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How Do We Explain Honor Violence As a Function of Gender Norms and Identity? A Case Study of Turkey

Erin Robbins

Introduction

Honor-based violence occurs commonly within a variety of cultures and communities. Definitive and reliable worldwide estimates of incidences of honor violence do not exist, but most recent estimates by the UN report the number of honor killings alone at five thousand per year.¹ Whereas media attention focuses primarily on honor killings themselves, all honor-based acts of violence reflect social and cultural norms of honor in the contexts in which they occur. Violent crimes motivated by a desire to preserve or restore family or community honor include, aside from murder, forced marriage, enslavement, abuse or mutilation, and the deprivation of certain freedoms such as access to education. In most cases, the victims of honor-based violence are female and the perpetrators their male relatives, and the commission of these crimes is typically justified by their perpetrators as having been warranted by certain behaviors deemed unacceptable or inappropriate on the part of the victim. Ultimately, the boundaries of acceptable behavior for a woman are dictated by culturally-ingrained codes of honor which effectively rob her of her autonomy over her own body and sexuality.

Due to the fact that honor violence usually occurs within families, states have traditionally used its private context as a pretext for non-intervention, and, until recently, the issue was excluded from the agendas of international human rights institutions for the same reason. The problem with this depoliticization of violence against women and, particularly, violence justified based on notions of honor in patriarchal societies, is that it ignores the fact that, in many cases, these types of crimes are both condoned by permissiveness on the part of state agencies and institutions and perpetuated by a rigid defense of multiculturalism. What makes this an international relations issue, aside from the fact that it spans multiple regions and cultures, is that it is, without a doubt, a question of human rights. Tacit approval of these practices on the basis of multiculturalism amounts to condoning human rights violations on a grand scale. As Amartya Sen, an Indian economist and professor of philosophy and economy at Harvard University, notes, a distinction must be made between cultural diversity or cultural freedom and “the celebration of every form of cultural inheritance, irrespective of whether the persons involved would choose those particular practices given the opportunity of critical scrutiny and an adequate knowledge of other options and of the choices that actually exist.”²

Whereas the current literature on the subject of honor violence focuses primarily on honor violence in the context of cultural tradition, my interest lies in analyzing and explaining how gender based norms and the various elements of identity interact to construct and perpetuate said traditions. Through a case study analysis of Turkey, in which I examine various aspects of Turkish culture and society and explore the various themes and similarities to be drawn from case studies of honor violence in Turkey, I come to the conclusion that honor violence has its origins in patriarchal gender norms and roles which are already prevalent in Turkish society generally, and which, when combined

¹United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), “The State of World Population: Lives Together, Worlds Apart. Men and Women in a Time of Change.” https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/swp2000_eng.pdf [2000]

²Amartya Sen. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2006.

101, boulevard Raspail, 75006 Paris – France Tel: +33(0)1 47 20 00 94 – Fax: +33 (0)1 47 20 81 89 Website: www.ags.edu (Please cite this paper as the following: Erin Robbins (2016). How Do We Explain Honor Violence As a Function of Gender Norms and Identity? A Case Study of Turkey. *The Journal of International Relations, Peace and Development Studies*. Volume 2. Available from: <http://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/agsjournal/vol2/iss1/6>)

with a very particular concept of collective honor based on female sexual purity, as well as with the will to maintain said honor at any and all costs, result in the oppression of women and even murder.

Honor Violence and the Status of Women in Turkey

In 2006, the Turkish National Assembly published a report on violence against women.³ This report included the first official statistical data regarding honor crimes committed in Turkey. According to the report, 1091 honor killings occurred in Turkey between the years 2000 and 2005. As this number was determined by consultation of police records, it is likely a conservative estimate, for not only do many such crimes go unreported and undocumented, others are filed away as accidental, and cases involving women who were pressured to commit suicide are not included. However, even this number is significant, as it indicates that honor killings accounted for approximately 10% of the country's homicides, based on intentional homicide rates in Turkey during the relevant time period provided by the World Bank.⁴

While it can be said generally that honor crimes in Turkey are more common in rural regions where tribal/feudal ties and relations are still relatively strong and patriarchal norms and hierarchies are still found in their most severe and anachronistic forms, honor crimes still occur in Turkey's big cities, as well as in Turkish immigrant communities in Europe and elsewhere. These crimes take place within the larger context of a society in which violence against women is a serious problem. Debates regarding the government's attempts to address this problem have been vigorous and ongoing in recent years, as the prevalence of such violence endures despite the country's rapid modernization and economic progress.⁵ On paper, women's rights activists have gained many victories since the 1990s in legislating against domestic violence generally and honor violence in particular. Changes to the Penal and Civil Codes in 2004 and 2005 provided for stricter sentences for perpetrators of honor killings, but many people question both the effectiveness of the legislation and the government's own commitment to enforcing it.⁶

Since 2002, Turkey has seen a transformation of its political discourse and practice concurrent with the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Despite always having identified itself as conservative, between the years of 2002 and 2007, the AKP demonstrated especially strong commitment to Western democratic values and liberal economic principles.⁷ However, patriarchal and moral notions and values, often framed by religion, have become increasingly prominent in the party's rhetoric regarding the regulation of social and cultural domains.⁸ Since the 1920s, the official approach adopted by the Turkish state in regards to gender equality is to define it as "the enjoyment of the same rights by women and men," and many legal and institutional arrangements have been adopted in view of this definition.⁹ Particularly since the 1990s and following Turkey's candidacy for the European Union, the conception of gender equality has impacted law and policy formulation with the goal of eliminating discrimination against women. The AKP, despite officially proclaiming to endorse this agenda, has acted in defense of a conservative and essentially patriarchal value system.¹⁰

³ Zulfı Livaneli, member of Turkish Parliament. Summary of talk given at NYU in April 2006. <http://www.turkishculture.org/lifestyles/turkish-culture-portal/the-women/honor-killings-426.htm?type=1>

⁴ World Bank, Homicide Rate Dataset. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTCPR/Resources/407739-1267651559887/Homicide_Rate_Dataset.pdf

⁵ Alexander Christie-Miller. "Turkey grapples with spike in 'honor' killings," *Christian Science Monitor* [14 April, 2011] <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/2011/0414/Turkey-grapples-with-spike-in-honor-killings>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Feride Acar and Gulbanu Altunok. "The 'politics of intimate' at the intersection of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism in contemporary Turkey," *Women's Studies International Forum* 41:1 [2013], 14.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid, 16

¹⁰ Ibid

These values have, in turn, become increasingly visible in domestic social policies and political projects. In this context, the stance of the government has demonstrated itself to be one which undermines true gender equality by emphasizing “the centrality of the family institution” and “glorifying traditional gender roles.”¹¹

The treatment of women rights and gender issues by political leadership has become increasingly colored by the tendency to emphasize women's roles as caregiver within the family and identify womanhood exclusively with motherhood.¹² Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has himself made several comments to this effect. For example, in July 2010, at a meeting held with leaders of several women's organizations, Erdogan, still at that time Prime Minister, encountered questions about the emphasis in his speeches on motherhood and women's role in the family and was asked to lend more support to gender equality in Turkish society. Erdogan responded that women and men were different in nature and therefore should complement one another rather than compete for equal treatment. He reiterated this argument in 2014, stating that the idea of equality is “turning the victim into an oppressor by force” and that “what women need is to be able to be equivalent, rather than equal, so it is justice.”¹³ “You cannot bring women and men into equal positions; that is against nature because their nature is different,” he claimed.¹⁴ Furthermore, he asserted that it is against a woman's “delicate nature” to do every job that a man can do and cited the needs of pregnant women and nursing mothers as examples of why women could never be equal to men in the workplace.¹⁵

It is in this context that Turkey ranks consistently at the bottom of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, which quantifies the magnitude of gender-based disparities in health, education, economy, and politics, and tracks their progress over time. In 2014, Turkey ranked number 130 out of 145 countries analyzed (125 out of 142 in 2014).¹⁶ What this demonstrates is that such a moral and ideological stance, a sort of “equivalent, but not equal” argument, articulated by statements of political leaders and public officials of no less standing than the President himself, has indeed been translated into legislation and social policy. Therefore, the family, which is considered to be the only legitimate domain for experiencing sexual and reproductive capabilities, plays a crucial role in producing and sustaining the desired moral order, and the contribution of women to society is perceived to be primarily based on, if not entirely limited to, their role in this familial context. As a result, the regulation of sexuality becomes a central concern, and abortion, homosexuality, and the sexuality of unmarried women, all of which challenge the heterosexual and patriarchal family structure, are strongly rejected.¹⁷

Domestic Violence in Turkey

Parallel to the invisibility of women's work in their capacity as caregivers, domestic violence, though shockingly common, has remained invisible in Turkey, hidden safely behind the curtain of the private sphere. According to a survey by the Directorate General on the Status of Women, 85% of women are exposed to violence by those with whom they have a close relationship.¹⁸ The prevalence

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid, 17

¹³Cited by Laura Smith-Spark and Gul Tuysuz. “Rights groups slam Turkey's Erdogan over remarks on women,” *CNN News* [25 November, 2014] <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/25/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-women/>

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶World Economic Forum, “The Global Gender Gap Report.” [2015] <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR2015/cover.pdf>

¹⁷Acar, 20.

¹⁸Songul Sallan Gul. “The Role of the State in Protecting Women against Domestic Violence and Women's Shelters in Turkey,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 38 [2013], 112.

rate for psychological or emotional abuse is 44%; for physical abuse, 39%, and for sexual abuse, 15%. Women's inability to reach economic opportunities and financial resources, their lack of voice in managing family assets, lack of work skills, and the low value attached to women's labor, among other factors, have played a role in increased incidence of both poverty and violence against women.¹⁹ The hierarchical male-female relationship has been reinforced by patriarchal social and cultural values, attitudes, and dependency.²⁰ Improvement in women's control over family resources and in access to basic public services has remained below expectations, due in part to the shrinking of the welfare state, and many women do not share their problems or seek solutions, believing that violence is something that occurs commonly in the context of marriage.²¹

It is important to underline that the government's policy-making strategy does not recognize the essential theoretical connection between gender-based violence against women and overall gender inequality; analyses of the sources of violence against women and mechanisms of elimination, such as those of women's empowerment, are thus rarely offered by policymakers.²² In the context where women are viewed as victims in need of protection, and violence against them is perceived as a threat to the family institution which has a negative impact on children's welfare, women exposed to physical violence are typically offered protection within the family rather than social, political, or economic equality within society.²³ In other words, violence against women is not treated as a serious violation of women's human rights, but rather in a more restricted way, addressing physical violence almost exclusively and expected to be controlled through penal law measures.²⁴ Family Protection Law, which came into force in 1998 and was revised in 2007, defines the concept of domestic violence in a legal text and made possible the intervention of law enforcement and justice mechanisms in domestic violence cases even in the absence of the victim's complaint, meaning that a report of domestic violence by a third party is sufficient to start the legal procedure.

Despite these legal changes, however, research suggests very few cases are actually reported to the authorities. A 2015 study conducted in the province of Sakarya by a team of researchers from Bigadic Public Hospital, Marmara University, and Kocaeli University indicated that 86.6% of women who were victims of violence did not go to the police to report it, despite only 30.8% of the victims surveyed being unaware of the family protection law.²⁵ Moreover, among those who did not go to the police, 93.6% were unemployed. Of those who did report the violence to the authorities, 89.5% reported experiencing difficulties during the reporting process, arising either from pressure shown by family members or husbands or from the authorities themselves, indicating once again that legal measures, though necessary, are alone insufficient to address such a problem.

Domestic violence, which so often falls behind the curtain of the private sphere, is too often perceived as a family issue which must be kept confidential and which rests squarely outside the purview of the state. Understanding why so many cases go unreported requires us to examine the complexity of circumstances—emotional and psychological, economic, social, and cultural—that victims face. Aside from the fact that government support is insufficient, many women do not feel safe

¹⁹Ibid, 110.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Acar, 19

²³Ibid

²⁴Ibid

²⁵Guler Agcay, Sinem Yildiz Inanici, Basar Colak, and Mehmet Akif Inanici. "Risk factors for violence against women by intimate partners in Sakarya, Turkey," *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* 36 [2015], 37-42.

101, boulevard Raspail, 75006 Paris – France Tel: +33(0)1 47 20 00 94 – Fax: +33 (0)1 47 20 81 89 Website: www.ags.edu (Please cite this paper as the following: Erin Robbins (2016). How Do We Explain Honor Violence As a Function of Gender Norms and Identity? A Case Study of Turkey. *The Journal of International Relations, Peace and Development Studies*. Volume 2. Available from: <http://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/agsjournal/vol2/iss1/6>)

seeking help from legal organizations, and/or are unarmed with the necessary knowledge, awareness, and resources to benefit from their legal rights.²⁶ Additionally, seeking help can be seen as a process that shames and isolates, and victims have claimed that law enforcement and the justice system in Turkey are often apathetic, indifferent, and provide inappropriate solutions to the problem.²⁷

In addition to the aforementioned risk factors, the beliefs and behaviors of victims themselves are especially important to break the cycle of violence.²⁸ Although the majority of victimized women interviewed in this study stated upon initial questioning that husbands should never show violence towards their wives, deeper questioning revealed implicit beliefs that, under certain conditions, violence was acceptable and, hence, to some degree, merited.²⁹ Examples of conditions under which violence was perceived as being acceptable include when a wife does not properly perform domestic duties, when she is rude to elder members of her husband's family, or when she does not meet the needs of the children. One may conclude, therefore, that domestic violence, even by the victims themselves, is seen as appropriate in circumstances where the wife does not adequately adhere to expected gender roles related to the family. Therefore, internalization of said gender roles, emphasized at the level of government, society, and culture, may be, in some cases, so powerful as to make perpetrator and victim alike see violence as a necessary and appropriate means of enforcing them.

Conceptions of Honor: *Seref* vs. *Namus*

The term “honor killing” refers to the murder of a family member—typically female—for bringing perceived shame and dishonor to her family and/or community.³⁰ Honor killings are a form of societal violence that arises from a desire on the part of the perpetrators to avoid social ostracism; these murders transcend the bounds of the family home and represent an extreme form of revenge that becomes necessary when no alternative exists for restoring family honor.³¹ Typically viewed as a measure of social prestige within the community, honor is a quality ever subject to defense and loss, which, in turn, serves as a “cornerstone in the construction of gender identity.”³² In this context, “honor” represents virtue, on the one hand, and hierarchical dominance, on the other.³³

In Turkey, there are two different words denoting two different types of honor. *Seref* is closest to what one would associate with the word *honor* as it is understood in English, a notion of honor defined in terms of integrity and virtuous behavior, an achieved status that increases or decreases with the owner's own accomplishments and actions.³⁴ In the Turkish context, *seref* is possessed and controlled primarily, if not exclusively, by men as a mark of social worth and reputation.³⁵ Independent from the actions of females, it stands in stark contrast to its counterpart, *namus*. *Namus*, on the other hand, creates the foundation for Turkish honor killings. It represents a form of sexual honor that presupposes certain moral qualities and behaviors that women should have. Reflecting on the entire family and/or community, it “refers directly to the sexual purity of females and stresses traditional gender roles in which women are expected to assume and accept subordinate social

²⁶Gul, 110.

²⁷Agcay, 41.

²⁸Ibid

²⁹Ibid, 38

³⁰Bethany A. Corbin. “Between Saviors and Savages: The Effect of Turkey’s Revised Penal Code on the Transformation of Honor Killings into Honor Suicides and Why Community Discourse is Necessary for Honor Crime Eradication,” *Emory International Law Review* 29:2 [2014], 281.

³¹Ibid, 281

³²Ibid

³³Ibid

³⁴Ibid

³⁵Ibid

positions.”³⁶ In other words, structured as a gender-specific code of honor, it requires women to maintain the social reputation of their family through sexual purity and thereby creates a preoccupation with women's sexuality and chastity.

What this means is that women bear the burden of safeguarding group identity and group honor, and men, who cannot directly claim *namus*, are fundamentally impacted by any perceived loss of female virtue.³⁷ Given that honor serves as the “barometer of familial worth,” male family members actively strive to restrict the sexual behavior of the family's females, as a means of avoiding any potential loss of *namus* which will ultimately reflect negatively on the entire family. Indeed, male domination of female sexuality operates on a community-wide scale and leads to the development of extreme sanctions aimed at controlling the sexual behavior of women.³⁸ As a result, women serve as agents of men when it comes to their sexuality and are perceived only as potential producers of shame; hence, honor killings are premised on an honor/shame complex, wherein the perpetrator's sense of identity or failing is based on the behavior of another.³⁹ Over the course of her research into honor violence in Turkey, including interviews with victims and perpetrators alike, the Turkish journalist Ayse Onal reaches the conclusion that what emerges from the stories is “the fragility of a masculine identity which depends on other people's behavior.”⁴⁰ She finds that “men who live in honor-based cultures are perpetually fearful, suspicious, and angry, fueling the violence with which they react when they believe their anxieties have been confirmed.”⁴¹

Significantly, honor codes and, by extension, honor crimes, are not exclusively concerned with individual men controlling individual women. Rather they are about “community norms, social policing, and collective decisions and acts of punishment.”⁴² “Created as the product of social interactions among societal members, ‘honor killings’ are a recurrent form of domestic and intra-familial violence, finding vindication and acceptance in society and the law.”⁴³ Once rumors of a female's “transgressions” spread throughout the community, killing the female in question is perceived to be the only means of restoring the honor lost. Hence, honor killing can be defined as the deliberate murder of a disobedient or shameful family member, an obligation of the disgraced family seeking to absolve its honor.⁴⁴ In this way, honor killings occur within the structure of family and community where “bonds of affection, love, and obedience bind all participants to the murder.”⁴⁵

Although this notion of honor, or *namus*, may seem foreign to those who have not lived in a society where it is prevalent, in communities where honor killings occur, this concept of honor holds very powerful meaning, and there is the belief that honor is the most fundamental value in life.⁴⁶ This is an understanding that equates life with honor, and loss of honor with loss of life; hence, in such communities, people are surrounded by those for whom the loss of honor requires killing or violence in return as a means to cleanse themselves of shame and regain the honor lost.⁴⁷ The individual who grows up in this environment, therefore, depending on the frequency, duration, and intensity, of his or

³⁶Ibid, 282

³⁷Ibid

³⁸Ibid

³⁹Ibid, 283.

⁴⁰ Ayse Onal. “Honour Killing: Stories of Men Who Killed.” London, UK: Saqi Books, 2008.

⁴¹Ibid

⁴²Corbin, 283

⁴³Ibid

⁴⁴Ibid

⁴⁵Ibid

⁴⁶Recep Dogan. “Different Cultural Understandings of Honor That Inspire Killing: An Enquiry into the Defendant's Perspective,” *Homicide Studies* 18:4 [2014], 364.

⁴⁷Ibid

her association with these views, comes to learn and to accept that killing, though itself criminal, is the correct and necessary response in situations where honor is threatened.⁴⁸

Honor above All

The extreme view of honor as the most sacred, most precious possession to be protected at all costs is one that emerges repeatedly in the testimonies of perpetrators of honor crimes. In a study conducted by Turkish scholar Recep Dogan and published in 2014, in which he interviewed dozens of people imprisoned for honor crimes, as well as in Onal's 2008 anthology of stories compiled by means of interviews with both perpetrators and victims, preoccupation with honor and its indomitable value is the recurrent motivating theme. The following statements regarding perceptions of honor on the part of those interviewed clearly reflect this theme:

“A person lives for his honor and his dignity. Honor is something that holds the family and people together. It enables people to have a decent life and you live for your honor.”⁴⁹

“People live for their honor. Your honor is your pride, your glory and praise. You can be without water or food. You can live on without water or food but you cannot live on without honor.”⁵⁰

“Honor is the most precious thing in this world and in the eyes of God. It is priceless. The reward of maintaining honor is also given by God.”⁵¹

“Honor is a person's pride and praise. It means everything for a person. Without it nothing can happen, nothing has a meaning. It would be better for a person to die rather than being dishonored. Without honor death would be better than life. Other people may think differently. But this is what I think about honor.”⁵²

“Honor is a source of life for a family and it is an essential responsibility for a family.”⁵³

“People live for honor [*namus*].”⁵⁴

“You are left with a choice between your honor and your sister. You must choose one. You either destroy your honor or your sister. If you don't choose the latter you can't walk amongst those around you as a man. What do we live for anyway? Why except to live like a true man?”⁵⁵

In other words, men live for their honor. It is the most precious thing in life and in the eyes of God. Without it, nothing holds meaning. Hence, when one is faced with a threat to his honor or his family's honor, with a choice between the loss of honor and anything else, he will sacrifice anything, anything at all, to uphold it. Indeed, it is his duty to do so. Moreover, there is little ambiguity in what is meant by the notion of honor in this context and the way in which different standards are applied to men and women. An honorable man, according to interviewees:

“is a man who takes care of his children, wife, and family by putting a roof over their heads, having the means, and earning money (...). An honorable man minds his own business and stays out of other people's

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid, 372

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Onal, Chapter 9

business [read: the business of other men and other families, not that of the females over whom he claims moral authority]. So, as long as a man meets the basic needs of his family, he meets the ideal standards. Therefore, he should be respected and obeyed (...). Any sign of disrespect and disobedience against such a man is condemned and not approved.”⁵⁶

“Apart from taking care of his children and family by earning money, it is desirable for an honorable man to behave in a certain manner and to have certain characteristics. For instance, an honorable man does not gamble, spread rumors, or drink heavily. He tells the truth and always keeps his promises. He does not steal or use deceitful methods; he does his job properly (...). He never stabs anybody in the back. [He is] always (...). prepared to respond to any attack or threats against his family and female relatives... [he is] strong and dignified.”⁵⁷

In other words, an honorable man is honorable primarily by virtue of his ability to provide for and take care of his family, as well as by his work ethic and his honesty. In contrast, an honorable woman is honorable primarily by virtue of her sexual purity and adherence to prescribed gender roles:

“Apart from taking care of her children and being modest in her behavior (...). an honorable woman says her prayers every day. She does not go out without permission from her husband. She does not let unrelated people enter her house, and she always keeps her husband's head held high among people and relatives. An honorable woman is modest in her dress. She is not cheeky, or impertinent, or flirtatious (...). She respects her husband and cooks for him (...). She is a reasonable woman who accepts whatever her husband provides for her without any complaint (...). being respectful, obedient, and modest in behavior, and keeping virginity before marriage is essential.”⁵⁸

What may be concluded from these gender-specific standards of honor, along with the accepted notion that honor is something to be defended and maintained at all costs, is that any deviation from or violation of prescribed gender roles or norms on the part of women is likely to evoke a disproportionate response from her male relative(s) intended to regain the honor lost as a result of her perceived transgressions. One might argue, therefore, that it is said gender roles and norms, a conception of honor as more precious than life itself, the link between these two established by the concept of *namus*, specifically, the influence of *namus* concept on identity, and the consequent willingness and/or compulsion felt by perpetrators and, in some case, even victims themselves, to do whatever is necessary to uphold, enforce, and maintain honor, which combine to result in honor violence.

Compelled to Act? The Perception of Having No Choice

Ultimately, honor, fragile as it is and easily damaged or lost, is a heavy burden which imposes duties on both males and females. It is the duty of the female to adhere to the roles prescribed for her, to be modest, submissive, and obedient. It is the duty of the man to defend his honor and that of his family. In this context protecting their honor entails that men assume responsibility for and control of their female relatives. Moreover, the concept of honor, combined with the concept of shame, makes a person exceedingly sensitive to the judgment of others and leaves very little freedom of choice for the situations that it regulates.⁵⁹ Leaving, as this does, few ways of dealing with the issue of dishonor in any way other than that suggested or designed by the society in which they live, many perpetrators in

⁵⁶Dogan, “Different Cultural Understandings of Honor,” 374

⁵⁷Ibid

⁵⁸Ibid, 375

⁵⁹Ibid, 379

their interviews express having felt as though they had no choice but to do what they did.⁶⁰ Recurrent in Dogan's interviews were such expressions as “I had no choice,” “it was not in my hands,” “there was no other remedy,” and “this problem could only be solved like that.”⁶¹ By using these expressions, perpetrators attempted to convey the pressure they had experienced and justify their actions by appealing to higher loyalties in the form of cultural norms:

“Honor is not something light and easy. It is like a heavy burden. It is too heavy to carry. But it has to be carried.”⁶²

“I sacrificed myself for my family, and I would do it again if I met the same situation.”⁶³

“But for me, even if I go to the USA and have a master's degree, my view does not change. You cannot live without honor. So if I met the same situation again I would kill again.”⁶⁴

“This is honor that we are talking about, nothing else. The murder I committed is not the same as other murders. It is different.”⁶⁵

It is important to note that the pressure the perpetrator feels to defend and protect his honor and, by extension, that of his family, is not exclusively internal. In addition to the internal pressure he feels, which stems from internalized notions about his identity and the roles and duties assigned to him, many perpetrators also face external pressure, either explicit or implicit, from other family members and/or members of their larger community. In some extreme cases, the degree of pressure might be so grave as to amount to a situation in which the perpetrator must choose between killing the female relative in question to restore honor to the family or being killed himself.⁶⁶ In other cases, family members use guilt to pressure younger males to carry out killings in sacrifice for the family. In yet others, perpetrators experience shaming, ridicule, and/or ostracism from their community. The following excerpts from Dogan's interviews demonstrate the form in which external pressure acts upon the perpetrator and influences his actions:

“After my sister eloped, my father could not go out. He even could not go to his own brother's house. If you are involved in something dishonorable, in my community people stare at you in anger. Once, I even heard that without mentioning my name, but by implying me, they said, 'there are so many dishonorable people who live in this world. Could you imagine? Their girl runs away to a man, involves in a dishonorable conduct and when she comes back, they do not do anything to this bitch.’”⁶⁷

“After hearing rumors about my wife's infidelity, even my best friends did not want to be seen (...) with me (...). People used to describe my wife as dirt and dirty.”⁶⁸

“Ten months passed between my sisters' elopements and the killing. During this period (...) people began to stop greeting me (...). I used to check the corner of every street whether there was anybody that I knew. What I felt most was shame (...). On one occasion (...) there was a fight between

⁶⁰Ibid

⁶¹Ibid

⁶²Ibid, 373

⁶³Ibid, 379

⁶⁴Ibid

⁶⁵Ibid, 380

⁶⁶Dogan, “Dynamics of Honor Killings,” 64

⁶⁷Ibid

⁶⁸Ibid

me and one of my cousins in a construction site where we worked. After the fight I was told that he said, 'he cannot dare to use his strength against his sisters, but he is using it against me(...).' If [people] feel that they can question your honor, or your honor is in question, they try to take advantage of this point."⁶⁹

Such external pressure is reflected in story after story, interview after interview, many of which involve pressure placed on younger male relatives by their families, either due to expectations (prior to changes in law) that the sentences imposed upon them would be less harsh or practical considerations, such as the fact that they are, as of yet, unmarried, free from the responsibilities of marriage and without a wife and children to provide for.

In one case, which took place in 1999, a 25-year-old woman from a Sunni Muslim family disobeyed her father by marrying a man who was an Alevi Muslim. After the convening of a meeting of male family members, the woman's father ordered his 16-year-old son to shoot his sister. Initially, the son resisted and was beaten. He was told by his father, "You are young. This is your task. You will only stay in prison a few weeks." Ultimately, he succumbed to this pressure, went to his sister's house, and shot her in the back while she was doing housework. He served eleven months in prison. None of his other family members served any time at all.⁷⁰

In a second case, recounted by Onal on the basis of her interview with a man imprisoned for having killed his mother, the level of pressure experienced was less explicit, but no less severe. The man's mother had been forced by her father at the age of fifteen into marriage with a much older man, despite her affections for someone else. Though she bore her husband several children, she continued a relationship with the man who had previously been the object of her affections, unbeknownst to her aging husband. It was not until he was a teenager that the perpetrator became aware of her affair, but, when he did, he became obsessed with the suspicion that other people knew about it. "Each time he imagined that [someone] knew, he sank deeper in torment (...). When walking along the street, if someone coming towards him looked at him for five seconds, he'd torture himself with the illusion that they knew."⁷¹ One day, his uncle summoned him. When he met with his uncle, the uncle said, "there's something you need to do (...). It's up to you to clean this stain on our honor and our dignity (...). If you don't do this, I won't be able to show my face in the market (...). If you don't do it we'll have blood on our hands and we have children and responsibilities."⁷²

The perpetrator thus made the decision to kill his own mother. Afterwards, however, his uncle turned his back on him, claiming no responsibility or part in what had happened. In speaking with Onal, the perpetrator revealed that, for years after, he was haunted by the thought that his mother had bowed her head and closed her eyes in order to make the job easier for him, that she neither flinched nor struggled nor tried to escape. What is interesting to note is that even this particular perpetrator, who appeared to have experienced more remorse than most of the others, emphasized that he felt he had no choice and that honor killings in general are likely to persist amidst increasingly severe penalties. He stated:

"As long as the mentality doesn't change, no matter how severe the penalties (...) no matter how heavy

⁶⁹Ibid, 65

⁷⁰Boon, 815

⁷¹Onal, Chapter 2

⁷²Ibid

the sanctions, this kind of thing will carry on. Because the person who does it has no idea of the terrible loneliness and personal tragedy he will face afterwards. The only thought in his head is his belief that once he has done it, everyone around him will accept that his honor has been cleansed.”⁷³

Other perpetrators, despite feeling some measure of remorse, recounted feelings of relief, as though carrying out the murder had lifted a weight from their shoulders:

“I felt relieved. The burden was lifted.”⁷⁴

“Soon after the murder, I experienced sorrow and anger together. I also felt relieved because the burden was lifted from my shoulders. But I felt deep sorrow for them and cried. Neither the thought of prison nor the question of what would happen to me went through my mind.”⁷⁵

“I felt relieved; I saved myself from all the problems and hardship. My psychology improved and my sleeping problem disappeared.”⁷⁶

Such feelings of relief, even felt simultaneously with remorse, demonstrate the extent of the pressure felt by perpetrators to take violent action and highlight the weight of the burden imposed by their perceived roles and duties corresponding to threats to their honor. Moreover, Dogan's research found no support for the idea that increased prison sentences succeed in changing a perpetrator's mentality as it relates to honor and thus in deterring him from a willingness to repeat the same offense; on the contrary, for the majority of perpetrators, the underlying assumption seemed to be that “killing was almost inevitable and was the only solution for their problem and that anybody who met the same or similar circumstances would do what they did.”⁷⁷

Guilty Until Proven Innocent

In a context where honor is valued above all else, men are highly sensitive to any perceived threat to their honor and, by extension, any perceived loss of honor in the eyes of their community. What this means, therefore, is that perception is, in fact, more important than reality. Mere suspicion or rumor of dishonorable behavior can be a death sentence for a woman, regardless of whether said suspicion or rumor is true. Moreover, given how fragile one's honor is and how easily called into question, men are inherently suspicious, and, often, rumors serve to confirm suspicions, providing the perpetrator with all the explanation or proof he deems necessary.⁷⁸ The following excerpts from Dogan's interviews demonstrate the extent to which perpetrators were affected by suspicions or rumors:

“I heard rumors that my sister was on the bad way (...). One day, I saw her in front of a bakery. She used to wear a head scarf. But I saw that she got her hair color changed, wore a colored contact lens, make-up, and no head scarf. Seeing such changes (...) made me sure that the rumors were true.”⁷⁹

“If you do not eat garlic, your mouth does not smell of garlic. There were rumors about [my sister]. In

⁷³Ibid

⁷⁴Dogan, “Dynamics of Honor Killings,” 70

⁷⁵Ibid

⁷⁶Ibid

⁷⁷Ibid, 73

⁷⁸Ibid, 60

⁷⁹Ibid

spite of rumors, she did not sit at her home (...). One day, I was sitting in front of my butcher shop and two men were talking (...). I overheard them saying, 'this butcher is the brother of that tart.' I had enough."⁸⁰

"It was a year-and-a-half before the crime. My younger daughter and my wife started to distance themselves from my eldest daughter. The talk of my neighbors and their behavior gave me the impression that there was a problem (...). One day, I saw my eldest daughter in a car. I followed her, she entered a hotel (...). So I learned what was going on."⁸¹

"My sister was behaving in a way as if she was not married. She started to hang around with people who were known as tarts; rumors went round that my sister was a tart too. People started to treat and stare at me as if I was encouraging her to be a tart."⁸²

Given the power of suspicion and rumor to influence perception, single women, namely those who are divorced or widowed or otherwise unmarried are often victims of honor violence. This is due to the fact that, in the absence of an evident male authority figure who assumes responsibility for them and ensures their honor and sexual purity, they are frequent targets of rumor and gossip in the community. There are several such cases in the interviews of both Dogan and Onal.

One man murdered his sister for having expressed a desire to divorce her husband.⁸³ He expressed no remorse for having done so, instead blaming what he called "modern ideas," for corrupting women's minds. He stated that, "instead of telling our women, 'do this, these are your rights,' you should teach them to obey our customs and traditions. The people who don't, who tell our women to break with our ways, are the real murderers."⁸⁴ What was his sister's crime? She wished to divorce a husband who was abusive, a husband who blamed his poverty and misfortune on her having borne him three daughters and no sons. Her elder brothers refused to allow it; in their eyes, "a divorced or widowed woman was no different from a prostitute (...). In cities where relationships between girls and boys outside marriage were forbidden, most adolescent boys enjoyed their first sexual experience with a widow or divorcee (...). There was not a single widow or divorcee without a slur on her name."⁸⁵ Because his sister refused to return to her husband, he murdered her. When he gave himself up at the police station, the police treated him kindly, saying he was a victim of fate. Neither his family nor her husband took responsibility for her funeral or burial.

Another man interviewed by Onal murdered his sister after hearing rumors that she was regarded as a prostitute by the neighborhood, rumors which he traced back to a time when he had been absent from home completing military service and there had been "no man in the house to guide the women."⁸⁶ After months of feeling himself the object of ridicule in his community and feeling he could no longer bear the shame and humiliation, he murdered his sister, only to discover in the results of the forensic report that she had been a virgin at the time of death. In a similar case, another perpetrator had two aunts who had decided to live together after having both left their husbands. His uncles found the situation questionable and so decided that both women were to be killed.⁸⁷

⁸⁰Ibid

⁸¹Ibid, 61

⁸²Dogan, "Different Cultural Understandings of Honor," 374

⁸³Onal, Chapter 3

⁸⁴Ibid

⁸⁵Ibid

⁸⁶Ibid, Chapter 5

⁸⁷Dogan, "Dynamics of Honor Killings," 64-65

What these cases suggest is that even the mere suspicion or rumor of “inappropriate” behavior is enough to set in motion a chain of events that culminates in murder.⁸⁸ In other words, perception is everything, because one's honor is based on the community's validation of it, and, regardless of whether it is true, a rumor has the power to influence public opinion and result in a loss of honor. In a very literal sense, one is guilty until proven innocent, and even then it may be too late. For this reason, women are expected to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, and single women often find themselves victims of rumor and suspicion, founded or not, simply because they are perceived to lack a male authority figure who monitors their behavior and controls their sexuality.

Women Held Responsible for Their Own Victimization

The preoccupation with female sexual purity is so extreme that little difference is made between situations in which it has been compromised voluntarily versus situations in which it has been compromised involuntarily. Ultimately, what this means is that women are often held responsible for their own victimization, in the form of rape, incest, or forced prostitution. Countless cases of this type have been documented.

In November 2002, a young woman named Semse was stoned and her throat slashed by five men, including her father and brothers. Accused of having sex with a married man and becoming pregnant, she claimed that she had been raped, but it made no difference. She died after six months in a coma, and her family refused to claim her body from the hospital or give her a proper funeral.⁸⁹

Another young woman, Guldunya, was raped by a relative and consequently became pregnant. Though initially her family sent her to Istanbul to fend for herself, two of her brothers subsequently tracked her down and shot her in the street. When she survived the gunshot wounds, they stabbed her to death in her hospital bed. Her body also remained unclaimed by the family.⁹⁰

Kadriye was raped and impregnated by her 18-year-old cousin. In order to avoid having to marry her, her rapist fled, and her brother subsequently crushed her head with a stone and slashed her face with a meat cleaver. When her parents were asked about their son, they claimed he did what any young man would do to cleanse his family's honor. When asked how he should be punished, his mother replied, “I wish they would send him home (...). I don't want him to worry and get upset (...). What is done is done.” Kadriye's body was also unclaimed by her family.⁹¹

Naile became pregnant by her aunt's husband. Upon discovering her pregnancy, her mother beat her with a rolling pin, claiming that Naile had denigrated the honor and dignity of the family and demanding she reveal the identity of the father. Her uncle claimed she was lying, denied having ever touched her, and she was beaten again for her alleged dishonesty. Taken to a hospital, she was placed in the care of a doctor who suspected she would be the victim of an honor killing if returned to her family. Her doctor informed the police and the office of the public prosecutor of this, but when Naile's mother begged the prosecutor to return her daughter, he instructed the police to let Naile go back to her family. Ultimately, a family council decided that Naile would be shot in the street to serve as an example for the other girls in the family. The only family member who was opposed to this was Naile's father, Yusuf, so Naile's mother had her son, Bahri, lock Yusuf in a room before forcing him to

⁸⁸ Ibid, 61

⁸⁹ Aysan Sev'er. “In the Name of Fathers: Honour Killings and Some Examples from Southeastern Turkey,” *Atlantis* 30:1 [2005], 133.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 134

⁹¹ Ibid

shoot his sister. During his interview with Onal, Bahri justified the murder as follows:⁹²

“The authority of our family over the girls would have been shaken if I hadn't shot Naile (...). Could you accept it if your sister became pregnant out of wedlock? If she went to the bed of a man without asking you, wouldn't it be as if she was telling everyone what she took the family for? Can you control the other girls if you don't shoot the one who has proved herself immoral? And if you don't shoot the immoral one, you jeopardize the morality of the others. All the girls in your family will be soiled. In such a situation you can be as innocent as anything but you are committing a sin by letting others commit sins.”⁹³

In March 2015, the bodies of two women, mother Semire and daughter Ayse, were found in a ditch in the Turkish city of Adana. Both had been shot multiple times. The suspects in the case were the father, from whom Semire had been divorced for four years, and her son, Ayse's brother. After the divorce, Semire and Ayse had been living together along with Ayse's husband, who allegedly forced his wife into prostitution. When the father and son discovered this, they murdered both Semire and Ayse, and Ayse's husband fled to escape execution.⁹⁴

What these stories demonstrate is that no distinction is made between voluntary or involuntary action on the part of the woman. The simple fact that her sexual purity is perceived to have been compromised, whether due to rape, incest, or prostitution, means that the family's honor has been tainted and must be cleansed. This is especially true in cases where the rape or incest results in an illegitimate pregnancy. Though the rapist may, in some cases, be held accountable to some extent, by being forced to marry his victim, he often faces no consequences and is not typically murdered by the victim's family, for fear of starting a blood feud.

Honor Suicides

In light of recent changes to the penal code mentioned previously, which bring with them the threat of heavier penalties for perpetrators of honor crimes, Turkey has witnessed the rise of a phenomenon known as honor suicide, where victims take their own lives as a result of pressure from their families and in order to ensure that family members do not risk incurring these penalties on themselves. A preliminary report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women states that honor crimes are one of the primary causes of suicides among Turkish women and that these suicides are often ignored by authorities particularly in the southeast.⁹⁵ Indeed, the chief prosecutor, Mustafa Peker, in the Turkish town of Batman, which has acquired the nickname “Suicide City” and where three-quarters of all suicides are committed by women, has stated that “ [he thinks] most of these suicide cases are forced. There are just too many of them, it's suspicious. But they're almost impossible to investigate.”⁹⁶

Though such cases are difficult to prove, there are some that have been officially documented, mostly of young women who have been pressured to commit suicide and have consequently fled their families. One young woman by the name of Elif declined the offer of an arranged marriage with an older man, telling her parents she preferred to continue her education instead.⁹⁷ This was seen as an act

⁹²Onal, Chapter 6

⁹³Ibid

⁹⁴Didem Atakam. “Mother, daughter: victims of so-called honor killings,” *Daily Sabah* [16 March, 2015] <http://www.dailysabah.com/nation/2015/03/16/turkey-mother-daughter-victims-of-so-called-honor-killings>

⁹⁵Boon, 840

⁹⁶Ramita Navai. “Honor Killings Have Morphed into Honor Suicides in Turkey,” *The Huffington Post* [27 April, 2009] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/27/honor-killings-have-morph_n_179928.html

⁹⁷Ibid

of disobedience on her part, which brought dishonor on her family and merited death. Her father told her that she must kill herself in order to spare him the prison sentence for her murder. As she recounted, “I loved my father so much, I was ready to commit suicide for him, even though I hadn’t done anything wrong. But I just couldn’t go through with it.”⁹⁸ She managed to escape, fleeing to various women’s shelters, living in hiding and in fear. Her uncles and other relatives, carrying weapons, continued to look for her, once even raiding one of the shelters where she had stayed. “I managed to escape,” she said, adding: “when I was at school, a few girls I knew were killed by their families in the name of honor—one of them simply for receiving a text message from a boy.”⁹⁹

Another young woman named Derya, actually attempted suicide three times, but survived all three attempts.¹⁰⁰ Derya had fallen in love with one of her high-school classmates, Recep. She spoke to him daily on the phone. When her uncle discovered her secret, he confiscated her phone and alerted her family, but she continued the relationship in spite of her family’s violent objections, in spite of the knowledge that her aunt had been murdered by her grandfather for having done exactly what she herself was doing. She subsequently received a message from her uncle that read “You have blackened our name. Kill yourself and clean our shame, or we will kill you first.”¹⁰¹ Derya felt as though she had no other choice. “I felt I had no right to dishonor my family, that I had no right to be alive. So I decided to respect my family’s desire and die”¹⁰² Derya first attempted suicide by jumping into the Tigris River. When that failed, she tried to hang herself and then slashed her own wrists with a kitchen knife. Ultimately, she was unsuccessful in her attempts and ended up fleeing to a women’s shelter. In her opinion, as long as gender inequality is explicitly and implicitly sanctioned in Turkey, these crimes will continue.¹⁰³ “In my village and in my father’s tribe, boys are in the sky, while girls are treated as if they are under the earth.”¹⁰⁴

Honor Violence and Law

In Turkey, the fundamental document regulating all issues regarding gender equality is the Constitution. Additionally, relevant legal documents regulating gender policy are the Turkish Civil Code, the Labor Law, and the Penal Code. In the past ten to fifteen years, the Civil Code and Penal Code both saw changes in favor of equality for women, and a number of amendments were added to other legal documents. In 2001, the Turkish Grand National Assembly passed amendments to the Constitution in Articles 41 and 66, ensuring gender equality within the family. Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution, which envisages “equality before law” was amended by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 2004 to “men and women have equal rights and the State is responsible for the measures to implement those rights.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, as a signatory and party to the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, Turkey adopted an amendment to Article 90 of the Constitution in 2004, rendering CEDAW superior to national law in gender policy.¹⁰⁶ Turkey has also officially demonstrated its support for UN efforts in eliminating the practice of honor crimes by voting in favor of General Assembly resolutions 55/66, in which the Assembly expressed concern at the persistence of violence

⁹⁸Ibid

⁹⁹Ibid

¹⁰⁰Corbin, 278

¹⁰¹Ibid, 277

¹⁰²Ibid

¹⁰³Boon, 840

¹⁰⁴Ibid

¹⁰⁵Meltem Muftuler-Bac. “Gender Equality in Turkey.” Monograph, The European Parliament, Brussels [2012]

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201202/20120207ATT37506/20120207ATT37506EN.pdf>

¹⁰⁶Ibid

against women in all parts of the world and in particular crimes committed in the name of honor, and 55/111, in which the Assembly called upon governments to investigate crimes committed in the name of passion or honor, to bring perpetrators to justice before impartial judiciaries, and to ensure that such killings were neither condoned nor sanctioned by representatives of the government.¹⁰⁷

Under Turkey's former Penal Code, the punishment for intentional murder was a minimum sentence of twenty-four years imprisonment; when the murder was committed against family members, parents, or children, or was premeditated, the perpetrator was to receive capital punishment under Articles 449 and 450.¹⁰⁸ Hence, the minimum punishment under the former code for perpetrators of honor killings should have been capital punishment for cases prior to the reforms of 2004. In practice, however, perpetrators rarely spent more than twenty years in prison, and entire acquittals were common.¹⁰⁹ In the city of Siverek, for instance, “nearly half of all honor killing cases tried in courts between 1996 and 2004 resulted in acquittal, and the average sentence length for every woman murdered was 10.2 years.”¹¹⁰ High acquittal rates and low sentences for perpetrators of honor killings resulted directly from Articles 462, 51, 29, and 59 of the former Penal Code. These articles together afforded perpetrators substantial penalty reductions in the event of prosecution.

Articles 462 and 29 of the former code specifically offered sentence reductions in cases of “provoked” homicide. Article 462 explicitly referred to instances of special aggravating provocation in situations where the perpetrator discovered that a first-degree relative was involved in an illicit sexual relationship:

Regarding the perpetrators who commit the offenses specified in the two foregoing Chapters, against the wife, husband, sister, or offspring, at the time the victim is caught in the act of adultery or illegal sexual intercourse, or while the victim was about to commit adultery or engage in illegal sexual intercourse, or while the victim was in a situation showing, free from any doubt, that he or she has just completed the act of adultery or sexual intercourse; or against another person caught participating in such acts with one of the aforesaid relatives, or against both, the punishment prescribed for the offense shall be reduced to 7/8 and heavy imprisonment shall be changed to imprisonment. In view of heavy life imprisonment, imprisonment for four to eight years shall be imposed, and in view of death, imprisonment for five to ten years shall be imposed.¹¹¹

Honor crimes were therefore typically presented as homicides committed in the heat of passion and treated under Articles 462 and 29 as cases of unjust provocation. These provocation defenses were granted in approximately sixty-three percent of cases in which they were applicable.¹¹² Furthermore, Article 462 was often used in combination with Article 51, the general mitigating clause in Turkish law, which could be used to reduce a perpetrator's sentence by up to two-thirds if it was found that the individual committed homicide as a result of uncontrollable grief or provocation.¹¹³ When upheld,

¹⁰⁷World Organization Against Torture. “Violence Against Women in Turkey: A Report to the UN Committee against Torture.” [2003] http://uudenmaanpiiri.mil.fi/@Bin/126557/vaw_Turkey.pdf

¹⁰⁸Corbin, 304

¹⁰⁹Ibid

¹¹⁰Ibid

¹¹¹Rebecca E. Boon “They Killed Her for Going out with Boys: Honor Killings in Turkey in Light of Turkey's Accession to the European Union and Lessons for Iraq,” *Hofstra Law Review* 35:2 [2006] Article 17, 829

¹¹²Corbin, 305

¹¹³Ibid

therefore, this defense could offer an additional two-thirds penalty reduction in conjunction with the one-eighths reduction afforded by Article 462. Similarly, Article 59 permitted a judge to reduce sentencing further by one-sixth at his discretion.

In response to pressure from the European Union and general discontent with Turkey's lenient honor provisions, the Turkish government revised the Turkish Penal Code in 2004. The new code, modified in accordance with the Copenhagen Criteria, resulted in a shift from laws that arguably condoned and protected honor killing and were clearly gender discriminatory to a new penal code which rejects honor as a justifiable motive for murder.¹¹⁴ Specifically, Article 462 of the old Penal Code, was revoked, Article 29 was amended to clarify its inapplicability to honor killings, and Articles 414 through 416, 453, and 457 were amended to impose heavier sentences for perpetrators of homicide against children and family members.¹¹⁵ Arguably the most important revision to the law, however, is Article 38, which in the new Penal Code provides that “the perpetrator of an honor killing... and the family council responsible for the decision to commit the crime are to be punished equally.”¹¹⁶ This is meant to eliminate the immunity family councils and young perpetrators once claimed; families can no longer select the youngest male to commit the murder and escape punishment.

Although the legislative steps taken by Turkey to eradicate honor killings are both necessary and commendable, the implementation of the new law and its effectiveness have been called into question. Sentencing still remains largely within the discretion of the judge, and many judges are still sympathetic to the honor defense. As Corbin notes, “textual changes to the law cannot simply eliminate the patriarchal and cultural biases that may influence a judge's decision-making process.”¹¹⁷ Most judges in Turkey remain socially conservative and interpret the law as offering light punishments to honor crimes despite amendments to the Penal Code. According to KA-MER, a women's group in Turkey aiming to combat honor killings, “the law has changed, but you don't see it yet in the courts when verdicts are handed out. Judges don't always follow the new laws, they follow their own feelings too.”¹¹⁸ In other words, there is an established way of interpreting and applying laws, and, as a result of this convention, legal professionals select certain legal texts over others, deem some legal excuses more valid than others, and this plays out in the daily operation of the law.¹¹⁹ Dicle Kogacioglu, a Turkish academic and women's rights activist, upon interviewing judges in Istanbul, found that they saw honor as a fundamental aspect of tradition that, while primitive in content, should be “appropriately” taken into consideration as social norms during sentencing.¹²⁰

Therefore, while substantial progress has been achieved in terms of legal reformation, the practical implementation of these laws is still far from ideal. Moreover, “while the workable reality of Turkey's new Penal Code remains unsettled, it is undeniable that these laudable changes have failed to reduce honor killings in any appreciable manner.”¹²¹ Though perpetrators of honor killings face harsher prosecution under the revised code, numbers show that the prospect of imprisonment has either failed to deter honor crimes, implying that perpetrators do not fear harsh judgment or are

¹¹⁴Ibid, 307

¹¹⁵Ibid, 308

¹¹⁶Ibid

¹¹⁷Ibid, 309

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Dicle Kogacioglu. “The Tradition Effect: Framing Honor Crimes in Turkey,” *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 15:2 [2004], 124.

¹²⁰Ibid

¹²¹Corbin, 320

prepared to risk imprisonment in order to “cleanse their honor,” or has only altered their form, resulting in the emerging problem of “honor suicide,” where families pressure women to take their own lives in order to spare the potential loss of another family member to prison.

Conclusion

The status of women, even in modern Turkish society, reflects the standards of a culture based on gender norms and roles that perpetuate a patriarchal system and reinforce a double standard for men and women. Undue emphasis is placed on the sexual purity of women, especially the virginity of unmarried women, and women are often forced into marriages without their consent, without, in fact, having even been consulted. In marriage, many women are subject to domestic violence in some form from their partners, but economic and social imperatives prevent them from escaping their situation. Single women, whether they be divorced, widowed, or never married at all, face social stigmatization. All of this contributes to perpetuating a culture in which women are defined primarily in relation to their dependence on the male figures in their lives, especially in the private sphere. This is a value system endorsed, at times openly, at times tacitly, by the current Turkish government.

The case study of Turkey demonstrates that, in the context of honor violence, cultural notions of honor are dictated by gender-specific roles and norms dictating the sexual purity of women and resulting in disparate expectations' being placed on women and men. Moreover, gender-specific cultural prescriptions dictating behavior are internalized insofar as they become ingrained in the identity of the victim and the perpetrator and inform his or her thoughts, beliefs, and actions. The victim's perception of her own identity, both individually and collectively, results in her adhering to the gender roles and norms expected of her. Honor killings represent those cases in which a woman has departed (or is perceived to have departed) from her rightful role and violated expectations. In turn, the perpetrator's perception of his own identity, both individually and collectively, leads him to enforce gender roles, as he believes to be both his duty and his right, in order to cleanse and restore his honor and/or the honor of his family.

The internalization of disparate gender roles dictated by patriarchal values, combined with a notion of honor as more important than life itself, a notion of honor which depends upon adherence to and enforcement of said gender roles: this is both the origin of honor violence and the cause of its perpetuation. In the case of Turkey, honor violence endures, despite economic progress and development, despite increased literacy and education, despite legal reforms, despite religious secularism. All of these changes, granted, have a critical role to play in addressing the problem, however, as of yet, none of them has proven sufficient. This is because in order to effect change, what must be addressed is the underlying, necessary cause, and this can happen only through a genuine shift in consciousness, a de-internalization of the gender roles and notions of honor from which honor violence ultimately stems.

By blaming honor violence on subculture or a minority group, one obscures a critical element of the issue, namely, that, while the conception of honor as worth killing for is half of the problem, the other half of the problem is that the gender roles and norms linked to such a conception of honor are also widely prevalent in the larger society where honor violence takes place. In other words, the same society which may condemn the killing of a woman for having premarital sex or for seeking to divorce her husband, and rightfully so, endorses the disparity in gender norms which labels her actions dishonorable. It may not believe she merits death for her actions, but it does believe she merits

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judgment, condemnation, and social stigmatization, to a degree that a man in similar circumstances almost certainly would not. What needs to be addressed, therefore, is the way in which such a gender-specific conceptualization of honor has created an environment conducive to men sustaining patriarchal values and constructing their masculine identities through violence and control.¹²²

In order to prevent honor crimes, therefore, it is crucial to redefine the concept of honor within the community and within the society as a whole. Violence against women is legitimized by the attitudes of state actors, many mainstream human rights activists, and Turkish society at large because ultimately gender imbalances are the status quo.¹²³ Women lack autonomy, and they suffer when they assert their rights as individuals and go against established societal norms.¹²⁴ Given that the concept of honor and the gender roles and norms which that concept implies are so imbedded in Turkish culture, Leyla Pervizat, a Turkish women's rights advocate, supports a two-pronged approach in addressing the problem of honor violence in Turkey, one which employs different frameworks and discourses depending on the target audience and level of intervention. In other words, when intervening preventively at the local level, instead of a human rights framework, she advocates the use of cultural discourse, as cultural variables are what we are trying to understand, use, and ultimately transform. Recognizing that men are also victims of the concept of masculinity, she emphasizes the importance of creating space for long-term change, taking advantage of positive aspects of Turkish culture that offer men an excuse to avoid violence, such as gatherings where nonviolent negotiations are encouraged or where authority figures can act as intermediaries. Such prescriptions would provide men with a "cultural and psychological space" where their masculinity is not challenged and they do not feel forced to kill in order to cleanse their honor, while simultaneously employing as preventative tools established cultural traditions of hospitality and respect for the authority and recommendations of elders. On the other hand, in addressing the problem at a state level, in speaking with government officials and courts, a human rights framework should be employed as an effective tool for achieving recognition of honor killings as human rights violations, putting violence against women on the same plane as extrajudicial executions and torture.¹²⁵

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¹²²Dogan, "Differences," 368

¹²³Leyla Pervizat and Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. "In the Name of Honor," *Human Rights Dialogue* 2:10 [2003] https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/archive/dialogue/2_10/articles/1058.html#:pf_printable

¹²⁴Ibid

¹²⁵Ibid