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Gay Documentary Makes Inroads in Turkey

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Dorian Jones
March 05, 2013

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ISTANBUL — Homosexuality in Turkey is legal, but remains highly contentious in the predominantly conservative Muslim society. Hate crimes are not unusual, often times carried out by fellow family members. But a Turkish documentary called *My Child* is telling a different story.

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The Gala Night in Istanbul of the documentary *My Child* drew a packed audience. The powerful film tells the story of [Listag](#) a parent's support group of lesbian gay bisexual and transgender children, or LGBT. It follows the group, helping fellow parents come to terms with their children's sexuality as well as challenging prejudice in society.

Director Can Candan hopes the film will help challenge traditional attitudes towards LGBT people.

"We want to bring about change in this society. And we feel this documentary could do that by bringing these stories of the parents of LGBT individuals to general public," he said.

A leading newspaper made the film frontpage news, reporting positively on the parents' work. The Turkish media are more accustomed to reporting about attacks and even murders by parents or family of gay people.

But Turkish society appears to be changing. Last year Istanbul hosted its 20th Gay Pride Day, drawing a record attendance of thousands. Two women from the group were invited in June by the main opposition party to address a parliamentary commission.

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Metehan Ozkan of the LGBT group [Lambda](#) and who helped to set up Listag says prejudice and hate crimes remain a common problem in Turkey. But he claims the Listag parents play a crucial role in challenging prejudices."

"In one of the prides here, I have seen these people saying 'look at these faggots they are again on the streets.' Then one of guys says 'look at this, someone is holding a placard that says, I am your father and I am next to you. Aha, this is something brave,' he says, just right after he said faggots," he said. "They are great icebreakers, they can manage to talk to people that we cannot directly talk to. This parliament visit, they shook hands with many MPs there, just saying, 'I am a mother, do you have a child, do you?' 'Yes I did do.' 'Ok my child is gay or trans [transgender], then do something for my child.'"

Attending the opening of the documentary, Sule Ceylan, one of the members of the Listag delegation that visited parliament, believes Turkey is moving in the right direction.

"Surely things have changed. We went to the parliament as two mothers and we really startled them," she said. "They showed a lot of interest in us. They see that these children are not coming from outer space. They are not freaks. They have mothers, families. They were impressed. We are here today, an incredible crowd. I am very, very excited. I believe there will be more beautiful things happening. I can see that."

In a packed cinema the film was warmly received. Speaking to the audience it is clear there is widespread recognition that the film is highlighting the important work of the parents.

"It's not an activist film, it's a family film," said one audience member. "They are parents of those individuals. They love them and are ready to die for them. They can do everything for their children and they are doing it. It's very brave what they have done."

The documentary is being shown across Turkey and in a special screening that was shown in neighboring Armenia and in the Palestinian territory city of Ramallah. The hope of the filmmaker and the parents is that barriers can be continued to be broken down not only in Turkey but also eventually across the region.



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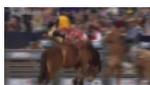
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