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FROM MATERNITY TO ACTIVISM: TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER INEQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

Our study which deals with loss of social and human rights realized generally by social gender inequality within the context of social challenge dynamics, organized for obtaining these rights and LİSTAG taking position as an alternative family organization just happening these days, has more than one interrelated purpose.

This study aims to clarify the issues of basic human rights and gender inequality within the context of family members of LGBTI individuals. Consequently, if the issue is considered from the perspective of social gender eqality, the first target group to be addressed for providing social rights of LGBTI individuals are their own families. The family organizations such as LİSTAG are of great importance for ensuring social gender quality in Turkey and providing coverage for social rights of LGBTI individuals. The fundamental purpose of this study structured on such an approach is to provide contribution in current human rights practics of Turkey both in intellectual and practical sense by improving academic and social visibility of LİSTAG family organization established for eliminating current discrimination and protecting social rights of these individuals.

Key Words: Social movements, Women studies, Qualitative studies in sociology, Social gender, LİSTAG.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender concept has increasingly become more important both in social sciences literature and our daily/political lives. Considering the gender concept we identify on biological basis from a sociological basis, we see that gender is actually built socially in a higher rate. Most of our daily lives (at home, office and all other public spaces) are formed in accordance with our gender roles. And our gender policy practice is mainly based on institutions.

In this sense, we can say that family and affinity relations are deemed worthy of honor for holding gender and sexuality. Family structure is an important part of sociological analysis for gender roles. In the literature of social sciences, generally, there is not much on gender concepts in the studies conducted on classic themes such as state, economy, politics, urbanization and etc. Ignorance of woman-centered gender approaches at such a scale, has made its necessary to establish its own specific discipline, the woman studies and gender field. The most important and specific contribution of woman studies in social sciences literature is that the gender relations are not in any special institution of society but in all of them. Gender regime is interpretation of gender relations in social institutions and interaction between them (Connell, 1998:166). Gender perception, shaped in an androcentric and aggressive heterosexual construct is a problematic field even for today.

Gender concept of social construct based on patriarchal, dominant heterosexual and violence where individuals live in the frame of cultural codes they obtain in the process of socialization shapes all social mechanisms. Referring to the classical theories predicting socialization begins from family, it is possible to accept family as the center where the first seeds related to gender and gender regime are planted. However,

with all its characteristics, family does not only contain the "private" field. With several factors, family also represents the public space. Because, it is possible to say that in Turkey, social policies and human rights concept are managed on family-basis. This process, which can be identified as the family system, means positioning basis of human rights and social rights of individuals on family (Anderson, Sabatelli, 2011:6). Definition of individual-based social and human rights is extremely important within the scope of this study. From social rights based point of view, a significant distinction reveals itself. In Turkey, social rights are managed through labor of the breadwinner and distribution of all available social rights by him/her. Considering the family-based social policies and human right notion, women and LGBTI individuals are in disadvantageous position. This case is more traumatic especially for the children with different gender identity and sexual orientation. LGBTI individuals mostly hide themselves for preserving such humane and social rights provided by their families. When, LGBTI individuals reveal them to their families, this action mostly results by losing their rights. This process which can be called as disengagement from family creates great problems for LGBTI problems. These young people deprived of their rights of housing, education, health, employment as well as being loved and respected, leave their families and become "domestic refugees" (Tarhan, 2014:124).

It is possible to say that the LGBTI individuals who are disengaged with their families and conderned to insecure work conditions are deprived of individual basis of human rights. There are various ways for theoretically and practically overcoming such a course. These problems arising due to family-based causes can only be overcome through family-based approaches. Today, "family organization" concept, which is frequently discussed in social sciences literature imposes itself as an appropriate approach for resolving problems related with it. The idea of establishing an international organization for dealing with family matters was adopted by the First World Family Congress - 22-28 June 1947, Paris. In the Congress where 200 representatives from 27 nations attended, the International Union of Family Organizations (IUFO) was founded and the purpose of this organization was stated to establish contact between social movements for improving life quality of families and individuals live in them (www.worldfamilyorganization.org). Following this course, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was accepted in 1951. The name of the organization was changed as the World Family Organization (WFO) in the meeting held in Wien in 1998. The World Family Organization intending to put family matters on international agenda conducts studies on poverty, employment (with "good work for all" slogan) and especially on gender and strengthening of women.

While, such efficiency of the World Family Organization in political and daily life triggers family organizations at local level, it also accelerates the academic studies on family organization. Today, the studies in social sciences literature, which are conducted on the organizational structures of families, gradually increase in every passing day (DeVault, 1994, Becker 2009, Allen 2001). It has still been discussed that men come into power and control children in family organization through the power provided by state and other public institutions. The effect of the World Family Organization in daily life is solidarist family organizations which gradually become a social movement.

LİSTAG, which has become institutionalized since 2008, is an important family organization of Turkey. The families with LGBTI children - especially mothers - are organized for jointly overcoming challenges they experience and remedying social and human right losses of their children. This family organization which used to be a solidarist organization based on mobilization of mothers, today evolves towards a social movement. LISTAG which can be considered as a social movement type, we can refer as identity-based new social movements within the context of social movements in Turkey, is among one of the rare examples making the course of transformation of a family organization into social movement ideally visible. Main focus of actions for LİSTAG which can be accepted within identity-based new social movements (Melucci 1980, Offe 1985, Çayır, 1999) is women, namely mothers. The mothers who have children with different sexual orientation or identity are organized for resolving right losses of their children.

There is a bilateral reason for calling LİSTAG as an identity-based social movement. The first of them is the self-characteristics of the movement as a social arena (structure of activists, addressed themes, organizational structure and etc.) and the second one is the queer concept and theory based structure of organizational construct of the movement. Queer concept is known as the theory defending that gender identities are formed socially and culturally. It is the approach defending that the concepts such as lesbian, gay and etc. have arisen as a result of construct of the society trying to provide specific norms to identities

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(Jagose 1997, Sullivan 2003). According to such descriptive model, it is also the society which determines sexual policy.

Today, the LİSTAG-based construct of this study, aiming to develop a descriptive model for family discussions in social sciences literature through family organization, which has turned into a social movement through the discourse "a different family is possible", also conceptually, refers to identity-based social movements. In this study, it is aimed to establish a problematic area for the humane and social rights, the LGBTI individuals and their families are deprived and develop a perspective on human-rights based problems and their solutions. However, more importantly, the transition course of women to become activists in social life by leaving their positions as "ordinary mothers" will be taken into consideration.

2. METHODOLOGY

Overall approach of the study is established on an interpretative basis. 19. The basis of the interpretative approach emerged in the 19th century and known as a theory of meaning is to establish an interpretational explanation model which is based on understanding and establishing causality. Considering from sociological context, it is observed that all social institution, structure and society itself are established on meaningful actions of individuals. Addressing LİSTAG addressed within the scope of this study and came up as a solidarist family organization at first and mothers organized in it in an interpretative basis is extremely important for understanding and explaining the foundation and the solidarist construct of the group based on liaison. However, it should be highlighted that a supervision approach based on causative explanations as well as an understanding-based approach are adopted within the scope of the study. Shorttime evolution course of a family organization into a social movement should be taken into consideration in an understanding/interpretation-based construct. Because, it is very important both for social sciences context and daily life practices to understand all recent social events and facts like LİSTAG through interpretation and explain them causatively with regards to their impacts brought on the agenda.

Qualitative method was applied in the practical, field-survey phase of the study. It is impossible to conduct a quantitative survey because of the scope of the universe of LİSTAG due to its recent history, as the focal point of the study and the ethical and sensitive qualities of the subject. It became possible to collect data through deep meetings by gaining trusts and consents of LİSTAG volunteer women/mothers by means of qualitative method. Consequently, we can say that the Case Study method is adopted as the research design of our study. Case study method is considered appropriate for the construct of this study as it covers deep understanding, explaning and interpreting a single or a social fact. Due to self ethical grounds of the study subject, LİSTAG was contacted before starting it and the study related information was provided and their consent was obtained for participating in it.

The field survey of this study constructed through the Case Study method has been established in accordance with the data provided by LISTAG. Currently, there are approximately two-hundred and fifty families volunteered in LİSTAG as at least one of the members of their families is gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersexual. However, there are various problems in organization phase due to recent history of LİSTAG and sensitivity of the issue in Turkey. Even, LİSTAG, activated an organization in Istanbul in the beginning, desires to be active throughout Turkey, it seem that it has not achieved that goal, yet. An organized structure with the supports of volunteered psychiatrists and psychologists of ÇETAD (the Sexual Education, Treatment and Research Center) has been put into practice only in four cities of Turkey. The cities where organization has been put into practice are Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir and Denizli. However, in this study, the women/mothers organized in İzmir were interviewed. Within the scope of the study, it was aimed to reach the women/mothers who have LGBTI individuals in their families so they have become LİSTAG volunteers.

LİSTAG volunteer women were reached by this study conducted in İzmir through snowball sampling method. Gaining trusts and consents of the participants to involve in the study is extremely important for ethical construct of the study. Consequently, rather than recording data upon a single or several interviews like an ordinary researcher, a long-term data-collection process was aimed by establishing a trust relationship with the participants and reflecting concerns.

The informatory and sharing meetings which were conducted in İzmir on every month basis were targeted as the starting phase of the interviews held with the participants involved in LİSTAG. It was aimed to establish baseline data on the ones who might involve in the study by attending meetings and providing information to the participants on the study and its ethical concerns. It became possible to reach other participants through snowball sampling method starting from these first participants involved in the study.

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Although, a net figure is not given for the population, the interviews of this study were conducted with 18 mothers through a semi-structured interview format. Rather than, reaching higher number of participants, it is more important to conduct interviews with volunteer participants/activists. However, it was aimed to conduct interviews with all participants declaring to contribute the study in accordance with the available resources (such as time, data analysis, cost, human resources and etc.)

Interview is not the only technique used for case study analysis of the study. Moreover, in addition to monthly meetings held every month, it was possible to attend the Saturday meetings organized for preparing a weekly activity program and the introduction and sharing meetings organized once in a month in the house of one of the participants. Through such a based on participant observation, it became possible to meet and contact with other participants who could not be reached within the scope of the study and the chance to directly observe the relations of LGBTI individuals with organized families become possible. In addition to all these, we tried to observe the course of transformation of a family organization into a social movement by attending the "Pride March" which is organized every year by LBGTI individuals and LİSTAG. It was possible to observe social positions of women taking a step towards from their role of maternity to activism very clearly. As well as the Pride March, the panels, sessions, marches and events organized by LISTAG were followed and study logs were prepared for them. By this way, information was obtained not only from LİSTAG volunteer women but also from the social struggle patterns adopted by them. Finally, the brochures, invitations, posters and website of LİSTAG prepared on the issue were included in the study as the papers and documentation of it. Consequently, at this stage of the study, it is possible to say that the interview, participant observation, study logs and paper/document analysis techniques were used within the case study design.

All interviews were recorded by recorders by consent of the participants and then analyzed by resolution in accordance with the interpretation techniques of the case study design. All these findings were interpreted by enriching with the information obtained through other research techniques.

3. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

This study has been conducted in 7 months from March to September 2018. Mothers were also contacted before this study conducted with LİSTAG volunteer women. The experiences of mothers have been obtained as a result of various conferences and panels organized by LİSTAG. In addition, mothers have been contacted in different times by attending several projections of "My Child" documentary which created a significant impact in Turkey.

The data obtained after the workshop has firstly been transcribed and then coded. It is possible to combine this main coding conducted through the sub-problems of the study under two topics. Consequently, it should be indicated that the data analysis and interpretation of the study are shaped through these topics.

3.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of LİSTAG Volunteer Mothers/ Women

The first thing to be said just in the beginning of this study is the leadership of the women/mothers of LİSTAG. Most of the organization is managed by women. It should be said that the first activists gathered on a solidarist approach as a family organization are women. Even, the foundation story of organization is based on the adventure of two or three mothers sharing similar stories with each other. What is more, although, there are fathers/men in LİSTAG who have become visible at this point, it should be said that LİSTAG is organized mostly through women/mothers. Such an emerging situation has a dual meaning within the context of social conditions of Turkey. The first of them is the social concern of fathers/men for their children for having a different sexual orientation or an identity. It is quite hard for a father to accept different sexual identity of his child and carry on seeking for the rights of his child through his/her identity in a social construct of Turkey which we can accept as a traditional one. This is very visible in the interviews held with women. "My husband says he does not want to get involved in any of this. Yes, he knows our son is homosexual and accepts his as is. But, he says I do not walk with him on the street." "My husband knows his situation, I told him. Anyway, he has seen it while he was a kid. But, he has not even talked to him, frankly. I always insist him to attend the meetings. But he does not want. He refuses. I understand him." As it is mentioned by the participants, it is very problematic for a father/man to have a child with different sexual orientation and identity in the conditions of Turkey. Certainly, there are fathers become visible in LİSTAG. However, the number of them is quite deficient compared to mothers. During

²Interview held in 28.04.2018 2.

¹Interview held in 06.06. 2018 4.

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the study, only one father has been seen attending the monthly meetings held in İzmir. Actually, this person is not an activist organized in LISTAG. This person, who has begun accepting that his child is transsexual, is an individual who attended the meeting for learning what he can do for him and his child. Except this, fathers have participated in LİSTAG organizations in Istanbul, Ankara and Denizli while there was not any father volunteered in İzmir. The second part of the problems with regards to visibility of men is related with organization. Various organization related problems are experienced in İzmir. Because, it should be stated that LİSTAG mobilization in İzmir, is weaker compared to the organizational dynamics of other cities. Especially, this is seen obviously when compared to Istanbul. However, it should be indicated that the organization related problems will be addressed in more detail in further sections of the study.

On the other hand, it should be said that a similar case is observed when the professions, ages and education levels of LİSTAG volunteer women are considered. The following table reflecting the general socio-demographic characteristics of the people participated in the study is prepared for conducting a clearer evaluation on participants.

INTERVIEW	AGE	PLACE OF BIRTH	MARITAI STATUS	PROFESSION	IDENTITY/ORIENTATION OF THE CHILD
1	42	İzmir	Married	Hairdresser	Mother of a homosexual man
2	62	İzmir	Married	Retiree	Mother of a homosexual man
3	49	Denizli	Married	Housewife	Mother of a homosexual man
4	38	Manisa	Married	Cleaning Lady	Mother of a Transsexual Woman
5	48	İzmir	Married	Physician	Mother of a Transsexual Man
6	51	İzmir	Single	Teacher	Mother of a homosexual man
7	44	Istanbul	Married	Banker	Mother of a Transsexual Man
8	64	Ankara	Married	Retiree	Mother of a homosexual man
9	52	Bursa	Married	Public Servant	Mother of a homosexual man
10	54	Malatya	Married	Housewife	Mother of a homosexual man
11	48	Bolu	Married	Housewife	Mother of a Homosexual Woman
12	51	Ankara	Married	Accountant	Mother of a Transsexual Man
13	62	Mersin	Single	Retiree	Mother of a homosexual man
14	42	Aydın	Single	Public Servant	Mother of a homosexual man
15	44	İzmir	Single	Housewife	Mother of a Homosexual Woman
16	41	Mardin	Married	Housewife	Mother of a homosexual man
17	50	Van	Married	Insurer	Mother of a Transsexual Man
18	48	İzmir	Single	Sales Person	Mother of a Transsexual Woman

Thoughly reviewing the table above, it is seen that the participants of the study generally belong to middle age generation. Except five, our participants mostly born in İzmir are married. Three of married participants indicated that they are remarried and their children related with the study are from their first marriages. Except five housewives, all other participants have paid employment status. Three of them are retirees.

In the previous parts of the study, it has been mentioned that LİSTAG organization can be considered within New Social Movements category of social movement classification. The data obtained from this applied field study and the theoretical discussions suggested within it coincide. As it is known, one of the most fundamental characteristics of new social movements is the structure of activists. Other than ideology and class-based codes, new social movement activities consist of the persons defined as new middle class who act based on culture and identity. New middle class is a conceptualization representing well-educated and middle-aged people with specific income level. So it can be said that the LİSTAG activists women participated in this study represent the middle class due to their characteristics.

Organization Practices of Women: From Maternity to Activism

The main goal of the women/mothers gathered around a family organization since 2018 was only based on solidarity in the beginning. The mothers who have children with different sexual identity and orientation have begun getting together for sharing similar problems they experience, communicate and maybe creating solutions to them in their way. After, a family organization was founded in Istanbul, various family organizations have been founded in different cities. One of them, the family organization in İzmir has a more recent background. Mothers got together under the leadership of a psychiatrist have accomplished Izmir organization in 2010. "Of course, I do not know...I had never heard of a formation as

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LİSTAG. The psychiatrist I consulted after, my child came out to me recommended it. Thank God, he did. After all, I have taken advantage more than my child by being a part of LİSTAG.³ The individuals who contacted a ÇETAD volunteer psychiatrist in İzmir have begun getting together in time. "Actually, the person who introduced us all is the same person. We have got together when we consulted the same psychiatrist for us and our children. Now, we get together in the first week of every month and support new parents participated."

The main element for the women in İzmir group of the solidarity-based LİSTAG family organization is periodically held monthly meetings. These meetings held in the first Thursday of every month except summer season are very important for all participants. In these meetings held with a ÇETAD volunteer expert psychiatrist, the LİSTAG mothers guiding new participating parents what they should do, state that this organization is good for them at first. "Yes, we are here for the rights of our children. But these meetings and LİSTAG are mostly good for us. There, we see people just like us. We see that we are not the only ones struggling with these problems in the world where we are not alone. And it is good for us." People share their experiences in these monthly meetings; mothers share what they can do for their children with solutions for existing problems. Especially, participating in the Pride March organized in Turkey every June as LİSTAG gives great strength to women. "It keeps me going to be with my child in the Pride March while holding a sign. At that time, I tell myself that I am a real activist... And, people's reactions to mothers are very beautiful. Society has difficulty in accepting a homosexual young individual. But, it sees a mother saying my child is homosexual and protecting him/her with sympathy."

In the study, the responses of the women in LİSTAG organization in İzmir for the question whether they see themselves as activists of a social movement are quite interesting. Several women define herself as an activist despite all problems experienced in organization and challenging for struggling the rights of their children. "We were ordinary mothers, who prepare jams and pickle. But now, we are the mothers struggling for the rights of our children. Instead of keeping, hiding it. We go out and bawl. That my child is homosexual. Yes, I consider myself as an activist. Because, I struggle for my child." Although, most of the participants state that they consider themselves as activists, there are ones who do not defend the same idea. "Yes, a mother in Istanbul can say that she is an activist. Because, they are extremely active. But, we are not much like them. Or, I do not see myself like that. Actually, I have not attended a Pride March, yet. To be more precise, I could not. I do not see myself as an activist. Such a bilateral tendency of LİSTAG mothers is directly related with organizational problems. Considering the Istanbul organization acting as a center for LISTAG, it is seen that the mothers there are actually quite active. It can be said that an organization of women struggling for their children jointly with various national and international networks. However, it can be said that the organization of İzmir is not active as Istanbul. "So to say, we are like a satellite of them (Istanbul). They are certainly very active. They make us join their activities. Sometimes, they train us. But, the real problem here is how you consider this. In other words, I can say that. Several parents in Istanbul put LİSTAG in the center of their lives. It has become the main interest of their lives. But, it is not like that for us. For us, LİSTAG does not have such a central position in our lives." It is expected that such a bilateral difference among the women in İzmir family organization will disappear and be overcome by strengthening organization.

When, the issue the women struggle the most on the path from maternity to activism is problematized, results draw attention. The women increasing their visibility in society through attending the panels and conferences organized for LİSTAG indicate that they had various disclosing related problems in the beginning. The participants stating that they had some concerns as they had not estimate reactions from relatives, neighbors and school environment of their children, indicate that this concern has disappeared in time. "At first, I thought much on what people would say...I was concerned that my neighbors, my sister and other parents at the school would learn the identity of my child. But, I choose my child. Not other people." "At first, it is hard to tell the parents. My parents still do not know that my child is homosexual. Actually, I did not tell them. I hold signs on the street. I attend panels and conferences everywhere. But, I

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³Interview held in 20.03.2018 1.

⁴Interview held in 16.07.2018 6.

⁵Interview held in 16.08.2018 13.

⁶Interview held 02 08.2018 7.

⁷Interview held in 04.08.2018 15.

⁸Interview held in 27.073.2018 9.

⁹Interview held in 25.05.2018 3.

¹⁰Interview held in 20.03.2018 1.

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could not talk to my family about that. 11 In addition to visibility, one of the other important organization related problems women experience is the financial ones. The family organization of İzmir without any office does not have any financial resource to use for renting an office space and compensate stationery expenses for various activities. The women organizing periodical monthly meetings in CETAD center say that currently, financial problems are impossible for them to resolve. Along with such a significant finance related problem, it becomes impossible to execute organization in an active manner. "We pay for anything we do from our own wallets. We prepare pennants and signs in marches on our own. We do not have an office. We need a secretariat for communication. But, we do not have any money. So, we also do that. We have started a call center. For the families to contact us for their children. We even pay the invoice of that phone line. And, certainly we will, but money is important. "12

Despite, all the organizational problems emerged in an eight-year journey of the İzmir family organization, it is obvious that the women press on with their struggle for seeking the rights of their children. Conference calls of universities and panels organized by municipalities are extremely important for LİSTAG volunteer women. Because, in these meetings, the mothers indicate that they have the chance to reach young people with different sexual orientation and identity who could not come out to their families. They think that their situation can set an example for them and their families. It is even considered as an important achievement to eliminate prejudices of society on LGBTI individuals. "Of course, it is hard to break down the prejudices. But, people are impressed when they see me as a mother standing next to my transsexual child. Because, mothers are sacred in our society. They respect me. For instance, if, my child goes to a panel and says that he is transsexual, people might judge him/her. But, when, as a mother, I say that my child is transsexual. And I support him/her. People respect that. Which is why, we, mothers have a lot to do."13 In addition to conferences and panels organized by various institutions, one of the most important platforms where the Izmir family organization has increased its visibility is social networks. It is quite possible to communicate with national and international stakeholders through LİSTAG's website (www.listag.org) and joint platforms established through social networks. Women, who use the internet very actively, have various communication-based information technologies between them. Use of information technologies and the internet within the context of organizing new social movements, is quite efficiently used by LİSTAG mothers. "Actually, we carry out all our activities through the internet. Several people also reach us from there. Furthermore, we communicate with other family organizations of the Europe through the internet. We communicate instantly through our WhatsApp group. Sometimes, we share our problems." ¹⁴ It is obvious that the internet technologies which have significant importance for organizing social movements and articulating them globally are extremely important for organization of LİSTAG mothers. Internet technologies accelerating organization, also increases visibility of the activists of a social movement. "I see that I gave a speech at somewhere. Then, I see my photograph in the internet. You just try to hide your identity. So what, Or, an event has been organized in another city. We learn instantly. This is extremely important for us, this makes things easier."15

Despite all aforementioned problems, LİSTAG mothers have grabbed a quite slice in history of today's Turkey. It is quite important for them to struggle for their children with different sexual orientations/identities and loss of rights they experience, in Turkish culture which we can consider conservative and traditional. It is extremely interesting that "ordinary" mothers turn into activists of a movement in time both for them and the social movements of Turkey.

4. EVALUATION AND RESULT

The course of experience mainly undergone by the mothers/women since 2010, in LİSTAG family organization, mobilized on identity policies and seeking for rights is the main topic of this study. The transition process of women from maternity to activism who have created a social movement for their children with different sexual identity or orientation is quite interesting.

The women actually mobilized for providing their children the social capital reserves which their children do not have in social structure have great contributions in social movement studies. This struggle pattern adopted by the mothers for young people who were marginalized from social networks for their differences can provide significant contributions both in women studies and social movement studies in academic field.

¹²Interview held in 02.07.2018 5.

¹¹Interview held in 21.05.2018 11.

¹³Interview held in 18.08.2018 7.

¹⁴Interview held in 05.09.2018 14.

¹⁵Interview held in 27.07.2018 12.

Especially, it is very special that a gender based struggle is carried out by parents in a social construct with more traditional structures like Turkey. Today, the struggle patterns established by LGBTI individuals for their own lost rights are experienced in several fields. There are quite a number of academic studies conducted on LGBTI individuals. However, authenticity of this study is this. In this study, fight of the mothers with LGBTI children is addressed. In Turkey, there is not any such study in academic literature of social sciences. Because, actually the social reality revealed here has yet a very close history.

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