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Conversations Across Borders: Men and Honour Violence in U.K. and Sweden

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The media, in particular, in U.K. and Sweden has been implicated in disseminating decontextualised discourses, which define, construct and represent the ethnic minority communities (for example, the Turkish-Kurdish, Iraqi-Kurdish or Pakistani Muslims) as 'violent' and locate the issue of honour violence as a 'cultural' problem. A corollary to this understanding is that honour related violence (HRV) is conceptualised as irreconcilable differences between cultural values of some ethnic groups and the values of Western society. Sociologists and anthropologists have departed from these approaches and highlighted the prevalence of gendered and sexualised violence in the white Swedish and British populations but which is not approached or analysed in a culturalist and essentialist manner. These debates and rebuttals have placed honour violence at the centre stage of government and non-government attempts at combating gendered violence. However, one of the central arguments of the paper is that analysis on honour violence has inadvertently focused on men as 'perpetrators' and women as 'victims' of violence. This paper argues and departs from such analyses on two levels- first, in order to analyse the political and social complexity of honour violence, we need to look at the various subject positions that women as well as men occupy in relation to HRV: as perpetrators, as witnesses, victims and as combatants. Second, all measures to combat violence need to engage men. In relation to the latter, the paper will engage with the ongoing work of the Sharaf Heroes in Sweden (Sharaf Hjältar).

Introduction

In 2000, the United Nations Population fund (UNFPA) report, *Living Together, Worlds Apart: Men and Women in a Time of Change* estimated that around “5000 women and girls are killed every year, across the world, because of dishonour”. Gender-based violence that uses ‘honour’ as a means of justification is prevalent in many countries such as Turkey, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Britain, Jordan, Brazil, Egypt, Ecuador, Israel, Morocco, Sweden and Uganda¹. Underpinned by the indefensible notions of honour (*izzat, sharaf*) and shame (*sharam*), honour killings appear to be on the increase, transcending social, cultural and national boundaries. The practice of honour killings transcends class and social boundaries and is not confined to the impoverished rural areas, but prevalent among the educated elite in the cities as well.

The term honour violence is associated with a range of oppressive and discriminatory practices, which may/may not result in the ‘murder’ or ‘killing’, but are equally and importantly harmful. I would like to draw attention to the fact that the reality of honour violence stretches beyond the ‘act’ of violence itself. Instead one has to draw attention to the inequalities and power disparities in social institutions that nurture and promote specific forms of direct interpersonal oppression and violence. Also, structural inequalities permeate the ‘ordinary’ lives of men and women differently-impacting in gendered ways. Often the potential development of an individual or group is held back by the conditions of specific unequal relationship and they underachieve in relation to their capabilities. Some analysts have conceptualised this as a form of structural violence, which nurtures other forms of symbolic and direct violence as well (Galtung 1996, also see Sen 1999).

Contextualising Conversations on Honor Violence

In Sweden, the discussion about violence against ‘women of foreign origin’ or ‘immigrant women’ has been the subject of debate since the second half of the nineties. Several cases were brought to attention by the media, where girls and women of ‘foreign origin’ were either killed or severely beaten by close male relatives. This sparked off a debate in the media on ‘oppression’ in different cultures and the discussions were fore grounded after January 2002, following the murder of Fadime Sahindal, a Kurdish-Swedish woman². The fact sheet titled “Governmental support for vulnerable girls in patriarchal families” (February 2002)³ reflected the urgency with which the government chose to act on the issue. According to an article in *Quick response* (2002),⁴ the murders of Sara, Pela Atroshi and Fadime Sahindal were treated in different ways in the media. When Sara was murdered in 1996, the focus was more on the ‘individual’. Her family was described as problematic and it was reported, that the boys that murdered Sara, were drunk at the time of the incident. When Pela Atroshi and Fadime Sahindal were murdered, instead of ‘individual explanations’, the media discussed the murders in relation to ‘culture clashes’ and ‘honour’ respectively. For example, the murder of Pela Atroshi, was, according to *Quick response*, mentioned as ‘the Kurd murder’. The debate also entailed the idea of ‘culture’ – how the concept of honour could be seen as something that belonged to the ‘Kurdish culture’. In all the three cases, a debate on immigrant men and boys who ‘can’t accept the girls’ wishes to choose their own lives’ was raised.

1 See CIMELand INTERIGHTS: Combatting Crimes of Honour through data, documentation, networking and development of strategies- <http://www.soas.ac.uk/honourcrimes/CimelandInterightsfinal.htm>.

2 Fadime Sahindal was a 26 year old Kurdish- Swedish woman who was shot dead by her father on 21st January, 2002.

3 Regeringens insatser för utsatta flickor i patriarkala familjer Fact Sheet, Feb 2002.

4 “Flickmord, kurdmord eller hedersmord” 2002-02-28 www.quickresponse.nu The idea behind Quick Response is to follow how the Swedish news media reports on immigration, integration and xenophobia.

At the time of the murder of Fadime Sahindal, the administrative boards of the major city counties were commissioned to hasten the work on creating shelters for vulnerable girls in patriarchal families.⁵ It is also possible to regard the murder of Fadime Sahindal as a wake-up call that gave the issue greater political dignity. Fadime Sahindal, who was threatened by her family, was already publicly known by her engagement on the issue. In November 20, 2001, she gave a speech in Parliament during the seminar ‘Integration on whose terms?’ Her murder on January 21, 2002, was a shock and on the anniversary of her death, the Swedish tabloid, *Aftonbladet*, published an article written by Prime Minister Göran Persson where he describes Fadime as a symbol of the ‘right to a life in safety and freedom.’⁶ In 2005, former minister, Jens Orback was present at a ceremony in memory of Fadime Sahindal, symbolic of the importance attached to the issue by the Government.

The international conference ‘Combating Patriarchal Violence Against Women – Focusing on Violence in the Name of Honour’ (7-8th December 2004) was an organised public forum where the Swedish Government together with other countries expressed their responsibility on the issue at an international level, and encouraged global networks on the issue. As the Minister of Democracy and Equality of Sweden, Jens Orback states, “we had not focussed on these problems until a few years ago... till we had these types of murders.”⁷

HRV, in Sweden, has been approached in many different ways. Firstly, the issue has been intensely debated in the media though some of the decontextualised analysis has led the media to disseminate discourses which define, construct and represent the ethnic minority communities as ‘violent’ and locate the issue of honour related violence as a ‘cultural’ problem⁸. A corollary to this understanding is that honour related violence is conceptualised as irreconcilable differences between cultural values of some ethnic groups and the values of Western-host society. Academics and practitioners in the field have taken the media to task and instead argued against simplistic understanding of honour related violence. In particular, feminists have argued for a greater cross-cultural understanding and have pointed towards the prevalence of gendered and sexualised violence in the white Swedish population but which is not approached /discussed in a cultural and essentialist manner (Mulinari, 2004, Apkinar, 2003). Feminists have also warned that the concept of ‘cultural relativism’, often used for explaining (and respecting) cultural differences, can “become a danger rather than an asset to feminist agendas (particularly when) cultures appear neatly, prediscursively, individuated from each other, in which the insistence of ‘difference’ that accompanies the ‘production’ of distinct ‘cultures’ appears unproblematic; and the central or constitutive components of a ‘culture’ are assumed to be ‘unchanging givens’”. This then re-enforces “essential differences” between Western cultures and Non-Western cultures (Narayan 2000:95).

In 2003, the researcher Masoud Kamali was commissioned by the Swedish State to examine issues of power, integration and State discrimination.⁹ In the summer of 2005, the first part of Kamali’s report was presented that suggested that the Swedish integration politics was based on an ‘us’ that will integrate and a ‘them’ that will be integrated. In the report Masoud Kamali also regards the media debate on ‘honour killings’ as an example of

5 Länsstyrelsen i Stockholm, *Rätten till sitt eget liv* (2002), ”Förord”.

6 Artikel av Göran Persson med anledning av årsdagen av mordet på Fadime Sahindal. *Aftonbladet* 2003.01.21.

7 Interview with Jens Orback, Former Minister for Democracy, Metropolitan Affairs, Integration and Gender Equality in the Ministry of Justice.

8 Interestingly, some Kurdish women argued that there was a ‘cultural dimension to the honour killings’ and viewed them as different from other kinds of violence. They pointed out the logic of ‘honour culture’ where male control over the females and their sexuality was of utmost importance. For a discussion on this issue see Mikael Kurkiala (2003).

9 ”Ny utredning om diskriminering, integration och makt” Pressmeddelande 22 december 2003, Justitiedepartementet.

discrimination.¹⁰ He also argues that it is “a myth that reveals profound prejudices, perhaps racism, to claim that a special honour culture exists.”

Kamali’s criticism is mainly based on the cultural connection commonly made when speaking of honour violence, while culture is never mentioned in connection with ‘Swedish’ men beating ‘Swedish’ women. In the anthology (2004) *The debate of honour murders—feminism or racism?* Kamali criticizes the debate in media after the death of Fadime Sahindal to be one-sided when culture is used as a model of explanation for the so-called honour murders. He comments: “The same line of reasoning should in the name of consequence be used to explain why people of Swedish origin commit crimes of paedophilia. It could then be argued that since most paedophiles in Sweden that have been reported or convicted are of Swedish origin, paedophilia is a part of Swedish culture.” Such a statement in his opinion was just as groundless as all other statements that build on cultural essentialisms or suggest that the problem lies with a specific culture¹¹. In *Dagens Nyheter* (050602) former minister, Jens Orback commenting on Kamali’s view of *so called* honour violence suggests that honour violence is a part of a general patriarchal violence in society—“but to shut one’s eyes on the different expressions of violence, is to also shut one’s eyes on how to reach solutions”.¹² However, anthropologists such as Mikael Kurkiala warn us that “acknowledging the cultural dimensions of human acts and motives, need not imply that all members of a community are pre-programmed to react in the same manner...(and) pointing to the culturally specific elements of honour killings need not mean belittling other forms of abuse against women, including those taking place in the West” (Kurkiala, 2003:7)¹³.

In her thesis *Heder på liv och död – Life-and-death honour* (2003) – Åsa Eldén describes how when she started her research, she was met by scepticism and the view that the issue had little to do with ‘us’ (2003:6). The issue of “honour killings” in 1996-1997 was, according to Eldén, extremely sensitive and was pictured in the debate as something “we Swedes” would never be able to comprehend.¹⁴ In subsequent essays, Eldén (2004:93) refers to the ‘cultural context of honour’ as a normative frame of interpretation in which the behaviour of the individual (woman) cannot be separated from the honour of the collective (of men). Alden argues that the women she has interviewed in her research have contrasted the ‘Swedish’ to the ‘Arab/Kurdish’ construct and loaded one contrast positively and the other negatively. The former signifies gender equality and the other oppression against women. Also, women in their narratives, according to Eldén, ‘oscillate’ in their stories. For example, “Arab/Kurdish may be filled with a content where the collective takes precedence over the individual, while at the same time its loading may alternate between positive (safety, community, love) and negative (limitations, constraint, subjection)” (2004:95). Eldén argues for a “analytical perspective that connects culture, violence and gender”, to comprehend honour violence (Eldén, 2004:96).

In Sweden, some cities have reported incidents of honour violence such as Eskilstuna, Uppsala, Umeå. In 2005, a 20-year-old man was found stabbed to death in an apartment in

10 De los Reyes & Masoud Kamali (2005) Bortom vi och dom – Teoretiska reflektioner om makt, integration och strukturell diskriminering, s 55 f.

11 Kamali, Masoud ”Media, experter och rasism” i *Debatten om hedersmord – feminism eller rasism* 2004, s 23.

12 ”Även Orback ser brister i integrationspolitiken” *Dagens Nyheter* 050602.

13 Kurkiala 92003) points out that the number of women killing in honour killings is small compared with the number of women killed by ethnically Swedish males; Similarly a report, National Council For Crime Prevention (BRÅ) by Lotta Nilsson (2002), points out that in research conducted in four counties in Sweden: Stockholm, Gotland, Dalarna and Östergötland, one percent of working women were exposed to violence within intimate relationships in one given year, BRÅ-report 2002:14.

14 Nationellt råd för kvinnofrids seminarium den 8 maj 2001. ”Våld mot kvinnor med invandrarkondig – vad vet du?”

Hågsby, Småland. A 17-year-old boy claimed to have committed the murder, but his whole family, a mother, father and a 16-year-old daughter were detained in custody. The murdered man had a relationship with the girl in the family. They are all from Afghanistan seeking asylum in Sweden. The murder has been discussed as a honour related murder in Swedish media¹⁵. It has been speculated that the daughter could also be threatened, since it is a widespread practice in Afghanistan and Pakistan that both parts in a ‘forbidden’ sexual relationship must be killed to re-establish the honour.¹⁶

The difficulties associated with culturalist-essentialist explanations for honour violence and the inherent danger of vilifying specific ethnic groups has also influenced the debates in the United Kingdom amongst practitioners, policy makers and academics. In 1998, Rukhsana Naz from Derby, was killed by her mother and brother.¹⁷ She was strangled by her brother “while her mother held her feet”. The mother and the brother were imprisoned for life at Nottingham Crown Court in 1999. On October 12, 2002, Abdalla Yones murdered his 16-year-old daughter Heshu because he “feared that she was becoming Westernised”. The case of Heshu Yones attracted considerable media attention and wide coverage was provided by broadsheet and tabloid press in U.K (Daily Mail 2003, The Sun, 2003). The media forwarded a problematic understanding of the killing (similar to statements made after the murder of Fadime Sahindal in Sweden) as a feature specific to the ‘other’ ethnic minorities in Britain, evident in phrases such as a ‘clash of cultures’, ‘fanaticism in other faiths’, and ‘barbarism’ (The Mirror 2003). The U.K. judge, Neil Denison, QC, in Yones murder trial stated: “In my view the case was a tragic story of irreconcilable *cultural differences* (my own emphasis) between traditional Kurdish values and the values of Western society” (The Observer November 21 2004). Such statements, made by the U.K. judge, have in the past, influenced the judiciary and the police to proceed cautiously on ‘murders’ where cultural practices are involved. However, Metropolitan police commander, Andy Baker, commented that ‘murder is a murder’ and often, in the matter of honour killings, multiculturalism too often became an excuse for ‘moral blindness’.

Media debates on honour violence in the U.K, also re-enforced dialogues between governmental and non-governmental debates on how best to define the issue without essentialising or being ‘culturally bound’ in their analysis. I identify three main approaches: The first approach analyses the practice as a form of domestic violence. As Teertha Gupta and Ann-Marie Hutchinson, Barristers at Renaissance Chambers¹⁸ point out.¹⁹

Genital mutilation, honour murders, facial tattooing and acid baths and scaldings: these are different international guises of the kinds of domestic violence that have been visited mostly by men upon women for time immemorial

There are advantages of understanding honour killings within a framework of domestic violence since it enables one to move beyond culturally essentialist explanations or an over-focus on practices within ‘foreign cultures’. Rahila Gupta (2003:3) from Southall Black Sisters states that “honour killing, like forced marriage or dowry abuse needs to be integrated into the mainstream fight against domestic violence...singling out honour killings risks

15 http://svt.se/svt/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=28854&a=490934&lid=puff_490999&lpos=rubrik

16 This system is referred to as karo Kari.

17 She had been married in Pakistan at the age of 15. She had returned to England, leaving her husband behind in Pakistan. Soon she became pregnant by the boyfriend that she had met at school.

18 Renaissance Chambers, the Chambers of Henry Setright QC and Brian Jubb, is a leading family law set including a leading team of immigration practitioners.

19 Teertha Gupta and Ann Marie-Hutchinson (2005), Honour Based Crimes and Murders, *Law Society*, Working Paper, p.8. Teertha and Ann Marie specilaise in child law, international child abduction and the repatriation and protection of children and adults from domestic violence within the context of forced marriages.

promoting a racist agenda rather than gender equality". However, Diana Nammi from the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) believes that to consider honour killings under the umbrella of Domestic Violence is wrong because "honour killing is a deliberate act, a planned killing and the perpetrator is actively looking to kill".²⁰ Though some of these links are tenuous, it has been observed that often domestic violence and oppression precedes any serious attempt of honour killing.

The second approach is to look at honour violence through the issue of forced marriages. Vinay Talwar at the Forced Marriages Unit, which works between the Home Office (HO) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) comments that, "the forced marriages have an element of honour in them...honour is used to justify violence and the burden of honour is placed on women". The third approach argues for adopting an integrated approach and understanding honour crimes as part of Violence Against Women, since acts committed in the name of honour are not that different from other acts of violence against women (Kelly and Lovett 2005).²¹ As Liz Keeler (2001) points out that "if we limit our focus, we will not be able to develop an overall accurate understanding of violence against women, but will contribute to the invisibility of one or more aspects of it" (Keeler 2001:7). At the same time feminists have alerted us that viewing all acts of violence against women in Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) communities as 'honour' related is also a form of discrimination and racism. So for example, an act of violence that takes place in a White community could be seen as an act of Domestic Violence but a similar act in a BME community, is identified as Honour Violence.²² In other words, though culture and religion are used to justify honour related crimes, it would be incorrect to suggest that HRV is a cultural practice of any specific community. In fact, feminists who have taken issue with multicultural policies argue that either the 'multicultural' state adheres to non-interference with issues related to minority communities. Or when the state intervenes, it works through tainted lens and can advocate 'preventative strategies' that are specially tailored for BME communities and different from strategies proposed for the White communities. This essentialises and constructs BME communities as different and re-inforces power relations between men and women of different ethnicities. However, Abu-Odeh (1997) suggests that if even we adopt VAW integrated approach, it will be difficult to resolve the tensions between honour violence and crimes of passion. For example, Abu-Odeh argues that a crime of passion can only involve an individual and could be related to issues of sexual jealousy. On the other hand, honour crimes involve the rationale of collective injury or insult to collective honour – so rather than involving individuals, they involve the family and in some cases the community.

Though these different perspectives on defining and analysing honour violence are enriching, it can become difficult for various governmental and non-governmental actors in the field to formulate consistent guidelines for both identifying and preventing further violence. Also, like in Sweden, there are no available statistics on honour killings in U.K and as Nasir Afzal from Crown Prosecution Service says "we never monitored it before and U.K. is coming in late on this issue and has to learn a lot". Some suggest that there are approximately 12 murders a year that are honour-related but this figure relates to 2003/2004²³. However, "these do not include crimes that fall short of a murder- such as forceful abductions, forced marriages, forced imprisonment". The national newspaper, The Guardian,

20 Personal Interview with Diana Nammi.

21 It has been pointed out that in the United Kingdom, the term violence against women has in the past decade come to represent mainly domestic violence. It was important , according to Marianne Hester (2007) to create change, it was important for women's groups to focus on domestic violence as a 'single issue, even if DV is not separate from and indeed overlaps with, other violences against women (2007:1433).

22 Hannana Siddiqui, Southall Black Sisters.

23 R. Cowan (2004) Death Threat Couple Still Running- 11years on, Guardian, June 28.

reported that in U.K. 117 ‘murders’ were being investigated as ‘honour killings by the MET police’.²⁴

Moving On

Though debates in U.K. and Sweden may not have been able to resolve the myriad tensions within analyses on violence, nonetheless, they have placed the subject of honour violence at the centre of national concerns. However, this paper argues that its important to move beyond the web of language and definitions and analyse the political and social complexity of violence in both the countries, including the positionality of different actors who are caught within the cycles of violence. Paradoxically, while the role of the ‘collective’²⁵ is identified as an important characteristic of honour violence, the role of all genders and generations, which constitute a ‘collective’, is largely ignored.

We need to move beyond statements such as ‘HRV is a problem created by men’ and explore the complexity of this deeply entrenched social issue. This entails looking at the various subject positions that men can occupy in relation to HRV: as perpetrators, as victims, as ‘silent witnesses’ and as combatants.²⁶ I will argue that men are culpable in honour violence and also vulnerable from that violence. The empirical data,²⁷ on which this paper is based, suggests that men can be *victims* of HRV in five ways.²⁸ **first**, based on their sexual orientation,²⁹ **second**, in relation to economic issues, such as if caught in theft or other economic violations, **third**, by being associated with the woman victim and **fourth**, men can be victims of gender patriarchal norms which disciplines younger members of the family, irrespective of their gender. They are often coerced to kill their own sisters and many men commit crimes under fear or threat of violence. They often do not dare to say ‘no’, due to cultural pressure, even when they feel that things are not right. Men themselves are forced to marry their cousins or girls ‘they don’t love’. **Finally**, younger male members of the family are at times expected to ‘own’ the honour killing, thus protecting the ‘real’ perpetrator, such as the father or the mother.³⁰ The above ideas are indicative of what Kaufman (2004) calls “the contradictory experience of power” for men. Kaufman argues that there may be a dissonance between the power that society bestows on men and the actual lived experiences of powerlessness. Normative understandings of femininity project women as being in need of protection from men by other men. This, while reiterating the essentialised vulnerability of women, misrepresents the lived gendered male experiences of powerlessness.

Women who are symbolic bearers and transmitters of ‘culture’ to the next generation can also play an important role in condoning honour violence. Working within the parameters of patriarchal norms, they are often complicit in these killings, by either remaining silent, by supporting/abetting in the killing, acting as informers or by perpetuating the same norms as

24 ‘Death Before Dishonour’, *Guardian Unlimited*, 2004.

25 ‘Collective’ is understood as both ‘family collective’ and ‘community collective’, where the dynamics of one is shaped by the other.

26 By being silent witnesses, men can benefit from the patriarchal system as well. This brings into sharper focus how the ‘collective’ works in sustaining HRV practices, thus distinguishing it from specific forms of spousal domestic violence.

27 Based on research project completed for Integrationsverket in 2006 (Integration Board), Sweden called State policy, strategies and implementation in combating patriarchal and ‘honour-related’ violence in U.K., Sweden and Turkey.

28 V.Sundaram and Stevi Jackson (2006), point out that men’s violence is a ‘gendered phenomenon whether its victims are men or women; (2006:4).

29 Also see the Government factsheet, ‘Government Initiatives to Help Young People at Risk of Violence in the Name of Honour, *Regeringskansliet*, Ministry of Justice, november 2004.

30 Unni Wikan (2005) points out that in societies where the murderer is given a reduced sentence if he is under age, it happens that the family gives a younger brother the task of carrying out the killing. ‘The honour Culture’ accessed at http://www.axess.se/english/2005/01/theme_wikan.php.

they encountered as young girls. But women in most instances have to shoulder the responsibility for their own death, implicit in statements such as ‘she brought dishonour and shame to the family’. Thus, paradoxically, honour is something that is often associated with women only.

Why involve men?

The greatest hesitation among organisations, academics and activists in Europe has been to involve men in combating violence even though the media has increasingly debated the issue of HRV and the initiatives that are (or need to be) in place for combating violence.³¹ In a programme, ‘Women’s Hour’ on BBC Radio 4, there was a discussion on ‘honour killings’ by Hanana Siddiqui (Southall Black Sisters) and Nasir Afzal (Crown Prosecution Service). Also, an example of combating HRV was drawn from the work of Fatima Shaheen, a Member of Parliament who heads a new parliamentary committee on combating HRV in Turkey. Her new approach is to have a more ‘pragmatic’ approach and to stress the fact that “honour killings” can “tear a whole family apart, putting the men in jail and children in the jail”. She has been visiting prisons and talking to men about their honour killings, emphasising that “its not a man vs. woman conflict”. She says that “you have to get the message across that this is a family’s problem, a society’s problem”. The programme did not take the latter issue further but it is still significant that some individuals, in government positions, do realise the significance of opening a dialogue with male perpetrators of violence. There is a need to focus on the needs of the ‘victims’ of violence, but without taking the responsibility away from men. As Jeff Hearn (1998) argues that “if men are to take feminism seriously, as within a pro-feminist perspective, then one of the most urgent tasks is for men to change men, ourselves and other men” (Hearn 1998:2; also see Connell 2003). It is also important that in order to engage men as agents in combating violence, we need to know more on their attitudes towards this social issue. Also, I would argue that to view HRV solely as a women’s issue or to focus on women only, is not a sustainable solution. If we are combating, what we recognise as gender-based violence, then men should have a political responsibility to combat violence as well. Moreover, an over-emphasis on men, as perpetrators, could lead to men being projected as always a part of the problem rather than as part of the solution (own emphasis). Similarly, the former Swedish minister, Lise Berg, argues that men should be as much involved in the work of gender-equality as women (Berg 2004:198).

While state institutions in U.K. lead on research on men as perpetrators of violence, they are hesitant to engage men in combating honour violence (HRV). They are also sceptical of the idea that men can occupy positions of vulnerability in everyday life. The dominant opinion among practitioners in U.K. is that men can be victims of honour violence though it may not happen on the same scale as it does for women. Thus men and women face honour violence differently. As Saba Johri from *Imkaan* states,³² “men also come under pressure for upholding honour and respectability but not to the same degree that women are expected to uphold. Women experience penalties for transgression that may not be imposed on men”. Similarly, the Southall Black Sisters argue that there are also differences between men and women ‘victims’ of honour. First, men tend to have greater power within the community and tend to be able to escape some pressures. Second, when men transgress, the family is quicker

31 There have been initiatives to involve men such as the White Ribbon Campaign. This campaign was initiated in Canada in 1991 and marks a commitment by men never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. The campaign encourages men to do educational work in schools, workplaces and communities and also to support local women’s groups. (www.whiteribbon.ca).

32 Imkaan is a national policy training and research initiative in the U.K., dedicated to providing support and advocacy to the specialist refuge sector, supporting Asian women and children experiencing violence. Imkaan has raised awareness and build capacity of individuals.

to forgive them and third men also have more economic freedom than women, and can take decisions to leave their family more easily than women, if things start going wrong. Nasir Afzal from Crown Prosecution Service suggests, that “even when the male was a victim of honour violence, the motivation for the attack was the woman...but the bulk of cases would involve women”. Ian Lewis from Renaissance Chambers argues that in the context of HRV:

There are male victims ...that is., the males who are associated with the female who is the primary victim...so far example in an adulterous relationship...or an elopement...the male victim would not be the immediate family member but the man outside the family, the outsider who is threatening the honour of the family by associating with the woman victim...

In a recent trial in the U.K., Arash Ghorbani-Zarin, 19 years, was found stabbed 46 times in a car in Rosehill, Oxford. The Iranian Muslim had a relationship with the sister (Miss Begum) of his killers, Mohammad Rahman, 19 years, and Mamnoor Rahman, 16 years (brothers to each other). They were allegedly ordered to kill Mr. Ghorbani-Zarin, due to the “shame and dishonour” brought to the family by his relationship with Manna Begum whose father had planned for her to have an arranged marriage. In summing up the trial, Mr. Justice Gross said that the “Western-style relationship” caused a “battle of wills” in Miss Begum’s family, as she resisted pressure to conform (BBC News, 4th Nov, 2005). Though the judge draws on the differences in culture and lifestyle by referring to ‘western style’ relationships as enabling individuals to have more sexual freedom, what is significant is that the case highlights the importance of viewing men as both perpetrators and victims of social systems.

In U.K., unlike in Sweden, there is no organised involvement of men in combating violence. Nasir Afzal from the Crown Prosecution Service states that in the United Kingdom, there are male dominated organisations such as The Muslim Parliament and The Council of Sikh Temples who have spoken out eloquently on the subject of HRV, but they are very different from the men’s groups in Sweden. These organisations have argued that religious faith cannot be used for committing violence.

There are very few males who stand up on the stage that condemn the issue of HRV. So I don’t think that as yet, that we will find large numbers of men will come out and speak on the subject. It will happen with time. But there is a desperate need in U.K. to have male-role models but these role models should come from the community themselves and not have individuals, such as me, from government authority who imposes their ideas on them. Also men who have a personal reason (being victims themselves) for getting involved...one example being that the man has his sister murdered in the family she married.....men should have a personal willingness.³³

However, it has been articulated by practitioners working in the field of violence that community leaders in U.K., mostly male, can be extremely patronising to women who are working on HRV. Also, as Nasir Afzal points out, community leaders respond better to government officials who work on different subjects, including honour violence rather than just HRV and “it is easier sometimes for men to work on this issue because they do not have the same obstacles put in their way as women activists experience”.³³

There are a few cohorts and initiatives such as *U.K. Men’s Movement* and *Sure Start*³⁴ that reiterate essentialist – culturalist ideas about HRV; that honour violence is a feature of *other* countries and not U.K. and second that ethnic groups can only talk about it since they are most exposed to it in *their culture*. For example, statements such as “I understand honour-

33 CPS, Nasir Afzal.

34 Sure Start is partly funded by Social Services.

killings as related to Indian notions of honour” or that “I feel hesitation to talk about violence with **Asian** men”.³⁵ One of the respondents also said that “I am not sure what HRV means but there are two women in the office of **South Asian** extraction – you can speak to them”.

The Sharaf Heros Project

Sweden is one of the only European countries that has some programmes in place for involving men to combat violence. One that is frequently mentioned is the so-called The Pite-rebellion (Pite-upproret).³⁶ This male network for the protection of women against violence was created after a woman in Piteå was beaten to death by a man close to her, in the autumn of 2004. The Pite-rebellion received a lot of attention in the media and a number of male-networks were created around Sweden to combat violence. These networks are, however, not specific for combating honour violence.³⁷

The organizing of men against violence has also been getting attention at Government level. In the spring of 2005, the former Swedish minister, Jens Orback, called for a joint meeting of various men’s organizations, to build a common platform and sustainable commitment from men³⁸ In the press release, Orback is quoted:

In order to find solutions, men must learn to see how they are themselves part of the problem. If they don’t see the superiority and subordination they are a part of and don’t commit themselves to break down structures, these structures will remain.³⁹

In an article in Swedish daily newspaper, Dagens Nyheter, Orback called the meeting “one of his most interesting as a minister.”⁴⁰ What is implicit in Orback’s arguments is that power inequalities in social structures, together with varying levels of oppression, constitute a more threatening form of structural violence and we should combat both direct violence (direct physical assaults and killings), and structural violence. Otherwise as Johan Galtung (1969) argues, “... otherwise (we may) be catching the small fry and letting the big fish loose” (Galtung 1969:172).

In a personal interview, Jens Orback stated:

Men have to take responsibility...either they are part of it or they have to struggle against it...men cannot remain neutral. If men are the core that we have to tackle with...then they have to be involved. Some might argue that men may not change but my social democratic, humanistic upbringing suggests that everybody can change.

Jens Orback mentions separate but interconnected levels of activities that may have different objectives but they all work towards combating violence. He mentions the national organisation called ‘Mens Network’(Manliga nätverket), which serves as an ‘infrastructure’ for other organisations which are coming up in other parts of Sweden, (such as Piteå, Malmö, Lund, Västervik) to combat men’s violence against women. According to Jens Orback, some men have voluntarily come together because they ‘have had enough’. The second set of related work is with individuals like doctors, psychiatrists who are working with men ‘who are loosing their control’. Finally, there are specific groups called Sharaf Heroes whose work is concentrated on honour violence.

35 Interviews with Alex Smith and George Dermot.

36 <http://www.piteupproret.se>.

37 For example in Norberg, there is a network ‘Manligt nätverk för Kvinnofrid’

38 Ny plattform för män mot kvinnovåld, *Dagens nyheter*, 20050318

39 Inbjudan till presskonferens – Män om mäns våld mot kvinnor, Pressmeddelande 17 mars, 2005

40 Ny plattform för män mot kvinnovåld, *Dagens Nyheter* 050318

I will now engage with the ideas of the Sharaf Heroes (Sharaf hjältar) project in Sweden⁴¹ that strongly believes that men are agents and victims of violence but also believe that no FIGHT AGAINST VIOLENCE is complete without engaging men. The Sharaf Heroes refer to ‘honour related life’, because they see it as a continuum of violence- where besides physical violence, different forms of oppressive behaviour can co-exist. As Ahmet states:

First of all, I do not want to call it honour violence; I want it to be called honour related life, or honour related oppression. - - - When talking of the violence, maybe only the active part is considered. To me a girl who doesn't chose her own boyfriend – that is a life, and that is oppression.

The Sharaf Heroes cannot be regarded as a men’s organization but rather a men’s project that works preventively for changing attitudes towards honour violence. It is organized on a ‘voluntary’ basis and the initiative actually comes from an established group, Elektra (which works to prevent honour violence and to help youths that are exposed to violence) at Fryshuset in Stockholm.⁴² Sharaf Heroes (SH) received money from the county administrative board of Stockholm. The first group was created in 2003 by the initiator Arhe Hamednaca.⁴³ Arhe Hamednaca states that he has been trying to work against different kinds of oppression and is committed to the issue of honour violence.⁴⁴ Arhe Hamednaca along with Ahmet Benhur Turkoglu aim to have young men and boys as role models; to work preventively; to create more Sharaf Heroes; to continue the dialogue on HRV and to change attitudes against HRV.⁴⁵ The goal is to create a Sharaf Heroes (SH) group at the municipal and local levels and later one in every school. One of the advantages of establishing a SH group at school level is that first; school is a pivotal place of change of attitudes and understandings on honour violence. Second, it creates young people as role models that understand and can communicate with each other and often share the same vocabulary. Third, it creates a gendered dialogue within the school on the subject of violence.⁴⁶ Kaufman (1998) argues that, children are often socialised into expectations of behaviour by our society at a young age’(Kaufman 1998). Thus we need to start early (my emphasis) in combating violence.

Ahmet states:

I now have a group with the right values. They have influenced their surroundings. Even the family. It has not changed completely, but it won’t hinder [the boys]. It gives them the space they need. The families are influenced and treat their children differently. And that is because of one [individual] in the family. And they can do a lot more. They influence segregated immigrant-dominated areas; they influence that area! They change the attitudes of their friends. They act when they see a girl treated wrongly. So they really can

41 Most of the interview material is derived from conversations with the initiator and project leader Arhe Hamednaca and Ahmet Benhur Turkoglu.

42 <http://www.elektra.nu>.

43 New groups have been started in Södertälje and Sollentuna. Interestingly, when Arhe first approached Fryshuset with his idea of working with young boys, he was advised to get in touch with immigrant organisations. However, Arhe feels that immigrant organisations are ‘based on ethnicity and culture’ and their focus is often on preservation of one’s culture. Arhe comments that the immigrant organisations keep claiming that ‘they don’t want to be Swedish...they don’t want to be assimilated’. Sharaf Heroes are critical of the ‘immigrant’ mentalities but paradoxically they also forge their ‘immigrant’ identity in accessing public forums.

44 He also fought as a guerrilla soldier in Eritrea for many years, before coming to Sweden.

45 www.elektra.nu/db/artiklar/sharaf.htm. The project is aimed at young boys (seventeen years onwards), who live within an “honour culture”.

46 At times the class room environment can become tense but it has to do with the ways the school teachers have prepared the class and partly dependent on the nature of the discussions.

influence. We have changed some of them totally...some of them cheered when Fadime was killed. But now they fight for women's rights. So the change may happen.

Kickis Åhré Älgamo from Rikskriminalen, supporting this idea suggests that "you need to have 100% of the community to combat violence, not only 50%". Åhré Älgamo also believes that the government should take responsibility and implement the Sharaf Project in every school. She says that 'One Sharaf Hero project is a good start but it will not solve the problem in the whole country'. However, it has to be said that in the ongoing Sharaf Heroes work, few men and boys choose to voluntarily commit themselves against the oppression of women. Yuksel Said at Linnamottagningen comments on this:

Men have not come out saying: 'We are against honour related thinking, we are against discrimination and oppression of women, and we will create a voluntary organization like Kvinnors nätverk and have this platform'—It is because it mainly concerns the woman. It does not concern [the men] directly. That's why you don't see many organize voluntarily—And at the same time it takes a lot of courage, because maybe you will be questioned a lot. 'We were called whores'. I miss men that will say: 'You may call us without honour, whore customers or I don't know what... anything, but we believe in ourselves and well'... We think that it should be changed'.

The above concerns of Yuksel Said (and supporting the earlier comments by Jens Orback) suggest that it is necessary, though difficult, to challenge the embedded patriarchal attitudes where men think that violence is something that affects women only and thus only women should organise against it or are nervous that if they do participate, then their identity and sexuality as 'real men' will be questioned. Ahmet supports this and comments:

... most of them think it is strange when I say that I work at a feminist organization, and that I am a feminist. Then the first thought is: Is he a fag? Is something wrong with him?

Alan Berkowitz (2004) reiterates that men who work to end violence against women are challenging the dominant culture and the understandings of masculinity that maintain it. "Thus male activists are often met with suspicion, homophobia and other questions about their masculinity" (2004:4). The other side to the coin is that if only women 'own' violence, then they encounter the risk of isolating themselves in a struggle that can be enriched through men's involvement.

Changing attitudes of young men leans towards the analysis of Crooks et al (2007), who working within a pro-feminist framework identify three ways that men can engage in anti-violence initiatives: through treatment programmes for batterers, which are integrated into a responsive criminal justice system, men playing an active role in addressing violence against women in their professional and personal lives and thirdly men who are not violent in their relationships but who have not yet made a personal commitment to be part of the solution for ending violence against women (Crooks 2003:218). It is the third group of Crook's study that bears similarities towards the Sharaf Heroes project.

Supporting the expanded definition in the 2004 Swedish government fact sheet⁴⁷ that identifies men as perpetrators and victims of violence, Arhe Hamednaca of the Sharaf Heroes project illustrates the ways in which men *can be victims* of honour-based violence.

⁴⁷ *Government Initiatives to help young people at risk of violence in the name of honour*(Fact Sheet, Nov 2004). The fact sheet states that "...attention must also be paid to the situation of boys and to young people who are threatened because of their sexual orientation".

The boys are the extended arms of the dads. The dads just call and say: ‘Mohammed, where is the girl, have you seen her?’ That is a problem. If we work with boys, it means that we change the boys so that they dare to say no. The other reason also being that the boys themselves, most of them, in fact, want to lead a modern life. The new generation, not all of them think in this way, but they have to, they are afraid. The pressure, the cultural pressure is huge on them. They need somebody to give them support, then maybe it would be possible to distance themselves from this. The third thing: they are also victims in some way. They are forced to marry cousins or girls they don’t love. There are arranged marriages. In another way he is also a victim, even if he isn’t killed, right? The worst thing that could happen to a boy, when a sister commits a crime according to their norms, is that the entire family sits down and decides that it is his task to kill the girl. He is forced to do it. And I think that most of them do it against their own will. And then is the case that there is nothing worse than killing your sister, to be forced to do this. What a hell of a life to live all your life. When you analyse all that, the boys are victims too. The grade of victimhood may not be the same as the girls’, but they are victims too. And then I think it is worth it to work with boys, but the most important part is two things: the boys of today are the future husbands of these girls *and* the future dads.⁴⁸

What comes clearly through in this quote is that men are often coerced to kill their own sisters and many men commit crimes under fear or threat of violence. Often the family makes this decision collectively. However, while identifying the vulnerability of boys as victims of honour violence, the Sharaf Heroes are aware of gendered differences, that is, while women’s bodies and sexuality is ‘totally’ controlled, men can have more freedom and control over their lives.

Both Arhe and Ahmet suggest that their positionality as immigrant men has facilitated their interaction and dissemination of their ideas among their audiences. They have been able to approach youth in “suburbs, ghettos such as Norsborg, Hallunda, youth recreation centres”. They suggest that:

A Swede would not do that. Imagine a Swede talking about these things at a youth recreation centre with immigrants. The first thing he will encounter is: What the hell do you know about that? You are a Swede! What do you know about it?

On the other hand, they have received mixed responses from the public. They have been threatened and many social groups have viewed their efforts as “working against culture and religion”. They have encountered statements such as: “You are a traitor; you betray your own people; you betray the culture you grew up in.” More pertinently women have spoken against their efforts and defended their religion and culture. This is interesting and challenges the often media informed discourses on HRV that women need to be protected and rescued from the ‘barbaric’, ‘fanatic’ men.

During the autumn of 2005, the Sharaf Heroes group in Södertälje were forced to take a temporary break in their work, because the project leader was threatened to death. “Our women should not play sex as Swedish women” was the message in the letter to the project leader. Eduardo Grutzky, (responsible of social projects at Fryshuset) comments, in an article that, “when you try to question the power relationship between men and women you get opposed”.⁴⁹

Finally, Sharaf Heroes also discuss issues associated with racism and discrimination and Ahre Hamednaca suggests that he wants the boys/young men to reflect on what racism could mean. Ahre emphasises that it is not so much the hostility but the fear of the ‘unknown’ or in many circumstances, ignorance of the other, that could be interpreted as racism. As he stated:

48 Interview with Ahre Hamednaca.

49 *Sharaf hjälter mordhotade*, Arbetaren Nr 45, 2005

Fear exists in all societies. You don't feel safe if you don't know me. And then that fear may be sometimes interpreted as racism.

Sharaf Heroes have received international attention for their work. Scotland Yard has invited them by to the U.K, but they generate mixed reactions among individuals from both Statutory and Voluntary organisations in U.K. For example, some individuals working in organisations such as Imkaan see Sharaf Heroes as ‘vigilantes’ and though organisations see the contribution of men as important, they emphasise two points: first that “men’s engagement should not be at the cost of women’s involvement”. Second, men’s engagement highlights the issue of representation, – “who speaks on behalf of whom”,⁵⁰ a subject, which over the last two decades has been debated between ‘western’ and ‘third world’ as well as amongst privileged feminists within third world countries.

Engagements/Disengagements: Afterthoughts on the Sharaf Heroes

The Sharaf Heroes project has raised important ideas on the subject of honour violence. Some distinguishing features of their work can be identified as follows – **first**, they have broadened the definition of HRV from physical acts of violence to include everyday forms of oppression as a form of violence. This is important because coercion, threats and undermining an individual’s dignity and integrity constitute forms of symbolic and structural violence. **Second**, they challenge the idea of an umbrella term such as ‘patriarchal violence’. In a personal interview, Jens Orback stated that HRV “is a form of patriarchal violence...patriarchal violence has to be seen as part of the overall male violence that occurs all over the world”. However, Arhe suggests, “it is not the same thing,” Arhe emphasises the difference between the ‘individual’ and the ‘collective’:

But the difference is that when Kalle kills Kerstin it is individual. He does it himself; he’s a lone maniac. Either he has had too much beer to drink, or he is jealous, or it may be anything. He isn’t assigned the task by the family. But honour related violence and life is... It is a collective... It is the entire family that sits down and decides that I should do it [kill the girl/woman] against my will to save the family honour. In addition to that, I’m a hero after I’ve done it, the family hero. But Kalle is not a hero. He is a disgrace. That is the difference.

Ahre Hamednaca also suggests that there are a lot of “girls of foreign origin” who do not have the right to decide over their own lives. These girls may not always be exposed to violence, but they could be controlled and monitored in other ways. However, it’s only when a girl resists that it erupts in violence and then become more public and visible to the society. He claims that it is wrong to mix up “honour related life” with the structural patriarchal oppression that he claims affects women of Swedish ethnicity⁵¹.

The difference – the Swedish woman of today – she has the basics, she can live her life as a human being. She can choose her future...whether to get an education, whether to leave home, whether to get a husband, children.... But the other part: the woman living under

50 Nalini Sinha is a member of *Imkaan* and Forced Marriages Unit.

51 Ahre also draws a distinction between patriarchy in Sweden and patriarchy in ‘home countries’. In countries without a strong democratic government, human rights are not honoured. Often small communities make their own rules – to defend themselves and HRV is a feature in these societies. However, in Sweden, Ahre claims, patriarchy works differently. It is an ‘individual’ society, you can stand on your own and society gives you support. I think that while these observations are useful, we cannot contextualise all experiences of HRV through these lens. For example what explains HRV in India- a long standing democracy.

honour related life. She has no chance. She is oppressed from the start. Somebody owns her. She does not own her body. That is the difference.

Third, the Sharaf Heroes are critical about the use of the word, ‘culture’ or the way in which honour related violence has been explained as a ‘clash of cultures’. Ahre Hamednaca would rather like to understand the problem as a ‘clash with human rights’. He suggests that instead of demanding people to adhere to human rights, we try to excuse them by saying that it is difficult for them, because they are in a clash between their ‘origin’ culture and the ‘Swedish’ culture. Ahre Hamednaca is also critical of the projected view that the problem is of being “between two cultures”.⁵²

And that is why I think sometimes when politicians, and everybody...say ”culture clash”. That is wrong. I don’t think that my culture clashes with your culture. When I speak of the rights of children and the rights of women, that is not Swedish culture to me. That is universal rights, you see?

However, the issue of human rights is difficult to disentangle because the human rights discourse is a huge canvas of rights and legislations, which is not always easy to understand. But more importantly the question that should be asked is if people are aware of these rights? Associated with this is the idea that we cannot make judgements on individual’s ideas of freedom, if they do not conform to our notions, since individuals and social groups can understand ‘oppression’ differently. Assigning the category ‘oppressed’ to individuals who perceive their social reality differently can be disempowering as well. Ahmet talks about an exchange with a girl in Rosengård in Malmö who did not want to be perceived as oppressed and opposed the ideas of the Sharaf Heroes:

Girl- Here I come, fighting for the rights of woman and then I get attacked by a girl. I just could not understand why it happened: but as soon as I started to talk to her I understand that they are so oppressed -they don’t understand that they are oppressed. She sees it plainly as the way it should be. That it is right. So, she says to me: I’m getting married soon.

Ahmet ‘Oh yeah, that’s good! Have you been going out for long?’

Girl- ‘No.’

Ahmet- ‘But then how are you going to get married?’

Girl- ‘Well, dad showed me three guys and I got to choose which one to marry!’

Ahmet- That is her freedom. – To choose one out of three. That’s her interpretation of freedom. That just gives a quick picture of how they live.

Though the above quote raises interesting ideas, I think the discussion is problematic, because one cannot impose ideas of freedom and equality on individuals whom we perceive as ‘victims’. The meaning of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ is subjective and time contingent. According to Ahmet many of the young girls and boys he meets do not associate positive qualities with being ‘Swedish’.

52 Interestingly, a psychotherapist from ‘Save the Children, Sweden, Rädda Barnen’ suggests that they have deliberately chosen not to use the phrase honour related violence and instead use the phrase: ’är du flicka, lever i två kulturer och behöver prata om det?’ Are you a girl, living in two cultures and want to talk about it’. The psychotherapist believes that girls and boys don’t want to be placed under a category or label of honour violence. For example, she explains, a young girl feels that her parents do not allow her to do things that she wants to do, but she may not conceptualise it in terms of honour violence.

You don't defend yourself but you defend your family. Because you are brought up to defend the family. The family is the most important thing, more important than society, in their opinion. That is why. And the first argument you hear when talking to boys is: 'But what do you mean? Should I make my sister a whore? Let her out to fuck whoever she wants? Is that what they're after? If it is a girl, it is the same. 'What, are we bad because we don't behave like Swedish girls?'

Several ideas are entangled in the above quote. First, I don't think its problematic, as Ahmet thinks, that his respondents defend their families. Making judgements or adopting an oppositional discourse on 'defend(se) of family' can be perceived as a 'cultural attack' by some immigrant groups. Also we need to bear in mind that familial networks are often the chief building blocks of social capital for immigrant communities. Secondly, there is a risk that if some affluent families move away from 'deprived' residential areas, they leave behind a section of Swedish population who could be in a less advantageous position (for ex, less affluent or experiencing problems associated with marginalisation). The latter, then are seen, as representative of 'Swedishness' and this could explain the heightened insecurity of specific immigrant communities. Thirdly, it is understandable that given this social context, if an 'immigrant' girl has a 'Swedish' friend, she might risk getting a bad reputation, and may generate problems in her immediate family and wider immigrant community. As Ahmet affirms:

So in these areas there is a rumour that if these immigrant girls have Swedish friends, then the girl gets a bad reputation. And she will find it difficult to get married in the future. So they didn't want their daughters to have anything to do with the Swedish girls, which is a pity.

Initiatives to involve men in combating violence are gaining considerable momentum and there will always be point of departures between the women's movement, with a long history of activism, and the burgeoning men's movement. However, identifying areas of engagement and developing dialogues, which are informed by the lived gendered realities, is the first step towards a concerted attempt at tackling violence against women.

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