

KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



**USES OF CULTURE:  
DEBATING HONOR KILLINGS, CULTURAL DEFENSE  
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

GRADUATE THESIS

**NINA SEKULOVIĆ**

MAY, 2016

**USES OF CULTURE:  
DEBATING HONOR KILLINGS, CULTURAL DEFENSE  
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

Nina Sekulović

Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in  
Communication Studies

KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY

May, 2016

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NINA SEKULOVIĆ

APPROVED BY:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Levent Soysal (Advisor)

Kadir Has University



Asst. Prof. Dr. Suncem Koçer

Kadir Has University



Assist. Prof. Dr. Kerem Karaosmanoğlu

Yildiz Technical University



APPROVAL DATE: 10/06/2016

“I, Nina Sekulovic, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.”

Nina Sekulović W.S.

Nina Sekulović

## **ABSTRACT**

# **USES OF CULTURE: DEBATING HONOR KILLINGS, CULTURAL DEFENSE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

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The concept of culture has been exploited numerous times as a justification for all sorts of wrongful actions, misunderstandings and unbridgeable gaps and the case of honor killings that will be here in the focus is no exception. This Thesis will be focused on recognizing unfair attribution to culture, but at the same time not forgetting about its victims or gender category that may easily be neglected or undermined in the light of East-West dichotomy, ethnocentrism or cultural relativism. Identifying honor killings as a culture of some groups, usually Muslim one, may lead to their stigmatization and at the same time prolong and strengthen the East-West collision. Further on, same acts of violence may be explained through completely different frameworks, where almost always cultural or collective one will be referred to East while psychological or individual one to West. The challenge is in analyzing stigmatization of Muslims in a way that will not be caught in an unproductive and never-ending net of East-West accusations. Here feminist approach that recognizes universality of the worldwide violence against women may give a tool for more constructive and beneficial position towards honor killings.

Ultimately, the most harmful way of looking upon honor killings would be not dealing with this matter as somehow not concerning all of us but simply and only belonging to some cultures and religions. My intention is questioning popularly perceived closeness between culture and practice of honor killings. (Keywords: Honor killings, Cultural defense, Cultural Relativism, Women's Rights, Patriarchy)

## ÖZET

# KÜLTÜRÜN KULLANIMLARI: NAMUS CİNAYETLERİ TARTIŞMALARI, KÜLTÜREL SAVUNMA VE ÇIKARIMLARI

Nina Sekulović

İletişim Bilimleri Yüksek Lisans

Danışman: Doç. Dr. Levent Soysal

Mayıs, 2016

Kültür kavramı her türlü haksız eylemin, yanlış anlamının ve derin görüş ayrılıklarının gerekçesi olarak pek çok defa istismar edilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın odağını oluşturan namus cinayetleri de bu durumun istisnası değildir. Bu tez, Doğu-Batı ikilemi, etnosentrizm veya kültürel görecelik gibi olguların gölgesinde kolayca göz ardı edilebilecek namus cinayeti kurbanlarını ve toplumsal cinsiyet kategorilerini unutmadan, namus cinayetlerinin nasıl haksız biçimde kültüre atfedildiğini tanımlamaya odaklanacaktır. Çoğu kez Müslümanlar olmak üzere namus cinayetlerini bazı zümrelerin kültürü olarak tanımlamak bir yandan bu zümrelerin damgalanmalarına yol açabilirken bir yandan da Doğu-Batı çatışması söylemini temdit ettirmekte ve güçlendirmektedir. Dahası aynı şiddet olayları bütünüyle farklı çerçeveler üzerinden açıklanabilir ve bu bağlamda neredeyse daima kültürel veya kolektif çerçeve Doğu'ya, psikolojik veya bireysel çerçeve ise Batı'ya gönderme yapacak biçimde anlamlı hale getirilmeye çalışılacaktır. Buna göre, Müslümanların damgalanması hakkında bir analiz çabasında asıl mesele, verimsiz ve bir türlü sonu gelmeyen meşum Doğu-Batı suçlamalarının ağına düşmemek olacaktır. Tam da burada, kadınlara karşı dünya çapında yaygın şiddetin evrenselliğini kabul eden Feminist yaklaşım, namus cinayetlerine yönelik daha yapıcı ve işlevsel bir eleştirel aygıt sağlayabilir.

Neticede, namus cinayetlerini ele almada en zararlı yaklaşım bu meseleyi bir şekilde doğrudan parçası olmaksızın; söz konusu cinayetlerin gerçekleştiği belli bazı hayali kültürel ve dini zümrelere ait olmaksızın ele almamak olacaktır. Bu bağlamda

benim niyetim, kltr ile namus cinayetleri arasında kurulan ucuz ve yaygın yakınlığı sorgulamaktır. (Anahtar kelimeler: Namus cinayetleri, kltrel savunma, kltrel grecelilik, kadın hakları, erkek egemen sylem)

## **Acknowledgements**

First I would like to express my special gratitude to my advisor Professor Dr. Levent Soysal who has been a remarkable mentor for me. I would like to thank him for teaching me how to think critically and question ideas we often take for granted, his classes have been the most brilliant one I attended during all my years of education. I appreciate all his advices on both this Thesis and on my future career. Special thanks as well to Professor Dr. Suncem Koçer, for all her help and encouragement that meant very much to me, for being a perfect role model, someone I look up to as an accomplished and inspiring person.

Also I would like to especially thank to The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) for their incredible support to engage in this academic journey, for recognizing my academic success and allowing me this amazing opportunity. Without their encouragement I would not be able to take part in this greatest journey of all, the one that helped me grow personally and academically, so once again I thank TÜBİTAK very much.

Last but not least, I would like to thank to my parents, my aunt Duda and my grandma who never stop encouraging and believing in me. Especially to one person who I know would sacrifice all for me and who has always been the biggest support in my entire life, my mother, I thank her for her endless patience and unconditional love.



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## **List of abbreviations**

AHA Foundation

Ayaan Hirsi Ali Foundation

AN

Amnesty International

FGM

Female Genital Mutilation

HBVA

Honor Based Violence Awareness Network

UK

United Kingdom

UN

The United Nations

UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific  
and Cultural Organization

USA

The United States of America

WHO

The World Health Organization

## **I. Introduction**

I remember the first time I heard about story of honor killing, although then I did not know about this particular naming used for describing these murders. It was many years ago, in my hometown, a story about a fourteen year-old girl, coming from Gypsy family, brutally beaten to death by her father for her alleged immoral behavior. I was almost the same age as this girl and was appalled thinking how this man had to be a monster to do something like this. More importantly here I used to think, influenced by local stereotypes and lack of knowledge, that violence of this kind can happen only among Gypsies and is somehow remnant of their culture that I could not understand. As a child, you may be prone to accept the quickest answer you are given, however today I know the problem is much more complex than that.

Stories like this may raise question whether honor killings should be associated with culture and on what grounds should that be. Then again, argumentations are needed as well in case of denying mention relation. Therefore, research question that I will be examining through all my further writing will be – Can honor killings be explained solely by cultural argumentation and what it further implies? If not by culture then what can be an alternative? Identification of honor killings as a cultural custom of some groups, usually Muslim one, presented by media, is a statement that I will be putting on test here. My center idea is that honor killings cannot be explained by culture and are indeed just one form of worldwide universal violence against women. In order to demonstrate so I will be exploring mechanisms and locations of this form of violence. Therefore I am interesting in who are the most likely to be victim of honor killings and secondly examining locations where they

may take place. For example, can one make any predictions about place where next honor killing may occur? Can we say that it happens in some parts of the World and some religions but not in others? Previous questions will be explored as a tool of getting to understand the scope of this violence in a way that will try to avoid impartiality and blindness of stereotyping.

As I said above, my focus is on the relation between culture and honor killings. Now, I will shortly examine two most problematic outcomes that come out of that association. Firstly, stigmatization of Muslims as probably most visible negative consequence of this connection. Many evidences do refute linking honor killings to Muslim group, as will be noted in this Thesis, nevertheless this incorrect characterization of honor killings seems to strongly persist. Secondly, when we relate these two to each other it usually leads to culture being a shield to honor killings or any other forms of violence. It is very likely that any criticism of someone else's cultural custom will be interpreted as racist or ethnocentric. This further ties our hands in making any interventions and fighting back against honor killings. Almost always violence is inflicted upon women, and it suggests that culture somehow has to and is hurting women and girls. This will be observed through many examples in the following writing, although it should be noted here that men too can be victims, although much rarely. To summarize, stigmatization of Muslims and danger of disregarding women's right due to inability of intervening and fighting back honor killings are very real and troubling consequences of simply classifying honor killings as a cultural custom.

Why I find this matter as an extremely important? Honor killings occur worldwide taking many young lives of those who are usually forgotten, memories of

them erased as they never existed and without receiving any justice for pain and terror they suffered. Having said this, I must mention the power of the media to expose and perpetuate forever these struggles, but doing so in a proper and professional manner. Luckily, this matter is receiving more attention by mass media, particularly film industry has been working eagerly on re-educating audience worldwide about factual face of honor killings. More and more documentaries are focusing on raising awareness about Muslims not being the only group among whom these killings take place. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and highlight all complexity and severity of this matter.

When it comes to the methodology used in this paper, I will be doing selective reading of literature and media material, in other word using general theoretical-empirical discussion about honor killings and its relation to culture. I will be first building and looking upon existing theories in areas of culture and feminism, attempting to combine and expend on them in order to get to the theoretical presumption of my Thesis. As an empirical material I have chosen Unni Wikan's book *In Honor of Fadime* (2008) that well manifests stigmatization of one group resulted by cultural interpretation of one particular honor killing that took place in 2008 in Sweden. This case will hopefully help readers to better understand complexities of honor killing's mechanisms, gender issues, cultural aspects etc. I do understand that this book represents secondary information and I cannot be certain that the whole facts in this book are correct. However this material will be combined with many other written on this concrete case including extensive media coverage of it. My goal is to connect theoretical frameworks and concepts related to honor killings with this specific story, for the purposes of better understanding the

phenomenon of honor killings. In addition, this will not be the only empirical material used as there will be mentioning of other cases of honor killings that took place, where appropriate as an exemplification of introduced theories and concepts.

Summarizing the writing, the beginning chapter will briefly provide readers with elementary information about the practice of honor killings as well as background description on existing interpretations of looking upon this custom. Those interpretations will be more visible and touchable in the next chapter, where particular case of honor killing will be examined. This specific case has been chosen as the first case of honor killing that provoked an outrage and shock among Swedish society and further opened fiery debate on how honor killings should be approached. Following chapter will introduce and examine the concept and use of Cultural defense and problems it further opens. I found important to analyze this matter as an area where relation between practice of honor killings and use of cultural argumentation takes its direct, full and practical form. Last chapter will focus on representation of honor killings in mass media as well as uneasy debate on finding proper terminology when referring upon this matter, followed by short conclusion on the whole preceding discussion.

## **II. Analyzing Different Interpretations on Honor Killings**

This Chapter will provide readers with necessary background on the practice of honor killings by presenting various definitions, specifics, mechanisms and different approaches to its logistics. As any other matter, honor killings can and will be here approached from different angles, precisely within three interpretations; psychological, feminist and cultural one while afterwards pointing out while feminist one seems to be the most applicable. At the end of this chapter writing on honor killings by well-established scholar Abu-Lughod that recognizes negative consequences of cultural interpretation, will be in the focus.

### **2.1 Defining honor killings. Its Roots and Mechanisms**

As defined by Amnesty International honor killings are typically murders committed inside a family by male members against female ones, referring to daughters, sisters, wives and mothers in order to regain family honor that is perceived as jeopardized. (2012) As further stated, these acts are based on “deeply rooted belief that women are objects and commodities, not human beings entitled to dignity and rights equal to those of men.” (Amnesty International 2012) According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, honor killing is defined as a customary practice in certain countries of killing a family member who is believed to have tainted family honor. (2016) Almost the same definition can be found in Oxford Dictionary identifying honor killing as a killing of a relative, usually female one, who is perceived to have dishonored her family. (2016) Another explanation by Leyla Pervizat in *In The name of Honor* describes it as “one of the

most horrendous violations of women's human rights and a form of extrajudicial execution" committed against those whose behavior is perceived "at odds with the social norms of their society."(2003:30) it can be observed that none of the found definitions is relating honor killings to culture, but rather focusing on violence and motive of the killings, tainted family honor.

Before I go on, I want to clarify readers that honor killing is one of many forms of honor-based violence. Honor Based Violence is a term used to describe violence against women inside families or communities governed by patriarchal structures in order to protect socially constructed value of honor. (United Nations 2009) Or according to Honor Based Violence Awareness Network (HBVA) it reflects "violence committed within the context of the extended family which are motivated by a perceived need to restore standing within the community", lost due to victim's behavior. (2016) The term honor-based crime is used to refer as well to other violations of personal liberties like forced marriage, honor suicides, ostracism, imprisonment and abduction, disfiguration and other emotional, social or physically coercive acts. (Welchman & Hossain 2005; HBVA 2016) All of these acts are causing great damage to women physically or emotionally, however in its consequences honor killing is the most radical and ultimate form of honor-based violence.

As noted in definition above, bringing shame to the family is considered as a valid reason for honor killing, yet the problem occurs when trying to identify which precise behavior may dishonor ones family. Alleged reasons for why women are punished by their relatives vary from engaging in extramarital affair, having premarital sex, seeking a divorce, being raped, resisting an arrangement marriage to simply being seen next to a man who is not relative. Not so rarely violence resulted



due to the fact that victim was wearing a dress or makeup, was dedicated a song on radio or did not cook the meal on time. (Prochazka 2012) It can go that far that in one case dream of a family member was called upon as a motive for murder. (Cohan 2010:195) As Prochazka notes; “Women are also blamed and punished for reasons beyond their control. For instance, a female rape victim may be forced by her family to marry her attacker in order to regain some measure of purity.”(2012:476) Very often completely unbiased rumors are provoking murders, as Wikan well notes: “Young women have paid with their lives for flimsy tales about their flawed virtue. They were not even given the chance to defend themselves.”(2008:17)These facts may suggest that simply inflicting violence on women is prioritized before even finding a motive or knowing that shame has been indeed brought on family. This is important as it takes away acknowledged logistics that honor killings are committed due to unfixable damage.

Now I will briefly browse through historical roots of honor killings with one intention of trying to answer from where and why these acts of violence come from. This may be helpful to understand why honor killings have persisted for so long without losing or changing its form through all those centuries. I want to remind readers here not to lose from sight that relation of honor killings with culture I was talking about before. As many anthropologists have recognized culture is dynamic and so it tends to change, transform, and adapt to needs of society, on the other hand if this practice never changed but survived so well all the social changes, then it may lead us to re-examine if we are dealing with culture here. So, when tracing back roots of honor killings one should be aware that there is not only one direct, accurate source to call upon. History testifies of its long presence and uses of controlling

sexual autonomy starting with ancient times; as found in codes of Hammurabi and Assyrian law practiced back in 6000 BCE (*Honor Killings; Tradition and Law; History*, 2016) Moreover, found documentation testifies that in Ancient Rome men who did not take any discipline actions against family members who engaged in dishonored sexual acts were actually penalized. (2016) Another example, from Latin America in the early times of Peru can be found among Incas who as a punishment in cases of an adulterous act legally allowed husbands to starve their wives to death. (Muhammad, 2010) Within ancient desert tribes, women were look upon as Vitoshka notes possessions of their husbands, fathers or other male relatives or as Ruane describes the storage of a family's honor. (*Honor Killings; Tradition and Law; History*, 2016) Killing women was encouraged as a tool for men to publicly exercise their power, avoiding in such manner to be looked upon as “‘socially impotent’ and *beghariat* (without honor) by their community” (2016) Scholar Leila Ahmed argues, as cited in *Nicole Pope's Honor Killings in Twenty-First Century*, that its purpose originated with settlement of the first tribes, where these patterns were being designed, “to guarantee the paternity of property-heirs.” (Pope 2012:17) In other words, honor killings represented a mechanism of constant control of female members, reassuring male members in the family that descendents were indeed and no mistake theirs. (2012) Therefore, these sources may suggest honor killings being an instrument of maintaining male domination from its earliest stage.

Gender inequalities could be traced as well in the language, for example term honor, from its beginning had different meanings for male and female gender. For instance, in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, noun honor is defined as “high respect, esteem, or reverence, accorded to exalted worth or rank” while referring to woman as

“chastity, purity, as a virtue of the highest consideration; reputation for this virtue, good name.” (Cohan 2010:182) Whether we are calling upon Eastern or Western tradition the concept of honor was commonly seen as an asset to male rather than female gender. “It is fine for men to be honorable, or worthy of honor; ‘a woman of honor’ somehow does not trip so easily off the tongue. It used to be that men had honor, women a sense of shame.” (Wikan 2008:49) Indeed, man's honor is tied to sexual behavior of his wife, sister or daughter. Ironically although saving honor is perceived as guarding women sexuality it is not seen as a part of them. Quite the opposite, women are the keepers but never the holders of these cherished possession. “To avoid being shamed, women must know how to behave with propriety, as prescribed in the code of honor.”(2008:61)

Thus, though we were talking solely of women being the victims of honor killings, this is not always the case, men too can be victims of honor killings considering how “culture of masculinity” punishes those who may deviate and threat those structures. In *American Honor Killings: Desire and Rage Among Men*, McConnell writes precisely about murders motivated by homophobia, where publicly displayed act of violence is considered by a perpetrator as an obligatory measure for reasserting the idea of his masculinity. (2013) While women are generally the victims of honor violence, men also may be targeted if they reject an arranged marriage or in case of homosexual assumption. For example in Pakistan, proponents of anti-honor killings claim that men too are targeted as much as women in so called ‘*karo kari*’ (‘black man, black woman’ where black meaning morally corrupted) honor killings (Terman 2010:11) Victims may also be pressured to commit suicide, and may do so without even realizing they are victims of honor-

motivated violence, as explained by AHA Foundation<sup>1</sup> (Ayaan Hirsi Ali Foundation) that offers help to victims of honor violence. Considering those stories where women are not necessarily always the victims, Wikan writes “this is why violence in the name of honor cannot be understood simply as systemic violence against women or globalized oppression of women. To argue this is to ignore the underlying ideology of honor.”(2008:56) At the same time, admitting this does not undermine the fact that those cases are in minority and by far more often women are the one paying the price of honor.

## **2.2 Three angles of understanding honor killings**

Following section will briefly analyze three different interpretations of honor killings so the readers would hopefully better understand the complexity and problematic nature of this matter. Precisely, problematic lies in the inability to give only one satisfying explanation, only one rightful framework, which would give complete sense to this practice. Moreover in next chapter, exhibited interpretations will be conveniently used as analyzing tools for one particular case of honor killing. Although angles of looking upon honor killings may differ by various authors, they could be positioned in one of these three following categories: particularistic interpretation concentrating on psychology of an individual; the universal or feminist interpretation that stresses patriarchal frameworks and finally cultural interpretation.

After presenting all of them with their strengths and weaknesses, I will offer

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<sup>1</sup> The AHA (Ayaan Hirsi Ali) Foundation is an organization working to combat honor violence that hurts, kills or put in risk thousands of women and girls in the US each year, as stated on their website. It was founded by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Somalian women’s rights activist and author who experienced herself honor-based violence and has been fighting for its elimination (AHA Foundation 2016)

argumentation why I consider feminist one to be the most complete and beneficial. Finally for better understanding of my ideas, as mentioned before, I will further refer to and reflect on one specific article by Abu-Lughod.

### **2.2.1 Individual (Particularistic) Interpretation**

This interpretation puts honor killing under one particular spotlight giving priority to a psychology of an individual, presenting it as an acts committed by mentally disturbed people in moments of temporary madness. This approach will be presented through work of Steve Taylor<sup>2</sup>, recognized British psychology lecturer and author. Taylor identifies honor killing as “many other ‘insane’ types of human behavior – such as warfare, racism and materialism”, caused by the feelings of fragility and inability to feel complete. (*The Madness of Honor Killing* 2012) We lack things from inside our selves, as he claims, so therefore we build the need to approve our statuses and at the same time great fear of losing it.

Concretely Taylor offers an explanation founded in “extreme form of status anxiety”, “pathological insecurity” and ongoing pressure to obey severe social rules in order to escape ostracism by the rest of the group. (2012) One can just observe strong preservation of caste system in India through centuries, as Taylor notes, to understand an obsession with a rank in mentioned society. (2012) What should be

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<sup>2</sup> Steve Taylor is a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University, UK. He is the author on several books published in 19 languages on psychology and spirituality, some of them: *Back to Sanity; Healing the Madness of Our Minds, The Fall, Waking From Sleep and Out of the Darkness*. His research has appeared in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, The Journal of Consciousness Studies, The Transpersonal Psychology Review, The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* and in UK media, including BBC World TV, The Guardian and The Independent. (Psychology Today)

treated here as Taylor suggest is the feeling of incompleteness and separateness resulting from a great anxiety of losing its own status. As Taylor explains in one interview for Journal of Humanitarian Affairs conducted by Ernest Dempsey; “If you feel complete and authentic inside, what does it matter if other people shake their heads at you, and talk about you behind your back? You feel sorry for them for caring about such trivial things.” (Taylor, *Psychology of honor killing - Interview with Steve Taylor*, 2012) It suggests that satisfaction from the inside may mirror and transform the society outside.

Further Taylor broadens its analysis by including some feministic observations, exemplified when commenting upon the price of female lives in certain cultures. He notices clear frameworks of male domination stating that it is only possible for a father to kill his daughter or brother his sister in a society where value of female life is very low. (*The Madness of Honor Killing 2012*) In his opinion if women were truly appreciated and respected in society they would not be facing these abuses. He as well finds its roots in sexual repression, society that punishes its members for simply falling in love or being attracted to someone. He believes that it is not accidental that honor killings happen among strongly patriarchal societies that in addition have unhealthy approach to sex and human body. (2012) Taylor concludes that honor killings would be impossible to imagine if girls and women were indeed appreciated and their sexuality seen as a normal part of their lives. Mentioned observation on unequal female-male relations, when it comes to roles and freedom of genders is in somewhat level overlapping with positions of feminist one that is presented next.

### 2.2.2 From Feminist (Universal) Angle

Patriarchy is one specific term that should be explained at the beginning as a central and crucial point of feminist's observations, term attributed and inseparably linked to feminist theory. Therefore, I will present few definitions, for example author Walby in *Theorizing Patriarchy*, defined it as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women."(1990:20) Perhaps fuller explanation can be found in Hartman's *Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex*, where he defines patriarchy "as a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, which enable them to control women."(Hartman 1976:138) In her article *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women*, Susan M. Okin as well acknowledges the same oppression of women by men, stating that in patriarchal relations women are not recognized the same equality as men but are in fact undermined as their main purpose being observed in serving men. (1999:18) Definitions on patriarchy may be formulated in more or less radical sense but all agree upon existing social structures that provide women being exploited by men.

From this perspective, honor killings appear to fit into the understanding of femicide<sup>3</sup>, defined by Radford as 'the misogynous killing of women by men' and as 'a form of sexual violence.'(1992:3) Devers and Bacon as well argue strong feministic approach of honor killings seeing it as a "fatal form of social control" that

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<sup>3</sup> The term femicide was "elaborated in the work of Jill Radford and Diana E.H Russell in a compilation of works entitled *Femicide, The politics of woman* published in 1992" representing "a derivative from Latin word *caedere* which means to kill and *femina* which means a woman or female" as cited by Kaye Josie in *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence* (2007:2)

finds its meaning in subjugation of women.(2010:359) According to mentioned authors women are systematically discriminated as a result of institutional incapacity to offer them protection against violence. (2010:359) Although, these authors admit that men too can be victims of honor crimes, they write that is happening only when both women and men are killed in an adultery act. (2010:361) They further see the basis of this discrimination in leniency and partiality of criminal justice system favoring only male perpetrators. If the law is not objective, as they continue, then their truth and their knowledge are questionable and that society could be just reflecting the power of males. (2010:362) In that case, as Welchman and Hossain write, law is only granting leniency in cases of honor killings committed by men, allowing only men to benefit from these regulations. (2005:363)

This interpretation observes honor killings as one form of violence against women that is universal and applies to women everywhere, women of every religion and culture. This approach exceeds beyond East-West dichotomy that associates violence of East with family honor and violence of West with heat of the moment. (Welchman and Hossain 2005) Feminists observe that outcome and actors in both cases are the same, “both are manifestations of femicide where culturally positive values legally/judicially mitigate the murder of women from, arguably, motivations of male control, whether named as ‘honour’ or ‘passion’”.(2005:16) They are suggesting holding the mirror up both on Western and Eastern gendered constructions of property and control and their role in maintaining violence. (2005:21)



However rise of Islamic feminism<sup>4</sup> may have blurred those clear borders that divide this too. Universality associated with feminism while particularity to cultural angle is here questioned as Islamic feminism being located somewhere in between these two. There is no consensus among feminist on whether this position is beneficial or effective and some feminists are criticizing this approach to be flawed and moreover dangerous arguing that Islamic feminists will have to decide eventually what is more important for them; Islam or Feminism (Ahmad 2015) This however does not distant us from the primary interest that whether we are talking about Islamic Feminism or just Feminism, from their perspective women are the one victimized and how they should fight back may differ among different types of feminism.

### **2.2.3 Cultural Interpretation**

Cultural interpretation puts focus on acknowledging differences in various cultures when it comes to prescribing what is considered moral or immoral in particular society. This includes as well differences on adequate measures used by communities to sanction inappropriate behavior. This explanation is argued by Recep Doğan<sup>5</sup>, who elaborates this perception on different ‘conduct norms’ with the

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<sup>4</sup> Islamic feminism has emerged to question patriarchy in Muslim societies and does so by reinterpreting Islam that is seen as a powerful source of gender justice. In accordance to that Islamic feminists are turning to re-reading of Islam’s holy sources. The need for this particular feminism comes from looking upon Western feminism as an alien and elitist that does not resonate to Muslim women. (Ahmad Ambar 2015)

<sup>5</sup> Recep Dogan is a recognized Muslim scholar, author and lecturer in Traditional Islamic Studies at Charles Sturt University in Australia. He received his PhD in November 2010 from Keele University with his Thesis “Honour Killings in Turkey: Culture, Subjectivism, and Provocation” research that

concept of ‘culture conflict’. (2016:55-56) This term “cultural conflict” was originally formulated in late 30s by Thorsten Selin, one of the earliest criminologists who investigated the relation between cultural conflict and deviant behavior, finding it particularly important in experience of second-generation of immigrants, as being caught in between and exposed strongly to both cultures. (1938) As Selin notes, certain behaviors in a community after some time become so well accepted that “violation of it arouses a group reaction. This rules or norms may be called conduct norms” (1938:28) He further observes the presence of conduct norms in every society although different ones, considering various definitions on what conduct norm should be. Further those in power are in position to decide what acts should be considered as a crime and therefore sanctioned, which in its consequences is creating cultural conflict. (1938)

To go back to Doğan, he writes that this interpretation recognizes communal nature of honor and loss of female moral activity that in these circumstances requires measures of punishments. Honor killings are governed, as Doğan continues by “‘the specific logic of an honor culture’ and a particular cultural understanding of honor and shame which is likely to be alien and inexplicable to people from a different cultural background” (2011:426) He explains that in community where members are urged and supported to take drastic steps to keep their honor and all members agree upon these conditions that have meaning for all of them, killings are seen simply as required measures. Ultimately, as a result of social interactions with those for whom

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reflects the voice of those who committed murders in the name of honor. Some of his books: *Five Pillars of Islam* (2015), *Usul al-Fiqh: Methodology of Islamic Jurisprudence* (2015), *The Exemplary Role Model Muhammad* (2014) and *Usul al Tafsir: The Sciences and Methodology of the Qur'an* (2014) (Common Ground Publisher 2016)

the loss of honor requires killing or violence in return, the rest of group “comes to accept and to learn that killing, though itself criminal, is the correct response.” (2011:56) In that case perpetrators kill under conviction they have done what was supposed or expected of them, as Dogan observes the power of idea is what kills ultimately rather than concrete social conditions.

Cultural interpretation also stresses indestructibility and duration of this practice due to capacity of society to always find a way to rationalize its use over and over and preserve further custom of honor killings. (2016) It should be noted that despite the fact this author gives importance to cultural influence, he at the same time claims that this “does not necessarily mean that individuals are programmed by their culture such that their behavior is predetermined.”(2016:56) Finally, mentioned author insists on cultural dimension for two reasons, as he explains; first knowing cultural patterns and dynamics helps in exposing and recognizing these crimes happening under disguise of an accident or very often as a suicide and secondly in fighting cultural stereotypes and mistaken beliefs surrounding this phenomenon. (2016:56-57) The second statement however raises confusion as it has been argued by many authors, including Abu-Lughod, whose writing will be particularly analyzed further, that stigmatization comes as a result of this precise interpretation.

### **2.3 Why feminist explanation may work**

Now, when I have presented different interpretations of honor killings I will further clarify why I find feminist explanation as the most complete and productive one. My argumentation could be summarized in three following observations on honor killings, first and main - honor killings are simply a form of violence against

women as almost always women and girls are victims while men are perpetrators; next two following arguments are built on rejecting cultural explanation as being too narrow and incorrect. This will be exemplified by showing how dynamic flow of culture does not correspond to the flow of honor killings and by presenting universality of these killings unfitting to particular cultural or religious frames.

As stated many times before, women are almost always paying deadly price of preserving fragile family honor by male relatives. From the beginning of this social construction female members are put in an unfair position to be the only direct victims, although the whole family may be affected by these tragedies, ultimate sacrifice is always on her and her life. If we remember feminist observation and definitions on patriarchy represented previously as the oppression of women by men, we may understand why almost always women are the victims, the part on which cultural interpretation stays silent. This argumentation is presented in writings of Swedish journalist and author of *Honor killings in The Twenty-First Century*, Nicole Pope who revealed her shock and surprise with unending scope of data on her honor killings analysis. As she writes “But I soon realized that that a ‘blanket’ of honor was thrown over a much broader variety of crimes and abuses, and that cases of honor killings that seems to follow a kind of tribal pattern were in fact only the tip of the iceberg.” (2012: X) The only way to fully comprehend honor killings, Pope writes, demanded putting them in the wider context of a patriarchal structure and its different roles imposed genders. She further observes patriarchal violence to be very much alive and not dying remnant from past.

One of the counterarguments to this feminist observation could be that sometimes women kill women as well in honor killings either directly or through

accusations. The important question here – Do these cases automatically nullify patriarchal explanation? For instance, we can look at one recent non-random, qualitative study of 31 honor killings committed between 1989 and 2013 in North America, Europe, India, and Muslim-majority countries by women directly or indirectly as conspirator-accomplices. It was conducted by author and retired psychotherapist Dr. Phyllis Chesler, titled as “When Women Commit Honor Killings” and found that female-on female aggression is not a minor problem. As Chesler explains results showed an active involvement of women in honor-based femicide, whether as spreading gossips, being conspirator-accomplices or killers. (2015) Considering all this, one could naturally ask how these atypical cases should be interpreted. It may seem at first glance it is contradicting with the feminist angle, however, despite its superficial contradictions it could have a lot to do with patriarchy after all. One of the theories can be as well that the rivalry, envy, jealousy, the strangest obsessions with virginity, all comes as a consequence of male domination and male gaze on to the world, even when being observed through the eyes of women. As Chesler writes that just as men women too have “internalized sexist and tribal codes of behavior; that a mother, grandmother, or mother-in-law can instigate, serve as a conspirator-accomplice in, or perpetrate the hands-on killing of her daughter, granddaughter, or daughter-in-law...” (2015) It can be that patriarchy persists as being enforced that much silently and deeply, that it stays in some levels accepted by both genders, regardless of who is gaining or losing in this social construction.

I mentioned above that my further argumentations will go against cultural interpretation showing why culture should be left out when identifying honor

killings. Firstly, it implies negative connotation, as associating culture with honor killings can be interpreted as equal to encouraging violence and killings. This however, will certainly not be the first time to use culture in this manner, as Terman reminds us of its ahistorical and racist presentation in 19<sup>th</sup> Century used to "justify colonization of peoples in the New World, Asia, and Africa and demonize Jews in Germany as the 'other', providing an intellectual basis for nationalism and imperialism in the face of supposedly egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment."(2010:5) As one can see, the uses and abuses of culture, have their own history, not hard to track. Moreover, cultures are not static but tend to transform, adjust, change, however control and violence against women, for what so ever reasons, persist. If it was only matter of culture and we agreed upon its dynamic nature then it would be logical to ask why we are dealing with the same pattern over and over.

Finally, if honor killing is a universal problem that goes beyond cultures and religions then cultural explanation is not a valid one. In that case framework has to be the most general mechanisms applicable everywhere in the world, more or less relating to all women. First we should examine scope of honor killings being universal or particular by showing its locations and its patterns. As many reports showed they have been reported in Eastern and Western countries. Moreover, eleven thousand cases of honor based violence documented in the United Kingdom in previous five years while other cases being recorded as well in Germany, France, Canada and Sweden. (McKay 2015) As Mojab and Hassanpour write every day in the United States men kill ten women and usually these murders are provoked by women's demands to end relationship or file for divorce. (2002:60) Also, study

conducted last year “Honor Violence Measurement Methods,” by research corporation Westat, and commissioned by the U.S. Department of Justice, found that annually 23 to 27 honor killings take place in U.S., where being too Westernized is seen as a main motive in 91 percent of cases in North America and father being almost always implicated in situations of minor victims. (McKay 2015) Either if it is a wife or a daughter we are faced with the same controlling and possessive mechanism of women by men.

What holds this perception of femicide being differently motivated inside East –West division, according to Terman, is specific media coverage. He criticizes manner in which media reports on violence in USA as being related to honor only when involving Muslims or Middle Easter/South Asian immigrants. “Of all the women 14 murdered in the U.S., about one-third were killed by an intimate partner. These crimes, too, reflect a patriarchal culture meant to control women’s sexuality and limit their choices and bodily mobility.” (Terman 2010:13-14) This discriminatory trend in the media, is observed as well by Shalhoub –Kevorkian, enforcing different terms for same cases of femicide, whether using ‘crimes of passion ’for West or ‘crime of honor’ in the East. (2002:580) Considering this, it seems untruthful to suppose anything exotic and particular about violence against women, moreover associating it with some cultures while finding it not existent in others. This question of unbalanced media reporting will be additionally discussed in last chapter.

## **2.4 Acknowledging honor killings without stigmatization (Reflecting on Abu-Lughod's writing)**

As I previously mentioned I will present here my reflection on Abu – Lughod's article "Seductions of the 'Honor Crime'" finding it for one particular issue relevant and important to be included. This article was not only chosen because this scholar recognizes damage of cultural interpretation as causing stigmatization of one group and further seeing violence against women to be universal. This of course confirms my previous writing; however there is one very interesting matter that may be easily neglected but important as well to be included. Before I go on, first it should be clear that Abu-Lughod's interpretation on honor killings is not cultural one but suggests that much wider frameworks are needed for true understanding. Blaming culture, as she writes is not only wrong as representing them as fixed, simple and homogenized human experiences but moreover it ignores "the dynamism of historical and political transformations of women, families, and everyday social and cultural life and experience." (2011:44) As she writes on universality of violence: "everywhere, it seems some fathers are violent, some brothers commit incest, there are men who kill their wives and lovers on suspicion, and families and marriages can be dysfunctional and abusive." (2011:34)

Despite universality of this violence, as Abu-Lughod continues, there is a widespread trend of explaining honor crimes as "behavior of a specific ethnic or cultural community" where culture "is taken to be the cause of the criminal violence."(2011:18)This as she continues, leads to stigmatization of not only particular acts but whole cultures. All those who stress the matter of honor killings, media or human right activists, as she writes contribute to stigmatization of some



groups while leaving others out of that reach. “In the West today, Muslim communities are repeatedly portrayed as deficient, backward, and prone to violence.” (2011:18) Therefore the term used in title “seductions” refers to that sensationalism reporting that has caused, intentionally or not, division between good and bad cultures, barbaric and civilized, victims and saviors. As Abu -Lughod observes, the seductive power of honor crimes “with its unique mix of sexual titillation and moral horror and its polymorphous interpretive capacity, has allowed it to emerge in the last couple of decades as a robust category that does significant political and cultural work.” (2011:50) All previously said lead us to that important matter – how write on honor killings and protect women’s right in a way that does not stigmatizes or divides?

As I wrote before, the focus of this Thesis is on two negative consequences of cultural interpretation of honor killings; first stigmatization of one group and other infringement of women and girls rights. What is interesting and challenging is that the fight for recognizing and eliminating honor killings shows tendency to embody in itself the idea of stigmatization and East-West division. As Abu-Lughod writes; “can one acknowledge the seriousness of violence against women without contributing to this stigmatization of particular communities?” (2011:18) It would be illogical to assume that if we are talking about women’s right everywhere in the world the focus would stay on some women being victimized, like Muslim one but not the others. In practice as Abu-Lughod recognizes, problem arouses when identifying who can be saviors and who those victimized and further which values are to be prioritized. As she wisely notes violence against women is a Western problem too but this has been blurred and silenced by loudly celebrating values of gender equality and freedom as

its own. "It distracts our gaze from violence within, establishes the superiority of a concatenation of cultural values associated with liberalism—autonomy, individualism, and sexual freedom" (2011:37) She continued emphasizing the devastating results of Western interventions by pretexts of bringing freedom and further women's rights.

Although Abu-Lughod's skepticism is built on strong and credible grounds, as Western interventions have for many reasons a bitter reputation, simply discrediting them does not eliminate the problem of existing violence worldwide. Despite, Lughod's conviction that honor killings have "exhausted its usefulness" (2011:53), I would agree here with Welchman and Hossain, of this conclusion being precipitated. (2014) Perhaps West cannot be called upon to defend ideals it does not itself possess; still taking sides between West or East lead us again to another division and another battle that does nothing for victims. Showing that violence is universal takes away the stigma from one particular group being characterized as victim of its violent culture, and then the question would not be if Muslim women needs saving but would speak to any potential victims of violence, simply that victims of violence not their cultures. Perhaps it can be the most optimistic alternative to stop focusing on approach that magnifies East-West conflict with its impartiality and incorrectness.

### **III. Representing Honor Killing of Fadime Sahindal**

In order to illustrate and make more understandable to readers all previously mentioned theories, interpretations and concerns relating to honor killings I will further present one particular case study. I chose this particular case finding it suitable to demonstrate how honor killings are likely to be portrayed by media and further to present consequences of these portrayals. There are two important matters it embodies; first, the great debate between cultural and feminist interpretation that have been analyzed in first chapter and secondly one particular effect of cultural interpretation. I have mentioned in Introduction as well through Lughod's article that one of negative consequences of cultural interpretation on honor killings its stigmatization of one particular group, and this case is no exception. In addition I hope that through this vivid and detailed story of one murdered young woman, reader would comprehend complexity and uneasiness of this matter and moreover how important it is how we classify and to what concepts we relate honor killings.

#### **3.1 Background on the story of Fadime**

What makes a father kills his own daughter? What convinces a man who is about to kill his child that this is the only solution left? What makes him feel revealed as if taking off a heavy burden, now when his daughter will no longer live? What makes a mother testify in favor of a man who murdered her child? These are the question that Unni Wikan tries to answer in her book *In honor of Fadime*, same questions that disturbed me and provoked to explore this matter further. The mentioned book speaks about controversial and extensively media covered honor

killing of a 26 year-old-woman killed by her father in Uppsala, in Sweden in 2002. Man of Kurdish origin (it is important to mention his origin due to further analysis) killed his daughter because of her inappropriate and shameful behavior, as he explained during the trial. The murder of this young woman was not the first but a third known case of honor killing in Sweden, preceded by murder of another Kurdish girl Pela Atroshi in 1999 and 15-year-old Sara in 1996. It created a new category of murder, honor killings, as Cecilia Englund writes, calling victims “subject girls living in patriarchal families” (2002:3)

Unlike two previous cases, story of Fadime for its specifics has been leading news in all Swedish and some international media for weeks after murder.”Fadime Sahindal was seven years old when she moved to Sweden to join her father in 1984. According to press reports, her parents discouraged her from associating with Swedish children in school. They told her that she should eventually return to Turkey and get married there. (Mojab & Hassanpour 2002:56) However her life path brought her to falling in love in 1996 with Patrik Lindesjo, Swedish student, while they were both taking computer course. Again she was not supported, even though Patrik's parents tried to respect the engagement custom and ask permission for her hand from Fadime's father. In 1998 due to unbearable threats and violent behavior by her brother and father she turned to police for help. Being disappointed with lack of cooperation and interest by police she decided to speak to media about her constant fear and violence she was facing in her home. The same year Patrik, with whom she planned to start leaving together, crashed and died in a car accident. After this she was forbidden to go back home and lived some time in exile. Fadime’s determination to publicly speak of her situation went further when she gave a speech in Old

Parliament Building on 20th November, 2001, two months before she was killed. Therefore, public had a chance to hear about this 26-year-old women's rights activist, before she would be killed. In 2002 while visiting her mother and sister in Uppsala, just night before she planned to go to Kenya to conduct research for her Thesis, she was shot in head by her father.

The last goodbye from Fadime was accompanied by many people, including Crown Princess Victoria, Integration minister Mona Sahlin and the Social Democratic Member of Parliament Nalin Pekgul, who all came to express their condolence during the memorial ceremony that was even broadcasted live by one of the national TV stations. This is how much interest, curiosity, and compassion her story aroused. "One of our time's martyrs", (Englund 2002:10), this is how Fadime was characterized by the dean of the Uppsala Cathedral and many times after whether in media or academic writings. As Fadime was not any girl, but the one who already urged for help from Swedish authorities, although unsuccessfully and then to media giving interviews on how threatened she felt and how tormented she was, her death disturbed that much more the Swedish society. It brought to surface two important issues; the nature of honor killings and necessitate to somehow explain them and secondly, various critics on failed integration policy of this country. Although the story of unsuccessful integration of immigrants is no doubts very complex and crucial question to be addressed, my focus will however remain on first one.

### **3.2 The Debate in Media - Clash of Cultural and Feminist**

#### **Interpretation**

Two interpretations mentioned before; cultural and feminist one, were strongly imposed in media coverage on Fadime's murder, intensely opposing one another and dividing Swedish audience. As Englund writes, debate heated up between those who argued in favor of cultural explanation, focusing on particular Islamic or Middle-Eastern culture and its opponents, supporters of universal explanation model. The second claimed that "the root of the problem is not the Kurdish or Muslim culture, but a general oppression of women—the patriarchal system that exist in Kurdistan as well as Japan or Sweden, and which only find different expressions due to different traditions" (2002:17) First approached was advocated by both feminist and anti-feminists and second argued by predominantly Swedish feminists, both women and men.

Mentioned dichotomy is observed in Reimers's study of three different Swedish daily newspapers during the month after the murder, counting 250 news items and articles. (2007) In first case Fadime was attributed heroic characteristics, a symbol of "equality, modernity, freedom, and enlightenment."(2007:252) in opposition to weakness, ignorance and "inadequate masculinity" (2007:246), terms used in describing Rahmi, her father. As one of the reports asks, referring to Rahmi; 'how can these aggressive misogynist delusions prosper in the modern Sweden of 2002?'(2007:244) This portrayal built two stereotypes of immigrants, as Reiners continues, representing the daughter as an immigrant woman that fits in and prospers while on the other side her father as limited and unfitting. (2007) As Brune recognizes two stereotypes, problem and a victim, where immigrant man is being

seen as a problem. "He is supposed to be governed by a misogynist culture that justifies violence against women. The immigrant woman is represented as a victim, as subordinated and oppressed." (2007: 250) In that light Fadime was characterized as a martyr who died fighting against violence inflicted on women, aiming for an autonomous life outside control and limitations of her family. (Hellgren and Hobson 2008: 391) Further, it puts Swedish society on pedestal of gender equality, relating violence against women only to immigrants and their culture. "Whereas, like in other 'Western' countries violence against women perpetrated by Swedish men were made sense of in terms of the perpetrators' individual social and psychological circumstances."(Reimers 2007:241) Despite, ethnocentrism and simplification it carried, this opinion dominated through press.

The other side, one in minority as Reimers writes, called upon stepping outside cultural and traditional factors, in order to see a broader and overlooked picture, attributing the murder to male violence against women in general. For instance, Uppsala Nya Tidning ( a regional daily newspaper published in Uppsala ) argued from feminist position; "Last Monday, another woman was murdered in Sweden, but paradoxically enough it was a case that fell under the responsibility of the Minister of Integration, not the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Equal Opportunities ..." (2007: 247) Patriarchy was as well recognized in one of the TV reports aired after the trial: 'So finally it was Fadime's father who held the gun, although many more can be said to have been there with him last night; relatives, neighbors and thousand year old patriarchal traditions.' (Hellgren & Hobson, 2008:392) Unlike first approach patriarchal one did not celebrate Swedish society as a cradle of gender equality and freedom, quite the contrary it criticized the same patriarchal structures as a part of

Swedish society. As Reimers reminds of words of one debater in Dagens Nyheter, under the heading *Fadime a victim of male oppression* , “I object to the notion that we in Sweden live in a society with equality between men and women, or that our injustices should be accepted because women are worse off elsewhere.”(2007:247) Also, in a program of Swedish National Television, journalist and author Jan Guillou compared Fadime's case to well known story of attempted murder of a child by a Swedish mother. “The mother hurled her three-year old son into the water from the bridge in central Stockholm. This murder was explained in social terms in media and not as something specific for Swedish culture and was according to Guillou neglected by the public as such” (2008:15) As understood from previous reports cultural and feminist interpretation of honor killings collided in media’s coverage of this particular case, with first approach leaving harmful consequences for one group in particular, matter that will be explored next.

### **3.3 Stigmatization of one group**

This section will help us observe and understand how stigmatization of one group is likely to occur due to reinforcement of cultural interpretation of honor killings. So continuing with the examination of Fadime’s case, the central question of cultural impact, like Pandora's box opened many others including those referring to cultural roots of honor killings, culture of Kurds<sup>6</sup>, relation to Islam and finally what

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<sup>6</sup> Kurds make up the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, inhabiting mountainous region around the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Armenia. Although they created a characteristic community, united through race, culture and language they have never obtained permanent nation state. Majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims. (BBC, Middle East 2014)



culture and religion truly meant for this family. As mentioned above, the funeral service was held in cathedral even though, as Wikan writes in her book, Sahindals were originally Muslims but did not practice Islam. This fact takes away the possible impact of religion or any use of it for the broader analysis. Nevertheless in the media they were portrayed as Muslims in whose culture and religion honor killings are common practice. As Doğan notes, “while honor killing is not a solely Muslim phenomenon, the concept has increasingly become associated with Muslim societies in general.” (2011:423)

Nevertheless almost every current writing upon honor killings rejects claims of honor killings being solely related to Islam or any particular religion. This was precisely stressed by Wikan in her writing, as happening “among Christians as well as Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, Buddhists, and Confucians...It is custom and tradition, rather than religion, that is the driving force, although religion can be used, and is sometimes being used, to justify honor killings.” (Wikan 2008:3) Indeed, manipulations of holy text are common and can be used for justifying honor killings. As Terman writes, certain parts of Sharia<sup>7</sup> may be leading to conclusion of honor killings being acceptable. Concretely Sharia imposes strict sanctions for zina, or extramarital sex, punishable by up to 100 lashes, while lethal stoning being prescribed in cases of adultery, in that case act must be witnessed by at least four Muslim men of a good reputation. (2010:21) At the same time it should be noted that

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<sup>7</sup> Sharī‘ah also spelled Sharia represents crucial religious concept of Islam, especially its law, established during the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Muslim era. It is considered as an “expression of Allah’s command for Muslim society and in application, constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon a Muslim by virtue of his religious belief.” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014)

in some countries as Indonesia, Bangladesh or parts of West Africa, populated with large Muslim population, practices of honor killings are unknown.

Nonetheless, after Fadime's murder Kurds were harshly targeted as a consequence of ignorant and unfair generalization. Even though members of this group condemned Fadime's honor killing and joined in many occasions to protest against all forms of violence against women they were still seen as culprits. More media wrote on how other Kurds can relate and understand Fadime's father and his desperate act, more it increased hatred and anger towards this group, to which both Fadime and Pela belonged. It even went that far that Kurdish organization had to make a public announcement denying any association between custom of honor killings and their culture. (Hellgren & Hobson 2008:392) Even the Kurd from the neighboring countries feared of racist retributions, as can be observed in a Finnish paper *Helsingin Sanomat* titled "Kurds in Finland fear racist reaction to Swedish honour killing". (Mojab & Hassanpour 2002:58)

What is important not to forget is that the culture of this group as like any other, any Western, is not homogenous nor monolithic. Therefore, there are voices that argue against practice of honor killings. Authors who explored modern Kurdish history found various evidences of feminism. As Mojab and Hassanpour write, from the very beginning of the emergence of Kurdish culture in press of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was inspired by liberal feminist and women's movements. For example, recognized modern Kurdish poet, Abdullah Goran (1904-1962) firmly condemned in his poems honor killings and since the 1990s a there has been a significant fight in Iraqi Kurdistan against this custom. (Mojab & Hassanpour 2002:60) Therefore it would be unfair to deny and exclude existence of those rejecting honor killings by

putting them in the same stereotyping box of violence and misogyny, whether we are talking about Kurds, or any other group.

## **IV. Predicament of Cultural Defense**

As mentioned in Introduction one of the possible negative consequences of classifying honor killings as a cultural custom is a danger of disregarding and infringing women's and children's rights. In order to exemplify so I will further introduce the concept of cultural defense, term acknowledged in legal theory that may have enabled this particular situation very possible. For that purposes factual cases of honor killings where cultural defense has been successfully plead, meaning perpetrators have been exonerated of sentence due to their cultural background, will be in focused. Further, I found important to include argumentation for and against this particular defense as well as problematic of its implementation. The last is important as opening one more quite difficult question concerning what culture is and whom it belongs, additionally complicating very troublesome matter.

### **4.1 Introducing Cultural defense**

First, to resolve what is referred by cultural defense. As Phillips writes "the notion of cultural defense surfaced in American law journals in the mid-1980s, in the wake of a number of cases where defendants invoked the traditions of their culture to explain or mitigate their actions."(2003:2)Among other definitions, one by Paul Magnarella, explains that those who were socialized in a foreign culture and who acted in accordance with their own cultural norms "should not be held fully

accountable for conduct that violates official law, if that conduct conforms to the prescriptions of their own culture” (2003:5) Or as Renteln Alison briefly notes that theoretical foundation of mentioned defense basis on the belief that human beings will think and behave in correspondence with patterns of culture. (2005:48) While there is no official recognition of stand-alone cultural defense, in cases of some criminal defendants where it was used, as Sikora writes, charges were considerably reduced or completely dismissed. (2001:2)

How powerful, convenient or damaging cultural defense is will best exemplified by presenting well-known cases where that argumentation was accepted. This few cases, although the list is longer, will serve to observe the effect of this defense on human and children rights, especially considering possibility of these cases creating precedence for next to come. So let us examine following cases. In one case of Australian justice, *R v. Dincer*, (1983) Turkish immigrant killed his sixteen –year- old daughter because of her alleged extramarital conduct. With use of cultural defense that claimed he had no choice but to act like this in order to save his family honor, charges were reduced from murder to manslaughter. (Renteln 2004:35) In another case, Japanese American woman named Fumiko Kimura in 1989 drowned her two children into the Pacific Ocean and then tried to kill herself, justifying these acts with great shame brought by her husband’s infidelity. Considering cultural background, charges were overturned from first degree murder to voluntary manslaughter, sentencing her to five years probation and psychiatric counseling. (Sikora 2001:2-3) In similar case *People v. Wu* (1991), a native Chinese woman living in USA killed her son due to shame her partner brought to this family by rejecting and abusing her and her son. After killing her child like in previous case

mentioned woman tried to kill herself, as believed that she will be again reunited with her son. Cultural defense has been used in this case as well and has been ultimately accepted by judge, considering that Wu was given a new trial in which her first sentence of second-degree murder was convicted to voluntary manslaughter. (Renteln 2004:27)

So question that logically follows why these people were not punished accordingly to their acts which is a murder? There is an extensive debate on whether mentioned defense should be accepted in legal theory. One of authors who argue that cultural defense should be allowed in all cases is Alison D. Renteln whose arguments will be presented next. This is particularly important as it opens again big question on cultural impact on our behavior and its acknowledgment. Later critics of this approach will be in focus followed with big debate on cultural relativism, as presenting the basis of this defense.

## **4.2 In defense of Cultural Argumentation**

In her book *Cultural defense*, Alison D. Renteln<sup>8</sup> explains that influence culture has on our behavior is undoubtedly strong and cannot be easily dismissed, moreover she argues that cultural defense in both criminal and civil matters should be formally acknowledged. If one remembers in first Chapter when we discussed Cultural interpretation by Dogan, he as well claimed how our acts are strongly influenced although not predetermined by culture, the same point Renteln makes. This impact,

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<sup>8</sup> Alison Dundes Renteln is a Professor of Political Science, Anthropology, Law, and Public Policy at the University of Southern California. She holds a B.A. (History and Literature) from Harvard-Radcliffe, a J.D. from USC's Gould School of Law, and a Ph.D. in Jurisprudence & Social Policy from the University of California, Berkeley. Her book *The Cultural Defense* (2004) was first book-length study that provides an extensive overview of the debate surrounding the acceptance of cultural evidence in the courtroom (University of Southern California 2016)

as Reneteln writes can be observed in the process known as enculturation, that she defines as a “process of acquiring the values of the group”, taking place on our subconscious level. (2004:12) In support of this statement she calls upon the writing of well-known anthropologist Ralph Linton who claims that “even the most deliberately unconventional person is unable to escape his culture to any significant degree...Cultural influences are so deep that even the behavior of the insane reflects them strongly.” (Linton 1961:39) It should be clear that Renteln as well recognizes that no matter how strong cultural influence is it “does not render humans incapable of making moral judgments”, as in contrary the law would not make much sense. (2004:13)

Arguing for cultural defense Renteln writes that refusal to recognize cultural background of the accused when estimating his or hers acts, is violating the principles of equal protection and fundamental fairness. (2004:36) This is therefore the only way, as she states, that the rights of ethnic minorities are taken in consideration. When it comes to the criticism of its damageable effect on women’s rights, she argues that women too benefit from this defense and secondly just because cultural defense is available it does not mean it will succeed. Referring to claims that mentioned defense reinforces stereotypes she explains that stereotypes exist with or without cultural defense. As she writes, “patterns of culture are not equivalent to racist stereotypes, even though in the debate about the cultural defense there is an unfortunate tendency to conflate race and culture.” (2004:198) Another arguments are that empirical data does not prove that punishments deters crime and that allowing cultural defense, whether a complete or partial excuse, would unlikely have an effect on crime rate. (2004:194) As she states: “punishment, no matter how

severe or light, would provide notice to the ethnic minority community that the conduct is not permissible.” (2004:195) Renteln concludes that even at the expense of deterrence, even if other members decide to commit the same crimes knowing they will face lighter punishment considering their cultural background, proportional justice still requires culture to be considered. Another point, Renteln makes is that “legal systems have always made special exceptions for specific groups, and these exemptions have not led to the demise of the political order” (2004:196) So she rejects assumption that acceptance of cultural defense would undermine legal system.

### **4.3 Reasons for dismissing Cultural Defense in Courtrooms**

After considering argumentation for cultural defense now I will turn to its critics as there are many strong voices arguing against it. Renteln mentioned previously that one of the benefits of this defense can be seen in its equal and fair approach however Cohan disagrees with this observation. He writes that even though mentioned defense may be interpreted as a fair and democratic solution in the manner it respects all values and beliefs, it at the same time goes against the uniformity of justice. This can be observed, as he elaborates, how cultural defense enables entirely different standards to be used by court for some defendants but not for the others charged with similar crimes. (2010:242) Also, not everyone will welcome and support other’s culture as an explanation for certain acts. For example, as Cohan writes, in case of emigration of homosexual American couple to Iran or Saudi Arabia, where homosexuals are mistreated if not executed, it is out of question that courts of mentioned countries would allow use of cultural defense. (2010:243)



And not to forget of another troublesome matter, how far should this defense go? "What about parents who wish to defend themselves against charges of child abuse when they refuse to provide the child with medical treatment, based on religious teachings that prayer is the answer?" (2010:244) As one can see it is a vicious circle that leave chaos behind. One more argument, it is believed that by not allowing cultural defense, court will incite immigrants to accommodate more quickly to legal system of their new environment. (Cohan, 2010:244-245) In that manner, dismissing cultural defense could be interpreted as a supportive, rather than a racist step towards the immigrants.

The argumentation against acceptance of cultural defense in courtroom can be observed as well in various difficulties its implementation raises. There are two very serious problems that appear in the process of implementing cultural defense that further illuminate much broader issues that are not just tied to cultural defense. First issue can be summarized in what constitutes ones culture, how to know which practices are part of it and whom they belong to. Second, reflecting patriarchal structures we discussed before, there is a troubling matter on very different use of cultural defense according to gender of perpetrator. It further supports feminist voices mentioned previously about law system being gender biased and working only in cases of male perpetrators. So let us first focus on problem of constituting what culture is and afterwards how it is being used.

There is an extensive never ending material written on culture defining this concept mostly in a very broad and abstract way. It can be observed in Tylor's definition of culture as "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a

\member of society” (1871:1) For example The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) gives following definition of culture:”the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.” (2001) However, the problem lies in agreeing upon what are those features and to whom and when they are applicable. We previously established that cultures tend to change which in addition opens another uneasy matter. As Phillips writes “something may be claimed as a cultural practice when it has long been contested or abandoned by other members of the group.” (2003:7) So the question remains in which category should we put those customs that are being partly abandoned or slowly becoming extinct.

Moving on the second concern, manner in which cultural defense may work. According to Phillips it works through stereotyping patterns (2003:36) that seem to work differently for male than female perpetrators. “They convey for women a particular stereotype of passivity, and for men a meaningful context for violent, and are then likely to figure for men in diminishing the severity of their actions, and for women in diminishing who they are.” (2003:36) For example, in the case of non-Western woman, a victim of abusive arranged marriage, Kiranjit Alhuwalia that Philips write about, who happen to be at the same time an educated woman, cultural defense failed. In this case jury did not give much weight to cultural circumstances, as she did not fit in the picture of someone driven by desperate and sudden measures. As Philips concludes; “This suggests that ‘culture’ becomes available to female defendants only when they conform to prevailing images of the subservient non-

Western wife.” (2003:26) Once again culture comes as most familiar and recognizable when displaying clearly gender norms. These two very important matters question once more cultural frameworks due to inability to always know what can be called culture and more importantly who benefits of that affiliation.

#### **4.4 Relativism as the basis for Cultural defense. Its strengths and weaknesses**

In the previous section I mentioned the matter on existing cultural differences and dilemma on whether they should all be acknowledged and respected, which will be now discussed. When we are talking about minor differences that are not likely to lead to any greater consequences we face no problem and differences are commonly tolerated and accepted. However if these differences are touching and disturbing core values as questions of life, death, family or religion the situation is very different. Theoretically, the debate on whether differences should always be encouraged and approved or only depending on circumstances is very challenging and intellectually appealing. Nevertheless unconditional acceptance of very different moral systems in practice may easily lose its charm and benevolence. Precisely this viewpoint that acknowledges all ways of life as valid and equally correct as no judgments are being allowed, known as Cultural Relativism is the basis of cultural defense we previously explored. That is why evaluation of Cultural Relativism is given space in following writing. The subsequent discussion is crucial when deciding whether all existing practices and traditions are to be looked upon as equally tolerable and respectable, therefore including honor killings as well.

To begin with analyze on cultural relativism let us look upon how cultural anthropology defines it: “the notion that a people’s values and customs must be understood in terms of the culture in which they are a part.”(Nanda and Warmas 2014:12) In other words; “Cultural relativism is a theory which asserts that there is no absolute truth, be it ethical, moral, or cultural, and that there is no meaningful way to judge different cultures because all judgments are ethnocentric<sup>9</sup>.”(Zechenter 1997:323) Therefore, those who observe and interpret by their own terms “systematically distort the cultures they study” (2014:29) The term cultural relativism<sup>10</sup> was established in anthropological research in the first few decades of the 20th century by anthropologist Franz Boas and later popularized in the work of his students, particularly scholar Ruth Benedict. Now I will present the ideas of proponents of cultural relativism followed with argumentation of those who strongly criticized this concept.

As I mentioned previously Ruth Benedicts was one of most known scholars who promoted in her work use of cultural relativism as an effective tool for observing the world around us. As Benedict wrote we recognize that morality differs in every society but what we usually do not comprehend is that those moralities are simply socially approved habits. “Mankind has always preferred to say, ‘It is morally good’, rather than ‘It is habitual’”, but these two phrases, as she concludes, are synonymous. (2011: 276) Also, Clifford Geertz in his article "Distinguished Lecture: Anti Anti-

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<sup>9</sup> Ethnocentrism is a term used to reflect judgments towards another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture (Omohundro 2008) Or as defined by Herskowitz, the viewpoint that prioritizes its own way of life over all others. (1972:6)

<sup>10</sup> Although Boas was first to articulate the idea of cultural relativism and this term became common after his death in 1942 to express Boas ideas by his followers, he was not first who formulated the term. It can be traced before as recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1924, by philosopher and social theorist Alain Locke, as cited in the *The Journal of Social Science Scholar* by Amit Fouzder (2013)

Relativism” is indirectly defending Cultural Relativism by attacking anti-relativism. His intention, as he says, is to destroy fear towards various ways of thinking, interpreting cultural relativism “as a specter to scare us away from certain ways of thinking and towards others.”(1984:263) In other words rejecting cultural relativism can be a tool of manipulation and blindness as closing your eyes to possible alternatives and that is why Geertz is suggesting “praxis of casting our demons” (1984: 263) Herskovitz is another author that interprets our judgments to be founded on experiences that are further understood in accordance with our own enculturation. (1974:5) Through many examples like comparing polygamy to monogamy or use of different animal meat in various societies, Herskovitz also defends the basis of cultural relativism as useful tool in fighting ethnocentrism.

One of critics of this approach Louis Pojman agrees on wrongfulness of ethnocentrism, however due to further questionable consequences of cultural relativism he argues ultimately for its rejection. He writes that the concept of tolerance that Herskovits emphasizes is not much rational, as there is no clear evidence why should we be more tolerant than intolerant or how is the first stand morally superior than the second one. (1995:15) Pojman observes that if we can get to know the truth in science why we can’t do the same when it comes to morality and that perhaps culture may be mistaken or confused about its own approaches on this matter. (1995:16) Another critic Zechenter observes that it is illogical that theory which claims neutrality builds its own case by absolutely denying possibility of any critics. In that manner cultural relativists make a mistake by claiming no judgments of any cultural practice by outsiders are allowed, considering there are no universal rules, whether ethical or moral. (1997:332)The same idea is expressed by Freeman,

as he writes; "it is a common fallacy that cultural relativism supports anti-imperialism, but in fact it does not, for cultural relativism provides no basis for criticizing imperialistic cultures."(2011:126)

Another concerning contra argument can be observed in fact that despite its initial tolerance and fairness, cultural relativism may end up supporting violence and all sorts of abuses. As Symonides states; "cultural relativist arguments are used to justify limitations on speech, subjugation of women, female genital mutilation<sup>11</sup>, amputation of limbs and other violations of international human rights conventions."(2000:58) This particular idea proved to be successful in tying down our hands, muting screams and silencing any revolts. In that manner, Zechenter described cultural relativism as 'intellectually irresponsible', as tending to accept any cultural pattern including slavery, cannibalism or Nazism. (1997:324) Finally, Cultural Relativism seems to forget the nature and flow of culture itself, interpreting the concept of culture as completed, all serving justification of human behavior. (Zechenter 1997:332) Quite the contrary, culture and traditions change, sometimes they disappear as no longer serving its purpose, sometimes they transform, but the final point is they are not static and immune to time and space. Precisely the reason why culture is able to persist all that long, as Zechenter reminds, is due to the continuous modification and reinterpretation of its own customs. (1997:333) Ultimately, any discussion on authenticity of cultural practices and traditions leaves us unsettled with what might have been the case considering that any prove of absolute accuracy is quite unlikely. And we have seen above, in case of cultural

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<sup>11</sup> The term 'female genital mutilation' (also called 'female genital cutting') is used to describe all practices involving partial or entire removal of external female genitalia in cases where this is not medically required. It is estimated that between 100 and 140 million of women and girls have endured this procedure and it has been reported in all parts of the world. (World Health Organization WHO, 2008:1)

defense, lenient punishment is sentenced on the grounds of cultural background of perpetrator, despite the fact that these conditions can be easily manipulated, incomplete and misleading.

## **V. Mass Media Representation on Honor Killings**

Considering the indisputable influence of media on shaping the opinion of masses worldwide, how they report on delicate issues like honor killings is of great importance. However it seems that publicly this topic was nowhere to be discussed but introduced just recently and in a very ambiguous manner. Many scholars criticized media for its sensationalism and impartial approach while referring to stories of this nature. I previously mentioned critics about different manners in which similar stories of honor killings are presented by Western and Eastern media. However, as it will be shown further, no matter we are referring to Western or Eastern media the problem may be the same - superficiality and lack of persistence to analyze this matter in a more deep level. Having all this in mind I will first focus on representation of honor killings by non Western, precisely Indian media and afterwards on one particular report assessing media work of few countries more or less considered as Western. This will help to notice possible similarities or differences and whether problem truly lies in asymmetry of East-West division.

### **5.1. Through media prism**

Referring to Indian society scholar Nidhi Shendurnikar<sup>12</sup> writes in the *Honour In the News: Media Representation Of Honor Killings (2016)* about importance of

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<sup>12</sup> Dr. Nidhi Shendurnikar Tere (Ph.D in “Mediation of Conflict between India Pakistan and the Role of the Press and New Media”) is an independent researcher with focus in political science, peace and conflict, media, gender and popular culture. Shendurnikar was a former University Grants Commission (UGC) fellow of the Department of Political Science, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Gujarat. Some of her papers presented at national and state level seminars; “Mass Media



media to report most cautiously. She writes that in past years this topic was rarely the subject of media coverage and that media has just woken up recently to acknowledge these acts. While analyzing media work so far, Shendurnikar found tendency of media to very lightly and superficially present these stories, for example, “story of Rizwanur Rehman’s death in Kolkata in 2007 was initially lost in the inside pages of the newspapers as a regular crime story.” (2016:3) The crime was acknowledged as an honor killing only after when it happened to involve famous figures, as she states. Even though media is swamped with stories of couples who had to elope due to enormous pressure for choosing inadequate partners, as Shendurnikar observes, “they are not smitten by the desire to tell their audiences about continuing social violence in the name of caste and religion even as they narrate stories of India’s GDP growth” (2016: 2) Another issue, as she observes is that due to impartial representation of this matter in media, one may very likely conclude that these crimes only happen in rural areas, among barbaric tribes or only certain cultural groups. (2016:4) However, as Shendurnikar acknowledges, there are examples where media did an excellent job, displaying all which would have stayed hidden if it wasn’t for them. Further, this question is likely to trigger debate on media role and its limits.

When it comes to other reports, I will examine another research concentrating on honor killings and honor-related violence in sixteen English-language media outlets worldwide from 2007 until 2009 conducted by Rochelle L. Terman. Among hundred and three cases compiled, it included those happening in Belgium, Canada, Germany, Israel/Palestine, Italy, Norway, United Kingdom (UK) and The United States of

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and Indian Languages”, “Mass Media and Global Security” and “Right to Information Act and the Press in Gujarat”. (The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, 2015)

America (USA). As Terman writes there is a strong tendency by Western media to particularly focus on violence happening among immigrants even though rates of inter-family murders, rapes, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women are high in West. This is more highlighted if the story is about honor killing that happened inside Muslim family. (2010) Concretely, Terman recognizes the general trend of presenting honor killings simply by highlighting origins of the perpetrators rather than interpreting the context and manner in which murdered happened. For instance in ten news reports of Israel/Palestine cases, victims or perpetrators were characterized as Palestinian, Arab or located in an Arab community. (2010:17) Terman observes that with this kind of media representation it is no wonder that public stays confused within the nature of honor killings. Also, we have seen previously in case of Fadime how Swedish media was focusing on ethnic background of this family.

Mentioned trend is particularly observed in one case of alleged honor killing from 2009, where woman named Aasiya Hassan from Buffalo, New York was decapitated by her husband Muzzammil Hassan, Buffalo businessman of Pakistani origin, after she demanded divorce. Ironically Hassan was well known to Muslim community after founding Bridges TV in order to fight stereotyping and improve bad image of Muslim Americans after the terrorist attack on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Terman believes that media reported on this case classifying it as an honor killing solely due to ethnicity and religion of this couple, although nothing else implied it was, as she writes, truly matter of honor. “How do you spot an honor killing? Well, it’s done by a Muslim. Why is an honor killing worse? Because it’s done by a Muslim”(Terman 2010:2) Especially, as she explains, considering that Aasiya was Hassan’s third wife

and he did not kill other two women who asked for divorce and further observing the fact that murder was committed by one man only. Regardless of that information, murder of this woman was presented firmly in media as a case of honor killing. The same conclusion is made by Korteweg and Yurdakul who examined reporting in the newspapers' content in the Netherlands, Germany, and Britain finding that European media tends to present the debate on honor killings by drawing clear boundaries in reference to ethnicity, national origin or religion. (2009) Nevertheless, as in cases of Swedish media that we reviewed previously in third chapter, these two author as well found that some articles ignored the gap of cultural differences by discussing honor killings as a form of violence against women.

It seems that the most problematic matter about reports on honor killings is frameworks in which murders are placed, especially lack of a background that could explain audience that reported case is not an isolated or a particular one. As observed from previous, both Western and Eastern media while referring to this matter seem to make the same mistakes by simplifying violence; concretely by placing the burden of murder on culture, religion or ethnicity of perpetrators and presenting it as if only possible in specific locations of backwards and rural communities. Nonetheless, as seen from above there is still some space left for patriarchal interpretations. In the end the most damaging portrayal would be the one presenting the case of honor killing as a separate story that will further be simply replaced with new one that in fact speaks of the same matter.

## 5.2 Using Films to Re-educate Audience

Lately, film industry as well tried to raise awareness about honor killings taking place in both Eastern and Western countries, among Muslims, Hindus and Christians. Beside showing that honor crimes are happening worldwide, their primary aim is, as will be further observed, safeguarding women's rights that are constantly under attack. That is why the number of documentaries addressing the horror and tragedy of honor killings is growing. *In her Honor*, *The price of Honor*, *Honor Diaries*, *In the name of the family* are just some of other documentaries aiming to raise awareness and closer the matter of honor killings to the worldwide audience. For example, *In her honor*, as acknowledged on the official website, is determined to make clear that honor killings are not religious custom. (2011) Therefore this film is presenting three very different stories, coming from different religious and cultural background, precisely Hindu, Christian and Muslim family, of fathers who have killed their daughters. The goal, as further stated, is to fight against Muslim stigmatization and show that the same violence happens in Western countries too. As explained on website rather than focusing on Middle-Eastern countries the film highlights crimes committed in Germany, UK, Canada and U.S. (2016) Another, *Honor Diaries*, awarded four times as a best documentary, has undertaken the same uneasy task of breaking silence on honor violence against women and girls. As stated on their website "*Honor Diaries* is more than a movie, it is a movement to save women and girls from human rights abuses – around the world and here in America."(2016) Like in previous case it is about uniting women all over the world in their struggle by sharing their troublesome

experiences that happen to be very much alike. Also it directly denounces cultural roots as justification using the following motto: “Culture is no excuse for abuse.”(2016) These examples, and there are many other to call upon, just show how many aspects of honor killings need to be question loudly and importantly to be question everywhere.

Some might say that films as any other piece of art cannot do much, yet following case proves otherwise. This year Oscar’s winner in category of Documentary Short Subject, *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness* has caught attention of Prime minister of this country minister Nawaz Sharif who promised publicly he will focus on combating honor killings starting with changes in law system. This documentary present a story of honor killings in Pakistan from an angle of survivor, Saba Quaiser, eighteen-year-old girl who was shot in head and then thrown in river by her father and uncle for marrying without their approval. ‘If you put a drop of piss in a gallon of milk, the whole thing gets ruined. That is what she has done — destroyed everything’, the words Saba’s father used to justify his crime. (The World Post, 2016) Luckily Saba survived this attack and now, thanks to filmmaker and journalist Obaid-Chinoy, world will now about her fight and courage. Congratulating Ms. Obaid-Chinoy, Pakistani Prime minister stated that there is no space for killings in the name of Islam or honor or and that his government already started with changes in legislating process to stop such atrocities. (Shah, 2016) It shows that mass media can and is stepping to make much needed changes.

### 5.3 Disputing on Proper Terminology

Lastly, it is important to mention discussion upon terminology used to characterize violence we discussed above, in other words how adequate or not is the use of the term *honor killings*. Many have questioned that this title may not be the most satisfying, honest or proper tool for combating these particular acts. Therefore, there are some strong voices arguing against *honor killings* label, finding it as purely dishonorable act, reasonably asking why use term honor for brutal and cowardly practices. In this manner, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay addressed this subject in Geneva, as cited by Mariottini: “I do not even wish to use the phrase ‘honor killing,’ There is not the faintest vestige of honor in killing a woman in this way.” (Mariottini, 2014) On the other hand, some find the use of term *honor killings* as appropriate and necessary, as will be discussed further.

Proponents against this title, claim that the term *honor killings* sends wrong and impartial message to public that comes entirely from the angle and perception of the killers, giving importance to perpetrators rather than to victims. “By adding the word ‘honor’ to killing, we use the language of those who justify this odious crime on the basis of ‘honorable’ motives.” (Dias & Proudman 2014) Or as Terman exemplified by quoting a word of one blogger: “honor killing’ is a shameful crime, but it is also shameful that everyone continues to use this term to describe it. It is an insult to all the victims, and a source of pride to their murderers” (2010:12) When questioning about right definition, in its report in 2009, the Council of Europe acknowledges that use of honor to explain these killings should be treated with skepticism, while by the UN this term might be misleading by presenting women as an embodiment of men and their communities. (2014) Another very important argument is that voices

against honor killings claim that using mentioned terms stigmatizes Muslim community, stressing moreover differences between Western and non-Western world. Therefore, observing this use to be racist, xenophobic and harmful toward those coming from Muslim communities, implying that somehow Muslim or Brown culture is more aggressive, brutal and patriarchal than Western one. (Terman 2010:13)

When talking about appropriate terminology on gender violence, one could compare this case with the one of similar nature referring to genital mutilations. What matters here is that the act of cutting genitals of young girls, that causes unbearable pain and shame physically and even more psychologically, was originally addressed in UK as a female circumcision. However this title was subsequently changed, as it did not truly reflect horrors and abuses of its victims. It shows that choosing proper word matters greatly, as each of them expresses particular emotion. Ultimately, we should be careful about who we call the victim, as one FGM activist reminds: 'Language is powerful. It's important we use it correctly. Being labeled a 'victim' in itself continues the violation.' (Dias & Proudman 2014) Ironically, advocates for using the term *honor killings* state that this is required to combat and fight this precise violence and that "to be specific is not to be racist" (Terman 2010:26) The point is, as Terman continues, that honor killings must be addressed despite or in spite of those whose intentions are embedded in Islamophobia and xenophobia, therefore fighting human rights abuses must not be left aside. (2010: 26) Proponents for using the original term explain that avoiding or ignoring it helps no one, but further gives ammunition to those who claim that Muslims simply do not care and do nothing to stop violence against women in their own societies. (2010)

So what might be the alternative? Recommendation by United Nations (UN) Women suggests, referring to legislation, that drafters should use the term ‘so-called honor’ or to use quotation marks around ‘honor’ in order to “imply the absence of ‘honor’ in these crimes.” (2012) They further explain that one should be aware of the complexity of this use, so it would not imply that there is any honor in these crimes or that women or girls somehow exemplify the honor of men in that community. Recommendation especially emphasizes how important it is that “that drafters of ‘honor’ crimes legislation refrain from framing such crimes in a way that equates them with any particular culture or religion.” (2012) Other suggestions advise using term "femicide" or "family femicide", while term *shame killings* was a suggestion by Kofi Annan, at the time of his position as UN Secretary-General, (Dias & Proudman 2014), In addition, patriarchal killing as well has been term often proposed by many feminist authors or organizations fighting honor killings.

Indeed the debate on terminology is uneasy and perhaps exhausting but necessary as I hope readers so far could understand that how we identify and to what we associate the problem or the crime in this case, matters significantly. It after all insinuates the motive and determines our understanding on the nature of crime. This has been an idea from beginning whether we are relating honor killings to culture or patriarchy, whether we are repeating terms honor or femicide will define not just crime but our perception on perpetrators, victims, excuses and finally society’s approach and treatment to this matter.



## **VI. Conclusion**

Throughout this Thesis I have been analyzing relation between two concepts; culture and practice of honor killings. I was focused on two main consequences of mentioned relation that happen to be dominantly negative; first observed in causing stigmatization of certain groups and secondly in the damage inflicted upon human, concretely women's rights. Just recently mass media started paying attention to incorrectness and harmfulness of cultural interpretation on honor killings even though it has been for a long time contributing to it, using culture for its simplistic explanations. My intention was to show how honor killings are more than just practices of few or some but are to be observed from broader angle that is far more unsettling but more fair and beneficial one. In that sense reducing them to culture, religion or ethnicity is incorrect as it has been shown, supported by many worldwide reports, that they can take place anywhere in the world.

As an alternative it is far more valid to observe it as a form of violence against women as women are primary victims and they are controlled by honor violence almost the same as they would be in an abusive relationship. Cultural explanation may seem as very convenient for being so long taken for granted, without having to answer many other questions, including why would culture support or demand oppression of women. Finally, only if accepting feminist interpretation, including certain flaws as in any other theory and by leaving culture on the side, we may remove uneasy obstacles on the way of eliminating not just honor killings but honor-based violence. No one can eliminate culture or has right to do so, it is after all something we cherish as humankind, but in 21 Century there is no debate on

cherishing or preserving violence let along against a group that constitutes around half or more of the entire population.

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