

Redefining the Family: Changes and Continuities*

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Abstract: Family has been discussed in the sociology literature for a long time from a structural functionalist perspective. Attempted in this context is the revealing of the family seen as a micro-state and its function in social integration. However, family has undergone a rapid transformation in recent history. Therefore, revising the theoretical approaches that examine family has become imperative. This article claims the present definitions of family to remain inadequate in showing current family relationships. This claim has been brought to the agenda, specifically in Turkey. In other words, when considering current family organization, the definitions of family do not fully reflect reality. This claim is proven using Ricoeur's hermeneutical method together with symbolic interactionism. While bringing the definitions of family in the literature to the agenda on one side in the section Analytical Thought, a discussion is opened on the shortcomings in order to arrive at a holistic definition of family. The shortcomings of the existing definitions of family are clearly revealed in light of both the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from TURKSTAT and various studies. In fact, the differentiation of household structure and data showing family organization to be able to have interruptions and breaks from being permanently together overrides a functional definition of family. In the section Dialectical Thought, a holistic definition of family has been able to be reached by interpreting the data from the qualitative interviews performed with 22 fathers using the symbolic interactionism approach. It is laid out this way by showing how family has passed through a transformation in Turkey, thus uncovering the current meaning of family in the world today. Therefore a different dimension is brought to discussions that will be done in the literature on family. In conclusion, the current definitions of family are shown to be insufficient and evaluating the new forms that family has received as a scattering or destructive process as a result of the experienced social transformation are shown to have flaws. Thus a new definition for family is obtained and, by producing new areas of interest in the process of family members' current transformations using this definition, continuity of a capital flow is clearly revealed.

Keywords: family • social transformation of the family • hermeneutics • symbolic interaction • extent of relationships

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In the majority of studies sociologically about families, a structural-functionalist perspective can be said to be dominant. The family is evaluated in this approach in terms of its function in society. The family is generally evaluated as a system or as one total unit (Swingewood, 2010). However, such an approach has been criticized by recent sociological theories and its inadequacies have been revealed (Giddens, 2005, p. 523). In contrast with the structural-functionalist approach, the family can be considered as the extent of a relationship that occurs among its members. In fact, this study has adopted such a perspective theoretically. Only in order to develop a view like this, the family needs to be examined within a dialectical thinking process. Handling the family as a completeness that bears its own contradictions is quite old in terms of the history of thought; however, it can be evaluated sociologically as a new one. In other words, the family is a wholeness whose uniqueness is specific to itself and only as being a member; however, it should also be considered as a means of being a person, or of reaching the universal. On one hand, this contradiction contains one side that imprisons the person in the barrier of the state of being, namely in being singular, but at the same time contains in itself a side that provides the opportunity of being someone and that also conveys one to being. Therefore the family is discussed with both/and patterns.

The researcher has strived to transform radical uncertainty to a personal attitude in the design phase of this study. The researcher has adopted Ricoeur's (2006) hermeneutical method in the article in order to be able to find the answer to the research question. This method involves a two-stage process. While revealing the meanings that the family possesses on one side in the section on analytical thinking, how the family arrives at transformation through the meanings it already possesses is investigated in the section on dialectic thinking. However, a small field study has been added to Ricoeur's method in the study's second stage. The data from the interviews made with 21 fathers using open-ended semi-structured questions designed in a qualitative pattern have been analyzed through the symbolic interactionism approach. Thus the meanings that family possesses in both historical and current cases has been attempted to be revealed more fully.

The study has attempted to express the effects that open the way to family transformation in the analytical section due to the methodological perspective of the article. The transformations that families experience in the world in general and Turkey in particular lay in the backdrop of an approach like this (Therborn, 2004, p. 295; Türkiye Aile Yapısı Araştırması [Turkish Family Structure Research (TAYA)], 2014, p. 75; Goody, 2004, p. 145; Nirun, 1994). The study dedicates itself to revealing the differences that emerge between the family as expressed in the literature and the semantic content that the modern-day family possesses and to proposing a valid definition of family. It attempts to see what meanings family carries within and what meanings have disappeared inside history by revealing the historical

exploits of family. It shows the breaking away of the family from the context of property particularly after industrialization, its slide from a mechanical relationship into a romantic direction, and the differentiations that occur in the new forms of family formation and its conditions (Gittins, 2011, p. 22; Macinios, 2012, p. 471; Therborn, 2004, p. 166). The study additionally shows the family sheltered within its extended history and, hence, its rather laden legacy. In addition to this, intellectual disinformation is also shown related to a bruising experienced in the relationships between family forms and members at different historical periods and, thanks to this effort, one review that can prevent forming nostalgia about family history under modern conditions has been able to be reached (Gökalp, 1976, p. 152; Kemal, 2005, p. 277; Mithat Efendi, 2013a). Alongside these, the reshaping of the family according to economic transformations has also been revealed.

The first section of dialectical thinking, which is the second process of the research, seeks to analyze what fathers understand about the family within the framework of the historical course of family organization. In the scope of the data obtained from the field research, the following meanings are seen loaded to the family: Family gives life purpose to men, provides social confirmation, and earns reputation. Additionally, the family internalizes the social and establishes healthy communications. In contrast, family: is the sanitization of the social, is a natural process, takes responsibility, allocates time to its members, is the quenching of the need to love and be loved, is regular living, is the growth of new generations, builds nests, develops the relationship of dependence and commitment, is the cure for loneliness, is to have children, is the coexistence of husband and wife, expends labor and shows patience, performs certain roles, is long-term coexistence, shows solidarity, establishes communication, achieves a sense of completeness, is a stratified formation, and sets its members free. Thanks to these meanings we have two separate clusters of data. On one hand are the family's meanings of differentiation that they disseminate within the course of history, and on the other are how modern fathers make sense of the family. Thus we have developed arguments that can make an up-to-date and comprehensive definition of family or revise the definitions in the literature.

These two sets of data obtained in the second section of dialectical thinking have been used for comparing them with the descriptions of family that take place in the literature. Most of the family definitions in the literature on family in Turkey are seen to have been made in the framework of structural-functionalist theory. The following have been detected as common points of these definitions of family: heterosexual relations, having children, showing group qualities, providing transitions between generations, showing continuity, having blood ties, and signing the contract with the bond of marriage. These definitions of family have revealed both the new organized forms of families that have changed and also the interviews performed with fathers

to remain insufficient at expressing the organization of current families from many perspectives in the interviews' results. However, some definitions are again also seen to be closely related to the new organization of the family. These definitions are seen trying to evaluate the family generally as a relationship network, emphasizing the importance of sharing feelings and solidarity in the relationship among people, and evaluating the family within the idea of continuity. In these definition attempts, the special emphasis that Ülken (1991, p. 37) makes on "order of law" and "convention" and Macionis' (2012, p. 462) and Dikeçligil's (2014, p. 44) emphases on "solidarity" present important intellectual opportunities for today's family organization. Alongside these, the field research and historical exploits of the family point to how the family bears continuity and can adjust itself to the conditions of the day. In light of all these data, the bravery of suggesting a new definition of family has been found for the social sciences in the context of Turkey. Family is the relational space where a social connection or solidarity that is formed among its members or that produces a sense of solidarity is socially accepted and therefore has a legal form as a collective object that additionally has the ability to be able to be added to the provisions of the day.

As seen, this study is an attempt to pave the way for revising the definitions of family that take place in the literature by looking at the meanings that family hosts within its historical course and in its updated states. In this context, organizing the Turk family that has changed in accordance with the trends around the world is seen to have undergone a very rapid process of change especially in the last 20 years. In this process, the meanings that have been installed on family can be said to have at least been also added to the meanings located in the literature. In other words, family has made its own formation continuous, resembling "new wine in an old bottle". In addition, this study can be stated as important in terms of establishing the dialectical thinking approach into the act of sociological thinking through its occurrence. Thus any case being discussed can be taken as a whole within both its uniqueness and in its universality. In this context, the article hopes to present the groundwork of a discussion in terms of future studies to be made on the family.

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