



The pot, the cup and the jar: *Coming together in/for stories*

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Abstract

What sort of story can you tell with just a pot, a cup, a coffee pot, a jar, a chopping board, an onion and a knife? Would the stories told among a group of seven PhD candidate women reveal the burden of writing a PhD dissertation relating the process to cooking? We, eight women, came together to run an event for the March 8th, International Women's Day in 2014 and talked about what we had been experiencing during the period of writing master's and PhD dissertations through the help of some ordinary life kitchen objects. We called this digital storytelling workshop, "I have food on the stove", getting our inspiration from a very common phrase used by women during their everyday life conversations in Turkey. This workshop enabled me to think about what kind of roles both kitchen and objects have in our lives and how telling stories help women to deal with hard times.

Keywords: Digital Storytelling, experience, kitchen, object, academic life

Introduction: A digital storytelling workshop for ourselves

I have twin boys and live in an apartment with an open kitchen. In addition to this context, my family roots are in central Anatolia, while my childhood memories are from Antalya, a Mediterranean coastal city in Turkey. Kitchen and cooking have been a compelling interest, learning how to prepare the olives and how to select the best of

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lemons and oranges from my mother, as I grew older. When I think about why I decided to study “kitchen” as a communication place for my PhD studies, it is not hard to realize the very personal connection. Then comes my boys, pointing to pots, cups, saucepans or discovering the function of the buttons on the dishwasher. My experience as a mother is one of veritable millions and being timeless is another subject once I consider my position as a mother working in academia. Just like in the kitchen, in academia, we have ingredients and tools to put things together and create new things.

In the Preface of his *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*, Joe Lambert concludes the introduction of the little booklet with the following words that give me a very good starting point: “The rest of this cookbook will break this digital story down into a recipe with ingredients, that will help you to prepare it all again. We’ll talk more about stories in general too, so you can take this recipe and adapt it to your own tastes. We encourage you to make the digital story you’re hungry for” (Lambert, 2010: v). The digital story that I was hungry for was a relief from my struggle with an object that I was trying to create: my dissertation. Digital stories have surrounded me since 2009. Sharing the same office with Burcu Şimşek, I was destined to be a part of the story² of digital storytelling at Hacettepe University. Following my participation in the facilitator training at Hacettepe in November 2009, with Digital Stories from the Amargi Women’s project,³ I learned more about digital storytelling, co-facilitating many other digital storytelling workshops since then.

“I have food on the stove” Digital Storytelling Workshop came out as a result of the pressure I felt while I was writing my PhD dissertation about kitchen and the meanings that are produced in relation to kitchen and cooking in the urban kitchen of contemporary society in Turkey. This pressure was a shared one in our office. Burcu felt the same throughout the time she was working on not only her dissertation, but also her book titled *Mutfakta Dijital Hikayeler*⁴ [*Digital Stories in the Kitchen*]. We were sure that with multiple responsibilities of being a woman in academia, a mother and a wife, there would be others to share the feeling of being in-between and never having enough time for any of the stated roles. The pressure women academicians’ tasks (preparing courses, writing articles, making researches and of course writing dissertations) put on their lives

² The process, having started with Digital Storytelling Workshops from Amargi Women that we ran in order to collect the daily life experiences of women, has continued with the workshops such as “Ben Alandayken (*When I was in the field*)”, “24 Saat Detay (*24-Hour-Detail*)”, “Feministim [*I am a feminist*]”, which open paths for sharing various women’s experiences; “Böyleyken Böyle [*As it is*]” and “Aşk Demek... [*Love is...*]” which were organized with the participation of lesbians and bisexual women who are not very visible in women’s movements and LGBT movements; and “Kökler, İzler ve Gölgeler [*Roots, Scars and Shadows*]”.

³ <http://www.digitalstoryhub.org/AMARGI-ISTANBUL-1>

<http://www.digitalstoryhub.org/AMARGI-ISTANBUL-2>

<http://www.digitalstoryhub.org/AMARGI-ANTAKYA>

⁴ Forthcoming book by Burcu Şimşek on the digital storytelling movement in Turkey.

and that are not limited by space and time, led us to think about running such a workshop to make women's really fragmented and divided lives in patriarchal societies visible. The point to where this thought took us was the idea that there is also a remarkably strong link between the tasks we work through in academic life and the domestic responsibilities we deal with in our private lives. Moreover, there is a big similarity especially between kitchen tasks, namely cooking and academic tasks, especially writing. In *Philosophy in the Kitchen*, the book I came across while writing my dissertation and constantly used, Francesco Rigotti points out that there are significant similarities between kitchen and philosophy and she cites these words of Sister Juana who lived in the 14th century, noticing the connection: "What else do we, the women, already know apart from kitchen philosophy?" (2011: 15). When I read these words to Burcu, she said: "Maybe we could write dissertations as we can cook".⁵ We as well believed that there are strong ties between what we do for a living in academia and in our kitchens where we sometimes cook for pleasure or with a sense of the responsibility of feeding the family another time. We thought about the kitchen and its connection with and where what we are busy with, being an influential place providing us opportunities to talk about ourselves in the meantime. After we put together these beliefs, opinions and the data I acquired during the field research I conducted between the years 2012-2013 for my dissertation,⁶ we decided to collect similar stories to ours in the digital storytelling workshop that we called, "I have food on the stove", thinking that other women who have gone through the same processes are in need of giving voice to their experiences, putting emphasis on lack of time in everyday life.⁷ The wider story that these stories would tell when they came together made it possible for us to think about the dead ends in women's lives, in which one get stuck both in academic daily tasks, pressures of conscience, vernacular desires, the things that are left undone and procrastination, but on the other hand the solidarity and the other women's contributions to one another's lives.

⁵ On one of the long telephone conversations that we had while Burcu was writing her dissertation in 2011.

⁶ İnce, Şengül (2014). *Toplumsal ve Kültürel Dönüşümlerin Gündelik Hayata Yansımaları: 2000'lerde Türkiye Mutfağı*. Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi. [The Reflections of Social and Cultural Transformations into Everyday Life: The Kitchen of Turkey in the 2000s. Ankara University, Social Sciences Institute Unpublished PhD Thesis].

⁷ A detailed discussion on the time and place aspect of this workshop can be found in Turkish in Kadın/Women 2000 article of Şimşek and İnce (2014).

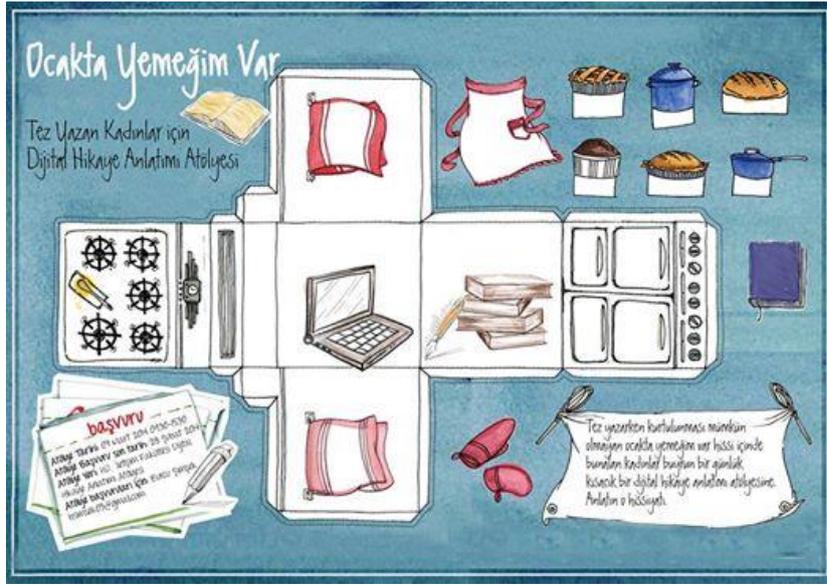


Image 1: Call poster for, “I have food on the stove” Digital Storytelling Workshop in 2014. The little section on the right corner reads; “Women with the feeling of having food on the stove while writing your dissertation join us on a one-day-digital storytelling workshop. Tell us about that feeling”. Poster design: Çağrı Çakın.

Although, “*I have food on the stove*” Digital Storytelling Workshop concentrates on our story of writing dissertations that last many years, it was planned as a one-day workshop due to the fact that the women who would participate in this workshop would have limited time owing to the ongoing hustle and bustle of their home and work life. Thus, in addition to arranging the place to run the workshop, we also needed to speed up the workshop process, putting pressure on ourselves time wise to make participation possible for most of our participants. Our experiences from previous workshops pointed to the fact that a one-day workshop meant the participant’s spending one-whole day in the workshop. Accordingly, this meant that the place where we would run the workshop was going to be used for all the stages of the workshop including image production and editing. In the meantime, the workshop venue served as a kitchen where we ate and drank coffee and tea, had a rest for a few minutes and had our lunch break as it being the kitchen of the stories. After many years of facilitating digital storytelling workshops for various groups and different purposes, this was the first workshop where we decided to make digital stories ourselves after our facilitator training.

All of the participants who take part in a digital storytelling workshop either/both as a coordinator-facilitator or/and a participant know that story circle is the hardest stage of the digital storytelling workshops. It is difficult for the participants both not to be able to know what to talk about and to tell something intimate to the people they meet for the first time in their lives and also to do it in a really short time. However, this circle makes the people, who do not know each other beforehand, come closer to be able to connect to

each other not only face-to-face, but also intimately through enabling them to tell stories in the circle, which they may not be able to do so elsewhere. We found a really practical way while we were trying to figure out how to deal with the limited time and feeling of not being able to know what to tell in the story circle in the, “I have food on the stove” workshop. Through using the capacities of the objects for attributing and containing the meanings and feelings within itself, we could fit our lives during our dissertation into a can of tomato paste, a pot, a jar, a coffee pot, a ladle, an onion, a knife, a chopping board and a mug that we put into a box.

Objects, Stories and Tactics

Our stories concentrating on our lives full of dissertation are not only about the stress, despair, dilemmas or sacrifices we experienced during writing our dissertations, but they are at the same time the reflection of questioning, “the compulsory duties” that are socially attributed to women and that gets harder to carry each day, the burden of which we felt more during the period of time devoted to dissertation as the issue is about the time that we can have more for our thesis writing process, with its all components, such as reading, taking notes and fieldwork/experiments in some cases. In order to make the process less complicated for the participant women, we decided to put the selected kitchen objects into a box, giving each a number. Then we asked our participants to draw numbers from a bag for identifying their objects for their stories. Taking an object as a starting point for a story makes the process less complicated most of the time. This time was not different other than surprising coincidences. It was shocking for me to draw the number of my own teacup whereas my officemate co-facilitator Burcu drew the number for the coffee jar. The objects were used and attributed meanings in such a way that each became the main character of the story. After all, I could not help thinking about how the objects can be so significant and embellished with meaning and emotion.

Objects, as things to fulfill the needs of persons are described as all the life contents except subjects, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochber-Halton in their book titled *The Meaning of Things*. In support of this description, comes the underlining necessity to accept the objects as, “polysemantic and multifunctional” narratives of life in opposition to thinking about them as solely functional (Ruppert, 1996: 19). The expression of narratives of life depicts the things to which the objects correspond in people’s lives. Within this framework, an object may be made one’s own, and is made a part of one’s own style by who uses or owns it. Stating that this process is implemented to ordinary-daily objects such as furniture and cloths with which bodied interaction takes place, Lupton remarks that these objects, which are given value through being ascribed personal meanings, notably tend to be attributed emotions (1998: 212). The aspect of attributing meaning and emotions to objects shows also their potential to be used as a means for transferring and creating meaning; within this context Eiguer accordingly states that, “the objects arouse the strongest feelings” (2013: 91). Any object, which is

bought and started to be used, gains importance through being attributed meaning and emotion by means of any occasion, person and time it is made to be related with, together with becoming a tool for explaining, recalling and talking about the things they are associated with. The research Csikszentmihayli and Rochberg Halton conducted with 315 people in 1981, showed that people frequently described the object which they associate with a person, place, memory, occasion or values the person harbors, as significant and they started to talk about them (1991: 27-28).

Another reason why the objects are of such importance in our lives is that they articulate our feelings and the things we would like to say. In this workshop, just like participant, Kübra's identifying her dissertation, which is somehow not finishing and lengthening out, with a tin of tomato paste (scattered into all corners of her life)⁸ or Emel's associating her quest for tranquility in dissertation dominated life with potatoes which are put into a pot and waiting peacefully to be cooked⁹. Within this framework, we can remark that objects and various creative works are used as a tactic that enables implicitly or openly to raise awareness, to oppose or resist our daily lives surrounding and putting pressure on us. We can use the roles, compulsorily imposed on us and the instruments that are given to us to fulfill these roles, against the conditions surrounding us. This aspect of the objects make me recall De Certeau's concept of, 'tactic'. With this term, De Certeau emphasizes that the consumers, positioning passively in the dominant system, produce against the dominant structure so cunningly and silently that it can leak into everywhere. In the process of this production, they develop their own ways of using the products that the system enforces upon them. The weak ones in a system try to take advantage of foreign and outer powers by means of gathering things and creating fertile instances that are not considered important by the dominant ones in the systems. De Certeau indicates that plenty of habits, attitudes and practices, the successes of the weak against the powerful, the art of pulling tricks and maneuvers... all the evidences that are so poetic, joyful and cheerful as they are challenging, are tactics (2008: 45-55).

In the "I have food on the stove" digital storytelling workshop, using the objects related to kitchen was a tactic that we used to make the workshop stages go faster due to the power the objects have as tools of telling stories as we mentioned above. On the other hand, while trying to make a connection between kitchen and writing dissertation, we thought that the objects that can be related to each other would stimulate participants' ideas and stories and would tell a larger story through being tied to each other. We reached this point through Burcu's remark, that in our everyday conversations, we connect to others through their stories, with reference to Norrick's following words: "We tell stories to make a point, to catch up on each other's lives, to report news, and to entertain each other. And one story opens the floor to other participants for stories of their own" (qtd. in Şimşek, 2012: 32). In the in-group screening we made at the end of the

⁸ Kübra's digital story can be found: <http://vimeo.com/album/2816367/video/92034037>

⁹ For Emel's digital story: <http://vimeo.com/album/2816367/video/91283934>

workshop, we realized that our stories were connected to one another visually as well. In this workshop the thing we had not predicted before the process, was that participants put together the object they had in their hands with the others' objects while they were building up their stories and creating the images for their own stories. The objects that we brought to the workshop and mentioned above did not belong to any participant; nevertheless they became the things the participants appropriated and spoke about without feeling out of them as each one of the objects was familiar due to the connection the participants have with the kitchen. Then we thought that almost none of the objects except the ones related to kitchen would be so convenient for making private as well as being ordinary and very public. Owing to this connection between stories constructed by means of objects, each story actually completed one another through telling a part of another participant's life experience with dissertation, just like Ece did in her story, "Keskin Bıçak (*Sharp Knife*)", that I will focus on in the rest of this paper then in relation taking a look at the dynamics of home for women from academia.

Cuts from the Life with a Thesis

In her digital story, "Sharp Knife",¹⁰ Ece talks about her life with dissertation through combining the knife that she chose in the story circle with the onion and chopping board that were also in the box and used as the main objects by other participants. In Ece's story, the knife is used as a means for speeding up the compulsory things she will have to do and with the meaning to cut everything everywhere in order to tell about the things she wants to leave aside or has already left aside after she started to write her dissertation. The things Ece told us about displaying all the emotions that are felt, sometimes giving happiness or at another time being a burden, which continues while writing her dissertation and takes place also in other participants' lives. Didn't we all get angry about our husbands', partner's, sibling's, friend's sleeping, watching TV, going on holiday, in short having rest and fun, while we were studying at home, in the library, at midnight, during the summer heat or winter cold? Ece tells us about these common things, focusing

¹⁰ "Sharp Knife" Transcription in English: I'm married. I have a daughter and a 110 kg husband. "Knife" is my biggest helper, my weapon. There are people waiting, the "food on the stove" to be cooked immediately. Who cares about the thesis! Onions and vegetables should be chopped quickly and well. So I'm so in need of a sharp knife. I cut out from the journals and the books for my thesis. Meanwhile, there emerged a feeling of cutting off many things: to cut off my daughter's voice, my husband's snores (especially when I'm studying), my mom's, my sister's, my father-in-law's wishes, the desire for cutting off the lecturers' voices during the Thesis Committee Meetings. There were indeed the things I'd really cut. To appease my conscience, to save time I cut off the working of psychodrama. I cut off going to the coiffeur; I don't have my hair dyed anymore. I cut off some of my social activities and visits. There are also the things I'd like to cut off. To have relief, to be me... I want to cut off giving answers to my daughter, my mom while at the same time talking to my lecturer on the phone, to overeat, the times I cry and say "I can't do this anymore!" and to cut off my thesis (to finish it). And let the next track come for me by Yasar: "Sharp Knife" [the song sings: one day plus another, another sin in a day, my tears dropped one day, didn't stop].(1.37) <http://vimeo.com/91286135>

on the wish to cut off people's demands that have to be fulfilled in our lives full of dissertation, about which we thought nobody cares except us.

We deprive ourselves. We cut off the things that we enjoy and do for ourselves in our lives. Ece gave up/cut off going to the hairdresser and having her hair dyed, also visiting her friends. For a more comfortable and peaceful life, there were things we wanted to cut off just like the ones we could not manage to do in this life: with her knife, Ece depicted for us our wish to cut off our supervisors' demands as opposed to ours, the necessity to fulfil several things at the same time, the scars the life with dissertation has left on us, the moments we fall in despair; and certainly our great desire for completing our dissertation.



Image 2: Ece's first image in her digital story that talks about the things she had to cut- take out from her life with her thesis.



Image 3: Two objects accompany Ece's object, knife.



*Image 4: Ece cutting the onion with the knife.
The pot and the ladle enter the frame to complete the story.*

“Digital stories often start with the pictures” (2010: 27) states Lambert. In our workshop, the story circle started with objects. “Stories move in circles” says Lambert and adds, “[t]hey don’t move in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles” (cited by Lambert 2010: v). Since 2009, in none of the workshops it was possible for me to create another digital story. However, this time the workshop was to find a relief for my own longing for solution to the struggle with an object: my dissertation. At the end of this workshop, none of us had a secret formula, but a path for solidarity: hearing that I am not the only one to go through the hardship, juggling with multiple responsibilities. In the next section, I intend to position this solidarity into the discussion about housework and homework.

Housework and homework for women academics

There will always be some tension in the everyday lives of women academics as Ece reflects in her digital story. The respected image of the housewife combined with the myth and the struggles for being present in academic life as a women, is a complex blend. In this section of the paper, I focus on the modern phenomenon of everyday life and its weight on women especially in academia.

Everyday life weighs heaviest on women, he [Henri Lefebvre] claimed; they are ‘sentenced to everyday life’. Repetition is seen as a threat to the modern Project of self-determination with its sense of an imposed pattern of life and the absence of change. The modern individual needs to leave this world behind in order to transcend its mundanity and the limitations of human bodily existence. Lefebvre, as Rita Felski points out, placed some value on women’s connections to ordinary rhythms of biology, emotion and sensuality, but believed them nevertheless to be victims and quintessential representatives of the quotidian because of their responsibilities for sustaining the everyday life of the home. [...]Ensuring that the work of home-making becomes more visible would challenge the long-held

separation of home and work just as it would unsettle the solipsism that can arise from a lack of connectedness with one's own and others' human physical needs"
(Johnson and Lloyd, 2002:150- 155)

In a world governed by speed, the everyday life responsibilities and engagements have inclined for women, who have been associated with home and have attempted to be limited to the life cycle at home through providing their labour only for the family. The entrance of the women to the labour force, providing income for themselves on one hand, have doubled the burden because of the expectations that division of labor according to gender that have been put on them have made life harder.

Bedriye Poyraz (2013), in her research where she examined the common argument, academia being one of the institutions where women have been represented the best, she provided counter arguments. When the career development, positions, use of resources, the life-work balance, the national and international mobility and the publications are taken into consideration, women are in disadvantaged positions. Through the in-depth interviews with eight female academics and eight male academics, Poyraz provided an overview about what sort of private and public lives academics pursue in Turkey. While the majority of the men are married and have kids, most of the women are single or married with fewer children. The responsibilities of the children of these married men are mostly on their partners. Most of the married academic women with kids mentioned that they are fully responsible for the children. Leaving her job in order to take care of a family member was of great importance for one of the participants and was expressed with a strong statement: "without any hesitation" (2013: 11). The inequality between men and women in the sharing of the responsibilities concerning home and children causes most women in academia to spend more time and energy than men (similar to other sectors). In her conclusion, Poyraz states that for most academic women, the dissertation writing process, that is mentioned as the hardest phase of the PhD studies, usually intersects with getting married and having their kids and due to the temporary working conditions during the PhD studies, dependency on family weighs heavier and as a result academic life becomes secondary in the list of women (2013: 15, 16). In addition to my experience, the women academics around me have similar reasons for their burden between these two worlds, mostly they are caused by their husbands, immediate environment and also by the gender roles and stereotypes that they are directly exposed to. In Turkish society, as expressed by Kandiyoti, the family type is a *patriarchal family*, that is based on the gender based division of labour between wife and husband, where the man is the breadwinner and the woman is responsible for mothering, housework, caring for and feeding the family (cited in Dedeoğlu, 2000: 157). However, there has been no decline in the load of the division of labour that depends on the distinction between inside and outside, with women's entrance to the work life. In addition to this, the dominant association of women academics' work within the teacher occupation, that is coded as a suitable job for women due to the fact that a teacher is more flexible with time which seems to be very good to raise one's own children, makes women academics' lives harder. The necessity of doing

research, publishing articles and attending conferences and other scientific events usually are not considered to be important aspects of the occupation for outsiders as lecturing seem to be the only task that needs to be fulfilled. As the working hours of the occupation is not limited to the physical environment of the university and in fixed time frames, the relationships within the family as well as the maintenance of friendships and kinship could be tricky, due to the fact that academics always need time to complete particular tasks. In Turkey, with the second wave of the women's movement, the struggle for women rights has become more visible. The emergence of Women Studies departments at universities have contributed to widening the discussions on gender in relation to the labour market, body politics, education, health and education as well as the questioning of gender and university relationships. The struggle in academic life in Turkey for feminist academics is in line with the statements of Ramazanoğlu and Holland:

Feminists continue to challenge the adequacy of knowledge of gender relations produced by the authoritative voices of male-centered science and social science. They counter masculinist claims about the nature of gender and the capabilities of women. They open up the methodological, political and ethical implications of claiming connections between ideas, experience and reality. This has made relations between knowledge and power a critical area in considering how best to decide between competing knowledge claims, but has not given feminists new tools for thinking with. Feminism has moved on from Enlightenment in making gender, politics, emotions and exclusionary practices visible in knowledge production, but not in any simple or consensual manner (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002: 39).

In this respect, it is likely to say that feminist attempts for knowledge production derives its sources from women's narratives and lives, particularly the lives of the women who face particular burdens caused by the patriarchal systems.

The fulcrum of sociology for women is the standpoint of the subject. Sociology for women preserves the presence of subjects as knowers and as actors. It does not transform subjects into the objects of study or make use of conceptual devices for eliminating the active presence of subjects. Its methods of thinking and its analytic procedures must preserve the presence of the active and experiencing subject. Sociology is a systematically developed knowledge of society and social relations. The knower who is constructed in the sociology for women is she whose grasp of the world from where she stands is enlarged thereby. For actual subjects situated in the actualities of their everyday worlds, a sociology for women offers an understanding of how those worlds are organized and determined by social relations immanent in and extending beyond them (Smith, 2002: 272).

Discovering the commonalities and diversity in the experiences for women have great importance in understanding social relations and reorganizing the everyday worlds. "An

objective of a unifying female identity becomes blind to changing identities through time and context, and this puts boundaries around mutual understanding between differences”(Şimşek, 2012:286). In such a context, Şimşek values digital storytelling as a form of sharing commonalities and diversities among women’s groups (2012:288) and she concludes: “It is clear that digital story circles help forming new connections. In the digital era, attempts to form such circles matter on the way to overcoming exclusion and enhancing inclusion” (2012: 293). Talking about Capture Wales and London’s Voices projects, Thumim also reminds us of the importance of giving voice and hearing voices:

Self-representation is also understood in more explicitly, political terms, thus participants talked about having a voice and ‘being heard’, suggesting that the process of taking part in the projects afforded them valuable recognition of their point of view and experience. It seems a short step to assume that the result of ‘having a voice’ might be some form of social change, or that ‘having a voice’ in itself constitutes pressure for social change. After all, the phrase, ‘having a voice’ comes from a popular discourse about democracy. [...]Self-representations deliver everyday experiences and while these are all, always, unique, at the same time there are universal aspects to these stories (Thumim, 2009:91-93).

Digital storytelling: A tactic for solidarity

In the editor’s introduction for Carolyn Steedman’s *Landscape for a Good Woman (2002)*, it is stated that,

Steedman’s historical work has shown how important narrative is for the self-understanding of social life. In this regard the stories we can tell about ourselves (the forms of narrative that we have access to) play a constitutive role in our social consciousness. That everyday life might fall outside available narratives (for instance in its lack of ‘event’, or in its unheroic drudgery) is of considerable import”(262).

“I have food on the stove” was a digital storytelling workshop ‘for ourselves’ as facilitators. We were keen on listening to other women’s voices and to have our voices heard by other women in the context of academia. In my personal academic journey with the kitchen as my subject, I focused on the everyday life aspects and the material culture while I was focusing on the gender dynamics in the meaning production process. Although my PhD fieldwork was not connected to digital storytelling directly, my life is and carrying that connection to the process as a way of resisting the stress became a tactic for me. “The storytelling process is a journey” (Lambert, 2010: 24) and my journey in the Digital Storytelling Unit at Hacettepe University seems to inspire me to explore new horizons, enriching my life as an academic mother.

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