

Mutilation And Killing For Muslim "Honor": Religious Or Tribal Custom? (Part Three of Three)
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Whether the barbaric act of "honor" killings is a tribal or religious custom, FSM Contributing Editor Adrian Morgan demonstrates what can happen when mass concentrations of Muslim immigrants come to Western societies, such as America, and bring their customs with them. Do we know how many "honor" killings already occur right here in the United States?

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Religious Or Tribal Custom?**
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There is nothing in the Koran that sanctions honor killing, but it is nonetheless true that most honor killings take place in Muslim societies. Dr. Nawal Ammar of Kent State University [argues](#) that honor killings are a "pre-Islamic, tribal custom". It has been stated by anthropologist [James Emery](#): "Prior to the arrival of Islam in AD 622, Arabs occasionally buried infant daughters to avoid the possibility that they would later bring shame to the family." Emery suggests that honor killing in the Middle East is an Arabic tribal custom, perpetuating social patterns from the pre-Islamic (jahilayah) era.

The second Caliph - Omar (Umar, died 644 AD) - was a close friend of Mohammed. He is said to have only [cried once](#). This happened when he recollected that in the time of *jahilayah* he buried his infant daughter alive, and as he did so, she [brushed away](#) the dust from his beard. Under the first Caliphs, Islam was spread by the sword, and within three centuries it had expanded to Spain in the West and to Afghanistan and parts of India in the east. Yet it is true that in Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country, honor killing is almost unheard of. In Malaysia too, honor killings are apparently nonexistent. Islam did not arrive in South-East Asia until the 13th century, which may explain why honor-killing is not common in this region.

In other non-Arab Muslim societies such as Pakistan, the custom is common. If "honor-killing" is merely a reflection of local tribal customs, then it would be found to the same degree amongst Hindus and Sikhs in India, who share the same ancestors. Among these

groups, the practice is rare, although in [Maharashtra state](#) women are killed and tortured for being suspected witches. Annually, there are thought to be 5,000 dowry-killings in India, where a bride's family defaults on payment and the wife is killed. *Sati* or *sutti* was a Hindu custom where a widow would immolate herself on her husband's funeral-pyre. This custom was banned by the British. Neither *sutti*, dowry killings nor witch-burning could be seen as "honor killings".

The Kurds of Turkey and Iraq who practice honor killings are not Arabs, nor are the predominantly Pashtun peoples of Afghanistan who engage in the practice. If honor-killing is a survival of an Arab, pre-Islamic custom, then it has been exported to Kurdish peoples and those in Afghanistan and the Indian sub-continent, a "fellow-traveler" during the early (pre-Ottoman) historical spread of Islam. Therefore, I do not buy into the argument that honor-killings have nothing to do with Islam. They are a living part of its history. Adultery, according to Sharia principles, is punishable by death, and most honor-killings involve suspected adultery. Apostasy is also, according to some Islamic schools of thought, punishable by death.



The victims of honor killings are seen as "heretics" who flout traditional Islamic values: apostates from the true path. Instead of a family enduring public shame through an Islamic tribunal, it retains "honor" by showing that it can enact its own punishment in a poor mimicry of sharia, with such actions often supported by neighbors and friends.

In Arab communities, honor killing thrives. In Iran, during two months in [2003](#), there were 45 cases of honor killings. These took place in the southwestern province of Khuzestan, which is predominantly Arab. The [Druze](#) are Arab and have a secretive religion, which they consider to be Muslim, but most Muslims regard them as non-Muslim. In [March](#) this year, Druze beauty Doaa Fares was forced to withdraw from the "Miss Israel" pageant. She was threatened with being subjected to "honor killing" by two uncles and others from her village in Galilee. Doaa said: "My life is much more important than a contest, but it's very difficult for me to give up my dream."

In Israel last year, there were seven women killed in Muslim/Arab honor crimes. The Times states that their sins ranged "from having sex before marriage to being the victim of rape". One of these cases involved 26-year old [Basel Abu-Dahal](#), who murdered his 24-year old sister Miriam in an honor killing in Ramle, 12 miles from Tel Aviv. He stabbed her 29 times in broad daylight in a parking lot, while two onlookers watched and did nothing. His action was captured on security cameras. Abu-Dahal claimed that Miriam was raising her daughter in an "improper" manner. He told police that he was "willing to do the time for the sake of honor".

In 2005 in Israel there were 15 recorded honor killings, with three of these taking place in the municipality of Ramle. Palestinians have engaged in savage honor killings, and with the rise of the Islamist group Hamas, there may be a rise in such murders. In [April 2005](#), a young woman was killed for the "crime" of being with her fiancé in the Gaza

strip. Her killers were said to be Hamas' morality police, the *Anti-Corruption Unit*.

Twenty-two year old Yusra al-Azzami was in a car with her fiancé, and was shot from a vehicle which contained five masked men. After Yusra was shot, her dead body was dragged from the car and beaten with iron bars. Later, the fiancé and (her) sister were also [beaten](#).

In the Palestinian territories, there has been an increase in honor killings. [Last month](#) a 40-page report was compiled by Ohaila Shomar of women's rights group SAWA. Until 2004, there were 10 to 12 murders of women each year in Palestinian territories. Over the past three years, there have been 48 murders of females aged from 12 to 85 years old. Of these cases, 32 have been honor killings. The [Times](#) states that last year, 17 Palestinian women were honor victims. 12 were killed in the Gaza Strip and 5 were killed in the West Bank.



The reasoning behind honor killings is alien to the Western mind. Though not recent, the case of Amira Abu Hanhan Qaoud, a mother of nine who killed her teenaged daughter Rofayda on [January 27, 2002](#) shows a callousness that shocks.

Rofayda had been raped by her two elder brothers in their shared bedroom in their Ramallah home. She became pregnant. On December 23, 2002, Rofayda gave birth to a baby boy at a women's shelter in Bethlehem. She returned to the family's

three bedroom home in the suburb of Abu Qash. The family and village heads signed a promise that they would not harm the teenager. The two brothers were jailed.

Amira Qaoud did not keep her promise. She bought razor blades, and ordered her daughter to slash her own wrists. When Rofayda refused, her mother smothered her with a plastic bag, slashed the girl's wrists and hit her with a wooden stick. The killing took twenty minutes. Amira Qaoud said: "She killed me before I killed her. I had to protect my children. This is the only way I could protect my family's honor." Her nine year old daughter Fatima echoed her sentiments, saying: "My mother did this because she does not want us to be punished by people. I love my mother much more now than before."

In Palestinian territories, a murder is regarded as less serious if it is an honor killing, and thus honor killers receive from six to twelve months' jail. This stems from Jordanian legislation from 1960. [Article 340](#) of the Jordanian Penal Code affirms that "*he who discovers his wife or one of his female relatives committing adultery with another, and he kills, wounds or injures one or both of them, is exempt from any penalty... he who discovers his wife, or one of his female ascendants or descendants or sisters with another in an unlawful bed and he kills, wounds or injures one or both of them, benefits from a reduction of penalty.*" In addition to this, Article 98 of the Penal Code allows a reduced sentence if a perpetrator kills in a "fit of fury".

In 2000, a bill to repeal Article 340 was twice sent through parliament, but twice failed to become law. In both instances the Upper House approved the changes but the Lower House, the chamber of Deputies, refused to ratify the bills. The situation was repeated in [2003](#). Article 340 directly contradicts Section 6 of Jordan's constitution which guarantees equal treatment for both genders.

The majority of those killed on suspicion of adultery are innocent. Author Norma Khouri told the [BBC](#): "Ninety percent of the cases that occur are based on just rumor and suspicion. So 90% of the women that are killed are still virgins at the time of death." Norma's friend Dalia had been stabbed 12 times by her father, for the "crime" of falling in love with a Christian man.

There are on average between 20 and 25 honor killings in Jordan every year. In [2003](#) the US State Department urged the Jordanian government to take action against honor killings, but the situation [remains the same](#). There were between 15 and 20 women who were subjected to honor killings in Jordan last year. This was a reduction from [previous years](#). In 2003 there were 17 such killings reported, and 22 in the preceding year. There has been more awareness of honor killings and domestic abuse over the past decade. The *Jordan Times* [estimated](#) that between 28 and 60 women had been killed in honor killings in 1994.

Jordanian journalist Rana Hussein, author of the forthcoming book [Murder in the Name of Honor](#), states that jail sentences for convicted honor killers in Jordan range between three months and two years.

In [Lebanon](#) between 1996 and 1998 there were 36 reported cases of honor killings. In the small communities where these took place, the killers were feted as heroes. In Syria, as in Jordan, honor killings are given legal sanction. Article 548 of the Syrian Legal Code states: "*1: He who catches his wife, or one of his ascendants, descendants or sister committing adultery (flagrante delicto) or illegitimate sex acts with another and he kills or injures one of both of them benefits from an exemption of penalty. 2: He who catches his wife, or one of his ascendants, descendants or sister in a suspicious state (attitude equivoce) with another and he kills or injures one of both of them benefits from an exemption of penalty.*"

In January this year in Syria, there were two killings of 16-year old girls within two days. On [January 21](#), a girl called Sheren was killed by her brother when six months' pregnant. The following day, [Zahra Ezzo](#) was murdered. Her brother admitted the murder, and said his family had chosen him to carry out the "honor" killing. Syria's Grand Mufti, Ahmad Hassoun, condemned her killing, and called for legal reform. As many as 200 to 300 honor killings are thought by some to occur annually in Syria.

In [Yemen](#), the law makes allowances for honor killings. Article 232 of the Yemeni Penal Code rules that: "*if a man kills his wife or her alleged lover in the act of committing adultery or attacking them causing disability, he may be fined or sentenced to*

imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year." Mohammed Ba Obaid of Sana'a University stated that in 1997 there were 400 cases of women killed for "honor".

Morocco too sanctions honor killings in its penal code. Article 418 [states](#): "*Murder, injury and beating are excusable if they are committed by a husband on his wife as well as the accomplice at the moment in which he surprises them in the act of adultery.*" Here, as in Yemen, a principle of Islamic law, where the death penalty is traditionally invoked for adultery, is misapplied. Sharia law stipulates that four Muslim men (a woman's testimony has half the value of a man) must witness an act of *zina* (illegal intercourse) for the death penalty to be carried out.

In the mainly Arabic north of Sudan, honor killings are said to be widespread. In the [Nuba](#) regions, where Muslims live alongside animist groups, honor killings occur. In Saudi Arabia there are only rumors of honor killings. In a culture which denies a free press and women's rights, such information is scant. However, one [famous execution](#), that of 19-year old Princess Misha'al bint Fahd al Saud in 1977, was an honor killing. The princess was Islamically married to a "commoner". Her grandfather, Prince Muhammad bin Abdul Aziz, was outraged by the union, and ordered that Misha'al and her husband be publicly executed.

In Egypt, a [UN report](#) by Fatma Khafagy of the Cairo-based Association of Legal Aid for Women was produced in 2005. It states that in 1995, out of a total of 819 slayings, 52 of these were honor killings. In 2003, a report by a women's rights group claimed that 42% of domestic violence cases involved "honor crimes". Article 17 of Egypt's Penal Code allows judges to decrease sentences in murder cases if they decide that the murder's condition merits it. As a result, a sentence can be as little as six months' duration. In Article 277 of the Penal Code, a man can commit adultery only within his marital home. A woman is adulterous within or outside of the home, and need not be caught "in the act" for a husband to use the defense of inflamed emotions.

Fatma Khafagy states: "Egyptian films represent honor killing as part of highly valued and well respected tradition. Family honor is shown as dependent on the sexual conformity of its female family members. With the strong wave of conservatism in Egypt, strong criticism of the practice of honor killing by activists is rejected by many. They consider activists who condemn the practice as deviants from the religious principles and from good traditions and that they are only attempting to adopt a western agenda that does not respect family's honor and that permit females to practice premarital and extra marital relationships."

Between 1998 and 2001, women's rights group CEWLA collected press clippings of honor killings. In only 9% of these instances was there actual adultery. 79% of such killings happened because adultery was only suspected, and 6% of cases happened to cover up cases of incest.

Over the past decade, Europe has seen a wave of honor killings within its immigrant communities. There have so far only been a [few](#) cases in the United States. It will only be

a matter of time before the numbers increase. In Canada, honor killings are more common. There has been one [Sikh](#) honor killing in Vancouver. There have also been Muslim honor killings. In [Toronto](#) in 1999, a Pakistani Muslim murdered his wife's five-year old daughter to save his "honor". Muhammad Aarsal Khan said in court in [2004](#) that the girl, offspring of his first wife's adultery, was "that useless child," a "bastard offspring" and a "child of a dog."

The Vancouver Sun recently [gave brief descriptions](#) of three Canadian honor killing cases: "A 14-year-old female rape victim is strangled to death in March 2004 by her father and brother because she has supposedly tarnished the family name. In April 2004, a man brutally kills his wife and daughter after finding out that his brother had previously molested them. A teenage girl with a Turkish background has her throat cut by her father after he learns she has a Christian boyfriend."

Last month, a devout Muslim of Moroccan origins [stood trial](#) for killing his 38-year old elder brother in an honor killing. Najib Bellari stabbed his brother El-Mehdi at the Montreal restaurant where El-Mehdi worked as a dishwasher, on October 24, 2005. Najib Bellari thought his brother was a bad Muslim and [said](#): "He was a believer in Satan."

If the United States allows mass concentrations of Muslim immigrants in its cities without encouraging them to think and act as Americans, the likelihood of honor killings will increase. In Europe, vast ghettos have been created in major cities, where little integration or assimilation takes place. In these ghettos, the traditions of the immigrants' homelands take precedence over the traditions of the host country. If immigrants are to become truly American, they must be encouraged to respect American values. Honor killings exist in the West precisely because their practitioners have no respect for Western values such as personal liberty and the equality of women.

Parts One and Two of this series can be found [here](#).

For more information on honor killings, please visit the [website Stop Honor Killings](#).

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