

Framing Honor Killing in Turkey as a Kurdish Problem: A Postcolonial Analysis

Mufti Rasyid*

UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, Indonesia

Yulia Nasrul Latifi

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Ibnu Burdah

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Muhammad Khoirul Malik

Leipzig University, Germany

*Correspondence: mufti.rasyid@uinsatu.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

received: 20/01/2026

revised: 09/02/2026

accepted: 15/03/2026

Keywords:

Honor Killing; Kurdish;

Turkish; Media; State

DOI:

10.32509/mirshus.v6i1.157

ABSTRACT

Honor killing refers to the murder of a family member (usually female) who have brought shame or dishonor upon the family. This article explores how honor killing is discussed in Turkey, with particular attention to how the practice is frequently linked to the Kurdish ethnic minority. Drawing on Robert Entman's framing theory and supported by postcolonial critique, the study analyzes twelve news reports published between 2016 and 2023 in three major Turkish outlets. The analysis indicates that Turkish media and state discourse (manifested in legal system) repeatedly frame honor killing in ways that marginalize and stigmatize Kurds. By attaching the practice to Kurdish identity, these discourses normalize an image of Kurds as 'backward' and Turks as modern, reproducing orientalist binaries of tradition versus civilization. Building on Spivak's concept of the subaltern, the article argues that Kurdish women who always become the victims of honor killing are rendered voiceless and are instrumentalized as symbolic evidence of Kurdish 'backwardness'. In this framing, women's suffering becomes a rhetorical device that helps justify state authority and domination over particular minorities.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women remains a pressing global concern. The United Nations defines it as a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women, functioning as a mechanism that preserves women's subordinations (UN, 1993). One of the most severe forms of violence is 'honor killing'. It is the act of murdering a family member (usually female) accused of bringing dishonor or shame upon family. Although both men and women can become victims of honor killings, empirical evidence consistently shows that women comprise the vast majority of victims in honor-based murders worldwide (UNODC,

2019). It is estimated that around 5000 women are killed each year in the name of honor (WEF, 2020). Unfortunately, determining the exact number of victims remains challenging due to sporadic reporting to the police, particularly as family members often attempt to cover up such crimes to protect their honor (Begikhani, 2005). Victims of honor killings must endure brutal methods of execution, including strangulation, stabbing, stoning, being burned alive, being forced to jump from windows, and being forced to drink poison (Gregory et al., 2020)

Honor killing has been taking place for thousands of years, and continues to be practiced globally. The law of ancient Rome issued in year 18 BC stated that a woman can be killed by a father or husband for bringing shame to the family (Toševa, 2019). Honor killings stems from a cultural understanding of honor that requires public recognition for validation and confirmation. By possessing honor, individuals find a place in their community. In systems of honor, women's sexuality is an important object of control. It belongs by default to the male members of the family such as fathers, brothers, or husbands. The 'integrity' of women's sexuality is an urgent source of honor for the family (Heydari et al., 2021).

Honor killings are often associated with regions located in 'patriarchy belt', a term to describe areas stretching from northern part of Africa to eastern part of Asia where collective family honor is closely tied to female members' morality (Littrell & Bertsch, 2013). Within this geographical range, the Middle East reports some of the highest incidences of honor killings. In Iran, estimates suggest that 375- 500 women are killed annually in honor crimes (MEFD, 2020). In Iraq, human rights organizations report approximately 500 honor killings per year (HRW, 2022) . In Palestine, the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling documented 42 cases of honor killing in 2014-2015, though the actual number is believed to be bigger (AlQahtani et al., 27). Meanwhile in Egypt, 165 women and girls murdered in 2020, 14 of them were attributed to honor killing (Salaam Gateway, 2020).

Turkey, despite its image as the most modern, secular and Westernized state in the Middle East, also records high numbers of honor killing. Although reliable figures are limited because many honor killings are unreported, at least 27 honor killing cases happened in 2017 (Koç, 2022). A recent 2024 report revealed that 211 women (54% of the 394 murder cases) were killed by their own male family members, including husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons (KCDF, 2025). While the motives are not officially classified as 'honor killings', it is believed that most of the cases are related to honor issue. In Turkey, there is a concept called *namus* (sexual honor) that are deeply rooted in the cultural constructs. A man is said to possess *namus* if the female members of his family are *namuslu* (honorable) (van Eck, 2003). Here, we can see the strong presence of patriarchy in Turkey, where women are regarded as merely symbols of male honor.

Honor killings are reported across Turkey, yet public narratives often localize the practice to the country's eastern provinces where Kurds are concentrated. Kurds constitute the second largest ethnic group in Turkey; recent estimates place the Kurdish population at roughly 12–20 million (about 14–23% of the population) (OSW, 2024). They also inhabit three neighboring countries (Iran, Iraq, and Syria). Since Kurds always face discrimination and oppression, many of them also live as diaspora in Europe and America. The term diaspora refers to people who leave their homeland due to political or social pressure, or economic reasons (Rasyid, 2022).

Historically, "Turkifying" policies and long-standing stereotypes have positioned Kurds as resistant to modernization, and mainstream media has repeatedly circulated tropes

of Kurdish “backwardness”. In this discursive environment, honor killing becomes a convenient signifier through which Kurdishness is marked as “tribal” or “pre-modern”. This raises a question that motivates the present study: how do Turkish media and state policies narratively associate honor killings with Kurdish identity?

Previous studies on honor killings have explored the phenomenon from various perspectives but within limited conceptual frameworks. Van Eck traces the roots of honor killings to the very essence of the concept of honor, analyzing how the interplay between tradition, religion, and state constructs the notion of honor in Turkey (van Eck, 2003). Goldstein examines the concept of honor from a biological standpoint, concluding that honor killings stem from the evolution of male sexual aggression coupled with the emergence of patriarchy (Goldstein, 2002). Vishwanath and Palakonda argue that in India, honor killings function to restore male dominance that was intimidated by British colonial policies who granted women more rights and freedoms (Vishwanath & Palakonda, 2011).

From a postcolonial perspective, Gill investigates honor killings within immigrant communities in Canada and criticizes Western discourse for framing them as a form of violence ‘attached’ to Eastern culture (Gill, 2022). Kucukalioglu criticizes Turkish discourse for attributing the issue primarily to the eastern Kurdish region. She argues that honor killings do not occur only in eastern Kurdish area but also in western, urban areas such as Istanbul (Kucukalioglu, 2018). In the same vein, Bayir argues that Turkish legal documents frequently associate honor killings with the Kurdish ethnic group, embedding elements of racism and tend to deliberately ‘target’ Kurdish communities (Bayir, 2013).

While existing research provides valuable insights into honor killings, two gaps remain. First, prior work has rarely offered a systematic comparison of how mainstream Turkish newspapers frame honor killings when perpetrators are presented as Kurdish versus Turkish, especially through the recurring distinction between *töre cinayeti* (custom/tradition killing) and *namus cinayeti* (honor killing). Second, the mutual reinforcement between media framing and state discourse (particularly legal classifications) has been noted but not empirically traced through close textual analysis of news reporting. To address these gaps, this article combines Entman’s framing analysis with a postcolonial reading (Said, Bhabha, Spivak) to show how ethnicized framings reproduce orientalist binaries and how Kurdish women are positioned as subaltern subjects whose suffering is narratively instrumentalized.

Discrimination against Kurds in Turkey has deep historical roots tied to the formation of the modern Turkish state. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic in 1923, Turkish nationalism became central to state ideology, emphasizing cultural unity and a singular Turkish identity (Tezcür, 2009). This ideology led to the marginalization and repression of other ethnic groups, especially the Kurds, which finally triggered Kurdish ethno-nationalism (Vali, 2003). In this context, we can assume that Turkey is doing colonialism on Kurdish people, although not in the sense of European colonialism in the past. In colonialism, women are the ones who suffer the most. Here, Kurdish women, the primary victims of honor killings, occupy a position as ‘subaltern’, another important term introduced by Gayatri Spivak in her seminal essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1994). She identifies these oppressed groups as ‘the silenced’ who are unable to articulate their voices. The colonial men nor the local men did not have ears to listen to them and they even represent them for their own profit.

Accordingly, this study investigates how Turkish media coverage alongside the state (through its legal system) constructs honor killing as a “Kurdish problem” and how such construction marginalizes Kurdish women’s voices. Guided by three research questions, the study asks: first, how Turkish media framed the news coverage on honor killings. Second, how these framing functions differ between cases associated with Kurdish perpetrators and Turkish perpetrators. Third, how Turkish state with its legal discourse authorizes or amplifies the media framing. By addressing these questions, the article clarifies the discursive mechanisms through which gendered violence is ethnicized in Turkey and extends debates on “internal colonialism” via a gendered postcolonial lens.

METHOD

This qualitative study uses Entman’s (1993) framing model as an analytic scaffold to examine how Turkish mainstream media make particular interpretations of honor killings salient through problem definitions, causal attributions, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations. Framing analysis is appropriate here because the research questions focus on how journalistic language selects and emphasizes certain aspects of “honor killing” to produce ethnicized common sense. This analysis is later strengthened by postcolonial analysis which posits this phenomenon under the concept of ‘internal colonialism’.

Data were drawn from the online archives of three high-circulation Turkish outlets: Hürriyet, Haberturk, and Posta, selected for their national reach and agenda-setting influence. Using archive searches and site queries, the author retrieved reports published between 2016 and 2023 containing keywords such as *töre cinayeti*, *namus cinayeti*, *töre kararı* and related terms. Inclusion criteria were: (1) the report describes the killing (or suspected killing) of a woman or family member explicitly framed as honor/tradition related; (2) it is a straight news report (not an editorial); and (3) it contains sufficient narrative detail for textual analysis. After removing duplicates and brief re-posts, twelve reports constituted the final corpus.

Using purposive sampling, the study compiled 12 news reports: nine implicitly marked as “Kurdish” through geographic or culturally recognizable namings and three framed as “Turkish” to enable a contrastive analysis of ethnicized framing. Ethnicity is treated not as a verified demographic fact but as a discursive inference produced by textual cues. The analysis followed three steps: (1) close reading to extract recurring descriptors and actors into a keyword matrix; (2) mapping codes onto Entman’s four framing functions to compare outlets and the “Kurdish” versus “Turkish” subsets; and (3) reading state/legal discourse, especially the *töre/namus* distinction, to assess alignment and amplification.

RESULTS

Findings on Media Discourse

Gender-based violence, including honor killings, is deeply entrenched across Turkey, transcending ethnic and regional boundaries. Yet, hegemonic discourse persist that make people perceive that honor killings only happen within Kurdish community. This misperception is reinforced by many parties, especially mass media. To interrogate this discursive construction, this study would analyze twelve news excerpts published in four selected years: 2016, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 by three Turkish newspapers: Hürriyet, Haberturk, and Posta. They are selected for their large readership in Turkey.



Figure 1. Logos of Heberturk, Hurriyet and Posta

Source: hurriyetdailynews.com, haberturk.com, and posta.com.tr

Table 1. News excerpts

No	News Excerpt	Translation	Source
1	<i>Korkunç cinayetin. Vildan, Diyarbakır'dan Kırşehir'e göç eden bir ailenin 8 çocuğundan biriydi...</i>	The horrifying murder. Vildan was one of eight siblings from a family migrated from Diyarbakır to Kırşehir.	Hurriyet, 13 June 2020
2	<i>Aile meclisinde ölüm kararı! Kara çarşaf giydi, eski eşini vurdu, sevgilisini öldürdü.</i>	Death was decided by the family council! The perpetrator wore a black veil, shot his ex-wife, and killed her lover.	Hurriyet, 20 June 2022
3	<i>Aile, kızlarının cenazesini memleketleri Şanlıurfa'da toprağa verdi.</i>	The family buried their daughter's body in their hometown, Şanlıurfa.	Hurriyet, 05 June 2020
4	<i>Olayın faili Galip Gülistan (70) ile karar veren aile meclisinde yer aldığı iddia edilen eşi, kayınvalidesi, eniştesi ve amcasının çocuklarının da aralarında bulunduğu 7 şüpheli öldürmek amacıyla gözaltına alındı.</i>	The main perpetrator, Galip Gülistan (70), along with seven other suspects, including his wife, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, and cousins who were allegedly part of the family council that planned the murder, have been arrested.	Posta, 28 January 2022
5	<i>Guldunya'nın Drami Tecavuzlu Basladı: Töre kararı neden ve nasıl verilmişti?</i>	Guldunya's Tragedy Began with Rape: Why and how was this customary decision made?	Haberturk, 25 June 2023
6	<i>İnşallah bunlara yardım ve yataklık eden. arkasında duran, böyle bir katliamı yapanların töre cinayeti adı altında gereken cezayı almalarını istiyoruz. Artık bitsin bu töreler, saçmalıklar.</i>	Hopefully, all those who helped, funded, supported, or stood behind the killers will receive the punishment they deserve in the name of "honor." "Let's put an end to these traditions and barbarities."	Posta News, 15 October 2021
7	<i>Ağır Ceza Mahkemesi'ne Ramazan Durak ve Kadir Durak, hakkında tasarlayarak ve töre saikiyle öldürme.</i>	A lawsuit was filed against Ramazan and Kadir Durak, accused of "premeditated murder motivated by tradition."	Haberturk, 20 July 2023
8	<i>Bölgenin töre cinayetleri ve ülkenin kadına şiddet sorunu var. Neler yapacaksınız bu konularla ilgili?</i>	This region (Kurdistan) faces the problem of honor killings, while the country (Turkey) struggles with violence against women.	Haberturk, 19 July 2023

9	<i>5 gündür kayıp olan H. G.'nin bulunabilmesi için köyde arama çalışmalarını yürüten jandarma ekipleri töre cinayetinden şüphelenerek, soruşturmayı derinleştirdi</i>	The gendarmerie team conducting searches in the village to find H.G., who had been missing for five days, suspected an honor killing and deepened their investigation.	Haberturk, July 18 2022
10	<i>Alkhan arkamızdan bize doğru tabancayla ateş etti. Bu olay bir namus davasıdır.... Beni, namusumu kirletmeyle tehdit etti.</i>	Alkhan shot at us from behind with a pistol. "This incident is related to honor... He threatened me by defiling my honor."	Posta, November 10 2023
11	<i>eşinin aldattığını görüyordu.... karısı ve sevgilisini öldürdüğünü itiraf etti</i>	He witnessed his wife's infidelity... He confessed to killing his wife and her lover.	Posta, 11 Novembr 2022
12	<i>...tarafından 'iffetsiz bir yaşam sürdüğü'.... Kararı kendim verdim</i>	...because she "was living an immoral life"... "I made the decision myself."	Hurriyet, 27 January 2016

Source: haberturk.com, hurriyet.com and postanews.com

In the twelve news reports above, several keywords were identified that, according to the researcher, could shape readers' assumptions, biases, and beliefs. The discovery of these keywords would help the researcher analyzes how honor killings are reported in Turkey through the lens of Robert Entman's (1993) framing theory. Of these twelve articles, nine reported cases involving Kurdish perpetrators (news excerpts 1 until 9), while three involved Turkish perpetrators (news excerpts 10 until 12). The researcher put the keywords related to honor killings involving Kurdish perpetrators in the left column, and those involving Turkish perpetrators in the right column.

Table 2. Keywords

Kurdish perpetrator		Turkish perpetrator	
Keyword	Translation	Keyword	Translation
<i>töre</i>	tradition	<i>namus</i>	honor
<i>töre kararı</i>	customary decision	<i>iffetsiz</i>	dishonorable
<i>aile</i>	family	<i>kararı verdim</i>	personal
<i>aile meclisinde</i>	family council	<i>sevgili</i>	lover
<i>göç</i>	migration	<i>aldattığı</i>	infidelity
<i>memleket</i>	hometown	<i>tehdit</i>	threat
<i>bölge</i>	region	<i>ülken</i>	country
<i>jandarma</i>	gendarmerie		

Source: hurriyetdailynews.com, haberturk.com, and posta.com.tr

The framing analysis is organized around Entman's four functions: (1) defining the problem, (2) diagnosing causes, (3) making moral judgments, and (4) recommending treatment. The findings are reported below in that sequence.

Defining the Problem

Across the news reports, killings are named and categorized through two recurring labels: *töre cinayeti* (custom/tradition killing) and *namus cinayeti* (honor killing). In the reports implicitly marked as Kurdish, problem definitions more often use *töre*-related vocabulary (e.g., *töre*, *töre kararı*, *töre saikiyle*), whereas reports framed as Turkish cases more often foreground *namus*-related vocabulary (e.g., *namus davası*) or moral descriptors such as *iffetsiz* (unchaste/immoral).

For instance, Habertürk's report on the Güldünya Tören case asks, "*töre kararı neden ve nasıl verilmişti?*" (why and how was this customary decision made?), and another report describes the charge as "*tasarlayarak ve töre saikiyle öldürme*" (premeditated murder motivated by tradition). By contrast, a Posta report frames a Turkish perpetrator's case as "*bir namus davasıdır*" (a matter of honor), while a Hürriyet report describes the victim as living "*iffetsiz bir yaşam*" (an immoral/unchaste life).

Taken together, these findings shows a consistent pattern in which similar acts are linguistically distinguished: *töre* (custom)-related labels are more obvious in Kurdish-marked reports, while *namus* (sexual-morality) labels are more emphasized in Turkish-marked reports.

Diagnosing the Cause

In attributing causes and identifying responsible actors, Kurdish-marked reports frequently introduce geography and mobility details (e.g., migration routes, 'hometowns', or eastern provinces) that are not strictly necessary for describing the crime but function as contextual cues. Turkish-marked reports, in contrast, more often frame causality through individualized motives such as jealousy, infidelity, or an alleged threat to personal honor.

For example, one report describes a family as "*Diyarbakır'dan Kırşehir'e göç eden*" (migrated from Diyarbakır to Kırşehir), and another notes that a victim's funeral was held in "*memleketleri Şanlıurfa*" (their hometown, Şanlıurfa). Across the Kurdish-marked subset, repeated place-based cues invite readers to infer ethnicity through geography, even when the term "Kurdish" is not explicitly used.

Making Moral Judgments

Moral evaluation is often conveyed through quotations from officials and through contrasts embedded in the reporting. One afternoon Habertürk reports the quote of former Minister of Family and Social Affairs Fatma Şahin distinguishing "*bölge*" (the region) from "*ülke*" (the country): "*bölgenin töre cinayetleri ve ülkenin kadına şiddet sorunu var*" (this region has the problem of *töre* killings, while the country has violence against women).



Figure 2. Map of Kurdish population, most of them live in the East
Source: ABC News, 2018.

Within the news excerpts, this contrast recurs alongside lexical pairings that separate ‘tradition’ from ‘honor/individual morality’. Kurdish-marked reports more often evaluate the event through collective ‘tradition’ language (*töre*, *aile meclisi*), whereas Turkish-marked reports more often foreground interpersonal morality and relationship terms (*aldatma*/infidelity, *sevgili*/lover, *tehdit*/threat). For example, a Posta report on a Turkish perpetrator highlights that he “saw his wife cheating” and “confessed to killing his wife and her lover,” while Kurdish-marked reports more frequently attribute the act to a customary decision or family council.

Recommending Treatment

Treatment recommendations in the news texts frequently frame prevention as ending “traditions” rather than as addressing a criminal justice problem. For example, one report concludes with the appeal “*Artık bitsin bu töreler*” (let these traditions end). In addition, Kurdish-marked reports repeatedly highlight the role of the *jandarma* (*gendarmerie*) in searching, investigating, and detaining suspects in rural settings. For instance, a Habertürk report notes that gendarmerie teams deepened an investigation after suspecting a *töre cinayeti* in Şanlıurfa.

Findings on State/Legal Discourse.

To assess how state discourse may authorize or amplify media framing, this subsection summarizes how Turkish legal texts classify honor-related murders and how this classification is reflected in sentencing practices reported in the literature. Observing the law on honor killing is important because law is inseparable from the everyday social realities of society and is manifested through human social behavior (Alawiyah, 2025).

In Turkish law, honor-related killings are commonly differentiated as *töre cinayeti* (tradition/custom killing) and *namus cinayeti* (honor killing). Table 3 summarizes key differences reported in prior legal analyses. Legal analyses describe *töre cinayeti* as a collective, planned killing typically linked to a family or tribal council decision, whereas *namus*

cinayeti is treated as an individual act connected to perceived sexual dishonor or ‘improper behavior’. As summarized in Table 3, these categories are associated with different procedural narratives and sentencing consequences.

Table 3. Classification of honor-related murder in legal system

Aspect	<i>Töre cinayeti</i>	<i>Namus cinayeti</i>
Definition	A killing committed based on the violation of established cultural norms.	A killing committed because the perpetrator is provoked by the victim’s “improper behavior.”
Perpetrator	Collective – usually done following a decision by the extended family or tribal council; the perpetrators are predominantly male.	Individual – committed based on the perpetrator’s own will; the perpetrators are also mostly male.
Planning	Carefully planned, often involving deliberations within the family or tribal council.	Spontaneous, driven by anger or provocation, with little to no prior planning.
Punishment	Very severe. Life imprisonment without the possibility of appeal or sentence reduction.	Severe, but comparatively lighter. Life imprisonment, but the perpetrator may seek sentence reduction and file for appeal.

Source: summary of Derya Bayır’s article (Bayır, 2013)

For killings classified as *namus cinayeti*, legal arguments about provocation or the victim’s alleged ‘improper behavior’ have been documented as grounds for sentence reduction in some cases, effectively treating the act as an emotionally driven response rather than a planned crime (Pope, 2012). By contrast, *töre cinayeti* is associated with collective decision-making and is typically punished more severely. Scholars have criticized this legal distinction for its potential to stigmatize communities stereotyped as having ‘tribal’ or extended-family structures (e.g., Kurds), thereby reinforcing ethnicized assumptions about who commits which type of killing (Bayır, 2013).

Available national reporting also indicates that honor-related killings are not confined to a single region or ethnic group. For example, one report cited 288 women killed in honor-related crimes across Turkey between 2001 and 2009 (Independent Online, 2010), and survey research has documented support for honor-based violence among respondents across regions (Cohen, 2006).

Table 4. Comparison of violence on women between eastern and western Turkey

Statement	Eastern	Western
I have experienced physical violence	39%	33%
I have experienced sexual violence	15%	14%
I would report to the police if I witnessed gender-based violence	4%	15%

Source: Altınay and Arat’s survey (Altınay & Arat, 2009)

As Table 4 indicates, women reported experiencing physical and sexual violence in both in western and eastern Turkey (where Kurds predominantly live). The most pronounced

difference in the survey is reporting behavior: respondents in the east were less likely to report violence to the police, a pattern linked in the source to structural factors such as literacy, access, and trust in law enforcement (Altınay & Arat, 2009).

DISCUSSION

Interpreting ethnicized framing

Following Foucault's insight that knowledge and power are mutually constitutive (Foucault, 2013), the empirical patterns reported above can be read as part of a wider discursive system in which media, law, and state institutions circulate shared vocabularies and normalize particular 'common-sense' explanations of violence. In this case, the repeated *töre/namus* distinction functions not only as description but also as a classificatory resource that organizes public interpretation.

Taken together, the media reports and the legal distinction between *töre* and *namus* contribute to an ethnicization of honor killing: Kurdish-marked cases are more often narrated as outcomes of collective 'tradition' (*töre, aile meclisi*), while Turkish-marked cases are more often narrated as individualized motives of honor, jealousy, or sexual morality (*namus, aldatma, iffetsiz*). A news report about a government official who distinguish between *bölge* (the region) from "*ülke*" (the country) proves how the hierarchy is constructed between Turks as majority and Kurds as minority. This asymmetry sustains an orientalist binary of 'tribal tradition' versus 'modern nation' in which Kurdishness is positioned as pre-modern and Turkishness as the implicit norm of modernity. The treatment frames observed in the reports strengthen this binary by repeatedly casting the solution as the eradication of 'tradition' and foregrounding the *jandarma* as 'state apparatuses' who protect 'rural people'. In this sense, the state appears as the modern rescuer of women from allegedly backward communities.

Kurdish Women and Turkey's Postcoloniality

Building on the empirical patterns above, a postcolonial reading helps explain how ethnicized framings of honor killing can reproduce hierarchies between Turks and Kurds. When Kurdish-marked cases are repeatedly narrated as products of 'tradition', Kurdishness is positioned as the cultural 'other', while Turkishness appears as the unmarked norm of modernity.

As Lo and Gilbert emphasize, postcolonial studies focus on the cultural dynamics of nations that endured European imperialism, particularly on how indigenous elites sustained or reproduced structures of colonial domination (Gilbert & Lo, 1998). As Homi Bhabha argued, the tendency of the colonized subject to perpetuate the structures of domination they hate constitutes a form of ambivalence (Bhabha, 2012). Yet this raises a crucial question: how can a postcolonial framework be applied to Turkey, a state that was never formally colonized? Instead, it was a colonizer as the Ottoman empire. However, some scholars argue that Turkey's contemporary policies may still resonate with colonial logics despite its imperial past. Although Turkey was never 'formally' colonized by European powers, Çapan and Zarakol argue that postcolonial analysis is still relevant in Turkish context, especially under the rule of Erdoğan / AKP Party (Çapan & Zarakol, 2017).

Between 1918 and 1923, Turkey actually experienced Western occupation led by Britain, France, and Italy, which commemorated as 'Turkish War of Independence'. This episode, often remembered as a heroic moment of national resistance against the West, led

to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, marked by Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. This collapse gave birth to the modern Republic of Turkey (Avedian, 2012). Çapan and Zarakol argue, that Erdoğan's regime has strategically reframed this brief occupation as evidence of a broader colonial experience, allowing the AKP to position Turkey as a victim of Western imperialism while disregarding its own Ottoman imperial past. What makes this particularly interesting is that before the rise of the AKP in 2002 (during the Kemalist era), Turkey defined itself as a modern, Western-oriented nation, seeking recognition as part of Europe rather than as a victim of colonialism. In contrast, under the AKP's leadership, Turkey has sought to redefine itself as a non-Western nation grounded in its own distinct values (Bilgin, 2009).

Under Erdoğan, anti-Western rhetoric has become a central political instrument. International criticism, especially on human rights violations in Kurdistan, is accused as neo-colonial interference, while compliance with global norms is portrayed as submission to Western domination. A striking case occurred on January 12, 2016, when Academics for Peace (*Barış için Akademisyenler*) group issued a petition signed by 1128 Turkish and 346 international scholars criticizing the Turkey's military operations in Kurdistan that have resulted many victims. They encouraged the government to respect international human rights norms. This made Erdoğan really angry. He accused the scholars as 'traitors' who have 'colonial mentality'. He claimed that they were not different from intellectuals a century earlier who betrayed the country by inviting foreign powers to intervene. These facts trigger us to rethink how postcolonial discourse can be co-opted by state power to justify new forms of domination. In other word, Turkey invokes postcolonial discourse not to dismantle domination, but to mask and legitimize its own repressive policies.

Returning to the framing of honor killing, women often bear the heaviest burden in systems shaped by both patriarchy and colonial logics. In the Turkish-Kurdish context, Kurdish women can be read as experiencing layered subordination: as women within patriarchal communities, as Kurds within a state that has historically marginalized Kurdish identity, and as subjects positioned within broader East-West hierarchies. The framing of honor killing as a uniquely Kurdish problem conceals power relations and perpetuates Turkey's internal colonialism as an unconscious legacy of Western colonialism. It reminds us to another form of 'framing' criticized by Gayatri Spivak: the British abolition of '*sati*' in colonial India. She argues that the act, while presented as a humanitarian effort, was primarily a tool for consolidating colonial power. By framing *sati* as a barbaric practice of 'brown men' oppressing 'brown women', the British positioned themselves as civilizing saviors. This narrative, famously summarized as 'White men saving brown women from brown men', served to legitimize their rule rather than truly empower the subaltern women who, in Spivak's view, can not speak. The prohibition of *sati* became a political act that reinforced the British civilizing mission by portraying Indian society as backward and cruel (Spivak, 1994). The Turkish state, similar to the British in India, frames the Kurds as uncivilized by utilizing honor killing phenomenons. This allows the state to adopt the role of protector, with the narrative: 'Turkish men saving Kurdish women from Kurdish men'. In both scenarios, the powerful claim to speak for the voiceless, but in doing so, they primarily advance their own political agendas, whether it be traditional colonialism or the consolidation of a national authority.

This leads us to another urgent issue in Turkey: nation-building. As Harris Mylonas explains, nation-building involves a set of policies crafted by the ruling core to manage 'non-core' groups within fixed national borders. He identifies three main strategies:

accommodation (granting minority rights while maintaining group distinctions), assimilation (pressuring non-core groups to adopt the culture, language, and identity of the dominant population), and exclusion (removing non-core groups through deportation, population transfers, or mass violence) (Mylonas, 2013). Turkey's policies toward the Kurds combine elements of assimilation and exclusion. Central to this strategy is the creation of a national discourse that frames Kurds as 'backward' and 'pre-modern'. By associating honor killings almost exclusively with Kurds, the Turkish state discourse casts Kurdish women as the most oppressed group in need of 'rescue', reinforcing Turkey's modernization and civilizing mission. As Hobsbawm argues, nationalism is inseparable from modernity (Kocka, 2013), while Gellner views nations as political constructs deliberately shaped by elites to advance nation-building agenda (Gellner, 2006). Within this framework, the 'traditional vs. modern' dichotomy transforms into 'Kurdish vs. Turkish'. Kurds are expected to assimilate into Turkish identity, while those who resisted faced various forms of state violence.

However, when Erdoğan first came to power, many Kurds felt optimistic. As Baser notes, Erdoğan and the AKP promised reforms and opened some space for Kurdish cultural expression (Baser, 2015). But in practice, Kurdish political demands continued to be securitized, and Kurdish activism was frequently framed through the language of 'terror' and national security (Martin, 2018). Turkey's campaign to build nationalism, which includes producing a discourse of saving Kurdish women from the horrific tradition of "honor" killings, directly or indirectly robs Kurdish women of their own narratives. As a result, the voices of Kurdish women become even less audible, buried beneath the boisterous narrative of the 'future Turk' that the Turkish state pushes from the top down, using every available instrument. In other words, Turkey's proclaimed mission to 'eradicate honor killings' thus functions less as a humanitarian reform and more as a strategic discourse to legitimize its ongoing nation-building agenda, ultimately reinforcing its vision of a modern and "civilized" Turkish nation-state.

CONCLUSION

This study addressed three research questions on how Turkish mainstream media frame honor-related killings and how state discourse reinforces these frames. In response to the first research question about media discourse, the analysis shows that media define the issue through two recurrent labels: *töre cinayeti* and *namus cinayeti*; and organize problem definitions, causal attributions, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations through repeated lexical and narrative choices. Answering the second research questions about differentiation of Kurdish-Turkish perpetrators, Kurdish-marked cases more often rely on geography-based cues (eastern provinces, migration/hometowns) and collective-tradition narratives (*töre*, *aile meclisi*), whereas Turkish-marked cases more often foreground individualized motives, interpersonal morality (e.g., infidelity, 'lover', 'threat') and honor-related terms. The study also answers the last research questions about state discourse. Turkish state through its legal system helps authorize and amplify this differentiation: the *töre/namus* distinction is institutionalized in judicial categories and linked to different sentencing logics, which then help construct public interpretation.

Entman's framing analysis has helped us understanding how media, language, and law altogether sustain a colonial-style hierarchy that stigmatizes Kurds. From a postcolonial perspective, all these discourses strategically frame honor killings as a uniquely Kurdish

problem, portraying Kurds as backward, and pre-modern in contrast to a civilized, modern Turkish nation. This framing legitimizes the Turkish state's 'civilizing mission', casting itself as the savior of Kurdish society, thus justifying its control on Kurdish minorities.

REFERENCE

- Alawiyah, T. (2025). ANALYSIS OF LEGAL SOCIOLOGY THEORY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MEDICAL LAW. *Moestopo International Review on Social, Humanities, and Sciences*, 5(2), 327–336. <https://doi.org/10.32509/mirshus.v5i2.142>
- AlQahtani, S. M., Almutairi, D. S., BinAqeel, E. A., Almutairi, R. A., Al-Qahtani, R. D., & Menezes, R. G. (27). Honor Killings in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: A Narrative Review. *Healthcare*, 11(1), 74.
- Altınay, A. G., & Arat, Y. (2009, January). *Violence against women in Turkey: A nationwide survey* [Monograph]. Punto. <https://research.sabanciuniv.edu/id/eprint/11418/>
- Avedian, V. (2012). State Identity, Continuity, and Responsibility: The Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey and the Armenian Genocide. *European Journal of International Law*, 23(3), 797–820.
- Bayır, D. (2013). Representation of the Kurds by the Turkish Judiciary. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 35(1), 116–142.
- Begikhani, N. (2005). Honour-based violence among the Kurds: The case of Iraqi Kurdistan. *Honour: Crimes, Paradigms and Violence against Women*, 209–229.
- Bhabha, H. K. (2012). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- Bilgin, P. (2009). Securing Turkey through western-oriented foreign policy. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 40, 103–123. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600005239>
- Çapan, Z. G., & Zarakol, A. (2017). Postcolonial colonialism?: The case of Turkey. In *Against International Relations Norms*. Routledge.
- Gellner, E. (2006). *Nations and Nationalism*. Blackwell.
- Gilbert, H., & Lo, J. (1998). *Postcolonial Theory: Possibilities and Limitations*. Intenational research Workshop.
- Gill, J. (2022). Problematizing Honour Crimes within Canadian Context: Postcolonial Feminist Analysis of Popular Media and Political Discourses. *Societies*, 12(2), 62–29.
- Goldstein, M. A. (2002). The Biological Roots of Heat-of-Passion Crimes and Honor Killings. *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 21(2), 28–37.
- Gregory, G. A., Fox, J., & Howard, B. K. (2020). Honour-based violence: Awareness and recognition. *Paediatrics and Child Health*, 30(11), 365–370.
- Heydari, A., Teymoori, A., & Trappes, R. (2021). Honor killing as a dark side of modernity: Prevalence, common discourses, and a critical view. *Social Science Information*, 60(1), 86–106.
- HRW. (2022). *World Report 2022: Iraq* | Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/iraq>
- KCDF. (2025). *2024 Femicide Report*.
- Koç, G. (2022). A Study of Femicide in Turkey From 2010 to 2017. *SAGE Open*, 12(3).
- Kocka, J. (2013). Eric J. Hobsbawm (1917–2012). *International Review of Social History*, 58(1), 1–8.

- Küçükalioglu, E. G. (2018). Framing Gender-Based Violence in Turkey. *Les Cahiers Du CEDREF. Centre d'enseignement, d'études et de Recherches Pour Les Études Féministes*, (22), Article 22. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cedref.1138>
- Littrell, R., & Bertsch, A. (2013). Traditional and contemporary status of women in the patriarchal belt. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 32(2).
- MEFD. (2020). *Policy Brief – Iran: “Honour Killings” – Middle East Forum for Development*. <https://me-fd.org/policy-brief-iran-honour-killings/>
- Mylonas, H. (2013). *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rasyid, M. (2022). Nasib Diaspora Palestina di Kuwait: Antara Rumah Kedua dan Dampak Perang Teluk. *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora Sigli*, 5(2), 190–198. <https://doi.org/10.47647/jsh.v5i2.974>
- Salaam Gateway. (2020). *Egypt's Gender Based Violence*. Salaam Gateway. <https://salaamgateway.com/story/egypt-sees-gender-based-violent-crimes-rise-to-415-during-2020-edraak-foundation>
- Spivak, G. C. (1994). □ Can the Subaltern Speak? In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*. Routledge.
- Tezcür, G. M. (2009). Kurdish Nationalism and Identity in Turkey: A Conceptual Reinterpretation. *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, (10). <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.4008>
- Toševa, D. (2019). The Concept of Adultery in Roman Law. *Philological Studies*, 17(2), 44–62.
- UN. (1993). *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women—UN Documents: Gathering a body of global agreements*. <http://www.un-documents.net/a48r104.htm>
- UNODC. (2019). *Gender-related Killing of Women and Girl*. United Nation Office on Drugs and Crimes.
- Vali, A. (2003). *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*. Mazda Publishers.
- van Eck, C. (2003). Honour and honour killing. In *Purified by Blood* (pp. 15–42). Amsterdam University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46mx61.5>
- Vishwanath, J., & Palakonda, S. C. (2011). Patriarchal Ideology of Honour and Honour Crimes in India. *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, 6(1), 386–395.
- WEF. (2020). *Global Gender Gap Report 2020 | World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality/>