

**TRACKING THE INVISIBLE: QUEER APPROACHES TO PARENTHOOD AND  
FAMILY IN TURKEY**

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Submitted to the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Sabancı University  
Spring 2012-2013

**TRACKING THE INVISIBLE: QUEER APPROACHES TO PARENTHOOD AND  
FAMILY IN TURKEY**

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Date of Approval: 06.09.2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TRACKING THE INVISIBLE: QUEER APPROACHES TO PARENTHOOD AND FAMILY IN TURKEY**

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Cultural Studies, MA Thesis, 2013

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Keywords: LGBT, Queer, Gender, Family, Parenthood, Ethnography

This thesis focuses on the experiences of parents and the dreams and plans of parents-to-be that are abjected by the heteronormative family system. Based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant-observation with lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer parents, the research explores the strategies developed by these parents for raising their children in the context of the heteronormative family system. How do these parents constitute a challenge for the “ideal nuclear family” form that is constitutive of nation-state practices? How do they experience or approach the school, which is heavily shaped by heteronormativity, as part of their parenting process? What are the different ways in which they define and experience themselves as “parents”? Asking such questions, this thesis critically analyzes the different articulations of queer parenthood and their challenge to compulsory heterosexuality, conjugality, and compulsory parental identification.

The ethnography not only traces parents’ relations with their children and their children’s school, but also their self-identification as a parent in the dichotomous gender system. In this sense, this research provides a thorough questioning of parental identifications within the heterosexual matrix and explores the possibilities of “non-compliant” parenting. The thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature on family and motherhood in Turkey by exploring the intersections between gender, sexual orientation and parenthood.

## ÖZET

# GÖRÜNMEYENİN İZİNİ SÜRMEK: TÜRKİYE’DE EBEVEYNLIK VE AİLEYE QUEER YAKLAŞIMLAR

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Kültürel Çalışmalar, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2013

Tez Danışmanı: Associate Professor Ayşe Gül Altınay

Anahtar Sözcükler: LGBT, Queer, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Aile, Ebeveynlik, Etnografi

Bu tez, heteronormatif aile sistemi tarafından dışlanmış ebeveynlerin deneyimlerine ve ebeveyn adaylarının hayallerine ve planlarına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, yarı-yapılandırılmış, derinlemesine mülakat ve katılımcı gözlemci tekniğine dayanarak lezbiyen, biseksüel, trans ve queer ebeveynlerin heteronormatif aile sistemi bağlamında çocuklarını yetiştirmek için nasıl stratejiler geliştirdiğini incelemektedir. Bu ebeveynler ulus-devlet pratiklerinin temel yapısı olan “ideal çekirdek aile” formuna nasıl bir karşı çıkışı temsil etmektedirler? Ebeveynlik süreçlerinin bir parçası olan heteronormativite tarafından şekillenen okulu veli olarak nasıl deneyimlemektedirler? Kendilerini “ebeveyn” olarak nasıl farklı şekillerde tanımlıyorlar ve bu ebeveyn kimliğini nasıl deneyimliyorlar? Bu sorular çerçevesinde bu tez, queer ebeveynliğin farklı ifadelendirmelerini ve zorunlu heteroseksüelliğe, evlilik bağına ve zorunlu ebeveynlik kimliğine karşı çıkış noktalarını analiz eder.

Bu etnografik çalışma ebeveynlerin çocuklarıyla ilişkilerini ve çocuklarının okuluyla ilişkilendirmelerini incelemenin yanı sıra ikili cinsiyet sistemi evreninde bir ebeveyn olarak kendilerini nasıl tanımladıklarının izini sürer. Bu bağlamda, araştırma heterosüksel matris içerisindeki ebeveyn kimliklerini sorgular ve “uygunsuz” ebeveynlik deneyimlerini inceler. Bu tez, Türkiye’de varolan aile ve annelik literatürüne toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsel yönelim ve ebeveynliğin keşişimini analiz ederek katkı sunmayı hedeflemektedir.

*To Derya, iek, Ceren, Zeynep, Eda, zge,  
Elif, Memo, Zin, Derin, Leyla, Esra,  
Defne, Dilan and Tuana*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor Ayşe Gül Altınay. She was always supportive about my thesis from the very first day I have opened up what was on my mind. Her academic and intellectual guidance, incessant enthusiasm for my thesis, her encouragement and patience at every stage of this work have given me the strength to continue. I am also thankful to Begüm Başdaş and Hülya Adak for both their initial advice about the thesis proposal and their insightful comments on the final product which will also contribute to my future work.

This thesis would not have been written without the help and support of my dearest friends Sema, Şebnem, Nihal, and Duygu who have always been there for me. I also owe Bade a depth of gratitude with regards to her great emergency help. I am deeply grateful to my sister and my mother because without their unconditional love and support, and their trust in this life, I wouldn't be able to learn what the love, compassion and cooperation was. Lastly, I am so blessed to be with Ezel, Turşu, Cici and Sarışın. Their love and companionship has always made me realize the flowers during this journey.

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## INTRODUCTION: “HELLO MY DEAR”

### MERHABA CANIM

Ben az konuşan çok yorulan biriyim  
Şarabı helvayla içmeyi severim  
Hiç namaz kılmadım şimdiye kadar  
Annemi ve allahı da çok severim  
annem de allahı çok sever  
biz bütün aile zaten biraz  
allahı da kedileri de çok severiz

hayat trajik bir homoseksüeldir  
bence bütün homoseksüeller adonistir biraz  
çünkü bütün sarhoşluklar biraz  
freüdün alkolsüz sayıklamalarıdır

siz inanmayın bir gün değişir elbet  
güneşe ve penise tapan rüzgârın yönü  
çünkü ben okumuştum muydu neydi  
bir yerlerde tanrılara kadın satıldığını

ah canım aristophones  
barışı ve eşek arılarını hiç unutmuyorum  
ölümü de bir giz gibi tutuyorum içimde  
ölümü tanrıya saklıyorum

ve bir gün hiç anlamıyacaksınız  
güneşe ve erkeklığe büyüyen vücudum  
düşüvericek ellerinizden ellerinizden ve  
bir gün elbette  
zeki müreni seviceksiniz

(zeki müreni seviniz)<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Arkadaş Z. Özger, “Merhaba Canım”,

[http://www.siir.gen.tr/siir/a/arkadas\\_zekai\\_ozger/merhaba\\_canim.htm](http://www.siir.gen.tr/siir/a/arkadas_zekai_ozger/merhaba_canim.htm), (date accessed  
October 6, 2013): I am the person who talks less but gets tired soon/ I like drinking wine

This is a poem by Arkadaş Z. Özger, a Turkish poet whose body was found on a street in Ankara in 1973. It is suspected that he was murdered because he was leftist and gay. Most of his poems draw attention to his view of the problematic social construction of masculinity and femininity in society; and how this limits one's own existence.<sup>2</sup> This poem has always haunted me, like the voice of the silence of gender oppression. Arkadaş Z. Özger knows that one day everybody will love Zeki Müren<sup>3</sup> and ends his poem with an invitation, in parenthesis, to "love Zeki Müren." This thesis departs from this call and seeks to remove the parentheses. In more theoretical wording, or to translate a line of poetry into

---

with halvah/ I have never prayed/ I love my mother and god very much/ My mother loves god as well/ We, as a family, after all/ Love god as well as cats/

Life is a tragic homosexual/ I think all of the homosexuals somewhat are adonis,/ because each drunkenness' is/ the deliria of Freud without alcohol./

Don't believe, certainly, it will change one day/ the direction of the wind which worship the sun and the phallus/ because somehow I read it before/ somewhere the women are sold to the gods/

Oh dear Aristophanes/ I don't forget the peacetime and the hornet/ The death which is deeply inside of me like a secret/ I hide the death for god/

And one day you won't understand anything/ my body that grow through the sun and manhood/ will fall down from your hands/ one day surely/you will love zeki müren/ (love zeki müren).

<sup>2</sup>For a detailed analysis of Arkadaş Z. Özger's poetry, see Yeliz Kızılarıslan "Arkadaş Z. Özger Şiirinde Erkeklik ve Homofobi Eleştirisi" in Homofobi Kimin Meselesi? By Kaos GL, 2010.

<sup>3</sup>Zeki Müren was one of the greatest and most popular vocal artists in Turkey. The paradoxical situation is that he was accepted as "model citizen," and yet, his queerness was ignored. His queerness –or denials of it- has triggered heated debate, particularly after his death in the 1990s (See Stokes 2010).

anthropology, my aim in this research is to make the “familiar” - that is, the normative family often depicted as a safe haven - “strange” and make the “strange” - that is, socially abjected queer parents - “familiar” (Rosaldo, 1989; 39). Based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant-observation with lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer parents, the research explores the strategies developed by these parents for raising their children in the context of the heteronormative family system. How do these parents constitute a challenge for the “ideal nuclear family” form that is constitutive of nation-state practices? How do they experience or approach the school, which is heavily shaped by heteronormativity, as part of their parenting process? What are the different ways in which they define and experience themselves as “parents”? Asking these questions and others, this thesis critically analyzes the different articulations of queer parenthood and their challenge to compulsory heterosexuality, conjugality, and compulsory parental identification. What brings all these narratives together is not just their non-conformity with sexual and gender norms, but also that they force us to question parental identifications within the heterosexual matrix and point to possibilities of “non-compliant” parenting.

In this chapter, I first introduce the research participants while at the same time reflecting on my experience as a researcher, specifically focusing on my struggle with access and the limits of my earlier conceptualization. In discussing these issues, I also delve into my research method and data analysis, as well as the process of doing interviews. This research has been shaped by every interviewee I have met, and my queer reformulation of the research topic wouldn't have been possible if my research questions had not been challenged by the individual experiences of the parents involved. As I introduce my research participants, I discuss the ways in which the theoretical framework of my research

and my research questions developed and transformed in the course of the study itself. In the following section, I provide an overview of the literature on LGBT issues and situate my research in this literature. Lastly, I provide an outline indicating the structure of the thesis.

## **1.1. Love Derya, Çiçek, Ceren, Zeynep, Eda, Özge, Elif, Memo, Zin, Derin, Leyla, Esra, Defne, Dilan, and Tuana**

### **1.1.1. Data and Method**

I conducted semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews with 15 individuals, discussing not only their parenting experiences but also their thoughts, plans, anxieties, and dreams about parenting and family. While thirteen of the interviews were one-on-one, two individuals were interviewed as a couple upon their request. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 21 to 50 while their children's ages ranged from 3 to 25. One interviewee was seven months pregnant while five of them were planning to have a child in the next five years. Eight of them had children from previous heterosexual marriages or relationships, one of them had a child via arranged pregnancy, and one of them had adopted a child. Among those who are planning to have children, three of them are considering adoption, one plan to give birth, and one wants her partner to give birth. Three identify themselves as lesbians, four as bisexuals, two as genderqueer, one as queer, three as transgenders, and two don't embrace any form of self-identification. In terms of parental identification, they

identify themselves according to the categories of “mother” or “father,” with the exception of one who uses the “meaningless” category of “*bizz*.”

Six of my research participants had bachelor’s degrees, three are currently studying for their Master’s degrees, two had Master’s degrees, one is studying for a PhD, one left high school, and one has a high school diploma. Three of the interviewees are currently students, four works in part-time jobs, and eight works full-time. Nine of them live in Istanbul, two of them live in İzmir, three of them live in Ankara and one lives in Antalya. I conducted all the interviews in the cities where they live. Besides the interviews, I also benefited from participant-observation as the basis of my research to gain insights about their everyday life. Most of the interviews were conducted at their residences, and I tried to spend time with their children so that I could form an impression about the relationship between the child and parent(s).

All of the interviews were conducted based on the principle of confidentiality, which I discussed with each research participant. For each interviewee, I use pseudonyms of their own choice. Some of the information about their lives has been changed per their request so as not to reveal their identities.

The average duration of the interviews was two-and-a-half hours, and they were all digitally-recorded with the permission of the participant and later transcribed by me. Each interview began with the same set of open-ended questions, but interviewees’ narratives shaped each interview (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Esterberg 2002 in Butterfield and Padavic, 2011). On the other hand, I negotiated and renegotiated my research questions at every turn. Note-taking during interviews and both analytical and theoretical memo-writing after every interview led me to systematically revise my research questions and the

framework of the research itself. Therefore, both my research and research questions were developed and shaped by the research process. A reformulation of the theoretical framework as a result of self-reflectivity and personal experience as a valuable method of inquiry served as both personal and political interventions (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001).

### **1.1.2. The Field: Meeting with the Parents and Parents-to-be**

For this research, I initially reached my interviewees through personal contacts<sup>4</sup>, while I also contacted LGBT organizations such as Lambdaistanbul, İstanbul LGBT, and Kaos GL. Before the beginning of my fieldwork, I had already contacted three mothers who were willing to talk to me about their experiences. Therefore, I thought that these initial contacts might also be able to provide me with new contacts as well.

I first conducted an interview with Derya. I have known him/her for several years, since s/he is an LGBT activist. Before the interview, I had met him/her at a panel titled “Alternative Togetherness and Utopias” which was held at the LGBT Pride Week events in 2010. When I told him/her about my research and asked him/her about the possibility of doing interview, s/he willingly agreed to meet with me. We met at Moda Park in Istanbul, where we had a picnic on the grass on a nice, sunny day. I remember that day as an inspiring beginning for my research.

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<sup>4</sup> I had voluntarily worked for Lambdaistanbul LGBT Solidarity Association before my thesis process which enabled me to meet and know many LGBT activists.

### **Derya, 35, İstanbul**

S/he<sup>5</sup> was born in İstanbul. S/he graduated from university and is currently working as a free-lance translator. S/he has been identifying himself/herself as anarchist since his/her high school years. Derya has also been active in the LGBT movement. Additionally, s/he has endeavored to adapt queer theory to his/her everyday life, which I believe is one of the most important components of his/her activism. The talks s/he has been giving about queer parenting and alternative intimacies also play a significant role in his/her attempts to unite queer theory with his/her everyday life. The significant difference between him/her and my other interviewees is that s/he can be thought of as an activist of queer parenting as a parent.

Derya identifies himself/herself as genderqueer. S/he feels himself/herself both this and that; “both man and woman,” as s/he states. S/he came out last year as a trans. S/he believes that gender is not limited to the categories of man and woman. S/he prefers to be with someone whom s/he desires independently from his/her gender as long as that person (she, he or s/he) desires him/her, too. His/her self-identification is critical at this point, because his/her questioning of her gender identity and sexual orientation is a significant part of his/her life experience. During the interview, s/he discussed his/her experience as a queer mother.

S/he grew up in a family which consisted of a mother and a brother in addition to him/herself. His/her mother was a single mother, and Derya has never seen his/her father

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<sup>5</sup>Because of Derya’s gender identity I asked if I could use “she” as a pronoun or whether she preferred a gender-neutral pronoun. She said she had no problem with being “she,” but because it signifies a universal woman category, she suggested that I use “s/he.”

because his/her parents separated when s/he was a young child. S/he realized at the age of 27 that s/he would like to be a mother. Before that, s/he had not wanted a child since s/he had been against nuclear family norms, compulsory heterosexuality, monogamy and compulsory gender roles. S/he used to believe that a child could pose a threat to his/her freedom. However, according to him/her, giving birth to a child empowered him/her both physically and spiritually in his/her life. S/he had wanted to raise a child with one of his/her woman partners in the past; however, they never accepted it. What's more, s/he could not find a way of having a child due to the legal restrictions in Turkey.

Derya met his/her beloved,<sup>6</sup> and they decided to have a child immediately. His/her beloved is a bisexual man who also feels himself to be both a man and a woman, according to Derya. At the time of our interview, their child was 6 years old, and they all lived together in the same apartment. The domestic arrangements and the division of labor in their home are, in Derya's words, "very egalitarian"; there is no "sacred bedroom" for the parents, and they all have their own rooms. On the other hand, s/he and his/her beloved both have issues with monogamy, and for that reason they have a polyamorous<sup>7</sup> relationship. The relationship with her beloved represents quite a challenge to hegemonic familial norms, which is why s/he describes their situation as a blow against the concept of the nuclear family:

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<sup>6</sup>I refer to his/her partner as his/her "beloved" because s/he does not like calling his/her beloved husband, boyfriend and so on. S/he said, "I am just his beloved, neither his wife nor his partner."

<sup>7</sup>Unlike polygamy, polyamory is the desire for and practice of having more than one intimate relationship with the consent of all partners.

... Because both of us think that the nuclear family is a cage. It is a kind of confinement. This confinement is so severe and painful. It leads to great unhappiness.

We promised that we would do this neither to our child nor to ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

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After the interview, I had planned to meet two mothers. Although they had promised me interviews, both of them cancelled for various reasons. One of them said that she didn't have much to say about her mothering experience as a lesbian since she was not out to her child. The other one similarly said she was not out to her child, and for that reason she was afraid the interview could bring harm to her child. I tried to convince both of them to participate. I told the former that it doesn't matter whether she is out or not to her child; either way, we could talk about her experiences as a mother. I told the latter that some of the information about her life could be changed upon her request and I guaranteed that the information wouldn't be used anywhere else except for my research. Both of them rejected my offer, using the same argument, which was based on their intention to hide their sexual orientation, especially from their children.

Derya had told me about other mothers s/he knew, but later informed me that they didn't want to meet because they, too, were "in the closet." At the beginning of my fieldwork, I thus found myself stuck; I had hoped to contact other mothers through these interviewees via the snowball sampling method. Although I failed to get the interviews, their rejection and reasoning had multiple implications for my research. The principle of confidentiality is not enough to make some mothers comfortable enough to talk about their

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<sup>8</sup>...çünkü o çekirdek ailenin bir hapisane olduğunu düşünüyoruz ikimizde. Bir kapatılma olduğunu. O kapatılmanın çok sert ve acı olduğunu. Çok büyük mutsuzluklara sebep olduğunu düşünüyoruz. Birbirimize bunu yapmayacağımıza, çocuğa bunu yapmayacağımıza dair bir sözümüz var.

lives. Because Derya, as an activist, takes queer parenting seriously and talks publicly about it, she did not have problems talking to me. On the other hand, other people lead binary lives; hence they wanted to protect their children, themselves and also their relationship with their children. Some might have avoided talking about their sexual orientation because it also means coming out of the closet as a parent. They might be trying to separate those two aspects of their lives, and such an interview would force them to combine these disparate existences. Those were very understandable concerns.

When I hit the wall in terms of access to lesbian, bisexual and queer parents in the early stages of my research, I changed my focus to parents-to-be, their dreams about mothering and their thoughts on motherhood. As a result of this new focus, I decided to conduct interviews with parents-to-be until I was able to reach other actual parents.

In those days, I often spoke with Çiçek – one of my best friends – about my research. Before I asked for an interview, we had discussed his/her dreams of adopting a child. Since my research touched on his/her dreams about raising a child, we actually had been having informal talks about his/her plans. So, I decided to continue the interviews with people I was close to, because I believed that it could also help me reformulate my interview questions, the way I ask them, and the way I approach my interviewees.

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## **Çiçek, 24, Istanbul**

S/he<sup>9</sup> was born in İstanbul but s/he grew up in Edirne. S/he has two brothers; one is a university student, and the other is a high school student. Çiçek was raised in a nuclear family but s/he stayed at a boarding school during his/her high school years. S/he is currently studying for his/her Master's degree in social sciences. S/he sometimes works part-time as a waitress, translator or editor. S/he has been an LGBT activist for several years, and s/he identifies herself/himself as trans.

S/he wants to adopt a child and collectively raise him/her with his/her friends. The reason for adopting is not just to avoid giving birth, but also because, even if it were possible, she would prefer not to. According to him/her, this world is simply not a good place into which to bring a new human life. Furthermore, there are already many children without parents who are in need of care, and s/he would like to provide the care that such a child needs. S/he would like to raise the child within a collective family consisting of his/her friends regardless of blood relations, as a result of which his/her child could have, for example, two mothers, three fathers, four uncles, and three aunts. The important thing is that the child will be able to choose his/her own family and call family members however she/he likes. Çiçek will be his/her mother as long as s/he calls him/her that way. Çiçek also says s/he doesn't mind if his/her child calls her/him by his/her name. S/he would take full responsibility of childcare, but at the same time would avoid making him/her dependent on himself/herself. On the other hand, she would be open to sharing the responsibility of childcare with his/her friends who would like to be a part of the family, and in such a

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<sup>9</sup> Like Derya, Çiçek suggested that I uses/he instead of she or he.

situation, each person would have their particular share of responsibility. In this way, Çiçek dreams of having an extended family that is not bound by blood relations.

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By the time I interviewed Çiçek, I had also gotten in contact with Eda, who already has two children, and Didem, who has three children. Eda promised me to meet me two weeks later, and Didem said we could meet the following month. Meanwhile, in the days after my interview with Çiçek, I met Ceren through a friend of mine, Zeynep, in a cafe. Zeynep was very interested in participating in my research, and we decided to have an informal talk about my study. After a short while, Ceren joined us. She said she was also planning to give birth to a child in 2-3 years. The three of us ended up talking about the parenting issue the whole night, and after that warm conversation, Ceren herself offered to be interviewed. The prospect of speaking with her was quite exciting, because unlike the other interviewees she dreams of raising a genderless child. Because of Zeynep's schedule, we arranged an interview with Ceren first.

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### **Ceren, 26, Istanbul**

She was born and raised in Ankara, and came to Istanbul for her high school education. She received her bachelor's degree from a university in the US, and at the time of our interview she was working on her Master's degree in social sciences and writing her thesis. Also, she worked as an assistant to a psychiatrist. She identifies her sexual orientation as genderqueer. On the other hand, she politically identifies herself as a woman because of "the patriarchal society," as she says. For her, being a woman offers significant power in itself.

Ceren grew up in a family consisting of a mother and a father. After the death of her father when she was 13, she was raised by a single mother. Ceren would prefer to give birth to her child. She wants to experience this physically and she has had a boyfriend for several years. Before this relationship, Ceren wanted to raise a child collectively with her friends but then changed her mind, and now she would like to raise a child with her partner. Still, she said that she is open to friends who would like to take part in childcare, and although she has thought of forming an extended family, Ceren and her partner will take on full responsibility of caring for the child. She would like to be the mother of her child. An important point that she stresses is that she wants to raise the child to be genderless. In addition to raising a child without obeying compulsory gender roles, she also won't divulge the child's biological sex to anyone.

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Two weeks later, Eda said that she was still busy, and we had to wait another two weeks for the interview, so we agreed to call each other later. Meanwhile, Didem neither called nor wrote back. I felt that I was insisting too much, and decided to wait for her to call. I was still nervous about the possibility of not being able to contact other parents, and I kept writing to all of my friends and LGBT associations. Two weeks after my interview with Ceren, I went to Zeynep's house for an interview, where she lived with her two cats.

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## **Zeynep, 29, Istanbul**

She was born in Mersin, and lived there during her primary school years. She stayed at a boarding school starting from middle school, and then went to the US for her undergraduate degree. She came back to Turkey, where she received her Master's degree in education. She works as a teacher now.

Zeynep identifies herself as queer. I had never asked about her sexual orientation or gender identity,<sup>10</sup> but she started the interview by stating that she avoided self-identification but said that if I needed to know, she felt closer to being queer.

Zeynep was born into a nuclear family but she was always by herself, as she stated. Because she stayed at a boarding school after primary school, she was responsible for herself. She said that she has been making her own decisions and taking responsibility for her own life for a long time. This childhood experience led her to the idea of having a child as a single mother. Both of her parents were civil servants employed in shift work involving night hours. Due to those working hours, the division of labor at home was equally shared by her parents, so she was raised without “compulsory” gender role models. For Zeynep, her mother was a very strong woman although she only had a primary school education. She believes that awareness of compulsory gender roles is not about the education of the individual. Zeynep said that she would like to borrow that model of an

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<sup>10</sup>Throughout this research, I never directly asked my interviewees about either their sexual orientation or gender identity. Each interviewee knew that the research was on lesbian, bisexual and queer parents. As a result, they mentioned how they self-identify during the interviews. The reason I didn't want to ask about their identification is based on both political and ethical issues. Firstly, it's a slippery slope to ask someone his/her identification, because it may end up forcing the interviewee to construct himself/herself according to an identity. However, they may not adhere to any particular identity; it could be just a flux of experience. Secondly, in my everyday life I always find this question to be awkward, as if one is forced to say “I am a penguin.” So I let my interviewees shape their own narratives vis-à-vis their sexual orientation and gender identity.

egalitarian nuclear family life as she experienced it. She said she derived strength from her mother in terms of raising a child as a single mother. Her mother had a previous marriage from which Zeynep had a sister and a brother. Her mother's ex-husband left one day and her mother struggled with her two children for years. After she met Zeynep's father at work, they decided to get married, and then Zeynep was born. In the meantime, her aunt was having difficulty raising her own child due to financial problems. So, her aunt's child joined their family when she was a year old. Hence, Zeynep was raised in a family with three other siblings. Those experiences taught her two things: first, being strong as a woman is very important; and second, blood relations are insignificant in the formation of a family. That's why she wanted to adopt a child and she believed she had the strength to be a single mother.

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After conducting 3 interviews with mothers-to-be (Çiçek, Ceren and Zeynep), I realized that their narratives share similar gaps and silences.<sup>11</sup> Although they definitely want to rear a child and have plans to do it, their narratives stop at the point when they

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<sup>11</sup> After every interview, I made additional notes under my interview notes. I would like to share some of those without revising them in order to emphasize how each narrative also shaped my position. "Note: I have realized that all three of the interviewees who are mothers-to-be are having difficulty expressing their dreams (Ceren, Çiçek and Zeynep). When I asked them how they'd be as mothers, their narration stopped and then they said that they don't have an example in their lives, and that they are in need of sharing experiences. Or, they said that I need to ask this to someone who already is a mother. When I asked them about their dreams, I got the sense that their dreams were stifled, especially by institutions. At this point, I wondered: Should I be asking intriguing questions with regards to how they'll fight back in situations when together with the child they come into contact with a hospital, school, etc. or is this the fundamental irony of the current governmental policy with regard to these experiences? That they even prevent individuals from dreaming?"

imagine a situation in which their child has to interact with institutions. I felt that they have some worries about interpersonal discrimination, although for them legal discrimination pales beside interpersonal discrimination. The fear of facing an institution seems to block even their dreams. When I asked questions about schools or hospitals, silence fell over the interview. All these narratives embedded in strength became “I don’t know,” “I don’t want to think about this,” “It makes me really scared to dream about it,” “I have no idea,” “You should ask people who are already parents.” I noted this and pushed myself to get into contact with a parent who had experience. Fortunately, I was able to at last make an appointment with Eda. In the meantime, Didem wrote a reply to me, stating that since she wasn’t out to her children, she would prefer not to have an interview; hence she refused to meet with me, giving the same explanation as the two parents who had rejected me before.

I got into contact with Eda through a friend of mine, who knows her from Lambdaistanbul. She had been voluntarily working there for several years. We first met at a café, and she came with her girlfriend. She spoke honestly and said that before the interview they just wanted to chat and then decide whether or not to do an interview. Before, she had avoided talking about her children because she was afraid of hurting them. She wanted to find out if I had a bias against this form of parenting, or if I had a transphobic or homophobic attitude towards such parents. I told her about my research in detail and in the end she agreed to meet up. A week later, I met her and her 7 seven cats at her flat.

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## **Eda, 50, Istanbul**

She was born and raised in Bursa. She moved to a large city for her university education and completed her bachelor's degree in the field of communications. She works as a web designer now.

Because of her father's status, she wasn't able to come out as a transsexual woman for years. She had a girlfriend during her university years. One day, her girlfriend realized that she was pregnant and it was too late for an abortion. So they decided to get married immediately. This meant that at the age of 22, she had already formed a nuclear family. Four years later, her wife gave birth to another child. After a few years passed, her father died. After his death, she couldn't bear to keep her secret any longer and came out to her wife. Although she was biologically a man, she always felt himself to be a woman, as she states. Her wife was shocked, but kept her silence about the issue for years. When one of her children was in high school and the other was in middle school, her wife became sick. Unfortunately, she died the same year. So, Eda was left with her two children by herself.

Eda didn't want to go on being their "father". As that idea was running through her head, the family had been following a TV serial which featured a gay character. The children had always empathized with that character and got angry with people who discriminated against him because of his sexual orientation. It was this attitude they had about the gay character that gave Eda the idea to talk to them about the issue, and she attempted to tell them. Eventually, she came out to her children as a transsexual woman. Her children's first reaction was whether she wanted them to refer to her as "mother" or not. She said she was still their father. But after a while, she invented a word, "bizz," which lacks gender connotation and meaning. She said she had no idea what queer theory was

back then, “but now it seems to be a very queer word,” she says. After that day, she was their “Bizz.” Now, her children are 19 and 25 years old. Eda lives with her girlfriend.

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After my interview with Eda, nothing would be the same again for my research. I realized that I was trying to put her, and my other interviewees, into paradigmatic categories, as though they had to be either father or mother. What was she, indeed? She was “bizz.” What was the meaning of bizz? Just bizz. Eda’s challenge went beyond my research.<sup>12</sup> It led me to rethink those barriers to the identity creation of parenting. Like the woman/man binary, mother/father is constructed as a binary opposition corresponding solely to biology. Eda’s experience of parenthood did not conform to the categories of mother/father dichotomy, constituting a major challenge to the institution of gendered parenting.

With all those questions in mind, I got in contact with a woman named Özge who lived in Antalya. She was a single mother and wrote a blog about being a single mother. A friend of mine met Özge thanks to the motherhood networks on the Internet. Özge came out to my friend and asked if she knew any lesbian mothers. My friend told her about my

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<sup>12</sup>Here is a part of my field notes after the interview with Eda: “A note of confusion: In fact Eda had to live as their “father” for many years. She said that she was never their “father,” she was an individual who was making things easier for them as well as taking care of them. After she came out to her children, she became their “bizz.” She believes that the construct of “bizz” is rather queer. This confuses me, as to where to place Eda’s experience in my research. On the one hand, she states that motherhood and fatherhood are gendered identities, so she refuses to accept them. On the other hand, the stuff she says about motherhood enriches my research questions. I constructed my research topic around the issue of “lesbian, bisexual and queer mothers’ experiences,” but Eda does not fit under any of these constructs. Do I need to categorize every individual that I meet? Or do I need to reconsider the topic? Or is this the irony that I need to be discussing?”

research; in this way, we started writing to each other and I went to Antalya for the interview the following weekend. I stayed with Özge and her daughter, and we spent three days together. Every morning her daughter woke me up with her original song “Wake up wake up, sleepy potato!”

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### **Özge, 41, Antalya**

She was born and raised in Antalya. She has a bachelor’s degree, and works as a foreign trade specialist. She identifies herself as a lesbian. Özge grew up in a family consisting of a father, mother, brother and sister. She had dreamed of being a mother for a long time and had been looking for ways to actualize her dream. She told her parents that she wanted a child and mentioned her idea of going to a sperm bank, but her mother and sister were strictly against it. Özge wanted to raise her child and be close with her family so she was heedful of what they said. In the end, they supported the idea of adoption. However, things didn’t quite work out the way she expected. The process of adopting a baby as a single mother was going to take longer than she expected, up to 5-6 years. She was 37 when she decided to adopt and she didn’t want to wait such a long time. At that time, she had to go abroad for her job, and very coincidentally learnt that there was also a legal arrangement for foreigners for adoption. At last she adopted a child and they lived for a year in that country. After her term of office ended, they came back to Antalya together. Özge identifies herself as a single mother whose family consists of her 3 year-old daughter and herself. They live close to Özge’s parents. Although Özge states that she takes full

responsibility of childcare, she makes sure that her daughter spends time with the other members of her family.

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In the meantime I received a reply from KAOS GL. They told me about someone named Elif and gave me her e-mail address, and I immediately wrote to her about my research. She agreed to do an interview, and two weeks later we met in Ankara. We also spent some time with her son after the interview, and he played the guitar for me.

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### **Elif, 40, Ankara**

She was born and raised in Ankara. She holds a Master's degree and has been working for international development projects for a long time. As a feminist, she works in feminist organizations, and she identifies herself as a bisexual.

She grew up in a family consisting of a father and a mother. She was born when her parents were in their 40s; because of this, there was a significant age difference between them. She married her boyfriend soon after getting her bachelor's degree and found herself in the midst of a nuclear family, something which she was against. She gave birth to her child after their marriage. All of her struggles to transform it into an "alternative" family were a "wild-goose chase," as she stated. The domestic arrangements, division of labor and childcare were handled in an unfair manner. Eventually these problems led her to end the marriage.

After Elif separated from her husband, she lived with a girlfriend for two years. Her girlfriend helped out with the childcare. At the time, however, Elif wasn't legally divorced. Her husband placed a camera and a tape recorder in the house in an attempt to get material

he could use against her to gain custody. At last, Elif managed to convince him that her girlfriend wouldn't be living with them. But her ex-husband's harassment exhausted her and her girlfriend, and ultimately drove them apart. Elif has a 12 year-old son whom she raises as a single mother now.

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I contacted Memo through Elif, and I met up with Memo and his fiancée Zin in their apartment. I had originally planned to conduct an interview with each of them separately. Before the interview, we had breakfast and got to know each other better. Memo repeatedly said that he was nervous about the interview. He refused to talk by himself and wanted Zin to join him, so I arranged for them to be interviewed together. I respected the way they feel when they are together and so I went along with their request, and in the end I interviewed them as a couple.

### **Memo, 36, Ankara**

He was born and raised in Ankara. He self-identifies as a transsexual man. His life has been very hard because of his parents' attitude towards him throughout his life. During his high school years, he had a relationship with a girl, but when his family found out about it, they immediately made him quit school. His parents forced him to marry a 53 year-old man. When he got married he was 17, and although he warned the man about the situation, the man did not care about his reluctance to get married. Soon after their marriage, he got pregnant. He did not want the child and tried to have a miscarriage. He even jumped from a balcony to miscarry the baby, but the baby insisted to be born, as he stated:

He was so small and defenseless the day he was born. Actually I was as small and defenseless as Berk. I believe that we held onto each other. Because the

first thing Berk did when he was born (*he grabbed my finger to show me*), and I just can't forget that warmth. Is that clear? I just can't forget that. It is something else. Because for me, he really was the one thing I could hold onto. In fact he was holding onto me as well. When I look at it now, Berk and I just had each other.<sup>13</sup>

When his child was 4 years old, the man died of a heart attack. After his death, Memo's parents tried to convince him to marry again right away. However, this time Memo ran away with his child, and they lived in bus terminals for six months. Then, Memo moved into a friend's apartment with his child. He didn't talk with his parents for years.

Memo doesn't embrace the biological experience of giving birth to a child. He identifies himself as Berk's father. He has never been his "mother," according to his narrative. His son has always accepted him the way he is. After his relationship had started with Zin, Berk wanted to call Zin "mother". So, they created a new family together. It is difficult for Memo to find a job because of his transsexual identity, and now he earns money by transcribing interviews.

### **Zin, 32, Ankara**

She was born and raised in İzmir. She had been studying for her PhD in social sciences. She noted that she grew up in a family that is, in her words, "white, kemalist and upper class." They always pushed her to be at the top of her class, but they never asked

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<sup>13</sup>Doğduđu gün çok küçük ve çok savunmasızdı. Ben de aslında Berk kadar küçük ve savunmasızdım. Birbirimize tutduğumuzu düşünüyorum. Çünkü Berk böyle ilk doğduğunda yaptığı tek şey şuydu: parmağımı tuttu (bana göstermek için parmağımı tuttu) ve o sıcaklığı hiç unutmuyorum. Anlatabildim mi? Onu hiç unutmuyorum. Bu başka bir şey. Çünkü gerçekten o benim hayattaki tutunacak bir dalım olmuştu. Ama o da bana tutunmuştu aslında. Şimdi bakacak olursan hayatta aslında bizim birbirimizden başka kimsemiz yoktu Berkle.

what really she wanted in life. She always dreamed of having a family in which everybody could have their own dreams. She identifies herself as a bisexual.

She is Berk's mother, the child Memo gave birth to. Their family consists of a father, mother and child, and they have been together for 6 years. A short while after their relationship started, Berk wanted to call Zin his mother. She had already taken on this responsibility and accepted him as her child, but the idea of being called "mother" made her feel confused because she had always said that she didn't want to be a mother and never wanted to give birth to a child. She had been against the motherhood institution. But since she didn't want to break his heart, she relented. And after that, her thoughts on mothering changed due to the fact that there was no change in their lives except for the way Berk called her. In fact, she still had the same childcare responsibilities and she continued being Zin, just as she was before. She realized how that institution had made her afraid of being a mother. But now, she is glad to be his mother.

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I contacted Derin through a friend of mine who is an activist for Lambdaistanbul. My friend told her about my research, and we talked on the phone. We decided to meet two weeks later, because of her busy schedule. She lives on the outskirts of Istanbul. When I arrived at her home, her son wasn't there, but he came back sooner than I expected. Derin wanted me to meet her son as well, but the problem was that she thought I could conduct the interview while her son was at home. However, the house was very small; so, there was a possibility he would hear the entire conversation. This had the potential to change Derin's narrative and also to hurt the child. Derin insisted that we begin the interview, but I suggested that we meet another time and I expressed my concerns. So the three of us went

to a café and spent a pleasant Sunday evening. The next day when her son was at school, we met at her flat for the interview.

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### **Derin, 33, Istanbul**

She was born and raised in Istanbul. She graduated from high school and started working as a civil servant. She identifies herself as lesbian.

Derin began a relationship with a woman at her workplace when she was 19. The woman, who was older than her, was married with children. Soon after, their relationship came out and her parents immediately forced her to leave her job. All of the people at her workplace censured her because of this relationship, while the other woman was considered to be the “victim” since she already had a family. Derin was seen as the one who seduced a married woman. In the end, her parents forced her to move to another city. Derin quit her job and spent nearly a year in exile. When the dust settled, she returned to Istanbul and to her workplace, but began working in another department (to this day she still works at the same place). Nonetheless, people continued to gossip about her at work.

Derin thought that she had no choice except to get married in order to prove to her family and colleagues that she was not a lesbian. So she decided to strike up a strategic marriage with a friend. She knew that she was a lesbian, but she promised her parents not to have a relationship with a woman. She started a family, and dedicated herself to her job so she could earn enough money to be independent.

After a few years, Derin decided to end the marriage, but she realized that she was pregnant. They had been trying in vitro fertilization. As soon as she gave birth to her child, she separated from her husband, and continued life as a single mother. Derin didn't see her

ex-husband after they separated. After her son's birth, she moved into her family's house. Her whole family used to live in the apartment including her sister's family and her brother's family. Four years later, she moved into her own flat. Two of her girlfriends used to share the flat with Derin and her son, but Derin now lives just with her 10 year old son. She is not out to her child yet.

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A friend of mine introduced me to Leyla, who was also planning to adopt a child. What led me to conduct an interview with her was that she was strictly against raising a child in Turkey, which piqued my interest. Also, all of the people I had met had been forced to see a psychiatrist, and her father, who is a psychologist, doesn't support the life she leads, and I wanted to hear about her experiences. We met at her apartment.

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### **Leyla, 26, Istanbul**

She was born and raised in Istanbul. She is studying for her Master's degree. She identifies herself as a bisexual.

She was born into a family in which both parents are doctors. Her brother was born when she was 12 years old. She looked after her brother to help her mother. Those years led her to want a child. She would like to adopt a child and raise him/her in Berlin with her partner. She is certain that as a lesbian couple she doesn't want to raise a child in Turkey, because she believes that all of them - she, her partner and their child - would be exposed to discrimination under the current circumstances. Not only is this because there are no legal arrangements for LGBT couples in Turkey, but also she prefers not to deal with interpersonal discrimination. She dreams of rearing a child in a communal setting in Berlin.

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I contacted Defne through Özge, who had asked three of her friends to participate in my research, but only Defne responded positively. When we talked on the phone, somehow Defne was quite reluctant to meet. Nevertheless, she agreed, and I went to İzmir to meet her a week later. When we met at a cafe, she had brought her girlfriend Esra, who also had two children. This was the first time I had an interview in a café; we sat on the café's second floor so we could be more comfortable. Still, being in a public space affected their narratives. Defne, for example, was hesitant to speak. Her tone of voice was strained and she seemed very nervous, and she only gave short answers. All of my efforts were in vain. The interview took an hour and fifteen minutes, but silence prevailed for most of the interview; yet, that silence sometimes implies more than words.

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### **Esra, 41, İzmir**

She was born and raised in Istanbul. She works as an electronics engineer. After getting her bachelor's degree, she got married and soon after she had two children. Her husband was always out of town because of work. She talked about her marriage as though it was a duty; she finished school, had a boyfriend, they got married, and she had children - she never suspected that flow.

Esra identifies herself as a bisexual. She began having relationships with women 4-5 years after she got married. She has been with Defne for years. The previous year, Esra had moved to İzmir in order to be closer to her. After that, her husband quit his job to live with his family. Since his return home limited Esra's life, she decided to tell her husband the truth. She had come out to her husband just two weeks prior, but he said that he had

known. She was very surprised that he said nothing. In fact, to her, coming out meant taking the risk of losing everything, even her children. He said they could continue their marriage if she wanted, but she didn't want to. He moved somewhere else and there is no strife between them. Her children are 12 and 15. She is not out to them.

**Defne, 48, İzmir**

She was born and raised in Istanbul. She received her bachelor's degree in Ankara and lived there for a while after completing her university education. Soon after she married her boyfriend, she gave birth to her daughter. As she said, she was incapable of stopping herself from having relationships with women. She has been together with Esra for several years. Defne insistently defined her mothering experience as deficient because she felt that she didn't dedicate herself to her daughter, who is 25 now. Her child grew up very alone, according to her. She heavily avoided talking about her family and her experiences as a mother during the interview. Defne doesn't embrace any self-identification for her sexual orientation.

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I met Dilan, who is the owner of a lesbian bar, so I believed she could provide me with some contacts. When we met, she came with her girlfriend. Actually, they had gotten "married" the previous year. They told me their story and I suggested we do an interview. In the end, I conducted an interview just with Dilan. Although for a month I tried to meet up with her partner, it wasn't possible because of her busy schedule.

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### **Dilan, 32, Istanbul**

She was born and raised in Van, where she lived until she began university. She is the owner of a lesbian bar. Dilan grew up in a very large family. She has three mothers and ten siblings.

Dilan identifies herself as a lesbian. She is Kurdish, woman and lesbian; she said she cannot separate those identities from one another. She has a wife. They arranged a wedding with a registrar who was their friend. Although it wasn't a legal marriage, they stuck to the rituals of a wedding ceremony. They accept themselves as being married. Her partner had planned to give birth to a child but they were unsure about how to proceed. Dilan was against using a sperm bank; she preferred obtaining sperm from somebody they knew. Her wife is against the latter idea because she fears that one day that friend could sue for the child. They are still discussing this, but they are fairly sure that they want a child within two years.

Dilan said that her wife would be the mother of the child since she was the one who is going to give birth. She wasn't sure about what she was going to be for the child. As her narrative developed, it emerged that she would like to be the child's father. She added that she identified herself as a woman and had no problem with this self-identification. However, according to Dilan, being the other mother would be confusing both for her and the child. She had the idea that a "real" family consisted of a father, mother and child.

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I came across Tuana, who was pregnant, in a lesbian café. I had a chance to talk to her about my research and she agreed to meet. She had to postpone our interview several times due to her pregnancy. We eventually met up at her house and I met her mother and

brother. There was a cat in the house which was also pregnant. Everybody seemed to be very excited, because two living beings were pregnant in the house.

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### **Tuana, 21, Istanbul**

She was born in Erzurum. Due to her mother's assignment as a teacher, she spent several years in this city and other cities as well. She graduated from high school. She had been a dance teacher but she took a break from working due to her pregnancy. She was 7 months pregnant.

Tuana doesn't embrace any self-identification for her sexual orientation. She believes love has no gender. She got pregnant as a result of an arranged relationship with her ex-boyfriend. Being a mother was the dream of her life. She would like to be a single mother. Still, she wants her daughter to know her father and to spend time with him. The inspiration for her dream is that she had an amazing childhood. Tuana grew up in a nuclear family consisting of a father, mother and brother. She lost her father several years prior. She lives with her mother and brother, with whom she plans to raise her daughter. Her desire is to raise a child and provide for all of her desires and needs.

Tuana has a girlfriend now but her responsibility and her identity in the family will become clear after the baby joins their family. She plans to be out to her child one day.

## **1.2. After The Field Research**

### **1.2.1. The issue of access**

I planned to utilize the snowball sampling method to enter into the field but most of the parents I contacted refused to be interviewed, and they all gave similar explanations, which centered on a desire to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity since they were not out to their children. Their refusal and reasoning had multiple implications for my research. Some might have avoided talking about their sexual orientation. What's more it also means coming out of the closet as a parent. Therefore, their intention to separate those two aspects of their lives- the sexual orientation itself and being a parent- would prevent them to accept the interview, and because such an interview simply would force them to combine these disparate existences. In this sense, the inaccessibility of those parents said much about the parenting experience itself. Most of them preferred to be "invisible" as a parent not complying with the heteronormative family norm. This refusal is indicative of the fact that most of the parents I wanted to interview, although they may want to, are hesitant to disclose themselves to their children. In relation to this, they were hesitant to disclose themselves as LGBT parents as a result of their participation in this research. Therefore, the inaccessibility of parents caused me to change my focus to parents-to-be and their dreams and plans about parenting until I was able to contact other actual parents. Although this move came as a result of my problems of access, it had positive ramifications for the research. The plans and dreams of parents-to-be, who constitute the next generation of queer parents, enriched my research and analysis in unprecedented ways.

### 1.2. 2. Renegotiating Research Questions

In this research, I initially had aimed to scrutinize the experiences of lesbian, bisexual and queer mothers' experiences within the context of Turkey, but I ended up questioning those parental identifications themselves. Especially after my interviews with Eda, Memo and Zin, I realized that I was trying to put them, and my other interviewees, into paradigmatic categories set by the binary gender system, as though one had to be either a father or mother. For instance, Eda identifies herself neither mother nor father, but *Bizz*. Therefore, Eda's experience of parenthood did not conform to the categories of the mother/father dichotomy, constituting a major challenge to the institution of gendered parenting. On the other hand, Memo as the father of the child had given birth to him. In this sense, those experiences led me to rethink the barriers to the very categories we use to identify parenting. One of the main challenges of this fieldwork was a direct outcome of the binary sex/gender system which constitutes parenthood in the dichotomy of mother/father. The effort to bring my research participants together under an umbrella term seemed to be a failure which ended up with a thorough questioning of parental identifications.

In this sense, the initial research questions on lesbian and bisexual mothers' experiences turned into questioning the parental identification within the binary sex/gender system which shapes society. At the beginning, my inability to draw boundaries around lesbian and bisexual motherhood seemed to be a failure. What was I going to do with parental experiences I had confronted that did not fit into this framework? Should I exclusively concentrate on lesbian and bisexual mothers? Should transgender and queer parenthood be the topic of a separate research project? Struggling with such questions, I

decided to question my theoretical framework rather than “leave out” parental identifications and experiences that “did not fit”. Reflecting on how and why they did not conform became my most significant axis of learning. Therefore, as a result of self-reflectivity and personal experience as a valuable method of inquiry (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001), it was the both personal and political interventions that provided the queer reformulation of the theoretical framework.

In the light of questioning the theoretical framework at every turn, the research and research questions were shaped and developed on the basis of each parents’ experience. Unless the research questions had been challenged by the experiences of the parents involved, the queer reformulation would not have been possible. Hence, in this research, the direct outcome of the binary sex/gender system which constitutes gendered parenthood within the mother/father dichotomy ended up being problematized through questions that scrutinize the ways in which mechanisms of compulsory identification work on the basis of the coercive and regulatory binary gender system. The journey of researching lesbian and bisexual mothers’ experiences led to a thorough questioning of parental identifications within the heterosexual matrix. The tension between the struggle of parenting and sexual as well as gender-nonconformity, and what this tension implies regarding the sex/gender system, in which we live, has become the central point of my research.

### 1.2.3. Disputing Compulsory Parental Identification

The compulsory order of sex/gender/desire, in other words, the heterosexual matrix is defined by Butler as “a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (Butler, 1990; 151).

The heterosexual matrix creates normative ideals of sex and gender which are constructed through naturalizing certain bodies, desires and practices (Butler, 1999). Hence, this heterosexual matrix also provides a stable model of parenthood in which a female (sex) becomes a woman (gender) whose (desire) must be towards man, and then she becomes a mother. However, my interviewees’ experiences show that parental identification does not always conform to the heterosexual matrix defined through a particular configuration of sex, gender, and desire, nor does parental identification. Disputing the biology-is-destiny formulation (Butler, 1999) is a way to question the parental identification within this heterosexual matrix. What I initially experienced as the “chaos” of my interviewees’ sexual orientation and gender identities, which traverse genderqueer, transgender (their own self-identification includes trans, transwoman as well as transman), queer, lesbian, bisexual, or non-identification that was followed by conceptualizations of parental identifications as mother, Çiçek/mother/anything possible, Leyla/mother, Dilan/father and the meaningless category of *bizz*. In this sense, disputing the heterosexual matrix works well in the sense that it opens a way to challenge identities and, particularly in this research, make room for

discussions of not just the self-identification of my interviewees on the basis of gender and sexuality, but also for their parental identifications.

Obviously, the heterosexual matrix initially shapes the circumstances of those parents' lives which led me to reformulate my research questions to include such queries as how certain habitual and violent presumptions of the heterosexual matrix shape the parental identification of parents. On the other hand, the heterosexual matrix, in other words, the dichotomy of father and mother, limits the dreams and thoughts of parents-to-be because the sex/gender system condemns parental identity to either the role of a father or mother. They have considerable difficulties in depicting their dreams regarding parental identification, and they are aware that this matrix limits their subjectivity in the context of familial norms.

Both the experiences and self-identification of my interviewees indicates that neither the mother/father concept as parental identification nor gender identity/sexual orientation is fixed or essential. However, the binary sex/gender system constrains self-expression of parents with regards to their parental identification. How these parental do experiences subvert/disturb/annoy the heterosexual matrix? How do these parents disturb the heterosexual family form? By asking such questions, the queer approach could suggest new openings for understanding and situating the experiences of parents who do not comply with the heterosexual matrix. In this research, I benefited from approaches to the queer as demarcating not a positivity but a positionality vis-a-vis the normative - a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or feels marginalized within the existing family norm; which could also include married couples without children, for example, or even (who knows?) married couples with

children - with, perhaps, very naughty children (Halperin, 1997; 62). Therefore, the identifications and experiences of my interviewees could be discussed through their oppositional relation to the norm. Hence, I am using queer to imply not positivity but positionality vis-a-vis the normative (Halperin, 1997). It is within this framework that queer practices as experienced in parenthood will be scrutinized in this thesis. In what follows, I discuss the evolving queer literature within LGBT studies in parallel to my renegotiation of the research questions during the fieldwork.

### **1.3. Situating the Literature**

There has been a paradigm shift in family research which has involved a change in focus from the family as a monolithic entity to family pluralism (Cheal, 1991; Scanzoni, Polonko, Teachman & Thompson, 1989; Sprey, 1990; Thomas and Wilcox, 1987), and at the same time feminist scholars have made notable progress in deconstructing assumptions about women's location within the family structure (Ferree, 1990; Glenn, 1987; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Thorne, 1982). Yet, in these debates, sexual orientation has been virtually ignored (Allen, 1995; 111). Although the field of lesbian/gay studies in anthropology in the United States was slower to develop than its counterparts in literary or historical studies, by the 1990s ethnographic analyses of homosexual behavior and identity, "gender bending," lesbian and gay male communities, transgressive sexual practices, and homosociality began to flourish (Weston, 1993; 339). The field of lesbian/gay studies in anthropology has witnessed a proliferation of ethnographic research about same-sex couples and the children they raise (Freeman, 2007). The growing body of scholarship

examining LGBT parenting and families has even included handbooks for lesbian and gay parents that have been published since the mid-1980s and that offer advice to lesbians and gay men about building families and raising children (Pies, 1985; Clunis and Green, 1995; Martin 1993; Saffron, 1998).

Meanwhile, queer theory has evolved to challenge both the binary opposition and essentialist point of view of the binary gender system of feminist theory and gay/lesbian studies' understanding of the "nature" of sexual identities. In this way, queer theory developed out of a perception of the limitations of identity politics (Warner, 1993; Seidman, 1997). Queer theory has also challenged many of the underpinnings of gay/lesbian studies (Piontek, 2006), particularly research on gay/lesbian families, taking issue not just with understandings of the "nature" of sexual identities in those family structures but also the structure itself (Halberstam, 2007; Weston, 1991; Freeman, 2007; Bernstein and Reimann, 2001; Butler, 2002; Doyle, 2007). A groundbreaking work that examines LGBT parenting and families, Weston's *Families We Choose*, states that "while gay and lesbian families are not imitations of biological families, they are still not quite independent from them. Although they transform notions of "straight" kinship, they also have the potential to constitute a queer-unfriendly model" (Freeman, 2007). As Freeman argues, "it may be friendly to bourgeois lesbians and gays. For it presumes a range of economic, racial, gender, and national privileges to which many sexual dissidents do not have access - often by virtue of their sexual dissidence itself" (Freeman, 304). Queer theory has triggered discussions on "gay and lesbian" families by positing that that they are not independent from economic, racial, gender and national privileges, and in this regard gay and lesbian politics, particularly as regard the family, needs the queer debate in order to challenge

homonormativity<sup>14</sup>. According to Bernstein and Reimann (2001), queer families present new challenges to the privatized-nuclear family, contradicting the sexual dimorphism upon which the ideal family is based. Such families challenge dominant notions of not only gender but also sexuality, while also confounding heteronormativity, contesting the hegemonic family ideal, and complicating gay and lesbian politics.

### 1.3.1. Turkey

In the early 2000s, academic publications and articles on LGBT issues began to appear in Turkey, alongside fanzines, booklets, and internet blogs. Among the publications that focused on LGBT identity and identity politics were *Maskeler Süvariler Gacılar* (Selek, 2001), *Eşcinsel Erkekler* (Hocaoğlu, 2002), *Eşcinsel Kadınlar* (Özbay and Soydan, 2003), and *Lubunya: Transseksüel Kimlik ve Beden* (Berghan, 2007), and these were followed by queer literature such as *Cogito Cinsel Yönelimler ve Queer Kuram* (2011), *Cinsellik Muamması* (Çakırlar and Delice, 2012), and *Queer Tahayyül* (Güçlü and Yardımcı, 2013). However, none of these publications focus on the issue of parenting or family, with the exception of an article titled “Bozuk Aile” in *Cinsellik Muamması* and an article about LİSTAG (Families of LGBT Individuals) in *Cogito* (2012). Burcu Baba’s *Fe Dergi* article

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, being an LGBT individual doesn’t necessarily mean resistance to the sex/gender system or heteronormativity. Duggan coined the concept “homonormativity” to describe this enactment of queer subjectivities. Homonormativity is a politics that does not contest heteronormativity but rather sustains these normalizing practices by aligning the queer and straight through their private acts of consumption and domestication (Duggan cited in Lisa Blackman, 2011). It can be described as a particular kind of sexual politics constituted by neoliberal policies which fragments LGBT communities by setting hierarchies of worthiness according to how much they conform to the heteronormative sexual regime (Duggan cited in Baba, 2011).

titled “The Construction of Heteropatriarchal Family and Dissident Sexualities in Turkey” (Baba, 2011) was the first to break the silence in academia with regards to the issue of families of non-conforming citizens.

In the LGBT movement itself, the issue of family is generally discussed in light of LGBT individuals’ coming out to family members; in other words, the issue centers on LGBT individuals in terms of their family relationships as children and siblings. There have been some debates about alternative families in a booklet titled *Canım Ailem* published by KAOS GL (2010). But on the whole, the public silence was first broken in 2010 when the 18<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Pride Week’s theme was “Family” and an event titled “Dikkat! Aile Var!<sup>15</sup>” generated much discussion of family among LGBT individuals and participants. There was a panel discussion called “Queer and Feminist Approaches to Hetero-patriarchal Family” in which participants discussed the possibility of recreating a social system which could construct a safe social space instead of notions of family ideology and family independent of gender, sexuality, biological parenting, and so on. On the other hand, LİSTAG (Families of LGBT individuals), which is a solidarity group for families, publishes booklets for the families of LGBT individuals, and recently screened a documentary called *Benim Çocuğum* which traces the historical contours of the establishment of the solidarity group. Both the production and screening of this documentary attracted much public attention and played an important role in facilitating discussions of the “normative family” in Turkey. In this sense, both the documentary and LİSTAG are revolutionary since they created a public arena for questioning family norms.

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<sup>15</sup>This title has a reference to public spaces such as tea gardens and dining halls that are only open to normative families, which means that public space is open only to the “well-behaved.” Those public spaces abject any person who does not fit in with the norms of family.

However, the discussion has tended to focus on the parents of LGBT individuals, not LGBT parents.

Today, while in the United States marriage and adoption rights for same-sex couples vary by state, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, South Africa, and Spain have no official discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, including the rights of marriage and adoption. Also, Portugal has rights for same-sex marriage, although this does not include same-sex adoption. In terms of legal rights for LGBT individuals, Turkey can be considered a “hinge” country (Bereket and Adams, 2009) in the Middle East since most of the countries to its east penalize homosexuality whereas most countries that fall to the west provide legal rights (Baba, 2011; 57) In Turkey, same-sex marriage, partnership or joint custody rights are not legally recognized. Similarly, reproductive technology is reserved solely for married couples. Sperm banks are forbidden, and it is illegal for Turkish nationals to employ the service of sperm banks outside the country. Sex reassignment surgery is legal but individuals who opt for the procedure must undergo mandatory sterilization. As the result of a Supreme Court ruling dating from 1982, lesbian mothers are at risk of losing custody of their children. Given this legal context, it is quite understandable why such parents tend to be invisible. The experiences of my interviewees, however, indicate that the parenting issue is not as unimaginable as may have been thought. Nonetheless, in the context of contemporary Turkey, there are numerous struggles to be faced in parenting given the legal arrangements and heteropatriarchal family norms, leaving little room for alternative parenthood.

In light of these issues, the overall aim of this research is to scrutinize the genealogy of heteronormativity and the nuclear family within the construction of the nation-state while reexamining parenthood and family practices that have been silenced and abjected in the context of Turkey. My research participants, who may seem to be invisible and unimaginable, constitute challenging voices with regard to the sex/gender system and parental identification, and through an analysis of this I intend to examine how their experiences carry the potential to challenge the hegemony of the nuclear family and compulsory heterosexuality.

#### **1.4. Outline of the thesis**

The following chapter first provides an analysis of how the nuclear family appeared within constructions of the nation-state. While problematizing construction of nuclear family in Turkey, the following sections in the chapter discuss “breakdowns” in terms of family issues regarding achievements of the feminist and LGBT movements. In the second part, I will analyze the discourses of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy on family, motherhood and homosexuality. Through an analysis of this cultural and historical background, this chapter seeks to situate the family practices of my participants in a concrete social framework.

The third chapter focuses on the debate surrounding parental identification. I take up the theoretical debates on gendered parenthood through a discussion of how mechanisms of compulsory identification work on the basis of the coercive and regulatory binary gender system. Following this, I provide an analysis of how the decisions of my

research participants regarding the disclosing/closing of their sexual orientation and gender identity to their children shapes their parental experiences.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the theoretical debates on the embeddedness of heteronormativity and the binary gender system in the school system. I question how the confrontations my research participants have faced at their children's schools led them to develop strategies for raising their children as parents. The emphasis is on the way that schooling and the education system reproduce binary gender roles and a nuclear family structure for children which often results in changes in parent-child relations after their children start attending school. In turn, I concentrate on the non-existent but possible support networks for those parents which may help them deal with the heteronormative universe.

## CHAPTER II. “NO MORE SAFE HAVEN”: THE CONSTRUCTION OF NUCLEAR FAMILY WITH “AT LEAST THREE CHILDREN”

*Sonra bir gün anneler de ölür  
Böcekler ve kertenkeleler ölür  
Boşalır suyu havuzun kum seddi yıkılınca  
Sivrisinekler ve kağıttan kayıklar ölür  
Sonra o gün çocuklar da ölür*

*Biz hepimiz önce küçük bir çocuktuk*

*Sonra büyüdük hepimiz çocuk olduk  
Balçıktan bir külçe olan dölleri  
En iri elleriyle kepeçeliyen  
Ve biçimliyen  
Ve hep önce kendiyle biçimliyen  
O dehşetli yontucuyu  
Doğumu ve gebelik sanatının bütün hünerlerini  
Sütten bir mermere eşsiz bir incelikle işliyen  
Anneyi o usta nakkaşı  
Unutmadık*

*Önce anne doğurdu çocuğu acıya  
Sonra çocuk acıya anneyi ve ölümü kattı  
Sonra herşey ve herkes çocuktan var oldu<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup>Excerpts from Arkadaş Z. Özger’s poem “Beyaz Ölüm Kuşları”: Then one day mothers will die as well/ The insects and lizards will die/ The water will drain away when the sand bank of the pool falls down/ Mosquitoes and paper boats will die/ Then that day the children will die as well.

We were all little children before/ Then we grew up we all became children / The offspring as the mass of slime/ Scooping with the most huge hands/ And shaping/ And always shaping with itself before/ That terrific sculpture/ Whole ingenuity of the birth and the art of pregnancy/ Delicately embroidering from the milk to the marble/ The mother that wizard muralist/ We didn’t forget.

The mother gave birth to the child through the pain before/ Then the child added mother and death to the pain/ Then everything and everyone came into being through the child.

*“When no child has to go through humiliation and misery, when no child faces torture, when no child’s identity comes under attack, when no child feels abandoned, defenseless and alone... when no adult mind attempts to hide its evil and cruel acts behind facades of religion, governance, patriotism, morality, society or education... Only then we will have the chance to imagine a beautiful future for our children. Till the end of time...”<sup>17</sup>*

## **Introduction**

In this chapter, I situate my research of parenting with queer practices in Turkey in the nexus of state policies, citizenship practices, and feminist/LGBT politics of gender, sexuality, family, and parenthood. I first attempt to develop an analysis of how the Republican modernization project constructed gendered citizenship and the modern nuclear family as the smallest component of the state. Since the 1980s, both the centrality of the nuclear family in nation-state citizenship policies, as well as its nature has been challenged by feminist scholars and activists. Issues ranging from domestic violence to unpaid labor in the home and expectations for a particular kind of motherhood have been brought to the political agenda. The first part of this chapter will scrutinize both the contributions and limitations of the feminist movement vis-à-vis family and hegemonic gender roles. On the other hand, I will discuss the new questions that have arisen regarding the family that have come into public debate with the rise of the LGBT movement and the growing visibility of

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<sup>17</sup>Sibel Yerdeniz, “Karabasandan Kurtulmanın Yolu Uyanmaktır” T24, August 28, 2012, <http://t24.com.tr/yazi/karabasandan-kurtulmanin-yolu-uyanmaktır/5552>, (date accessed October 6, 2013): “Hiçbir çocuk aşağılanma ve sefalet deneyimlerinden geçmek zorunda kalmadığında, hiçbirini işkence görmediğinde, hiçbirinin kişiliğine saldırılmadığında, hiçbir çocuk kendisini terk edilmiş, savunmasız ve yalnız hissetmediğinde; hiçbir yetişkin akıl kendi kötülüklerini ve zalimliklerini din, devlet, vatan sevgisi, ahlak, namus, toplum, eğitim perdesinin arkasına gizlemeye çalışmadığında çocuklarımız için güzel bir gelecek düşleyebilme ihtimalimiz olacak. Sonsuza dek.”

LGBT individuals in the 1990s. I will briefly discuss the short history of the LGBT movement and outline the main arguments that movement activists have raised regarding the family and parenthood.

The chapter will end with a discussion of the discourses of the AKP government (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, the Justice and Development Party) and particularly the Ministry of Family and Social Policy with regards to their active promotion of “at least three children” for each family and their understanding of “family values.” The emphasis will be on the way in which the AKP has neglected LGBT parents as the result of the hegemony of heteronormativity that governs contemporary official state discourse and political debates.

## **2.1. The research participants’ families**

The ideology of the family (Barrett, 1995) reproduces the ideal family extending from heterosexual couples to the parent-child unit. The family is conceptualized in this way as a universal category; however, it is, in fact, a historically and culturally constructed phenomenon, and any definition of “family” depends on the context (Gittins, 2011). In this sense, nation-states do not just construct their gender regime (Connell, 1990) but also recognize some forms of lived relationality and attempt to make other forms of relationality unimaginable (Butler, 2002; Richardson, 1998; Weeks, 1999; Sirman, 2005). The hegemony of the nuclear family and compulsory heterosexuality is shaped by marriage and reproduction; and although different forms of families exist, they are exposed to the legal

restrictions<sup>18</sup>. Faced with legal, and particularly medical, limitations, the parents who “do not fit” in the acceptable family model, in turn, develop strategies to cope with those limitations.

In Turkey, same-sex marriage, partnership or joint custody rights are not legally permitted. Similarly, reproductive technology is reserved solely for married couples. Sperm banks are forbidden, and it is illegal for Turkish nationals to employ the service of sperm banks outside the country<sup>19</sup>. Sex reassignment surgery is legal but individuals who opt for the procedure must undergo mandatory sterilization<sup>20</sup> which means transgender individuals don’t have the right to be parents. Lesbian mothers run the risk of losing custody due to a 1982 Supreme Court ruling<sup>21</sup>. In this legal context, parents who are situated outside the heteronormative family model would prefer to remain invisible and would be difficult to locate. This research aims to explore how these parents struggle to open up a space for alternative parenting practices in light of the given legal restrictions.

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<sup>18</sup> Nuclear family model can be the most common “household” model in Turkey now. In fact, other forms of families do exist, such as single parents, extended families, re-formed families (a family formed with divorced parents, new spouse and old-new children) etc. In this research, my focus is on LGBT family models. Although some of my participants are single parents, or live in re-formed families, my main focus will be on how they are directly or indirectly exposed to discrimination because of being LGBT parents.

<sup>19</sup>The regulations on assisted-reproduction treatment: <http://www.saglik.gov.tr/TR/belge/1-10093/uremeye-yardimci-tedavi-uygulamalari-ve-uremeye-yardimci-.html>  
Also, see the news: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/14109315.asp>;  
<http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/03/16/bakanliktan.sperm.bankasi.aciklamasi/568057.0/index.html>

<sup>20</sup>See the detailed analysis of the legal regulation of sex reassignment cases of transgender individuals in Turkey, see the research: Şahin, Deniz. 2012.

<sup>21</sup>For the detailed analysis of this 1982 Supreme Court ruling see the article: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/radikal.aspx?atype=haberyazdir&articleid=868926>

The research participants' experiences and imaginations on forming a family diversify and depend on their life stories. Firstly, all of the participants declared during the interviews that the legal rights for same-sex couples, the recognition of this family form like any heterosexual relationship is critical for them. All of them similarly said it was not because they are "fond" of marriage as an institution; but because the social recognition of LGBT family and childbearing depended on legal recognition.

Secondly, none of them are against the idea of family but each of them defines it differently. In fact, most of them implicitly questioned the term family and what family meant for them during the interviews. Since most of them were exposed to psychological violence by their family members before –which includes the pressure from their families to get married - because of their sexual orientation/gender identity, they needed to define what real affection, love and cooperation could be in a family. Their past experiences led them implicitly or explicitly to declare that children are individuals who have their own preferences and their own subjectivity distinct from their parents.

Due to the fact that some of them (Defne, Esra, Elif) had their children from their previous marriage, they raised their child in the nuclear family form. In fact, they questioned this family form and didn't interpret it as an ideal one for raising children. Firstly, this is due to the unequal division of labor they were subjected to during their marriage. They similarly mentioned their process of forming a nuclear family as "the flow"<sup>22</sup>: they finish university, have a boyfriend (in Eda's case, a girlfriend), they get

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<sup>22</sup>Borrowing term "the flow" from their narrative, I will be using it throughout this chapter. The conceptualization of the flow implies the life flux which constitutes social, cultural hegemony upon their lives, which, in their case, led to finding themselves in the midst of

married, and they have children. In their narratives, “the flow” appears as an indisputable direction that they experience as an “obligation” or a “duty” towards their own families or the society at large. On the other hand, although Derin gave birth to her child from her previous marriage, her story is different than Defne, Esra and Elif. She arranged a strategic marriage with a friend because of her parents’ psychological violence- which could also be regarded as a forced marriage-she thought that she had no choice except to get married in order to prove to her family that she was not a lesbian.

On the other hand, Derya dreamed of raising a child with one of his/her woman partners in the past; however, they never accepted it. What’s more, s/he could not find a way of having a child due to the legal restrictions in Turkey. Therefore, she decided to give birth to a child with his/her beloved. However, she was against nuclear family and their relationship with his/her beloved represents quite a challenge to hegemonic familial norms, because s/he thinks that the nuclear family is a cage, kind of a confinement. She stands for a family that is formed by his/her friends and his/her beloved and their child.

In Özge’s story, the process of adopting a baby as a single mother was going to take longer than she expected because of the legal arrangements for single parents in Turkey. Therefore, she adopted her daughter abroad. During our interview, she mentioned how she struggled with the hegemony of the flow which her parents continue to remind her of. On the other hand, Memo and Eda’s experience as parents differ significantly from the other parents, due to their gender identification. Eda and Memo mainly have difficulty because they do not fit into the mother or father appearance they were once in. The paradoxical

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given family forms. In other words, they experienced the heterosexual family form as a “duty.” Their narratives also suggest that they didn’t fit into that flow, even that they got drowned in it. Drowning in that flow provides the common ground which enables the discussion of queer practices within their lives.

situation regarding their parental identification within the dichotomous gender system constitutes their struggle as a family. The legal prohibition against being a parent as transgender individuals did not directly affect their lives, as they had their children before their gender transition. Since the legal regulation of sex reassignment is based on mandatory sterilization of transsexuals who want to undergo sex reassignment surgery, this effectively leads to transgender individuals not having the right to be parents. However, like Derin, Memo was exposed to forced marriage by his family. In Eda's case, it was not possible for her to come out as a trans in her early ages, and when her girlfriend got pregnant, they felt obliged to get married.

The parents-to-be Ceren (who wants to raise a genderless child), Çiçek (who wants to form a collective family regardless of blood relation), Zeynep (who wants to form a family that consists of a mother and a child), Dilan (who wants to raise children with her partner as the father), and the pregnant Tuana (who will be a single mother) have significant anxieties regarding (lack of) legal regulations and the prevalent social norms in Turkey. Since Turkey has rendered certain forms of relationality, including that of two mothers and a child, unimaginable, in fact, impossible, Leyla is considering leaving the country to raise their child with two mothers.

The heteronormative flow of life that some parents found themselves participating in, the issue of (directly or indirectly) forced marriage, and legal restrictions constituted the main dynamics behind the family experiences and imaginations of my research participants. Legally, the only recognized family relationality is one between heterosexual couples, who

fit into the strictly dichotomous gender roles and appearances<sup>23</sup>. In this framework, families consisting of same-sex couples or families with multiple forms of sexual orientation and gender identity, especially if children are involved, remain legally impossible and socially invisible and unimaginable. The parents who participated in my research have to construct their lives within this framework of unimaginability. In the following section I will first trace the genealogy of the heteronormative flow that has shaped the lives of my research participants, as constitutive of the modernization project of the Turkish nation-state.

## **2.2. The construction of nuclear family in Turkey**

The family institution acts as a key site for controlling and regulating the bodies of citizens (Baba, 2011), the “modern” (read nuclear) family has been constructed as “a safe haven” since the beginning of the Turkish nation-state building process. In this “modern” nuclear family, women are defined through the domestic sphere and portrayed as the mothers of the nation. On the other hand, the construction of gendered citizenship and the modern nuclear family - as the smallest component of the state - is governed by the hegemony of heteronormativity with regards to gendered state policies on family,

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<sup>23</sup>The example came from the marriage debates about Aras and Barış, who announced that their marriage would be the first gay marriage in Turkey in 2011. Their overall aim is to make visible the rights for LGBT couples. Aras, as a transman had a pink identity card, and there would be no obstacle for their marriage. With pink and blue identity cards, they will legally constitute a heterosexual couple. In their imagination, this would be an “alternative family.” Ultimately, the state did not allow their marriage because Aras was not found “eligible” for marriage. They sued Turkey at the European Court of Human Rights for preventing their marriage. This legally sanctioned discrimination is a striking example of how the state understands of the family grounded upon “eligibility”. In their case, the pink and blue identity cards were not enough to secure their rights for a legally recognized union. Rather, their modes of being were regarded as illegitimate by the state. See the interview with Barış and Aras: <http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=6607>

reproduction and sexuality. In this section, I intend to scrutinize the construction of this hegemonic imagined family form encoded as heteronormative as part of the modernization project in the early years of the Turkish Republic, and discuss how it was both questioned and shattered through the rise of the feminist and LGBT movements in Turkey.

In his article titled “Sexual Enigma of the Corrupted Family” (“Bozuk Aile in Cinsellik Muamması”), Somay discusses the term “corrupt family” and asks,

...so we can see the reality behind the “modern family” today (we could have only guessed before). Therefore, we can use the Tom and Jerry story that Zizek tells at every occasion: Tom (a cat) passes over the edge of a cliff as he’s running. He keeps running in space, but he doesn’t fall down, he just keeps running in the air until he looks down and realizes that there is nothing beneath his feet. Then he falls. We are looking beneath us now, and we realize that the “modern family” is not a structure for love, compassion and cooperation, but also a place for abuse, harassment and violence. That’s when we start to fall down. The modern family is collapsing; [...] Okay, fine, obviously we’re not going to defend it. But do we know what to replace it with?<sup>24</sup> (Somay, 2012; 113)

Reexamining constructions of the nuclear family and motherhood through the nation-state will help answer this question and reclaim the meaning of the family. According to Connell (1990), each state has a definable “gender regime” that is the precipitate of social struggles and is linked to - though not a simple reflection of - the wider gender order of society (Connell, 1990; 523). Hence, those gender regimes have been historically constituted and controlled in Turkey with regards to the modernization process.

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<sup>24</sup>Dolayısıyla, biz “Modern Aile”nin altında yatan hakikatı ancak bugün görebilirdik (daha önce ancak tahmin edebilirdik) O yüzden, Zizek’in her fırsatta anlatıp durduğu (ve biraz da kabak tadı veren) Tom ve Jerry hikayesini burada da kullanabiliriz: Tom (kedi) koşarken uçurumun kıyısını aşar, boşlukta koşmaya devam eder, ancak düşmez, havada asılı kalır. Ta ki aşağı bakıp ayaklarının altında hiçbir şey olmadığını fark edene kadar. O zaman düşer. Biz de “aşağı” bakıyoruz ve “Modern Aile”nin sevgi, şefkat ve dayanışmanın değil, taciz, tecavüz ve şiddetin evinde yaşadığını görüyoruz. O zaman düşmeye başlıyoruz. Modern aile çöküyor; [...] İyi, çöksün, savunacak halimiz yok. Ancak, yerine ne koyacağımızı biliyor muyuz?”

The organization of the nation-state bears great resemblance to the organization of the nuclear family: *anavatan* (the motherland) and *devlet baba* (the state as the father<sup>25</sup>), and the motherland is under the control of the state. The control of women and their sexuality is also central to national and ethnic processes (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989; Kandiyoti, 1991; Peterson & Runyan, 1993; Sharoni, 1993).

Social and sexual regulations of citizenship are explicitly constructed around conjugality. But how and why was conjugal love legitimized in Turkey? How did the nuclear family appear as a predominant model? Answers to these questions can be found by analyzing how the nation-state has controlled and constituted the nuclear family, which is based on the idea of love and affection between the conjugal couple whose intimacy is a private affair (Sirman, 2005; 184). In “Sexing the Citizen,” according to Surkis, “conjugality is seen as a powerful figure for the happy reconciliation of individual and social interests. The conception of marriage as a social ideal - indeed, as an institution which at once signifies and produces individuals’ socialization - implicitly consigns persons who cannot or do not marry to asociality. The constituted normative force of

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<sup>25</sup> In Turkish, the state is referred to as “the father” in a genderizing of the relation between the land and regime that cannot be coincidental. The motherland is conquered and controlled by the state, just as how the nuclear family works, specifically parental roles.

<sup>26</sup> Umut Güner, “Yoldaş Söyleşiler: Sema Semih” July 30, 2012, <http://www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=11975>, (date accessed October 6, 2013): Kendimi 2011 yılındaki 8 Mart yürüyüşüne kadar feminist olarak tanımlamakta hiç bir zaman çekinmemiştim. Bu yürüyüşe kadar çevremdeki feminist kadınlar hiç bir zaman benim neden ve nasıl feminist olabileceğimi sorgulamamışlardı. Ancak bu tarihten sonra farklı feminist gruplarla gerek çeşitli toplantılarda gerekse yürüyüşlerde yaşadığım karşılaşmalar beni kendi feminizmimi sorgulamaya itti. Sadece kadınlara açık olan bir sürü ortamdan trans ya da erkek olduğum gerekçesiyle çıkarılmak istendim ve bahsettiğim yürüyüşte bir çok trans arkadaşım taşıdıkları dövizler yüzünden, yıllardır feminist hareket içinde mücadele veren diğer birtakım insanlar tarafından açıkça şiddet gördüler. Ve bu olaylardan, tartışmalardan sonra feminizmin kendisi benim için mücadele etmem gereken bir alan haline geldi. Anladım ki Türkiye’de yıllardır feminist hareketin temsil ettiği özne ya da öznelerden biri ben değildim. Peki kimdi?

conjugalities is caused by this threat of social abjection” (Surkis, 2006; 1). Furthermore, the normative force of conjugality also shapes “proper” womanhood and manhood, fit with “proper” conjugality. It is bound together with ideals about gender - “proper” masculinity and femininity - specifically as regards social and moral concerns about sexuality (Surkis, 2006; 3). Considering the constituted normative force of conjugality which shapes these notions of womanhood and manhood, “Durkheim emphasized ‘the conjugal family’ and the effective and sexual bonds that it implied, and this was new to Western modernity and an important corollary to the decline of traditional society and the rise of an implicitly male modern individual” (Surkis, 2006; 5).

### **2.2.1. Early years of the Turkish Republic**

Although constructions of the nuclear family and sexed citizens in Turkey have their roots in the late Ottoman period, the global rise of capitalism and the transition from Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey marked an epoch in which efforts were made to construct the nuclear family in light of the modernization project. The early years of the Turkish Republic “witnessed a radical break from Ottoman traditions, particularly with regards to women’s rights, but the reforms that were brought about during this period with respect to family life and women’s status were imperative in accompanying the modern nation-building project” (Kandiyoti, 1995).

During the late Ottoman period, women as mothers and wives were not just responsible for the well-being of the Ottoman man but also for the creation of enlightened generations. The aim was “to create (gendered) responsible citizens but traditional arranged

marriages, divorce laws leading to the easy repudiation of wives, polygamy and the segregation of the sexes were seen as constituting the major obstacles preventing the education and liberation of women” (Sirman, 1989; 5). The official adaption of the Swiss civil code in 1926, which entailed the abolition of polygamy and easy repudiation, marked an important step towards establishing the modern, nuclear family as the norm. The equality of Turkish women and men as part of the modernization project was promoted by the state ideology but control over women’s participation in public space was upheld. Therefore, women continued to be seen as the wives and mothers of the nation:

The new woman was to take her place in the public sphere of the Republican Turkey as an educated social woman. There would be no difference between men and women, both of whom would have to endorse the values of the nation without hesitation. Above all, women were conceived as mothers and wives [...] which led to the creation of a new space; that of private, within which matters relating to the family, that is women and children, were to be placed. (Sirman, 1989; 12)

In spite of ongoing practices, women’s condemnation to the family sphere as wives and mothers were challenged by women in numerous writings; some women writers were very critical of men’s role in the subordination of women (Sirman, 1989; 7). Especially after the promulgation of the Second Constitution in the late Ottoman era, intellectual women gathered around unions which aimed to help support women’s participation in the public sphere through economic activities and education. The purpose was to seek solutions for the construction of a national economy but also the definition and function of woman was to be redefined. The “new woman” was not identified only with her family roles (like being a wife or mother) but her new identity was to be a social woman who contributes the wellness of society and economic development. The policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) supported women’s participation in the public

sphere and these policies continued to constitute a basis for Republican policies for the creation of a “new public woman” which symbolized the face of the modernization project. Therefore, before the demise of the Ottoman Empire, women were counted as primarily responsible for the home and hearth both by themselves and by the state. On the other hand, “although educated women had begun to question the Ottoman family system, the main discourse on progress and education did not challenge the identity of women as wives and mothers” (Sirman, 1989; 9).

In that period of great symbolic revolutions (Sirman, 1989), women were invoked as a significant symbol of the Turkish Republic as well as being constituted as patriotic citizens. The activities of women during the war of independence had important effects on the creation of the new identity of modern Turkish women who were out in the war arena helping her brothers and fathers save the country and also out in the streets making speeches but when the war was over, women returned to their homes and back to their primary roles as mothers and wives (Arat, 1993; Sirman, 1989; Tekeli, 1982; Kandiyoti, 1991).

Kandiyoti defines the achievement of woman’s integration into the nationalistic project in terms of being emancipated but “unliberated” (Kandiyoti, 1987). The idea of women’s emancipation falls into an instrumentalist approach of the nation-state which attempted to create the new Turkish women as an image of the rupture from the Ottoman past to the new modern republic (Arat, 1998). The new Turkish woman would continue to have children and to be a wife as a duty for the nation. Also, “this new woman of the Republican period was a thrifty, enlightened, professionally trained housewife who,

cognizant of the needs of the Turkish Republic, only consumed goods produced in Turkey and experienced heterosexual friendship only with her husband” (Sirman, 1989; 12).

The production of the modern family and marriage – which goes hand in hand with the construction of the new Turkish woman - along with conjugal love, was provided in the early republican period through legislation. By the civil code of 1926 and the Surname Law of 1934, the independence of the conjugal unit was proclaimed in all legality. After then, “a citizen could become a subject ruled not by kinship ties and loyalties, but through her/his own sentiments: love for family and country. Thereafter, the nuclear family- composed of the mother, father and children- became the norm; other forms were seen as ‘traditional’ and familial issues were regarded as having nothing to do with politics” (Sirman, 2005; 187). Therefore, the modernization of the family also gave rise to a process of marginalizing and silencing all sexual dissidents. The modern family that was silently presumed to be heterosexual was considered to be “the germ-cell of the nation-state” (Toprak, 1991; 451). In other words, this process can be seen as part of a “quiet heteronormalization” with regards to non-normative sexualities and genders that had been neglected in official state discourses, legislation and political debates (Savcı, 2011).

### **2.2.2. The rise of the feminist movement**

Although the feminist movement gained political traction in the 1980s, it has roots that can be traced back to the Ottoman era when women’s periodicals and associations were established, to demand suffrage, education and labor rights. The first political party to be established in the new Republic was called the Women’s Party of the People (*Kadınlar*

*Halk Fırkası*) (Toprak, 1988). The political gains of the Ottoman and Early Republican women's movement remained minimal (with the movement itself being marginalized in national historiography), but the feminist movement of the 1980s built up from this past and drew on a discourse which declared that "the private is political" to demystify the hidden face of the home and the family.

The feminist movement arose in the 1980s, not only following the 1980 military coup d'état but also as a result of it (Diner and Tokaş 2010; Ayata and Tütüncü 2008; Arat 2008). The year 1987 witnessed the rise of the feminist movement through which women's rights gained significant public attention. Three thousand women held a protest to denounce violence against women, and the protest was triggered by a court case where a judge said to a woman who had been subjected to physical violence by her husband that "a woman should have a child in her womb and a stick beating her back" (Hennecke, 2007; 13). This protest was followed by a campaign against the battering of women. A pamphlet which was published to point out the physical violence that is carried out against women at home stated, "Above all, this pamphlet tries to show that the family is a major site of violence against women and argues that such violence is a product of the widespread view that women within the family are the property of the men who are its legal heads" (Sirman, 1989; 19).

It was the first moment in the public arena that the modern Turkish family was no longer a "sacred institution," and at last it was seen as a locus of violence against women. At the same time, the protest was held on Mother's Day in 1987, which also initiated a debate on motherhood that led to a questioning of "the essential" nature of women. In this process, the phrase the "personal is political" was adopted in order to address domestic

abuse against women, and therefore the untouchable discourse of “safe” private space was opened up for discussion.

In such a political atmosphere, it was not a coincidence that the first independent publishing house of the feminist movement called Kadın Çevresi Yayınları published *Evlilik Mahkumları (Prisoners of Marriage)* as their first book (Comer, 1984). Women’s bodies and her household labor within the family were, and are, under the control of the ideology of the patriarchal family, and the feminist movement drew on burgeoning critiques of this. From the 1980s onwards, the idealization of the nuclear family came under critical scrutiny through the efforts of the feminist movement (Tekeli, 1982; Arat, 1993).

At this point, it will be helpful to ask: In what ways has the feminist movement been successful in challenging the hegemonic gender roles defined around the nuclear family? The family and its explicit relation to the subordination of women have been questioned by many women who have noted that essentialized conceptions of womanhood and motherhood are problematic. In addition, how the gendered division of labor in the family is interrelated with gender inequality has become apparent. The efforts of the feminist movement to challenge patriarchy have not only been successful in opening up a political arena on family and gender roles but also for equal rights. The womanhood identified with the domestic space has been questioned, and the dichotomy of private and public space which has become a political issue with regards to family is not a private issue any more. The feminist movement’s critical position on family, motherhood and parenting was limited to division of labor in the family, however, and one of its significant mottos, the “private is political,” was inclusive of the fact that the home was no longer a “safe haven.” Although violence against women has remained a pressing issue, the focus of feminists

shifted from issues such as division of labor in the family to women's involvement in politics and the elimination of discriminatory laws in the feminist struggle at Turkey (Marshall, 2005; 106). But what have been the limitations of feminist debates and struggles with regard to the family?

One of the critical limitations of feminist debates is that the family ideal was maintained as heteronormative, and the questioning of gender roles has been limited through essentialist standpoints. The feminist debates still tend to center around the family, which, in the debates, is accepted as being heterosexual and consists of a man and woman; that is, until the LGBT movement opened up heteronormativity for critique.

### **2.2.3. The 1990s and 2000s of feminist movement**

Since the 1990s, the feminist movement has been challenged by different subjectivities and movements, such as the Islamic women's movement, Kurdish women's movement, LBT women's movements, leading to changes in the agenda and framework of the feminist debates. The splintering of the feminist movement in which different ideologies found expression dates back to the 1990s when Islamic feminism developed and the Kurdish movement gave birth to the Kurdish women's movement, at the same time as alternative feminist groups started to gather (Diner and Tokaş; 2010). The diverse subjectivities of the universal "woman category" were no more taken for granted and multiple identities took hold with regards to cleavages that exist within the feminist movements of Turkey. The diversity and complexity of the feminist movement has resulted in conflicts, even though they all stand in pursuit of women's rights.

Given this political atmosphere, I will focus on the lesbian, bisexual and transgender activism and their transformative power to shape the debates among feminist women. In recent years, the participation of transgender individuals to March 8<sup>th</sup> protests has posed a major challenge to the taken-for-granted gender norms of the feminist movement. In the 1980s, feminist women had struggled (mostly against socialist men) to keep 8<sup>th</sup> March protests as “women-only” protests. More recently, this principle has been problematized by LBT activists. In 2011, the debates on trans individuals’ right to be a part of feminist public spaces and activities, such as the 8<sup>th</sup> March protests, revealed the deeply normative womanhood among many feminists in Turkey. Biological determinism, which has still not been thoroughly challenged, assigns women who do not fit into the imagined categories an abject position. This is how a trans activist, Sema Semih, discusses the disappointment s/he experienced in the course of these debates and during the protests themselves:

Until the protest on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011, I had never hesitated to define myself as a feminist. The feminist women around me had never questioned why or how I could be a feminist. However, after that protest and facing various feminist groups both at meetings and in protests forced me to question my own feminism. In many instances, I was pressured to leave the group since I was a trans, or a man. During the protest that particular day, many friends of mine who are trans-individuals openly suffered violence at the hands of women who have been involved in feminist political action for years, just because they adhered to different positions. After this event and debates, feminism itself became an area of struggle for me. I realized that I was not one of the subjects or subjectivities represented by feminism. If that’s the case, then who does it represent?<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Umut Güner, “Yoldaş Söyleşiler: Sema Semih” July 30, 2012, <http://www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=11975>, (date accessed October 6, 2013): Kendimi 2011 yılındaki 8 Mart yürüyüşüne kadar feminist olarak tanımlamakta hiç bir zaman çekinmemiştim. Bu yürüyüşe kadar çevremdeki feminist kadınlar hiç bir zaman benim neden ve nasıl feminist olabileceğimi sorgulamamışlardı. Ancak bu tarihten sonra farklı feminist gruplarla gerek çeşitli toplantılarda gerekse yürüyüşlerde yaşadığım karşılaşmalar beni kendi feminizmini sorgulamaya itti. Sadece kadınlara açık olan bir sürü ortamdan trans ya da erkek olduğum gerekçesiyle çıkarılmak istendim ve bahsettiğim yürüyüşte bir

This conflict between feminist women and LBT individuals has triggered intense discussions about the binary gender system. Given the fact that the struggle for women's rights had to contend with the issue of who the category of woman should include, the question remains: Do trans women reproduce the gender roles that feminism is opposed to? And, should trans men join the struggles of feminism or do they reproduce the manhood which feminism opposes? Or, is another "manhood" possible? (Arıkan, 2012) Although this debate has brought about conflicts with feminists, it also has set the stage for the possibility of new alliances. Those feminist activists who continue to opt to "walk together" with transgender activists may constitute a turning point in the recent, short history of feminism in Turkey.

#### **2.2.4. LGBT movement**

In recent years, Turkey has been undergoing the most dynamic epoch in terms of the LGBT movement which has had significant effects on the visibility of LGBT individuals and their experiences. In 2012, the LGBT movement celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. During these years, the public attention that has been garnered can be observed

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çok trans arkadaşım taşıdıkları dövizler yüzünden, yıllardır feminist hareket içinde mücadele veren diğer birtakım insanlar tarafından açıkça şiddet gördüler. Ve bu olaylardan, tartışmalardan sonra feminizmin kendisi benim için mücadele etmem gereken bir alan haline geldi. Anladım ki Türkiye'de yıllardır feminist hareketin temsil ettiği özne ya da öznelerden biri ben değildim. Peki kimdi?

in the numbers of participants of the Pride March<sup>27</sup>, since participation in the Pride March and the activism of LGBT movement are interrelated. In 2003 when the Pride March was held for the first time, the number of participants was only in the tens; in contrast, in 2013,<sup>28</sup> 15,000-20,000 people marched for the rights of LGBT individuals. In the past decade, the LGBT movement has significantly expanded their space of legitimacy in the public sphere. And in the last three years, the trans movement has organized a trans pride week and a trans pride parade to promote the visibility of trans individuals. The two pride weeks have drawn thousands to the streets and other sites of meeting and exchange. As a result of this increased visibility, the number of LGBT individuals “coming out”<sup>29</sup> publicly with their sexual orientation and gender identity has significantly increased. LGBT organizations have also become more active and effective in the legal field. At different moments in the past decade, Kaos GL<sup>30</sup> and Pembe Hayat<sup>31</sup> in Ankara, Lambdaistanbul<sup>32</sup> in Istanbul, and Siyah Pembe Üçgen in İzmir, (all of them non-governmental organizations for

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<sup>27</sup> Also known as gay pride parades, pride events and pride festivals are events that occur annually, and many take place in June in remembrance of the Stonewall riots, a central moment of the LGBT rights movement.

<sup>28</sup>For a discussion of the latest parade, see: “Onur Yürüyüşüne Gittik!” Kaos GL, July 30, 2012: <http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=11972> (date accessed October 6, 2013).

<sup>29</sup>“Coming out” refers to LGBT people disclosing their sexual orientation and gender identity.

<sup>30</sup>Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Studies and Solidarity Association, <http://kaosgl.org> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>31</sup> Pembe Hayat LGBT Solidarity Association, <http://pembehayat.org/> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>32</sup>Lambdaistanbul Solidarity Association, <http://lambdaistanbul.org> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

LGBT solidarity and empowerment) were brought to court on the basis that they are “against public morality,” the courts decided for their right to expression and association.<sup>33</sup>

The struggle to exist in a heteronormative society certainly affects LGBT individuals’ everyday lives, and therefore visibility can be strictly limited. The movement’s debates on the visibility of LGBT individuals, the right to live, and the prevention of hate crimes have been of top priority. Despite the challenges, the visibility of LGBT individuals has increased over the years. Violence against LGBT individuals, specifically against trans women and hate crimes, has gained public attention through the efforts of the LGBT movement. Although debates over sexual orientation and the terms of gender identity written in the constitution still continue, being able to open such a discussion is one of the significant achievements of the LGBT movement in Turkey.

Organizations which support the rights of LGBT individuals are now in their golden era. These include Lambda İstanbul LGBT Solidarity Association, İstanbul LGBT<sup>34</sup>, SPOD<sup>35</sup>, KAOS GL, Pembe Hayat in Ankara, Siyah Pembe Üçgen in İzmir, MorEl<sup>36</sup> in

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<sup>33</sup>Fırat Söyle, “Lambdaistanbul'a Karşı Kapatma Davası Kronolojisi”, Bianet, April 29, 2009 <http://www.bianet.org/biamag/bianet/114196-lambdaistanbul-a-karsi-kapatma-davasi-kronolojisi> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>34</sup> İstanbul LGBT Solidarity Association: <http://www.istanbul-lgbtt.net/lgbtt/> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>35</sup> SPOD- Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association: <http://www.spod.org.tr/> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>36</sup> MorEl LGBT Solidarity Association: <http://moreleskisehir.blogspot.com/> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

Eskişehir, Keskosor<sup>37</sup> and Hebun<sup>38</sup> in Diyarbakır, and LİSTAG<sup>39</sup> (Families of LGBT individuals) which is a solidarity group for families and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people. LİSTAG publishes booklets for the families of LGBT individuals, and recently screened a documentary called “Benim Çocuğum,” directed by Can Candan, which traces the historical contours of the establishment of the solidarity group. Both the production and screening of this documentary during the If Istanbul Film Festival and afterwards attracted much public attention and became significant for discussions around the “normative family” in Turkey. In addition, the organization of transman called Voltrans<sup>40</sup>, and the lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals’ organization İllet have been among the informal organizations that have drawn LGBT individuals together. University student groups<sup>41</sup> and clubs have also become common and quite active in the last few years.

The LGBT movement began taking up the issue of queer in recent years. In these debates, identity politics have been deconstructed and problematized. Within LGBT debates, identity is no longer treated as a fixed notion but rather as a performativity which

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<sup>37</sup> Keskosor LGBT Solidarity Association: <http://keskosorlgbt.blogspot.com/> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>38</sup> Hebun LGBT Solidarity Association: <http://hebunlgbt.com/> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>39</sup> <http://listag.wordpress.com/> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>40</sup> <http://vol-trans.blogspot.com/> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>41</sup> The LGBT student groups are LuBUnya in Boğaziçi University, Radar in İstanbul University, Flu Baykuş in MimarSinan University, MadiMar in Marmara University, BahçehirGri in Bahçeşehir University, BilgiGökkuşağı in Bilgi University, Kuir in Koç University, BilkentRenkliDüşün in Bilkent University, CinsKlüp in Sabancı University, İTÜ Cins Arı in İstanbul Technical University, and LeGeBit in Ege University.

undergirds discussions of queer modes of being. The first public arena for queer debates was the conference entitled “Queer, Turkey and Identity” which was organized at Boğaziçi University in 2004 and it was followed by “Queer, Turkey and Transgender” in 2010. At these conferences, an identity-based LGBT form of sexual politics met queer understandings of sexual politics for the first time, and the heated debates at these conferences quickly spread out to the movement’s different sites.

The early 2000s were the years in which academic publications and articles on LGBT issues began to appear, alongside fanzines, booklets, and internet blogs. Among the publications that focused on LGBT identity and identity politics were *Maskeler Süvariler Gacılar* (Selek, 2001), *Eşcinsel Erkekler* (Hocaoğlu, 2002), *Eşcinsel Kadınlar* (Özbay and Soydan, 2003), and *Lubunya: Transseksüel Kimlik ve Beden* (Berghan, 2007), which were soon followed by explicitly queer writing and theorizing in *Cinsiyet Halleri* (Mutluer, 2008), journal *Cogito*’s special issue on sexual orientation and queer theory (2011), *Cinsellik Muamması* (Çakırlar and Delice, 2012), and *Queer Tahayyül* (Güçlü and Yardımcı, 2013). A significantly missing topic in all of these publications appears to be the family. None of these publications focus on the issue of parenting or family except for an article by Bülent Somay titled “Bozuk Aile” [Rotten Family] in *Cinsellik Muamması* and an article about Listag (2012) in *Cogito*. The article in *Fe Dergi* titled “The Construction of Heteropatriarchal Family and Dissident Sexualities in Turkey” by Burcu Baba (Baba, 2011) is the first to break the silence in the academia with regards to the issue of families of non-conforming citizens.

In LGBT activism and the publications of LGBT organizations, when the issue of family is discussed, it is usually through the experiences of coming out to family members;

in other words, LGBT individuals involving in family relationships as children. One significant exception is the booklet titled *Canım Ailem* published by KAOS GL, which debates the possibility of alternative families. But on the whole, the public silence was first broken in 2010 when the 18<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Pride Week's theme was "Family" and featured an event titled "Dikkat! Aile Var!"<sup>42</sup> which generated much discussion around family among LGBT individuals and participants. As part of this event, there was a panel discussion called "Queer and Feminist Approaches to the Hetero-Patriarchal Family" in which participants discussed the possibility of doing away with the family and family ideology, and recreating a social system with safe social spaces, independent of gender, sexuality, biological parenting, and so on. .

The rise of the LGBT movement presents a major challenge to heteronormativity and the process of "quiet heteronormalization" and concomitant marginalization of non-normative sexualities and genders (Savcı, 2011). However, the issue of family and the parenting of LGBT individuals is a struggle that has hardly begun, largely due to state policies and predominant social norms. Queer parenting and mothering are not yet on the agenda of the LGBT movement. One possible justification may be that the LGBT movement is quite young, which means that the issue of parenting may have only recently appeared on the agenda of publicly out and politically visible LGBT individuals. And yet, as this research shows, LGBT parenting itself, despite its invisibility, is not new.

Another possible justification may be the continuing "life-and-death" struggle that many LGBT individuals find themselves engaged in. Most of the lesbian/bisexual women

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<sup>42</sup>This title has a reference to public spaces such as tea gardens and dining halls that are only open to normative families, which means that public space is open only to the "well-behaved." Those public spaces abject any person who does not fit with the norms of family.

that I have conversed with in the course of this research say that it is too utopian to dream of raising a child in Turkey today, given the prevailing conditions. They also note that they are not able to take responsibility for a child because of the lack of constitutional and other legal rights in Turkey.

The invisibility of LGBT parents is understandable in terms of how the socio-political realm forces them to enclose themselves. There is no legal recognition or support for such parents, and there is no constitutional recognition for sexual orientation and gender identity in either the Constitution or civil law. Therefore, LGBT individuals are under threat of discrimination for being both LGBT individuals and LGBT parents. In such a legal and political setting, it is difficult to broach the issue of regulations for same-sex marriage, partnership or joint custody.

On the other hand, LİSTAG, with its documentary “My Child,” reached a broad array of audiences and made possible the visibility of the struggle of the parents of LGBT individuals. In this sense, both the documentary and LİSTAG have been revolutionary since they created a public arena for questioning heteronormative family norms. Yet, the discussion still tends to center around the (heterosexual) parents of LGBT individuals, not LGBT parents.

We can hardly talk about research on parenthood and motherhood with regards to queer practices. This research led me to develop a queer rethinking of parenting experiences in Turkey. The mostly inaccessible and invisible experiences of queer parenting, which are left unimaginable, carry the potential to reform, in fact revolutionize, our understanding of family. These experiences constitute challenging voices to compulsory heterosexuality, conjugality and compulsory motherhood. What brings the

narratives in this research together is not only the fact that they do not fit into sexual and gender norms, but also that they reveal experiences of non-compliant parenting in a social and political setting that is heavily based on compliance.

In this sense, queer family is an unexplored area for both the feminist movement and the LGBT movement in Turkey. Although research on LGBT individuals has gained attention in recent years, a significant gap exists concerning experiences of parenting and motherhood. Most of the studies on parenting in Turkey have been conducted on heterosexual motherhood, the relationship between militarism and motherhood, and maternal thinking and the politics of war, with a focus on anti-militarist feminist theories. The existing literature on motherhood tends to dwell on - in fact, assume - heterosexual motherhood. In fact we can confidently say that the existing research on motherhood is characterized by - and perpetuates - heteronormativity. On the other hand, even though the LGBT movement has started debating parenting and LISTAG has become an important driving force for the organization of parents of LGBT individuals, currently there is no visibility of queer families in Turkey yet.

### **2.3. The reconstruction of the Turkish family structure under the AKP**

The modern, heteropatriarchal, nuclear family form, which has recently come under challenge by the feminist and LGBT movements, is also being reformulated under the neoconservative policies of AKP. As it was discussed throughout the chapter, “the issue of gender and women’s rights has historically been a site of state policy and political debate, however, in recent years, Turkey has witnessed new forms of patriarchy shaped by the

intersection of neoliberal, nationalist and religious politics during the rule of the AKP (2002-07; 2007- present)” (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011). The AKP government’s conservatism in socio-cultural and political spheres (Bora 2005; Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2006; Kahraman 2007; Toprak 2009) is not solely derived from the party’s Islamist origin. Rather, it should be considered a version of the patriarchal structure that permeates almost all political tendencies in Turkey (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011; 556- 557). In this section of the chapter, I will analyze the discourses of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy on family, parenthood and LGBT rights, I will trace to how characteristics of AKP government’s discourse and regulations lead to a claustrophobic environment in terms of family and parenthood.

Soon after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government took majority power in 2002, a European Commission report noted that “According to different reports, more than half of the female population are subject to physical and psychological forms of violence within the family environment” (European Commission, 2003; 36). Yet, during its 11 years in power, the politics of the AKP government have been based on strengthening the ideology of the family, with primary focus on protecting the family as a unit in itself instead of maintaining gender equality, women’s rights and fighting against physical and psychological forms of violence within the family.

In a symbolic move, which reflects the AKP’s approach to the issue of gender, the term “women” was removed from the Ministry for Women and Family, which had been established in 1991 as the result of women’s rights activists’ struggles for deciphering power relations within the family structure. In 2011, its name was changed to the Ministry of Family and Social Policy despite protests against this alteration. Many observers read

this change as a move setting back the gains of the feminist movement and giving priority to the family as a unit (Belge, 2011). Given this state of affairs, gender equality gets considered within the boundaries of the family.

Moreover, the AKP government's definition of family is exclusively shaped by heteronormativity. at the center of which lies heterosexual marriage with children. Furthermore, the government has urged its citizens to have at least three children and it has also sought to limit abortion, discourages divorce and encourages individuals to obtain familial assistance from the "family ombudsman program."<sup>43</sup> Considering the fact that the bodies of citizens are under the control of the nation-state and each nation-state creates its own gender and sexual regimes to manage populations, the basic way to regulate and control the bodies of citizens can be achieved within the boundaries of the family institution (Baba, 2011); seen in this light, the efforts of the AKP government have led to a claustrophobic heteronormative conceptualization of family that places women into an antagonistic position with men.

**2.3.1. The dichotomy of women and men:** In 2010, Tayyip Erdoğan, the current Prime Minister of Turkey and chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), asserted that it is not possible for women and men to be equals since they are

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<sup>43</sup> For the discussion of family ombudsman program See: Dağlan Ailenin Reçetesi: "Aile Ombudsmanlığı", 2012, <http://www.ozgurgelecek.net/kadin-haberleri/3239-dalan-ailenin-recetesi-aile-ombudsmanl-.html> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

“complementary.”<sup>44</sup> This statement, together with the “three-child” policy, implies that men and women are seen as different entities, with women bearing the major responsibility for the home and children and men being active in the realms of work, politics and life outside. Hence, the family is defined as a unit that requires one man and one woman who complement one another. Additionally, AKP politicians have identified the aim of women’s education as helping them fulfill their domestic responsibilities, indicative of their position that the familial sphere is the natural locus of women (Coşar and Yeğenoğlu, 2011).

In opposition to Erdoğan’s statement, an amendment made to the Turkish Constitution in 2004 included the statement “women and men equally enjoy the same rights, and [that] the state is responsible for the implementation of these equal rights” (Ayata and Tütüncü, 2008; 375). However, since coming to power, the AKP has taken on a “gender-washing” approach (Leake, 2011); for that reason, the inclusion of the clause about gender equality in the constitution has not resulted in any policy changes or substantive changes in women’s lives.

**2.3.2. At least three children:** In order to ensure population growth, Erdoğan claimed in 2008 that “Every family would need to have at least three children,”<sup>45</sup> a statement which is indicative of the explicit family ideology of the government. He emphasized that he

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<sup>44</sup> “Kadın ve erkeğin eşit olması mümkün değil” Habertürk, July 31, 2010, <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/537849-kadin-ve-erkegin-esit-olmasi-mumkun-degil> , (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>45</sup>He also urged women to give birth to at least five children during his public speeches in Bosna Hercegovina and Kazakhstan in order to support the population growth rate of those countries:

<http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/776812-3-az-5-cocuk-yapin> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/744781-3-degil-en-az-5-cocuk> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

repeated this statement every time he made a speech: “We might not be able to see 2071. I’m talking especially to the youngsters, the single ones. You will get married. *İnşallah* you will raise the generation of 2071. You will do this in such a way that they will carry this nation’s place to the top 10 of the world in a different way. We are people of different horizons. Therefore, I keep repeating everywhere I go, that you need to have at least 3 children. Look, it can be more, but definitely not less.”<sup>46</sup> According to this statement, family in all accounts is based on conjugality, which in turn invokes reproduction and a particular family model.

Furthermore, the recent debates on practices of abortion and caesarean births are signs of both the ruling government’s strategies on regulating and controlling the bodies of women and their understanding of family structure which includes at least three children. Women’s right to abortion, which has been in place since 1983 in Turkey, has fallen under threat of prohibition. In a much-debated speech in 2012, Erdoğan likened abortion to “a massacre,” comparing it to a botched air raid that claimed 34 lives in Uludere in south eastern Turkey: “As prime minister, I oppose caesarean births, and I know they are being done on purpose. I know that these steps are being taken to prevent this country’s population from growing further. For me, abortion is murder, and I call upon those circles and members of the media who oppose my comments: You live and breathe Uludere. I say

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<sup>46</sup> Ümit Çetin, “2071 için 3 çocuk”, *Hürriyet*, December 17, 2012, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/22173846.asp> (date accessed October 6, 2013): “Bizler 2071’i göremeyebiliriz. Özellikle gençlere, bekar olanlara sesleniyorum. Evleneceksiniz. İnşallah 1071’in neslini siz yetiştireceksiniz. Ama öyle bir şuurla yetiştireceksiniz ki bu milletin dünyadaki yerini onlar ilk 10’un içinde farklı bir yere taşıyacaklar. Biz farklı ufukların insanlarıyız. Onun için her gittiğim yerde en az 3 çocuk diyorum. Bak daha fazla olmalı, altında olmamalı.”

every abortion is an Uludere;” adding that Turkey needs a young and dynamic population that constitutes the basis of its economy, stating that they would undertake efforts to increase the country’s population.<sup>47</sup> Some critics interpreted this speech as an effort to change the political agenda, moving the public debate away from the Uludere incident (for which the Prime Minister was being held accountable) towards a new controversy, namely abortion.<sup>48</sup> This speech initiated a heated public debate, and whether it was a conscious effort or not, it led to a draft bill that proposed to limit practices of abortion and C-sections which were later dropped due to widespread protests by women’s rights activists all around the country.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, there have been reports that, especially in state hospitals, it has become very difficult to have abortions or C-sections.

**2.3.3. Preventing divorce:** The AKP government has also set up a Family Ombudsman Program with the intent to prevent divorce. This program aims to protect the family by reducing divorce, or to put it another way, by dissuading women from seeking divorce. For the Prime Minister, the interrelation between the state and the family is so obvious that preventing divorce and controlling the family is seen as the responsibility of the ruling party: “As long as the family and nation exist, the state exists. We want strong families with

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<sup>47</sup>“Abortion sparks raging debate in Turkey”, Hürriyet Daily News, May 28, 2012, [http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/abortion-sparks-  
raging%20debate.aspx?pageID=238&nid=21740](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/abortion-sparks-<br/>raging%20debate.aspx?pageID=238&nid=21740), (date accessed October 6, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Cemre Baytok, “Kürtaj haktır ne demek?” Sosyalist Feminist Kollektif, [http://www.sosyalistfeministkollektif.org/feminist-gundem/feminist-gundem/kurtaj/284-  
kurtaj-haktir-ne-demek](http://www.sosyalistfeministkollektif.org/feminist-gundem/feminist-gundem/kurtaj/284-<br/>kurtaj-haktir-ne-demek) (date accessed October 6, 2013).

<sup>49</sup>“Turkey drops controversial plan to reduce abortion limits” Ahram Online, June 17, 2012, [http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/45819/World/Region/Turkey-drops-  
controversial-plan-to-reduce-abortion.aspx](http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/45819/World/Region/Turkey-drops-<br/>controversial-plan-to-reduce-abortion.aspx) ,(date accessed October 6, 2013)

at least three children. This is the way of strengthening our families. We should achieve this as the ruling party.”<sup>50</sup>

The position of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy in terms of divorce or separation is explicit in publications that have been prepared about single parents in Turkey (ASAGEM, 2011a) and the Turkish family structure (ASAGEM, 2011b). Firstly, both studies highlight the current ideology of the ministry, and historicize and contextualize their understanding of family and motherhood. The former study simply tries to determine the psychological, economic, social, legal and cultural effects of becoming a single parent family through death, divorce or separation on the remaining family members. However, being a single parent is only referred to in terms of death, divorce, or separation. It focuses on the “absence” of one of the parents; in other words, there is no room for any other type of family except the model of one mother, one father, and at least one child. Nonetheless, the research accepts that there is no institutional support for such single parent families and offers solutions for single parents: “One solution is to provide suitable and happy single parent family examples alongside dual parent families in textbooks, commercials, and television programs” (Aile ve Sosyal Arařtırmalar, 2011; 283). Still, the separation of parents brings with it “catastrophic consequences,” according to this research, for the reason that it “damages the family unit” in society. Besides a discussion of the consequences of separation in Turkey, the report echoes the ideology of the ministry

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<sup>50</sup>“Üç çocuk çağrısını yineledi” İHA, January 2, 2013, <http://www.iha.com.tr/3-cocuk-cagrisini-yineledi-256933-haber>, (date accessed October 6, 2013): “Aile varoldukça, millet varoldukça, devlet varolur... En az üç çocukla beraber güçlü aileler istiyoruz. Ailelerimizi güçlü kılmanın yolu buradan geçiyor... İktidar olarak bunu başarmalıyız.”

regarding the mother/father dichotomy, heteronormativity, and idealized family norms through the experience of single parents who are *absolutely* accepted as heterosexual.

**2.3.4. Heterosexuality:** In 2010, Aliye Kavaf, the Minister of Women and Family of the time, declared that homosexuality is a biological disorder that needs treatment. In doing so, the Ministry draws the boundaries of “healthy” individuals for the family:

We do not say homosexuals do not exist. I believe homosexuality is a biological disorder; it is a disease that should be treated. Therefore, I do not look at gay marriage positively. We don't do any work about this issue at our Ministry. In addition, no such request has been submitted to our Ministry.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to those statements, Aliye Kavaf also stated that family is a universal institution that protects and ensures the continuance of history, cultural identity and humanistic values.<sup>52</sup> It can be argued that the aim of the ministry is to reproduce family norms as a constituent of “Turkish culture” that should unquestionably be heterosexual and based on nuclear family values.

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<sup>51</sup> "Eşcinsellik Bir Hastalık, Tedavi Edilmeli", Kaos GL, April 7, 2010, [http://kaosgl.org/icerik/escinsellik\\_bir\\_hastalik\\_tedavi\\_edilmeli](http://kaosgl.org/icerik/escinsellik_bir_hastalik_tedavi_edilmeli) (date accessed October 6, 2013): Eşcinseller yok demiyoruz. Ben eşcinselliğin biyolojik bir bozukluk, bir hastalık olduğuna inanıyorum. Tedavi edilmesi gereken birşey bence. Dolayısıyla eşcinsel evliliklere de olumlu bakmıyorum. Bakanlığımızda onlarla ilgili bir çalışma yok. Zaten bize iletilmiş bir talep de yok. Türkiye’de eşcinseller yok demiyoruz, bu vaka var.”

<sup>52</sup> Selma Aliye Kavaf, May 15, 2010, <http://www.selmaaliyekavaf.com.tr/haber.asp?durum=kat&kt=4>. (date accessed August 15, 2012): Çünkü aile, tüm toplumlarda kültürel kimliğin, insani değerlerin ve tarihi sürekliliğin koruyucusu ve aktarıcısı olan evrensel bir kurumdur.

The current head of the same ministry, now renamed as the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, Fatma Şahin has, on the other hand, declared: “We do not allow discrimination against homosexuals. However, we should not weaken our family values.” In other words, the main reasoning against same-sex marriage or civil unions is identified as “family values.” The state policy on same-sex marriage has been made explicit in a recent congress in Vienna, where the Minister declared that same-sex marriage and same-sex parents are not recognized in Turkey. The reason provided for this antagonistic stance is once again that it is found to contradict with the “Turkish family structure.”<sup>53</sup> In this way, the ministry can be seen as holding up a particularly narrow perspective on the “Turkish family” and moral codes of family.

To conclude, the AKP government, especially through the work of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, has attempted to reconstruct the ideal family within a binary gender system and heteronormativity which holds as its model married heterosexual couples with at least three children, as well as mechanisms to protect this “family” from dissolution. In this framework, there is no room for LGBT parents and no possibility for the recognition of their existence, let alone legal rights.

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<sup>53</sup> Yasemin Öz, “Türkiye Eşcinsellerin Evliliğine de Ebeveynliğine de Karşı”, Kaos GL, February 24, 2010, [http://www.kaosgl.org/icerik/turkiye\\_escinsellerin\\_evligine\\_de\\_ebeveynligine\\_de\\_karsi](http://www.kaosgl.org/icerik/turkiye_escinsellerin_evligine_de_ebeveynligine_de_karsi) (date accessed October 6, 2013)

#### **2.3.4.1. Revisiting heterosexuality through the crisis of Yunus’s family**

As noted above, in Turkey same-sex marriage is not permitted, neither are partnership and joint custody rights. There is not even constitutional recognition<sup>54</sup> for sexual orientation and gender identity aside from heterosexual and cisgender individuals.<sup>55</sup> and the AKP government’s policy about LGBT parenting had been based on denial of their existence and indifference to their problems. This silence has recently been broken with the news of a Turkish child being adopted by a Dutch Lesbian couple in Holland. The story, in fact, dates back to 2004 when Yunus lived with his “biological” family in Holland and was subjected to physical family violence when he was just 9 months old. Yunus was taken from his “biological” family and was adopted by a Dutch family in order to provide him with a safe family environment. Now, he is 9 years old and still lives with his Dutch family. The biological Turkish family sued the Dutch government for the return of their son, and the case was rejected since Yunus had already adapted to his new family over the years. More importantly, the rejection was based on the assertion that the attention, affection, and compassion any child needs were fulfilled in his family environment. After the rejection, the Turkish media sensationalized the case in the following way: “The Azeroğlu family

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<sup>54</sup>There are no regulations regarding LGBT individuals in either the Constitution or civil law. Article 10 of the constitution notes: “Everyone is equal before the law without any distinction based on language, race, skin color, gender, political view, philosophical belief, religion, sect and other categories. State organs and administrative authorities are obliged to act in accordance to the principle of equality before the law regarding any and all of their actions.”

<sup>55</sup>Cisgender, as opposed to transgender, refers to someone whose gender matches with the sex that was assigned at birth.

couldn't rescue their son from the Dutch lesbian family"<sup>56</sup>. The situation garnered much scathing media attention and sparked debates through stigmatization of the family as "lesbian;" and, Yunus was depicted as "suffering" because he was living with a lesbian couple and "needed to be rescued."

The AKP government objected not just because Yunus was adopted by a lesbian couple but also because this family was Christian. The argument was "He should be adopted in accordance with the culture of his own family. Instead, he was adopted by homosexual family which is a foreign culture."<sup>57</sup> But just what does "foreign culture" mean? With what criteria should the most "convenient" culture be decided upon in an adoption process? Calling a lesbian couple "foreign" is AKP's way of asserting that Turkish "culture" is not just Muslim, but also heterosexual. Vice Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ stated that the case of foster parents who are lesbian and Christian was unacceptable, noting "This is an unacceptable situation for a Turkish family!" Erdoğan argued that this case was against public morality and against the Turkish family structure: "The adopted child should be given to an appropriate family with regards to his own culture and values. In Muslim or Islamic culture, it contradicts with public morality and with the faith of that society to hand in a child to a homosexual family. Family institution is a sacred institution which should be

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<sup>56</sup> "Yusuf'un velayeti lezbiyen aileye verildi" Sabah Gazetesi, February 18, 2013, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2013/02/18/yusufun-velayeti-lezbiyen-aileye-verildi> (date accessed October 6, 2013)

<sup>57</sup> "Bir ailenin en yakın kültürüne verilmelidir. Yabancı bir kültür olan eşcinsel aileye veriliyor."

sustained.”<sup>58</sup>In light of this speech, the Turkish family structure of the AKP, beyond a shadow of doubt, is heterosexual, and also inclined to be Muslim, specifically Sunni.

This was the first time that the AKP government directly discussed the issue of LGBT parenting, and it explicitly situated itself against LGBT parenting. The way they oppose a child being raised by a lesbian couple also highlights their non-existent policies on LGBT parenting. For that reason, if the issue of LGBT parenting were to arise in Turkey, it would most likely be labeled as “belonging to a foreign culture.” The government has failed to take into account LGBT parents in Turkey, and has made its position clear by stating that LGBT parenting is against “our” public morality.

Following this debate, SPOD issued a statement titled “Meclis’ten Çocuk Hakları ile İlgili Gerçek Gündemi Takip Etmesini Talep Ediyoruz!”<sup>59</sup>, arguing for the government to take responsibility for and focus on children’s rights with the aim of preventing physical violence, sexual abuse, child marriage, child labor, and so on. Clearly the government’s agenda goes beyond protecting children’s rights, because there is no relationship between good parenting and the sexual orientation/gender identity of the parents (Fitzgerald, 1999; Herek, 2006). Gür, in an article titled “Can gay and lesbian be good at parenting?” asks whether the real aim was to protect children child or not:

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<sup>58</sup>“Kendi kültürüne, kendi değerlerine uygun bir aileye verilmelidir. Müslüman olan veya İslam kültürü içerisindeki yaklaşım olarak eşcinsel bir aileye çocuğun teslim edilmesi bir defa o toplumun genel ahlak kurallarına terstir, kendi inanç değerlerine terstir. Aile kurumu kutsal bir kurumdur, bu yapının güçlü tutulması lazım.”

<sup>59</sup> “Meclis’ten Çocuk Hakları ile İlgili Gerçek Gündemi Takip Etmesini Talep Ediyoruz!” SPOD, <http://www.spod.org.tr/turkce/meclisten-cocuk-haklari-ile-ilgili-gercek-gundemi-takip-etmesini-talep-ediyoruz/> ,(date accessed October 6, 2013)

The most significant question is this: Is the real aim to protect the child or to punish the parents? If they were just interested in protecting the children, the sexual orientation of the parents wouldn't be important. The children should be loved; they should be wrapped up in cotton wool. They deserve the best only because they are children. The children should be protected. They deserve the best education. They deserve the best diet. Whoever provides them for the child, are good parents. It doesn't matter who they are, it could be a mother a father, or two mothers or two fathers.<sup>60</sup>

The Turkish family structure which the government and media have simultaneously promoted leaves no room for other familial forms except for one in which there is one mother and father and at least one child. Furthermore, the invocation of “foreign culture” (*yabancı kültür*) both explicitly and implicitly refers to an east/west dichotomy which means that LGBT individuals belong to the “West” which is not acceptable for “our” culture. As a country that has a Muslim majority and has aspired to be “modern” and “Western” throughout its history, how can Turkey move beyond these ontological crises as a country and surpass the “east/west” dichotomy? Koğacıoğlu's answer, borrowing from Chaterjee (1990), is very meaningful: “On the one hand, the nation must be unique in its realization of its own essence. On the other, it must appropriate Western modernity, which in effect means changing and becoming like the West. How can the non-Western nation be both unique and like the West?” (Koğacıoğlu, 2004; 126)

The paradoxical ontological existence of the Turkish nation-state results in institutions that manipulate the term “tradition” and “culture” for the sake of their own benefit, particularly for their gendered state policies on family, reproduction and sexuality. Koğacıoğlu (2004) has pointed out that institutions manipulate the terms “tradition” and “culture” to achieve their own ends. LGBT individuals are often discriminated against by

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<sup>60</sup>Kahraman Gür, “Gey ve lezbiyenlerden iyi anne baba olur mu?” Kaos Gl, February 13, 2009, <http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=2469> , (date accessed October 6, 2013)

the AKP government through the invocation of ambiguous terms such as public morality, traditions, mores or Turkish family structure. In this way, heteronormativity as a regulating power is unleashed via gendered state policies on family, reproduction and sexuality.

This social and political atmosphere that leaves no room for non-heteronormative family and parenting forms finds expression, in the narratives of my research participants, as “the flow of life” that leads them to make heteronormative decisions, (directly or indirectly) forced marriages, and legal restrictions. Both this social atmosphere and the lack of legal regulations cause them to stay as invisible and unimaginable subjectivities.

## **Conclusion**

The quiet heteronormalization process which can be traced back to early years of the Republic when the “modern” nuclear family was imagined and institutionalized. In this framework, women are held responsible with the domestic sphere, even when they work outside the home, and are constructed as the “mothers of the nation.” The rise of a politically active feminist movement in the 1980s which focused on domestic violence in the family opened up new ground for politics and public debate with their statement “the private is political.” The idea of the family as a “safe haven” was questioned, and activists’ struggled to decipher the power relations within the family structure.

Yet, as I have shown in this chapter, the feminist academic and political literature has tended to focus on binary gender roles, leaving little room for non-heteronormative sexualities and genders. It was with the rise of the LGBT movement, which has been growing both in conflict and alliance with the feminist movement, that a major challenge to

heteronormativity and the process of “quiet heteronormalization” was posed in the political arena. On the other hand, within the LGBT movement, the issue of family remains generally confined to the experiences of coming out to family members; in other words, LGBT individuals involved in family relationships as children and siblings is in the agenda.

At present, the AKP government, including the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, attempts to reconstruct the ideal family within a strengthened and more explicit binary, heteronormative gender system which holds as its model married heterosexual couples with at least three children. AKP explicitly neglects LGBT parents due to the hegemony of heteronormativity underpinning legislation, official state discourses and political debates as it became explicit in the case of the Dutch lesbian couple. In the following chapters, I discuss the ways in which non-heteronormative parenting practices find articulation in the background of the legal, political and social restrictions discussed here.

## CHAPTER III. A REEXAMINATION OF PARENTHOOD THROUGH QUEER PRACTICES

*“Pencereyi aç  
sesin sarsın dünyayı  
duyulur elbet ta ötelelerden  
Yürek kendini tanır.”<sup>61</sup>*

### Introduction

In this chapter, I first aim to address the theoretical debates on the intersections of queer theory and kinship theory. I discuss why kinship matters for queer theory in the way that “bodies matter.” Second, I examine issues related to parental identification focusing on how my interviewees define themselves as parents. I also ask: How does the dichotomy father vs. mother play into their self-identification? In answering this question, I also discuss the limitations of their parental identification in terms of the binary gender system and heteronormativity. And lastly, I address the ways in which coming out to their children shapes parental experiences within the heterosexual matrix. How do they decide to disclose or not to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identification to their children?

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<sup>61</sup>This is an excerpt from the poem “Pencere” [Window] by Arkadaş Z. Özger: Open the windows/ Let your voice wind round the world/ It will be heard surely even at distant/ The heart knows itself.

### 3.1. “Your mother was *not* an angel, sweetheart!”

The first time I attempted to work on this chapter, I had a dream. In my dream, the mother of one of my best friends (who had passed away four years ago) was sitting in my living room. I was very surprised to see her. She said she was back on earth. I was very happy to hear this news! She suddenly said:

- You were searching for earthly angels, right? But I am the real angel here. Did you forget me? To be an angel, first you have to be dead.

I answered:

- Of course, I didn't forget you *Alime Abila* but I am working on the critical issue of compulsory parental identities for this dissertation.

She replied:

- You know what, sweetheart? To be an angel, you first have to be dead. Do you think being a mother is equal to being dead? Do women die after they become a mother?

So when I went back to work at the computer in the morning, I asked myself what my subconscious was trying to tell me. Reflecting on my dream and *Alime Abila's* warning, I remembered the unforgettable, cliché cue in *Yeşilçam* Turkish cinema: “Your mother was an angel, sweetheart!” Throughout these films, the mother is thought to be an indecent woman, but at the end of the film it is understood that everything was a misunderstanding as the child discovers that his/her mother was a decent woman, more like an angel.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>The term angel is generally attached to mothers to define them as compassionate, warmhearted, holy, well-behaved, and so on. This socially constructed ideal of mothers is also asexual, and in *Yeşilçam* cinema, the plots are generally built around a

Besides the expectation that she is an earthly angel, the mother may not be the imagined person with regard to blood relations, parental identification, gender identification, and heteronormativity. Moreover, the mother may not be *the mother*.<sup>63</sup> It is perhaps possible to imagine a mother who is not “an angel” - who never has to be one, and not just because she hasn’t died yet. Yet, can we imagine a mother who is not a *mother*? In other words, one of the main goals of this chapter is to lay out the layers of social and political anxiety over the boundaries of parental identities and roles and discuss the ways in which my research participants deal with, respond to, and challenge hegemonic parental identifications. It is possible to suggest that their challenges pave the way for new imaginings of the family and of parenthood.

### **3.1.1. From compulsory identities to parental identification**

In terms of the parental identification of my interviewees, I will scrutinize why and how they construct a lived relationality and define themselves as a parent in terms of parental identification. Some of the questions I consider are: What is the relation between their self-identification as a parent and their parenting experiences? How does the mother/father dichotomy lead them to perform the role of an imagined father or mother with regards to the heterosexual matrix?

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misunderstanding of the mother engaging in an extramarital sexual act. In this context, the sinner and the mother constitute an oxymoron, but in the end, it is discovered that the mother is not a sinner, but rather an angel.

<sup>63</sup>A parent who has a child and was born female but is not a mother. This ontological debate will be discussed throughout chapter.

Both the experiences and self-identification of my interviewees indicate that neither the concepts of mother and father parental identification nor gender identity and sexual orientation are fixed or essential. However, the binary sex/gender system constrains self-expression of parents with regards to their parental identification. In addition, language informs and regulates their parental experiences. Thus the mother/father binary, like those of female/male or woman/man, takes place within the dichotomous gender system. In other words, mother/father dichotomy is treated as fixed identities which are identified with the sex and gender categories of female/male and woman/man.

One of the main challenges of this research project was a direct outcome of the binary sex/gender system which constitutes parenthood in the mother/father dichotomy. The effort to bring my research participants together under an umbrella term was like a wild goose chase. The journey of researching lesbian, bisexual and queer mothers' experiences led to a thorough questioning of parental identifications within the binary sex/gender system that shapes Turkish society. Initially, I experienced my inability to draw boundaries around lesbian and bisexual motherhood as a failure. What was I going to do with parental experiences that I confronted which did not fit into this framework? What was I to do with the parents who were not "mothers" and those who did not identify as lesbian or bisexual? Should trans and queer parenthood be the topic of a separate study? Should I exclusively concentrate on lesbian and bisexual mothers? Struggling with such questions, I decided to change (and in fact, question) my theoretical framework, rather than "leaving out" parental identifications and experiences that "did not fit." Reflecting on how they "did not fit" became my most significant axis of learning. The tension between the

struggle of parenting and dissident sexualities, and what this tension implied regarding the sex/gender system in which we lived, became the central point of my research.

### **3.1.2. From taking motherhood for granted to exploring the intersections of Queer theory and kinship theory**

In her groundbreaking work on motherhood theory entitled *Of Woman Born* (Rich, 1976), Rich states that the institution of motherhood is not identical to bearing and caring for children any more than the institution of heterosexuality is identical with intimacy and sexual love. Both create the prescriptions and conditions in which choices are made or blocked; they are “not” reality but they have shaped the circumstances of our lives (Rich, 1976; 42). This research has taught me that Rich was right in suggesting that “we know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood” (Rich, 1976; 11). My journey into this research was based on the hope that I would be able to discover not just the “nature” and meaning of motherhood for lesbian and bisexual women but also to discover how these prescriptions and the conditions shaped the circumstances of their lives. The great challenge in diversifying motherhood as an institution and mothering as an experience (Rich, 1976) has the potential to open up a significant debate for understanding the experiences of lesbian and bisexual mothers.

As McCullough’s article, which was a review of Rich’s work, states, “motherhood is an institution that works to circumscribe women and protect the status quo of patriarchy; it is not simply a personal experience but one deeply shaped by the forces of the state, defined by legal systems, controlled by the medical system, and linked to the production

and protection of the nuclear heterosexual family and a capitalist economy. Motherhood is described in the article as the vehicle by which children are gendered and the family is reproduced; it is also an ideological ideal to which all women are taught to aspire but that none can achieve, and motherhood and birth are yet further terrain through which women's bodies are coerced and controlled by the structural institutions of patriarchy" (McCullough, 2004; 104). In this heteropatriarchal universe of motherhood, I will focus on how motherhood is limited to a binary sex/gender system and a gender binary system constructed via parental identification within the heterosexual matrix. The reexamination of the nature and meaning - if it exists - of motherhood, of which we don't know, as Rich says, led me to resituate my research questions between queer theory and kinship theory.

### **3.1.2.1. What is queer?**

The "chaos" of my interviewees' sexual orientation and gender identities, which traverse genderqueer, transgender (specifically their own self-identification including trans, transwoman, and transman), queer, lesbian, bisexual, or no explanation, were accompanied by a variety of parental identifications: mother, Çiçek/mother/anything possible, Leyla/mother, Dilan/father and the meaningless category of bizz. To make sense of these diverse identifications, queer theory works well in the sense that it opens a way to challenge the concept of "identity" and, particularly in the context of this research, makes room for discussions of not just the sexual and gender self-identification of my interviewees but also for their parental identifications.

The term queer can be traced back to the 1990s when it was developed as a response to increasing homophobia as a result of the AIDS crisis and the assumption that HIV/AIDS

was a “gay” disease. The word “queer” was initially used to insult LGBT individuals, but the movement embraced the word and argued that they were proud of being “queer.” So the meaning of the word changed as it was embraced by the movement.

Queer theory has its roots in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* and was followed by the groundbreaking works of Eve Sedgwick (1991), Butler (1990), and Berlant (1997). Queer theory evolved to challenge both the binary opposition and essentialist point of view of the gender system of feminist theory and gay/lesbian studies’ understandings of the “nature” of sexual identities. Therefore, queer theory developed out of perceptions of the limitations of identity politics (Warner, 1993; Seidman, 1997).

Placing queer next to LGBT may be critiqued as an oxymoron, because it is neither an identity nor an umbrella term (Çakırlar and Delice, 2012; Baba, 2011; Erdem, 2012; Jacobsen, 1998). It is not an identity because “queer” in any case “does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviors, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-constitution, and practices of community with the aim of restricting the relationships between power, truth and desire” (Halperin, 1997; 62). Secondly, it is not an umbrella term “because ‘queer’ need not be grounded in any positive truth or in any stable reality. As the word implies, ‘queer’ does not name some natural phenomenon or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm” (Halperin, 1997; 62).

The “chaos” of my interviewees’ sexual orientation/gender identities, and correspondingly, their parental identification led me to theorize that to add queer next to lesbian bisexual identifications can be analyzed as an oxymoron, because it is neither an identity nor an umbrella term. In Halperin’s discussions of queer, it demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-a-vis the normative - a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices; it could also include married couples without children, for example, or even (who knows?) married couples with children - with, perhaps, very naughty children (Halperin, 1997; 62). Therefore, the identifications and experiences of my interviewees could be discussed through their oppositional relation to the norm. Hence, as queer implies, “it is not positivity but positionality vis-a-vis the normative - a positionality” (Halperin, 1997). It is within this framework that queer practices as experienced in parenthood will be scrutinized.

### **3.1.2.2. What happens when queer meets kinship?**

Kinship theory is a body of knowledge that has emerged from attempts to abstract the governing principles of relationality from the practices of intimacy observed in a given culture (Freeman, 2007). As a result of the works of Radcliffe-Brown (1935), Evans-Pritchard (1940), and Fortes (1953), kinship studies in the first half and middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on investigating the nature and the significance of unilineal descent groups. Early understandings of kinship were based on biological relationality and subsequently

focused on the way biological relationality is transformed by the culture that is under investigation.

The meeting of queer theory and kinship theory builds upon anthropological theories of kinship that approach kinship “as a social not a biological phenomenon, a matter of culture not nature. Hence, it is a founding gesture for the project of queering kinship” (Freeman, 1997). On the other hand, the structuralist theory of kinship developed by Claude Levi-Strauss in *Elementary Societies of Kinship* suggests that there is a sexed nature before the law which is culled from the argument on the “exchange of women” (Levi-Strauss, 1969). The significance of this work stems from its analysis of a social symbolic emerging from biological facts. This symbolic system of the “exchange of women” is not a biological fact; rather, it is constructed through marriage ties. Yet, the social exchange of woman is still based on biologism because of the dichotomy of “exchanger” and “exchanged,” which are associated with taken-for-granted distinctions in anatomical sex (Rubin, 1975).

Gayle Rubin’s theorizing of the sex/gender system in *The Traffic in Women* (Rubin, 1975) reads Levi-Strauss’ kinship theory from a feminist lens and discusses the process of gendering individuals as male or female: “It is a regulated system for making people look like they were born into an anatomical sex that is actually an effect of particular modes of production and their attendant social relations” (Freeman, 1997; 301). According to Rubin, “gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes and a product of the social relations of sexuality. The kinship system is based upon marriage. They therefore transform males and females into “men” and “women,” each an incomplete half which can only find wholeness when united with the other. [...] The idea that men and women are different from one

another, then, either is from anything else must come from somewhere other than nature. Furthermore, there are differences between males and females in a variety of traits, and the range of variation in those traits shows considerable overlap. [...] But the idea that men and women are two mutually exclusive categories must arise out of something other than a nonexistent “natural” opposition” (Rubin, 179). Rubin examines the historical and social mechanisms by which gender and compulsory heterosexuality are produced and result in women being consigned to a secondary position in human relations. According to Rubin, the division of labor by sex can therefore be seen as a “taboo”; “it is a taboo against the sameness of men and women, a taboo dividing the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories, a taboo which exacerbates the biological differences between the sexes and thereby creates gender. This division of labor can also be seen as a taboo against sexual arrangements other than those containing one man and one woman, thereby enjoining heterosexual marriage” (Rubin, 1975, 178).

Rubin’s groundbreaking discussion of Levi-Strauss’s “exchange of women” was challenged by Butler’s theory of performativity, in which there is no biological “sex” behind expressions of gender. In Butler’s conceptualization, identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results (Butler, 1990; 33). Additionally, Butler asks, what if sex is also constructed (Butler, 1990). In Butler’s questioning of whether or not sex is constructed and “if there is a condemnation of gender in sex, it would make no sense, then, to define a cultural interpretation of sex if it is itself is a gendered category” (Butler, 1999; 11). “One is not born a woman, rather one becomes a woman” Simone De Beauvoir argues in the *Second Sex*. This also represents the greatest attempt to decipher how gender is constructed. According to Butler, there is nothing in her

account that guarantees that the “one” who becomes a woman is necessarily female. [...] Indeed, she argues, sex may have been gender all along (Butler; 1999; 12).

The heterosexual matrix creates normative ideals of sex and gender which are constructed through the naturalization of certain bodies, desires and practices (Butler, 1999). Hence, this heterosexual matrix provides a stable model of parenthood in which a female (sex) becomes a woman (gender) whose (desire) must be towards man, and then she becomes a mother. This research looks into those cases where parental identification does not conform to the heterosexual matrix in terms of their sex, gender, and.

Obviously, the heterosexual matrix does shape the circumstances of the lives of the parents I have interviewed. During the research, this has led me to reformulate my research questions to include such queries as to how certain habitual and violent presumptions of the heterosexual matrix shape the parental identification of parents. These questions run parallel to Butler’s question “When and why, for instance, do some butch lesbians who become parents become ‘dads’ and others become ‘moms’?” (Butler; 1999, 11), and that of Padavic and Batterfield: “What does the liminal position of “mather” - which is the non-biological mother who identifies herself as neither mother nor father - say to us?” (Padavic and Batterfield, 2011).

As Butler argues, the assumption of universality as regards the category of “woman” in feminism has coercive and regulatory consequences, even if the construction has “emancipatory” purposes (Butler, 1999; 7). This research approaches sex and gender through their queer reformulations, exploring the limits of identity politics. Throughout my research I had to contend with the ways I formulated the mother identity as a parental identification which entailed new forms of exclusion and hierarchy. My initial point of

departure, “lesbian and bisexual mothers,” was shaped by essentialist assumptions and, at the outset, limited imaginable identifications. The “emancipatory purposes” behind this formulation did not undermine its coercive and regulatory consequences. It was the queer reformulation of gender and kinship that helped me “hear” and to formulate the diverse and dynamic nature of the parental identifications expressed by my research participants.

If kinship is a social and not a biological phenomenon, then it is a matter of culture not nature (Freeman, 1997) and if queer demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-a-vis the normative - a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices – (Halperin, 1997) how can we discover the intersections of those theories? In light of Butler’s theory, Elizabeth Freeman’s *Queer Belongings* (Freeman, 1997) discusses kinship matters for queer theory in a way that, as “Butler reminds us, ‘bodies matter’: (1) a culture’s repetition of particular practices actually produces what seem to be the material facts that supposedly ground those practices in the first place, and (2) when those repetitions are governed by a norm, other possibilities are literally unthinkable and impossible. Heterosexual gender norms therefore “make” kin relations in that they regulate human behavior toward procreation while appearing to be the result of some primal need to propagate species. Meanwhile, whatever the connections forged by queer gender performances or other embodied behaviors “make” remains unintelligible as kinship” (Freeman, 1997; 297-298).

What this means for the purposes of this research is: If (1) the culture’s practices of particular kinship relations actually produce what seem to be the material facts that supposedly ground those practices in the first place, then (2) the mother/father dichotomy

governed by a norm renders unthinkable and impossible other possibilities of parental identification (mother, Çiçek/mother/anything possible, Leyla/mother, Dilan/father and the meaningless category of bizz).

### **3.2. Parental identifications also matter**

Parents' experiences are shaped through the heterosexual matrix which regulates their parental identification. The heterosexual matrix forces them to situate themselves either as father or as mother; it limits the possibility of parental identification to a binary formulation that departs from a biological conceptualization of sex. As Freeman states, "a culture's repetition of particular practices actually produces what seem to be the material facts that supposedly ground those practices in the first place and when those repetitions are governed by a norm, other possibilities are literally erased" (Freeman, 1997; 297-298). Although language designates their identity and situates their parental experiences - because these repetitions are governed by norms - the other possibilities which seem to be unthinkable and impossible could be offered through a reexamination of those parental identifications.

Halperin argues, borrowing from Foucault that "power is also positive and productive; it produces possibilities of action, of choice - and ultimately, it produces the conditions for the exercise of freedom" (Halperin, 1997; 17). The hegemony of familial norms and the institution of motherhood as well as heteronormativity make room for a positive and productive space for the struggle involved in parental identifications and

experiences. Some of them construct a space of resistance within the language itself, which leads them to explicitly mock those norms.

Resistance to normativity is not purely negative or reactive or destructive; in other words, “it is also positive, dynamic and creative. It is by resisting discursive and institutional practices which, in their scattered and diffuse functioning, contribute to the operation of heteronormativity that queer identities can open up a social space for the construction of different identities, for the elaboration of various types of relationships” (Halperin, 1997; 66).

I realized that not just language itself but also questioning the language blurs the boundaries of parental identifications. The parental identifications of my research participants reveal a queer discussion of parenting itself. Just as Halperin argues, the queer positioning of parental identities opens up a social space for the construction of different identities, for the possibility of various types of relationalities.

The “chaos” of my research participants’ sexual orientation/gender identities and parental identifications challenge the heterosexual matrix: giving birth to a child doesn’t necessarily make an individual a mother; biology does not determine parental identification just as blood relations do not determine a familial connection. In light of these challenges, this research transcends the categories of lesbian and bisexual motherhood or transgender parenting and, through a queer lens, explores the diverse and dynamic universe of parental identifications.

### **3.2.1. Parental identifications of parents-to-be**

A shared characteristic of my parents-to-be interviewees' narratives is that their parental identification is closely connected to their family ideals. On the other hand, Ceren, Zeynep, Çiçek, Leyla, and Dilan's dreams about parental identification diversify with regard to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Their parental identification shapes their conceptualization of parental roles in their imagined family, as well as their dreams about what form the family should take. The identifications offered by my parents-to-be research participants ranges from mother to non-identification to father, and is at times left to the child's preference, in view of the ambiguity of there being two mothers.

#### **3.2.1.1. Mother**

Ceren and Zeynep suggest that they will identify themselves as the mothers of their child. Ceren politically holds on to this identity, whereas Zeynep says that she plans to be a single mother. Ceren wants to give birth to her child. Nonetheless, according to her, to be a mother you do not have to give birth to a child. Mothering is something which goes beyond blood relations in her narrative. But still, she wants to experience giving birth to a child. Unlike Ceren, Zeynep does not promote this bodily experience; rather, she just dreams of being a single mother no matter how. Zeynep also rejects the importance of blood relations in the formation of a family. Here is a long excerpt from Ceren's narrative:

Are you asking whether I define myself as the mother of the child or not? If so, then my answer will be yes, it will be my child...  
[...]

What you just asked was right. You said your child would be genderless, but you are not. I didn't grow up genderless. Yet I define myself as a woman. And probably I will define myself as the mother. Or shouldn't I be a mother or should I be a parent? Because... This is a question. Shouldn't there be a mother or a father, should there be only parents? To me, the important thing is to subvert these identifications in practice. Giving birth to a child doesn't necessarily mean being a mother or being a mother doesn't mean giving birth.

[...]

It is not to deny mothering, but to redefine it. I think I am curious about the biological aspects of mothering. I have been curious about it and I would like to experience it. Also, I don't think it is a wrong thing to be curious about it. Do I make myself clear? Another life grows inside of you. I really would like to experience this. On the other hand, being a woman is a political identity for me that I can hold onto. After all, I came to this life as a biological woman. And I am capable of producing a new life. A-ah so good! Do I make myself clear? That's why I have been thinking about it for a long time. Because... It may be instinct or curiosity. In any case, I really am curious and I want to experience it. If mothering includes this –not that it has to- getting pregnant and giving birth, and it does, then I would like to experience it. I have always wanted to. I desired it firstly through this, getting pregnant then giving birth to a child. Because... I don't know, I always thought that it is a beautiful thing.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Kendini onun annesi olarak tanımlayacak mısın diye mi soruyorsun? Buysa evet kafamdaki onun benim çocuğum olacağı...

[...]

Az önce sorduğun çok doğru bir yerdendi. Çocuğun cinsiyetsiz olacak, ama sen öyle değilsin dedin. Cinsiyetsiz büyümedim. Ve hala da kendimi kadın olarak tanımlıyorum. Ve anne olarak da tanımlayacağım büyük ihtimalle. Ya da anne olmamalıyım da ebeveyn mi olmalıyım. Çünkü... o da bir soru yani. Acaba anne ya da baba olmamalı mı ve sadece ebeveyn mi olmalı. Ve aslında önemli olanın onun pratikte kırılması gibi geliyor bana. Zaten doğum yapmanın kendisi ille de anne olmak değil de ya da anne olmak ille de doğum yapmış olmak demek değil.

[...]

Anneliği reddetmek değil yeniden tanımlamak gerekebilir. Ben sanırım anneliğin biyolojik kısmını da çok merak ediyorum açıkçası. O zamandan beri merak ettiğim ve yaşamak istediğim bir şey. Ve bunun illa da ters bir şey olduğunu düşünmüyorum. Anlatabiliyor muyum? Böyle içinde başka bir hayat büyüyecek... onu hep merak ediyordum ve yaşamak istiyorum yani. Bir de şey üzerinden çok... Kadın olmak benim için bir yandan politik bir kimlik, o yüzden de tutduğum bir şey. Ve biyolojik bir kadın olarak dünyaya geldim. Ve yeni bir hayat üretebiliyorum. A-ah ne güzel! Anlatabiliyor muyum? O zamandan beri düşündüğüm bir şey olmasının nedeni de bu. Çünkü... içgüdü de olabilir bilmiyorum. Merak olabilir. Ama gerçekten merak ediyorum ve yaşamak istiyorum. Eğer annelik dediğim şeyin içerisinde bu da varsa –ille olmak zorunda değil- hamile kalmak ve çocuk doğurmak varsa ki var; e bunu da yaşamak istiyorum ben. hep istediğim bir şeydi. İlk bunun üzerinden istediğim bir şeydi. Hamile kalmak ve çocuğu dünyaya getirmek üzerinden... çünkü bilmiyorum hep bana güzel bir şeymiş gibi geldi.

And this is how Zeynep defines her dreams of motherhood:

When I dream about my child, I never dream about someone else next to me. I always feel like I would be the only mother. I could marry with someone and have a child or I could adopt. I doesn't matter how it comes true. I feel like there would be different people who take responsibilities of the child in particular periods. This could be my partner or the grandmother or the grandfather who takes responsibilities of the child. Yet, I would raise that child by myself as the mother. I always dream that I am the mother of a child just by myself.<sup>65</sup>

Neither Ceren nor Zeynep interprets motherhood to be a biological phenomenon. The reason for Ceren's preference to give birth to a child stems from her curiosity of the bodily experience of pregnancy. She believes in the power of this bodily experience.

Unlike Ceren, Zeynep finds this bodily experience terrifying and prefers not to experience it, which has led her to the idea of adopting a child.

Ceren defines herself as genderqueer whereas Zeynep defines herself as queer.

Nevertheless, both of them choose to identify themselves as mothers of their child. The dichotomy of parental identification requires one to be either a mother or a father, and this parental dichotomy offers little in the way of a different identification. Although Ceren and Zeynep question their gender and desire, their dreams about parenthood still rely on that dichotomy. Still, both of them said that reconstructing the mother identity in practical terms

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<sup>65</sup>Çocuğumu hayal ettiğimde hiçbir zaman yanımdaki kişiyi hayal etmiyorum. Ben her zaman tek anne olacakmışım gibi hissediyorum. Yani gerçekten şuan karşıma öyle çok aklımın uyuştuğu birisi çıksa evlenip hani çocuk yapabilirim ya da evlatlık alabilirim.Yani fark etmiyor açıkçası nasıl olduğu.Bana şey gibi geliyor dönemsel olarak çocuğumun yanında olacak insanlar olacak.bu benim partnerim olabilir işte çocuğun sorumluluğunu alan anane, dede olabilir. Ama ben tek başıma o çocuğun annesi olarak onu büyütecekmişim gibime geliyor.Hep hayalimde onun tek başıma annesi olduğumu kuruyorum.

is their dream for forming a family, and this family does not necessarily depend on biological ties.

On the other hand, Ceren plans to be the mother of a genderless child; not sharing the sex of the child with anyone. What's more, she plans to raise the child regardless of gender roles. According to her, this will "emancipate" the child from the gendered world; however, she is not sure about how the genderless child will be able to find a place in such a world.

### **3.2.1.2. Identification depends on the child's preference**

Çiçek does not mind what his/her child calls him/her. S/he wants to recreate kinship relations and let her child call her whatever she or he wants. According to him/her, s/he could be his/her child's mother or just his/her Çiçek or anything else. The name won't change her position in the life of his/her child. Nevertheless, s/he is hesitant about whether or not this dream could possibly come true because kinship relations based on blood relations seem to be inalterable. So, s/he explicitly ignores blood relations and constructs his/her space of resistance to form a new family regardless of blood relations. To him/her, blood relations are nothing; a genuine family is something we choose. During our interview, Çiçek said,

We live in a collective. We eat, drink and do everything together. On the other hand, every individual has their own lives. Some of us work, some of us study. I dream of raising a child in such an environment. One of us can have a child in this collective life, and we can decide to raise this child together. Or we can adopt a child and want him/her to be a part of our collective life. Then, everybody shares the responsibilities of raising the child. It is important to raise a child in this way because it leads him/her to see diversity, to see different relationalities. It is important that a child observe those relational ties instead of the patterns of

mothering and fathering and the stereotypes of the mother and the father. Maybe she/he prefers to call some of us the mother or the father or she/he doesn't. It will be his/ her choice. I think these points are significant. However, I am confused about how a child could grow in this collective that there are no kinship ties and power relations. Before attempting to raise a child, we could plan how we could achieve a good environment for the child or we could talk about how she/he calls us while she/he lives in a collective family. [...]

It doesn't matter if my child calls me mother or not but if she/he prefers to call me as the mother, it doesn't mean anything different for me. However, my mothering would be different than how motherhood is generally understood in society.<sup>66</sup>

Since Çiçek dreams of a collective family she could not situate himself/herself as the (only) mother of the child. Instead she dreams of being one of the caregivers and it will be the child's decision to call him/her whatever she or he wants. S/he problematizes the restriction of parental identification to mother and father, as well as questioning the very institution of nuclear family - not only because s/he theoretically and practically challenges sexual and gender norms, but also s/he intends to create a non-conforming family.

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<sup>66</sup>Kolektif yaşıyoruz. Birlikte yiyoruz içiyoruz herşeyi birlikte yapıyoruz. Bir yandan kendi hepimizin hayatları var. Kimimiz çalışıyor, kimimiz okuyor. Böyle bir ortamda bir çocuk olduğunu düşünüyorum, herhangi bir insanın bir çocuğu, kolektif olarak 5-10 kişi çocuğu büyötmeye karar veriyoruz. O kolektif hayatımızın içine dahil olmasını istiyoruz ve bir evlat ediniyoruz. Ve herkes onun büyümesinde ve ihtiyaçlarını karşılamada sorumluluk sahibi oluyor. Bu şekilde çocuk büyötmek o çocuğun etrafında hem büyöyken sosyalleşirken etrafında farklılıkları görmesini, farklı ilişki tarzlarını olması açısından çok önemli olduğunu düşünüyorum. Hem o dayatılan annelik ve babalık kalıbının dışında... belki birine anne belki birine baba diyecek ya da demeyecek, onun tercihi olacak sonuçta kiminle nasıl ilişki kuracağı. Bunların önemli olduğunu düşünüyorum. Tamamen özgürlükçü tamamen hiç bir iktidar ilişkisinin olmadığı, akrabalık ilişkisinin olmadığı bir şekilde o çocuk nasıl büyöye dair kafam karışık. Kolektifin içerisinde olsa da birilerine abi mi diyecek abla mı diyecek sadece isimleriyle mi hitap edecek ne olacak ne bitecek bunları çok iyi tasarlamak gerekiyor böyle bir işe kalkışmadan önce.

[...]

Benim kafamda anne diyecekse bana benim çocuğum –ki anne deyip dememesi Çiçek demesi de bana çok değişik bir şey ifade etmeyecek. Ama çok daha genelde gerçekten toplumda algılandığı şekilde anneliğe baktığımda çok farklı algılanacak yerler var.

### **3.2.1.3. Leyla: Because of the ambiguity of having two mothers**

Leyla wants her child to call her by her name because she believes it would be confusing for the child to refer to both parents as mothers. She prefers for her child to use her name but nevertheless she will let her child decide by himself/herself. On the other hand, she is quite sure that it is next to impossible to raise a child with two mothers in Turkey. Here is an excerpt from my interview with Leyla where we discuss the issue of parental identification and the challenges of raising a child with two mothers:

This is a really scary issue for me. Even the concept of family relation irritates me. I am opposed to the family...the concept of family. Actually, I dream of a communal life. Once we were living in one in Berlin. I dream of raising a child in a commune, where the child will be related to me and Sevgi but does not “belong” to us. That is what I actually dream of. However, I feel like this is next to impossible. As an individual who lives in Turkey, this idea seems difficult to achieve.

[...]

Therefore, I can never imagine it in Turkey. What would the child say “I have no father but I have two mothers”? What would the child say at school? When I think about these scenarios, I panic. My family would never support me in this!

**You said how would the child say I have two mommies in Turkey, so what about in Berlin?**

Berlin is more relaxed. The child can say that she/he has two mommies. The TV and media are more open. It is more normal than here. For instance the TV shows weddings of both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Therefore, Berlin seems to be less scary for me. I don't say it is perfect. But there is an arrangement for partnership in Berlin.

[...]

**What kind of a division of labor do you imagine with Sevgi? Will you both be mothers? How will the child address you?**

Sevgi calls her mother and father by their name. I think I prefer it to be like that. I don't want the child to call me mother.

**Why?**

Then who would be the mother? Who does the child call mother? There is a problem. Would she/he call both of us mother? I don't know. I don't know why.

**For example the child could call you as mimi or mommy?**

Mother... I leave to him/ her to decide whatever she/he wants. I will call Sevgi as Sevgi, and she will call me Leyla. I won't specially say to the child I am your mother. If she/he prefers she/he could say it.<sup>67</sup>

Since Turkey recognizes some forms of lived relationality and has rendered other forms of relationality unimaginable, the unimaginability or impossibility of two mothers is

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<sup>67</sup>Bu aslında korkutucu bir konu benim için.Aile ilişkileri deyince bile tüylerim diken diken oluyor.Aile... aile kavramını çok ters buluyorum.Aslında benim hayal ettiğim biraz daha komün hayatı.Berlin'de çünkü öyleydik biz. Bu komün hayatı içinde bana işte attach olacak ya da Sevgiye attach olacak bize daha yakın çocuğumuzun olması. Ama bize ait bir çocuk olması değil bu. Esas hayal ettiğim o. Ama bana uzak geliyor biraz bu. Türkiye'de yaşayan biri olarak.Bu fikir uzak geliyor.

[...]

O yüzden Türkiye'de hayatta düşünemem. Çocuk ne diyecek benim babam yok iki tane annem var. ne diyecek çocuk okulda?Bunları düşünüp panik oluyorum.Ailem hayatta destek olmaz bana bu konuda.

[...]

Türkiyede çocuk iki annem var nasıl diyecek dedin mesela berlin'de koşullar nasıl? Berlin'de çok daha rahat.Bunu diyebilir çocuk.Benim iki annem var diyebilir.Televizyon medya falan bu konuya duyarlı.Daha bir normal.Evlilik programlarında mesela yüzde 50 eş arama.Heteroseksüel ve homoseksüel olarak. Daha az korkutucu geliyor o yüzden. Mükemmel demiyorum ama.Berlin'de evlilik hakkı yok da partnership hakkı gibi bir şey.Bütün yasal hakları alabiliyorsun ama biraz daha partnership gibi ismi değişik.

[...]

Peki Sevgi ile çocuğun bakımında nasıl bir işbölümü hayal ediyorsun? İkinizde anne mi olacaksınız? Çocuk size ne diye hitap edecek?

Sevgi anne ve babasına ismiyle hitap ediyor. Öyle olmasını tercih ederdim herhalde.Anne dememesini isterdim.

Neden peki?

Kime anne diyecek o zaman? Sorun var işte ikimize birden anne mi diyecek? Bilmiyorum.Bilmiyorum neden olduğunu.

Mesela mimi, mommy gibi başka şeylerde diyebilir sonuçta?

Anne... ona bırakırdım herhalde. Kendi ne isterse desin. Ben Sevgi'e Sevgi diye hitap edeceğim, o da bana leyla diyecek. Öyle çünkü öyle oluyor. Çocuğa özellikle ben senin annenim demez.Onu kendi tercih ederse ileride diyebilir.

clear for Leyla in this context and she even has considered leaving the country to raise their child with two mothers.

#### **3.2.1.4. From Dilan to Father**

Dilan's thoughts on parental identification were very ambivalent throughout her narrative. Firstly, she said she was against gender roles, and therefore she thought she was just going to be her child's parent and instead of being mother or father, and then she said that she prefers to be called by her name. But as our interview progressed, her narrative evolved, and in the end, she said she felt herself closer to a father role and said she was going to be the father of the child. Although she emphasized that she identifies herself as a woman and has no problem with this gender, she believes her partner - since she is going to give birth - would be the "real" mother. And the idea of being a non-biological mother is very confusing for her. Dilan said,

I want my child to call me as Dilan. I would be neither a mother nor a father. I would be his/her parent who would do everything for him/her.

[...]

Would we be his/her mother or father? I am against manhood or womanhood. They say men are able to do this while woman can't do but I don't believe in manhood and womanhood. I stand up for being genderless. However, I am a masculine type of person. For instance, I don't wear skirt. I would never wear make-up. If this means manhood or being a man in the society, yes I am. Most of the people tell me that I am as powerful as a man, you don't wear makeup and you dress like a man. However, I believe this is related to the appearance.

[...]

I don't say that I will be the father but the child will probably perceive me as a father. For instance, we have a dog. When I call him, everybody says "run Bob your father calls you." When Müge does, they say your mother calls you. The society identifies me as a man. I feel like neither a woman nor a man. Instead, I stand for being genderless.

[...]

**What do you mean by saying you will perform the social role of manhood?**

I will be the one who plants the tree or flowers and work in the garden. I will chop the wood. Those works which are associated with power, I will do them. The child will learn those things from me. I will also cook. I will do the works that will not be done by Müge. I will fix the broken table, or broken sink. The child will learn those things from me. I go outside at night for shopping. If my child was fan of a team, I would bring him/her to the soccer games. Müge probably won't go; I will go with him/her. Or if she prefers to come, she will join us.

I will perform the roles which are attached to the manhood in the society. The child will practice with me those heavy works. But the child says "Father, I..." Look I said father! He would probably call me as his/her father. I feel myself close to that one. My subconscious was out! Yet, I told you that she/he would call me as Dilan. Maybe I am closer to the manhood in my subconscious. I am glad that I am a woman, but I am closer to the character of a man. I think there shouldn't be this dichotomy of woman /man but at the moment I am closer to the character of a man.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Çocuğumun bana Dilan demesini isterim, baba anne falan da değilim. Dilanım ben onun için.Bir ebeveyniyim, onun için her şeyi yapabilecek.

[...]

İkimizde anne mi baba mı olacağız. Ben şeye çok karşıyım erkeklik kadınlık.Erkek şunu yapar kadın bunu yapamaz.Erkeklik kadınlık diye bir şey yok.Ben tamamıyla cinsiyetsizliği savunan biriyim ama maskülen biriyim.Etek asla giymem.Makyaj yapmıyorum yapmam da.Bu erkeklikse erkek tarafı olmaksu bu toplumda erkek gibi olmaksu evet.Çoğuş kişi bana erkek gibi güçlüsün erkek gibi kuvvetlisin diyor.Makyaj yapmıyorsun, erkek gibi giyiniyorsun diyor.Ama bu tamamıyla imajla alakalı.

[...]

Ben şey demiyorum bir baba olacağım demiyorum ama muhtemelen beni öyle görecek. Bizim bir köpeğımız var. holiyi ben çağırduğımda holi baban çağırıyor diyorlar, Müge çağırduğımda annene git diyorlar.Bir kere toplum böyle bir şeyi bana yüklemiş.Kendimi erkek gibi hissetmiyorum ama kadın gibi de hissetmiyorum. Çünkü cinsiyetsizliği savunduğum için.

[...]

Toplumsal olarak erkek rolünü ben yapacağım dedin. Onun içinde başka ne var?

Bahçeye bir şeyler ekilmesi gerekiyorsa ben ekeceğim. Odun kırılması gerekiyorsa ben yapacağım. Güç gerektiren şeyleri ben yapacağım. Evde matkapla bir şeyler yapacaksa ben yapacağım. Çocuk bunları benden görecek. Yemek de ben yapacağım. Müge'nin yapmadığı şeyleri de yapacağım.Masanın tamirini yapacağım, musluk bozulmuşsa musluğu tamir edeceğim.Çocuk bunları görecek benden. Gece dışarı çıkıp alışveriş yapıyorum. Çocuğuş bir takım tutuyorsa onu maça götürürüm, o takımın maçını izler.Muhtemelen Müge gitmez o benimle gelir.Ve yahut Müge de gelmek isterse bizimle gelir.

Toplumda kadın ve erkekte denilen şeyin babaya yapılan şeylerin hepsini ben yapacağım ve çocuk bunları benimle görecek.Bu tür ağır işler falan filan bunların hepsini benimle görecek.

According to Padavic and Butterfield, a non-biologically related female parent acquires a parental identity in a social system that continually reminds her of her liminal position (Padavic and Butterfield, 2011; 176). The one mother-one father family model is so dominant that lesbian co-parents can hardly make room for alternatives, even in their imagined lives. One of the reasons for Dilan’s dilemma could be the idea of trying to fit into the one mother-one father model. Additionally, she really would like to identify herself as the father but she cannot bring the two identities together in her mind - father and woman - and therefore she can’t clearly put it into words. On the other hand, she did not want to stay in that liminal position in her family. Furthermore, Dilan’s ambiguous narrative may be shaped by how society - which adheres to compulsory binary gender roles and the father/mother dichotomy –conceived her as masculine.

How can we analyze the parental identifications of these parents-to-be? Each of them has a different dream for the future and imagined a different type of family and parental identification. In contrast to the other parents-to-be, Çiçek dreams of creating an extended family and his/her identification depends on the child’s preference. Zeynep would like to be a single mother. Leyla would like to raise her child with her girlfriend abroad because of the conditions in Turkey. Ceren dreams of raising a genderless child with her partner, but she will identify herself as the mother because she was not raised to be

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[...]

Ama o “baba ben”... baba dedim. Muhtemelen baba diyecek bana. Ben kendimi ona yakın görüyorum.Bilinçaltı çıktı.Oysa Dilan diyecek demiştim.Belki de bilinçaltımla alakalı erkek karakterine daha yakınım. Kadın olmaktan mutluyum ama erkek karakterine daha yakınım bunu kabulleniyorum. Bence erkek kadın karakteri olmamalı ama şuanda erkek karakterine daha yakınım.

genderless. Although Dilan is sure that she will raise a child with her girlfriend she is fairly ambivalent about her identification in the family since her girlfriend will give birth to their child. First, it can be argued that the heterosexual matrix, and its constitutive dichotomy father and mother, limits the dreams and thoughts of parents-to-be because the sex/gender system condemns parental identity to either the role of a father or mother. Secondly, since normative family forms and heterosexual gender norms “make” kin relations, whatever connections forged by queer gender performances or other embodied behaviors “make” remains unintelligible as kinship (Freeman, 1997); meanwhile they have considerable difficulties in imagining their future with a child, especially in the Turkish context. As a result, Leyla, for instance, is quite sure that she would raise her child outside Turkey.

### **3.2.2. Parental identifications of the parents**

The narratives of the parents among my research participants also revealed a diversity of parental identifications and parental performances. Firstly, Özge, Tuana, Elif, Derin, Esra and Defne identify themselves as mothers. Except for Tuana, all of them have children from a previous heterosexual marriage. Since they had experienced the hegemonic family model which consists of one father-one mother, there was no apparent tension regarding their parental identity. Yet, not all of them have felt comfortable with the parental identification they had to assume. For instance, Eda and Memo have children from a previous marriage as well but Eda identifies herself as their children’s *Bızz* whereas Memo gave birth to his child, and yet he has always been the father. On the other hand, Memo’s

partner Zin identifies herself as the mother of the child. Lastly, Derya identifies his/her experience as queer mothering and his/her child calls him/her by name.

### 3.2.2.1. Derya or Deroş

Although Derya identifies himself/herself as the mother of the child, the child calls him/her by his/her name. Derya said,

He calls me as Derya or Deroş.

#### **Did you prefer it or did he choose to say it?**

No! I would be happy if he occasionally called me mother. There is only one person in the world who could call me mother. No I didn't do this. He started to talk when he was 8 months old. He called me mother for a long time. He called us mother and father. Then it turned to mother and Uğur. Then father and Derya. At last, it turned into Uğur and Derya. It goes like this.<sup>69</sup>

S/he allows her child to call him/her whatever he prefers. Just as with Çiçek's dream, his/her family represents a powerful challenge to hegemonic familial norms not because his/her child calls him/her by name,<sup>70</sup> but because their family practices do not conform to the nuclear family norms, including compulsory heterosexuality, monogamy and compulsory gender roles.

Derya identifies himself/herself as genderqueer. S/he feels himself/herself both this and that, "both man and woman" as s/he states, and correspondingly, s/he defines his/her

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<sup>69</sup>Bana Derya ya da Deroş diyor.

Sen mi tercih ettin, o mu böyle istedi?

Hayır canım! Arada bir anne dese çok mutlu olacağım. Zaten anne diyebilecek bir tanecik insan var. Yok ben yapmadım bunu. 8 aylıkken konuşmaya başladı. Epey bir anne dedi. Anne baba diyordu. Anne ve Uğur oldu. Sonra baba ve Derya oldu. Sonra da Uğur ve Derya'ya döndü. Böyle gidiyor.

<sup>70</sup>Of course, calling a parent by name does not necessarily imply a queer practice.

experience as a queer mother. S/he does not problematize her mother identity; however, she does problematize the socially constructed notion of motherhood.

### **3.2.2.2. Bizz**

When Eda came out to her children, their first reaction was about whether she wanted them to call her “mother” or not. In the end, she found a solution by creating a meaningless word, “bizz.” Nevertheless, she identifies herself as the parent of her children and doesn’t embrace any parental identification. Eda said,

After I had come out to them, they asked whether I would be their mother. We talked like it was not possible. I mean I told them I wouldn’t be their mother. However, I didn’t want them to call me as their father. When they called me as the father, I felt like I was lying both to myself and to our social milieu.

I can’t stand this phrase: pose as a woman. The explanation for trans individuals as a man posing as a woman and wearing “woman’s clothes” is very ignorant. I was afraid that my children would carry the same impression. I found the solution by making everything genderless. Actually, I think this is the basis of queer theory. If your aim is to make the concept of gender unintelligible, you won’t have to struggle for the dichotomy of gender, or trinity, quinary of gender etc. Therefore, queer is right in this sense. How couldn’t this be resolved all over the world? I didn’t know anything about queer at that time. I instinctively found the solution by making everything genderless. I told them that I didn’t want them to call me as their father. Okay, I would be your father inside of you. This is not because I don’t want to be your father anymore. However, this is because I don’t want to be associated with manhood. That’s why I want this. From now on, call me as Bizz; you can call me as Bizz.

#### **What does Bizz mean?**

I don’t know. It suddenly occurred to me. I was thinking about how they could call me instead of calling me as father. It came to my mind; it was both a meaningless and lovely word. This word is only for a person and it is not related to any identity. They loved it and adapted to it soon. After that they called me as Bizz. This made me feel relieved. I am sure they also felt the same way. For instance, we went to the stationery shop for buying their course books. Salesperson welcomed me like “Welcome, lady”. One of my daughters brought a notebook to show me and suddenly said “Look! Father...” Then the atmosphere in the shop became weird, everybody stared at us. Thanks to the Bizz, we avoided those experiences. This was

a good thing for us.<sup>71</sup>

Inventing the word “bızz,” which lacks meaning or gender connotation, becomes a major life-saver for Eda and their children. She said she had no idea what queer theory was back then, but now it seems to be a very queer word for her. Bızz fits into neither the category of mother nor father. The liminal position of this name is quite resistant to compulsory gender roles and parental identification. The term “bızz” can be seen as subverting the heterosexual matrix, revealing how the binary gender system tries to condemn a diversity of experiences into a narrow understanding of “man” and “woman” and correspondingly into father and mother categories as parental identities.

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<sup>71</sup>Açıldıktan sonra böyle bir bana şeyi de sordular hatta nasıl olacak sen bizim annemiz mi olacaksın.Olmaz öyle şey falan gibi konuşuyoruz.Ben de yani çocuklar sizin anneniz falan olamam diyorum.Ama bana baba demenizi de istemiyorum.Baba denince hani sanki kendime ve çevreme de yalan söylüyormuş gibi bir şey oluyor. En sinir olduğum şeylerden biridir o: kadın kılığına girmek lafı. Ben erkeğim de kadın kılığına girip yaşıyorum mantığı vardır ya cahilce. Çocuklarda da öyle bir şey oluşur mu diye de korkuyorum tabii.Onun çözümünü şeyde buldum. Tümüyle cinsiyetsizleştirmede. Aslında queer teorisinin en temelindeki doğru da bence bu. Yani tümüyle cinsiyetsizleşme, cinsiyet kavramını tümünden belirsiz bir hale getirilebilirse, ikilisi de üçlüsü de beşlisi de kalmaz yani. o yüzden queer kavramının doğrusu da orda. Bu nasıl o çözülemiyor hiç bir yerde, dünyanın hiçbir yerinde.Ben bu queer kavramıyla o zamanlar hiç bilgim falan yoktu.Sadece tümüyle içgüdüsel bir çözüm arayışı içerisinde evde çocuklarla ilişkimde cinsiyetsizleşme gibi bir yol buldum. Bundan sonra bana baba demenizi istemiyorum dedim. Tamam ben sizin için sizin içinizde babanız olayım ama babanız ol... olmayı istemediğimden de değil. Erkeklikle bağlantı kurulmasını istemediğimden bunu böyle istiyorum dedim. Bundan sonra bana bızz diye hitap edin, bızz diye çağırın.

Nerden çıktı bızz?

Ne bileyim öyle bir anda aklıma geldi yani.Böyle hani bana baba demeyin ne diyin diye düşünürken aklıma hiç bir anlamı olmayan sevimli.Sadece o kişi herhangi kimliğe tekabül etmeyen falan böyle bir şey olsun diye düşünürken aklıma o geldi.Onlar da sevdiler, benimsediler çok kısa sürede.Ondan sonra bana hep bızz diye hitap ettiler.Bu benim açımdan bir çok şeyi rahatlattı.Bu eminim onlar açısından da öyle.Mesela kırtasiyeciyeye gidiyoruz ne bileyim ders kitaplarını almaya gidiyoruz çocukların.Tezgahtar buyurun hanımefendi falan diyor, gösteriyor kitapları çıkarıyor önümüze. Kızım bir anda “aa baba bak” falan dediğinde böyle ortalık karışıyor. Bir tuhaf oluyor, bakışlar değişiyor falan. Bü tür şeyler yaşamamın da önüne geçmiş oldu böylece. Bu iyi bir şey oldu.

### 3.2.2.3. Father

In another example, Memo gave birth to his child, and yet he has always felt as the child's father. He identifies himself as the father of his child, and his child refers to him as "father" as well. Memo said,

I feel like... Berk dropped out of the sky. I wanted to think that way. Did I make myself clear? I wanted to think like that. I love him this way. [...]

I can say that we grew up together. We grew up together. We have still been growing up together. Like I said this is not like a father-child relationship. On the contrary, we had an interesting relationship. We raised each other. Before I talked to Berk about myself, he started to know me without asking anything. We knew each other this way, and communicated to one another this way. That's why...<sup>72</sup>

### 3.2.2.4. Zin: Mother

Zin identifies herself as the mother of the child. She had never planned to be a mother but her relationship with Memo changed her plans and one day she found herself to be a mother. A short while after their relationship started, Berk wanted to call Zin his mother. She had already taken on this responsibility and accepted him as her child, but the idea of being called "mother" made her feel confused because she had always said that she

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<sup>72</sup>Sanki bana şeymiş gibi geliyor. Berk hop gökten kucağıma indi falan. Hani böyle düşünmek istiyorum anlatabildim mi? Böyle düşünmek istiyorum. Çünkü onu böyle seviyorum ben.

[...]

Beraber büyüdük öyle söyleyeyim. Beraber büyüdük. Hala da beraber büyümeye devam ediyoruz. Berk'le dediğim gibi öyle bir babalık ilişkisi içerisinde değil. O da beni çocuğummuş gibi değil. Tam tersi farklı garip bir ilişkimiz var. Birbirimizi yetiştirdik. Ben Berka kendimi anlatmadan zaten Berk bana sormadan beni tanımaya başladı. Birbirimizi bu şekilde tanıdık ve bu şekilde iletişime kurmaya başladık. O yüzden...

did not want to be a mother and never wanted to give birth to a child. She had been theoretically against the institution of motherhood. But since she did not want to break his heart, she relented. And after that, her thoughts on mothering changed since there was no change in their lives except for the way Berk called her, she still had the same childcare responsibilities and she continued being Zin, just as she was before. She realized how that institution had made her afraid of being a mother. Zin said,

I had never felt myself capable of being a mother. I had never wanted to have a child. But Berk... I love Memo very much. He is irreplaceable for me. Berk is irreplaceable for Memo. Therefore, Berk entered into our life in this way. Otherwise, I had never thought about a child.

[...]

One day Berk asked me if he could call me as his mother. Being a mother is a position that I had never wanted to occupy before. However, I can't break a heart of a little child. Memo calmed me down by saying that I was already parenting him and recommended me not to exaggerate this request of Berk. According to Memo, it is not different than being sister to him. "You take care of him after he comes home. You study with him for his homework. You are interested in his life. You have already been his parent. You shouldn't exaggerate that much." I don't know, it was a chaos for me before because of the image of socially constructed motherhood in my mind.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Ne bileyim kendimi hiç anne olabilecek gibi görmedim. Hiç bir çocuğum olsun istemedim.

Berk'a gelince de yani ben memo'yu çok seviyorum. O benim hayatımın vazgeçilmezi. Berk de onun için hayatının bir vazgeçilmezi. O şekilde Berk bizim hayatımıza girdi. Yoksa ben öyle çocuk falan düşünmemiştim.

[...]

Bir gün sana anne diyebilir miyim? Diye sordu. Ben zaten bu konumda kendimi hayatım boyunca görmeyi reddedeceğim bir şeydi. Ama küçük bir çocuğu asla kıramam. Memo beni biraz telkin etti şu anlamda yani gözünde büyütme sen ona zaten bir ebeveynlik yapıyorsun. Bir ablalıktan çok farkı yok. Eve geldiğinde onunla ilgileniyorsun. Dersleriyle ilgileniyorsun. Onunla tatlı tatlı sohbet ediyorsun. Hayatıyla ilgileniyorsun. Sen zaten bir ebeveynsin. Bunu gözünde bu kadar büyütme bu kadar gerek yok. Toplumsal anneliğin çok yüceltilmesiyle ilgili bir karmaşaydı bilemiyorum şimdi.

Individuals who care for children are, in general, assigned a parental identity based on the experience of giving birth or not giving birth. In that sense, the parenting experiences of Memo and Zin challenge biological determinism. Although Memo gave birth to a child, he is the father of the child. According to his narrative, the experience of giving birth to a child didn't necessarily cause maternal feelings. On the other hand, Zin is the one who is non-biologically related to the child but nonetheless is the mother. This traversal experience muddies the waters of biological determinism, but still fits the one mother-one father family model. According to them, their child was an important driving force in the formation of their family. Memo and Zin said,

Memo: Berk longed for being a family.

Zin: He acted like he had to place someone to those family figures.

Memo: He had a father. He needed a mother next to his mother. That's why he acts like a child while he is with us. The states of family, nuclear family, mother-father-and-child were delayed figures for him. I feel like he started to grow up with us again.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.2.2.5. Mothers

Elif, Özge, Tuana, Derin, Esra and Defne define themselves as the mothers of their children. Throughout their narratives they made no room for the option of another identity. Furthermore, language doesn't directly affect their parental experiences. Except for Özge, all of them gave birth to a child either from a husband or partner. The binary sex/gender

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<sup>74</sup>Memo: Berk'de bir aile olma özlemi vardı.

Zin: O figürlere birilerini oturtması gerekiyormuş gibi davrandı.

Memo: Babası vardı. Babasının yanında bir de annesi olması gerekiyordu. Bu yüzden yanımızda bir türlü büyümek istemiyor, çocuklaşıyor. Çünkü bunu çok geç aldı. Aile olma çekirdek aile, anne baba çocuk olma durumunu. Yanımızda yeniden büyümeye başlıyormuş gibi geliyor.

system has had no direct impact effect on their lives as parents because they became parents through heterosexual marriages. Özge, as the exception, adopted her child, and experiences her parental identity in a way no different way from a biological mother. Özge said,

I have read a book called the brain of women. I paid attention to a data there. You can give birth to a child or adopt a child; in the two cases, the amount of discharged hormones is the same. There is no difference between these experiences. Same hormones are discharged at the same degree. Honestly, my breasts got bigger at that time. Just milk didn't come out. I put on weight. For a year, I had no sexual needs. I never even thought about it.<sup>75</sup>

The narrative of Tuana, who dreamed of becoming a mother, is based on how important mothering is for her. She identifies herself as a mother not just because she will give birth to her daughter in two months, but also because she believes in the strength of being mother. Tuana said,

Maybe I don't have an amazing life; I am neither a doctor nor an engineer. I don't have a career. Yet, I carry the joy of living, I struggle. Because I had all these features, I wanted to be a mother.

[...]

Being a single mother was always in my mind. I am against marriage... but not against men. I can't say I don't like men because you don't know. You don't know whom you will fall in love with. However, I was sure that I couldn't share my whole life with a man. Therefore, I dream of raising a child by myself. She will be just mine. I am also the jealous type. Of course, she will see her father. We can spend time together but I didn't want to raise a child as husband and wife under the same roof. My dream was that.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Kadın beyni diye bir kitap okumuştum. Ordaki bilgi dikkatimi çekmişti. Kendin de doğursan evlat da edinsen çocuk sahibi olduktan sonra bir kadının salgıladığı hormonlar tamamen aynı hiç bir fark yok. Aynı hormonları aynı düzeyde salgılıyor. Gerçekten o dönemde göğüslerim büyüdü. Bir süt gelmediği kaldı. Böyle daha bir yuvarlaklaştım. Gerçekten cinsel ihtiyaç denen şeyi bir sene hiç hissetmedim. Öyle bir şey aklıma bile gelmedi.

<sup>76</sup>Çok muhteşem bir hayatın olmayabilir, doktor mühendis olmayabilirim, bir baltaya sap da olmayabilirim. Ama yaşama sevincim vardır, mücadeleciyimdir. Bunların hepsi bende olduğu için anne olmak istedim.

[...]

As with Özge and Tuana, Elif, Derin, Esra and Defne identify themselves as mothers. On the other hand, all of them had their children from a previous heterosexual marriage. Therefore, they had experienced the dominant family model which consists of one father and one mother that there was no apparent tension in their parental identification.

The heterosexual matrix creates normative ideals of sex and gender which are constructed through the naturalizing of certain bodies, desires and practices (Butler, 1999). Hence, this heterosexual matrix provides a stable parenthood with regards to compulsory sex/gender/desire order which means a female (sex) becomes a woman (gender) whose (desire) must be directed towards men, and then she becomes a mother. In the analysis of my interviewees' parental identifications, it was seen that the binary sex/gender system which constitutes parenthood in the dichotomy of mother/father affects their lives depending on how they had their children. If they had a nuclear family model before, which seems to be the ideal medium to practice heterosexuality, and if they fit with the parental appearance, then there may not be a tension. However, their parenting experiences move not just around their self-identification as a parent but also their decision to come out or not come out to their children. Among my research participants, the parents who generally prefer staying in the closet tend to be lesbian or bisexual parents who had their children

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Benim aklımda bekar anne olmak vardı. Çünkü evliliğe karşı bir anne... erkek kişiye karşı değil, tamamen erkeklerden soyutlanmış biri olarak kendimi göremem. Her an ne olacağını bilemem çünkü. Aşk sevgi hoşlantı kime duyacağım bilemezsin. Bildiğim emin olduğum şey bir erkekle hayatımı geçiremeyeceğimdi, bir erkeğe adapte olamayacağımdı. Annelik konusunda da tek başıma çocuğumu büyütme hayalim vardı. Sadece benim olsun. Çok kiskancım ya ben şimdi. Tabii babasıyla da görüşün. Babası da alsın gezdiresin. Beraber de gezelim. Fakat aynı evin içinde bir koşturmaca hengame arasında karı koca arasında kalan bir çocuk büyütme istemedim. Böyle bir hayalim vardı.

from previous marriages. The heterosexual matrix does not challenge their parental identification; rather, they perform the mother in the heterosexual matrix.

On the other hand, in the stories of Eda and Memo, the binary sex/gender system becomes a major issue; the tension between their gender identities and parental identification shapes their parental experiences. Although they also had their children in previous marriages, they do not fit into the parental role they were once in. Although the heterosexual matrix provides a stable model of parenthood, neither mother/father as parental identification nor gender identity/sexual orientation are fixed or essential.

### **3.3. Coming out: To be (in the closet) or not to be (in the closet) as a parent**

Besides the significance of parental identification, each parents' decision about coming out, or the process itself, plays a key role in their parenting experiences within the heterosexual matrix (Wright, 2001). Coming out or not coming out determines the way they behave towards their children as parents. Some of the parents I conducted interviews with declared that there is no correlation between their sexual orientation and parenting experiences. They interpret them as two different entities, whereas some of the interviewees think that the tension between their sexual orientation/gender identity and parenting restricts their everyday life experiences.

Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* depicts how the closet is an impossibly contradictory place in-itself; you can neither be in it nor out of it. Halperin explains this through a Foucauldian analysis of power relations. According to Halperin,

Nothing communicates that power is everywhere more eloquently than the experience of the closet. The closet is nothing, first of all, if not the product of

complex relations of power. The only reason to be in the closet is to protect oneself from the many virulent sorts of social disqualification that one would suffer were the discreditable fact of one's sexual orientation more widely known.

[...]

If to come out is to release oneself from a state of unfreedom, that is not because coming out constitutes an escape from the reach of power to a place outside of power; rather, coming out puts into play a different set of power relations and alters the dynamics of personal and political struggle. Coming out is an act of freedom, then, not in the sense of liberation but in the sense of resistance. (Halperin, 29)

Both coming out and not coming out can be seen as acts of *resistance*. Without being carried away by a romanticizing of resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1990), I will analyze the position of my research participants within the framework of their decision to come out or not as strategy. Lewin (2007) analyzes the dialectics of resistance and accommodation through the experiences of lesbian mothers. According to her, “lesbian mothers are neither resisters nor accommodators, or perhaps they are both. She offers the term ‘strategists’ to describe them because they use the cultural resources offered by motherhood to achieve a particular set of goals. In addition to this, we cannot limit our analyses of women’s lives to accounts of victimization, and we cannot be complacent when we discover evidence of resistance and subversion” (Lewin, 2007; 385).

Some of the parents interpret their parenting and sexual orientation/gender identity as two different categories, and these binary lives are strategically constituted. According to Lewin, “lesbian mothers are, in some sense, both lesbian and mothers, but they shape identity and renegotiate its meaning at every turn, reinventing themselves as they make their way in a difficult world” (Lewin, 2007; 386). Although Lewin’s analyses are based on the experience of lesbian mothers, this could be extended to any non-conforming parent on

the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. In light of the term “strategist,” the issue of coming out differs for transgender, lesbian, bisexual and queer parents.

### **3.3.1. Parents-to-be**

My interviewees who were not yet parents differ as regards the decision to come out to their children. For Çiçek, it is not just because of his/her transgender identity, but also s/he wants to be honest to his/her child from the beginning. Ceren also wants to be out to her child because she wants to raise her child as genderless. On the other hand, Leyla and Zeynep have some hesitations. Leyla wants to raise her child in Berlin just because she is afraid of the discrimination she and her child will be exposed to in Turkey. Dilan wants to be out to her child since she plans to raise her child with her partner from the very beginning.

The shared narrative among my parents-to-be interviewees is that they all want to be honest with their children but without hurting them. Therefore, they say that raising a child as non-conforming parents may bring harm in the heteronormative universe because their children will be exposed to discrimination. However, all of them stated that even if they disclose themselves, it would result in a continuance of the heterosexual matrix that they never belonged to. Furthermore, they dream of raising children who are not obliged to obey the “rules” of the heterosexual matrix.

### 3.3.2. Transgender parents

Transgender individuals' experiences are different from those of lesbian and bisexual parents' experiences in the closet since they challenge gender roles and expressions (Hines, 2006; Pfeffer, 2012) as well as parental appearances. Their transgender identity - which does not fit gender norms - forces them to disclose themselves; furthermore, they prefer to be out of the closet.

Eda and Memo's stories challenge biological determinism and demonstrate that father/mother as parental identities are in no way related to biology. That's why Eda became Bizz in the family, and although Memo gave birth to the child, he refuses the identification of motherhood and is instead performing the father. In both cases, their transgender identity encouraged – or perhaps, even forced - them to be out to their child.

Memo said that he could easily explain his child about his transsexualism when he was 9 years old and he asked his son whether he felt sorry about anything or not. According to his narrative, his son always supported him the way he was. Memo said,

**Memo:** I told my son about my surgical operations before I had them. He was 9. I also explained him the process of taking hormones. This process was long before the operation. He was 9 when I had the surgical operation. I told him I was injected hormones that would cause growing a beard. I asked him how he would feel about that. He had friends, so, would he feel sad? Would it cause him difficulty to explain it to his friends? I asked him if he wanted to see me or not while I was in that process. Did I make myself clear? I was worried for him. However, Berk said: “No, why will I get annoyed of this? I don't have any problem about that. I don't care whether anyone gets annoyed of that.” He was 8 when I started to take hormones. Before taking hormones I had a baby face, unlike now. We had a photograph with Zin that was taken before I took hormones. One day Berk looked and looked at it and said: “Father! You looked more handsome before you had a beard.”

**Zin:** What was your answer? Your face was also better before your beard started coming out?

**Memo:** You looked better before your beard started coming out. You are looking uglier now. They say you should come out [to your child] before or after puberty. Like I said, since we grew up together with Berk, we knew and understood each other without asking many questions. However, I didn't want Berk to carry any question marks about me. So I told him everything about transsexualism. He was 9 when I made my transsexual opening to him.<sup>77</sup>

As another example, after Eda's wife passed away, Eda was left with two children by herself and she was in the closet. However, she didn't want to remain as their father any longer. While that idea was running through her mind, she and her children had been following a TV serial. There was a gay character in that serial with whom her children always empathized and they got angry at the people who discriminated against the character because of his sexual orientation. Their attitude towards the gay character gave her the courage to tell them and she came out to her children as a transsexual woman. Her children's first reaction was about whether she wanted them to call her mother or not. She

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<sup>77</sup>Memo: Bir tek dediğim gibi ameliyatlarımı oğluma olmadan önce anlattım. 9 yaşındaydı. Hormon kullanma sürecimi anlattım. Bu ameliyat süreci 9 yaşındaydı, hormon daha erkendi daha önce çok. Şey dedim onun hormon olduğunu oğlum ben bir iğne vuruluyorum, bir süre sonra buralardan sakallarım çıkacak dedim haberin olsun. Sen ne hissedersin senin bir arkadaş çevren var hani ve sen nasıl hissedersin üzülür müsün... İnsanlara karşı açıklama yapmakta zorlanır mısın? Ya da yakınında olmamı ister misin istemez misin? Anlatabiliyor muyum? Onu da düşünüyordum çünkü. Ama Berk hiç yani şey dedi: "hayır dedi niye rahatsız olayımki onlar rahatsız olsun ben niye rahatsız olayımki benim için hiç bir sorun yok" dedi. 8 yaşındaydı işte ilk hormonu kullanmaya başladığımda... 7si yeni bitti 8e giriyordu. Hatta şey diyor hormonlardan önce biraz daha baby face bir surat vardı bende. Geçenlerde bilgisyarda Zin'le öyle bir fotoğrafımız var. Baktı baktı şey dedi: "ya baba sakalsız halin biraz daha mı yakışıklıymış, keşke öyle mi kalsaydın"

Zin: Peki cevabı ne? Senin de sakalsız halin daha iyiydi Berk.

Memo: Senin de sakalsız halin daha iyiydi ve çok çirkinleşiyorsun... ergenliğin öncesinde ya söyleyin diyorlar ya sonrasında söyleyin diyorlar. Dediğim gibi biz Berkle beraber yetiştiğimiz için çok fazla birbirimize soru sormadan birbirimizi anlayıp tanımaya başladık. Ama onun ilerisinde de çocuğumun kafasında soru işaretleri olmasın istediğim için oturup kendimi anlattım. Transseksüelliği anlattım. Tam olarak 9 yaşında transseksüel açılımını yaptım kendimce.

said she was still their father. But after a while, they invented the word “bızz” which does not carry any meaning or connotations of gender.

Derya can be seen as an activist of LGBT parenting, and s/he is out to his/her child. Even though his/her child is just 5 years old, s/he easily built up a dialogue with his/her son about his/her sexual orientation and gender identity. Derya said,

For instance, I don't control my behaviors with my non-heterosexual darlings while we are with my child, Çağrı. When he asks, I explain everything to him. If he comes close to us, I don't change my gestures. This is the flux in Çağrı's life. I don't use the terms gay or lesbian but he sometimes asks if boys just like girls or not. We answer that some boys like girls, some of them like boys. Some girls like girls. Some boys like both boys and girls. By the way, Çağrı is the first person in my life that I came out to. Suddenly he asked me “Did you want to be a boy when you were a kid?” When he asks those kinds of questions, I start feeling awkward. Firstly, you don't want to shoot yourself in the foot. You can't exist by saying things that you don't believe in. On the other hand, the child is just 4-5 years old, you can't shatter his world. I replied “No, I felt like both girl and boy when I was a kid.” And then I added “I think I still feel the same way.” Do you know what he did? He touched my shoulder and said “Yes you are!” You cannot find this kind of sincerity even among the most dissident activists.<sup>78</sup>

The experiences of Memo, Eda and Derya imply that the dialogue they constructed with their children ended up with their children “accepting” the way they were, and not finding their parents' coming out strange.

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<sup>78</sup> Mesela heteroseksüel olmayan sevgililerimle davranışlarıma Çağrı'nın yanında bir kısıtlama getirmiyorum gayet açık davranıyorum. Sorarsa söylüyorum. Çağrı gelirse toparlanmıyorum. Bu Çağrı'nın hayatında akan giden bir şey. Kelime olarak lezbiyen, gay geçmiyor ama mesela soruyor bazen. Oğlanlar kızları mı sever sadece diye. Biz de bazı oğlanların kızları sever, bazı oğlanlar oğlanları sever. Bazı kızlar kızları sever. Bazı oğlanlar hem kızları hem oğlanları sever diyoruz. Bu arada benim trans olarak ilk açıldığım kişi Çağrı'dır. Bana durup dururken “Sen küçükken hep oğlan mı olmak istedin?” dedi. Böyle sorular geldiğinde içim bir garip oluyor. Bir kendine çelme takmak istemiyorsun. İnanmadığın bir şeyi söyleyip varolamazsın. Bir yandan karşıdaki 4-5 yaşındaki bir çocuk onun bütün dünyasını sarsacak bir şekilde davranamazsın. “Yok ya çocukken ben kendimi hem oğlan hem kız gibi hissediyordum” dedim, “galiba hala öyle hissediyorum” dedim. Ne yaptı biliyor musun omzuma dokunup “evet öylesin” dedi. Bu en muhalif çevrelerde bile gösterilmeyecek bir samimiyetti.

### 3.3.3. Planning to explain it one day

Derin, Özge, Elif and Esra are not out to their children because they are afraid of their children's reactions. However, all of them plan to tell them one day. In addition, they clearly distinguish their parental identity and their sexual orientation/gender identity which leads to a situation in which their lives become binary. Most of the time they struggle with the tension that arises from living both of these lives but still, the *strategy* of staying in the closet creates a space of freedom for them. As Lewin stated (2007), they are both parents and lesbian, and they shape their identities and renegotiate their meanings at every turn.

Derin believes that her son instinctively will find out one day without need for an explanation. She repeated, "He will find out by himself. Without any special effort of mine, he will find out" several times during the interview. This repeated sentence may imply both the fear of coming out of the closet and the wish that her son may discover it by himself; also, it may suggest her son's eventual acceptance of his mother the way she is. Derin said,

When? When? If I had a long-term relationship with my girlfriend and we decided to move in the same house, I would tell my son since we were living together.

**You said that you lived with your son and your girlfriend before. Why did you choose not to tell him then?**

He was a kid. He didn't understand. He was a kid.

**When do you want to tell him? For example, how old should he be that you can tell?**

He will find out by himself. Without any special effort of mine, he will find out. This is very interesting. I always wear trousers and t-shirt. He hasn't questioned it yet. But he absolutely will understand because of my clothing style. For instance, I go to parent meetings. I am different among other parents. One day he will find out. I think before I tell him, he will find out.

**What is the difference?**

They are totally different than me. I am totally different. I am out of the mother character. Okay, Eren calls me mother but our relation with him is such that I am more like a mother-friend. He will find out. He will find out without the need to tell him.<sup>79</sup>

From the bottom of her heart Esra would like to speak about herself with her daughters, but she believes that the right time to speak will arise naturally in the course of her relationship with her daughters. Esra said,

I feel that the true relationship just occurs when you don't pretend to be someone and honestly explain yourself. Regardless of whom you have a relationship with, when you hide one of your features, or your feelings, you cannot have a true relationship. I would like to have a true relationship with my children. I didn't want to cause them a trauma. They are young. They reached puberty. I don't want to affect "that side" of them.

**What do you mean with that?**

They can be homophobic. They can hate. Or they would want to lean that way which they don't know. I don't want them to do radical acts. They will follow the paths through what their hearts say to them. I will explain them later.

**Do you think there is a right time to come out to them?**

No, there isn't. I believe that I can feel that time. I believe that I can feel the true

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<sup>79</sup>Ne zaman? Ne zaman? Çok uzun anlamda bir kız arkadaşımı hayatıma alıp onunla beraber aynı evin içinde yaşamaya başlarsam o zaman, oğlum da benimle beraber olacağı için, o zaman bunu söylerim.

Sizin içinüz yaşadığı dönemlerde oldu demiştin. O dönemlerde söylemeyi neden tercih etmedin?

Eren küçüktü. Anlamayacağı için, küçüktü.

Eren'e açıklamak için bir yaş var mı kafanda?

O zaten belli bir şeyden sonra belki kendi bile anlayacak. Benim açıklamama bile gerek kalmayacak. Çünkü şu var. Ben mesela çok enteresan. Kıyafetim hep pantolon, tshirt. Şuanda sorgulamıyor ama.[...]

Giyim tarzımdan dolayı bir süre sonra muhakkak anlayacak.

Mesela veli toplantısına gidiyorum. Veliler arasında da farklı olduğum için zaten bir gün anlayacak o. Benim ona anlatmama gerek kalmayacak bana göre.

Nasıl bir fark?

Onlar tamamıyla farklı. Ben tamamıyla farklıyım zaten. Anne tiplemesinin tamamıyla dışında bir tipim zaten. Tamam Eren bana anne diyor ama bizim Erenle olan ilişkimiz zaten anne-arkadaş. Öyle bir ilişkimiz var. Belli bir zaman sonra o zaten anlayacak. Benim ona anlatmama gerek kalmayacak.

time. It will happen like it happened with my husband before. But I trust and believe that they will understand me, somehow we will reach a common ground.<sup>80</sup>

Defne came out to her child when she was 15 years old, but her child still blames her for being dishonest before, and ignores the way she is. Thus, this incompatibility between Defne and her child forces her to struggle with this tension as well. Defne said,

I am not out to everyone I know. Who am I out to? My child knows. My husband knows. My mother knows. Who else? Of course some of my friends know. Actually, I am out, I am not in the closet. But I don't always feel the necessity to tell. I used to hesitate to tell it, now I don't feel any hesitation. Only because my children... Because she doesn't feel herself comfortable about that... Somehow she became more... her social milieu affected her. She wasn't like that before. I don't know why. I just don't want to hurt her. I know that she is not really happy about that. She is annoyed when I am not in the closet. Yet, I don't care if I am out or not. I would tell everyone. I felt pressure before. Not any longer. What would they tell to her? I would also have questions like "what would they say about my husband? What would be this or that?" I got rid of those questions. I don't feel that pressure now. Only for my child... that is the only reason to limit myself. [...]

### **Do you mean she changed later on?**

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<sup>80</sup>Benim anladığım kadarıyla gerçek bir ilişki kendini gerçek halinle kendini olduğun halinle ifade edebildiğin yerde oluşuyor ancak. Herhangi bir tarafını sakladığın zaman, bir yönünü, bir duygunu bir şeyini sakladığın zaman orda gerçek bir ilişki kuramıyorsun asla. Kim olursa olsun. Çocuklarımla da gerçek bir ilişki kurmak istiyorum ben. Sadece şimdi bunun onlar için travmatik bir şey olmasını istemiyorum. Yaşları küçük. Ergenlik çağındalar. Onlarda kendi cinselliklerine bakıyorlar bir yandan, oralarda geziniyorlar. Bana çok söylemiyorlar ama o yaşları bende biliyorum. Onların yönünü çok etkilemek istemiyorum şu sıralar.

O yönünü etkilemek istemiyorum?

Homofobik olabilirler nefret edebilirler. Ya da o tarafa eğilmek isteyebilirler. Bilmedikleri bir şeye. Kafadan bir hareket yapınlar istemiyorum. Kalpleri onu söylüyorsa o yönde ilerleyip yollarını bulsunlar. Ben sonra kendimi çocuklara açıklarım.

Senin için uygun bir zaman var mı açıklamak için doğru zaman?

Yok öyle bir zaman yok. Ben onu hissedebileceğime inanıyorum sadece. Doğru zamanı hissedebileceğime inanıyorum, nasıl kocamla öyle bir şey olduysa.

Ama güvenim var inancım var onların beni anlayacağına ve bir şekilde bir yerde buluşabileceğimize...

Yes she started giving reaction later on. I don't think it is because of women. It would be the same if I had relationship with man during the marriage. I don't feel like it would change her reaction. It is more like because I disrupted the family, I behaved in a way that was not approved. To her, I disrupted the family. I was the one who disrupted the order of life.<sup>81</sup>

Lastly, Tuana, who is seven months pregnant, plans to be out to her child, and although she has a girlfriend right now, she is not sure what her position in their lives will be. She does not specify the age at which she will come out because she believes through her relationship with her child the right time will arise spontaneously. Tuana said,

While this relationship continues, Ayşe will grow up. The relationship might keep going for 10 years. If this relationship kept going when Ayşe reached the age that she would understand my explanations about our relationship, I wouldn't lie to my child. If I have feelings to a woman, it is my child's right to know it. Of course that doesn't mean I will suddenly tell to her.

The child will question why this woman is always with my mother. Since she always sees her, she wants to find out who she is. I would tell that we share the

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<sup>81</sup>Çevreme çok açık değilim. Kimlere açığım? Çocuğum biliyor, kocam biliyor, annem biliyor.Başka da dışarıdan çok fazla... bazı arkadaşlarım biliyor tabii.Aslında açığım saklanmıyorum aslında.Ama hani söyleme şeyi de hissetmiyorum.Eskiden daha fazla çekinirdim şimdi öyle bir çekincem yok.Sadece çocuğumun şeyinde... çünkü o iyi hissetmiyor kendini. Nedense o eskiden öyle olmadığı halde git gide sosyal çevrenin şeyleri onun üzerinde çok etkili olmaya başladı. O neden bilmiyorum. Sadece onun zarar görmemesini... onun bundan çok mutlu olmadığını, benim etrafımda bilinmem onu rahatsız ettiği için... biliniyor olmak tehlikesi ya da... onun için daha şey yapıyorum.Yoksa benim için hiç fark etmez.Gayet rahatlıkla şuanda herkese söyleyebilirdim yani. O şeylerim kalktı artık. Eskiden hissederdim. Şimdi ona ne diyecekler.Kocam hakkında ne söylenecek şu ne olacak bu ne olacak gibi şeyler benim üzerimde de vardı. Git gide onlardan kurtuldum. Şuanda öyle bir baskı hissetmiyorum üstümde. Sadece çocuğum için... Beni tutan bir tek var orda.

[...]

### **Sonradan değişti galiba?**

Valla sonradan sonradan tepkiselleşti. Ben yine de kadın olmasına çok bağlamıyorum.Erkek olsa da aynı şey olacağını düşünüyorum. Bunun tepkisinde farklı bir şey yarattığını zannetmiyorum, hissetmiyorum. Bence daha çok onaylanmayan bir şeyi yapmamın getirdiği şeylerden... aileyi bozmuş olmamdan. Neticede aileyi bozan benim. Düzeni bozan benim.

same house and she is my close friend. However, after she finds out the truth, I would get a psychological support. I don't want to lie to her.<sup>82</sup>

All of the parents in the closet plan to explain their sexual orientation to their children one day because they would like them to know "who they are." On the other hand, there is a tension caused by not coming out even if this affords them a space of freedom; at the same time, however, it prevents them from being honest with their children. Obviously, the reason for disclosing themselves stems from the pressures of a heteronormative society.

## **Conclusion**

One of the main challenges of this research project was a direct outcome of the binary sex/gender system which constitutes parenthood in the dichotomy of mother/father. The journey of researching lesbian, bisexual and queer mothers' experiences led me to a thorough questioning of parental identifications within the binary sex/gender system that shapes society.

The parental experiences of my interviewees were shaped through their parental identification. The heterosexual matrix, in other words, the dichotomy of father and mother, limits their dreams and thoughts of parents-to-be because the sex/gender system condemns parental identity to either the role of a father or mother. They have considerable difficulties

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<sup>82</sup>Sonuçta bu beraberlik sürdüğü müddetçe Ayşe büyümeye devam edecek. 10 sene sürebilir, Ayşe'nin bilinci bu ilişkiyi kaldırına kadar sürerse eğer zaten ben çocuğuma yalan söylemek istemem. Bir kadına karşı bir şey hissediyorsam kızımın bunu bilmeye hakkı olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bunu tabii çat diye söylemek değil.

Şimdi çocuk şunu düşünecektir büyük ihtimal, annemin yanında bir kadın var benim doğduğumdan beri var. Devamlı onu gördüğü için tabii bu ne ayak diye sorabilir. Böyle bir durumda onun benim yakın arkadaşım olduğunu söylersem beraber aynı evi paylaşıyoruz, seninle beraber üçümüz aynı evi paylaşmaya devam edeceğiz şeklinde bir açıklama yapabilirim. Bunu fazlasıyla aramaya geçtiği zaman bir danışmandan destek alabilirim. Asla bunu yalanla söylemek istemem.

in depicting their dreams regarding parental identification, and they are aware that this matrix limits their subjectivity.

Secondly, the coming out issue ended up in the paradoxical existence of those parents which is directly affected by legal, social and political structures of the society. All of parents-to-be interviewees stated that if they disclose themselves, it would result in a continuance of the heterosexual matrix that they never belonged to. Furthermore, they dream of raising children who are not obliged to obey the “rules” of the heterosexual matrix. In this regard, transgender individuals’ experiences are different from those of cisgender parents’ experiences in the closet since they challenge gender roles and expressions (Hines, 2006; Pfeffer, 2012) as well as parental appearances. Their transgender identity - which does not fit gender norms - forces them to disclose themselves; furthermore, they prefer to be out of the closet. All of the parents in the closet plan to explain their sexual orientation to their children one day because they would like them to know them for who they are. On the other hand, there is tension caused by not coming out even if this affords them a space of freedom; at the same time, however, it prevents them from being honest with their children as they stated. Also, they want their children to discover their parent in the flux.

## CHAPTER IV. “HIS TEACHER ASKED ‘HOW ARE YOU RELATED TO HIM?’ I SAID “I AM BOTH HIS MOTHER AND FATHER”:<sup>83</sup> THE CONFRONTATIONS OF PARENTS AT THEIR CHILDREN’S SCHOOLS

“Institutions and doctrines sadden me towards my mother”<sup>84</sup>

### Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to develop an analysis of my interviewees’ confrontations at their children’s schools and this relates to the absence of those parents with regards to their sexual orientation/gender identity. The emphasis will be on the way in which schooling and the education system reproduce binary gender roles and a nuclear family structure for children which changes parent-child relations after they start attending school. I ask: How do they deal with the gendering and heterosexualizing process that takes place at their children’s schools? How is the child-parent relationship affected as the result of this education system? Why are none of these parents out to the school or anyone related to the schools? By asking these questions, among others, this chapter will scrutinize the strategies developed by my interviewees as parents. In turn, I will concentrate on the non-existent but

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<sup>83</sup>This quotation is from Memo, who was recounting a conversation with a teacher at his child’s school. The teacher was shocked because of not being able to put Memo into either a father or mother category. In the end, Memo said he was both his child’s mother and father.

<sup>84</sup>This is a line of poetry from Ah Muhsin Ünlü, translated by me. The original of the text reads: Kurumlar ve kuramlar beni anneme üzer.

possible support networks for these parents which may help them deal with the heteronormative universe.

#### **4.1. “Why do a father and a mother love and raise their children?”**

I remember myself when I was in third-grade in primary school, and for the first time in my life I had to take a multiple-choice exam. One of the exam questions was something like, “Why do a father and a mother love and raise their children?” The first choice was “Children are so cute; for that reason, their families love and raise them.” Another answer was, “They love them in order to raise good citizens.” In spite of my efforts to recall the last choice, my memory fails me. Of course, as a third grader, I chose the first option. Not surprisingly, most of the class had made the same choice. After the exam, our teacher said, “Of course you are all cute, but your parents have an important mission to raise you as good citizens. You all have to be good citizens.” I remember that moment because it probably had a traumatic effect on me. Firstly, that was the first exam I had ever taken. Secondly, until that moment, I had no idea why my parents loved and raised me. I felt like they just unconditionally loved me, but with this answer I had to face the threat of not being loved. That multiple-choice exam question taught me that if I wasn’t a good citizen, I would not be loved by my parents. That was a “rite of passage”<sup>85</sup> through which we were told to be (good) citizens via an implicit threat. In addition to this, the

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<sup>85</sup> The concept of the rite of passage was first theorized by Arnold Van Gennep to express the rituals that are in the transitional phase between childhood and inclusion into social milieu in that society. For further analysis, see Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (1909).

question sent a latent message about what it means to be genuine parents or families consisting of a mother and a father. In other words, children are to be raised just by a mother and a father.<sup>86</sup>

According to the state, the parents who are my research participants at any time can be labeled as disqualified or improper citizens who do not subscribe to the existing gender regime. The school as an institution plays a key role in the disciplining of these parents along official lines, along with practices of discrimination, vis-à-vis their children's education. I would like to discuss why and how schools threaten to label my research participants as disqualified parents, or directly cause their absence from the school as a parent. In turn, I will explore how these parents develop certain mechanisms of self-defense and strategies against discriminatory school practices.

In light of the fact that schools are a major site for the reproduction of gender roles (Arnot, 1994; Chodorow, 1978), there are two main points discussed throughout this chapter as regards my interviewees' specific experiences. I first analyze how the education system both explicitly and implicitly promotes the binary gender system. Secondly, I discuss how there is no room for other family forms (single parenting, extended family, same-sex parenting) aside from the "ideal" nuclear family, which is thought to consist of one father, one mother and at least one child.

The reason that this chapter focuses on the gendering and heterosexualizing processes experienced through schooling is because these processes designate the ways that

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<sup>86</sup>I had never realized that point until I started this research. When I reevaluate this memory today, it makes me aware of how the question ("why do father and mother love and raise their children?") intricately connects the notion of an ideal nuclear family (father, the mother and at least one child) to the construction of citizenship.

parents construct a relationship with their children. To be more specific, their relationship fundamentally changes when their child starts going to school.<sup>87</sup> Their parenting practices are partially shaped by the hegemony of binary gender roles and the nuclear family in school textbooks and education practice. In other words, their encounters with schools throughout their children's education shape their parental behaviors and attitudes. Because these parents were also subjected to similar gendering and heterosexualizing processes in their childhoods (sometimes with traumatic consequences), they are familiar with it. What is also common is that, just as they had to go through this childhood experience on their own, they do not have any support from the education system as parents either. On the contrary, schools in fact set up obstacles between them and their children.

#### **4.1.1. Gendering and heterosexualizing citizens through schooling**

The central task of nation-states is to create their own citizens, and the school as a major institution is indispensable in the process of citizenship production (Wiseman and Alromi, 2007). The school is one of the compulsory state institutions that every citizen must attend at a certain age. Hence, the school is an inescapable institution more so than any other institutions and schooling is a long-term and slow-going process for every child, a process which aims to transform children into good citizens for national societies (Fuller

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<sup>87</sup>Throughout this chapter I will be using the term "school" to refer to kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school; there will not be any analysis, however, differentiating those levels of education. This is because I will focus on the way the parents deal with their children's education. Furthermore, I won't analyze the children's attitudes or feelings, which would require a different pedagogical approach; that could, however, could be a subject for another research project. This chapter discusses the parents' interpretations, attitudes and feelings with regards to interactions with their children and their children's schools.

and Rubinson, 1992). The potential impact of schooling as a major institution (Wiseman, Astiz, Fabrega and Baker, 2011) is the key component in the political socialization of youth (Wiseman and Alromi, 2007).

Seen in these ways, schooling is nationally organized to provide an education for a state's citizens. The Ministry of Education is the controlling mechanism for every detail of education which follows state-imposed guidelines.<sup>88</sup> The curriculum and text books are set by the state, reflecting its dominant ideology. Hence, the state-centric education system places the administration, teachers and the school under the thumb of the Ministry of Education.

It is possible to argue that education systems are always ideological and loaded with ideological knowledge (Freire, 1991; Apple, 2000), and most education systems in the world reproduce the binary gender system. Nation-states function to gender as well as heterosexualize their citizens (Richardson, 1998; Weeks, 1999). In Turkey, the modern education system, which developed as a part of the larger modernization project, aims not just to regulate gender relations but also to create an apparent gender regime (Sayılan, 2012). Most of the studies on the education system in Turkey that focus on gender have analyzed the inequalities between men and women's participation in education, women's access to education and women's secondary position during their educational lives (Acar and Ayata, 2002; Gök, 1990; Tan, 2008; Sayılan, 2012). Another group of studies concentrates on textbooks as significant texts that construct the world in the shadow of a gender binary with certain attributes attached to men and women (Esen, 1998; Gürkan and

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<sup>88</sup>For a detailed analysis of how nationhood enters every classroom in Turkey via a picture of Atatürk in the same position above the blackboard in every classroom and a framed copy of the same speech by Atatürk, along with other prescriptions which are required by the Ministry of Education, see Altınay and Kancı, 2007.

Hazır, 1997; Arslan, 2000; Esen and Bağlı, 2003; Tanrıöver, 2003; Güvenli and Tanrıöver, 2009). The glorification of the patriarchal family at school, based on the idea that women are associated with the private sphere and men with the public sphere, is correspondingly based on the mystification of motherhood for women and military service for men (Esen, 2007; Altınay and Kancı, 2007). Along these lines, the History Foundation of Turkey's research on human rights entitled *Human Rights Issues in Textbooks I-II* points out how the education system and specifically the curriculum are constructed in violation of human rights in many areas, including gender-based discrimination (Tarih Vakfı; 2003, 2008).

According to Tanrıöver and Güvenli,

In societies in which formal education is obligatory and widespread, and education institutions are shaped with legal regulations by the centralized power, the textbooks function as the most concrete images of the society project which is determined by official-political power regimes and, of society- that is officially and legally defined collective imaginary- in education.

Countries which have “National Education”, such as Turkey, due to the unity of the content of the curriculum, what is taught and transferred is accepted as the “common” and “legitimate” values of that society (Güvenli and Tanrıöver, 2009; 99).

In this way, the “common” and “legitimate” values of society are defined and reproduced through the education system in Turkey. Additionally, Tanrıöver and Güvenli analyze the latent sexist discourse, the symbolic absence/ invisibility<sup>89</sup> (of different family forms rather than the nuclear family, and of different gender existences or practices than binary gender norms), and the gendered language<sup>90</sup> in textbooks. They discuss how this hegemonic binary gender system seems to be so internalized and seen as legitimate that gender roles are taken for granted in these books starting from primary school all the way to high school, and

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<sup>89</sup>simgesel yokluk/ görünmezlik

<sup>90</sup>dilin cinsiyeti

cover a wide spectrum of courses from social studies to science, and even the arts. The latent message and symbolic absence/ invisibility make those other possibilities unimaginable and lead children to learn and obey those prevailing gender norms. Stereotypes of gender and gender roles infuse the school and the content of educational practices through latent or manifest messages. These messages lead students to adopt “proper” forms of behavior which fit constructed gender norms (Sayılan, 2012; Tan, 2000).

On the other hand, due to this symbolic absence/invisibility, the textbooks leave no possibility for different family forms except for the nuclear family:

Traditional nuclear family model which the gender roles are strictly defined can be the most common “household” model in Turkey at present. However, it is true that there are different forms of lives apart from that. As highlighted in some surveys, even though their number is few, families with single parents, re-formed families (a family formed with divorced parents, new spouse and old-new children) or LGBT family models are totally ignored in terms of the students in Turkey (Tanrıöver and Güvenli, 2009; 110).

The “common” and “legitimate” values of society are defined and reproduced through the education system, which again marks non-normative/non-conforming families as “illegitimate,” reinforcing their invisibility and unimaginability. Although Tanrıöver and Güvenli’s study examines how sexism is constructed within textbooks, there is no mention of the absence of non-heterosexual sexual orientations and transgender identities beyond this particular remark on the model family. One can argue that the absence of a more comprehensive analysis of heteronormativity in textbooks signals the prevalence of heteronormativity, even in a critical human rights project such as this. They only discuss through the sanctification of the family that the only possible family form is the nuclear family, leaving no room for different family forms like single parents, newly formed families, same-sex parents, etc. (Güvenli and Tanrıöver, 2009; 110). Nevertheless, this

remark underlines the challenges faced by my research participants in an education system that marks them as invisible and, in fact, unimaginable.

A group of relatively new research projects (Kaos GL, 2010; Kaos GL 2012; Eđitimsen 2010), however, have triggered a new debate on the politics of heterosexualizing children through school, unquestioned hegemony of the binary gender system and heteronormativity in schools, whereby LGBT individuals and parents remain invisible and unimaginable.

#### **4.1.2. What do children learn at school?**

Developing the idea of an Ideological State Apparatus, Althusser asks “what do children learn at school?” It is the place where they internalize information which is directly useful in jobs, in production (one is instruction for manual workers, another for technicians, a third for engineers, a final one for higher management, etc.). Thus they gain know-how (Althusser, 1971; 103). A huge mass of children ejected “into production” become workers or small peasants (Althusser, 1971; 118). Expanding Althusser’s analysis beyond an exclusively Marxist analysis of ideology, we can conceptualize the school also as the apparatus which teaches children know-how about the binary sex/gender system, compulsory gender roles, and the heterosexual matrix. A huge number of children are thus ejected “into heteropatriarchal society.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>For further analysis of heteropatriarchy see Francisco Valdes (1996) “Unpacking Heteropatriarchy: Tracing the Conflation of Sex, Gender & Sexual Orientation to Its Origins” and Andrea Smith (2010) “Dismantling Hierarchy, Queering Society:” “By heteropatriarchy, I mean the way our society is fundamentally based on male dominance—a dominance inherently built on a gender binary system that presumes heterosexuality as a social norm.”

Hence, sexism in the education system is both the cause and the effect of gender inequality in society (Sayılan, 45; 2012). According to Arnot, the origin of these processes lies in the concept of “sex-role ideology,” yet, paradoxically, this ideology is also produced and reproduced in the school. It is thus both the *cause* and the *effect* of gender inequality, since each new generation of pupils in turn becomes the new generation of parents, teachers, employers and so on, carrying with them the assumptions of such “sex-role ideology,” gender inequality is perpetuated. Therefore, what is portrayed is a vicious circle of attitudes in which the learnt attitudes of one generation constrain the subsequent generation and so on. It is in this sense that the concept of “reproduction” is used (Arnot, 106; 1994).

Sayılan and Özkazanç (2012) discuss the complex and contradictory ways that reproduction occurs in the education system. According to them, the school functions as a site of cultural reproduction in a complex and contradictory way. This approach emphasizes the dialectics among “reproduction” and “resistance,” “structure” and “subject” (Willis, 1977; Giroux, 1981; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991; Weiler, 1988; McLaren, 1989). Analyses of how schools function reveals the complex characteristics of both reproduction and resistance. The complex nature of gendered power relations cannot be simply explained by the reproduction of a singular system (Giroux, 1983; Giroux and McLaren, 1989; Jones, 1993; Francis, 1999 in Sayılan and Özkazanç 2012). Reproduction is always partial because it continually faces structural complexities, whereas resistance does not necessarily pave the way for “emancipatory” consequences, and it might unintentionally cause reproduction itself (Sayılan and Özkazanç, 2012). Hence, the school cannot be analyzed as the site of reproduction of gender relations of the outside world; on the contrary, it provides

a hegemonic ground of reconstruction of those gender regimes (Francis, 1999; Reay, 2001; Connell, 1995; Youdell, 2005 in Sayılan and Özkazanç, 2012).

As I discussed in the previous chapter, without being carried away by romanticizing resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1990), I will analyze their acts towards this hegemonic ground of school as strategic. Lewin (2007) analyzes the dialectics of resistance and accommodation through the experiences of lesbian mothers. According to her, lesbian mothers are neither resisters nor accommodators, or perhaps they are both. She suggests calling them “strategists” given that they deploy the cultural resources offered by motherhood to achieve a particular set of goals. In addition to this, “we cannot limit our analyses of women’s lives to accounts of victimization, and we cannot be complacent when we discover evidence of resistance and subversion. Either interpretation may fail to reveal the complex ways in which resistance and accommodation, subversion and compliance, are interwoven and interdependent, not distinct orientations, but mutually reinforcing aspects of a single strategy” (Lewin, 2007; 385). The “common” and “legitimate” value system of the gender binary system and family structure - which are nonetheless interrelated - are reproduced at school in various complex ways. The heavy baggage of the learned concepts of children underpins the daily struggles of parents who end up developing certain strategies.

#### **4.2. Differentiating the experiences of the parents**

While discussing their parenting experiences, my interviewees paid specific attention to schools, focusing on particular incidences that took place there and reflecting on the school’s intervention into their parenting experiences. I initially intended to

undertake a general discussion of their interactions with “the outside world” through institutions such as schools, psychiatrists, courts, and the street, but most of the narratives significantly converged in their emphasis on the school being the major institution that shapes their relationships with both their children and the outside world. They belabored this point which led me to pay attention to the point of junction of those narratives.

I would like to explore both the differences in the experiences of each parent with the schools, but also highlight the points of convergence. The apparent common point among my interviewees is about their presence at their children’s schools. None of the cisgender parents are out to the school or anyone related to the school, while transgender parents are forced to minimize their contact and pass on their right to be a parent at the school to either their cisgender partners or the children’s grandmothers. Obviously, neither transgender parents nor cisgender parents are the parent as imagined by the school, and they partially pretend to be the parent the school imagines them to be.

Secondly, according to the parents-to-be, the school experiences of their children are unimaginable and frightening. School seems to be the major critical obstacle to their parenting experiences. Even their dreams are held back when they start imagining their children reaching the age when they will to start attending school. For instance, Leyla is planning to raise her child in another country because of the unimaginability of her child saying “I have two mothers!” at a school in Turkey.

Parents’ standpoints about school are quite divergent; Because of their political engagement, Elif, whose child is 12, and Derya, whose child is 6, have similar approaches to school in that they construct a narrative on how it is a gendering and heterosexualizing space. On the other hand, Özge, whose child is 3, finds the gendering process of

kindergarten to be considerably interruptive. Because Özge's child just started kindergarten, she is highly sensitive and reflective about situations that occur at the school. For Derin, whose child is 10, the issue of family is substantially oppressive with regards to the school's potentiality to ignore different family forms.

I emphasized the ages of their children because my interviewees who have younger children paid more attention to the issue of schooling, not just because it is on their agendas but also because the years of kindergarten, primary school and secondary school are those when parents are most active in the school. Those school years are important for the experience of parenting, in contrast to children's years in high school, a period when parents and children tend to drift apart more than before.

As they stated, Esra and Defne differ from other cisgender parents in terms of not being subjected to discrimination at the school. Esra, whose children are 12 and 15, hasn't directly encountered any problems. Due to the fact that she plans to divorce soon, she focused on the issue that the school promotes the idea of the nuclear family, which has the potential to traumatize students. However, she didn't emphasize any of her own experiences at the school. On the other hand, Defne, whose child is 25, avoided talking about school in a detailed way. This could be because she couldn't remember well when her child was in school, or it could be related to her general attitude during our interview.<sup>92</sup>

The narratives of transgender parents differ from those of my cisgender interviewees because transgender parents are forced to minimize their contact and pass on their right to be a parent at the school. Eda, whose children are 19 and 25, told about her

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<sup>92</sup> Defne resisted talking in general during our interview, not just about school. She consistently set her tone of voice and she seemed very nervous. She gave very short answers. All of my efforts were useless. The interview just took an hour and 15 minutes and silence prevailed in the majority of the interview.

absence at the school, just as Memo, whose child is 15, passed on his visibility firstly to his mother, then to his partner Zin. Hence, transgender parents focus on the reasons that cause them to be invisible at their children's schools. The fact that none of the parents find a place "out of the closet" at the school drove me to scrutinize their experiences. Also, most of the interviewees denote that the gendering and heterosexualizing processes their children go through at the school shape their parent-child relation.

#### **4.2.1. Who is that talking in their heads?-*School, school, school and school...***

One of my interviewees, Ceren, made me realize the anxieties of queer parenting by the particular narrative she gave after I asked about her child's school. While she was telling her dream about being a mother of a genderless child and their particular imagined experiences at the school, she suddenly stopped speaking. The silence filled the room for a while, and then she asked:

- Who is that talking?

I didn't understand what was going on. She immediately continued:

- I mean who is that talking in my head? I sometimes think that these worries are groundless. When I criticized myself for nothing, my mother used to ask me "Who is that talking in your head?" I mean whose voice is talking in my head. Is it your primary school teacher or your father's or your mother's voice? That is what I am wondering now. Who are talking to me in my head saying this dream can't be realized?<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Bazen bu endişelerin yersiz olduğunu düşünüyorum. Kendimi yersiz eleştirdiğim zaman ya da bir şeyler olmayacak diye konuştuğum zaman annem bana şey derdi "Şuanda kafanda kim konuşuyor?" Yani kafamda kimin sesi var. İlkokuldaki hocanın mı, yoksa babanın mı yoksa annenin mi? Onu da merak ediyorum kafamda kimlerin sesi var. Kimler bana bu iş böyle olmaz diyor."

The school as an ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1971) is a major site of contestation for my research participants. The similarities in their narratives in terms of their own and their children's school experiences are striking. Most importantly, none of them are out either to the school or to anyone related to the school. What does this silence tell us? Is it "the school" talking in their heads? The school refers to a space of fear in their narratives, which correspondingly becomes a major site of contestation. The parents-to-be interviewees are fairly anxious about school as well. School seems to be the major critical obstacle to their parenting experience. Even their dreams are held back when they imagine their children reaching the age of schooling. What do parents-to-be say about the imagined school experience of their expected children?

#### **4.2.2. Parents-to-be**

One of the common themes in the narratives of my interviewees who are parents-to-be is their concern related to possible exclusions or difficulties their child might face for being a minority at school. The majority of my interviewees point out that their children might be socially excluded or otherized by their peers, teachers or other staff, if their parents' same-sex identities are unveiled in the heteronormative universe of their schools. Their decisions are shaped in the face of expected future problems their children's minority situation might create. In order to avoid these problems and find ways to protect their children, they try to develop certain strategies.

For Dilan, her child would be the only one who has same sex parents among 30 students. Dilan's solution to the possible problems/side-effects related to this minority situation is seeking psychological support for her child.

Dilan said,

This is the great anxiety for me. They are 30 students in the class. Only one of them is brought to life by same-sex marriage, and she/he can't tell it to his/her friends. All of the parents come to the school. We go to school with Müge. This may cause a trauma to him/her; therefore, we will seek psychological support.<sup>94</sup>

Leyla is against raising a child in Turkey because of the discrimination she and her family would be subjected to. She repeated her earlier statement that she wouldn't think of raising a child in Turkey when the conversation came to the issue of school. She seriously panicked when she thought of her child saying "I don't have a father, I have two mothers" at school:

Therefore, I can't imagine it in Turkey. What would the child say? I don't have a father, I have two mothers. What would the child say at the school? I get panicked when I think about that.<sup>95</sup>

Like Leyla, Çiçek has some anxieties regarding how his/her child would feel about his/her parents at school. S/he doesn't want to hurt the child with the possibility of having a family that is "different" from the other students' families. S/he said s/he wasn't clear about

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<sup>94</sup>Bu benim için çok büyük bir korku.Sınıfta 30 kişiler.Otuzundan sadece biri eşcinsel evlilikten dünyaya gelmiş ve bunu arkadaşlarına anlatamıyor. Hepsinin anne babası okula geliyor. Biz Müge'yle okula geliyoruz.Bu onun için bir travma yaratabilir, bunun için psikolojik destek alacağız.

<sup>95</sup>O yüzden Türkiye'de hayatta düşünemem. Çocuk ne diyecek benim babam yok iki tane annem var. Ne diyecek çocuk okulda?Bunları düşünüp panik oluyorum.

the possible ways of actualizing the collective family s/he imagined without hurting the child. S/he wants to listen to experiences of queer parents before she makes a move towards parenting:

I don't want the child to feel... Most of the children will have a mother and a father. Their mother will come to the school as their parent. Most of the children's father will come. However, our children's family will not be apparent; she/he will not have mother, father, or aunt etc. I don't know how we will be able to create a family form so that she/he will not be hurt. I don't know, maybe it would be a good idea to listen to the experiences of parents.<sup>96</sup>

Ceren said she didn't believe in the education system either in Turkey or abroad, not just because she would like to raise a genderless child, but also because of the school's status as an ideological apparatus. She said she would love to raise her child in alternative education systems:

I don't want to talk about the issue of school because it is a long and divergent discussion for me. I don't want my children to get education in neither America nor Turkey.<sup>97</sup>

Zeynep said her child could be exposed to discrimination at school because of Zeynep's sexual orientation or the fact that her child does not have a father. She mentioned

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<sup>96</sup>Okula gittiğinde şeyi hissetmesini istemem. Bir sürü çocuğun annesi var, babası var. Annesi geliyor veli diye, babası geliyor bir sürü çocuğun. Bizim çocuğumuz olduğunda ne olduğu belli değil, anası yok babası yok, halası yok. O nasıl ona hiç zarar vermeyecek bir şekilde oturtulur onu hiç bilmiyorum. Yani bilmiyorum belki deneyimi olan insanları dinlemekte fayda var böyle bir şey yapmadan önce.

<sup>97</sup>Okula gitme meselesine girmek istemiyorum çünkü o da benim için uzun ve ayrı bir tartışma. Ben çocuğumu ne Türkiye'de ne Amerika'da ne başka bir yerde hiç bir eğitim sisteminin eline vermek istemiyorum.

the bullying and the hate speech that are widespread at schools. For her, the solution is to insistently talk with the teachers:

However, when I consider the school as an institution of my child, I will not spend time there as a parent. However, my child will be there whole day and it is difficult to control the dynamics of the classroom. Bullying is widespread at schools. My child would be exposed to hate speech because of my sexual identity. I don't want my child to stay in that position and at the same time I don't have any right to cause my child such a situation. That is to say everyone at the school doesn't have to know it but his/ her teacher has to know it. Even the teacher could resist understanding me but I would keep talking to her. I struggle against those difficulties. Ministry of Education requires nonsense activities such as conducting interviews with the father and mother for third grade students. What kind of interview? How was your childhood? Which games did you play? In short, my child as a child can say in the class that she or he has no father. The teacher is responsible for taking precautions, not me.<sup>98</sup>

Tuana says her family and acquaintances know that she is pregnant, unmarried and also a lesbian.<sup>99</sup> She imagines the school experience to be similar to the kinds of struggles she needs to engage in as a pregnant, single, lesbian woman. Her focus of attention is to avoid hurting the child because of the discrimination she faces:

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<sup>98</sup>Ama çocuğumun okulunu kurum olarak düşündüğümde orada ben zaman geçirmiyor olacağım bir veli olarak.Ama çocuğum bütün gününü orada harcıyor olacak ve o sınıf dinamiklerini kontrol etmek çok zor.Mesela akran zorbalığı var sonuçta ve benim cinsel kimliğim üzerinden çocuğuma nefret söylemlerinde bulunabilirler.Ve ben çocuğumu böyle bir duruma sokmak istemem ve böyle bir duruma sokmaya hakkım olmadığını düşünüyorum aynı zamanda.Yani sonuçta okuldaki kişilerin bunu bilmesine gerek yok ama şöyle bir şey var mesela öğretmeninin bilmesinin gereği olduğunu düşünüyorum.Ve laf anlatamayacağım bir öğretmen olsa da anlatırım.Ona enerji harcarım.Çünkü sonuçta böyle saçma sapan aktiviteler var milli eğitim annenizle babanızla roportaj yapın.Üçüncü sınıflara.Ne roportajı?Çocukluğunuz nasıl geçti çocukluğunuzda nasıl oyunlar vardı falan gibi. Sonuçta benim çocuğum çocuk olduğu için o an sınıfta benim babam yokki diyebilir. Ama bunun önlemini öğretmenin alması gerekiyor, benim değil.

<sup>99</sup>Although Tuana emphasizes she doesn't embrace any identification, and she believes love has no gender, during her narratives she sometimes identified as lesbian. Considering that she doesn't embrace any particular identification, it is understood that identification can be used strategically to express herself clearly, and I preserved those identities in the citation with this explanation.

At the moment I got reactions for my pregnancy. I am not married. Most of people know that I am lesbian. You can understand from my appearance that I am pregnant now. Like how I got reactions for all of them, I would also get reactions for anything. I could experience this in every step of my life but while I struggle against difficulties my child shouldn't be hurt.<sup>100</sup>

Both the fear of being a non-compliant parent in the eyes of the school and the possibility of their children being subjected to discrimination because of their parents' sexual orientation and gender identity limited the dreams and future plans of my research participants. Their narratives were interrupted when the dialogue came to the issue of school. Their anxieties about school are well-founded since current parents' experiences illustrate how complex the issue is. School always has the power to disqualify their parenting since they do not adhere to sexual and gender norms and the nuclear family structure. While Dilan, Leyla and Çiçek focused on the fact that they do not fit in with the normative family structure, Ceren even refused to broach the topic of school altogether. Additionally, Zeynep and Tuana considered the strategies they would probably develop as parents. Therefore, school as an institution becomes an obstacle between parents-to-be and their children. The concept of symbolic absence/invisibility of those parental forms (Güvenli and Tanrıöver, 2009) leads to the symbolic absence/invisibility as a parent at their children's school in their imaginations.

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<sup>100</sup> Şuanda nasıl hamilelik için tepki alıyorum. Evli değilim. Bir çok insan biliyor eşcinselim. Karnım burnumda. Bunlara nasıl tepki alıyorsam yaşadığım herşeye tepki alabilirim. Hayatımın her aşamasında bunu yaşayabilirim ama buna göğüs gererken çocuğumun hırpalanmaması lazım.

### **4.3. The construction of “brave,” “hero,” “lion,” “wizard” boys and “sweetie,” “cutie pie,” “honeybunch,” “princess” girls and photoshopped families**

#### **4.3.1. The construction of “brave boys” and “cutie pie girls”**

One of the shared experiences among my interviewees is their conflicts with the gender normative school structure that imposes binary gender roles onto their children. Many of them told me stories about how their children’s preferences, likings and wishes have been gradually constructed within the school system in relation to normative roles attached to gender. Proper and improper forms of behavior and practices are defined in a wide range of areas including in which color girls and boys should be dressed, which classes’ girls and boys should attend, and which types of toys they should play with.

The school works as an apparatus not only for heterosexualizing and gendering children but also for militarizing them; indeed, militarizing cannot be separated from its gendering function. One of the branches of the myth of “the Turkish nation is a military nation” is that “every (male) Turk is born a soldier,” and this is taught in this educational system in order to educate the sons and the daughters of this “military nation” and also to differentiate “little Ayşes” and “little soldiers” (Altınay and Kancı; 2007). The attribute of being a soldier by birth can be reevaluated in the eyes of the state as every (male) Turk is born a soldier while every (female) is born a mother. Further, every individual (male/female) is born to be a man or a woman. Taking the construction of gendered citizenship into consideration (Kancı; 2008), to fulfill the requirements for being good citizens, you should obey what you are “born” to be.

A news story about a 5 year old boy<sup>101</sup> is a striking example of this fact. At a kindergarten in Ankara, a 5 year-old boy was found constantly playing with dolls; in the end, he was kicked out of the kindergarten. Obviously, this case is not unique or peculiar to that kindergarten. The anxiety caused by a 5 year-old boy just playing with a doll denotes the powerful ideology of compulsory gender roles and the heteronormativity embodied in schools as an ideological state apparatus.

The process of standardization of children is one of the missions of the education system, which works for the construction of “brave boys” and “cutie pie girls.” According to research titled “The Development of Identity at Preschool Children’s Books”, “ ‘Curious’ ‘creative’ boys are playing at the outside while building something with their father whereas ‘warmhearted’ girls are making a cake with their mother at home. Boys are associated with being ‘brave’, ‘hero’, ‘lion’, ‘wizard’, on the other hand, girls are identify with ‘sweetie’, ‘cutie pie’, ‘honeybunch’, ‘princess’.<sup>102</sup>

Parent-child relations change after children attend school because of the effects of the construction of “brave boys” and “cutie pie girls” schools perpetuate. For instance, Elif talked about her son’s willingness to participate in a ballet class seven years earlier while at kindergarten. However, the administration of the kindergarten categorized the classes based on gender. Boys were able to attend music and drawing classes, while the ballet class was only open to girls. When Elif said to the kindergarten management that her son would like to attend that class, they declined her request. Her effort as a parent to have her son join the

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<sup>101</sup> “Bez bebekle oynuyor diye kreşten attılar” Focus Haber, April 2, 2012, <http://www.focushaber.com/bez-bebekle-oynuyor-diye-kresten-attilar-h-125619.html>, (date accessed October 6, 2013).

<sup>102</sup> “Çocuk Kitapları Tek Tipleştiriyor” Kaos GL, February 26, 2010, <http://www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=4381>, (date accessed October 6, 2013).

ballet class was marginalized. Nevertheless, her insistence paid off and in the end, her son was allowed to attend the class. What's more, other boys in the kindergarten attended the ballet class as well. Although she was able to create a transformation with the collaboration of her son in the kindergarten regarding binary gender roles, she said that today her child would not attend that kind of class because he would find it "girlish." Elif said,

In the kindergarten there were elective courses. [...] The list of elective courses was given; ballet was only for girls, it was not in the list for boys. I was surprised. Just then Cem turned me and said "I would like to attend to the ballet class. Why can't boys attend to that class?" I said okay and talked to the kindergarten. They first objected. Then I insisted so that the boys also could attend to ballet class. Cem was the only boy who registered to the ballet class. After Cem had attended to the ballet class, two boys wanted to attend as well. However, Cem would never attend it now. He would find it girlish.<sup>103</sup>

According to Elif, the change in her child's approach to gender roles was caused by the socialization process regarding those gender roles at the school. Hence, she gave up trying to change the gender norms imposed by the school because she was afraid of hurting her child, an issue which will be elaborated later on.

Like Elif, Özge has been struggling against the gender roles embodied at the kindergarten her child attends. At first she resisted buying her daughter pink clothes, as she attributed them a symbolic meaning because of the dichotomy of pink-blue colors worn by girls and boys at Turkish schools. In other words, this constitutes a kind of a space of resistance for her, a refusal to raise her child in compliance with gender roles. But when her

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<sup>103</sup>Anaokulunda seçmeli dersler geliyor. [...] Liste geliyor, kızların içinde bale var, erkekler de yok. Ben "allah allah" dedim. O arada Cem de döndü dedi ki "ben baleye gitmek istiyorum. Niçin erkek çocuklarına bale yok?" "Tamam" dedim okulla konuştum. Önce itiraz ettiler. Okulu birbirine kattım bale dersine erkek çocuklarının da gitmesi için.Cem tek başına kaydoldu bale dersine. Cem tek başına kaydolduktan sonra sınıfından da bir iki çocuk gitmek istedi ama. Şimdi asla istemez, şimdi bale kız işi der.

child started kindergarten, this space socialization made her young daughter begins to adore pink and become a “pink princess.”

Özge said,

Pink/blue colors and gender roles were come from kindergarten. Neither my family nor I had taught them. She learned them through the kindergarten. I was disturbed about that. In fact, I was going to warn them that they shouldn't have imposed that much. We have been experiencing such a negative situation because of the kindergarten now.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, Elif's son one day excitedly asked her mother to buy him a toy house. One of his girlfriends in the group owned a toy house which could be seen as a “girl's toy” because it has kitchen, and playing with the toy involves cooking, cleaning, and so on. Elif said that as soon as she bought the toy house, it became her son's favorite toy. However, he never took that toy to school because he was afraid they would make fun of him for playing with a girl's toy. He even hid that toy when his friends came to their house, even though he liked it so much.

Elif said,

One day, he said he wanted a toy house. He described the house as it had to include a kitchen, bedroom and dinner table, the fridge, the lights could be turned on etc. I didn't understand where I could find such a toy. He said one of the girls in the class had it. One of the girls! He said even you could open the fridge; there was food inside of it. You could also take the cooking pot out. I said “Okay son I will buy it”. He was so excited that we bought it soon. He consistently played with it for days.

In the kindergarten one of the days was called “toy day”. The kindergarten had their own toys that children could play. Only for one day, the children could bring their own toys. They generally were bringing their favorite toys. However, he never took his toy house to the school. He said they would make fun of him due to the fact that

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<sup>104</sup>Çok fazla şunda orda pembe mavi renk ve cinsiyet rolleri kreşten geldi bana açıkçası ve bu beni rahatsız etti. Ne kendi ailem ne de ben böyle bir şey hiç kullanmadım. Hep kreşten öğrendi. Bu beni rahatsız etti. Hatta uyaracaktım kreşi böyle çok fazla yükleme yapmayın diye. Kreş konusunda şöyle bir negatiflik şunda yaşıyoruz.

only girls played with that toy. He always played with it at home. Before his friends came home, he made me hide that toy. However, that was his favorite toy. He would play with it for four hours in a row. He would arrange the house; place the stuff here and there.

That was what I observed. He socialized at school which caused him to be afraid of exclusion. He felt that he would be excluded.<sup>105</sup>

The experiences of Elif's and Özge's children could have been quite similar to the news story about the five year-old boy who created such anxiety in the kindergarten if Elif's son had decided to bring the toy house to the kindergarten or Özge's daughter had given up wearing pink. After he began to attend school, Elif has been watching her son, asking herself what prevents him from showing his best toy to his friends, whereas Özge finds herself buying the very pink clothes for her daughter. Their children's preferences, likings and wishes have been gradually constructed within the heteronormative universe of the school system in relation to normative gender roles which have brought about conflicts with their parenting preferences, as well as likings and wishes within the non-heteronormative universe of their imaginations.

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<sup>105</sup>İşte ben bir tane oyuncak ev istiyorum dedi bir gün. Ve şöyle tarif ediyor.Evin içinde mutfağı olsun yatak olsun yemek masası olsun, buzdolabı olsun ışıkları yansın. Nereden bulayım böyle bir şeyi anlamadım dedim. Bizim sınıfta bilmemkimin var dedi. Kızlardan birinin! Hatta dedi buzdolabını açıyorsun içinde yemekler var. Tencereleri de çıkarıyorsun falan dedi. Olur oğlum alırız dedim. Çok heyecanlandı.Gittik onu aldık. Günlerce ayrılmaksızın oynuyor. Okulda da oyuncak günü var 1 gün. Okulun kendi oyuncakları var. Bir gün de evden kendi istedikleri oyuncakları götürüyorlar. Genelde zaten en sevdikleri oyuncuğı götürüyorlar.Ama o evi hiçbir zaman götürmedi. Benimle dalga geçerler dedi.Sadece kızlar oynuyor, ben bunu evde oynayacağım dedi.Bu oyuncakla hep evde oynadı.Arkadaşları gelirken de dolaba saklattı.Ama en sevdiği oyuncuğıydı.4 saat oynuyordu onunla.Evi yerleştiriyordu, düzenliyordu. Benim oğlumdan gördüğüm oydu, aslında kendisi yapmak istiyor, ama bir şekilde okulda bir toplumsallaşma var, dışlanacağıni hissediyorlar ve dışarıya onu göstermiyorlar.

### 4.3.2. Photoshopped families

A study titled “The Development of Identity at Preschool Children’s Books” also states “In the books, all of the children live with nuclear families; only in one book a child has divorced parents. Neither single parents nor same-sex parents take place at these books.”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, this symbolic absence/invisibility of those family forms (Tanrıöver and Güvenli, 2009) re-determines their parental behaviors.

One of the rituals at every school is to request family photographs and to talk about the family memoirs of each student in classrooms. There would be no problem regarding this activity if the school understood that the nuclear family is not the only type. Yet, the textbook understanding of “family” does not include single parents, extended family, or same-sex parents, and many students are subjected to exclusion because of this fact. One of the shared experiences among my interviewees is that this activity inflicts psychological violence against them and their children.

When Derin’s child started school, the teacher wanted a family photograph every month. The fact that her family consists of a mother and a child didn’t make a genuine family in the eyes of the school. What was their understanding of a family photograph? Not surprisingly, one father, one mother and at least one child, the nuclear family; that is what is expected by the school. The photograph sent to the school of her and her child was immediately sent back. The school again asked for a genuine family photograph. When her son brought that request home, she decided to learn the Photoshop program, and then she

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<sup>106</sup> “Çocuk Kitapları Tek Tipleştiriyor” Kaos GL, February 26, 2010, <http://www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=4381>, (date accessed October 6, 2013).

cut and pasted the father's face on different photographs and sent it to school with her child. She just had one photograph of his son's father in all the edited photos of the family.

Derin said,

I found the solution for the family photography issue. I had just one photograph of him that I hadn't thrown away. I copied his face from that photograph and always pasted to the old photographs. I pasted, pasted and sent it to school with my son. What could I do? I said Oh my god! I said enough! This father issue was enough.

**What did you tell at school?**

Of course I told them. We are raising a child without a father. There is no father. So what? Extending this issue this much is nonsense. They request it again.

They request it every year because the counselor changes. Every year I talk to the new counselor. You are always talking, talking and talking to them.<sup>107</sup>

But in the end, she felt alienated by what she did. Firstly, by this act she caused her child to not accept the two of them as a family. She asked herself why she felt she had to do this. Although she was alienated by her own act, this strategic act led to a mockery of the school and its understanding of the family.

On the other hand, Özge, who adopted her child outside the country, said everyone felt pity for her and her child. Her child goes to kindergarten now, and her struggle is based on being a single mother. Because she is not married and the child is adopted, everybody sees the family as broken. She questions the definition of "broken"; just because they constructed a family like that, a mother and a child, what is missing? Özge said,

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<sup>107</sup>Aile fotoğrafı meselesinde çözümü buldum. Adamın bir tane fotoğrafı vardı. Atmadım o fotoğrafı. Eski fotoğraflara durmadan aynı fotoğrafı yapıştırdım yapıştırdım yolladım. Napayım yani. Allahım dedim ya. Yeter dedim ya. Bu baba faktörü.

Okuldakilere ne demiştin?

Söyledim tabii. Bu baba baba nereye kadar. Biz babasız çocuk büyütüyoruz. Baba yok yani. Ne olacak? Bunu bu kadar uzatmanın anlamı yok. Yine istiyorlar. Her sene istiyorlar. Çünkü her sene rehber öğretmen değişiyor. Her sene rehber öğretmenle konuş konuş. Konuş konuş sürekli konuşuyorsun.

This is a new family form; this is not a broken family. [...] No, this is not a broken family. I mean we are a family with my child. Two times two equals four. This is out of the discussion. Why are we supposed to be broken?<sup>108</sup>

On the other hand, she felt pressure to talk to the teachers and the manager of the kindergarten. She said that in an ideal world, particularly in the ideal kindergarten - in which the nuclear family is not the norm - there would be no need to warn the kindergarten about this fact. Özge said,

I told both the kindergarten teacher and the school principal that because my child hadn't a father, I don't feel bad. I also don't want my daughter to feel bad. This is not a problem for us. But whenever my daughter has a problem because of not having a father, it also turns into a problem for me. Therefore, when the issue of father takes place in the kindergarten- now she is exposed to such situations a lot-, don't wear a sad expression. Not every child has a father. This can be the case. Some have while others don't. Some of the father's are away. They understand this issue.<sup>109</sup>

Elif said that until her child started school, he had no problems with the separation of his parents. But the school changed his feelings and he ended up hiding the separation of his parents in the class. In one of the social sciences classes, the theme was "family," and every student was asked to talk about their parents. When it was his son's turn, he didn't mention that they were divorced or that he lived with his mother. Rather, he drew a picture

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<sup>108</sup>Yeni bir aile formu bu, parçalanmış aile değil. [...] Hayır bu parçalanmış bir aile değil. Bu bir aile yani ben çocuğumla bir aileyim. 2 kere 2 dört eder. Bunun tartışılacak bir tarafı yok. Neremiz parçalanmış ki bizim.

<sup>109</sup>Kreş öğretmenleriyle de müdüre de onu söyledim: benim çocuğumun babası yok diye ben kendimi kötü hissetmiyorum. Kızımın da kötü hissetmesini istemiyorum. Biz bunu problem olarak görmüyoruz dedim. Ama ne zaman ki kızım bunu babam yok diye problem yaparsa o zaman benim için sorun başlar. Bunu da çevresi problem yaparsa problem yapar. Onun için baba mevzu geçtiğinde -ki çok fazla karşılaşıyor orda şunda- şey bir ifade takınmayın. Üzgün bir ifade takınmayın. Olabilir herkesin babası olmaz bazılarının olur bazılarının olmaz bazılarının uzakta olur diye. O konuda anlayışla yaklaşıyorlar.

of a “happy family” living under one roof. But after that class, he started crying regularly, which led the teacher to eventually call Elif about this situation.

Elif said,

At the first grade, the family course takes place. It is a terrible thing [...] His teacher called me to the school and said he was constantly crying: “I don’t understand why he is crying. He is afraid of losing you.” While we were talking, I understood that in social studies lesson, their subject was family. And the definition of family is just mother-father-child in the course book of social studies lesson. No more possibility of different family forms in the book. What’s more, the family form might only be consists of the grandmother and grandfather. The children who grow up in Social Service and Children Protection Institution, feel like a shit because they don’t have a mother or a father in their lives. Those children also go to school. There is no description of family forms in the books like children live with only mother, or father; or children who lose mother and father living with grandmother.[...]

When he started school, I had told his teacher that we separated. We had just separated when he started to primary school. [...] She had to pay attention to what kind of questions would be asked to each student because they asked questions to know the students. Then, she called me and said while she was teaching a lesson on family; every student stood up and told about their fathers and mothers like “we come to the house at this or that o’clock, my mother does this my father does this. At the weekends we go outside with my father etc.” When it was Cem’s turn, he said “My father is a doctor; therefore, he is always on duty at hospital at nights. He is also busy at weekends. We can rarely spend time with my father. We generally spend time with my mother at home.” Yet we had already separated. He absolutely knew that. [...] She said “He depicted the family like this. He didn’t mention that you were separated.” Yet none of the children can tell this. This is because how it is depicted to the students at the school.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Bir kere ilkokul 1’de bir aile dersi başlıyor.Berbat bir şey.[..] Öğretmen çağırdı dedi ki sürekli ağlıyor.Neden ağladığımı anlayamıyorum.Sizi kaybetmekten korkuyor.Sonra konuşurken ortaya çıktı ki sosyal bilgilerde aileyi işliyorlar.Ve aile tanımını hayat bilgisi kitabında anne-baba-çocuk.Başka hiçbir aile yok. En fazla anneanneninin dedenin oraya katıldığı bir aile biçimi var. Çocuk esirgemelerde büyüyen çocuklarda aynı şeyi hissediyor bok gibi hissediyorlar. Çünkü onların hayatında bir anne baba bilmemne yok. Oralarda kalan çocuklarda okullara gidiyor yada ne bileyim sadece annesiyle yaşayan, sadece babasıyla yaşayan, anne baba kaybı olup sadece ananesiyle yaşayan böyle aile tanımları yok bizim kitaplarımızda. [...]

O zaman ben gidip anlatmıştım öğretmenine biz ayrıldık diye haberiniz olsun. Tam da ilkokula başladığı sene ayrıldık.[...] Ne tip sorular soracağımı bilsin. Çocukları tanımak için sorular soruyorlar çünkü. Sonra beni çağırıp şey dedi aile konusu işlenirken herkes sırayla kalkıp anlatıyormuş işte şu saatte eve geliyoruz annem şunu yapıyor babam şunu yapıyor. Haftasonları babam ben bilmemnereye gidiyoruz.Ceme sıra geldiğinde işte Cem

Although Esra didn't directly experience anything like this, when I asked her about the school, she said she was disturbed by the way school promoted the nuclear family and discriminated against the majority of children by insisting on the nuclear family. She added that sometimes she wonders if anyone still even has this exaggerated nuclear family. Esra said,

I didn't specifically experience anything but I am aware that the education system is like that. I am aware that they cause the children who have no mother or father to feel bad. I consider it as a bad thing. The surveys are brought by my daughters to home: "Are your parents separated or together?" Actually, these questions have bad effects on children. Somehow, the concept of family is imposed on the students as the true family could be like this. I consider it as a bad thing. It would be better if they didn't cause this.

This is not only about the school itself. After all, the individuals have it made at schools. Therefore, legalizing same-sex marriage is just a dream. This is the role expected. There should be a mother. There should be a father. The family should be like this. This is imposed on children from early childhood. No matter what you imposed on your children or not. After that, if their parents separated, the children would assume themselves unhappy although they were very happy. They suppose that they were not living "the normal life". However, they would be happy of their lives, they wouldn't have experience any difficulty.

After that you don't have to impose your children anything since it would be done at school. Then, the child would come and ask "Why are you separated? Why are you like this or that etc.?" However, you might already get over it, but after that same problems occur. The counseling at school is manipulative and unnecessary. No one cares whether the children are happy or not. They just care if you obey the normal. They just care whether you obey the social norms or not.<sup>111</sup>

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şey demiş: "Benim babam doktor o yüzden akşamları hep nöbette oluyor, haftasonları çok işi oluyor. Arada bir babamla da birşey yapabiliyoruz. Daha ziyade annemle vakit geçiriyoruz evde" demiş. Oysaki ayrılmıştık. Artık çok iyi biliyordu. [...] Kalkıp böyle anlattı dedi, annem babam ayrı demedi dedi. Çünkü hiç bir çocuk demiyor, diyemiyor. Öyle bir şey tarif ediliyor ki çocuklara.

<sup>111</sup> Yaşamsal bir deneyimim olmadı. Okulların o tarafa doğru gittiğinin çok farkındayım. Anne baba olsun aile olsun. Olmayan çocuklara çok kötü hissettirdiğinin de farkındayım. Bu bana kötü geliyor. Anketler geliyor. Anne baba birlikte mi ayrı mı. Bunlar çocukları etkileyen şeyler aslında. Aile kavramı çocuklarda yerleştiriliyor bir şekilde. Böyle olmalı diye. Bu bana çok kötü geliyor. Bunu yapmasalar iyi olur.

These narratives reveal the ways in which school is experienced as a claustrophobic place by both my interviewees and their children. Their fear of being shut in by the school's narrow understanding of family and the binary gender system illustrates the school as a claustrophobic institution. Within the boundaries of this place and their fear of being shut in, the construction of heterosexuality and gender binary roles on children determines parents' relationship with their children.

#### **4.3.3. 'Brave boys' in photoshopped families**

For Elif, the change in her son is interrelated with the school, in the way that it turns diversity into a threat. Before, her son loved meeting with her LGBT friends without questioning their appearance. Afterwards, his attitude towards them turned into hate speech, and her son explicitly asked her "Why aren't you a normal mother? Why are you such a weird mother? I would like you to be like my friends' mothers!" after seeing a transgender friend of Elif's on her Facebook account. Elif said,

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O aslında okulla da bitmiyor iş. Okula da onu yaptıran birileri var neticede. O yüzden eşcinsel evliliğin legal olması hayal yani. Biçilen rol bu. Anne olacak baba olacak.Böyle aile olacak.Küçükten çocuklara veriliyor zaten. Sen istediğin kadar verme. Ondan sonra anne baba ayrı olursa aslında mutlu olan çocuklar kendilerini mutsuz zannediyor. Normali yaşamadıklarını sanıyorlar.Halbuki hiç öyle sıkıntı yaşamayacaklar, hayatlarından gayet mutlu olacaklar.

Ondan sonra sen hiç verme verme yükleme çocuğa, okulda yüklesinler.Sonra gelecek siz niye ayrısınız siz niye bilmemnesiniz.Halbuki oraları geçmişken tekrar öyle sorunlar oluşuyor çocukta.Aslında o okullardaki rehberlikler şeyler içi boş şeyler.Kimse çocuğunun gerçekten mutlu olup olmadığıyla ilgilenmiyor.Toplumsal olarak normali yapıyor mu yapmıyor mu onunla ilgileniyorlar.

I will tell in order to indicate the change. Yet, the child feels disturbed. I was at Didem's facebook profile account and was writing something to Didem. Cem entered the room. There was her huge photograph on the screen. He asked who she was. I told him that she was a friend of mine named Didem. He looked at it. He seemed to be confused.

[...] He asked something like why she looked weird. He asked something about her body or face or hair, I don't remember. He asked something like if she wasn't a real woman or not. I told him that she was, but she was transgender. He asked what it meant. I thoroughly explained that she was born as a male but she felt herself as a female therefore, she wore woman clothes and she lived like a woman. [...] He was sitting there. I was talking to him while I was looking at the screen. I turned my face to him. He was silently crying. I saw his shedding of tears. He was tearingly listening to me. I asked "What is happening Cem?" He cried and cried and then said "Why aren't you a normal mother?" Why are you such a weird mother? I would like you to be like my friends' mothers" and then he left the room.<sup>112</sup>

She found that moment very sad and hurtful, because all of her struggles in raising a child were based on the issue of familiarizing him with diversity. She resisted not being a mother "like his son's friends' mothers" as he requested. His question "Why aren't you a normal mother like my friends' mother?" is very noteworthy in this sense. It shows how sameness seems to be a desirable ideal and being "different" seems to be so terrifying. After that day, Elif changed her attitudes towards him and decided to maintain a silence and pretend to be the mother that her son dreamed of. Of course, she didn't abandon the belief

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<sup>112</sup> Değişimi göstermek açısından söyleyeceğim, çocuk da rahatsız oluyor çünkü. Facebookta Didem'in sayfası açıktı, Didem'e birşeyler yazıyorum, Cem girdi içeri. Kocaman da bir fotoğrafı duruyor. Bu kim dedi? Arkadaşım Didem dedim. Biraz baktı falan. Bir karar veremedi bir şeylere.

[...] Niye tuhaf falan gibi bir şey dedi. Vucuduyla ilgili, saçıyla ilgili, yüzüyle ilgili bir şey sordu hatırlamıyorum. Bu tam bir kadın mı değil mi gibi bir şey sordu. Ben de kadın ama transgender olduğunu söyledim. O ne demek diye sordu. Erkek olarak doğduğunu ama kendini aslında kadın gibi hissettiğini ve artık kadın gibi giyindiğini ve bir kadın olarak yaşadığını gayet güzelce anlattım. [...] Şurada oturuyor, yüzüm ekrana dönük anlatıyorum. Bir ara kafamı bir çevirdim. Ağlıyor ama hiç sesi çıkmıyor. Şuradan yaşlar akıyor. Şöyle ağlayarak beni dinliyor. Ne oldu Cem dedim. Ağladı ağladı sonra şey dedi "sen niye normal bir anne değilsin" dedi. "Niye bu kadar acı bir annesin. Arkadaşlarımın anneleri gibi olmanı istiyorum" dedi ve çıktı odadan.

of diversity as the desirable ideal, but rather she decided to revise herself as a parent and to construct a dialogue the way her son wanted.

The shared experiences among my interviewees of their conflicts with a gender normative school structure that imposes binary gender roles and nuclear family onto their children ended up changing their parental attitudes towards their children.

#### **4.4. The issue of coming out at their children's school**

The experiences of transgender individuals' and cisgender parents' on the issue of coming out apparently differ due to the fact that transgender individuals remain totally invisible as parents at their children's schools. In contrast to cisgender parents, they are forced to minimize contact with the school because it is impossible for them to "pass" as "normal" parents. On the other hand, none of the cisgender parents are out to the school or anyone related to the school.

##### **4.4.1 Cisgender parents**

Since none of the cisgender parents are out to school or anyone related to the school, they are not directly exposed to homophobic situations. Nevertheless, indirectly homophobic discourses seem to be common experiences for those parents. The possibility of their children being exposed to discrimination just because of their sexual orientation and gender identity causes them not to even think about the possibility of disclosing themselves. After their children started school, the language they constructed with their

children as well as the way they construct the relationship with their children changed. The reason for changing their discourse on diversity and equality is that they are afraid their children will be hurt because of being or feeling different. School is a place that turns diversity into a threat rather than a desirable ideal. Being the same is promoted as a process of becoming proper citizens at school.

Derya said s/he strategically does not come out to the school of his/her child, but s/he does not change the way s/he lives. Sometimes her/his transgender friends pick his/her son up from the school, or she goes to the year-end shows of the students with her beloved, her girlfriend, her ex-girlfriend and her ex-girlfriend's new girlfriend and her mother. S/he is careful to protect the people in her life, and be present at the institution of his/her child with this diversity. Furthermore, this participation at a year-end show with a large family with their queer bonds is a considerably challenging act. Derya said,

I don't come out in every milieu. I don't want to do this. I don't believe this is always a necessity in terms of the politics of coming out... If it put someone at risk, there would be no need to come out. I don't believe the necessity of coming out at every step of life. But I have such criteria: I don't make concessions. I pick him up from school with my girlfriends. Even, my girl friends by themselves pick him up from school. A transgender friend of mine can pick him up from the school either. I make a phone call to the kindergarten and tell who is going to pick him up. When they ask about our degree of affinity, I reply as she/he is a friend of mine. You cannot easily say she is my girlfriend. For instance, I go to Çağrı's year-end show with my mother, my girlfriend, my ex-girlfriend and her ex-girl friend. I don't make concessions while engaging with the school as a parent. But, I don't carry a sign either.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Zorunlu olmadıkça her ortamda ben bilmem neyim diye açılmıyorum.Bunu yapmak istemiyorum.Bunun her zaman gerekli olduğunu düşünmüyorum. Açılma politikaları anlamında... Kişinin orada varoluşuna tehlikeye atacak bir durum varsa işyerinde açık olmasına falan da gerek yok.Herkesin her yerde mutlaka açık olmasını gerektiğini düşünmüyorum. Ama şöyle bir kriterim var: davranışlarımdan taviz vermiyorum. Kız arkadaşım gidip çocuğumu alıyorum.Hatta kız arkadaşım gidip çocuğumu alabiliyor. Transgender bir arkadaşım gidip alabiliyor.Telefon açıyorum yuvaya söylüyorum şu kişi gelip alacak diye. Neyiniz oluyor diyor sorunca arkadaşım diyorum.Sevgilim diyemiyorsun.Çağrı'nın müsamesesi oluyor mesela annemler, sevgilim, eski sevgilimin

In this way, parents can hardly exist at the school the way they are. According to Descoutures, “Since same-sex parents are so stigmatized that their mistakes are stigmatized as well.” (Descoutures, 2010, 17). Heteronormative families are so idealized that other parental forms are easily stigmatized at school. Since they are obviously legally ignored/rejected, we are not even in a situation where same-sex parents are stigmatized. Zeynep Direk (2010) in her article notes that the state should recognize “other” parental forms. Otherwise, these individuals will not know how to introduce themselves to the institutions as well as to their children. However, she mentions that it is very contradictory to raise a child as a lesbian/gay couple but not being able to come out to him/her. The parent might come out to the children but she/he could not come out to the children’s school or other institutions as a mother/father. The recognition of same-sex parents is quite critical on this point (Direk, 2010).

#### **4.4.2. “Unless there is an emergency...”: The invisibility of transgender parents at school**

*The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, a play by Bertolt Brecht, was originally derived from the Chinese play *Chalk of Circle* and consists of two stories which come together in the end. The first story is about a peasant woman named Grusha who rescues a baby and parents it, and becomes a “better” mother than its biological mother. Grusha just finds the baby needing care, rescues it and becomes its parent without questioning the biological bonds. In

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onun eski sevgilisi hep beraber gidiyoruz. Gerek aileyle ilişkilendirirken işle ilişkilendirirken çocuğun okuluyla ilişkilendirirken geri adım atmıyorum ama tabelada asmıyorum.

the last scene of the play, the court seeks to determine the “real” mother. A circle of chalk is drawn and the child is placed in the circle between the two mothers. The court then states that the true mother will be the one who is able to pull the child from the center. Grusha refuses since she doesn’t want to hurt the child, and “the real mother” pulls whereas Grusha lets go. The court orders them to do it again, and again Grusha lets go. The biological mother again pulls and proves that she is the “real” mother. Then the court changes its decision and awards the child to Grusha.

Outsiders including doctors, teachers, judges, attorneys and other parents metaphorically draw a circle of chalk and watch parents act to see if they pull their child from the center of the circle or not. Although they expect parents to pull them from the center in order to be perceived as good parents, those “real” parents may not since they do not want to hurt the child. The paradoxical expectations of outsiders complicate the experience of parenting.

This paradoxical expectation of outsiders - particularly at school - is readily observable in transgender parents’ experiences. Firstly, transgender individuals’ relations as parents with the children’s school are very limited.<sup>114</sup> In contrast to cisgender parents, they are forced to minimize contact with the school. They are invisible; they even must contend with the dilemma of going to parent-teacher meetings. As Memo and Eda said, they prefer

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<sup>114</sup>While I was working on this chapter, I was still confused about the categories of parent that they identify themselves with. Although there is a strict difference between transgender individuals’ and cisgender parents’ experiences, I was trying to organize the chapter to harmonize all of their experiences. Again, it was a failure due to the fact that those experiences couldn’t come together. It wouldn’t be possible, because transgender individuals’ experiences differ in that they don’t fit in with expectations regarding either parental appearance or gender appearance. This was the reality in which they are discriminated against for being transgender, and also they are subjected to different forms of discrimination for being transgender parents.

to not attend parent-teacher meetings unless there is an emergency. Hence, they transferred their right to speak about their children's education to someone else (to their own parents and to their partners who are cisgender) which makes them invisible in their children's education. If the circle of chalk was drawn, and Grusha was replaced with the transgender parents, they would let go of their child. The school would order them to pull again, and again the transgender parents would let go of their child and their visibility in the school to avoid hurting their children. But the school never gives their children back, like the court did in the play.

The obvious reason for their invisibility is that transgender parents fail to appear in accordance with accepted gendered norms. Additionally, transgender parents fail to appear in accordance with accepted parental identity.

Eda said,

But the problems arose because of those social norms. My position in the relationship between my children and their friend... Their necessity to hide me... I... The school... I was going to the school as a parent but I felt anxious that I might cause a trouble. I didn't prefer to go to the school unless there is an emergency...

My children didn't have a school life experience like their friends had. I don't know. They couldn't invite their friends to our home. They couldn't tell stories about their father and mother or they couldn't eat cookies together...<sup>115</sup>

After one of her children started university and went to another city to continue her education, Eda's family asked her to send the youngest child to the city where they lived.

Because being invisible at her children's school as a parent had been quite exhausting, she

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<sup>115</sup> Fakat tabii toplumsal bir takım sorunlar çıkmaya başladı. Çocukların diğer arkadaşlarıyla ilişkilerinde benim konumum, beni gizlemeleri gerekliliği... benim okul... veli olarak okula gidiyorum falan o bir takım sorunlar yaratacak diye korkuyorum tedirgin gidiyorum gitmemeye çalışıyorum çok acil bir şey olmadıkça...

Çocuklar açısından diğer arkadaşları gibi ortaokul-lise yaşamı olamadı. O ne bileyim. Eve arkadaşlarını davet edip annelerinin ya da babalarının hikayelerini anlatamadılar ya da kurabiyeleri birlikte yiyemediler falan.

asked her child whether she wanted to live with her grandmother and aunts and continue her education in another city. She accepted, and Eda “let her go.”

Like Eda, Memo’s existence as a parent at his school was interrupted after he started using hormones. One day when Memo was at the school, Berk’s friend asked what kind of a parent Memo was, if he is a mother or a father. His son protected his “mother” by depicting him as a powerful parent to his friends. After this story, Memo “let go of his son” and Memo’s own mother - the child’s grandmother - started to go to the parent-teacher meetings. After Zin entered their lives, she became the parent of their child at the school.

Memo and Zin said,

Zin: When Memo started to take hormones, he seemed to be unavoidably manifesting his identity. The grandmother took care of Berk’s school. Memo couldn’t go to the school as a parent. That is because Berk was confused about calling him mother or father. He experienced such difficulties. For instance, when he was going to primary school... Isn’t it? You told me Memo. One day, Memo went to school for picking him up. What did his friends say? Your mother... Memo: “Is this your mother or father?” He said she is my mother. They asked what kind of mother it is. Berk replied she was such a mother that she would smash all their fathers’ face in.<sup>116</sup>

Before he passed on his visibility as a parent at school, one day his son’s teacher asked him “who the hell he was” - he said her action was very humiliating. He answered he is both the mother and the father of his son.

Memo: Once there was a new teacher. This happened 3 years ago. She asked “How are you related to him?” I said “I am both his mother and father”. She

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<sup>116</sup>Zin: Aslında şöyle bir şey var. Memodan mesela tam hormon kullanmaya ilk başladığı dönem tabii hani ister istemez biraz belli ediyordu kendini. O noktada babaanne ilgileniyordu okuluyla falan. Memo gidemiyormuş. Çünkü Berk da hani orda anne mi demem lazım baba mı demem lazım... hani biraz sıkıntı yaşadığı şeyler oluyormuş .mesela daha küçükken ilkokula falan giderken... değil mi sen anlatmıştın. Memo mesela Berkı almaya gittiğinde işte ne demişlerdi..arkadaşları bir şey demiş demiştin.. senin annen... Memo: “Senin annen mi baban mı” demişler. O da annem demiş. Bu nasıl anne demiş. O öyle bir anne ki hepinizin babasının ağzını burnu kırar demiş.

asked “How come?” I said “Just like this”. She asked “Are you making fun of me?” I said “Why did I make fun of you? You asked a question and I answered. I am Berk’s mother and father at the same time.”<sup>117</sup>

The law about legal gender transition requires individuals to be “permanently infertile,” which implies that being both transgender and a parent is forbidden according to Turkish law. However, the transgender parents I met became parents before “coming out” as transgender individuals, which has brought about a different set of challenges.

Both transgender parents’ experiences bear similarities with regards to minimizing contact with the school. They passed on their right to be a parent at the school either to their parents or to their partners, and they were forced to indirectly follow their children’s education. They were obliged to become distant from the school and this also affected the child-parent relations.

#### **4.5. Musician Cow Sırma creates a musical orchestra with friends**

Özge’s daughter’s favorite book called Musician Cow Sırma<sup>118</sup> (Pennart; 2008) is about discrimination against a musician cow. Once, her daughter asked me to read that book to her since she was not able to read. The story is about a musician cow named Sırma who wants to join an orchestra so he can take part in a musical competition, but all of the orchestras are arranged according to similarities as regards the color, weight, clothes, and appearances of the animals. Because of her appearance, the musician cow can’t join any of

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<sup>117</sup>Memo: bir keresinde de yeni bir hoca vardı. O da bu son dönemlerde. Son derken bundan 3 yıl önceydi. Siz nesi oluyorsunuz dedi. Hem annesiyim hem babasıyım dedim. Nasıl yani yaptı. Öyle yani dedim. Benimle dalga mı geçiyorsunuz dedi. Ne dalga geçeceğim sizinle dedim soru soruyorsunuz cevabını veriyorum dedi. Berkın annesi de benim babası da benim.

<sup>118</sup>The title is translated from French, and the original title is “Sophie la vache musicienne.”

the orchestras even though she has a great talent. In the end, all of the animals which were discriminated against because of their appearance (as far as I remember there was a bear with a dress, a giraffe with its long neck, and a kangaroo with its baby in its pocket) gather together just to make music. Not surprisingly, this musical orchestra wins the competition and the musician cow and her friends share great happiness.

In summary, most of the experiences converge at this point where school turns diversity into a threat, rather than a desirable ideal, and therefore, sameness is promoted at school. The story of the musician cow Sırma is not just a story, although the real social world always carries the threat of forcing individuals into an abject position for being different.

Although diversity suffers at school, according to Derya, children have their own mechanisms of self-defense. Children have their own individualities, comprehend differences and know how to behave in any given environment. Derya said,

The children's perception is not insufficient as we suppose. Their perception is more open than the adults. They don't have a full command of the language but they are aware of what is going on. The relationality in the kindergarten, the street; the relationship with parents, social milieu, grandparents, everyone shapes them. They are aware of any difference. They are aware of the nuances. They know what is at home while that does not take place at school or reverse. And this diversity does not tear him up.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Bir kere çocuklar bizim sandığımız kadar algısı kıt değil, algıları yetişkinlerden daha açık. Dile kavramsal anlamda hakim olmayabilirler. Herşeyin son derece farkındalar. Anaokulunda kurduğu ilişkiden, sokaktaki ilişkiden, ebeveynleriyle kurduğu ilişkiden, sosyal çevreden, annene, babayla her yerden besleniyor. Aradaki farkların çok net farkında. Neyin evde olup okulda olmadığı, okulda olan evde değil. Bu çeşitlilik onu sarsmıyor.

#### 4.5.1. Support networks

In the narratives of my research participants, the school comes across as a claustrophobic institution that shapes both parents' relations with their children and their (including their children's) relationality with the world. In their narratives, all of the parents are isolated not just from the school, but also from other possible places where they cannot exist as the parent they are. As there are no resources or mechanisms of solidarity for LGBT parents' and their children's school experiences, debates have shifted towards support of LGBT students<sup>120</sup> or critiques of the construction of compulsory heterosexuality that take place at school. One of the common themes in the narratives of my interviewees is their expectation for and need to listen to the experiences of other parents.

In this regard, Özge launched a mother's blog to share her own experiences as a single mother with a foster child, and after a while she had an online social network among mothers from different cities in Turkey. Furthermore, thanks to this social network, she got into contact with lesbian and bisexual mothers with whom it became possible to share their own experiences. Now they also have a mail group which includes just those 5 lesbian and bisexual mothers. Some of the women had children who were older than her child, and because of this she benefited from those mothers' experiences. However, she said most of the time they hesitated to talk about the tensions that arose between their sexual orientation and their mothering experiences due to the fact that none of the women in that mail list are

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<sup>120</sup>One of the latest booklets put out by Kaos GL is called "LGBT öğrencileri Aile ve Okul Kısılcına Karşı Nasıl Korunmalı?"(2012). This text is specifically very supportive for teachers with regards to definitions of sexual orientation and gender identities. This booklet is also elucidatory about how to approach LGBT students, and how to contact their families or protect them from their families. This booklet is highly instructive for teachers of LGBT students.

out to their children. Still, she very much wants to meet with those mothers to create solidarity among parents to come up with solutions for the difficulties they face.

Özge said,

They severely oppress the mothers in many ways. Women are exposed to oppression in many ways. Absolutely, I would like to get together with mothers who share the same experiences. I feel like I would be free. I feel like there is something suppressed inside of me. Okay, I meet with heterosexual mothers. We have been talking about the experiences on mothering and our children. But there is something missing. I hit the wall and I am by myself in front of that wall. Even asking this question is significant: “What did you say to your child when she/he asked why you wear a man shoes?” We should share with each other. I wish we could.<sup>121</sup>

These concerns may seem very peculiar; for instance, wearing men’s shoes, or not, as a mother. However, these kinds of “details” are quite critical; in addition to their metaphorical meaning in Özge’s life, they also show that a mother can be marginalized because of the way she dresses, walks, and behaves. The anxiety stems from the hope of avoiding being stigmatized as an improper mother in the eyes of institutions.

The struggle of these parents at school is very noteworthy, and there is no support network or social solidarity that they can benefit from, which makes it seem like their experiences are merely individual. Still, the online network Özge created and her activism through mother blogs/forums, and also Derya’s presence at the year-end show of his/her child with his/her large family, as well as Derin’s editing of a photograph of a non-existing

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<sup>121</sup>Anneleri çok ciddi bir şekilde müthiş bir baskı altına alıyorlar. Heryerden baskı geliyor kadınlara...

Kesinlikle benim gibi benim durumumda olan annelerle ben biraraya gelmek isterim. İçimin özgürlüğe kavuşacağına hissediyorum. İçimde şuanda sürekli bir şey bastırılmış bir şekilde duruyor gibi şuanda öyle hissediyorum.Yani tamam heteroseksüel annelerle görüşüyorum, çocuk ve annelik deneyimi üzerine konuşuyoruz.Ama bir yerde illa ki tıkanıyor. İlla ki bir şey var yani bir duvara tosluyorum.Ve o duvarda o duvarın önünde tek başıma kalıyorum. Şunu bile sormak önemli, bir ayakkabı giydiğinde aa bu erkek ayakkabısı dediğinde sizin başınıza geldiğinde siz ne dediniz.. İlla ki paylaşılması lazım.Ve umarım olur.

father and Memo's resisting the teacher as the embodiment of both mother and father are some of the strategic coping mechanisms my research participants have developed.

One of the common themes in the narratives of my interviewees is their need listen to the experiences of other parents. Otherwise, they face the school all by themselves. What are the reasons for this state of loneliness as a parent? How does this state change when there are no resources or support networks available? If there were support networks, what would have changed in their lives?

Firstly, as of yet there are no public and visible same-sex parents in Turkey. This invisibility is quite critical in terms of understanding how the socio-political realm forces them to close themselves off. One of the critical reasons is that there is no legal recognition or support for those parents. There is no constitutional recognition for sexual orientation and gender identity regarding LGBT individuals in either the Constitution or in civil law. Article 10 of the Constitution states: "Everyone is equal before the law without any distinction on the basis of language, race, skin color, gender, political view, philosophical belief, religion, sect and other such categories. State organs and administrative authorities are obliged to act in accordance to the equality before law principle regarding any and all of their actions." This article basically guarantees equality; however, it lacks any mention of sexual orientation and gender identity. Therefore, LGBT individuals are under threat of being exposed to discrimination for being both LGBT individuals and LGBT parents. Yet, it is difficult to discuss regulations for same-sex marriage, partnership or joint custody rights in such an atmosphere.

One possible support network for those parents could be the families that raised them. However, when their own families discovered their sexual orientation and gender

identity, almost all of my interviewees were taken to a psychiatrist in their childhood because it was seen as being a biological disorder. Therefore, most of them mentioned their struggles to exist, or explained themselves within the scope of their own families throughout their lives. On the other hand, transgender individuals' parents are sometimes supportive, but their acceptance of their child as transgender is a long story.

Another possible support network could be provided by the LGBT solidarity associations. However, the issue of parenting is not on their agenda, which raises the question: Why aren't there any forums for LGBT parenting? One of the reasons could be that the LGBT movement is still a young movement which means that the issue of parenting may arise only later for LGBT individuals. On the other hand, LISTAG and its documentary *My Child* reached a wide range of audiences and it made possible the visibility of parents of LGBT individuals. In this sense, both the documentary and LISTAG is revolutionary since they created a public arena for questioning family norms. However, the discussion tends to focus on the parents of LGBT individuals, not yet LGBT parents.

Another possible support network could be children's schools, but school is precisely the gendering and heterosexualizing space which imagines a fixed parent and family ideal; in this way, school is an obstacle working against their parenting experiences. For Derya, one possible resource could be psychotherapy. However, one could be also getting exposed to the homophobic and transphobic attitude by psychologists or the psychotherapists.

Derya said,

Everybody generally tells this issue [the school] will cause trouble. Psychologist said "You don't understand now but you will have difficulties when he starts primary school." Another psychologist friend of mine said "A psychologist

shouldn't have said something like this" and she added "Every experience is unique; we need to understand the specific points in those individual experiences."<sup>122</sup>

Another possible source for a support network could be academic and NGO research about LGBT parenting. However, the expansive literature on gender and education contains very little on the issue of same-sex parenting and the issue is mentioned in mere passing reference. If they are realized, any of the resources mentioned above could provide vital support for the struggle of those parents. In other words, any support network would be revolutionary for their existence and to strengthen them as parents.

## **Conclusion**

Most of my interviewees' narratives reveal the ways in which school is experienced as a claustrophobic place for both them and their children. School, as an unavoidable institution, plays a key role in the disciplining of these parents along official lines, as well as in their discrimination vis-à-vis their children's education. None of my participants are out either to the school or to anyone related to the school, and transgender parents are absent at the school. In addition, parents-to-be's imagined symbolic absence is indicative of how school as a hegemonic ground renders them invisible and unimaginable.

The symbolic absence of those parents and alternative familial forms, and the gendered universe of the school and everything pertaining to it, results in a situation

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<sup>122</sup>Genelde herkes bu konuda [okul konusunda] sıkıntı olacağını söylüyor. Psikolog da "Şimdi anlamıyorsunuz ama ilkokula gittiğinde çok zorlanacaksınız" demişti. Başka bir psikolog arkadaşım "Böyle bir şeyi bir psikologun dememesi lazım" dedi. "Çünkü her deneyim biriciktir ve o deneyimdeki noktalara bakmak lazım" dedi.

conducive to the construction of gendered and heterosexualized citizens. In other words, the school as an institution is the hegemonic ground for the reproduction of gender norms and the nuclear family which shapes parent-child relations. Therefore, school is both the cause and the effect of gender inequality (Sayılan, 2012) and heteronormativity in society. The conflicts with a gender normative school structure that imposes binary gender roles and nuclear family onto their children ended up changing their parental attitudes towards their children. Those stories indicate that all of those parents are by themselves at the school. Any support network would be revolutionary for their existence and to strengthen them as parents at institutions.

## CONCLUSION

In this research, I initially had aimed to scrutinize the experiences of lesbian, bisexual and queer mothers' experiences within the context of Turkey, but the fieldwork process, for which I gave an overview in Chapter I, soon forced me to question parental identifications and the heterosexual matrix. As I discussed at length, the research and particularly research questions evolved in accordance with the fieldwork on the basis of the each parents' experiences. Secondly, the inaccessibility and then the refusal of most of the parents I contacted, and their similar explanations for refusing (which centered on a desire to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity since they were not out to their children) is indicative of the difficulties of queer parenting at large. In this sense, the social, legal, political as well as cultural atmosphere which marginalizes LGBT individuals is the determinant factor of the silence of those parents.

When I hit the wall with regards to access to parents, I decided to focus on the experiences of parents-to-be which enabled a new discussion on institutions since all of the

parents-to-be interviewees interestingly shared the same reflections about the imagined school experience of their children. The shared narrative among the parents-to-be interviews was that when I asked questions about institutions, specifically about school, silence fell over the interview. The social, legal, political as well as cultural obstacles appear within their narratives specifically on institutions. Hence, the school as an unavoidable institution for their children seems to be the major critical obstacle to their parenting experiences which made me to focus this issue although I had no plan about that. As a result of their repetition about the school during their narratives, I also revise my interview questions for parents, which ended up investigating their experiences within their children's school and one of the chapters was written specifically on the school.

When I reached the parents, after my interviews with Eda, Memo and Zin, above all, I realized that I was trying to put them, and my other interviewees, into paradigmatic categories as though one had to be either a father or mother. Eda's experience of parenthood as a Bizz did not conform to the categories of the mother/father dichotomy, constituting a major challenge to the institution of gendered parenting. On the other hand, Memo, as a father, gave birth to his child. Like the female/male binary, mother/father is constructed as a binary opposition corresponding solely to biology within the heterosexual matrix. Hence, this research project has ended up questioning the binary sex/gender system which constitutes gendered parenthood within the mother/father dichotomy, revealing the mechanisms of compulsory identification in the background of a coercive and regulatory binary gender system. What brings all the narratives together is not just that they fail to fit in with sexual and gender norms, but also that they reveal experiences of non-compliant parenting.

In the second chapter, I focus on the invisibility and unimaginability of the research participants as parents, which is related to the fact that nation-states do not just construct their gender regime (Connell, 1990); they also recognize some forms of lived relationality and attempt to make other forms of relationality unimaginable (Butler, 2002; Richardson, 1998; Weeks, 1999; Sirman, 2005). I scrutinized the genealogy of the heteronormative family construction which can be traced back to the years of the modernization project when an era of “quiet heteronormalization” was ushered in, which resulted in a shunting aside of non-normative sexualities and genders (Savcı, 2011). Because controlling and regulating the bodies of citizens can be achieved within the boundaries of the family institution, a situation is created in which the modern family was constructed as “a safe haven” at the beginning of the Turkish nation-state building process. This imagined hegemonic family form was encoded as heteronormative during the modernization project in the early years of the Turkish Republic; nonetheless, it has come under scrutiny and been questioned through the rise of the feminist and LGBT movements. The rise of the feminist movement in the 1980s constituted the first moment in the public arena when the modern Turkish family was removed from the pedestal of a “sacred institution” and henceforth seen as a locus of violence against women. The family and its explicit relations to the subordination of women have been questioned by many feminists who have noted that the essentialized conceptions of womanhood and motherhood are problematic. In addition, it has become apparent how the gendered division of labor in the family is interrelated with gender inequality. One of the critical limitations of these feminist debates, however, is that the family ideal was maintained as heteronormative, and the questioning of gender roles has been limited through essentialist standpoints. Until the LGBT movement opened up

heteronormativity for critique, the feminist debates tended to center around the family which was constructed as heterosexual and consisting of a man and woman.

The rise of the LGBT movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s has presented a major challenge to heteronormativity and the process of “quiet heteronormalization” which have been placed in the political arena. In the context of Turkey, the issue of family has generally been discussed in terms of the experience of coming out to family members; in other words, the conversation has focused on LGBT individuals involved in family relationships as children and siblings. In this sense, queer parenthood has remained largely unexplored by both the feminist movement and the LGBT movement in contemporary Turkey.

In the following section of the chapter, I developed an analysis about the AKP government’s constructions of embedded heteronormativity and the normative family in official state discourses, while also looking at legislation and political debates that have had coercive consequences both on the family and gender regime at present. In this regard, the AKP government, including the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, has attempted to reconstruct an “ideal” family within a binary gender and heteronormative system which holds up as its model married heterosexual couples who have at least three children as well as mechanisms to protect this “family” from dissolution. The AKP has neglected LGBT parents directly as the result of its adherence to hegemony of heteronormativity governing official state discourse and political debates.

In the third chapter, I discussed how the outcomes of my fieldwork revealed that the dichotomy of the father/mother form of identification often caused my interviewees to define themselves within the heterosexual matrix. The “chaos” of my interviewees’ sexual

orientation and gender identities, which traverses genderqueer, transgender (specifically their own self-identification including trans, transwoman, transman), queer, lesbian, bisexual, or no explanation, followed conceptualizations of parental identification which are mother, Çiçek/mother/anything possible, Leyla/mother, Dilan/father and the meaningless category of “bizz.” In this sense, queer theory works well because it opens a way to challenge identities and, particularly in this research, it makes room for discussions of not just the self-identification of my interviewees but also for their parental identifications. The limitations of their parental identification are not independent, however, from the regulatory and coercive consequences of the binary gender system and heteronormativity. On the other hand, the parents’ “coming out” to their children shapes their parental experiences within the heterosexual matrix. The shared narrative among my parents-to-be interviewees is that raising a child as non-conforming parents may bring harm in the heteronormative universe because their children will be exposed to discrimination. However, all of them stated that even if they disclose themselves, it would result in a continuance of the heterosexual matrix that they never belonged to. Furthermore, they dream of raising children who are not obliged to obey the “rules” of that heterosexual matrix. Hence, they plan to tell their children about their sexual orientation from the beginning. Transgender individuals’ experiences are different from those of lesbian and bisexual parents who are in the closet since they challenge gender roles and expressions as well as parental appearances. Their transgender identity - which does not fit gender norms - forces them to disclose themselves; furthermore, they prefer to be out of the closet. Most of the cisgender parents are not yet out to their children, and as they stated, most of the time they struggle with the tension that their binary lives generate. But still, the *strategy* of

keeping this “secret” creates a space of freedom for them. As Lewin stated (2007), they are both parents and lesbian, and they shape their identities and renegotiate their meanings at every turn.

In the last chapter, I examined how my interviewees discussed their parenting experience with specific attention to school, and how they focused on particular incidences that took place at school and reflected on the interventions brought about by the educational system in their parenting experiences. Most of the interviewees’ narratives reveal the ways in which school is experienced as a claustrophobic place for both themselves and their children. School, as an unavoidable institution, plays a key role in the disciplining of these parents along official lines, as well as in their discrimination vis-à-vis their children’s education. None of the participants are out either to the school or to anyone related to the school, and transgender parents are absent at the school. In addition, parents-to-be’s imagined symbolic absence is indicative of how school as a hegemonic ground renders them invisible and unimaginable. The symbolic absence of those parents and alternative familial forms, and the gendered universe of the school and everything pertaining to it, results in a situation conducive to the construction of gendered and heterosexualized citizens. In other words, school as an institution is a hegemonic ground for the reproduction of gender norms and the nuclear family which shapes parent-child relations.

Through this research I sought to discover non-compliant and invisible parents’ experiences, and to scrutinize the anxiety which abjects them. This abjection has roots in legal, political and social system which causes different family forms to be unimaginable and drives queer parents’ lives into a corner in terms of their relationality with their children and social milieu. The claustrophobic imagination of nuclear family which is

promoted throughout the history of Turkey and particularly by the current government at every turn is the basis of discrimination against their citizens. Overall aim of this research is to show the corner that they were driven into and to reveal the ways in which they develop strategies both as parents and as queer individuals.

In this light, the feminist literature on family and women's right as well as recently LGBT movement's contribution to the literature is not just academically significant but also in terms of their impact on the social, cultural and legal system. However, the nexus of state policies, and feminist/LGBT politics of gender, sexuality, family, and parenthood was disregarded on the basis of those literatures up to the present. In this sense, this research aims to contribute to the existing literature on family and motherhood in Turkey by exploring the area of intersection among LGBT issues, parenthood and family. It can be thought of as marking a beginning for ethnographic research in Turkey about parents who have non-conforming gender and sexualities, and I hope it will open the way for new ethnographic researches on family from different perspectives.

**APPENDIX: INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Participant	Age	City	Education	Job	Identification	Parental Identification	Having child(through)	Age of child	of	Out to child?	The way to raise child
<b>Ceren</b> (parents-to-be)	26	İst.	MA student	student	genderqueer	mother	Birth	X		yes she will be	with her partner
<b>Çiçek</b> (parents-to-be)	24	İst.	MA student	student	trans	Çiçek/mother	Adoption	X		yes s/he will be	collective family
<b>Zeynep</b> (parents-to-be)	29	İst.	MA	teacher	queer	mother	adoption	X		confused	single mother
<b>Leyla</b> (parents-to-be)	26	İst.	MA student	student	bisexual	Leyla/mother	adoption	X		yes she will be	communal life
<b>Dilan</b> (parents-to-be)	32	İst.	BA	manager of lesbian bar	lesbian	Dilan/father	her partner will give birth	X		yes she will be	nuclear family
<b>Tuana</b> (7 months pregnant)	21	İst.	high school	dance teacher	to her, love has no gender	mother	birth	X		yes she will be	single mother

<b>Eda</b>	50	İst.	BA	web designer	transwoman/bisexual	Bızz	her wife gave birth	19 and 25	yes	nuclear family before/single parent
<b>Elif</b>	40	Ank.	MA	coordinator of Int. development projects	bisexual	mother	gave birth	12	no but one day	single mother
<b>Özge</b>	41	Ant.	BA	Int. trade	lesbian	mother	adopted	3	no but one day	single mother
<b>Memo</b>	36	Ank.	left high school	unemployed	transman	father	gave birth	15	yes	nuclear family
<b>Zin</b>	32	Ank.	PhD student	student	bisexual	mother	her partner gave birth	15	yes	nuclear family
<b>Derin</b>	33	İst.	high school	public officer	lesbian	mother	gave birth	10	no but one day	single mother
<b>Esra</b>	41	İzm.	BA	electrical engineer	bisexual	mother	gave birth	12 and 15	no but one day	will divorce/single mother
<b>Defne</b>	48	İzm.	BA	public relations	no identification	mother	gave birth	25	yes	nuclear family
<b>Derya</b>	35	İst.	BA	translator	genderqueer	deroş/mother	gave birth	5	yes	with his/her beloved

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