

Campaign and Critical Reflection

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Emancipation is Not Liberation

by Hall

The name of this campaign draws inspiration from the work of Turkish feminist Binnaz Toprak. Toprak's phrase "*emancipated but unliberated*" highlights the struggle in Turkey; that equal 'rights' and laws do not equal liberation (2). This campaign aims to emphasise how fundamentalism restricts liberation and how we need to focus the blame onto politicians who oppress liberation but hide behind their treaties and laws (Atuk 285).

Use the hashtag #emancipatednotliberated to keep Turkish's women's stories alive and to show your support!

Ankara Women's Platform protest in 2020



What is Happening in Turkey right now?

Currently, femicide rates in Turkey are on the rise. From 2002 to 2009, the alleged number of femicides increased by 1400% and 718% from 2008 to 2019 (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 4). However, official and unofficial data on femicides often have disparities which is further hindered by the government who stopped releasing data on femicides after 2009 (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 5). These high and extremely worrying statistics are not okay. Considering Turkey's supposedly historically progressive past, why is this happening?


What can I do to help?

- Use the hashtag #emancipatednotliberated to remind the world of the current femicide issues and share Turkish women's stories!
- Lobby and protest for the Turkish government to fulfil the requirements of the Istanbul Convention

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Ankara Women's Platform protest in 2020



Source = <https://www.kqed.org/arts/13884151/5-ways-to-support-womens-rights-campaigns-in-turkey>

History of Turkey's Emancipation

To truly understand the situation in Turkey, we believe you need to know the country's historical context. After the war of independence, Mustafa Kemal began

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The reality is that although some Turkish middle-class women live fairly liberal lives, many Turkish women remain unliberated and uneducated, due to a lack of legal support, and the 'traditional' values pushed by the ruling elite (Muftuler-Bac 303). Men who commit femicide, usually husbands or family members, often receive lenient sentences due to the provocation defence, an unjust defence rooted in sexism and fundamentalism due to claims that the woman's actions violated social and traditional norms (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2). We need to protest against the use

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- Use the hashtag #emancipatednotliberated to remind the world of the current femicide issues and share Turkish women's stories!
- Lobby and protest for the Turkish government to fulfil the requirements of the Istanbul Convention.
- Do further reading on the current legal, political, and social issues.
- Lobby and protest for Turkish politicians, including the Prime Minister, to condemn gender-based violence and enact stricter punishments for femicides.
- Donate to charities such as: TPF, Small Projects and Purple Roof.

"Misogynists will be silenced, the Istanbul Convention will be applied" a banner from a protest in 2020



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History of Turkey's Emancipation

To truly understand the situation in Turkey, we believe you need to know the country's historical context. After the war of independence, Mustafa Kemal began introducing modern, western policies into the new established Republic (Kandiyoti 320). One of the major strides taken was the emancipation of women (Tepe 299). Following the adoption of the Turkish Civil code which gave a range of martial rights, women were given the right to vote in the 1930's (Kandiyoti 320). However, these outcomes were clearly a strategy to emphasis the move away from the strict, 'traditional' Islamic Ottoman Empire, rather than a success due to women's dissent (Kandiyoti 320). Following these new rights, women were not allowed to organise and lobby for rights and legislation still contained gender roles ideology (Arat 111). It became obvious that women were only emancipated to the level that men deemed acceptable.

A new wave of feminist dissent began in the 1990's


A Turkish woman being arrested at a protest in 2019



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Source = <https://insideturkey.news/2020/08/31/no-backtracking-on-rights-say-womens-groups/>

A new wave of feminist dissent began in the 1980's when educated women started organisations and fighting for autonomy from tradition (Arat 107). However, we believe there has never been true liberation for Turkish women, especially with recent increases in femicide. Instead, this historical illusion that Turkish women are emancipated and liberated means current Turkish women's struggles are glossed over.



Source = <https://en.qantara.de/content/violence-against-women-femicide-on-the-rise-in-turkey>

Is religion the problem?

Although Erdoğan and the AKP's are reaffirming their religious views publicly and there has been a documented increase of religiosity in Turkey (Yeşilada 21), we do not blame religion or consider it a 'problem'. Rather, we advocate against fundamentalism. We believe the most appropriate definition of fundamentalism is "political movements of the extreme right, which, in a context of globalization . . . manipulate religion . . . in order to achieve their political aims" (Bennoune 373). Therefore, when Erdoğan publicly victim blames or when MP's shut down female speakers when they criticise the government with statements such as "Know your place!" and defend their statements by mentioning family values and gender roles (Atuk

27-year-old Pinar Gültekin, one of the hundreds of victims of femicide in 2020



What is wrong with Erdoğan and the AKP?

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, leader of the AKP, has been Prime Minister since 2003 (Yeşilada 19). AKP is a party whose members have conservative Islamist roots, and many fear the effects of Erdoğan's strong Islamic beliefs with a possible secret Islamist agenda (Yeşilada 19). Whether there is hidden agenda or not, it is blinding obvious Erdoğan publicly expresses his personal religious beliefs and this has disastrous effects.

In 2009, after public outrage over the gruesome murder of 18-year-old Munevver Karabulut by her boyfriend, Erdoğan publicly suggested that such "undesirable massacres" were due to moral erosion of family values and that families should control their children more (Atuk 283). This display of victim blaming and lack of responsibility for the murderer is unacceptable. Erdoğan has made numerous other controversial claims, such as saying men and women are not and cannot be equal due to differences in their divine dispositions and that "women who refuse to become

27-year-old Pinar Gültekin, one of the hundreds of victims of femicide in 2020



Source = <http://www.t-vine.com/fury-across-turkey-after-gruesome-murder-details-of-pinar-gultekin-emerge/>

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What is liberation?

We define liberation as "freedom from and freedom to...strong emphasis on the social and political dimensions...even a freedom from politics" (Misgeld 28). We believe everyone deserves this concept of liberation and that Turkish women are currently unliberated.

Protest by KCDP in Istanbul 2020



Source = <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/23/turkey-outrage-rising-violence-against-women>

Istanbul Convention

Contradictory to Erdoğan and AKP's MPs victim-blaming statements, Turkey joined the Istanbul Convention in 2011, set up to combat violence against women (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 5). However, the body that monitors the implementation of the convention recognised Turkey's failure to comply and instate the infrastructural work such as improving the current legal system, increasing awareness of legal personnel and helping survivors of violence (Atuk 285).

What is liberation?

Comments

Add comment

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Critical Reflection:

Turkey has a complex and perhaps bizarre political scene (Yeşilada 19). Critics believe that to a foreigner assessing the situation, Turkey appears as an anomaly in comparison to other Islamic countries, with a modern, democratic society and a progressive history in granting rights to women (Müftüler-Bac 303, Toprak 281). However, upon further reading, it becomes clear the history and current situation of women's liberation is not so simple or positive. By viewing and praising Turkey as a liberating country, allows their fundamentalist and often deadly social, legal, and political norms to oppress Turkish women under the impression that it could be worse (Müftüler-Bac 313). I found the lack of media attention and international awareness of current Turkish women's struggles concerning, therefore I felt it necessary to set up the campaign "Emancipation is Not Liberation" to spread awareness.

Currently, Turkey have a worrying increase in numbers of femicides every year (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 4). The statistics I mentioned in the campaign show the raw and ugly truth of how drastic the problem is. Also introduced is the growing issue of shorter sentences for femicide due to the provocation defence (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 2). After reading about the provocation defence, I was shocked that I had never heard of it, which is why in the "What can I do to help?" section, I encouraged further reading as I felt it necessary to fully grasp the concept. The provocation defence allows men to feel justified in committing honour killings with a defence of being provoked by disobedience (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 7, Arin 823). At first, I could not comprehend that these cases were not satire, as from an outside perspective being granted a lenient sentence due to disobedience sounds preposterous. However, I realised it emphasises my privilege, the lack of media attention these cases get and how unfair the legal system is.

I included a section to summarise the history of Turkey as it contextualises why Turkey is viewed as more progressive than other Islamic countries (Müftüler-Bac 303). Despite granting legal and political rights to women to demonstrate to the world that Turkey was modern and democratic, Turkey differs to most of Europe when interfering with women's private lives (Müftüler-Bac 305). Therefore, I wanted to emphasise the history of the emancipation of women primarily in the public sphere to only appear liberated. I decided to mention Europe as little as possible on the campaign page. As a white, non-religious woman from the UK, I found it essential not to project my Western ideas and concerns onto countries such as Turkey. All women are oppressed in some way, but it is to varying degrees (Müftüler-Bac 304). Since I was so shocked by reading into Turkey's issues, it became clear I have little understanding of experiencing life like that. Cetin even suggests the rise in femicide is due to men's dislike of women's status slowly moving away from tradition, so my mindset of they should have complete equality and liberation immediately could potentially be harmful for women in a society unprepared for it (346). Therefore, I can help by pointing out the lack of liberation and an unjust system to those uninformed but amplifying Turkish women's stories through the hashtag and the comment section is crucial.

There is a section on Erdoğan and the AKP, primarily on Erdoğan's public statements where he justifies gender-based violence with his personal religious views (Atuk 290). Academics have indicated that some remarks embody a traditional, strict Islamic perspective and could potentially justify fundamentalists' violence (Atuk 286). However, some critics recognise that it is an exaggeration to claim a politician's statements can directly instruct violence and there is no certain link between a politician's intentions and the consequences, so rises in femicide cannot be blamed directly on a politician's lack of condemnation (Atuk 287). Regardless, Erdoğan and AKP's lack of blaming men and instead victim-blaming definitely does not help. I believe by publicly expressing their religious views through these statements, politicians do not instruct violence but rather




influence fundamentalists who already have specific gender roles ideology to go against others, specifically women, who do not. I also realised I cannot blame the Turkish government or any government as a whole. Governments exist with opposition and it cannot be considered one unified entity with set intentions and ideologies, so it was important to specify Erdoğan and the AKP (Atuk 289).

Politicians claim that femicide rates are rising globally, therefore the rise of rates in Turkey is expected (Atuk 289). The Minister of Interior publicly stated that femicide rates in Turkey are proportional to the world average and that Turkey's rates are actually declining (Atuk 290). As stated previously, statistics suggest this is untrue and femicide rates are reportedly still rising (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 5). These statistics, however, are unofficial as the government stopped releasing data on femicides after 2009 and there are large disparities between independent organisations (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 5). I was unsure whether to discuss this in the campaign as without official data, how certain can I be on the reality of the increasing femicide rates? However, I mentioned it on the campaign page as regardless of disparities, it is necessary to inform readers on how the government is controlling the public's knowledge on femicides and downplaying its seriousness by not releasing and misrepresenting data.

I was surprised when reading into the Istanbul Convention, that it failed to comply to the convention's agreement and we still do not see it being implemented (Muftuler-Bac and Muftuler 5). I previously assumed such an agreement would result in immediate implementation, but it further shows how emancipation does not translate into liberation. It is a major foundation for feminist organisation's criticism, which is why it felt necessary to include in the campaign, to help further others' dissent (Atuk 300).

Critics have varying opinions on when and to what extent Turkish woman have been liberated. I believed it was essential in the campaign to define liberation and that Turkish women have not been liberated. Arat theorises that women were emancipated legally and politically but confined by social, traditional norms until the 1980's, when the daughters of the emancipated generation began demanding liberation (107). Tepe argues that women were individually liberated before the 1980's, just not collectively like Arat suggests, and that liberation should not be limited to a collective experience (299). However, considering Turkey's current climate, I suggest they are both too optimistic of what liberation is and how it is succeeded. Müftüler-Bac merges the ideas of emancipation and liberation, that women have yet to even be emancipated due to a lack of education, employment, and opportunities, and that Turkey have also used this binary to create the illusion that Turkish women are liberated (313). All of these criticisms were published considering before Erdoğan's era, and with current increasing femicide rates, I believe Müftüler-Bac came the closest to identifying how liberated Turkey is. Turkey still have a traditional and religious-focused government and society, so I personally believe they are far from liberated.

When discussing the issue of Erdoğan's and AKP's Islamic views, I realise that someone reading could interpret it to mean religion is the problem when it is not, fundamentalism is. Therefore, on the campaign, I made a point of this and defined fundamentalism in the most fitting way involving politics so there was no further interpretative confusion (Bennoune 373). Freedom of religion is a human right, the issue lies with when expression of religion infringes on others' human rights (Bennoune 370), such as Erdoğan's statements which suggest publicly that he has gender roles ideology which could put women in unsafe positions (Atuk 298). Before researching for the campaign, I believed culture to be a product of religion. However, the cultural expectations of how women should live, and act, in Turkey runs deeper than influenced just by Islam, but also the Mediterranean culture of a family structure and Kemalism approach of integrating women in the



public sphere by concealing their femininity (Meltem Müftüler-Bac 305-307). Therefore, I made a point not to blame religion and to work on separating my internal binary of religion and culture.

The main aim of this campaign is to raise awareness on an issue I feel does not receive enough media attention, specifically aimed at people like myself, feminists who know little to nothing about Turkey. I designed it on a Mahara page as you can read the information and then leave comments at the end, which can generate discussion, give women an opportunity to share their stories and comment more information such as changes ongoing in Turkey. The hashtag can be used to transform the campaign further onto Twitter, which can involve a wider audience.

Overall, I believe the campaign successfully brings attention to and summaries a lot of the major feminist concerns of current issues in Turkey. By contextualising the historical and political scene, readers can have a more educated understanding of what is happening, why it is and how we can help. By using a Mahara page, I was able to input my own findings, definitions, and concerns, while also allowing a comment section to further discussion. I have learnt that I am more uneducated on global feminist issues than I first realised and that it is necessary for me to read, reflect and help spread awareness. If I were to further expand the page, I would include more individual, personal stories of Turkish women and would perhaps begin paralleling to similar struggles in other countries to further feminist dissent.

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