

AMID Working Paper Series 36/2004

Dishonourable Integration: Between Honour and Shame

Tordis Borchgrevink
Institutt for samfunnsforskning, Oslo

Some years ago Michael Walzer wrote: “Questions about family arrangements, gender and sexual behaviour are among the most divisive in all contemporary societies”. And he predicted: “The theoretical and practical line between the tolerable and the intolerable is most likely to be fought over and eventually drawn here, with reference to what I will call, summarily, questions of gender” (Walzer 1997:60). Certainly, since then Scandinavia has got its share of fights both in theory and practice, coming to a head when women with immigrant backgrounds attempt to draw the line themselves, between the tolerable and the intolerable. What has come as a shock to the natives are those instances when young women of immigrant background are threatened on their lives, molested and run the risk of being killed by male relatives - with the explicit motive of restoring family honour from the shame inflicted by these women’s conduct.

The most prominent cases in terms of documentation, scholarly and public debate, originate in Sweden: the murder of Sara in 1996; Pela in 1999, and Fadime in 2002. As evidenced during the trials subsequent to these deaths, conduct belonging safely within the range of ordinary, decent and even recommended Scandinavian behaviour is perceived as the ultimate transgression of cultural norms maintained and cherished by sections of the immigrant population. The defendants in the court cases, be it fathers, brothers, male cousins or uncles made no secret of what justified killing these women: The reason was their having become “Swedish”, which equalled behaving like whores.

Why Sweden figures so prominently in providing material for reflection upon this phenomenon, I cannot say. But whatever the cause, the minutely reported court cases, the scholarly attention as well as the public/political debate in Sweden are indispensable sources to further inquiry into this phenomenon. However, while there is a unanimous agreement that these murders represent the top an iceberg, there is a profound disagreement as to what is below the surface. From this debate different approaches have emerged, mutually exclusive, it appears, pertaining both to the nature of the problem to which these killings represent the solution, and to the nature of the society immigrants are supposed to integrate into. While these events leave no doubt that a contrast obtains between notions of female propriety deeply embedded in perceptions of the “good life”, a pertinent question is whether this difference corresponds to a dividing line between the established and the newcomers. And what seems to confound scholarly investigation is that the way this question is answered connotes a dividing line also in the intensely politicised debate about “multiculturalism”. Two positions may serve to illustrate the tangle.

The Swedish controversy

Åsa Eldén, a prominent participant in the Swedish debate, has dedicated her doctoral thesis to “Life-and-death honour” (Eldén 2003), in which she offers a comprehensive account of what she proposes as the feminist interpretation of the phenomenon. She argues in favour of looking at murder in the name of honour as belonging to the extreme end of a continuum representing any kind of violence against women, the source of which is always and everywhere men’s supremacy and control of women (Eldén 2003:60). Accordingly, the code of honour is not a distinct “logic” and the violence directed by immigrant men and adolescents against their women is not triggered by a culture fundamentally different from the Scandinavian (ibid:66). On the contrary, the very application of the concept of culture is misleading and suspicious: it supports the Scandinavian self-image of gender equality as against cultures oppressing women, thereby confirming the “us-them” dichotomy and by implication the native notion of Swedish supremacy versus the immigrants’ inferiority (ibid:67). Furthermore, it sustains the widespread interpretation of Scandinavian men’s violence against women as individually deviant behaviour – in contrast to immigrant culture which is perceived as deviant *per se*. In sum, this approach serves to hide the fact that violence is a part of ordinary Swedish everyday life, and not a marginal phenomenon. And the very opposition to the feminist approach to murder for the sake of honour is due to the fact that from this perspective native male violence moves too close for comfort (ibid:86) - hence this obsession with “culture”.¹

The Swedish Kurd, sociologist and political scientist Rasool Awla writes that while Åsa Eldén’s intentions are undoubtedly good, she is mistaken. Wanting to protect women’s rights, she underestimates the suppression of women

¹ The author is responsible for all translations from the Scandinavian languages.

embedded in the very concept of honour. Obviously, she is completely ignorant of the world of ideas motivating these murders. But along with race-related murder and murder of homosexuals this set of ideas must be confronted and demolished (Awla 2001a). He warns: multicultural Sweden must not turn into a country where Swedish culture is considered equal with cultures permitting the murder of women in the name of culture. “Official Sweden must dare to acknowledge murder in the name of honour as a culturally conditioned behaviour and muster the courage to criticise and reject this phenomenon as well as other aspects of immigrant culture that, to the extent that objectivity is possible, are inhuman” (Awla 2001b). After Fadime’s death in January 2002, he wrote in despair: “Is it really the case that the participants in this debate along with Swedish politicians still do not grasp the essence of murder for the sake of honour?” (Awla 2002).

*

Evidently, Eldén and Awla share an urgent wish to locate responsibility for inadequate measures in dealing with unacceptable practices, the turning point in this controversy being whose ideas and interests prevent a change of these practises. This is a challenge to everyone concerned, and so is the fact that each of the strikingly adverse answers – (all) *men* versus (immigrant) *culture* – entails its own cluster of disquieting issues. For instance, Eldén’s firm position begs the question of the attitude among surviving immigrant women towards honour-killings. Assuming male interests as the sole source of trouble she seems to preclude the possibility of women’s consent to murder. Admittedly, consent is a difficult issue, and the question of force and alternatives to consent is mandatory. But still, Steven Lukes’s question must be kept in mind: “Can we always assume that the victims of injustice would, but for the exercise of power, strive for justice and equality? What about the cultural relativity of values? Is not such an assumption a form of ethnocentrism?” (Lukes 1974:46-47). In the present discussion, the dismissal of “culture” seems to hinge on an assumption that the women in question stand united against violence against women. Another problem emerging from Eldén’s interpretation concerns the impact of the legal system in contemporary Scandinavia. To put it bluntly: Is it really the case that equality before the law makes no difference to women’s lives as compared to systems where no such principle applies?

It seems to me that this quarrel about the rationality of killing for the sake of honour touches upon questions in sociological theory reaching far beyond the issue at hand; the very interpretation of social forms is put on the agenda. And in order to approach the difficulties embedded in Eldén’s version, there seems to be no getting around an investigation along the lines suggested by Awla. The only way to answer questions about similarity and difference is by making an effort to understand these murders from the point of view of those who have committed them. But there is a rather unpleasant dilemma involved in Awla’s recommendation. Sticking to the “us-them” dichotomy and framed as a

warning against relativism, Awla criticises the position taken up among scholars (and politicians) on the question of a moral hierarchy between “life worlds” - and he is refreshingly clear about his own position. Nevertheless, passing judgement in a context like the present is no plain sailing. Since I intend to follow up on Awla’s suggestion, I must pay some attention to the ethical quagmire ahead.

Academic brinkmanship

While innocence regarding the socio-cultural motivation behind honour killings may be one obstacle in this debate, enlightenment is indeed another.

The fact is, there is no lack of scholarly knowledge and documentation of the phenomenon under discussion, since from the latter part of the 1960s Rasool Awla’s “world of ideas” was a major topic in social anthropology. Inspired by a collection of studies of Mediterranean society (Peristiany (ed.) 1966), extensive fieldwork was conducted in Italy, Greece, Turkey, The Middle East and Latin America. Along the way, the study of the set of values and norms of conduct referred to in terms of honour and shame took on a shape of such a comprehensive nature that analytical terms expanded from a “moral code” and a “logic” to a “syndrome”, an “organising principle” and a “total social fact”. With the accumulation of data, however, scholarly doubts emerged as to the validity of the current understanding of the subject which led to a fading of interest in the phenomenon as such (Melhuus 2002). But it so happened that while the anthropologists left the subject, the “field” itself moved in on the anthropologist’s home arena. Unquestionable empirical evidence to the effect that this “total social fact” was organising people’s lives in *diaspora*, however, did nothing to inspire a significant scholarly return to the issue. While there may be any number of reasons to stay away, at least one is relevant to the predicament of everyone working professionally with immigration and related subjects.

Consider the fact that the knowledge about honour and shame was gathered under the disciplinary assumption that the mission is to understand and to describe the premises of other people’s conduct in the “thickest” way possible; and with no intention of changing the society or culture under study. On the contrary, the job is to protect diversity, and normative judgement has no place in analysis, it is an error. But in a multicultural context this will not do. If a certain world of ideas represents a non-sustainable diversity within the framework of a democratic state based on law, there is no escape from judgement (Borchgrevink 2003). Any attempt at neutrality in cases where *they* break *our* laws in order to protect *their* culture is an invitation to anybody to move into the moral void and create a political platform from indignation and fear, hence the dilemma: On the one hand, the better the work, professionally, the more obvious the difference between the all-powerful majority and the notions of propriety and justice among sections of immigrants - and the more miserable you make life for groups of people already existing precariously at

the mercy of an easily provoked majority. Accordingly, a decent and responsible approach is either silence or muting the impact of difference by emphasising similarities. Although the overall aim of Eldén's work is not to protect immigrants from native scorn and fury, her analysis is a case in point.

On the other hand, by under-communicating the singular dynamic of honour and shame, one may become accessory to perpetuating a "world of ideas" that systematically deprives women of their rights, initially as citizens and subsequently their right to stay alive. In the present cases what triggered a death sentence were the young women's steps toward integration. In order to make up one's mind whether this fact indicates a non-sustainable difference in multicultural democracies based on law it is necessary to investigate the limits to individual adaptation as seen from the point of view of those who draw the line.

Falling from grace

Despite variation in the empirical application of honour and shame, there is a pattern, a common language, designating the intimacy of this pair of complementary notions. The turning point is a concept of the social *person* which is sexual in its most comprehensive meaning: Anatomy is destiny, and pertains to the full range of the sexual division of labour in society. Rights and duties are distributed according to rank, and define an empirical entity tuned to obey and to be obeyed, to serve and being served according to the hierarchy between generations and between female and male. This is a moral universe in which women's conduct represents the soft underbelly, so to speak, and proper husbandry of her "shame" in terms of modesty is crucial to the maintenance of honour. In operational terms to preclude the ultimate stain on honour - which is also shame² - women have to be virgins till marriage and spotlessly chaste thereafter. But transgression is a pervasive threat, hence the Spanish proverb defining an "honourable woman": She is "...locked in the house with a broken leg" (Pitt Rivers 1966:45).

This concept of the person based on honour-and-shame-has served both philosophy and the social sciences with the crucial contrast to post-enlightened notion of human dignity. In the latter version of "man", dignity is a birthright regardless of status, class, gender and religion, an entity endowed with an independent, critical mind along with an obligation to disobey orders if the order is unfair or immoral. There are numerous and valid objections to the empirical validity of this kind of "person": this socially naked individual stripped of all of her or his worldly attributes and equipped with rights on the basis of mere existence. But these objections are not very helpful within the framework of the present discussion. Admittedly, recognising a requirement of virility and force in men and chastity and obedience in women is hardly a big

² The conceptual duality of shame as both a positive and negative attribute is somewhat confusing, also within the anthropological dispute about the phenomenon.

challenge. The difference consists in the fact that *collective* honour is fatally lost through *one* deviant – shameless – woman. What contributes to turning this “world of ideas” into an organising principle is the fact that both honour and shame are instantly contaminating: relatives and associates are the immediate benefactors or otherwise of each others’ conduct. Since one sexually unreliable woman will be disastrous to many, no wonder women are in need of constant supervision and protection. Furthermore, and contrary to the notion of dignity, honour is strictly public and exists in the eyes of the beholder. From this stems a perpetual struggle not to lose, and hopefully to add some more - which in practical life means being always “on show”. People are acutely tuned to what others think, what they say - and to the dreadful consequences of gossip. Naser Khader, for instance, notes that one of the most pervasive phenomena in the Middle East, the topic of most novels, films and TV-serials is gossip and its consequences (Khader 1996:89). And gossip is a social fact in its own right; the stain is there regardless of what has actually taken place. But while loss of honour may entail serious consequences, “...what turns honour into a drama is the fact that honour can be restored” (Awla 2001).

Eldén writes: “Men’s honour is maintained through the control of female relatives, stained by women’s conduct, and restored by punishing women” (Eldén 2003:115). This is correct, yet the emphasis, within the context of Eldén argumentation may suggest one clue to the controversy. It is not *men’s* honour alone that is maintained through the control of women’s chastity, but the honour of the family; and hence the entire kinship group has a stake in restoration. It follows that women of all generations have a vital interest in keeping up the control of each female member of the group, and in principle, to see to it that the administration of punishment meets the requirements. If not, this group of people risks collective punishment in terms of disdain (Bourdieu 1966) and total isolation. Deficient control of one woman spells unreliability in all walks of life and to all associated with her, and the consequences are for instance: no respectable spouses for the unmarried children; trouble for those already married; no invitations to social events, no social calls, no sharing of gossip, never being consulted on current affair, the network gone also in practical terms, and no assistance in emergency. No wonder a scandal, or the suspicion of one, releases an enormous pressure to act. And notably, the act itself is no *crime passionelle*. A murder to restore honour is carefully considered, well planned and the decision is based on consensus. Moreover, the intention must be beyond doubt, the restorative effect depending on the execution being noticed precisely for what it is (Pitt-Rivers 1966:31).

It is true that the final decision to kill as well as the act itself is the privilege and duty of men, but men are not the sole benefactors from a successful retaliation. And as compared to the reactions to violent Scandinavian men whom nobody thanks for having murdered their women, these fathers, brothers, uncles and nephews are congratulated as saviours by their kin, and admired by their affiliates. Jan Hjärpe (1997) has summed up the difference: it is true that

Swedish men kill their women – but they are not praised for it.³ And this is a difference in kind.

Women at the edge of loyalty

Given the premise that individual acts of revenge and despair are beside the present concern, explaining why a defiled woman triggers collective action with reference to “honour” still seems a bit thin. Looking for reasons pointing beyond this almost tautological rendering of motive, religion presents itself as a likely candidate.

It is a fact that the families figuring in the notorious cases in contemporary Scandinavia are of Kurdish origin and of Muslim persuasion – and Islam appears as a plausible heading to this offensive “world of ideas”. But this is barking up the wrong tree, since what is also a fact is that the present “syndrome” is neither ethnically nor religiously specific. As evidenced by numerous studies, this code of honour is present among creeds otherwise dividing people into distinct, competing and even hostile denominations. What they share is the notion of women’s impurity and inferiority to men, also in cultic terms. The sexual hierarchy is pervasive in each of the three monotheistic denominations plus Buddhism and Hinduism. The point is that while violence as a means to keep women in their place occurs among Muslims, the phenomenon is not restricted to Muslims.

This is not to deny that religious tenets leave more or less hidden traces in cultural forms, or that interpretation of the Holy Scripture and the Divine plan may serve explicitly to legitimate established social practices. And violence explained in terms of theology is a matter of empirical interest. In order fully to appreciate the impact of faith and worship, an exploration of the effect of Lutheranism seems to be called for, since undeniably, integration in contemporary Scandinavia takes place in the aftermath of the Reformation. One would like to know, for instance, whether at any time kinship groups under the influence of the Protestant Church have acted in consort to restore the collective honour lost through the defilement of one of its female members.⁴ In more general terms and taking rape as an example, one starts to wonder what are the historical/socioeconomic conditions turning the perception of the offended party from the victim’s relatives to the victim herself?

Whatever the answer, no religion that I know of offers a satisfactory explanation to why certain groups of people feel impelled to kill in order to avoid social degradation as the result of one sexually degraded woman. And I

³ Referred to in Wikan 2003:45 and Eldén 2003:84, although for adverse purposes.

⁴ A Nordic network of historians and social scientists, is working on the issue. Taking as its point of departure the honour killings in Sweden; the idea is to see if the Nordic practices linked to the concept of honour is at all comparable to the present logic.

will turn to more mundane issues embedded in social structure, such as the viability of groups.

Any group (nations no exception) is concerned with its own “survival” (Taylor 1994) in terms of maintenance of boundaries and recruitment of new members. In the present three cases the family background is a village community primarily ordered by kinship according to patrilineal descent. Kinship and inheritance rights follow the male line and establishing the legitimacy of the issue of a marriage is a vital concern. And women are perceived as the weak link in this chain, which is hardly surprising: literally the vehicle of recruitment, that is, biological reproduction, women also represent the “danger at the margin” (Douglas 1966) in the empirical as well as the symbolic sense. Clearly, virginity at marriage and chastity thereafter serve to secure that property does not go astray, but it is more at stake here since the purity of women equals the purity of the group. Invested with symbolic value of this magnitude the practical import of supervising women’s whereabouts makes sense; each woman may put internal cohesion and solidarity at risk at any time. From this point of view, early marriages arranged by those in charge is a most sensible means to group-survival, and *particularly* if the people concerned depend on some redistributive system other than the state. But why this persistent focus on keeping kinship groups dependable, that is honourable, in a context as radically different in this respect as Scandinavia? The problem at this point is to account for the fact that this pattern survives in the world’s most advanced welfare states. These are some features pertaining to economic organisation which may suggest some part of an answer.

Patterns of exchange

The notion “symbolic capital” seems exceptionally well suited to a life world the turning point of which is honour. But honour gained and honour lost also involves a flow of tangible objects, and women are a crucial part of this flow. Two examples:

In 1982 a man of Turkish origin was killed in the Norwegian town of Drammen. Three men, the father and two sons, originating from the same village as the deceased, confessed to the murder. The motive was the seduction of their daughter/sister, and the girl, promised in marriage to a man also from the same village, was now damaged and forever unfit for marriage. There was no choice but to kill the seducer, and there was no time to lose; the entire kinship group was in uproar and shame increased by the hour (Grønhaug 1983). Years later, in a TV documentary shown on Norwegian television in 1999⁵, young men in a Pakistani village were interviewed about their plans for the future. And their prospects were unanimous: what they expected were for their parents to conclude the arrangement with relatives in Scandinavia to provide

⁵ TV2 “Rikets tilstand”. See also Storhaug 2003.

them with a spouse. The girl of their dreams, however, all had the same name; they were called “visa”.

From different places on the globe and over a span of twenty years or so, promises are given and confidence upheld that a virgin bride will be forthcoming. In order to appreciate what is involved in these arrangements one need to know something about the nature of the relationships between the giver and the receiver in terms of obligations, trust and expected return. But in order to understand this obsession with honour and shame it must first be acknowledged that control of women’s chastity is not an end in itself but (however much Kant may turn in his grave) a means also to other ends. Also important, however, is the fact that although this distribution of young women suits Gayle Rubin’s concept of “traffic in women” just fine (Gayle Rubin 1975) the issue at hand is far removed from the activity usually called “trafficking”. The latter is impersonal, the woman is anonymous; her past and future is of no concern to her exchangeability and she circulates at the outside of any lasting relationship.

Although data is insufficient to say exactly where a “promise” and a “visa” fit with Marshal Sahlins’s famous “Scheme of reciprocities” (Sahlins 1972:190), his typology is suggestive and worth looking into, also in the sense of pointing out a course of further research.

In this “scheme” *generalised-*, *balanced-* and *negative* reciprocity indicate the interplay between reciprocity, social relations and material circumstances, the assumption being that “the distance between poles of reciprocity is, among other things, social distance” (Sahlins 1972:190).

As an object of exchange the bride, or the “visa”, could be part of a generalised exchange, at the extreme end of which the presentation is a *gift*. In that case

...the expectation of a direct material return is unseemly. At best it is implicit. The material side of the transaction is repressed by the social: reckoning of debts outstanding cannot be overt and is typically left out of account. This is not to say that handing over things in such form, even to “loved ones”, generates no counter obligation. But the counter is not stipulated by time, quantity, or quality: the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite.
(ibid: 208)

And moreover

Failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver of stuff to stop giving: the goods move one way, in favour of the have-not, for a very long period.
(ibid: 208)

This being the case, the giver of daughters living in Scandinavia may act under a heavy pressure from the have-nots, the presentation triggered by the privileged position in a welfare state, with nothing in return. But even to the most generous of gifts, there is a catch.

A gift that is not yet requited in the first place “creates a something between people”. It engenders continuity in the relation, solidarity – at least until the obligation to reciprocate is discharged. Falling under the “shadow of indebtedness”, the recipient is constrained in his relations to the giver of things. The one who has benefited is held in a peaceful, circumspect, and responsive position in relation to his benefactor.

(ibid: 208)

Thus the “return” may be an increase of the power and the influence of the bride-giver with their relations in the village of origin, for instance in terms of an investment in social security in the case of actual return.

However, to know whether the girls promised in marriage represent obligatory sharing of assets with those in need, or a means to enhance the prestige of the giver, one would have to consider the possibility of a balanced exchange, which involves questions of equivalence and the toleration for delay.

Balanced reciprocity refers to direct exchange. In precise balance, the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received, is offered without delay (ibid:194), and is less “personal” than generalised reciprocity.

So the pragmatic test of balanced reciprocity becomes an inability to tolerate one-way flows; the relationship between people is disrupted by a failure to reciprocate within limited time and equivalence. It is notable of the main run of generalized reciprocities that the material flow is sustained by prevailing social relations; whereas, for the main run of balanced exchange, the social relations hinge on the material flow.

(ibid: 195)

What could be the equivalent of “visa”? The “pragmatic test” requires knowledge not only about the total flow of material objects, money, assistance and mutual help between the Scandinavians and those staying behind, but also the time factor structuring exchange - particularly the tolerance for delay. The assumption would be that the shorter the time span, the more business-like the relation, and the easier to substitute one partner for another. Another assumption is that to the extent that balanced exchange does take place, women belong to a different economic sphere.

Raymond Firth has noted that “far more than we ordinarily suppose economic relations rest on moral foundations” (Firth1951:44). What comes first may perhaps best be left to empirical investigation, but the observation could be

relevant in these cases where the sense of *duty* towards large groups of people do in fact seem to motivate exchange. But however commendable in terms of cause and effect, from the point of view of “western” norms there is a major moral problem embedded in this exchange, evidenced by the very notions about convertibility. One of the strong biases of “moderns” is the general abhorrence of confusing persons and things; love and money, marriage and profit etc. And parents, in particular, are under the obligation not to treat their children as objects of exchange. The comprehensive sense of reciprocity and moral commitments involved in these promises and “visas” duly noted, neither national law nor international conventions take kindly to the notion that parents have jurisdiction to the extent of distributing their children at will for reasons of prestige, honour or social security (Lidén 2004).

There is one last type of reciprocity to be considered; *negative* reciprocity. This is “...the attempt to get something for nothing”, and “...ranges from various degrees of cunning, guile, stealth and violence to the finesse of a well conducted horse raid” (Sahlins 1972:195).

What applies in the present cases is theft: assets have been lost through the violation of property rights. If the loss and the stain on family honour are caused by seduction or rape the seducer or rapist is the thief and the victim will have to remove the humiliation by punishing the man. But then there are Sara, Pela and Fadime. Certainly, theft of family property has taken place, but the culprits belong to the intimate circle of the family itself. These young persons have stained their own purity: Seen talking to a boy in school; going to a disco (Sara and Pela); sleeping over at a friend’s house (Pela stayed over night at a girl friend’s); appearing in public in the company of a man of her own choice (Fadime). In addition to the humiliating appropriation of family property comes the fact that the thieves are the young women themselves, and consequently the target of restorative measures.

*

In general terms poverty makes sense of the “visa”-transaction and, given the moral logic of honour and shame, also of the catastrophe involved in presenting damaged goods. But it must be noticed that honour-killing is not restricted to a peasant economy or stems solely from scarcity. In a recent case from Pakistan, the daughter of a wealthy and privileged family was trying to escape an arranged marriage by appealing to the judicial system. On her father’s orders she was shot while visiting her attorney (Sardar-Ali 2002). The suggestion is that it may take more than affluence to prevent murder of a disobedient female, which in turn makes it difficult to predict future developments also in Scandinavia. While one hypothesis is that the economic security of Scandinavian countries will serve to weaken the ties between immigrants and the relatives in the country of origin, the converse is also possible. Economic security may be perceived as an opportunity to increase the wealth of the entire

group by enlarging the number of people either employed or benefiting from the welfare system. Thus the welfare system itself may work as an incentive to tighten the control of immigrant women.

The keeping of order: justice versus legality

The rules of conduct in question are unwritten rules, but this is not the only departure from legality in terms of written law. Julian Pitt-Rivers states: “The conflict between honour and legality is a fundamental one... For to go to law for redress is to confess publicly that you have been wronged and the demonstration of your vulnerability...” Moreover, there are “...all the delays of court procedure, which in fact can do nothing to restore your honour but merely advertises its plight” (Pitt-Rivers 1966:30). This is a sure way to make shame public, while the very postponement of reaction to an insult will invariably raise suspicion about cowardice. And in the wings people are waiting.

Monopoly on violence is a vital characteristic of modern Statehood and for the populace to take the law into its own hands in terms of blood revenge equals anarchy and chaos, and the presence of vendettas and the like indicates “pre-modernity” of sorts. Looking for an explanation to the occurrence of honour-killing in Scandinavian context, a likely assumption would be that in those regions where the code of honour is prevalent, the judicial system is lenient or even disinterested in family feuds and honour-related violence. But this seems not to be the case. In the Middle East killing for the sake of honour is prohibited and punished as a crime (Khader 1996). This is also the case for instance in Turkey (Grønhaug 1983), Pakistan (Sardar Ali 2002), and Spain (Pitt-Rivers 1966). But nevertheless, a certain ambiguity seems to bear on the application of the law. Every now and then, information surfaces to the effect that murder committed in defence of honour is treated as an extenuating circumstance. But without a systematic study it is impossible to say whether there is any correspondence between leniency, for instance in the local courts in the immigrant’s country of origin, and the inclination to kill in *diaspora*. However that may be, from the point of view of those resorting to murder for the sake of honour, it is precisely the *prevention* of anarchy that justifies violation of the law. And also, if the intention of a person were paramount in relation to his honour (Pitt-Rivers 1966:31), one would expect the guilty party to take the full responsibility for the act of murder wherever it took place. But this is not always the case.

The testimonies in the Swedish courts demonstrate a considerable amount of evasion and change of story to escape responsibility, which in turn muddles the straightforward explanation as to what actually goes on in these families. Particularly the trial of Ramis Sahindal, Fadime’s father, has raised the question whether his pleading not guilty is to be understood as cunning or

ambivalence.⁶ Clearly, if he does not take full responsibility for Fadime's death, there is no gain in terms of honour. And so he did, the first time around. But next, Sahindal pleaded sick and confused and a nephew appeared as the murderer. Finally, some person impossible to name for fear of the life of the rest of the family was announced as the actual murderer. (The court did not believe this, and condemned Fadime's father to life.) Taking the harsh view, one may conclude that what took place was an attempt to exploit the judicial norms of Sweden ("sick") in order to save his own skin. Thus, apparently, relinquishing the restoration of family honour, he will appear as just another sorry coward in the eyes of his own relatives. But there are other possibilities. In court Fadime's father said that "he did not seek honour in Sweden" (Wikan 2003:122). This can be interpreted as an endorsement of the legitimacy of the established power, which is an operational term for integration as good as any. But, also, he may have meant the exact opposite, since "the moral commitment to tell the truth derives... from the social commitment to persons to whom it is due" (Pitt-Rivers 1966:33). Hence, by denouncing his own participation in the murder of his daughter he may have signalled the irrelevance of Swedish authorities, Swedish norms and public opinion: His "significant others" would know the truth, and by lying he can eat his cake and keep it too. This is guesswork, but the point remains that given the "logic" motivating murder for the sake of honour in the first place, lying about it is not the obvious thing to do. And Fadime's father claiming sickness and confusion may in fact have spoken the literal truth: Sick from the pressure upon him, confused by conflicting norms and deeply ambivalent as to the action taken.

Attempting to elucidate the connection between the code of honour, violence and the scorn of civility and law parallels have been drawn between the norms of conduct applying to the aristocracy, the Mafia, MC gangs and street-corner societies as well as the logic of duels. And certainly, while the aristocracy considers itself above the law and the "gangs" are positioned at the margins or outside society, they do share the notion of being a law unto themselves - and the administration of justice their privilege. Moreover, what seems to join the gangs and the mob with the Christian and Muslim communities that have been the object of study is the notion that turning the other cheek is the ultimate disgraceful act. But whatever the similarities, there is one point where the latter comparison seems to break down. There is no indication that crime is a preferred way of life within the families who feel compelled to slay women who adopt the ways of the country in which they live. And murder is the last resort.

According to the unwritten rules involved there are more peaceful solutions to the problem of dishonour inflicted by the transgression of sexual norms: If the offender is a man he may pay the family; he is forced to marry the girl

⁶ The discussion is based on Wikan's report from the two trials in Uppsala tingsrätt and Svea Hovrätt. She attended both and her account and discussion of the proceedings are thorough and reflective.

(Grønhaug 1983); or the girl is expelled. The stain may be removed by declaring the dishonourable women dead to the family; no members of the family are allowed contact, and she is forbidden to enter the territory where the family resides (Khader 1996, Wikan 2003). And this solution was attempted in Fadime's case. From 1998 her father ruled that she was not allowed to enter the city of Uppsala. He even appealed to the municipality and to the police for assistance to keep Fadime out of the area.

It must be noticed, however, that in terms of transgression the books written on Pela and Fadime do not tell quite the same story. On the one hand, apart from overstepping the line on a few occasions, Pela was an obedient girl, and "she had done nothing", as her sister Breen is reported saying again and again (Swanberg 2002). But there were rumours, rapidly "globalised" thanks to phone and internet, and Pela became a stain on the family reputation both in Sweden and in the Kurdish village of her origin. Fadime, on the other hand, left no doubt about the facts: a Swedish boyfriend of her own choice; reporting her brother to the police for harassment and violent attack; twice appearing on television with her story, and speaking in Parliament (Riksdagen) about the implications of the code of honour to girls and women living in Sweden. Fadime was a multi-transgressor and she made no secret of it. Rather, the hope was that publicity would protect her. There is a strong suggestion, however, that it was precisely this making her predicament public which finally signed her death sentence. Confirming in his own way Pitt-River's observation, Sahindal explained to the court that the only solution to this public humiliation was the "final solution" (Wikan 2003:115).

Sara, Pela and Fadime were condemned without a trial; their rights as legal subjects counted for nothing and there was no defence to claim their innocence until proven guilty. But what seems to distinguish these three from native victims of male violence is the fact that their rights as full citizens of the state in which they lived were not acknowledged by their executioners even prior to their death.

Eldén is worried about immigrant girls' perception of Sweden as a model for their own emancipation project. (Eldén 2003:112), and she proposes that this misunderstanding is due to their confusing an "ought" with an "is": In terms of women's rights Swedish society is not what it claims to be.

Certainly, something can be said about the gendered underbelly of the Scandinavian mind, yet it is difficult to support the view that the laws granting equality between the sexes are void of practical import in people's lives. Whether put to its intended use or not, the law stipulates protection from sexual harassment, grants access to economic independence, freedom of movement, a voice in public, inheritance, the right to divorce and custody of one's own children. Discussing "Cultural Pluralism and the Limits of Diversity" Bhiku Parekh notes that the "...operative values of a society".... "are collectively and

publicly committed, their authority remains unaffected even if some of its members do not personally subscribe to them. Some members of liberal society may not believe in the equality of all men and women, but that does not excuse them from adhering to it in their public behaviour” (Parekh 1995:437). In other words, I believe it is a mistake to underestimate the impact of law and jurisprudence in Scandinavian countries. And then there is the *right of exit*, also firmly modifying international conventions granting group rights. These young women had no such right; they were punished in a way that makes it very clear that the questioning of membership or negotiating the terms was not an option. The most pitiful aspect of these deaths, however, is that the young women *did not want* an “exit” from their families, an issue I will return to below.

In terms of integration it is not enough to answer why vengeance is not left to the judicial system, the question must be reversed: What conditions people to postpone revenge and to trust the judicial system to act on their behalf? Fear of the Law in terms of penalty is hardly the whole answer rather, the question is relevant to every crucial issue within theories of modernity, and historians, political scientists and – philosophers will have something to contribute to the understanding of what it takes to turn the sense of justice under discussion in the direction of legality.

Discussing the prerequisites for consensus in a democratic state based on law, Jürgen Habermas assumes that people need to experience themselves as co-authors of the laws that bind them (Habermas 1994). But popular democracy making the people legislator is not necessarily a part of the experience of immigrants to Scandinavia; rather it may have been the lack of democracy that brought them to Scandinavia in the first place. And with reference to the present cases it is only fair to note that Kurds have had less reason than most to trust the state and its institutions, while the level of Scandinavian’s trust in the state is reported as somewhat out of the ordinary, even in a “western” context (Hedetoft 2005). The problem, nevertheless, is that immigrants endorsing the collective ownership of its female members do not have the approximately 200 years it took for Wollstonecraft’s vindication of the equal rights of women to become part of the legal system and the collective sense of justice.

Considerations on change

If the challenge is to find a way to dissolve this “world of ideas”, the immediate question must be whether the code of honour is losing its grip – or is it tightening?

Taking into consideration what is implied in honour in the present sense, the dissolution of this world of ideas must involve changes in more places than one, for instance: A revised concept of the person; a loosening of the ties with the country of origin; a substitution of the “significant other”; change in patterns of redistribution and exchange as well as in the distribution of authority within the family. Hence, the requirements seem to range from a

change in the relationship to the state and in the perception of the natives, to the creation of culturally competent mothers able to navigate confidently in a modern world of ideas. It is a tall order, but so is the bid for knowledge about the processes of modernisation which meets the challenge engendered by the very tempo of change required in the present situation.

Looking for indications of change, there are two approaches: qualitative and quantitative. The former requires a scrutiny of empirical detail, for instance in terms of some fissure in the consensus within the actual groups of people. And if focusing solely on punishment for transgression, attention to the weak points in the “syndrome” itself may slip. And there are some. For instance, the documentation and literature based on the cases of Sara, Pela and Fadime suggests a discord between the women and the men in these families as to their support of the action taken. There are mothers and sisters going behind the back of their men-folk to meet with the culprit, and there are sisters witnessing against their male kin in court (Swanberg 2002, Wikan 2003). Impossible to say without proper investigation, but this may indicate that some kind of sabotage of this “world of ideas” is quietly under way. And that being the case, Eldén may prove to be right in the end: honour-killing has indeed become men’s business, isolating them from their “own” women - a development they cannot afford, one would think.

Furthermore, restricting the attention to violence and tragedy to the exclusion of the more trivial aspects of every-day life, change in patterns of exchange may take place and go unnoticed. The challenge is to know where to look for some kind of slack in this web of long-term interdependence also in economic terms. From the micro-level of integration, Annick Prieur provides a telling example of the transition from generalised to balanced reciprocity within the family circle itself. A Vietnamese woman reports that she has learned the “Norwegian way” to take care of herself, also financially, which in her book entails paying back when she borrows money, even when it is from the in-laws (Prieur 2002:66). No wonder this makes her in-laws uneasy: An experience common to all is that within the context of generalised reciprocity the immediate return of a service, a gift or a loan may be considered a brush-off, a lack of trust perhaps, or even a signal of wanting to terminate the relationship. Anyway, “balanced” reciprocity signifies independence. But to repay a loan according to this standard, one need one’s own money, and locked in the house with a broken leg, such assets are hard to come by. Earning, however, does not automatically imply control of the money.

In general terms the suggestion is that transformations in the patterns of exchange within and between kinship groups could be indicative of integration and should be looked into, provided of course that people are willing to share that kind of information.

The question of number, on the other hand, raises altogether different problems. In Sweden, but also in Norway, Fadime's death released a shower of political self-reproach: the persistence of the notions of honour and shame in a democratic welfare state is the epitome of failed integration policy. This was also Fadime's message to her audience in Riksdagen. However, since practical-political measures are not the topic of this discussion, I will turn to a puzzle overshadowed by the very effort to elucidate the rationality leading to the murder of Sara, Pela and Fadime. The question is: Why are there not *more* deaths? Given the number of people living in Scandinavia who presumably have ties to regions where the code of honour is operative, three dead daughters/sisters during the span of eight years seem modest after all. Since there is always the temptation to overstate a case and the risk of explaining too much, the questions must be faced. While I hold no firm answer to this, some possibilities suggest themselves.

Fear: The relatively few murders have had the desired effect. Girls of the second and third generation is now scared for their lives, and obedience makes sense as a life saving measure. The alternative to obedience is flight and hiding. In Norway an increasing number of women with immigrant background are living at hidden addresses and with secret identities. Statistics are forthcoming, but to my knowledge nothing has been reported so far about how many of these women are fleeing from their entire family, for instance from the consequences of not agreeing to an arranged marriage - and how many share the predicament of Scandinavian women hiding from a violent husband or boy friend. Without some ideas of the proportions, the number in itself is no measure of the prevalence of the code of honour under discussion. Another unknown quantity is the number of young women taken to their own, or their parent's country of origin - and then disappearing.

Love: Åsa Eldén quotes a young woman talking about her Kurdish family. To her the most positive aspect of this culture is the love and the mutual support that prevail between family members. But, she explains, the dark side of family care is that affection and love becomes an obstacle to self-development as an independent person (Eldén 2003:72).

I want to be careful here, but from various sources a certain emotional pattern seems to prevail that may be different from present day Scandinavian family life and notions about bringing up children. For instance, pervasive demonstrations of affection and of belonging as a cherished member of the kinship group seem to go hand in hand with unmistakable reminders that love may be lost in the most absolute way.

While the loss of parental love will cast a shadow over anybody's life, in Scandinavia estrangement will hardly take the shape of expulsion accompanied by the announcement that one is dead in the eyes of one's own family - dead meaning non-existent as in "has never been". Notably, Pela was buried without

a headstone on her grave. However, what appears to have been difficult beyond endurance in these cases was the act of leaving one's own family. After having sought refuge from threats, Pela returned to her family, so desperate for being re-included that she agreed to marry in her village of origin. Back in the village, however, instead of getting married she was shot dead. And Fadime re-established contact with her mother and sisters living in Uppsala, knowing it was dangerous to visit. She was shot leaving her sister's home.

Duty: It is an acknowledged fact that young people of immigrant background feel obligated to their parents in ways foreign to moderns, continuously concerned with their well-being and with not being a disappointment to them. And it is likely that the sense of responsibility will increase with their parent's helplessness; for instance in terms of poor command of the majority language, unemployment and other failures as grown-ups in a foreign country. But as we all know, the young generation in Scandinavia is not brought up to feel indebted to their parents or family; and since success as a parent is independent, self sufficient children with a mind of their own, loyalty does not spell obedience. The pressure to behave is always there, of course, but in more subtle ways (Sørhaug 1995).

There is no simple access to the motivation to choose to comply with one's parents' wishes, and each of these features may account for a profound reluctance to provoke and to disobey. And to the extent that they are operative, we may also suspect that Awla's "world of ideas" is intact. Paradoxically, the absence of murder may even indicate a reinforced pressure.

Above I have suggested some alternatives to these bleak answers to the question, and for reasons just as complex as those pointing in the direction of maintenance, pressure could be gradually diminishing. And surely, integration tends to come about in ways which are beyond the grasp of theory, far ahead of research - in this case, perhaps, quietly taking the shape of negotiation and compromise between generations, and between the sexes. But those who hold the answer to this as well as to questions about the future direction of integration are probably first and foremost the young parents of Sara's, Pela's and Fadime's generation.

And from these three, tragedy is not the only legacy. Ignoring cultural essentialism, whether in the version of majorities or minorities, they have left a message to the effect that integration is not such an impossible task. On the contrary, the shame inflicted on their families was due to the fact that adopting Scandinavian values and norms was easy.

Bibliography:

- Ali, Shaheen Sardar (2000), *Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law*. The Hague/London/Boston: Kluwer Law International
- Awla, Rasool,
Göteborg-Posten 18/7 2001
Svenska Dagbladet 5/2 2001
Göteborg-Posten 2/3 2002
- Borchgrevink, Tordis (2003), "Et ubehag i antropologien. Profesjonelle dilemmaer på den flerkulturelle hjemmebanen". In Marianne Rugkåsa & Kari Trædal Thorsen (eds.), *Nære steder, nye rom. Utfordringer i antropologiske studier i Norge*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, pp. 263–91
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1965), "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society". In J.G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 191-242
- Douglas, Mary (1966), *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Eldén, Åsa (2003), *Heder på liv och död. Voldsamma berättelser om rykten, oskyld och heder*. Dissertation from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Uppsala University
- Firth, Raymond (1951), *Elements of Social Organisation*. London: Watts
- Grønhaug, Reidar (1983), *Sakkyndig uttalelse i straffesak 838-83 ved Eidsivating Lagmannsrett*. Sosialantropologisk institutt, Universitetet i Bergen
- Habermas, Jürgen (1994), "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic, Constitutional State". In Gutman, Amy (ed.), *Multiculturalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 107-148
- Hedetoft, Ulf (forthcoming 2005), "More than kin, and less than kind: The Danish Politics of Ethnic Consensus and the Pluricultural Challenge". In John Campbell, John Hall and Ove Kaj Pedersen (eds.), *The State of Denmark*. Montreal: McGill -Queens University Press
- Hjärpe, Jan (1997), "Kan kultur och religion orsaka mord?". Göteborg-Posten, 16/2
- Khader, Naser (1996), *Ære og Skam: Det Islamiske familie- og livsmønster fra undfangelse til grav*. Copenhagen: Borgen
- Lidén, Hilde (forthcoming), "Barns rettigheter – en realiserbar intensjon?" *Tidsskrift for Velferdsforskning*, No. 4 .
- Lukes, Steven (1974), *Power. A Radical View*. Houndmills: Macmillan
- Melhuus, Marit (2002), "A House that Lacks a Man, Lacks Respect". In Tor Aase (ed.), *Tournaments of Power. Honour and Revenge in the Contemporary World*. Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 165-87
- Parekh, Bhiku (1995), "Cultural pluralism and the limits of diversity". *Alternatives*, No. 20, pp. 431- 57
- Peristiany, J. G. (ed.) (1966), *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

- Pitt-Rivers, Julian (1966), "Honour and Social Status". In J.G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 19-78
- Prieur, Annick (2002), "Gender remix. On gender constructions among children of immigrants in Norway". *Ethnicities*, Vol. 2(1), pp. 53 -77
- Rubin, Gayle (1975), "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex". In R.R. Reiter (ed.), *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, pp. 157-210
- Sahlins, Marshall (1972), *Stone Age Economics*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter
- Storhaug, Hege (2003), "Fra turistvisum til ekteskapsvisum". In Ottar Brox, T. Lindbekk and Sigurd Skirbekk (eds.), *Gode formål – gale følger?. Kritisk lys på norsk innvandringspolitikk*. Oslo: Cappelen, pp. 15-33
- Sørhaug, Tian (1995), "The Semantics of Love". In Tordis Borchgrevink and Ø. G. Holter (eds.), *Labour of Love. Beyond the Self-evidence of Everyday Life*. Aldershot: Avebury, pp. 17-44
- Swanberg, Lena Katarina (2002), *Hedersmordet på Pela*. Stockholm: MånPocket
- Taylor, Charles (1994), "The Politics of Recognition". In Gutman, Amy (ed.), *Multiculturalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 25-73
- Walzer, Michael (1997), *On Toleration*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press
- Wikan, Unni (2003), *For ærens skyld. Fadime til ettertanke*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget

© Tordis Borchgrevink & AMID

ISSN 1601-5967

Published by:

AMID

Aalborg University

Fibigerstraede 2

DK-9220 Aalborg OE

Denmark

Phone + 45 96 35 84 38

Fax + 45 98 15 11 26

Web: <http://www.amid.dk>

AMID – Akademiet for Migrationsstudier i Danmark

The Academy for Migration Studies in Denmark

Director: Professor dr. phil. Ulf Hedetoft

The Academy for Migration Studies in Denmark, AMID, is a consortium consisting of researchers at research centers representing three institutions of higher education and two research institutes. AMID is supported by the Danish Research Councils of the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

The Consortium consists of the following members:

Aalborg University--Department of Sociology, Social Studies and Organization, Department of Economics, Politics and Administration, as well as *SPIRIT* (School for Postgraduate Interdisciplinary Research on Interculturalism and Transnationality) and Institute for History, International and Social Studies. Aalborg University is the host institution.

The Aarhus School of Business--CIM (Centre for Research in Social Integration and Marginalization).

Aarhus University--Department of Political Science.

The Danish National Institute of Social Research (Socialforskningsinstituttet, SFI).

The Institute of Local Government Studies (Amternes og Kommunernes Forskningsinstitut, AKF).