempted themselves from being subjected to, and even deny others' experiences of, oversexualization. I call these narratives the stories of 'safety' instead of, for example, 'denial;' because, even though they partially or completely deny the existence of oversexualization, entitling them as denial has a connotation of refutation as if these participants may be diverting the story of how they experienced divorced motherhood. My primary aim in this chapter is not to question the reliability of the interviews, but rather to question how the consruction of conflicting narratives on divorced motherhood interact with each other.

Since the patterns of 'being oneself,' passing for married, and the stories of safety are not mutually exclusive, some of the safety narratives depend on a divorced woman's dedication to be herself and encounter the oversexualization. Therefore, a woman's ability to prevent gossips and sexual harassment constructs a story of safety while also acknowledging oversexualization and reinforcing her self-image. "I held my head up, didn't allow anyone to hit on me and sadden my children"[36] says a divorced mother (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), who is very much aware of oversexualization. Despite her own experience of oversexualization she constructs a story of safety yet again within her narrative:

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[36] "Başım dik durdum, kimsenin bana yan bakıp çoluğuma çocuğuma laf söyleteceği ortama gelmedim."

I didn't have any experience; anything besides that one (…) they can't dare to hit on me. If they even leer on me, they know I would sell nothing to them. I would never go there again. I would shit in their mouths, they wouldn't believe![37]

However, even the acknowledgement of oversexualization may undermine the experiences of oversexualization and the narratives of being oneself. One participant (late fifties, one, less than 20 years) who was not comfortable with me having her voice recorded said "No such thing happened. It also depends on the woman. I wasn't disturbed. No one could dare, I wouldn't let anyone talk. I don't have encouraging manners."[38] Since her struggle as a divorced mother is based on not having encouraging manners, she implies that the experiences of oversexualization take place due to a woman's encouraging manners. Thus the constant and systematic misinterpretations of a divorced woman's laugh, clothing, or friendship are no longer a form of everyday violence in her narrative. In other words, 'being oneself' is no longer a daily struggle against oversexualization. Even though they carry the risk of reinforcing the prevalent violent discourses on sexual harassment which further victimizes the victim, the stories of safety, first of all, promotes the possibility of a life without oversexualization.

In a few fortunate cases, the social environment around a divorced mother provides her a safe space which allows her to 'be herself.' A participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) who built close relations with her neighbors when she moved to a new house after divorce, constructs a story of safety by assuming that people around her know her true intentions; "What will I do to him? Why would I be with your man? As if there's no other man left..."[39] Another participant (late fifties, one, more than 20 years) draws her story of relative safety by referencing to worse experiences, in that, even though she had an experience of disturbing attempts of flirtation, what she encountered nothing compared to what 'those some other unlucky divorced women' are going through.[40]

The last two stories of safety, which I would like to mention in particular, diverge from the rest of the narratives including passing, being oneself, and the rest of the stories of safety, by claiming that prevalent disturbances of divorced womanhood

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[37] "Bana asılmaya cesaretleri yok, biliyolar ki bana herhangi bir şekilde yan gözle bile baksalar mal satmam onlara, girmem o dükkana, ağızlarına sıçarım inanamazlar!"

[38] "Yok olmadı. Biraz da kadına bağlı, rahatsız olmadım. Kimse cesaret edemezdi, kimseyi konuşturtmam, cesaret verici tavrım yok." The participant did not want me to use an audio recorder. The quote is based on my notes.

[39] "İnsanlar niyetimi biliyorlar. napcam abi ben adama yani, napiim senin adamını, hiç mi adam yok?"

[40] "Aman aman bazı şanssız kadınların başına gelenleri yaşamadım çok şükür"

depend on how one perceives things around her. One of these women, (mid-forties, one, approximately 5 years), thinks that such drastic changes in a woman's life do not happen because of her divorce. In this respect, those sexual harassments and stigmatizations that we see on TV or on the newspaper are rumors, because no other divorced friends of her have such stories.[41] If she was to consider every attempt coming from men to be harassment, she would be completely insecure and afraid. Therefore, there is no difference between having ring and no-ring if a divorced woman knows how to say 'no' in cases of unwanted flirtatious attempts.[42] The other participant (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) agrees with the former by adding that one sees what one has in herself. If one is not a pessimistic person, or if one is not prejudiced against divorce herself, then one would not see the things around her as a form of oppression caused by her divorce. Just as she herself is in peace with being divorced, it is probable that she might not realize any disturbing changes in the behaviors or perceptions of people in her social environment. Because when she thinks in a pessimistic way, she would see people as molesters even if their intentions are not bad. Therefore she does not notice, she does not sense anything.[43]

Intentionality in passing or not passing is crucial to the politics of passing and the self, precisely in these last two narratives. One of these participants in fact unintentionally passes for married because most of the people she works with are unaware of her divorce but all are aware of her motherhood. The unintentionality in her passing allows her to build her narrative around a non-oversexualized divorced womanhood. Although these narratives also harbor an effort to maintain their self-images, such effort is not for securing a safe position in relation to oversexualization by acknowledging the dangers and benefits of the married and divorced identities, or self-images. Rather, their effort to maintain their self-images is narrated as a rational choice which is unaffected by a set of oppression particular to divorced mothers. Therefore, the previous narratives may be analyzed as 'the stories of the construction of safety,' in that,

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[41] "Yani onlar televizyonda gazetede duyduğumuz şeyler rivayetler yani bana göre benim çevremde boşanan arkadaşlarım var hiçbirinin böyle şey yaşadığını duymadım."

[42] "Eğer öyle değerlendirirsen sana her türlü yaklaşımı yaftalarsın (...) bi kere son derece güvensiz yaşaman lazım hep böyle ürkerek ayy perdeleri indirerek falan, sen kendini bildikten sonra ne zaman neye dur diceğini bildikten sonra kimse bi adım ileri gidemez."

[43] "Ben mi dikkat etmiyorum öyle şeylere ama hiç öyle bir şey farketmedim, hissetmedim yani. Belki ben bunu negatif bişey olarak görmediğim için de dışardan olsa bile onu görmemiş olabilirim. Ama sende olmayanı göremezsin diye bi şey var ya, benim hiçbi zaman boşanmış bir insana karşı önyargım negatif bir düşüncem yoktur. Dolayısıyla benim etrafımda varsa da onu görmemiş olabilirim. Ben çok barışık olduğum için bu fikirle bu konuyla. Çünki seni rahatsız eden bişey varsa onu dışarda görüyosun bazen, karşı taraf bişey yapmadığı halde sen görüyosun. Sende var çünkü sen öyle düşündüğün için, Ben hiçbi zaman öyle bi şey düşünmedim, öyle bişey yaşamadım da yani."

they are about how divorced mothers or their social environment create a safe space against oversexualization. The last ones above, however, can be viewed as 'the construction of the stories of safety' in which no oppression peculiar to divorced mothers exists. These two participants disassociate oversexualization from external structures and discourses completely by conceptualizing it as wholly intrinsic. As the experience of everyday violence becomes the result of one's world-view, any form of struggle —passing as married or being oneself— against such violence is merely an individual paranoia, insecurity, or ill-intention.

Such advocacy of the non-existence of oversexualization may include different forms of 'politically viable response' to the obstacles of divorced motherhood. However, the construction of the stories of safety within a framework of oversexualization, makes a difference to the politics of passing and the self by promoting a rational self which is immune to a structural oppression against divorced women and a particular set of conflicting images attributed to divorced mothers. In their attempts to portray a non-oversexualized self, these stories of safety instrumentalized the ambiguity of oversexualization. They reinforce the intrinsic "malice" and "depravity" of the ones acting and speaking against the intangible oversexualizing harassments. Moreover, the narratives of being oneself secure the relations of power by reclaiming the authenticity of divorced identity, and thus rendering the inauthentic images of passing such as dishonorable (*şerefsiz*). For several participants who promote being oneself despite being oversexualized define any option of not being who they are and thus 'pretending' as some form of lying, seeking strategies and tactics. By zealously defending an alternative notion of surviving, these narratives create a brutal irony with the scholarly approach to single motherhood in terms of survival strategies (Edin & Lein, 1997) to passing as a form of survival strategy.[44] I acknowledge that this refusal of the terms strategy and tactic are oppressing as well. Because the nouns strategy and tactic refer to dishonesty and thus undermine the political viability of passing as discussed by Ahmed and Tyler. Nevertheless, I also argue that we should not oversee any subjugated and contestatory group's right to entitle their own struggle. Overall, the whole body of narratives reinvigorate the politics of passing and the self within the context of oversexualization. Yet, while the participants try to empower themselves in

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[44] I delivered my presentation "Passing (or Not Passing) for Married: Divorced Mothers' Narratives in Turkey" which was based on this chapter at the conference *Disrupting Visibility: The Politics of Passing* at Goldsmiths, University of London. Ironically, my presentation was arranged to be a part of the panel "Passing as a Survival Strategy."

their singular and distinctive ways, their narratives also have the potential of disempowering each other.

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to highlight what I call oversexualization, a very peculiar form of oppression that divorced women encounter in Turkey. In the face of marginalization, divorced mothers whom I had interviews with narrated various ways in which they struggle against oversexualization. These narratives formed three predominant patterns which I explored separately under the titles of being oneself, passing-for-married, and stories of safety. While not mutually exclusive, three types of narratives also have the potential of undermining each other. Passing as married both secures the power relations by conforming one's image to a less marginalized identity, and also forms a narrative of struggle against oversexualization through one's intentionality in passing. The narratives of passing, however, are marginalized yet again by the narratives of being oneself which consider passing to be dishonest and undignified. The idea of being oneself promotes one's dedication to preserve her self-image in relation to oversexualizing discourses. Even if they may include patterns of being oneself and passing-for-married, the stories of safety construct safe spaces of exemption in which the participant is not or is relatively less exposed to oversexualization. I analyzed two stories of safety in particular which disavowed the existence of oversexualization completely. I argued that despite harboring passing an being oneself, these narratives included unintentional passing and portrayed the self which can be rational when it comes to the 'rumors' of oversexualization.

The question of whether the participants with stories of safety were truly honest or whether they left some of their encounters with oversexualization unmentioned was not my concern in this research. Rather, I am intrigued by the political and emotional tensions between these diversive patterns. There is a divergence of stories such that some of them draw a picture freed from any isolation or sexual harassment whereas some other divorced women base their empowerment, at least partially, on confronting harassments and discriminatory attitudes through their carefully negotiated maneuvers in regard to passing or not passing as married. A focus group could be an efficient method to explore the interaction of different narratives, yet I found it highly

problematic since my participant observations have revealed outbursts such as "Am I living in a different world?," "Am I making it up?," "Am I paranoid?" or "Am I lying?" not as a kind of questioning but rather as a cry of frustration. Therefore, the question of what to do with such conflicting narratives in feminist ethnography remains unanswered and calls for further research.

CHAPTER 3

AMBIVALENT INTERSECTIONS OF WOMANHOOD, EMPOWERMENT, AND HAPPINESS: NARRATIVES ON *GÜÇ*

> *"That room belongs to me. I turned it into*
> *a horrible place so no one could enter.*
> *I relieved my mind there. I didn't tidy up my room.*
> *Left all the used cups, used clothes around.*
> *Because the rest of the house was perfectly neat.*
> *At least I could be free in my room."[45]*

> *"That [morning] was the last straw. Then —a friend*
> *used to take me to work— she called, I said 'I'm not*
> *coming' Çiçek, because I didn't want to do anything*
> *for work. I didn't want to do anything for the sick*
> *people. I didn't want to do anything for [my daughter].*
> *I didn't want to do anything for myself! I didn't want*
> *to do anything at all! Oh, I cried so much!"[46]*

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined how oversexualization is experienced and defined by divorced mothers and how several participants of the research conceptualized their encounters with oversexualization as a form of struggle and how it is denied by some other participants. Their narrtives depicted their various ways of empowering themselves against oversexualization, while the conflicts between different narratives patterns also undermined and, in a way, disempowered each other. In this chapter, I will elaborate on empowerment through divorced women's conceptualizations of womanhood and how a narrative in itself can demonstrate the ambivalence of

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[45] One of the participants: "O oda bana ait. Girilemez hale soktum, orda deşarj oldum. Toplamadım, bıraktım çaylar, kıyafetler bıraktım attım. Çünkü diğer yerler muntazam, bari orda serbest olayım."
[46] One of the participants: "Son damlayı o koydu. Sonra bi arkadaşım alırdı beni işe, geldi aradı, 'gelmiyorum' dedim Çiçek, çünkü hani iş için bişeyler yapmak istemiyorum. Hastalara bişey yapmak istemiyorum. [Kızıma] bişey yapmak istemiyorum. Kendime de yapmak istemiyorum! Hiçbi şey yapmak istemiyorum! Ama nasıl ağlıyorum!"

empowerment. What does the masculinity of a woman and even 'being women with wienies' mean in the context of empowerment? A woman, with whom I am acquaintant, introduced me to a few divorced mothers by defining them as very *güçlü* and masculine women who she believes have wienies.[47] Therefore, she said, no men managed to hang in their lives. During the interviews, several participants themselves also uttered such gendered descriptions of empowerment. This chapter explores divorced mothers' narratives on 'womanhood', 'empowerment,' and 'happiness' which are shaped around the linguistically and culturally specific notion of *güç*. Like one of the participants (at her mid-thirties, a divorced mother of two, divorced for approximately 5 years), who noted that she does not refer to power/strength (*erk* in Turkish) when she says *güç,* I prefer to use the term in Turkish instead of its literal meanings in English. In this respect, I will analyze *güç* by following three narrative patterns: *güç* as 'doing', *güç* as gender-bending, and *güç* as the reformulation of empowerment. Through these three sections, I will question how divorced mothers perceive themselves as *güçlü* (strong/powerful), how they play with gender roles by challenging and/or reinforcing gender binaries, and how they reformulate the idea of empowerment by negotiating between these culturally constructed gender roles and *güç*. Ultimately, I aim to explore the dynamics of gender and empowerment by navigating between Sara Ahmed's notion of happiness in *The Promise of Happiness* and Judith Butler's insights on the possibility of denaturalizing gender in *Gender Trouble* and *Undoing Gender*. By re-conceptualizing *güç,* this chapter offers a new perspective in the feminist academic literature in Turkey, which has extensively elaborated the utilization of women's empowerment by the state, oppositional Islamic movement, and feminist movement in Turkey.

According to Yeşim Arat's article, 'Contestation and Collaboration: Women's Struggles for Empowerment in Turkey', 'Turkey's ranking in terms of the gender empowerment measure, based on "*economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making and power over economic resources*" is 76 out of the 80 countries that could be measured.' (2008: 416-417, *emphasis mine*). Alongside decision-making, political power, and economic power as the indicators of gender empowerment, women's empowerment has widely been studied in the international literature through the lens of freedom of choice (Swirsky and Angelone,

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[47] Pipisi olan kadınlar.

2015; Sinha *et al*., 2012; Hatton and Trautner, 2013, Kaler, 2004), sexual liberation (Wood, 2013; Siebler, 2014, Kaler, 2004), and domestic violence (Hague, 2005; Hague and Bridge, 2008), all of which point out the conflictual form and ambiguity of women's empowerment. Furthermore, the political and historical context of Turkey in particular has led the feminist literature in Turkey to focus on how women's empowerment and 'womanhood' itself has been instrumentalized by the 'Westernized' state and the Islamic opposition (Kandiyoti, 1987; Sirman, 1989; Parla, 2001; Ahıska and Yenal, 2006). The literature in Turkey thus explores the control mechanisms over sexuality and gender, the attempts of the feminist movement to reclaim women's bodies and identities, the role of various agencies on 'womanhood' and 'femininity', and the forms of violence stemming from the tension among these spheres. As motherhood becomes one of the main means of controlling female sexuality and womanhood, women have long been constructed as the mothers who carry the duty of bringing up good Turkish citizens. In this chapter, I employ the idea of women's empowerment as an ambiguous notion (Kaley, 2004) in the light of divorced mothers' narratives on *güç* and their performativity of both womanhood and manhood in their practices of mothering, homemaking, and working. While the feminist literature in Turkey mainly analyzes the institutions of family and marriage, and the 'culturally defined modes of control of female sexuality' (Kandiyoti, 1987), I highlight instead the personal and everyday experiences of divorced mothers in which *güç* is accompanied by a 'promise of happiness' (Ahmed, 2010). The promise of happiness for the divorced mothers is unfulfilled yet again since *güç* is culturally considered to be masculine, appropriate only within limits for women. Therefore, *güç* becomes disempowering as well as empowering for the divorced mothers.

3.2. *Güç* as Doing

During the interview with a participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) who described herself and women in general as *güçlü,* I asked what she meant by *güç,* to which she answered: '*güçlü* is the one who *does*.'[48] In the current context, doing may have a wide range of meanings. It may mean doing the domestic work, or any necessary work of the household (children, ex-husbands, boyfriends, grandparents), both inside

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[48] "Yapandır güçlü olan."

and outside the home. Doing may also refer to making the decisions on what has to be done or to an affective labor of keeping the household happy. For some participants, doing may be a sign of *güç* regardless of what is being done, *if* doing takes place without any help. Within such a large framework of different meanings, 'doing' gains a meaning that comes with a promise, —a promise of good life, a promise of happiness.

Sara Ahmed, in *The Promise of Happiness,* examines happiness through how it is spoken, lived, and practiced. For Ahmed, happiness is what it does. In other words, it is a form of world-making. She considers how happiness makes the world cohere around the right people, and she thus explores the everyday habits of happiness. Such habits involve ways of thinking about the world, and therefore shape how the world coheres (2010: 13-15). 'Good habits' involve an approach to the right objects in the right ways (34). 'Happy objects' —such as family or heterosexual relationship— are ones attributed as happiness-causes, the ones that promise the happiness, the good life. Even when the promise is not fulfilled, happy objects circulate as 'gap-fillers' so that 'we anticipate that the happy object will cause happiness' even in the absence of happiness. 'The promise of the object is always in this specific sense ahead of us; to follow happiness is often narrated as following a path (it is no accident that we speak of "the path of happiness"), such that if we follow the path we imagine we will reach its point' (32).

Similar to Ahmed's theoretical and historical approach to happiness, domestic work arose from the narratives of divorced mothers as promising happiness yet failing to fulfill the promise. Domestic work and care work was mostly mentioned by participants through motherhood practices, and five women referred to domestic work within a framework which I would define as rebellious. It is rebellious in the sense that the failure —more precisely the realization of the failure— engenders the possibilities of challenging the notions of womanhood based on certain gender roles and tasks in the form of 'habits.' One participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) said during our interview about her marriage and current divorced motherhood:

> I cooked for years, so what? I haven't seen any appreciation, and I didn't appreciate myself either… "Ooh, my home is so clean, I'm awesome," I didn't say that and I didn't hear it either, "ooh, she's a great housewife."

(…) But now I definitely, definitely don't want it, I mean, no one is dying of hunger. [49]

Housewifery as a happy object, and its domestic tasks as good habits, thus fail the promise. 'I aim to give a history to unhappiness', says Ahmed since '[t]he history of the word *unhappy* might teach us about the unhappiness of the history of happiness' (2010: 17). Indeed, one of the participants (early fifties, one, more than 10 years), who had been a housewife throughout her marriage, got divorced simply because she was not happy with her marriage and her daily life within marriage. Her family considered her to be depressed, which supposedly caused her divorce. Yet she says 'everyone was unhappy, but I was happy [after divorce.]' She starts working for a wage for the first time after divorce, and she interprets the lack of 'bravo' for her housework from anyone as the ungratefulness of housewifery.

> No one applauds you when your curtains are starched, no one says "ooh look, how pretty those curtains are." Having a shining chandelier is no success (…) Even if you prepared ten meals, three or four tables for *rakı*[50] in one week… it has no importance in such a life. I got divorced and never did those again; no one ever said bravo anyway. Housewifery is something ungrateful. Here [in business life], they appreciate you, success is flattering. I mean, something happens to you. Housewifery is difficult with no satisfaction. Just like Pavlov's dog, tick tick tick.[51]

Another participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), who pushes her time and bodily limits to the end to provide the best she can for the well-being of the household including either her ex-husband or boyfriends after divorce, emphasized similar things but also widened the contents of the aforesaid domestic work by including motherhood, fun, and sexual work.

> That's all I saw from my elders. (…) [Y]ou were supposed to be happy if you can do all these chores. If you can't, you're screwed already (laughs). That's what my family taught me. I swear, it's almost as if I was licking those windows while cleaning them, so that my mother would like them. You could have done your makeup by looking at them! Yes, I can do cleaning very well; I am organized; I can also cook very well. There are few [things] that I cannot do. But it didn't work out (laughs), but it was supposed to work out. I'm an amusing woman, a good mother. [A woman] should be

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[49] Biz yemek yaptık da noldu? Hiç takdir görmedik, kendim de takdirini yapmadım kendime 'ayy ben ne kadar pırıl pırıl evde oo harikayım' demedim kendime başkasından da görmedim açıkçası 'oo harika ev kadınıdır' (...) ama şimdi kesinlikle ve kesinlikle istemiyorum yani kimse açlıktan ölmüyo bi kere.

[50] An alcoholic beverage that is usually accompanied with a variety of side dishes.

[51] Kimse seni alkışlamıyo perden kolalı aa bak ne güzel demiyo, avizen şıkır şıkır bu başarı değil. (...) Sonuçta o hayatı yaşarken hiçbi önemi yok, on tane yemek yapmışsın haftada üç dört rakı sofrası... Boşandım bi daha yapmadım, kimse bravo demiyodu, o ev kadınlığı nankör bişey, burda birileri seni taktir ediyo, başarı pohpohluyo, bişey geliyo yani ev kadınlığı zor, hiç tatmin yok. Pavlov'un köpeği gibi kalk tık tık tık.

like this and that in bed, I have that too. But it didn't work again! So, these are not so true after all.[52]

She has been taught all the 'good habits' beginning at an early age to be able to reach the happiness that was promised by a heterosexual marriage, as if the identity of a woman stands on top of a sum of all these good habits, which is like a jenga® tower. If a crucial block is pulled, the identity falls down with the fallen promise. Being clean, dexterous, amusing, and sexy, all of which are actually based on *giving* the happiness instead of *being* happy, have been culturally constructed as 'the paths to happiness' for women. A certain notion, a certain identity of woman is created in return by these very habits, such that when the tower collapses one's identity as a woman is being confused, reinterpreted, re-appropriated, and intermingled with other identities —which I will elaborate on later.

While giving happiness fails to bring happiness, it provides *güç* because the happiness of the other is conditional. A participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), who said that a woman deserves to be happy through 'surprises' and 'flattery' to keep going, thus designates the promise of happiness as her need for and her right to happiness due to her 'doing.' Challenging her ex-husband and two children, she expresses her reason as 'if you're sad I can solve it, but if I'm sad you'll all be sad because I'm the one who makes you happy.'[53] This quote refers to her labor both before and after her divorce, and the labor mentioned here is not merely domestic work or care work but rather a labor that is both mechanical —as the tick-tick-tickness of housewifery— and also affective —in a way that does much more than solving the problems of the household. The labor here is not only to satisfy needs but to make happy, which is conditioned on the happiness of the laborer.

Ahmed criticizes the popular discourse that situates happiness as 'not so much what the housewife has but what she does' because supposedly 'her duty is to generate happiness' (2010: 53). As the woman is entrusted to generate the happiness of the others

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[52] Ben büyüklerden hep öyle gördüm, kadın çalışan didinen, adam içerde. Başka bişeyle uğraşan bi tip. (…) bunlar varsa süper mutlu bir kadın olcaktın, bunları yapamıyosan zaten sıçtın (laughs). Bizim aile böyle öğretti bana. Yemin ederim annem beğensin diye silerken o camları yalıyodum böle, makyaj yapardın o camlarda. Evet ben çok iyi temizlik yaparım, düzenli bi kadınım, çok iyi de yemek yaparım, elimden gelmeyen çok az, e olmadı abi (laughs). Hani olcaktı? Eğlenceli bi kadınım, iyi de bi anneyim. Hani var ya yatakta şöyle şöyle olcak. O da var. E yine olmadı, demek çok doğru değilmiş bu.

[53] Ben varsam çözerim. (…) siz üzüldüğünüz zaman ben çözeri ama ben üzüldüğüm zaman hepiniz üzülürsünüz çünkü ben sizi mutlu ediyorrum. Kadın aslında burda hakediyo mutlu olmayı, pohpohlanmayı, gereksiz yerde gereksiz süprizler yaşatılmayı hakediyo, çünkü ayakta tutan o oluyo.

and promised to be happy if she makes the others happy, the others' happiness becomes a shared object in such a way that the others' happiness comes first. The generator of the happiness goes along with 'x' for the sake of the others' happiness even if she is not necessarily happy with 'x' (56-57). Therefore, Ahmed analyzes 'the sociality' of the conditional happiness in the form of, 'I am happy if you are happy', which means 'I will be unhappy if you are.' When 'your' unhappiness threatens 'my' happiness, then 'you might thus feel obliged to conceal your unhappiness in order to protect my happiness,' which means 'you have a duty to be happy for me' (90-91). In other words, Ahmed demonstrates how conditional happiness works as a means of oppression.

I argue that happiness becomes a means of oppression not only when it becomes a woman's duty, but also when she acknowledges it as a duty, and performs it without owning the 'doing,' —without recognizing the potential of 'doing' as a source of *güç*. By saying 'if I'm sad, you'll all be sad,' doing is constructed as her empowering labor since happiness happens only when she 'does.' Therefore, when Ahmed's notion of conditional happiness is reformulated in the participant's narrative, the condition becomes a source for *güç*. She owns her affective labor in a way so that she does not threaten the family by going on a strike, yet she states the possible result in case she cannot generate happiness due to her own unhappiness. The intimacy behind the affective labor —as she *wants* all of them to be happy— thus demands at least a minimum level of her own happiness for her to be able to sustain happiness for the whole household. Especially in the case of mothering —as I will elaborate on the empowering potential of the intimacy— these moments of expressing the conditionality of happiness sometimes take the form of a warning, not to punish, but to demand her own share of peace and happiness.

Doing housework and the affective labor of making everyone happy evolves into such a form within the narratives that, the divorced mother who 'does' also becomes self-sufficient. In this context, *güç* is described as 'not asking for help, and not being helpless' by many participants. One participant (mid-forties, two, approximately 5 years), who seeks to look *güçlü* in the eyes of her children, defines *güç* as 'not trying to get under anyone's wings.'[54] Because, being *güçlü* is crucial not only for herself but also and most importantly, for her children to feel safe. Even though she does not explicitly state to whom these wings belong, another participant (mid-thirties, one, less

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[54] Güçlü olmak zorunda, çocuğa güçlü görünmek, yoksa başkasının kanatları altına girmeye çalışırsın

than 10 years), who divorced her husband soon after giving birth and raised her child with the help of her family, assigns a gender to the wings and *güç* becomes not being in need of a man in particular.[55] Self-sufficiency is thus 'doing' without needing a man's help, which is a merit according to another narrative. A participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), who went through several crises throughout her life, said that she has been *güçlü* before, during, and after her marriage. Being *güçlü* is being able to stand on one's own feet in life, and what made her *güçlü* was 'to get up by herself every time she fell down.'[56]

As I have shown in this section, 'doing' has a wide range of connotations from mechanical and affective domestic work to self-sufficiency. As seen in the narratives of *güç, güç* is embraced yet also criticized through its failed promise of happiness. This conflict, I suggest, challenges the idea of empowerment. The challenge to the idea of empowerment, first of all, has its roots in the gendered aspects of *güç*. One participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) argued that her definition of *güç* is based on 'a balance of who does what.'[57] In other words, if the woman decides on what the chores are and does more housework compared to the man, then woman is the *güçlü* one. While such a division of labor renders the woman as *güçlü*, it also points out a division of gender categories and the exploitation of her roles, identity, and labor as a woman.

3.3. *Güç* as Gender-Bending

The portrait of *güçlü* woman who 'does,' reveals the set of links between women's labor, women's happiness, and women's empowerment. Such links challenge the culturally constructed ideas of and the duties attributed to womanhood, so that the divorced mothers also re-interpreted womanhood along with the re-interpretation of their relationship with doing as women and mothers. As mentioned before, they own their 'doing' so that their narratives indicate a shift from submissively happy doings to freely unhappy doings. Once 'doing' becomes a source of empowerment, the duties that

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[55] Kendi kendine yeten, kendi işini halleden, güçlü kadın (…) Benim hiçbi erkeğe ihtiyacım yok, ben her işimi kendim hallederim yani

[56] Her ne olursa olsun, kendi ayaklarınızın üzerinde durabilecek güçte olmanız gerekiyor hayatınızda (…) düştüğümde yerden hep kendim kalkmak zorunda kaldım ben. Bu bir meziyet. Bu beni çok güçlü kıldı.

[57] Dengeler arasındaki bi güçten bahsediyorum. Yani dengeler ne tarafa verirse güçlü olan taraf o oluyo.

suppress woman under the happiness of the husband, pave the way to escape from the husband. One participant (late fifties, one, more than 20 years), who also had no work experience before her divorce, explained how she resisted by at least depending on the duties attributed to her gender.

> First of all, my self-confidence was below zero. (…) I decided to get divorced, but what would I do for a living? What I did until then was cleaning, cooking, and so on. But, if I was able to go through all the fuss this man was making, I could go to other houses for cleaning and still make a living. I would at least have some peace.[58]

While she is not after happiness but merely peace —which could be secured by her 'doing'— one other participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), who is actually not against remarrying, prefers unhappiness if it is caused only by her 'doing.'

> I want to live not as unhappy and married but as happy and lonely… I mean, if I'll be unhappy, it should be because of me, not some other man! I shouldn't be carrying some other man's weight on my back. If I'll be unhappy, I'll be unhappy by myself.[59]

The notion of womanhood might be questioned by the shattering expectations, dissatisfactions, and unfulfilled promises of gender roles, yet —despite my desire to do so— the framework I provide in this article is not one of a total dissolution of gender categories and the relations of power. Almost all of the participants contextualized womanhood in relation to *güç*, however, the reproduction of gender binaries and the features assigned to the gender binaries within the participants' conceptualizations of womanhood cannot be denied. Therefore, I aim to analyze the fluidity of the gender categories within narratives, the tension between the separation and the confusion of these dichotomously constructed genders, and lastly, the relations of power that are re-constructed within these narratives of empowerment. I argue that, despite reproducing gender binaries, these narratives also have the potential of questioning womanhood and manhood through this reproduction process.

> Gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized. Indeed, it may be that the very apparatus that seeks to install the norm also works to

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[58] Her şeyden ötesi öz güvenim sıfırın altında sıfırdı. Bi tek hatırladığım, tamam dedim ya boşanırım. Peki ne iş yapıcam, ben bunca zaman evde yaptığım temizlik, yemek, iş, güç. Bu adamın bu kadar tantanasını çekiyosam evlere temizliğe giderim yine kazanırım hayatımı. Kafam huzurlu olur en azından.

[59] Ama ben hayatımı mutsuz ve evli olarak değil, mutlu ve yalnız geçirmek… yani mutsuzsam kendimden olmalı abi, başka bi adamdan değil! Ben başka bi adamın yükünü sırtımda götürmemeliyim. Hani mutsuz olcaksam da kendi başıma olıyım mutsuz

undermine that very installation, that the installation is, as it were, definitionally incomplete. (Butler, 2004: 42)

Judith Butler, in *Undoing Gender*, argues that gender does not only mean the two axes of masculine and feminine, but also the various alterations which do not fit the binary, since they are equally a part of gender as the most normative instances. The very contingency of the production of the binary is the critical point that Butler attends to. Similarly, by examining the certain narratives of empowerment, which yet again reproduce the gender binaries by associating *güç* to masculinity, I highlight how these narratives also disturb the very foundations of the binary. The very attempt to place the adjectives on the 'right' side of the binary —she is *güçlü,* therefore she is a man— simultaneously renders the binaries as fluid and random.

> There's only motherhood for me. I'm a woman, all right, yet there's only motherhood [for me]. Because I'm both the woman and the man of the house. And, why do we even [distinguish] between man and woman? (...) As long as we distinguish them, a woman is an object. Sooo, let's define it... People can write two pages [to define] 'woman.' (...) But if you ask them to define 'mother' and 'father,' the outcome would be more or less the same.

The chores, decisions, in short, the doings of the divorced mother for her child(ren) and other members of the house make her both the man and the woman of the ouse. Yet, it should be acknowledged that her choice of motherhood over womanhood is also heavily affected by her experiences of oversexualization. Nevertheless, the way she defines herself as both man and woman through the capacity of doing as a divorced mother calls the gender binaries it reproduces back into question. Similar to the description of *güçlü* women as 'women with wienies,' the interlocutors linked being *güçlü* with 'being like a man.'[60] Being like a man can vary from having man-like characteristics to 'living like a man or working like a man.' One of the participants (early fifties, one, more than 10 years) described her 'manhood' as a manner that can be transmitted to other people in the form of a feeling.

> I live like a man. I work like a man. My manners are also manly. (…) For example, when we go out for lunch, —it doesn't matter at work but when I am with my friends— there are four, five men but *I* manage the table, the check is brought to *me*. There are three, four men and the check comes to a woman. Now there– it means you give out such a feeling. [61]

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[60] Erkek gibi özellikler

[61] Ben erkek gibi yaşıyorum erkek gibi çalışıyorum. Tarzım da öyle, gittiğim yerde şeyim filan, bunu hep söylüyorum. Mesela, bi yemeğe falan gidiyoruz, işteyken çok farketmiyo ama kendi arkadaşlarımla… Dört beş tane

Upon my question of how they ended up with this conclusion of their *güç* being related to 'being like a man' to three of the participants, they all stated that they heard of this perception from other people such as psychologists, friends, partners, and self-improvement workshops. One of them (late forties, one, approximately 20 years) said she always thought of herself as normal until she was warned by other people. In other words, let alone *güç's* association with manhood, she did not even think of herself as particularly *güçlü;* 'I thought it was natural. I thought everyone was like this.'[62] Soon after she is described as a *güçlü* woman by others, she is also immediately told, especially by her several sexual/romantic partners, that she is like a man. Another one (early fifties, one, more than 10 years), who had several relationships after divorce yet did not have such problems in these relationships, was told that she is more like a man, more like a male model for her daughter by a psychologist. She first laughs at but later on agrees with the psychologist because of her daughter's antagonistic reaction to a joke about her sexual life. She also links her manhood to her relationship with man by saying "I think I don't cause a feeling of owning in men. I stand too, umm, too *güçlü* and straight. That's how I look."[63] Accordingly, in her opinion, while women in her generation claim their rights to earn their own money, to be independent individuals, and to be able to stand on their own feet, they fall into indecision between wanting and not wanting to be under someone's arms.

Lastly, self-improvement emerges as another way through which one of the participants (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) 'realizes' that her *güç* was caused by her masculine energy being more dominant than her feminine energy. She argues that a personal development discipline 'improved' her current relationship with a man. The link between manhood and *güç* becomes something to be learnt within her narrative as she learns the 'natures' of feminine and masculine energies, and manages to allay her masculine energy by reinforcing her feminine energy. She acknowledges, on the other hand, the *güç* of many women who are 'really successful and accomplished in the world of men;' however, the dominance of their masculine energy is problematic according to her. Therefore, they are 'women like men' as she puts it; 'or let's not even say

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adam var orda masayı ben yönlendiriyorum, hesap bana geliyo. Ordaki garsonlar ne hissediyorlarsa… Üç dört erkek var orda hesap bi kadına gidiyo şimdi sen ordaki şeyi hi– demek etrafa bu duyguyu yayıyosun

[62] Bunu doğal zannediyodum, herkes böyle zannediyodum.

[63] Mesela erkekler üzerinden de sahiplenilme duygusu yaratmıyorum diye düşünüyorum. Çok fazla şey duruyorum, güçlü ve dik duruyorum. Görüntüm o diye düşünüyorum.

women.'[64] She does not only associate women's *güç* to manhood but also disassociates *güçlü* women from womanhood by dismissing any 'likeness.' *Güçlü* women encounter difficulties in their heterosexual relationships with men because 'there can't be two penises in one house.'[65]

In her earlier book *Gender Trouble*, Butler focuses on the complicated relationship between the 'imitation' and the 'original.' She interprets the drag as revealing the distinctness of the 'original' as a falsely naturalized unity and also its imitative and contingent structure. Therefore, drag actually does not assume an original that the parody imitates but rather shows the fluidity of identities. Parody suggests the openness of gender identities 'to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities.'

> Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself. (1999: 175-176)

According to the narratives of divorced mothers, being *güçlü* is not a parody of manhood, yet the idea of imitation is culturally attributed to the women's *güç*. I mentioned before that a participant described how she always thought her *güç* to be 'natural,' —in opposition to parody— but her *güç* is interpreted as a parody as *güçlü* women are defined to be 'like men.' The attribution of imitation assumes and reproduces binarily gendered features as well as undermines the so-called originality of the binary by rendering genders fluid. Moreover, as the *güçlü* woman becomes not even a woman but a man within a discourse of feminine/masculine energy, the very reproduction of gender identities exposes the obvious possibility of a woman's transition into manhood through her *güç*.

However, Butler notes that '[p]arody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony.' (1999: 176-177) In this respect, women's *güç* is

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[64] Erkek gibi kadınlar yani, kadınlar demiyim hatta.
[65] Çünkü bi evde iki penis olmaz.

both disruptive as mentioned so far, and also domesticated and recirculated as an instrument of gender hegemony.

Women's *güç* is considered to be problematic within aforesaid self-improvement discourses, because it disturbs the balance of heterosexual relationship. This discourse is challenged by other participants through how they conceptualize womanhood and *güç*, or how they frame their narratives even when they re-produce the gender binaries. The heterosexual relationship is imagined within several narratives in a way that, while the woman's *güç* creates many problems in her relationships with men, men are not looking for women who are needy. On the contrary, they are looking for financially and emotionally *güçlü* women to depend on as a form of exploitation. A participant (late forties, one, approximately 20 years) who was exploited in terms of money and labor during her marriage and the relationships she had after the divorce, thus claims that the very basis of heterosexual relationship is this imbalance caused by men only wanting to be with her to feed on her.[66] In other words, her doing and her *güç* becomes the cause of her exploitation. Therefore, the promising idea of empowerment is challenged because the very narratives of empowerment also include how the financial and emotional empowerment of divorced mothers is instrumentalized to marginalize, exploit, and *dis*empower them in return.

3.4. *Güç* as the Reformulation of Empowerment

Eight participants out of thirteen mentioned being a *güçlü* woman, and even though the other five did not utter the word *güç,* they also constructed similar narratives of empowerment around the notion of womanhood and motherhood. The embracement of *güç* has taken various forms from self-confidence, and capability, to joy, and bravery. In addition to *güç* being based on doing, one participant (early fifties, one, more than 10 years) additionally defined *güç* as an enjoyable feeling.

> It is something different, *güç*. A totally different feeling, and very much enjoyable too… I mean, you own your life; your life belongs to you again. (…) The joy of buying a cup for one lira… (…) Because I earned it, this is

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[66] Güçlü olan kadını isteyen erkekler, sömürenler.

mine, I bought this, I bought that too. Not my husband, not my mother or father. (…) No one can interfere; I won't let anyone interfere.[67]

While the quoted participant does not care whether she left everything to her ex-husband for the joy of having the right to own a cheap tea cup, another one (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) associates *güç* with courage. According to her, rather than being *güçlü* in the eyes of her daughter after the divorce, they are both *güçlü* together: 'We have that *güç*, courage. I was the little girl of the house, now I can turn into a tiger for the smallest thing. People get surprised when they see how *güçlü* I can be when touched on my sore spot.'[68]

Even though some participants stated to get *güçlü* after the divorce while some participants stated that they have always been *güçlü*, in both instances, *güç* becomes particularly prominent for women in the context of divorce. According to Ahmed, the recognition of a gap between an object's promise of happiness and how one is affected by the object does not always lead to a correction of the gap, thus one becomes alienated from the promise (2010: 42, 49). After realizing that marriage did not provide the happiness it promised, all of the participants decided to move away from the happy object by choosing unhappiness over the gendered hypocrisy of the happiness. The attraction of unhappiness over happiness, I argue, very much depends on the idea of *güç*. To some extent, *güç* replaces the happy object and promises something else; the promise might be confidence, peacefulness, or empowerment. While *güç* gains more importance, it also becomes more open to being questioned, thus, *güç* too becomes open to alienation. Ahmed defined her term 'affect alien' as 'those who are alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world' (2010: 164), in other words, 'you cannot adjust to the world. The revolutionary is an affect alien in this specific sense. You do not flow; you are stressed; you experience the world as a form of resistance in coming to resist a world.' (2010: 169)

While embraced for its promise of empowerment, the *güç* of women concurrently becomes a sphere of struggle since it challenges the assumed gender boundaries. *Güçlü* women become 'affect aliens' as *güç* is considered to be masculine, approprieate only

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[67] O ayrı bi şey, güç. Ayrı bambaşka bi duygu, çok da keyifli yani hayatına sahip çıkıyosun, hayat yeniden senin oluyo yani. (…) Paşabahçe'den bi liralık bardak koymanın keyfi (…) çünkü kendim kazanmışım, şu benim, bunu ben aldım, bunu da ben aldım. Bunu [kocan] almamış, annen baban almamış. (…) kimse ne karışır, kimseyi karıştırtmam.
[68] O güç, cesaret var bizde. Evin küçük kızıydım şimdi Kaplan kesilebilirim en ufak şeyde. (…) damarıma basılıncane kadar güçlü olduğuma insan şaşırıyor.

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within limits for women. According to the experiences of one participant (late forties, one, approximately 20 years), she also suffered due to her *güç,* because *güç* is to stand against the value judgments in a way that becomes unintelligible for the other: 'you're not beautiful, and you're not rich… what are you counting on?'[69] As her *güç* leads people to be no longer willing to help her on anything, the lack of help also works as a form of stigmatization and isolation through the idea of 'let her do it herself if she is *güçlü.*' Consequently, she defines the struggles she had faced as 'being punched many times' primarily because she was *güçlü.* Ahmed's argument on the ones who choose unhappiness follows that 'unhappiness is pushed to the margins, which means certain bodies are pushed to the margins, in order that the unhappiness that is assumed to reside within these bodies does not threaten the happiness that has been given.' (2010: 98) However, in the case of divorced mothers participating in this research, the narratives always focus on how the unhappiness is kept under surveillance whereas *güç* is the one that is cast away. Considering yet again the participant who was thought to be depressed, which supposedly caused her to divorce, she narrated how she was always followed by her family and her ex-husband. Her actions as a mother were unintelligible to the others who consistently spied on her to make sense of her choice of so-called 'unhappiness.' On the other hand, a woman being *güçlü* without depending on either beauty or wealth is not only unintelligible but also something unbearable, intolerable, unacceptable for the other.[70] In other words, when a woman claims to be her own cause of unhappiness, she is even more marginalized than someone who only causes the unhappiness of others.

Since being *güçlü* and having the capability of doing carry the burdens of isolation along with physical and emotional exhaustion, the participant who works on her feminine energy argues that *güç* might as well be eliminated. Even though she defines herself as *güçlü* in the sense of not needing the help of a man, improving her feminine energy eliminates the obligation to be *güçlü,* which consequently creates the possibility of taking it easy, learning to ask for, and receiving instead of doing. However, the benefit of learning how not to be *güçlü* is given as having a better relationship with men:

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[69] Yani o kadar ahım şahım güzel değilsin, zengin değilsin, yani neyine güveniyosun?
[70] Hazmedemiyorlar.

Masculine energy is always to succeed, to do, to complete the task. *Güç* is also something that the masculine energy represents. But then, you clash with the men in your life because they like to be with women who need them. Only then they feel *güçlü* and sufficient. But if the woman doesn't need him, then he considers himself insufficient and dysfunctional. This makes the relationship harder to keep going. There should be a balance between giving and taking. I mean, the balance is achieved when the woman gives her compassionate and emotional side prominence and the man gives his masculine, doing, succeeding side prominence.[71]

According to her, *güç* is again defined as the ability to do anything without any help; however, she argues that women confuse *güç* with merit whereas she claims the opposite. Based on the teaching she follows, 'doing' is still a part of *güç*, yet 'being' is more important for the 'woman' as the one who should 'be' rather than 'do' as her feminine energy requires. She thus 'learns how to be herself' by also learning that she does not have to be *güçlü*, she does not have to do or succeed but just to be. Therefore, 'being oneself' is contradictory to being *güçlü* whereas in many other narratives being *güçlü* was to 'be oneself' so that some women did not try to change their statuses of being *güçlü* after facing various problem.[72] If we consider the other narratives as forms of empowerment, such an empowerment is conceptualized as a delusion in her narrative based on the teaching because 'you *see* yourself as such.'[73] In other words, *güçlü* women are not actually empowered but they only 'see' themselves as *güçlü* as they also 'see' *güç* as 'some sort of merit.'[74]

Another participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) does not want to be *güçlü* either and agrees with most of the narratives on *güç*, womanhood, and manhood. She argues that men need *güçlü* women and contradictorily, men need to be needed as well. Similarly, being *güçlü* is being herself and being *güçlü* is doing without the help of a man; yet she does not want to be *güçlü* but to be a 'woman' more. The most prominent difference between the two narratives on not being *güçlü*, on the other hand, is that the 'balance' between man and woman is not to be returned but to be forgotten for a new perspective on the balances of *güç* between men and women. Including her

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[71] Eril enerjisi başarmak yapmak iş bitirmek her zaman için. Güç de eril enerjisinin temsil ettiği bir şey. Öyle olduğu zaman da hayatındaki erkek ile her zaman çatışıyosun çünki, erkekler genelde onlara ihtiyacı olan kadınlarla olmayı seviyolar. Ancak o zaman güçlü ve yeterli hissediyolar. Ama hayatındaki kadının ona ihtiyacı yoksa o zaman kendini yetersiz ve işlevsiz görüyor. Bu ilişkiyi götüremeyen zorlaştıran bişey. Orda bir al-ver dengesinin oluyo olması lazım. Yani kadının daha şefkat tarafının duygusal tarafını ön plana çıkartıyo olması adamın da daha eril daha yapan başaran tarafını ön plana çıkarıyo olması o dengeyi getiren bişey.
[72] As I previously mentioned the other participant for whom being *güçlü* has been her natural self.
[73] Böyle görüyorsun kendini
[74] Böyle olmayı da marifet sayıyosun.

long relationships after divorce, the imbalance between her tasks as a divorced working mother and the daily tasks accomplished by the men in her life reinforces her *güç* and her alienation from her *güç*. Since she provided a very comprehensive and strongly interwoven narrative on *güç,* I will quote her at full length:

> I prefer not to be a *güçlü* woman from now on anyways. I mean, I'll sit back while the man deals with the chores. (…) I can find a solution to difficult situations and this makes me *güçlü*. That's why I get the *güç* again without realizing it, even if it's a man before me. I can see things that he can't see. (…) I have *güç* but actually I don't want to be *güçlü* so much. I mean, my children make me *güçlü,* yes but I need to stop and take a breath. (…) I wish I could just stop and let go, I mean, dealing with feminine stuff, without having to be both woman and man. (…) It's not good to be that much *güçlü*. You forget that you're a woman after a while. (…)
>
> Woman became *güçlü,* but man still thinks that he has the *güç*. But there's no such balance actually. He doesn't see woman's *güç*. And the woman is constantly doing some things to prove herself. She is more ambitious because she works harder since she barely gets the right to work. But it was already given to the man. (…) She puts more effort (…) and also she has to protect her honor. (…) Woman protects herself, protects her child, protects her honor, dignity. Cooks her meal at home, then she turns into rubbish. What does the man do? I'll count you three things, it wouldn't be four. That's why the woman becomes man-like. In time… Men hang about like losers. (…) He admits her *güç* on the other hand, he keeps his hands off now. If you're a little *güçlü*, a little capable, he says "she is doing it herself anyhow" (…) Man pulls himself back saying she is doing everything better than I do. I say the imbalance starts here. Right? (…) He said to me once "you never said that you can't open the jar or the wine bottle." I said "so what?" Now, before we go there, let's discuss the things you didn't say to me. I mean, you're saying that I couldn't manage to be a woman. Did you manage to be a man yourself? Did you let me be a woman in the first place to expect me to be one now? (…) Now let's be a woman. I don't wear my hair down, for example, so as not to be recognized as woman; it's always tied back. A slight makeup… I wear trousers instead of skirt. Depending on the workplace, I don't wear tight blouses. You tell me to disguise my womanhood when I'm at work. You don't say —but it's a common feeling that both the society and I know, the things that I need to do to protect myself. It's ok up until here. Now, you also leave in the morning. But you wear whatever you want. Tight shirts, tight trousers… You put on hair-jel, wrist pins, whatever that suits a man at work. You go to work by revealing some of your aspects while I go to work by covering some of mine. We go out the same door, for the same reason, but we go there differently. (…) And then I come home, cook, do this and that, help the children's homework, bathe them, love them. You come home, for example, clean the table, and so and so. But as you see, most of the balance is built upon the woman, woman has to watch the balance more. Your stances, even when you start on the same road are different. Then he waits for you to pass the jar to him to open it. That's what a man expects from women, to say "I don't know but he

knows." Why wouldn't I know? I mean, I know how to do bunch of things among 300 people [at work] but I won't know how to open the jar with a knife? Then, don't make me know that! Don't send me to work. Make me do a simple job, so that I can be a woman to you! Start for me my own business then, for example, open a jewellery shop for me.[75]

Her critique of the imbalance between man and woman and women's transition into manhood has a very different dimension compared to one's return to her feminine energy. The solution does not depend on woman's return to submissiveness, but rather on man's admission of woman's *güç* and his lack of *güç,* woman's doing and his inadequacy in doing. Moreover, she hijacks the very masculine notion of honor, which belongs to the family and the state in the context of Turkey (Parla, 2001). She converts honor into a part of 'doing' which provides her *güç,* whereas the man becomes a 'loser' that does not 'do' as much as she 'does'. Consequently, by seeing his lack of 'doing,'

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[75] Ben zaten bundan sonra güçsüz bir kadın olmayı tercih ediyorum. Ya ben böyle durıyım da adam düşünsün biraz gibi istediğim bir dünya var. (…) Zor durumlarda çözüm bulabiliyorum bu da beni güçlü kılıyor, o yüzden de farkında olmadan güç yine bana geçiyor, karşımdaki erkek de olsa. Ben onun göremediği şeyleri görüyorum. (…) Güç var da ben o kadar güçlü olmak istemiyorum aslında. Ya bu çocuk(lar) beni güçlü kılıyor evet ama ben bi durup soluklanmam gerektiğini düşünüyorum. (…) ben bi durayım bırakayım hani kadınsı olan şeylerle uğraşayım hem kadın hem erkek olmak zorunda kalmayayım. O kadar güçlü olmak da iyi bişey değil. Bi süre sonra kadın olduğunu unutuyo insan. Zaten kadınlar daha çok erkek işlerini üstlendikleri için, bence toplumun dengeleri çok değişiyo ya. (…) Eskiden erkek güçlü kadın boyun eğen taraftı. Sonra kadın güçlendi erkek hala gücün kendinde olduğunu sanıyor. Yok aslında öyle bir denge. Kadının gücünü görmüyor. Ve kadın erkeğe sürekli kendini ispatlamak için bişeyler yapmaya çalışıyor. Zaten kadın bu hakkı çok zor aldığı için erkeklerin elinden çok daha hırslı. Erkeğe zaten verilmişti bi çaba harcamadı ki. (…) Niye kesiyolar karıları.. Niye abi dünya kadınlar günü kutluyoruz ben buna da uyuzum. Niye? Kedi köpek miyiz biz, dünya hayvanlar günü gibi, niye erkekler günü kutlanmıyor? (…) Kadını farklı bir mahluk gibi gösteriyosunuz. Hep kutladığımız günlere bak, çocuklar günü kediler böcekler günü, hastalar veremliler günü, bi de kadınlar günü kutluyoruz. Statüye bak. Biz sanki aciz varlıkmışız gibi bizim günümüzü kutluyorlar. (…) Çok çaba sarfediyor (…)aynı zamanda namusunu korumak zorunda. Hiç bi erkeğe var mı taciz. Yooook. Hani kadına yapılanla erkeğe yapılan aynı mı? Değil. Eeee? Kadın kendini korusun, çocuğunu korusun, namusunu şerefini korusun. Evinde yemeğini yapsın bok olsun püsür olsun. Adam napsın? Üç tane madde sayarım sana dördüncü olmaz. O yüzden de kadın daha çok erkekleşiyor. Zaman geçtikçe. Erkekler de ezik ezik böle ortada dolaşıyor. (…) Hani erkek kadının gücünü kabul ediyo bi yandan böyle elini eteğini çekiyo şimdiki erkekler. Sen biraz güçlüysen biraz beceriyosan 'o nasıl olsa yapıyo' diyo. Kim istemez ki önüne hazırlansın önünden toplansın. (…) Ama biz kadınlar karşımızdaki erkek ne kadar güçlü olursa olsun mesela yine de biz de bişeyler yapmaya etmeye çalışıyoruz. (…) Erkek de sen bunları yaptığın zaman bak o daha iyisini yapabiliyor deyip kendini geri çekmeye başlıyor. İşlerin dengesizliği burda bitiyor diyorum ben. Oldu mu? (…) Adam dedi ki bana sen bi kere kavanozu açamıyorum şarabı açamıyorum dedi. Eee dedim ben de. Şimdi oraya gelene kadar sen bana neler demedin onları tartışalım. Hani sen diyon ki aslında sen kadın olmayı beceremedin. Sen adam olmayı ne kadar becerdin de ben kadın olmayı beceremedim mesela. Sen bana kadın olmayı verdin mi de karşılığını bekliyosun. Sen diyon ki çık abi piyasaya onca kekocanın arasına. Her gittiğin müşteride 100 tane adam olsun. Gir oraya ama sapasağlam da çık namusunla. Nasıl naif olcaz orda abi. Kadın olalım şimdi Ben saçımı açmıyorum mesela kadın olduğum anlaşılmasın diye. Saçım hep toplu. Hafif bir makyaj. Ekseriyette pantolon giyiyorum etek giymiyorum. Çalıştığım ortama göre, üstüme yapışan bişey giymiyorum. Sen bana diyosun ki oraya giderken kadınlığını ört. Demiyosun ama bu benim de bildiğim toplumun da bildiği ortak bir duygu. Kendimi korumam için yapmam gereken şeyler. Sen bana diyosun git oradan parayı kazan. Tamam buraya kadar. Sen de sabah çıkıyon. Ama istediğini giyiyon, dar gömlek dar pantolon giyiyon gidiyon işe. Saçları jöleliyon, kol düğmesi takıyon, yani bir erkeğe yakışabilecek her türlü aksesuarla gidiyon işe. Ben belli şeylerimi örterek işe gitmem gerekirken sen belli şeylerini ortaya çıkararak o işe gidiyosun. Mesela. Bak aynı kapıdan çıktık. Aynı amaç için gidiyoruz ama farklı gidiyoruz. (…) Sonra ben eve geldim yemek yaptım, onu bunu yaptım, çocukların ödevi ile ilgilendim, banyo yaptırdım, sevdim okşadım. Sen geldin atıyorum sen de sofrayı topladın falan filan. Ama gördüğün üzre biçok denge kadın üzerine kurulu. Bir çok dengeyi kadın yönetmek zorunda. Aynı yola çıktığımız işte bile ikimizin duruşu farklı. Sonra evde o konserveyi sana uzatmıyor olup beklemek, işte bi erkek bunu bekliyo kadından ben bilmem o bilir demeyi bekliyo. Niye bilmeyeyim abi ben? Yani şimdi gidip 300 tane insanın bulunduğu bi ortamda, bir sürü şey yapmayı biliyom da, konservenin ucunu bıçakla kanırtıp açmayı mı bilemicem yani. Onu bildirme o zaman, yollama beni işe. Daha basit bişey yaptır bana. Kadın olcam ya sana. Aç bana atıyorum kendi işimi yapım ben. Bujiterici olim ben atıyorum.

man is the one to depend on forming a new balance that requires an equal contribution to necessary labor required in the relationship. She wants to be less *güçlü* and she wants to be more 'woman,' however, her definition of womanhood differs from the other narrative in the sense that returning to womanhood includes mocking manhood, and giving up *güç* has a tone of protest. Therefore, the renouncement of *güç* due to marginalization and exhaustion becomes as political as the claim of *güç* through choosing unhappiness and peace. Correspondingly, the insistence on *güç* can be disempowering and the withdrawal of *güç* can be empowering.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to demonstrate how the divorced mothers' narratives on their daily encounters expose the ambivalence of women's empowerment and the openness of gender identities to transition and reinterpretation. Indeed, the divorced mothers' daily 'doing's —from domestic labor to affective labor— make them *güçlü* within their narratives of empowerment. While 'doing' does not make the women happy but rather generates happiness for the others, their *güç* also often brings along the extra burden of being isolated since their *güç* crosses the boundaries of 'womanhood.' Overall, *güç* becomes disempowering as well as empowering and empowerment thus becomes an ambiguous concept which could be given up for the sake of 'womanhood' or could equally be a means of challenging the idea of 'womanhood.'

CHAPTER 4

THREATENING AND EMBRACED: RECLAIMING MOTHERHOOD, WOMANHOOD, AND SEXUALITY EQUALLY

"So, I rented [the house], had it painted. We hung the photos of [my daughter], but we had nothing, plates or anything… I only had my dowry when I got divorced, porcelain tableware, crystal glasses… Me and [my daughter] used to drinkfrom crystal glasses because we didn't have normal ones (laughs). [Eating] with gilded forks andknives (laughs), but we're eating on the carpet, we didn't have table!"[76]

"That [morning] was the last straw. Then —a friend used to take me to work— she called, I said 'I'm not coming' Çiçek, because I didn't want to do anything for work. I didn't want to do anything for the sick people. I didn't want to do anything for [my daughter]. I didn't want to do anything for myself! I didn't want to do anything at all! Oh, I cried so much!"[77]

4.1. Introduction

Writing on motherhood through feminist ethnography in Turkey is challenging from an ethnographic perspective precisely because an ethnographic approach requires the context in which a narrative is provided. Feminists in Turkey have long been disclosing how women's identities are continuously reconstructed as good wives and

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[76] One of the participants: "Tuttum, boyattım [evi]. Resimleri astık. Eşyamız yoktu, tabak çanak. Boşanırken çeyizimi almıştım, porselenler, kristal bardaklar… Biz [kızımla] kristal bardakta içiyoduk. Çünkü normal bardak yoktu. Altın yaldızlı çatal bıçaklar, ama halının üstünde, masa yok!"

[77] One of the participants: "Son damlayı o koydu. Sonra bi arkadaşım alırdı beni işe, geldi aradı, 'gelmiyorum' dedim Çiçek, çünkü hani iş için bişeyler yapmak istemiyorum. Hastalara bişey yapmak istemiyorum. [Kızıma] bişey yapmak istemiyorum. Kendime de yapmak istemiyorum! Hiçbi şey yapmak istemiyorum! Ama nasıl ağlıyorum!"

sacrificing mothers. The increasing emphasis on family and motherhood in Turkey both dates back in the early years of the Republic and also holds sway in public discourses and social policies at the present. During the establishment of the Republic of Turkey women were portrayed as good mothers who are responsible for bringing up their children in the light of the Kemalist reformist ideologies, and educating the nation (Tekeli, 1986; Gulendam, 2000; Sirman, 1989; Parla, 2001; Kadıoğlu, 1994). The AKP government, continues to reproduce womanhood first and foremost through motherhood ("Sağlık Bakanı'ndan Kadına Kariyer Planı", 2015). Most of the time, even the word "woman" is replaced by the word "mother" as we have seen in 2011 when the Ministry Responsible for Women and Family was changed into the Ministry of Family and Social Policies ("Aile dışında hayat var!", n.d.). In their critique of Mother Universities which were founded with the collaboration of municipalities, associations, and the existing universities beginning in 2012, Socialist Feminist Collective defines the constant attempts to make women better mothers as "the domination of being a mother over being a woman," and "the domination of the institution of family over every other forms of togetherness" ("Anne Üniversiteleri: Masumiyetten Uzak Bir Adım", 2014). Therefore the feminist movement in Turkey continuously criticizes the myth of motherhood and how it imprisons womanhood and female sexuality. Considering such feminist analyses of motherhood, some narratives of the participant of this research undoubtedly exemplifies the erasure of womanhood under motherhood. However, in the narrower context of our interviews and their personal experiences as divorced mothers their narratives reveal a wider set of connotations. In this chapter, I will explore the participants' narratives on motherhood and how they conceptualize motherhood as a source of friendship, empowerment, and happiness. In the contexts of happiness and friendship, even the uncertainty of motherhood may become a source of empowerment as both intimacy of the child and the capability of the mother lead to self-confidence.

While the feminist literature in Turkey —especially that of the Socialist Feminist Collective— questions motherhood only through the strategies of the patriarchy, the literature on single mothers mainly focuses on their —mostly financial— survival strategies (Edin and Lein, 1997a; Edin and Lein, 1997b), or the development of their children (Garfinkel and McLahanan, 1987; Jackson et al., 2000) —not to mention that divorced motherhood per se is far less discussed (Brandwein et al., 1974). I will elaborate on the feminist literature in Turkey in this chapter, and question how it

corresponds (or fails to correspond) to the narratives of divorced mothers. Within the critical language towards motherhood —even though it vigorously and efficiently challenges the patriarchal discourses— motherhood is no longer as subordinated as womanhood and female sexuality are, and it no longer has the same potential of empowerment.

During the conference "Is a Different Family Concept Possible?" that took place in Istanbul in 2013, Sevgi Adak from Socialist Feminist Collective presented a speech on the campaign named "There is Life outside the Family" (Adak, 2014). While I would be proud to stand behind the placard with the name of the campaign on it, I was sure that my mother would hate to see me there because her perception of family consists of only me. After expressing my idea about the name of the campaign Sevgi Adak stated that she actually went through the same experience with her own mother due to a similar reason. According to Adak, the campaign was initially thought to be even more radical by claiming that "we will destroy the fortress of family." Feminists —or everyone who are marginalized by the idea of 'conventional family—' *can* be radical and *can* destroy the fortress, however, my aim in writing on how divorced mothers conceptualize motherhood is actually to question for, with, and against whom or what we are getting radical. In what ways it is possible to be outside the family? Or how rigid is the boundary between the inside and the outside of the family? Therefore, through the forms of oppression which are particular to divorced mothers and the defiance of divorced mothers against this oppression, I will try to elaborate on motherhood as an equally subordinated and empowering notion in feminist politics. Divorce, in this picture, becomes a crucial element since it multiplies both the subordination and the empowerment of motherhood.

4.2. Motherhood as a Source of Friendship

An overwhelming majority of the participants claimed to have a bond of friendship with their children. One participant (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) who changed her work and started all over with an incredibly busy schedule after divorce, described her relationship with her child as "having so much fun" with lots of

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their projects and sharing.[78] She thus finds a new romantic relationship with men a waste of time compared to spending time with her child. Another participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years) who also described her relationship with her child as based on friendship described such a friendly relationship as specifically being witty and humorous, and therefore wonderful.[79] The children are depicted as the ones who 'primarily teach someone how to have fun'[80] and 'lead someone to grow up by coming up with [unusually insightful] questions.'[81] While such friendship becomes the baseline of a mother-child relationship within the participants' narratives, it also creates a conundrum for them since they sometimes conceptualize being a mother and being a friend as opposites. In her attempt to create a balance between motherhood and friendship, a participant (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) who becomes the strict parent while the father is the fun one, says "We overdosed it a little, we're more like friends now and I think it's wrong."[82] The conundrum of being both a friend and a mother to the child is mostly revealed when the participants' own conceptions of motherhood being challenged by the psychological, pedagogical, or general ideas over motherhood —which I will dwell on later.

The friendship of the child provides an irreplaceable support for the divorced mother as a participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years) who did not want to get divorced at first, was shocked by the compassion she received from her infant son: "He sat on my lap and hugged me, wiped my tears and said 'I know you're crying because dad's leaving but I'm here [for you.]" Children's friendship to the mother is often a surprising source of emotional support, yet the participants' friendship to their children is rather seen as a must. One participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years) who have had clashes with her child a lot during his puberty, said that her motherhood was primarily based on the premise of "I stand by you. I'm your mother, and I'll never give up on you."[83] Another participant (early fifties, one, more than 10 years) similarly based her 'feeling of motherhood' on the search for unconditional happiness for her daughter. In other words, the premise becomes her child to be unconditionally happy not only around the mother but also around anyone that would come close to her daughter.

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[78] "Çok eğleniyoruz. Projelerimiz var, paylaşım var."
[79] The words used in Turkish are *esprili* and *harika*.
[80] "Her şeyden önce eğlenmeyi öğretti"
[81] "Beni büyütüyo. Öyle sorularla, öyle şeylerle karşıma geliyo ki..."
[82] "Biz biraz dozunu kaçırdık, daha çok arkadaşız ve bence bu yanlış."
[83] "Yanındayım, annenim, asla vazgemicem."

Hence she adds that her feeling of motherhood[84] has never changed. The reason why her feeling of motherhood has not changed ever since her child was born is that having a child was her own decision as it was the case for many other participants —some of them had to go against their husbands to give birth while a participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years) even named her decision of having a child as her own 'project.'

4.3. Motherhood as a 'Dark Ride'

For many of the participants motherhood is something internal, intuitive which is considered to be contrary to reason.[85] None of the participants mentioned motherhood to be something they performed by knowing exactly what to do. One participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years), despite the help of her family, is now laughing when she thinks of her first few years as a mother, telling how "motherhood was not supposed to be like this, with an infant crying non-stop until the age of 2-3!"[86] Another participant (mid-forties, two, more than 10 years) was not sure about whether she had been good at 'playing the role of a mother' because she was too young.[87] A participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years) who lived like a single mother for a decade even before her divorce said that she did not think but lived.[88] While she trusts her instincts, some participants used the idea of improvising, by her hand just like the expression "el yordamıyla" in Turkish —trying to find her way with her hands through the dark. A mother of two (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) says her motherhood is a motherhood with the help of hand, hence she is mothering by improvising[89] (and she is also not sure whether she is a 'good mother' or not). Such metaphor of being a mother with the help of hand, and its connotation of finding one's way in the dark is very much similar to a metaphor used by another participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 5 years) with financial difficulties, in that her whole experience after divorce was like a dark ride at an amusement park; riding in unease, always looking out for the next thing to pop up in the dark.

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[84] Annelik hissi
[85] İçsel, İçgüdüsel, contrary to mantık.
[86] "Anneliğin böyle olmaması gerekiyordu, sürekli ağlayan çocuk 2-3 yaşına kadar"
[87] "Belki ben çok anne rolü yapamadım, ben de küçüktüm."
[88] "Düşünmedim, yaşadım."
[89] "Benim anneliğim doğaçlama, el yordamıyla annelik"

I claimed before that motherhood is a very delicate notion to write about. Feminists are rightfully critical about the discourse of motherly instincts as it dangerously essentializes and glorifies women's position as mothers (Kutlu, 2012). However, I argue that the metaphors of a dark ride and walking with the help of hand bring a new perspective to instinctuality in motherhood. The narratives above do not necessarily refer to motherly instincts but rather to mothering with instincts. In the age of developmental psychology which bombards women with the right ways to raise children (Bora, 2001: 101-102), or even considering the earlier missions piled on mothers by the Kemalist ideologies, mothering with instincts opens up a new frame of motherhood drawn by the improvising mothers. Such improvisation in a way rebels against the "how to be a good mother" ideologies and brings one's motherhood back to her ordinariness. As Türkdoğan emphasizes, mothers in their ordinary lives almost never find a place in the Turkish media as "mothers," but rather they are only written on as "compromising, pedagogy expert, good" mothers —or contrarily insane, careless, bad" mothers (Türkdoğan, 2013: 49). In their 'dark ride,' lone divorced mothers' narratives reveal their fear yet the ride takes place in an amusement park. Motherhood is uncertain, yet it does not only provide friendship of the children but also happiness, peace, energy, mightiness, and self-confidence, if not clearly stated to be providing *güç* for the mother.

4.4. *Güç* Revisited: Motherhood and *Güç*

As I explored in the Chapter II, *güç* in the narratives of divorced mothers refer neither to strength nor to power which are the exact translations in English. It is a culturally and linguistically specific notion which renders the notion of empowerment ambivalent in its relation to happiness. In this chapter, the notion of *güç* again points out the ambivalence of women's empowerment within gender relations, yet *güç*'s promise of happiness is fulfilled in the context of motherhood unlike in the context of womanhood.

Even if the dark ride is described to take place at the tunnel of horror, even if the participants did not see the path but rather found their ways with their hands, the fact that they always found a way out becomes the main emphasis in their narratives. I have

asked them many times during the interviews, 'how did you manage it?' by referring back to the stories and obstacles they had told, yet there never was a clear answer. It might be the case that the answer did not matter as much as the fact that they *did* manage all the hardships somehow. One participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), who did not spare any of the details of oversexualization, her work, or the school of her children whenever I posed the question 'so, what did you do?!' upon each of her interesting stories, said "mothers manage those kinds of stuff. Well… mothers are weird women."[90]

One participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years), who continued to share the duties of parenthood with her ex-husband, explained that 'a weird *güç*, a terrific energy emerges in mothers to make insufficient suffice, non-happening happen.'[91] Such state of 'being able to do anything somehow' makes a participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 5 years), who wants to maintain her financial independence, say "See, I'm *güçlü.*" The 'feeling of responsibility' and the 'feeling of having to manage' thus creates the energy to be able to discharge the responsibilities of her. This energy was also described as 'keeping oneself robust'[92] by two other participants. One participant (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) who gave birth based on her own decision, argues that there are two reasons why she can and has to stand straight, firstly for the child and secondly thanks to the child. Besides needing the mother to stand straight, drawing on these two reasons, the child can also provide the necessary 'moral support' for the mother.[93]

> I could stand more straight and I cried less, because I have a child. Meal was cooked at home. There was an order at home. But if I didn't have a child, umm, I would fall sick for sure. (…) Having a child… that's what I laid my back on.[94]

The existence of a child brings with itself innumerable tasks to be done regularly, which forces, and at the same time, enables the mother to be *güçlü.*[95] She says "I'm here, and I will do it"[96] while I could sense that repeating how she managed everything overall, and how everything is ok, was also her way of soothing herself because she was

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[90] "Anneler halleder öyle şeyleri. İşte ya... anneler değişik kadınlar."
[91] "Annelere tuhaf bi güç geliyo, yetmeyeni yetiriyosunuz, olmayanı olduruyosunuz, korkunç bi enerji geliyo."
[92] Zinde tutmak
[93] Manevi destek
[94] "Çocuk olunca ben daha ayağımın üstünde durdum ve daha az ağladım. Evde yemek pişti, evde düzen vardı. Ama çocuk olmasaydı, ee hasta olurdum o kesin. (...) Çocuğun olması, sırtımı yasladığım şey o aslında."
[95] "Çocuğun olması anneyi güçlü kılıyo."
[96] "Ben varım ve bu işi ben yapıcam."

still in the midst of various tensions. Therefore, following her tasks as a mother is metaphorized as a machine by simplifying the course of managing tasks: "You start the engine and it goes. That's the gist of it."[97]

Another participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years), who describes herself as a crazy person and who takes very brave steps at her workplace, sees children as a source of motivation and the reason to her success. Similar to the other narratives I have mentioned before, she conceptualizes motherhood as a form of standing straight, being *güçlü,* and being robust.

> Being a mother makes me *güçlü.* It keeps me straight. It reminds me that I have a purpose. It tells me not to give up. You can't give up; you can't throw in the towel —not a chance. You keep the towel on your shoulders all the time. You will keep going. So, it keeps me robust.[98]

She does not throw in the towel, she does not cry: "I want to cry sometimes, but the kids are here, how can you cry?" Another participant (late fifties, one, more than 20 years) who once had a violent husband also said —as many others— that she could not cry because her child needs her, because she did not want to be a sitting and crying woman like her own mother, on the contrary, she would rather be a productive mother.[99] Now that her child is grown up, she looks back and questions whether her years, her youth were wasted by trying to be a *güçlü* mother all the time. Yet, on the other hand, she tells maybe she could not get herself together after the divorce. But since she had a child, she had to get herself together, keep her child together, keep their home together, ending up in a cycle and keep living.[100]

Overall, it should be noted that mothers' obligation to manage everything and the terror which stems from the bulk of tasks and the lack of help are very structural. They can and should be eased with the necessary social policies so that women will not have to cover the lack of governmental aids (financial, medical, or daily care) ("Aile dışında hayat var!", 2013). However, when motherhood becomes —or as it has already become for some— the most intimate reason to go on in the midst of her daily life especially

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[97] "Makineyi çalıştırıyosun ve gidiyo, işin özü bu."

[98] "Güçlü kılıyo beni anne olmak. Daha dik tutuyo. Bir amacım olduğunu hatırlatıyo. Vaz geçme diyo, vaz geçemiyorsun. Havlu atamıyorsun, ihtimal bile yok. Hep havlu omzunda olacak. Devam edeceksin. Zinde tutuyo beni."

[99] "[K]üçük oluşu, bana ihtiyacı olduğunu bilmem, birisi için bi şey yapmak, belki kendi anne modelinde olmamak için, ben üreten bi anne olucam. Oturup zırlayan bi kadın olmucam."

[100] "Bana çok güç verdi, tek başıma olsaydım kolay da toparlanamayabilirdim. (...) Bilmiyorum, ama çocuk olunca sürekli hem onu ayakta tutmak, hem kendini ayakta tutmak, hem yuvayı aynı kıvamda götürmek gibi bi döngünün içine giriyosun ve öyle yaşamaya başlıyorsun."

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after divorce, the feminist debate on motherhood should not be limited to the structural inequalities secured through the idea of motherhood. Because, *güç* in divorced mothers' narratives is not a kind of social power which is secured by bearing a healthy and preferably a male child, but rather it is *güç* that comes with the companionship as well as the responsibility of a child. Therefore, I am not trying to romanticize *güç* that accompanies motherhood. Indeed, as it is described above, a mother's *güç* is ambivalent as I also discussed in Chapter II. It is empowering as well as disempowering for divorced mothers. *Güç* disempowers mothers by making sure that they keep eduring the endless reproductory labor for the children, yet at the same time, empowers them by resulting in self-confidence and happiness.

4.4.1. Happiness and Peace Revisited

As the life of a mother turns into a cycle, a machine, and a dark ride, child becomes both the cause of the ride and the only source of happiness to be able to endure the ride. A participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) who spends almost all of her free time with her children said that she is always with them but she is at ease, and she is happy. She forgets about everything as soon as she is next to them.[101] She is glad to have children by claiming that she would be sad if she was not a mother. Another participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) who has an exhausting job told how her children give her peace, after her long day at work; "Peace… they give me peace; their peaceful faces when I tuck them in at night and give them each a kiss, oh, no need for anything else."[102] The tone of her voice, her mimics change as well as her narrative, compared to when she mentioned her promising labor within her marriage. Indeed, such change of tone, and the way she stresses the word 'peace' is a form of resistance. After criticizing the way she was brought up —to be a good wife— and how her *güç* and marriage failed to satisfy her, she gets rid of the disposable burdens of ex-husband, ex-boyfriend, ex-job, ex-neighborhood and reshapes her life with the help of her children.

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[101] "Hep onlarla, ama rahatım, mutluyum. Onların yanına geldiğim anda her şeyi unutuyorum."
[102] "Huzur abi huzur veriyorlar bana. Akşam şöyle üstlerini örtüp bi öpücük kondurduğumda onların yüzündeki huzuru görüyorum ya, ohoo, başka bi şeye ihtiyaç yok yani."

The ride and the child also feed the mother's ego according to two participants. A mother of two (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) claimed that the love of her children feeds her ego because it is unconditional love which makes her vitally important for someone: "You don't need anyone else to feed your ego. You're so valuable for someone, and you know that value won't die no matter what you do."[103] Feeling like a little girl when she was a recently divorced woman, the other participant's (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) ego was boosted when she realized that she handled the ride pretty well; "But I'm so glad. It feeds your ego so much. You know… like wow!"[104]

There is a nuance between being a *güçlü* woman and being a *güçlü* mother. In the previous chapter, I discussed how *güç* became disempowering when the participants realized that *güç*'s promise of happiness was not and maybe never to be realized. Some participants ended their mediocre marriages in the pursuit of peace at least, even if they will not be happy. The narratives of motherhood differ from the narratives of womanhood in terms of happiness. Unlike being a *güçlü* woman, even the unpredictable mothering by improvising provides either happiness or peace, and sometimes both.

4.5. Challenging and Reclaiming Motherhood

When also the industrialized mother-child sector tries to teach us and sell to us how to be a 'perfect mother,' we become the millions who deal with feelings like 'I couldn't be a good mother' and 'I failed,' who lose sleep at nights ("Aile dışında hayat var!", 2013).

In the statement of Socialist Feminist Collective, the feeling of guilt which is experienced by 'millions of mothers,' and which is also expressed by the participants of this research, is criticized as a product of a collaboration between patriarchy and the market. Further in text, however, motherhood is described as an imposed and refused identity by reclaiming the identity of womanhood.

We are not perfect mothers and we do not feel guilty. We say no to the imposition of feeding and raising, we say no to the moral norms imposed

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[103] "Sevildiğimi düşünüyorum karşılıksız. Biri için çok önemli olmak çok güzel bi duygu. Egonu acayip doyuruyo. Egonu doyurmak için başka bi insana ihtiyacın yok. Biri için çok değerlisin çok, ne yaparsan yap o değerin bitmeyeceğini biliyosun mesela."
[104] "Çok da memnunum ama, nasıl bi ego veriyo, biliyo musun... vay bee şeklinde."

upon us through motherhood. Because, we're not mothers, we're women! ("Aile dışında hayat var!", 2013)

The Socialist Feminist Collective reclaims the identity of womanhood by rejecting the identity of motherhood. While agreeing that motherhood may be the primary means of oppressing women, I suggest that both identities are to be reclaimed equally, even though one is imposed on us —actually, I argue that womanhood is also imposed on us as much as motherhood is. For motherhood to be reclaimed as much as womanhood, I will explore the exact feeling of guilt residing in the narratives of divorced mothers. How is the guilty feeling of divorced motherhood interlinked with the subordination of various identities including the motherhood itself? Singular narratives may not be as practical and as rebelling as the unyielding feminist analyses and statements are when opposing the patriarchal discourses. However, I find it problematic when these singular narratives and ordinary struggles cease to relate to or even conflict with the feminist slogans. If divorce is seen as women's fault, if motherhood —especially divorced motherhood— leaves the scars of guilt, if motherhood is as subordinated as womanhood and sexuality, then I propose a change the approach to the feminist slogans. The slogan "Our bodies, labor, identities belong to us!" should not only refer to womanhood and female sexualities but also to motherhood; it should reclaim motherhood by not diminishing motherhood to the undervalued labor imposed on mothers.

The participants' concerns over whether they are good mothers or not, and whether they made the right decisions or not were frequently revealed during the interviews. Two participants mentioned how they failed to conform to a certain type of motherhood which is exclusively defined within the boundaries of home and especially with preparing food. Both of them had irregular and intense working hours. The one (late forties, one, less than 10 years) who had continuous problems with the school counseling said that she misses to be a mother who greets her child after school with kisses and the smell of cookies.[105] Similarly, the other participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years) who jumped from being a housewife to being a working mother after divorce said that she has not been a mother that cooks meals, peels apples, and puts a glass of milk on the table:

> What does it mean to be a mother? Mother is someone who bathes the child, irons the clothes. (…) I do cleaning, but that's not enough. A mother

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[105] "Okula gönderen, kurabiye kokularıyla öpüp koklayıp evde karşılayan bi anne olmayı özlüyorum."

puts a glass of milk on the table while [the child] is studying. A mother says 'here you go honey, I squeezed some orange juice. Here, I peeled three apples.

Although this research does not cover the pedagogical and psychological literature on mothering with all its positive and negative aspects for divorced mothers, I will discuss 'appropriate' models on mothering in participants' narratives, which often threaten divorced mothers' own conceptions of motherhood as well as womanhood. Such appropriate mothering within these narratives expect women to be ideal mothers not only by giving a glass of milk or accomplishing any other domestic work but also by coming to school regularly, providing the other appropriate gender role models, and lastly by *not getting divorced*. One participant (mid-thirties, one, less than 10 years) who receives help from her parents agrees with the pedagogical discourse on how a child needs proper male/female models and provides a male model thanks to the presence of a grandfather 'luckily,' because supposedly a girl without a male role model may turn out to be interested in older men sexually when she grows up. Another participant (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) calls plumbers or electricians to her house for the technical problems which she could actually mend very well on her own. The male workers at home are supposed to show the little boy what a 'man' is supposed to do around the house because, according to the pedagogue's warning, she should provide her son a male model so that she wouldn't draw him into femininity. While none of these two participants gave account on how these discourses marginalize their children too for being the children of divorced parents, the latter argued with a psychologist that 'her problem is not with the son but with the daughter.' Yet her problems with her other child are rendered insignificant compared to an assumed danger of a boy growing up to be feminine. One of the participants (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years) that made the decision of getting divorce simply because she was not satisfied with her marriage, waited for few years to get divorced because a pedagogue told her to do so: "If [the child] doesn't remember the father, then it causes a lack of confidence. As if men are so dependable (confidential)[106]…"[107] A psychologist, as well, questions one of the participants' (late forties, one, less than 10 years) own gender as a role model saying that the child both lacks the male model and the female model because she was not like a mother but like a father:

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[106] I translated the word *güvenilir* as dependable by considering its meaning in the sentence. But I added confidential because *güven* and *güvenilir* have the same root as confidence and confidential which matters for the structure of the sentence.
[107] "Babayı hatırlamazsa kafasında, o onun güvenini alıyomuş. Hani erkek güvenilecek bi karakter ya..."

You're the female role model, a psychologist said to me. You're like a man. You say the child doesn't have a male model, but no, actually the child doesn't have a female model either. (…) Bring your boyfriend home; let him stay at your house. I mean, the child has to understand that you're a woman, but you live like a man.

Womanhood in this case is closely related to sex, and not just sex in general but particularly a heterosexual relationship with a man at home. She laughs at the psychologist's comments on her womanhood; moreover, she defines herself as a rakish woman and does not want her child to witness that face of hers. Yet, when her child — who is not a child anymore— gets shocked and overreact during a humorous and exaggerated conversation about the participant's sexual life, she starts thinking that the psychologist might have been right. The psychologist might have been 'right' in predicting that the child would assume that the mother does not have a sexual life but such prediction does not explain how womanhood in particular comes to be equated to sexuality.

Friendship of a mother to her children also becomes a problem as the 'experts' keep reminding them that they are mothers not friends. Therefore she is not supposed to talk to them as a friend. "[The pedagogue] says 'I don't understand your language, the child can't understand it either' Well, that child was born into this language!"[108] says a mother of two (mid-thirties, two, approximately 5 years). Supposedly, the children already have friends at school which should be enough. Two participants who were worried about their relationships with their children being more like friendship rather than being like a 'mother-child' relationship, both said that they tried reading books on mothering, and both concluded that it was nonsense because every child is not the same.

The school is yet another problem for a participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years) who argues that the problem is not her child's anti-sociality, but the school's inability to relate to her child's certain conditions. However, the belief that the child is having troubles at school due to the parents' divorce is constantly reminded to her, making her run from one psychological institution to the other to prove her child's conditions are not caused by the divorce. On the other hand, what the school defined as taking good care of a child was for a mother to come to school every now and then and ask teachers about how her child is doing, because the other mothers were not working as the participant was: "I was in the position of a 'careless' mother and that drew me

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[108] "Sizin dilinizi ben anlamıyorum, çocuk da anlamaz. O çocuk bu dile doğdu!"

crazy, because inwardly, I had pangs of conscience about whether I was a careless mother." Another participant (late forties, one, less than 10 years) whose child had different certain conditions that caused problems at school, also complained about how she was always accused of being a careless, bad mother. A participant (mid-forties, one, approximately 10 years) who learnt how to pick a fight after her divorce, quarrels with both the school and later the psychologist. She argues with the teachers by saying it is wrong to link every problem of her son to her divorce upon their advice to consult a psychologist. However, she and her son find the psychological methods particularly ridiculous:

> I tried to know what happened [to him] with the active listening method just like the psychologist taught me. The kid donnishly told me not to talk like a psychologist! Oh, is that so? Ok. Then I'll talk like a mother. If you don't behave yourself, I'll break your legs! Then, we both started laughing.[109]

All these diversive and interlinked form of controversies above, point out a more complex picture of subordinations rather than the subordination of womanhood through the notion of motherhood. Cooking, feeding, cleaning, and various other chores tied to the idea of a good mother reproduces the feeling of guilt that many women suffer from. But it is not merely the 'tasks' of mothering that is debatable by the outsiders of an intimate relationship. Her unique language, her way of talking, and hence a certain way of communication that also the child prefers gets criticized. When combined with the so-called problematic friendship between a mother and a child is included to this criticism, the whole dynamic of each unique relationships become debatable by the third parties. Even upon a mother's insistence that she has a problem not with her son but rather with her daughter, a psychologist's final decision about which problems of the children should be focused on disregards a woman's practices and experiences of motherhood. Linking every problem of the children to the divorce of the parents do not only marginalize divorce —and particularly divorced women as woman is the one accused for a failed marriage— but also the people who have divorced parents. The children of divorced parents are marginalized as their social problems, success, sexualities, gender, and personalities are exposed to often contradictory discourses. When a mother is told that she fails as a female role model, her gender and sexuality

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[109] "Psikoloğun bana öğrettiği gibi etkin dinleme yöntemiyle [çocuğa] nolduğunu öğrenmeye çalışıyorum, çocuk da aynı şekilde ukala dedi ki, anne psikolog psikolog konuşma. Haa, öyle mi? Tamam. Peki o halde anne gibi konuşuyorum, otur oturduğun yerde, bi daha görürsem bacaklarını kırarım. İkimiz de gülmeye başladık."

becomes marginalized and reshaped. While the whole pedagogical discourse of gender role models reproduces the unequal and binary gender identities, linking a person's lack of self-confidence to the lack of a father figure does not only marginalize the daughter but also overlooks a mother's own experiences of her gendered relationships. Zeynep Kurtuluş Korkman (2014) from Socialist Feminist Collective writes that "Limiting the feminist stance with the critique of the imposition, glorification, and objectification of motherhood, excludes various different experiences and needs, desires and emotions related to motherhood." However, her arguments follows with the critique of a feminist campaign against the Mother's Day which overlooks different class, ethnic, and cultural aspects of motherhood. I claim that even if motherhood was to be an issue of women with the same class, cultural, educational backgrounds, the aforesaid feminist stance still excludes various different experiences and needs, desires and emotions related to motherhood. This research which includes 13 middle class participants shows that rigid feminist debates can help understanding the structural subordination of divorced mothers but not their conceptualizations of motherhood. Womanhood, motherhood, and sexuality are all packages which harbor elements among which each person chooses what to own, reject, or redefine. Therefore, motherhood should not be exceptionally criticized with all of its elements. Such approach, firstly, overlooks the complex dynamics of gender inequality, and secondly, marginalizes how some women perform and enjoy motherhood.

I acknowledge that motherhood is also debated through several movements formed around motherhood such as Mothers of Peace, Saturday Mothers, and Mothers of Martyrs in Turkey. Özlem Aslan discusses motherhood as an arena where motherhood becomes contested through "proper" and "non-proper" mothers in her thesisin 2007 and her more recent interview with Elif İnce in 2014. Even though the feminist critique of motherhood is extended beyond the imprisonment of womanhood, what I stressed is the singularity of the divorced mother —as I also highlighted through oversexualization in the Chapter II— and the cruciality of the support and/or the responsibility of the child. Aslan, too, claims that motherhood is a challenging issue for feminism in that it can be both empowering and oppressing (İnce, 2014). The nuance which I tried to bring into this challenging discussion is that, in the case of divorced motherhood, the empowerment gained through motherhood is not an empowerment gained within a social network or social status but rather a singular and even almost an unseen one.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored how divorced mothers experienced and conceptualized motherhood, their relationships with their children, and the marginalization of these relationships. While motherhood reproduces the gendered tasks attributed to women, I argued that, I the context of divorced motherhood, the notion of motherhood is as subordinated, marginalized, and controlled as womanhood and sexuality. The participants' narratives have shown that the marginalization of divorce, divorced motherhood, the children of divorced parents, divorced mothers and their children's sexualities and genders are all deeply interconnected. Additionally, the intimate relationship between the child and the divorced mother can provide a very intimate source of moral support. I thus suggested that, instead of framing motherhood as the imprisonment of womanhood and female sexuality, the feminist approach should challenge and also reclaim motherhood, womanhood, and sexuality equally.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

My initial purpose in this research was to explore how divorced mothers conceptualize womanhood, motherhood, and sexuality in relation to a peculiar form of everyday violence that I addressed as oversexualization.

In Muğla and Istanbul, I have conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 13 middle class divorced mothers whom I contacted through snowball sampling method. I drew on Bourdieu's 'Forms of Capital' to designate the research sample based on their economic, cultural, and social capital. Therefore, 13 divorced mothers had the necessary social and/or family affiliations to access jobs, housing or help in taking care of the children, at least one income from a paid job, retirement or alimony, and hold at least a high school degree. The participants varied in terms of age (from early 30s to late 50s) and had either one or two children.

I also mentioned how this research has been a very intimate journey to me as a daughter of a divorced mother since the age of one. And I have always tried to meet the participants' expectations from me to be an expert on divorced motherhood, which overall, in my opinion, confirmed my claims on the importance of highlighting these particular experiences of divorced motherhood within the scholarly and feminist literature.

In the introductory chapter, I discussed not only the increasing emphasis on the family but also the marginalization of divorce which is less debated in the feminist literature in Turkey. I focused on the social policies and the prevalent governmental discourses which constantly picture divorce as a threat to the institution of family and to the society in general.

In the literature review, I elaborated on the academic literature on single motherhood and divorced motherhood. In both bodies of literature, single or divorced motherhood are questioned primarily within the contexts of child development, welfare

policies, women's decisions on re-marrying, or their financial survival strategies. As I demonstrated, divorced motherhood is far less analyzed compared to single motherhood. The particular marginalization of divorced women, on the other hand, is usually mentioned very briefly and generally trivialized through a critique of the family and marriage.

In the second chapter "Negotiating between Oversexualization and Self-Image: The Politics of Passing and the Self," I initially described what oversexualization is through the narratives of the participants. Oversexualization is, as I define it, the stigmatization of divorced women as seductresses, who are in need of sex and hence dangerous to other married couples. Oversexualizing discourses reveal themselves in the forms of gossips, sexual harassment, surveillance, and forced isolation. As in many cases of sexual harassment, oversexualization is ambiguous and sensed through intangible yet disturbing insinuations. I drew a link between this ambiguity and the narratives of the participants in which the participants usually referred themselves with the singular I instead of plural us.

In the face of oversexualization, the narratives constructed three predominant patterns which I analyzed under the titles of passing-for-married, being oneself, and the stories of safety. To analyze these patterns I mainly dwelt on Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters* and "Feminist Perspectives on the Self" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* written by Willett, Anderson, and Meyers. While not mutually exclusive, three types of narratives have the potential of undermining each other. Passing as married both secures the power relations by conforming one's image to a less marginalized identity, and also forms a narrative of struggle against oversexualization. The narratives of passing, however, are marginalized yet again by the narratives of being oneself which consider passing to be dishonest and undignified. The idea of being oneself promotes one's dedication to preserve her self-image in the face of oversexualizing discourses. Even if they may include patterns of being oneself and passing-for-married, the stories of safety construct safe spaces of exemption in which the participant is not or is relatively less exposed to oversexualization. I analyzed two stories of safety in more detail which disavowed the existence of oversexualization completely. As I re-emphasized the intentionality in passing or not passing and how it makes a difference to the politics of passing, I argued that despite harboring passing and being oneself, these two stories of safety threatened both the narratives of passing and

being oneself which base their position on the acknowledgement of oversexualization and an intentional struggle against it.

In the third chapter "Ambivalent Intersections of Womanhood, Empowerment, and Happiness: Narratives on *Güç*," I explored the linguistically and culturally specific notion of güç (strength/power) which relates to 'womanhood', 'empowerment' and 'happiness'. By following three narrative patterns, güç as 'doing', güç as gender-bending, and güç as the reformulation of empowerment, I questioned how divorced mothers perceive themselves as güçlü, how they play with gender roles by challenging and/or reinforcing gender binaries, and how they reformulate the idea of empowerment by negotiating between these culturally constructed gender roles and güç. I highlighted the dynamics of gender and empowerment by navigating between Sara Ahmed's notion of happiness in The Promise of Happiness (2010) and Judith Butler's insights on the possibility of denaturalizing gender in Gender Trouble (1999) and Undoing Gender (2004). This chapter revealed that the notion of güç as not needing help and making family members happy, fails to fulfill 'the promise of happiness' as in the sense of 'good life'. The promise of happiness for the divorced mothers is unfulfilled yet again since güç is culturally considered to be masculine, appropriate only within limits for women. Therefore, I suggest that güç consequently becomes disempowering as well as empowering for divorced mothers, empowerment becomes ambivalent in the narratives, and happiness, which is tied to strictly defined, gendered tasks, is challenged by the divorced mothers. By reconceptualizing güç, I tried to bring a new perspective to the feminist academic literature in Turkey, which has extensively elaborated the utilization of women's empowerment by the state, oppositional Islamic movement, and feminist movement in Turkey.

In the forth chapter "Threatening and Embraced: Reclaiming Motherhood, Womanhood, and Sexuality Equally," I aimed to challenge and also to contribute to the feminist debates in Turkey, especially that of Socialist Feminist Collective and Amargi. The feminist debates in Turkey do not only trivialize the marginalization of divorce within the critique of family and marriage, but it also overlooks the marginalization of motherhood. Instead, the feminist debates in Turkey mostly conceptualize motherhood as the imprisonment of womanhood and female sexuality, precisely due to the longstanding glorification of motherhood dating back to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and is still relevant today.

I explored how divorced mothers experienced and conceptualized motherhood, their relationships with their children, and the marginalization of these relationships in various ways. While motherhood reproduces the gendered tasks attributed to women, I argued that, in the context of divorced motherhood, the notion of motherhood is as subordinated, marginalized, and controlled as womanhood and sexuality. The participants' narratives have shown that the marginalization of divorce, divorced motherhood, the children of divorced parents, divorced mothers and their children's sexualities and genders are all deeply interconnected. Additionally, the intimate relationship between the child and the divorced mother can provide a very intimate source of moral support. I thus suggested that, instead of framing motherhood as the imprisonment of womanhood and female sexuality, the feminist approach should challenge and also reclaim motherhood, womanhood, and sexuality equally.

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