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CONFERENCE REPORT

Simply for Being a Woman: Conference on Femicide (20.03.2023, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation University, Istanbul)

Berna TERZİ ESKİN¹

SIRF KADIN OLDUĞU İÇİN: KADIN CİNAYETLERİ ÇALIŞTAYI

20 MART 2023 | PAZARTESİ
SAAT: 09:00 - 17:30

ÜSKÜDAR
YERLEŞKESİ



¹ **Corresponding author:** Berna Terzi Eskin, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Turkish Language and Literature, Istanbul, Türkiye, E-mail: bterzieskin@fsm.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0002-3169-9171

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On Monday, March 20, 2023; a three-session conference titled “*Sırf Kadın Olduğu İçin: Kadın Cinayetleri*” (Simply for Being a Woman: Femicide) was organized by Community Research and Application Center of Fatih Sultan Mehmet University in collaboration with the Andalusian Idea and Art Student Club at the university’s Üsküdar campus. Academics, representatives from civil society organizations, and field researchers from various disciplines attended the conference.

The Chairperson of the Conference Organizing Committee, Dr. Zeynep Kevser Şerefoğlu Danış, stated that the primary motivation for organizing the conference was to clarify the debates on how discussions on femicides are conducted and which cases are included under femicide. She mentioned that the committee aimed to focus on the extent to which the law can provide deterrence against femicides in theory and practice, the reasons why it may fail to do so, and proposals for improvement. She mentioned that they also aimed to address the aspects of femicide that are reflected in the media, along with the problems that arise from such reflection, and to find solutions to these issues.

In the first session of the conference where femicide is discussed around disciplines such as law, sociology, and philosophy, Assoc. Prof. Gülay Arslan Öncü delivered her presentation titled “Femicide as a Form of Discrimination and CEDAW”. Arslan Öncü first addressed the phenomenon of gender-based femicides, emphasizing the need for new concepts and strategies, and clarified the concept of femicide used for gender-based killings and discussed which killings are considered within the scope of femicide. In this context, she stated that the victim is deprived of life due to her gender and that is what characterizes femicide. She also stated that femicide is a severe and unacceptable violation of the most fundamental right of women and girls, which is the right to life. After Arslan Öncü, Prof. Dr. Gülsün Ayhan Aygörmez presented her paper titled “How Much Does Criminal Law Protect Women?”. Aygörmez expressed that criminal law would be the last step to take in terms of protecting woman and the law would be in effect when it comes to punishing the offender rather than protecting the victim. She also pointed out that the first thing to do is to work on preventing the crime. Aygörmez claimed that no matter how long the offender stays in prison, the potential risk may continue if they do not participate in a development program that addresses the conditions that led them to commit the crime, and added that the possibility of psychological and psychiatric assistance for the offender could be particularly effective in preventing the crime from happening again.

Asst. Prof. Nursem Keskin Aksay, who addressed the issue from a sociological perspective, stated in her presentation titled “The Mental and Social Background of

Femicides” that women have been positioned as objects since Plato and Aristotle, and have only been considered in terms of reproduction and the continuity of the lineage, and as such, they have been accepted as a dark entity without knowledge or competence. She revealed that the philosophical perspective has not changed over the centuries, and women have been viewed as a passive creature defined in the private sphere, and these fundamental ideas still affect the contemporary atmosphere. The final speaker of the session, Prof. Dr. Gülriz Uygur, highlighted the importance of terminological unity in her presentation titled “Understanding Femicides on the Basis of Gender Equality”. She stated that the concept of femicides can also be discussed within the framework of concepts such as “*kadın kırım*” (women-killing/femicide) or “*cins kırım*” (gender-based killing). She underlined that the lack of clarity in terminology leads to using hegemonic language and makes it difficult to find an answer to the question of what the indicator of gender-based violence is in cases of femicide.

In the second session, the presentations were about violence against women with a focus on law, femicides within the framework of hate crimes, and femicide within the context of criminal law. Firstly, Prof. Dr. Bertil Emrah Oder presented his paper titled “Violence Against Women: Counter Movements, Civil Society and Judicial Protection”. Oder explained that movements opposing gender equality are mainly focused on custody, alimony, household relationships, fathers’ rights, behaviours/acts of divorced fathers, and, most importantly, discussions around gender identity. She acknowledged that this phenomenon is not only valid for Turkey, but similar issues can be observed in different geographies, continents, and countries as well. She also pointed out that this phenomenon appears as an intersection of less established democracies and established democracies. Oder drew attention to the existence of bar associations supporting strategic litigations, women’s movement representatives, and their support-coalition partnerships in Turkey. She also emphasized that, considering all these aspects, the fundamental mechanism that needs to be legally defended should be the one in the Law No. 6284. After Oder, Asst. Prof. Asuman Aytekin İnceoğlu took the floor and in her presentation titled “Evaluation of Femicides Within the Framework of Hate Crimes,” she discussed whether femicides should be considered as hate crimes and where the recent incidents of violence against women, intentional homicide, intentional injury, and other crimes should be positioned as aggravating factors. She stated that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe refers to “honour crimes” as hate crimes and expressed that she also believes that all murders based on discriminatory attitudes towards gender constitute hate crimes. She argued that a comprehensive policy is needed to eliminate inequality caused by gender roles. Aytekin İnceoğlu emphasized the need to use gender in the context of social gender perspective, not in the biological context in femicides.

The third speaker of the session was Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ozan Ercan Taşkın with his presentation titled “Femicide as a Crime in the Context of Criminal Law on Victims: A General Framework”. Taşkın pointed out the reason why murders are defined through women even though the killer is male, and underlined the need for criminal law to be defined through the victim. In this context, Taşkın expressed that the term ‘femicide’ is inclusive and also addressed the issue of unjust provocation, stating that no one deserves to die for anything they have done, such as infidelity. He emphasized that from this perspective, most of the women’s suicides could be considered as femicides, and underlined the need to address this issue as well.

The last speaker of the session was Elif Naz Arıkan, with her presentation titled “Traces of Femicide Concept in Turkish Criminal Law and Normative Suggestions.” Arıkan put an emphasis on the concept of femicide and claimed that women’s murders are the last link in a systematic chain of violence, and that the driving force behind these acts of killing is the desire to suppress women, control them within societal norms, and prevent them from determining their own destiny by using violence. When this aspect of the action is considered, Arıkan indicated that the most consistent solution is to include a regulation about killings with the motive of violence against women as a qualified form of intentional homicide. She stated that it would prevent the uncertainties and difficulties of proof that could arise from concepts such as misogyny and hatred against women, and also it would enable the legislator to exhibit an effective stance in the fight against violence targeting women and femicides by punishing the injustice involved in the act of murder targeting women with the intention of violence against women, more severely than the basic form of the murder crime.

In the third and final session of the program, two women’s organizations gave presentations to inform about what can be done before the occurrence of femicide and to raise awareness of the work being carried out in the field regarding the issue. First, Attorney Selin Nakıpoğlu from Mor Çatı Women’s Shelter Foundation gave information about the working area of Mor Çatı. Nakıpoğlu mentioned that the foundation adopts feminist principles as its working method and operates shelters for women and children in need of accommodation. She also noted that these shelters are kept confidential as part of security measures and that utmost attention is paid to ensure the safety of women staying in the foundation’s shelters in the city. Nakıpoğlu expressed the importance for the victimized women of being occasionally contacted by the police or the hospital inquiring about their safety or health status, respectively, to help them feel safe and secure while living under a restraining order or receiving medical treatment due to violence. Nakıpoğlu noted that it is not appropriate to refer to the accommodation facilities where women who have experienced violence seek shelter as temporary guest houses, because women and children who run away from violence in desperation cannot be considered as mere guests. Nakıpoğlu highlighted the issue

of women being forced to return to the place where they experienced violence due to the policy of not accepting boys over 12 years old in existing guesthouses. She stated that this is not the case in Mor Çatı Women's Shelter. Lastly, Nakıpoğlu explicated the importance of reporting and complaining about domestic violence, highlighting that everyone has a legal responsibility to stand against it. She also pointed out that as awareness increases, many women and children's lives can be saved.

The second field presentation was conducted by Zeynep Demir, the General Secretary of the Women and Democracy Association. Demir explicated that they conduct various activities to raise awareness about violence and to enable social transformation, while also advocating for positive change in legislation and policy-making circles. Demir focused on a new initiative of the association and mentioned that the Women's Support Center, which was established two years ago, aims of providing a case-based innovative support model to women residing in Istanbul. She stated that a team was established within the center to seek solutions to problems arising from being a woman and to provide psychological support. Demir emphasized that they aim to provide support that enables women to stand on their own feet, taking into account that each woman comes from different cultural backgrounds and may have different religious beliefs. She also stated that the solidarity groups were formed within the association, and they approach the women who consult for these groups according to their specific needs. Demir also mentioned that breastfeeding rooms and playrooms were arranged for the women and their children, and pointed out that while striving to provide top-level support to women in need, they do not force them or impose ready-made solutions during the support process.

After the presentations, case studies and field presentations; a conference session was held where all participants engaged in discussions and inquiries through question-and-answer format. The main focus of the conference was on the relationship between gender inequality and femicides. The majority of the participants emphasized that although criminal sanctions are important, they are not sufficient for deterrence. It was highlighted that it is of primary importance to reflect upon the cultural norms, root causes, and ultimately the societal perception of gender that underlie the idea that "a woman's life can be deemed disposable", "her death may not be seen as equally important as that of another gender", and "any action can justify her murder". It was pointed out that the main problem is the perception of women as "deserving to be killed" or "needing to be punished with death". The question of whether cultural norms, root causes, and existing gender perceptions can be considered as the precursor to the act of "planning a murder" was also opened up for discussion. It was noted that the term "murder of women" does not automatically label the male gender as killer/murderer. It has been demonstrated through tangible data that women can also commit femicide and that in the minds of those who have internalized patriarchy, murder can be associated with women.

The issue was thoroughly discussed from both theoretical and practical perspectives in the conference that involved many academics and professionals from the field, and created a diverse and interactive environment. The conference brought together academics with a focus on the field, representatives from women's research centers at universities in Istanbul, and individuals from women's organizations and non-governmental organizations that operate in the field of women issues in Turkey, all of whom contributed to the discussion with their questions, answers, and suggestions.

In addition, representatives from the Üsküdar District Governorate, Üsküdar District Social Service Center, Üsküdar Women and Family Solidarity Center, Women and Children Directorate of İstanbul Provincial Gendarmerie Command, Women Services Unit of Provincial Directorate of Ministry of Family and Social Services and ŞÖNİM (Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centre) Unit of the Ministry of Family and Social Services as well as other representatives, doctors, lawyers, and mediators who focus on the issue and conduct fieldwork, contributed to the heterogenous and interdisciplinary discussion environment.

It is planned that the outcomes of the conference "Simply for Being a Woman: Femicide" will be evaluated and a report will be prepared based on these outcomes, which will be presented as a recommendation document to policy makers, particularly the Ministry of Justice, and then lobbying activities will be carried out for its follow-up.