

Dishonor Killings: Horrific Crimes Against Women

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There are two myths that you find in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions upon which rest the idea that men are superior to women. These ideas are that God's primary creation was Adam and from the rib of this male person. God created a woman — secondary and subordinate to man. The second is that although she's secondary in creation, she got Adam thrown out of paradise. Therefore women are to be seen as temptresses and seductresses, weak and dangerous to men.

I've done a lot of theological work to show that these beliefs are not supported by the basic teachings of Islam. The average Muslim thinks that woman was created from Adam's rib, but this story is not found in the *Qu'ran*, the sacred book of the Muslims. It has infiltrated into the Islamic tradition. In the *Qu'ran* there are 30 creation passages in which it says that God created all human beings at the same time and in the same manner. This shows that the traditional beliefs about women are contrary to *Qu'ranic* teaching.

In Pakistan, as in other cultures, honor is very prized by males. If a woman is seen by men as somehow compromising herself, then men believe they have the right to take that woman's life. A

woman can bring shame on her family through allegations of an illicit affair or rape, for marrying a man of her choice, or for the merest rumor of impropriety. Basically, the idea is that women belong to men as property, and if a woman causes them to lose face in society, the men can kill her. These are called honor killings.

According to Amnesty International, an average of two women each day are killed in Pakistan for betraying the honor of a husband or family. An honor killing is the easiest way for a man to get rid of his wife. But we know that a lot of these crimes are camouflage for other crimes. Amnesty International, for instance, recorded a case where a man had a quarrel with another man and killed him. In order to cover up his crime, he killed his sister-in-law and then made it look like an honor killing. He got away with it because honor killings are not regarded as crimes; nobody takes them seriously. There was also a very famous case last year (2000) in Pakistan, where a young woman was killed in a lawyer's office at the instigation of her parents because she wanted a divorce from her very abusive husband. The case became so politicized that the matter went to the Pakistani parliament. A group of senators wanted to discuss it, but in the end it was drowned out, because people said there's no discussion on matters of honor.

The problem with honor crimes and honor killings is that, because these are crimes committed by family members, most remain hidden. The police are very prejudiced against women, so they don't report or record the crimes. And the courts don't do anything about it.

But, there's a growing movement against honor killings. Women's groups, young Muslims and Pakistanis (especially in the West), mainstream Muslims, liberal, progressive Muslims, and a lot of men are protesting it. When they see graphic images of the women

who are being burned, mutilated, and murdered, they feel that they have to do something. They want people to know that the stereotype of Muslims as terrorists or extremists is wrong. The vast majority, more than 90 percent of Muslims, are mainstream. They want to be modern; they want to have human rights.

Pakistan now has a military government. General Musharraf has made a statement that honor killings have no place in Islam and in law and should be very severely denounced. So that's a hopeful statement. It has taken a lot of effort to get him to make that statement — effort and educational campaigns. That must continue, if we are to see our government implement some serious changes and help us put an end to this horror.

“Dishonor Killings: Horrific Crimes Against Women,” in *Global Uprising: Confronting the Tyrannies of the 21st Century (Stories from a New Generation of Activists)*, edited by Neva Welton and Linda Wolf, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, BC, Canada, 2001, pp. 213-215.