

Honor killings in traditional societies: Revisiting the case of Türkiye after Istanbul Convention withdrawal

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the complex dynamics of honor and honor killings in traditional societies, with a specific focus on Türkiye, which has a Muslim-majority population and secular-democratic politico-legal system. It sheds light on the cultural and societal frameworks that reinforce honor, particularly in the context of gender relations and familial reputation. Using a qualitative methodology, the study analyzes the case of Türkiye, with a significant emphasis on the controversial withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention. Examining discussions in the parliament, legal documents, and secondary sources, such as research reports, supports the case study. The findings reveal a complicated interplay between traditional perceptions of honor, legal inadequacies, and societal attitudes that perpetuate violence against women. The study argues that while legislative reforms have been implemented, cultural and societal norms continue to pose significant challenges to their effectiveness. The conclusion underscores the urgent need for a multifaceted approach, incorporating legal, educational, and societal strategies to dismantle the cultural norms that condone honor-related violence. This article contributes to the discourse on gender-based violence, advocating for a comprehensive understanding and action to address honor killings in Türkiye and beyond.

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Introduction

In May 2020, the Thought Platform of Türkiye, chaired by Islamic scholar Prof. Hayrettin Karaman, submitted a report to Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan, requesting the annulment of the Istanbul Convention. The report, titled "Legal and Psychosocial Assessment of the Istanbul Convention," stated:

In the definitions of concepts within the Istanbul Convention, while highlighting "grounds of discrimination," it is a significant criticism that concepts such as society, religion, culture, customs, traditions, honor, decency, morality, and family are being opened to debate and devalued. Rather than being perceived as a sincere effort, portraying these concepts as the root causes of murder, violence, and inequality is seen as an attempt to sever society from its roots. Additionally, the conceptualization of honor killings is thought to diminish the esteem of the values that uphold society more than they are well-intentioned. (Yetkin, 2020)

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This assessment is one of the most striking examples of the conflict between societal values and women's rights in Türkiye. The calls to revoke the Istanbul Convention undermined efforts to prevent violence against women and achieve gender equality. Critics of the Convention often justify their opposition by citing the need to preserve deeply rooted societal norms, such as honor.

Honor, as a symbolic form, and honor killings, as a direct form of violence against women, have been significant issues in Türkiye and many other traditional societies around the world (Gryzb, 2016; Hamzaoğlu & Konuralp, 2019). Honor is deeply ingrained in Türkiye's cultural and social fabric, shaping societal norms and values for centuries. However, the practice of honor killings, which involves the murder of individuals, typically women, who are perceived to have brought dishonor upon their family or community, has sparked widespread controversy and condemnation.

In this article, we will explore the historical and cultural roots of honor and honor killings, examining the traditional beliefs and societal expectations that have perpetuated such practices. Additionally, we will analyze the legal and social responses to honor killings in Türkiye, as well as the ongoing efforts to address and mitigate this issue.

This article aims to examine the perceptions surrounding honor killings and gender inequality. The belief that gender inequality is a natural and inevitable phenomenon can lead to the normalization of its consequences, thereby perpetuating its existence. Instead, it is crucial to recognize that gender inequality is a socially constructed issue that has persisted throughout history. Oppression towards women is not an inherent characteristic of human nature but is created by human behavior influenced by societal norms and prevalent discrimination. It is imperative to acknowledge the role of socially constructed gender roles and stereotypes in perpetuating gender inequality. By recognizing the socially constructed nature of gender inequality, we can take steps toward dismantling these structures through persistent efforts.

From a cultural perspective, since honor killings are a result of traditional patriarchal values deeply rooted in certain parts of Turkish society, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, aimed to challenge these cultural norms by regarding such acts of violence as unacceptable under any circumstances, which opposes the traditional beliefs that prioritize family honor above all. Therefore, the legal and political ramifications of the decision to withdraw from the Convention in Türkiye are seen by many as a political move aligned with a growing conservative agenda that values traditional family values over gender equality. This move has raised concerns about the weakening of legal protections for women, which may lead to a rise in gender-based violence, including honor killings. The lack of international oversight and reduced legal frameworks can decrease state accountability and protection for women. As a societal impact, the debate over the Convention and the withdrawal reflects broader societal conflicts over women's rights and gender equality in Türkiye. This article scrutinizes the symbolic impact that aligns state policies with cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women.

Understanding "honor"

Examining the intersection of gender roles and the concept of honor, it is crucial to recognize how societal norms prescribe specific behaviors that reinforce gender inequalities. Connell

(2005) reveals how societal expectations around gender can dictate the actions and self-perceptions of both men and women, often placing women in subservient positions. This dynamic is vividly outlined by Kandiyoti (1988) in her discussion of how women “bargain” with patriarchal norms to navigate oppressive structures, which frequently tie their honor to their sexual behavior. Similarly, Warrington and Younger (2011) illustrate how gender expectations can govern even the microcosms of society, such as gangs, where gender norms can dictate distinct roles and behaviors. The severe implications of these gendered expectations are most tragically seen in honor-related violence, where women can be subjected to extreme violence for perceived transgressions of these norms, as articulated by Welchman and Hossain (2005a, 2005b) and Sen (2005). Moreover, Yuval-Davis (1997) emphasizes that the concept of national identity can also intertwine with these gender norms, further complicating the lives of women who bear the burden of upholding a community’s honor. Together, these works highlight the pervasive impact of gendered societal expectations and the critical need for reevaluating how honor and gender are conceptualized and lived in various cultures.

In today’s societies where honor killings are prevalent, honor holds a significance beyond mere “respect.” There is a collective belief that honor represents the most crucial value in life, equating life with honor and viewing the loss of honor as tantamount to the loss of life (Doğan, 2014, p. 364). In these communities, individuals are often surrounded by others who consider it necessary to resort to killing or violence in response to any perceived dishonor. Therefore, the concept of honor encompasses broader meanings but often represents a set of values biased towards men, which they use to control women, particularly their sexuality. When the word “honor” is mentioned, it typically brings to mind a woman’s sexual purity. If a woman violates the customs’ rules of sexual restraint, her honor is considered tarnished. In extreme traditionalist segments of societies, this can result in death through honor killings – the killing of a woman suspected of deviating from societal sexual norms (Faqir, 2001, p. 66). Honor killings are visible manifestations that mark borders between different segments in modern societies with ethnic and cultural diversity (Hellgren & Hobson, 2008, p. 386). They are perceived as specific forms of violence against women within traditional segments but have also been observed in Western societies where minority communities have “ethnicized” them using different cultural repertoires. The paradigm of “multiculturalism,” emphasizing respect for diversity and valuing cultural differences, has led to the invisibility and voicelessness of these women by overemphasizing the “private sphere” when addressing violence based on cultural or religious origins (Yuval-Davis, 1997a, p. 63; Yuval-Davis, 1997b, p. 17; Meeto & Mirza, 2010). Also, these crimes often went unnoticed because they were considered “traditional or cultural practices” outside the bounds of state intervention (Keyhani, 2013, p. 255). In this respect, it is worth noting that multiculturalism arises from a particularism that is separate from the universal, where distinct identities within national categories lead to conflicting struggles and even violence (Konuralp, 2018, p. 143; Özdil, 2021a, 2021b). This poses a challenge for establishing democratic societies based on representation while also potentially reinforcing gender stereotypes in private spheres, complicating efforts to promote gender equality in Western democracies.

Thus, the fight against violence towards women and so-called honor killings cannot overlook the existence of a patriarchal cultural code known as the honor/shame complex. This cultural construct is embraced by some individuals in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean regions as a way to control female sexuality. Gender identity formation

varies across historical periods and geographical locations, necessitating a nuanced cultural analysis that avoids oversimplification. In other words, deep-rooted inequalities should not be neglected in the name of “multiculturalist” tolerance. Instead, uncovering the historical conditions that allowed patriarchal codes to thrive in cultural settings is crucial. Therefore, understanding violence against women requires recognizing its close connection to constructions of masculinity within different patriarchal systems. Therefore, examining forms of control over women’s sexual agency along a continuum of patriarchal dominance is imperative for comprehending this issue comprehensively; it may eventually lead to acts of violence. The honor/shame code can thus be seen as an aspect within the broader framework of patriarchal domination (Al-Qahtani *et al.*, 2022, p. 4; Akpınar, 2003, p. 427; Baker *et al.*, 1999; Kandiyoti & Kandiyoti, 1987).

In societies with solid traditionalism, the concept of honor often signifies men’s dominance over women and their hierarchical position. Honor becomes a tool for men to exploit and control women, thereby determining and limiting their lives. This fixation on women’s sexuality and virginity to preserve men’s privileged status leads to widespread practices like honor killings across different regions, such as Andalusia and the eastern Mediterranean (Acar-Savran, 2018, p. 112).

When we consider the meaning of the word, honor (*namus* in Turkish) is defined by the Turkish Language Association as adherence to moral rules and social values within a society, including chastity. This definition not only encompasses women’s sexual purity but also extends to a broader context. The term “chastity” (*iffet* in Turkish), used synonymously with “honor” by the Turkish Language Association, might be more suited to convey women’s sexual purity than the concept of honor. The definition of “chastity” pertains specifically to moral guidelines related to sexuality and is commonly associated with women. A woman who abides by these standards regarding sexual morality can be described as “chaste” (*iffetli* in Turkish), while one who does not is termed as “unchaste” (*iffetsiz* in Turkish). Nevertheless, given that the widely recognized term for femicide due to unchastity is “honor killing,” this study will use the term “honor” rather than “chastity.”

Nevin Yıldız Tahincioğlu (2011, p. 80) explains that the concept of “honor” is as significant as the founding law in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies, derived from the Latin word *nomos*, meaning “law.” Additionally, Bağlı and Özensel (2011, p. 36) note that *nâmûs* in Arabic originates from the Greek *nomos*, meaning “law.” They clarify its derivation from the infinitive *nems* meaning “to keep a secret, to speak a secret word,” with associated meanings such as “secret partner, trick, trap, hiding place.”

For women, honor is the sexual standard they are expected to uphold. This includes maintaining virginity until marriage and refraining from intimate relations with anyone other than their spouse after marriage. Sexual relations between women and their same-sex partners, either before or during the marriage, typically do not lead to “honor killing” or “honor-related violence.” In this phenomenon of “women’s honor,” the focus is usually on men. According to Tahincioğlu (2011), from the traditional perspective, all women represent the honor of the family. Bağlı and Özensel (2011) also state that a woman’s honor is equivalent to chastity. A woman’s responsibility to protect her honor means preserving her sexual purity and avoiding actions that would disrupt this purity; therefore, her behavior is supervised by men. The responsibility imposed on men by this phenomenon is to protect and supervise the honor of the women in their families. A woman’s protection of her honor begins with shame regarding her sexuality – the source of which stems from herself – and

creates a perception of honor for men as its bearer and owner stemming from this shame and abstinence.

We also find the justification for masculine violence in the fact that the source of the perception of honor for men is women. In social life, honor for the man is the sexual purity of his wife, daughter, sister, mother, and related women. According to custom, men are expected to protect the honor of women, even if it means using force or coercion when necessary. This includes the use of violence against both other women and any men who threaten the honor of women in their family. According to Tahincioğlu (2011, p. 78), honor is defined as the responsibility of men to protect women's sexual purity by using violence when necessary, while women are expected to protect their honor by being ashamed. It has been suggested that a woman's behavior, as perceived by society, reflects on the reputation of the man. This belief is based on the idea that men have the "right" to control a woman's body to ensure the legitimacy of their offspring. Recep Doğan (2016, p. 21) points to this reality that for men, honor is subject to social control due to the importance of the reproductive potential of women. In the context of ensuring the continuation of the generation, the man is committed to marrying a woman who will guarantee that the child to be born will be his descendant and that the woman will provide this guarantee throughout the marriage and draws attention to the fact that in this expectation, the man controls the woman's body, and this is accepted in society.

Accordingly, in practice, men place great importance on virginity. They insist that women be virgins at the time of marriage and then control their sexual behavior afterward. This responsibility is tied to the concept of honor, and they expect women to prioritize it as well. In terms of femicides, for men, honor is considered equal to life, while dishonor is equivalent to death. The man prefers (the woman's) death rather than being characterized as dishonest and dishonorable (Doğan, 2016, pp. 85-86). Because it is the woman's chastity and honor that makes a man honorable or dishonorable. If the woman has been unchaste, the man believes that he has saved his honor by killing her, and he accepts that this is what his environment expects of him. This is the man's understanding of honor as prescribed by tradition.

The historical development of honor killings shows that this phenomenon is a political problem based on socio-economic and social structure. In this context, while the phenomenon of honor plays a constitutive role in social organization as a means of male domination of women, we also witness the formation of a masculine power and state structure on the socio-economic structure shaped accordingly. In the end, it can be said that this structure, which constructs and feeds gender inequality, turns into biopower and that this power based on sexual ideology strengthens the hierarchical superiority and domination of men over women by positioning men at the top and women at the bottom, and "legitimizes" the subjection of women to male domination and sexual control through legal regulations. This situation shows that the structuring and governance of society and the state have been left to men throughout history. The masculine power based on this structure has passed down the patriarchal family, society, and political structure from generation to generation for hundreds of years, condemning women to a subordinate position and life. In other words, it should be underlined that the masculine nature of social and political power, which began with the control of women's sexuality and continues today, has remained valid from the societies where the "consanguine family" ruled until today's modern societies. Looking at this point in terms of the control of women's bodies, it can be said that both the process of social development and the state organization built on

the changing structure in this process have been realized around the phenomenon of the control of women's sexuality. In societies based on the matrilineal family, the organization of lineage was structured with the prohibition of incest, and in matriarchal societies, the threat of killing was only in question for incest. In other forms of relationships, sexual freedom and equality between men and women prevailed. Therefore, the notion of honor and murders based on it did not exist in these societies (Ecevitoglu, 2012, p. 475; Engels, 1986, pp. 53-54; Reich, 1995, pp. 29-36).

After the transition to a patriarchal structure, the dynamics changed significantly. In societies that follow patrilineal descent, where genealogical ties are traced through the father, women found themselves marginalized by sexual control and societal organization this time. Within the patriarchal system, male dominance was established on the basis of controlling female sexuality. Men not only regulated women's conduct but also dictated their way of life after marriage by imposing expectations of chastity and loyalty to their spouses, ultimately leading to women's exclusion from public life. As a result, the public and political spheres became exclusively reserved for men (Ecevitoglu, 2012, pp. 475-476).

In contrast to matriarchal times when women's fertility held sacred significance due to an unknown role for men in reproduction, during patriarchy, there was an emphasis placed on men's role in lineage reproduction, which reduced women's fertility solely to serving as surrogates. To ensure the reproduction of labor, vital for capitalist relations of production, the need to control women's fertility has persisted into the modern era (Acar-Savran & Demiryontan, 2008, p. 22).

Throughout history, male dominance and the resulting patriarchal society have persisted to this day, albeit with variations across different societies and countries. It is crucial to highlight three key aspects of these orders: Firstly, the rise of male domination was influenced by economic advancements and inter-tribal conflicts. Men gained prominence in agriculture and animal husbandry, establishing themselves as leaders through tribal disputes. Subsequently, they seized control over governance and leadership roles within their communities. Meanwhile, women became increasingly reliant on men during this period. The second aspect involves the emergence of private property ownership and men asserting dominion over women as possessions. Fathers claimed ownership over women, children, and enslaved people within families while also gaining the right to exercise authority, including life or death decisions. Lastly, those in power – in both public and private spheres – viewed women as a means of perpetuating their lineage while safeguarding family assets from external influence without foreign interference, given that it is associated with tradition; today, it remains intertwined with these fundamental characteristics.

Men have historically held greater economic and social power as the heads of their families. They transitioned from hunters to warriors, responsible for guarding the community and managing food resources. As private property emerged, men became the leaders of large families, while women were often viewed as objects of exchange and carriers of economic value, placing them in a lower position. Men's control over women's bodies became a means of enforcing moral rules and defining honor in accordance with their own sexual, economic, and social interests (Cooney, 2014; Thrasher & Handfield, 2018).

According to Morgan (2015), Engels (1986), and Reich (1995), the subjugation and control of women were deeply rooted in society and were further strengthened with economic growth, societal differentiation, and the emergence of classes. This led to the

establishment of moral codes and the concept of honor. In today's world, if we want to combat gender inequality, we cannot overthrow the core institutions of the gender-based power structure without addressing class politics since these institutions perpetuate both gender and class domination (Connell, 1998, p. 413). The reason behind the connection between patriarchy and modern-day capitalism is because patriarchy, which has existed for thousands of years, and capitalism, particularly through the unpaid and invisible labor of women in the home, work together to reduce the cost of labor power and its reproduction (Acar-Savran, 2018, pp. 18-19).

When considering honor as a phenomenon that contributes to the "domestication" of women within the home, family, or private sphere, it becomes apparent that it is closely linked to the relations of production in several ways: women's labor in the private sphere is normalized and considered inherent to their nature; the extent of this labor is often overlooked as it does not involve standard working hours; it remains unseen because it is not financially compensated (Acar-Savran, 2008, p. 11; Rogers, 2005). This hidden labor constitutes an essential component of patriarchal capitalism. It should be noted that Türkiye serves as an example in this article for evaluating honor-related phenomena with significant impacts on traditional society segments. The country exhibits strong reflections of patriarchal capitalism due to its economy being predominantly intertwined with capitalist structures and a secular-modern legal framework.

The so-called "modern" liberal order that replaced the feudal society and state structure, which treated women as objects of lineage and property, has also exhibited patriarchal characteristics that are detrimental to women. McKinnon (2015) maintains that the liberal state shapes the social order with a male-centric perspective. Due to the liberal state's emphasis on objectivity in law, it does not intervene in gender discrimination and inequality, thereby contributing to its perpetuation. This is because liberalism sees individuals as free to act as they please in their private lives. Consequently, the state has enabled and participated in the oppression and violence directed towards women by men in positions of power within the household. The patriarchal order's male dominance is reflected in the liberal state, thus institutionalizing the masculine character of the liberal state structure.

Similarly, Fatmagül Berktaş (2015, p. 37) argues that the liberal state's notion of an "individual" is inherently male because women are denied citizenship rights in the private sphere, which is essentially the home. Even though John Stuart Mill (2017, pp. 30-31) addressed the issue of women's subjugation in his work *The Subjection of Women*, published in 1869, his voice was relatively weak compared to the dominant understanding of his time. Liberal thought was generally not sensitive to the issue of women's rights. Mill did, however, acknowledge that women's dependence on men, much like slavery, was based on the "law of force," which is a law based on power rather than the fact of existence. He also noted that men who held physical power also held legal (public/political) power in this way.

The distinction between public and private spheres, as posited by liberal theory, is of great importance for our discussion. Beyond being an analytical distinction, this separation functions as a structural distinction and serves the reproduction of capitalist patriarchy. Moreover, a conceptualization of "publicness" that excludes the economic dimension, in Nancy Fraser's (1989, p. 168) words, leads to the depoliticization of many issues by either economizing, personalizing, or familializing them since what is "political" in a male-

dominated capitalist society is defined in opposition to what is “economic” and “domestic” or “personal.”

Moreover, there are arguments that the public/private distinction is specific to Western societies and that in traditional Eastern societies, it is replaced by the *mahram/namahram* distinction, reflecting the influence of culture in shaping gender division (Ilyasoglu, 1994, pp. 110- 111). In Islamic culture, there is a distinction made between individuals with whom one can or cannot have physical and social interaction based on their gender and relationship. *Mahram* pertains to those with whom one shares a close familial bond that excludes the possibility of marriage, allowing for more relaxed interactions without strict dress codes or physical segregation. This category typically encompasses immediate family members like parents, siblings, and children, as well as select extended family members such as grandparents, grandchildren, and in-laws based on varying interpretations. On the other hand, non-*mahram* (*namahram*) refers to individuals with whom marriage is allowed; therefore, adherence to Islamic rules regarding modesty and interaction is required. This entails maintaining distance, observing appropriate attire, and possibly refraining from private conversations or meetings according to a particular understanding of the concept (Krisjanous *et al.*, 2022; Sehlkoglou, 2016).

Turning back to the distinction between the public and private sphere, this serves a dual purpose as an explanation of women’s subordinate position and an ideology that constructs it (Davidoff, 2002, p. 190). Legal and administrative decisions, conditions, and rules in these areas also determine the level of gender inequality. The public/private distinction has existed from Ancient Greece to the present day. The concept of private space, based on the *oikos/polis* dichotomy, is where basic life needs, such as nutrition and reproduction, are met (Davidson, 2011; Elshtain, 1981; Foxhall, 1989; Hansson, 2008). On the other hand, the public sphere is where social, political, and civil interactions and communicative actions occur.

Feminist theories that question the division between public and private spheres argue that the private sphere, which includes the home and family, should also be a focus of public research. However, since individual relationships and family are considered to be part of the private sphere, they are seen as “non-political,” excluded from the public sphere, and depoliticized. The public-private sphere dichotomy, which is a reflection of gender roles, was supported and developed by 18th and 19th-century thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Immanuel Kant. For instance, according to Rousseau, the family cannot participate in the social contract since it cannot provide the neutrality required for the establishment of the general will (Berns, 2005; Fermon, 1994; Fox-Genovese & Schwartz, 1985; Schmitz, 2004). This distinction prevented women from engaging in politics and business, thus reinforcing women’s dependence and social invisibility.

In terms of gender equality and violence against women, there is a noticeable division where men are associated with the public sphere and women with the private sphere. In patriarchal social structures, masculine authority is often confined to the outside world, while women are expected to manage affairs within the home. This pattern extends to various levels in modern state settings as well. It originates from the perception of women being more closely linked to nature because of their fertility, while men are viewed as transcending nature and responsible for creating and owning culture (Hunter, 1988; Trigger, 2003; Walby, 1989).

In examining the patriarchal character of liberal theory from a feminist perspective, Berkday (2015, pp. 37-39) points out that the liberal state pursues a policy of strengthening male power by regulating the public sphere but not the private sphere. Feminists argue that gender inequality persists because the gendered division of labor in society is viewed as a natural problem rather than a political one (Acar-Savran, 2002, p. 267; Özgün, 2012, p. 355). In other words, the unequal distribution of labor between men and women is seen as a normal and acceptable state of affairs. This is where the feminist proposition of “the private is political” comes in. The feminist movement has been emphasizing this idea since the 1970s. It aims to highlight that women’s lives in the private sphere are not separate from the political sphere; thus, gender inequality is a political issue. The idea questions the power of masculine culture, ideology, or power structures that restrict women’s roles to the domestic sphere, rendering them “untouchable” by confining them to the private sphere and far from achieving gender equality.

The development of human rights and women’s human rights

The 1789 French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, as well as the United Nations’s (UN) 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, mention equality, freedom, and brotherhood for human beings. However, they only refer to “man,” with no acknowledgment or recognition of men’s historical dominance over women (Clinton, 1975; National Assembly of France, 2008; Morsink, 1999; United Nations, n. d.). This is evident in their economic exploitation, restriction from education, sexual control over their bodies, decision-making authority on behalf of women, treating them as property – effectively confining them to the private sphere while excluding them from public life.

Both declarations take a “neutral” approach that reflects a patriarchal understanding equating “man” with “human being.” The failure to legally regulate domestic matters within liberal states represents a violation of women’s human rights by feminists who argue that such legal institutions are inherently masculine. Despite overthrowing feudalism through revolutionary struggle and redefining societal hierarchies, liberal states did not fully recognize “women’s human rights,” leaving them in a social context reminiscent of medieval times.

Since the French Revolution, where women leaders demanding equality went to the guillotine, to the establishment of the UN after World War II, women have fought for “women’s human rights” without achieving universal progress. However, with public pressure from effective feminist movements in the 1960s, the UN organized a special convention on the mistreatment of women... The UN’s 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) stands as an important milestone as it is the first international regulation focusing on “women’s human rights” (Joachim, 2018; Okin, 1998; Tinker, 1981). The fact that it took until 1979 for such a regulation to be established indicates that male domination over women has been deeply ingrained in the social and political order. This dominance persisted through hundreds of years, and its effects can still be seen today, particularly in Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries. It underscores how issues faced by women living under male dominance are both ideological and political – including honor killings. Henceforth, the struggle for “women’s human rights” is inseparable from a broader political battle led by feminist movements; one cannot ignore this point: oppression experienced by women under

male dominion goes beyond cultural-ideological-legal-political dynamics; at its core lies a relationship rooted in exploitation (Acar-Savran & Demiryontan, 2008, p. 17).

Relatedly, there are two approaches to human rights. The first asserts that human rights should apply equally to all individuals based on a universal understanding of human rights. The second contends that human rights may vary based on cultural and religious norms across different countries or regions (Okin, 1998; Rose, 1999; Simuziya, 2021; UKEssays, 2021). This perspective is known as cultural relativism. However, this approach is often used to justify the oppression of women and uphold male dominance and control, making it unacceptable.

To comprehend honor killings, it is crucial to examine the reasons why moral codes centered on regulating women's sexuality and the concept of honor, which can lead to murder, are more widespread in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions. Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge that these practices have persisted until today.

The Mediterranean and Middle East regions have moral codes as significant as their founding laws. This is due primarily to the societies' anthropological specificity. According to Pınar Ecevitoglu (2012, p. 336), this specificity originates from the concept of "honor," which is closely related to the sexually oriented idea of "shame." The woman is regarded as the upholder of honor, which is defined as the protection of her sexual innocence, while the man is seen as the possessor of honor, which is derived from the woman's honor. This dynamic leads to male dominance. The man has the right to use force to safeguard the woman's chastity and, as a result, his lineage's purity. He perceives the woman as a biological entity that can tarnish his lineage's purity by "defiling" her chastity. This possibility gives him a fatal "authority" that justifies honor killings.

Although honor is one of the central concepts that shape daily life and influence value judgments in Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies, its influence may vary based on a woman's social class, location, and level of education, but it permeates all levels of society. Tahincioğlu (2011) conducted a face-to-face study with villagers, urban migrants from rural areas, as well as educated men and women, which confirmed this observation. The social structure centered around kinship revealed in studies such as Abu Ludhog's (2004) work on Bedouins and Germaine Tillon's (2006) research in Maghreb countries, along with religious and cultural justifications presented by countries like Egypt, Libya, Bangladesh, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates for their reservations to CEDAW further shed light on these reasons. The persistence of moral regulations, including honor killings, can be attributed to semi-feudal relations still existing within the region's socio-economic fabric despite attempts to use cultural or religious sentiments for justification. This explains why honor killings are prevalent in this region while being almost non-existent in more democratic and economically advanced Western societies.

Traditionalism holds strong sway in societies where semi-feudal production and the associated social structures persist. This is evident in the acceptance and even tacit approval of honor killings. In these communities, a significant portion supports those who commit murder in defense of their honor, while only a minority condemns such actions (Tezcan, 2003). The prevalence of honor killings reflects the deep-rooted notion of societal honor. The leniency shown towards perpetrators in countries like Türkiye until recent years or exempting them from punishment, as seen in Syria until 2009, further underscores this point. Indeed, the tolerance and reverence accorded to individuals who commit honor

killings within Turkish society – including within prisons – highlight an enduring support for male control over women’s sexuality by some segments of society.

In Türkiye, it has been observed that honor killings have moved from rural to urban areas. Despite the changes in the understanding of honor due to higher education levels and urban settlement, the underlying principles of honor remain intact (Tahincioğlu, 2011). This means that as individuals and families migrate from rural to urban areas, they bring with them their traditional and cultural beliefs, including those related to honor and controlling women’s sexuality. This transition does not necessarily lead to a complete abandonment of traditional values and practices but instead involves a negotiation between traditional norms and the modernizing influences of the urban lifestyle. In the case of honor killings, this means that while urbanization may lead to changes in the understanding of honor, the underlying power dynamics and fundamental principles remain entrenched (Erman, 1998, 2001; Schnaiberg, 1970).

Moreover, the experience of migrant communities in urban areas is characterized by a contrast between traditional values and the realities of urban life. This contrast leads to tensions and conflicts within families and communities as they struggle to balance preserving cultural identity while adapting to the changing urban landscape. Therefore, the persistence of the honor phenomenon and its associated practices, such as honor killings, reflect the enduring influence of patriarchal and traditional norms within urban spaces.

In summary, the phenomenon of honor and its manifestations, including honor killings, persist even in urban spaces after migration. The intergenerational transfer of cultural values, combined with the lasting impact of patriarchal norms, contributes to the continuation of the honor phenomenon within urban settings. A holistic approach is necessary to address this phenomenon, which acknowledges the intersections of culture, tradition, and urbanization in shaping attitudes and behaviors related to honor and women’s rights.

Combating violence against women in Türkiye: Change of politico-legal realm and transformation of socio-mentality

Since the beginning of the 1920s, Türkiye’s official definition of gender equality was “equal rights for women and men.” Many legal and institutional arrangements were put in place to achieve this goal. In the 1990s, there was an improvement in the women’s movement’s understanding of this issue. When Türkiye became a candidate for EU membership in 1999, there was increased attention on achieving gender equality through policies and amendments to basic laws to end discrimination against women. The EU process provided opportunities for legal changes that would advance gender equality (Ecevit, 2004). During this period, the women’s movement and civil society activism actively influenced changes in established policies and norms while advocating for new policy demands. However, it is argued that a conservative and patriarchal value system has become increasingly prominent in Türkiye in recent years. These values have significantly impacted family and social policies as they align with an official discourse that undermines gender equality and promotes traditional gender roles (Acar & Altunok, 2013, p. 16).

Although Türkiye differs from other Middle Eastern countries with its formal democratic and secular structure, it has not yet been able to prevent honor killings and femicide despite significant gains in this direction. On the contrary, the increase in femicides

every year shows that the problem is intensifying beyond the classical definition of honor killings. For example, according to data from the We Will Stop Femicide Platform (2024), the total number of women's deaths, either suspiciously or femicides, has been very high (Figure 1). In 2023, the reasons for 58% of the femicides remained unknown. Lack of identification regarding the motives and individuals responsible for violence against women hinders accountability and proactive measures. When the motive is known, approximately 70% of women were murdered due to their desire to assert independence in decision-making about their lives. This suggests that women are frequently victimized for asserting their autonomy, particularly in situations involving relationship endings or marital separation (We Will Stop Femicide Platform, 2024).

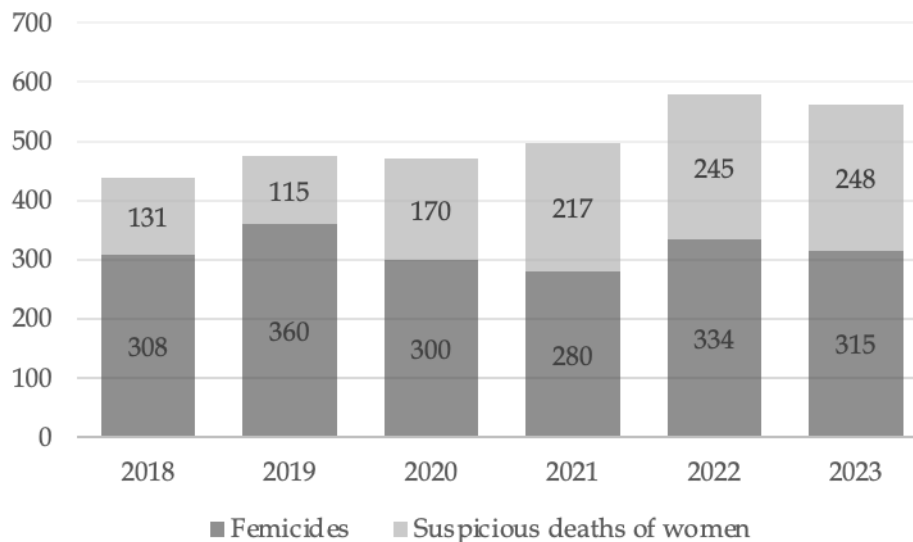


Figure 1. Femicides and suspicious deaths of women between 2018 and 2023

Source: The author tabulated the data collected from the We Will Stop Femicide Platform (2024).

Türkiye was not only one of the first signatories but also the first country to ratify the Istanbul Convention without any reservations. This took place in 2011, and the Convention itself is named after Istanbul, where it was opened for signature. The Istanbul Convention represents a significant milestone in the fight against gender-based violence as it is the first legally binding treaty in Europe that creates a comprehensive framework to prevent violence against women, protect victims, and end the impunity of perpetrators. By ratifying the Convention, member states are compelled to adopt a series of legislative and other measures, including criminalizing psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence, including rape, and all forms of violence against women. The Convention also established a specific monitoring mechanism to ensure the parties effectively implement its provisions. Also, the 5th paragraph of Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention explicitly rejects the concept of cultural relativism. It addresses cultural issues such as “honor” with a universal understanding of human rights, stating: “Parties shall ensure that culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called ‘honor’ shall not be considered as justification for any acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention” (Council of Europe, 2024a; Council of Europe, 2024b). Essentially, this clause establishes the principle that no cultural or traditional argument can be accepted as a valid excuse for committing acts of violence against women. It is a firm stance against cultural relativism that can sometimes be invoked to excuse gender-based violence, reaffirming that human rights and

the safety of individuals shall not be compromised by adherence to traditional beliefs or practices that perpetuate violence.

Türkiye's initial endorsement of this perspective was an influential moment, signaling to both Europe and the world its commitment to addressing and combating violence against women at the highest level of policy and legislation. However, Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 has raised international concern about the potential impact on protecting women's rights in the country.

Many proponents of Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention argue that the Convention undermines the traditional family structure and promotes Western values that are not in line with Türkiye's cultural and religious beliefs (Aksoy, 2021; Çevik, 2020; Yeni Akit, 2020). There are arguments that the Convention imposes a single approach to address gender-based violence, neglecting Türkiye's cultural and religious diversity. It is argued that the Istanbul Convention's emphasis on gender equality and non-discrimination does not align with Turk Türkiye's traditional gender roles and family structure. Some critics believe that the Convention undermines the values of Turkish society and imposes Western ideals of gender equality without considering the cultural context and specific needs of Turkish women. These arguments are present in both Islamic newspapers like *Milli Gazete* and *Yeni Akit*, as well as "mainstream" press like *Sabah*. They place feminism and homosexuality as the most severe threat to "family." For example, according to a conservative woman columnist, the foundation of the family institution is undermined by the imposition of "genderlessness" initiated by the feminist-homosexual movement (Kaplan, 2020a). She finds it troubling that the Istanbul Convention aligns with the rhetoric used by the homosexual movement in asserting that violence should not be inflicted on individuals due to their "sexual orientation" (Kaplan, 2020b). Additionally, some critics believe that the Convention infringes on national sovereignty by dictating specific legal and policy measures that member states must adopt. They argue that Türkiye should have the autonomy to develop its own strategies for addressing violence against women, considering its unique social and cultural dynamics (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

A study was conducted to analyze the news and columns published in the mainstream, left-leaning, and Islamic press when the discussions on Türkiye to withdraw from the Convention intensified. The study used critical discourse analysis to examine the arguments on the subject, which were divided into two opposing groups: egalitarian-feminist and sexist-conservative theses. The study discovered that Islamic newspapers generally utilized conservative arguments when discussing the Istanbul Convention. The discussions often revolved around concepts such as Muslimness, family, and the perceived danger of homosexuality. The news articles portrayed the Convention as damaging to the family values and incompatible with Islam, with calls for its abolition. The analysis of the news texts revealed that the Istanbul Convention was often associated with the word "depravation," suggesting that it was seen as disrupting the order and causing confusion (Kemahlı Garipoğlu & Sezer Şanlı, 2021, p. 182).

Given that it represents the "national will" or "people's sovereignty" that ratified the Convention, it is vital to examine the discussions that took place within the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) to understand the perspectives regarding the withdrawal issue. For this purpose, the speeches refer to the "Istanbul Convention" at the TBMM in the fourth legislative year of the 27th legislative term, from 01 October 2020 to 17 July 2021. This period included intense discussions about the withdrawal from the Convention, which was ultimately decided by the President. Since critical discourse analysis is an approach that

examines how discourses are structured in the social context and how they reflect and reproduce power relations (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993), we employed this method to examine the parliamentary minutes and investigate patriarchal power relations.

Our analysis confirmed that the parliamentary speeches were divided into two expected categories: those favoring the Istanbul Convention to promote gender equality (considered feminist) and those against the Convention, expressing sexist or conservative views. Feminist themes, which often include the views of left-wing or secular nationalist MPs, are as follows:

(1) *Increasing Violence Against Women*: It has been emphasized that violence against women has increased, and the number of femicides has risen after the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. This theme included codes such as “honor killings,” “femicides,” and “increasing violence.” To illustrate this theme, a member of parliament from the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) stated: “The issue of femicide is Türkiye’s shame. This cannot be solved by adding one or two articles to the omnibus bill. The problem lies in the changing mentality of the police, judiciary, politicians, women’s human rights, and gender equality.” Another MP from the Good Party (İyi Parti) argued that “Femicide is one of the most critical and persistent issues on Türkiye’s agenda.”

(2) *Responsibility of the State*: It has been maintained that the state has not fulfilled its obligation to protect women, and withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention violates this obligation. It has been frequently stated that the state should take measures to prevent, protect, and punish violence. This theme included codes such as “state obligation,” “protective measures,” and “impunity.” For instance, reminding the duties imposed on the state by the Istanbul Convention, an MP from the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) said: “Preventing violence imposes obligations on the state, regardless of who commits the violence, whether it is the woman’s husband, lover, father, or boss.” Another MP maintained that “Preventing femicide and crimes against women requires the effective implementation of existing laws and the development of policies combating sexism.”

(3) *Gender Equality*: The Istanbul Convention has been cited as a crucial part of the efforts to achieve gender equality. Withdrawing from this agreement is seen as a setback for women’s rights. Phrases such as “gender equality,” “women’s rights,” and “step back” were used under this theme. To address this issue, one member of parliament stated, “All executive stakeholders should adopt and implement social measures and cultural changes that envisage equality between men and women.” Another member of parliament emphasized, “No tradition or social value is superior to human rights or women’s rights. Women’s and LGBT rights are human rights, and people exist with these rights. Removing the Istanbul Convention is a form of misogyny.”

(4) *International Commitments*: It was emphasized that the Istanbul Convention is an international obligation, and Türkiye must fulfill it. It was argued that Türkiye would lose its reputation in the international arena by terminating the Convention. This theme included codes such as “international liability,” “loss of reputation,” and “termination of the convention.” Regarding this theme, an MP from the CHP stated, “The Istanbul Convention is the Council of Europe’s first binding international agreement on combating violence against women and domestic violence. Türkiye’s becoming a party to this Convention is a significant commitment to prevent violence against women in the international arena. Withdrawing from the Convention would cause Türkiye to lose its reputation in the international arena. This situation calls into question the reliability of our country in the

international arena.” Another CHP MP expressed similar views: “We affirm that the Istanbul Convention is binding for Türkiye and clearly outlines the state’s responsibilities in preventing violence against women. Adhering to this agreement is an obligation within the framework of international law.” Another HDP MP expressed, “The Istanbul Convention establishes an international standard for combating violence against women and places crucial obligations on the participating states. Türkiye’s decision to withdraw from this agreement signifies a failure to meet its international commitments. Withdrawal will result in a significant loss of international reputation. Our standing as a leading advocate in the fight against violence towards women will be compromised.”

The conservative themes, primarily representing the views of members of parliament from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its ally, the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), are as follows:

(1) *Family Values*: There have been claims that the Istanbul Convention negatively impacts the traditional family structure and increases divorces. Some argue that the Convention harms the family, citing concerns about family values and the potential for the dissolution of families. For example, prior to the withdrawal from the Convention, a member of parliament from the AKP stated, “It has been claimed that the Istanbul Convention disrupts the family structure and harms social morality, leading to the dispersion and elimination of families.” Another member of parliament commented, “The Istanbul Convention includes provisions that promote divorces. We believe that the traditional family structure should be safeguarded.” Another MP from the Good Party remarked, “Our society is a familial society. We will meticulously observe the rights and laws of our entire nation, especially those of our women, men, children, and the young and old in all our families. This Convention contains elements that threaten our traditional family structure.”

(2) *Homosexuality and Social Norms*: The Istanbul Convention has been criticized for allegedly normalizing homosexuality and disrupting social norms. Conservative groups have expressed discomfort with the treaty, citing concerns about the normalization of homosexuality and its impact on traditional values. The codes “homosexuality,” “social norms,” and “conservative discomfort” were evaluated in relation to this theme. For example, an MHP MP stated, “The Istanbul Convention contains provisions that normalize homosexuality, threatening our social norms and values.” Similarly, an AKP MP remarked, “This Convention goes against the values and norms of our society, promoting homosexuality. Therefore, we had to withdraw from the Convention.” Another MHP MP highlighted the conservative discomfort, stating, “The discomfort of conservative segments towards the Istanbul Convention cannot be ignored. This agreement harms our family structure and values.”

(3) *Sovereignty and National Values*: It has been argued that the West imposed the Istanbul Convention and is against Türkiye’s sovereignty. It has been stated that this Convention is not compatible with national values. The codes of “Western imposition,” “sovereignty,” and “national values” are combined under this theme. Before the decision to withdraw, an AKP MP stated, “We do not have to submit to the impositions of international agreements; we must make decisions that are in line with our own values.” After the withdrawal, he said, “Our decision to withdraw from the Convention was taken to protect Türkiye’s national sovereignty.”

(4) *Legal and Political Justifications*: The decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention was justified on legal and political grounds. It was argued that the withdrawal by presidential decree was a constitutional right granted to the President and a political decision. The key points included in the discussion were “legal justification,” “political decision,” and “Presidential decree.” An MP from the AKP stated, “Our decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention is a legal necessity. We acted as required by our Constitution.” On the other hand, an MHP member of parliament expressed, “The decision to withdraw from the Convention is a political choice. This choice was made in accordance with the values and needs of our society.”

After mentioning the discussions on withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, it is also essential to counter these claims with fact-based information and from the perspectives of universal human rights and the rule of law. Firstly, despite being approved by the Turkish parliament and having only a seven percent opposition rate among the Turkish public (KONDA, 2020), President Erdoğan withdrew Türkiye from the Istanbul Convention through a presidential decree. This move can be seen as a violation of international law, which holds priority over national legislation according to the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye, as well as a challenge to the power of the parliament (Apaydin, 2022; Pirim, 2022, p. 579; Türközü, 2021).

Secondly, viewing the Istanbul Convention as an imposition of foreign powers or disregarding national sovereignty is unrealistic. This is because the Convention was unanimously approved by all parties in the parliament, including the government and opposition. This means that the parliament demonstrated “national” unity against violence towards women. Furthermore, Türkiye played an active role in preparing the Convention. At the time it was signed, there were two Turkish representatives in the European Council: Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu was the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, a member of parliament from the ruling Justice and Development Party, was elected as the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Thirdly, the Convention is fundamentally about protecting human rights and providing safety and justice for victims of gender-based violence, which are universal values rather than exclusively Western ones. The Convention’s measures are not aimed at undermining families but at protecting their members from violence and abuse. Furthermore, gender-based violence is a critical issue that affects individuals in all societies, and addressing it does not conflict with preserving cultural and religious identities. Additionally, gender equality and the fight against violence are often seen as integral to moral values, as many faiths and cultures advocate for the dignity and worth of every individual. Measures to prevent violence and protect victims are not antithetical to these beliefs but complement them. It is also important to note that the concept of family need not be rigidly defined; it can be inclusive and respectful of the rights and safety of all its members.

Fourthly, contrary to the framing of the Convention as a promotion of “genderlessness,” it recognizes that gender roles are socially constructed (Article 3/c), not natural. Rather than “genderlessness,” the Convention seeks to ensure that all people, regardless of their gender, have the right to live free from violence and discrimination – principles that are consistent with the human rights frameworks to which Türkiye has committed itself as a member of the international community. Moreover, the Convention explicitly recognizes the need for culturally sensitive implementation of its measures,

allowing countries the flexibility to address gender-based violence within their specific social and cultural contexts. To illustrate, after the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in the TBMM in 2012, the “Law on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women” (Law No. 6284) was enacted.

The Law No. 6284 in 2012 met with overall positive reception. However, due to the legislator’s emphasis on protecting the family institution and moral concerns instead of a rights-based approach to prevent violence against women, international standards and expectations were not fully met. The policymaking strategy here failed to establish the theoretical link between gender-based violence against women and gender inequality in general (Acar & Altunok, 2013, p. 19). Violence against women was not widely recognized as a severe violation of their human rights within the broader framework of human rights. Instead, it was often viewed simply as physical violence and believed to be preventable through measures outlined in the penal code.

Moreover, women are often perceived as victims in need of protection, and violence against them is seen as a threat to the institution of the family. Women subjected to physical violence are offered protection within the family rather than being protected in society in terms of social, political, or economic equality. The forms of gender-based violence are detailed in academic studies and state research reports; however, they do not receive sufficient attention in national policymaking. For instance, while early marriage is acknowledged as a type of violence in international agreements such as the Istanbul Convention, it is not classified as a form of gender-based violence in Turkish legislative and policymaking procedures (Acar *et al.*, 2007).

Finally, violence should never be justified or overlooked on the basis of protecting cultural or family values. The protection of human rights, including the rights of women and LGBTQ+ individuals, should be the cornerstone of any society aiming to be democratic and respectful of its citizens’ dignity and safety. The resistance to gender equality by striking against the Istanbul Convention aims to delegitimize the norm that it embodies, which is ending gender violence (Berthet, 2022). A study on social media confirms how certain groups reframed their opposition to the Convention by leveraging homophobia as a tool to restrict women’s rights, aiming for a wider appeal. According to this study, especially the groups formed by divorced men, who argue that Law No. 6284’s provisions favor women and are particularly critical of the new alimony regulations, have tactically reframed the reference to “sexual orientation” in Article 4/3 of the Convention as promoting homosexuality to garner more backing from conservative, Islamist, and homophobic factions within Turkish society. These groups worked together with *Yeni Akit*, an Islamist and pro-government newspaper that is known for its opposition to the Convention (Elmas, Overdorf & Aberer, 2021). Unsurprisingly, the ruling alliance used similar tactics to vilify the opposition during the 2023 Elections. Therefore, another dimension of the instrumentalization of the Istanbul Convention against the opposition by the ruling alliance, which blends conservative, ultra-nationalist, and Islamist elements, is the tendency towards authoritarianism. The withdrawal from the Convention is seen as a move to centralize power, legitimize authority, and repress opposition. Unfortunately, instead of addressing issues related to the Convention itself, this move is seen as an attempt to restrict democratic freedoms and become more authoritarian. Ultimately, this is an effort to solidify the ruling party’s voter base (Bayar, 2024; Cerami, 2021).

Critics of Türkiye’s decision to leave the Convention argue that it could set back years of progress in the fight against gender-based violence (Bengisu, 2021). The departure from

the Convention has been seen by many as a step away from the commitment to protect women's rights and could potentially weaken the existing mechanisms that prevent violence against women and femicide. The influence of this withdrawal on the actual number of femicides and violence against women in Türkiye remains a subject for empirical examination and research. However, it is often mentioned that eliminating legal protections and signaling a diminished state commitment to combating violence against women could negatively impact the rates of such violence. Withdrawal from the Convention could also discourage victims from coming forward and reporting abuse due to a potential lack of trust in the protection mechanisms provided by the state.

Although coping with the issues of honor killings and domestic violence requires comprehensive efforts, including legal frameworks like the Istanbul Convention, social and cultural change also plays a significant role in addressing the deep-rooted patriarchal values that contribute to violence against women (Aysan & Yurdakul, 2001; Kiener, 2011). Furthermore, successful strategies often involve collaboration between governments, legal systems, civil society, and international bodies to encourage a holistic approach to ending gender-based violence (International Federation for Human Rights, 2017).

Regarding the legal aspect, Türkiye should make the civil and criminal codes clearer and more effective in practice. The courts should monitor the implementation of restraining orders more effectively. Article 29 of the Turkish Penal Code, which regulates unjust provocation, should not be left open for perpetrators of femicide on the grounds of honor or other reasons. Women's shelters, which were officially launched in 2006 to save women from male violence, should be activated in all provinces and districts and made widespread and effective. For law enforcement and the judicial system to protect women before they are subjected to violence and become victims of honor killings, women's applications to the police and prosecutors' offices must be responded to quickly, and the most effective protection measures must be taken.

In the previous section, we discussed how the CEDAW has played a crucial role in recognizing women's human rights as a part of international law. Recent surveys conducted in Türkiye reveal that women are perceived as the group whose rights are violated the most, with a high percentage of up to 45%, followed by people experiencing poverty at 30% (KONDA, 2021, p. 20). This indicates that society has grown more sensitive towards women's human rights, with 61% of young people agreeing (KONDA, 2022, p. 47).

However, a study conducted before Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention highlights that while women are gaining more space and weight in daily life, they also trigger mental transformation in a rapidly urbanizing and metropolitanizing country. One clear indicator of this is the perception of "honor." The percentage of people who thought it was "absolutely wrong" to go beyond the law in matters of honor was 11% in 2010, but this increased to 36% in 2016 and 41% in 2020. A total of 67% of society finds this statement either "definitely wrong" or "wrong." The voters of the HDP, a political party with a high voting rate in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, where Kurds are predominantly living, agree with this statement at the highest rate, which suggests that Kurds are more attached to the traditional perception of honor beyond the right-left political divide. Age and religiosity are directly proportional to the agreement rates with this statement, while education and income are inversely proportional (KONDA, 2020, p. 17). Taken together, despite the setback caused by withdrawal from the Convention, these

findings suggest that the mental transformation triggered by the changing gender roles will likely become even stronger in the years to come.

Conclusion

The societal and cultural values that perpetuate gender-based violence are deeply rooted in the phenomenon of honor. Across many communities and cultures, the concept of honor is often associated with the control and ownership of women. This leads to the justification of violence against women as a means of restoring or preserving honor within family and community structures.

The notion of honor is frequently invoked to enforce traditional gender roles and to curtail the autonomy of women. Behaviors and choices that are perceived as challenging these traditional roles, such as asserting independence, refusing forced marriages, or seeking divorce, are often met with violence under the guise of protecting family honor.

In the context of gender-based violence in Türkiye, the phenomenon of honor plays a significant role in perpetuating violence against women. It influences societal perceptions and responses to such violence, often leading to victim-blaming and impunity for perpetrators. Furthermore, the lack of recognition of certain forms of gender-based violence, such as early marriage, within legislative and policymaking processes reflects the embedded nature of these harmful cultural norms.

To truly address and eliminate gender-based violence, it is essential to challenge and transform the underlying notions of honor that contribute to the subjugation and mistreatment of women. This requires a comprehensive shift in societal attitudes, legal frameworks, and policy approaches to prioritize gender equality and the protection of women's rights.

The struggle for gender equality and eradicating gender-based violence should not be confined to feminist movements alone; it is a collective endeavor that demands the engagement of diverse segments of society, political parties, trade unions, and new social movements. By challenging the deeply ingrained patriarchal values and interests that underpin societal structures, a meaningful revolution in mentality can be achieved, paving the way for concrete and sustainable gender equality. Since there is a fine line between men appropriating the bodies of women they are close to and appropriating their labor, and this transformative endeavor must consider the class basis of capitalist patriarchy and production relations. It should emphasize how the struggle for gender equality is interconnected with broader social, economic, and political dynamics. In other words, this revolution of mentality cannot be viewed as a change limited to the ideological sphere and in an external relationship with the material ground; instead, it should start with an analysis of the relations of production and the class basis of capitalist patriarchy.

In essence, the phenomenon of honor must be critically examined and dismantled as part of the more extensive pursuit of gender equality, social justice, and freedom for all individuals. In the Turkish context, the discussions about withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention and the decision to do so are consequential because they indicate how patriarchal reactionary impulses hinder these goals.

Our analysis of the discussions in the TBMM about withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention revealed that feminist perspectives emphasized the importance of women's rights and gender equality. They highlighted the state's responsibility in preventing

violence against women as outlined in the Istanbul Convention. Feminist MPs pointed out that the Convention provides international legal protections and expressed concerns that these protections would be weakened by the decision to withdraw. These discussions underscored that violence against women is rooted in gender inequality and emphasized the need to eliminate this inequality.

While feminist approaches aim to address the patriarchal power structures present in society, conservative arguments oppose the Convention, arguing that it disrupts family dynamics and undermines social morality. Politicians in this view often emphasize national sovereignty and traditional values, claiming that the Convention does not align with local values. Additionally, they argue that the Convention promotes LGBTI+ rights, which they believe poses a threat to the existing social structure.

In conclusion, this analysis demonstrates how the discussions about the Istanbul Convention in the TBMM reflect social power struggles and how these discussions shape ideological positions in the fight for gender equality. This conflict between feminist and conservative discourses can be seen as a reflection of social values, power dynamics, and the battle for women's rights in Türkiye.

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