



Conceptualizing ‘Honour’ Killings in Canada: An Extreme Form of Domestic Violence?

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Abstract

This paper explores the conceptualization of ‘honour’ killings in Canada’s increasingly diverse and multicultural society, demonstrating that these murders are best seen as falling within the broad spectrum of domestic violence, rather than as a separate issue. Although there is limited amount of literature on how honour killings were reported in Canada before 2002, the current mainstream Canadian public discourse on honour killings is growing steadily more complex, though even the term itself is not fully understood. Looking beyond narratives that portray honour killings as resulting from real or perceived violations of family honour illustrates the vital role that gender plays in these crimes. Specifically, it demonstrates why they should be treated as a form of domestic violence instead of ‘exoticized’ as essentialised parts of the socio-cultural traditions and values of minority ethnic communities.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Gender Based Violence, ‘Honour’, ‘Honour’ Killing, Izzat, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Honour killings are recognized around the world as a serious crime. The 2000 United Nations Population Fund report estimated at least 5,000 women are killed in the name of honour each year (see also Gill, Begikhani & Hague, 2012; Meeto & Mirza, 2007). In Canada, recent media and policy reports estimate that twelve cases have occurred since 2002 (Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012; Keeping, 2012; Papp, 2010; Wilton, 2012). However, some commentators in Canada, including Professor Amin Muhammad and Toronto social worker Aruna Papp, believe that this number will continue to rise (D’Amato, 2012; Keeping, 2012). Moreover, although many murders are reported by the media, various forms of violence against women are underreported, making the true impact of gender-based violence difficult to accurately measure and assess. The situation is complicated by

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the fact that many victims and witnesses fail to report crimes to the police, not least because family members often collude to cover up honour crimes, especially when these are seen as being 'legitimate' (Gill *et al.*, 2012).

The term 'honour killing' is often used interchangeably with 'honour crimes' and 'honour-based violence'. Tripathi and Yadav define honour killing as "an ancient practice in which men kill female relatives in the name of family 'honour'" (2004, p. 64). Human Rights Watch (2001, quoted in Ballard, 2011, p. 125) provides a fuller, more detailed definition:

Honour crimes are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonour upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce – even from an abusive husband – or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that 'dishonours' her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life [.]

Fournier, McDougall and Dekker (2012) argue that more research on the historical origins of honour crimes is needed to explore apparent similarities with honour-based violence in ancient Rome (see also Goldstein, 2002). This may be especially useful in unpicking disagreements over terminology. As Hogben (2012) argues, many countries use the term 'honour-based violence' but some – including certain organizations in Canada – refuse to employ this terminology. In order to emphasize the gender-based nature of this crime, Hogben (2012, p. 43) observes that "in South America ... the East, and Palestine [many people are] abandoning the term honour killing and instead using the term *femicide*". Hogben (2012) believes that the term *femicide* does not separate women based on ethnicity, culture or religion. She is thus reluctant to use the term "honour killing" as it may give the perpetrator a justification of murder based on cultural motives (honour of the family or community), traditional practices or religious beliefs. The term *femicide* is not disrespectful or prejudicial towards ethno-cultural communities, highlighting the fact these murders are no different than the ones occurring in mainstream communities (e.g. domestic violence homicides).

Welchman and Hossain define gender-based violence "as violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman and affects her disproportionately" (2005, cited in Vishwanath & Palakonda, 2011, p. 389). Feminist theories about power and control offer a useful framework for discussing how honour killings emerge from the perceived need to support and/or restore patriarchal power within the family; this, in turn, illuminates how these crimes represent a socio-culturally defined form of domestic violence that can and should be dealt with in relation to the bigger picture of violence against women: a phenomenon that knows no social, cultural, religious or ethnic boundaries.

Murders referred to as honour killings are, in most cases, a particular form of gendered violence: "They symbolize a wider, more prevalent logic that shows women and girls what is likely to happen to them if they don't behave and conform to social and patriarchal expectations" (Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012, p. 3). As Gill (2006) and Meeto and Mirza (2007) argue, the particular set of behavioural norms associated with restoring lost 'honour' has not been recognized as a violation of human rights except in specialist circles.

However, scholars (Kirti *et al.*, 2011; Reddy, 2008; Tripathi & Yadav, 2004) have started to emphasize that it is the state's responsibility to prevent honour crimes by taking action on the issue of violence against women committed in the name of honour, both on an individual basis and as part of a bigger issue situating these crimes as an infringement of human rights.

Honour systems are often closely linked to patriarchal ideologies that construct women as passive and accepting of domination and control. As Hogben (2012, p.41) notes:

The social order of patriarchy is that the father/male is central and dominant. It is the male who is the norm for being human ... Women and girls are the dependents of the father, and so they must be obedient and subject to social control. Patriarchal values are about men, and these values are used to maintain the family's and the community's reputation with scant attention to women or children [.]

Feminist activists have been central in creating awareness about domestic violence through challenging patriarchy. Despite the many gains of the feminist movement, activists are still trying to deconstruct the underlying notions of power that support patriarchal values. Even though there is no consensus on the boundaries of patriarchy, most feminists agree that the core feature is that decision-makers are, by definition, male (Sev'er, 2005b). As hooks (2000; 2004) points out, patriarchy is something men do not think about: it is simply a learned pattern of behaviour. hooks (2000) explores how men are socialized to act as rulers of the household. In this role, they are expected to emphasize patriarchal thinking structured around gender scripts (e.g. what women should and should not do) by ensuring that women follow a set of predetermined rules that support these patriarchal values and beliefs. If they do not obey, they must be punished – and seen to be punished.

The term honour killing denies victims a voice, but more importantly it fails to speak to the larger social structures of patriarchy that perpetuate all forms of violence against women. This specific type of murder is rarely reported as emerging from gender inequalities rooted in strong patriarchal thinking, despite the fact that this demonstrates the close connections between the supposedly separate form of violence known as 'honour killing' and types of violence against women common across Western societies. Instead of focusing on the cultural context of crimes committed in the name of honour, it is vital to recognize that violence against women is found in all societies where there are unequal gender relations.

However, it is possible to use the term honour killing while subsuming it under the umbrella of domestic violence. Doing so would create greater opportunities to encourage critical thinking about power and honour in the context of violence against women. Ending patriarchy is a challenge that will only be met by changing how both men and women think about values and norms that legitimise the control of women by men (hooks, 2004). Patriarchal thinking, furthermore, is often supported by women, who help perpetuate these attitudes through their role in socialising male children to see themselves as rightfully dominant and female children as rightfully submissive (hooks, 2004).

Whose honour?

As Kirti, Kumar and Yadav (2011, p. 350) point out, two important but often overlooked inter-related questions are “Whose honour is at issue? Why are the women killed in the name of protecting it?” Answering these questions hinges on deconstructing the idea of honour to explore the key factors at stake, while allowing a variety of perspectives to be heard without privileging any singular one. The related notions of honour (*izzat*) and shame (*sharam*) are not unique to any one specific culture or religion, though these concepts have taken on particular forms in particular types of society. Virdi (2012) considers these variations to show that *izzat* is socially and culturally constructed.

Both Araji (2000) and Virdi (2012) have suggested that *izzat* is used to restore honour through violent acts and to encourage silence when enduring abuse. Thus, the concept of honour helps to keep women in abusive relationships and prevents them from reporting violence. Baker, Gregware and Cassidy (1999) and Reddy (2008) explore how the notion of shame is often used in Western societies when husbands seek to dominate their spouses through violence. Thus, it is not only ‘traditional’ or ‘Eastern’ societies that are concerned with shame and honour. Nevertheless, non-Western societies are more likely to justify femicide through reference to honour, especially when community members support a killing as ‘justified’ (Baker *et al.*, 1999).

Schliesmann (2012) describes shame as “a complex emotion that is connected to ‘face,’ and includes feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, and a sense of failure” (p. 48-49). However, the words *izzat* and *sharam* once translated into English as ‘honour’ and ‘shame’ lose these critical connotations (Gill, 2009). In societies predicated on an honour system, women are socialised to avoid any action that might harm the family’s reputation in the community, not least because if one woman in the family acts (or is perceived to have acted) in a shameful way then the dishonour is shared by the entire family, including the extended family. Thus, women are seen as responsible for maintaining their family’s honour, while men are perceived to be responsible for making sure women are not in a position to injure the family’s honour (Gill, 2009; Reddy, 2008; Vishwanath & Palakonda, 2011).

Critically, it is a woman’s responsibility to remain a virgin until marriage (Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001); while it is the duty of the men in the family to ensure that she does not and, indeed, *cannot* violate this expectation of sexual purity. If a woman acts (or is perceived to have acted) in a way that violates the honour code, family members must punish her to eliminate the shame and restore the family’s honour and reputation in the community (Araji, 2000; Gill, 2009; 2011; Gill *et al.*, 2012; Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012; Papp, 2012; Tripathi & Yadav, 2004).

However, killing is not the only crime committed in the name of honour, but simply the most violent. Others include early and forced marriage, the sisters and daughters being sold into slavery, [female genital] mutilation, and the deprivation of freedom, education, or friendship (Gill, 2006, p. 1).

The violations of ‘honour’ that may trigger violence are wide-ranging, including refusing to enter into an arranged marriage or seeking divorce from an abusive husband (Human Rights Watch, 2011); perpetrators in honour killings in Canada have identified different honour violations as their key motivation including staying out late, wearing makeup, wearing ‘Western’ clothes, wanting to leave an abusive husband, refusing an

arranged marriage, dating, and socializing with someone outside the community (Papp 2010; Chesler, 2009). As Schliesmann (2012, p. 48) argues

Inappropriate behaviour [triggering honour-based violence] can be anything from the manner of dress, association with friends and boyfriends outside of the family and social group, defiance and disobedience, adultery and even rape, and need only be suspected by male family members to prompt action[.]

Thus, “the concept of honour can be very broad and inclusive, containing an entire codex of concepts and behaviours” (Gill, 2006, p. 2). As Jiwani and Hoodfar (2012, p. 2) explain, the victims of honour killings “are women pegged as having deviated from the moral code and thus undermined the family’s honour; by killing them, family reputation and honour may be restored”. Thus, close relatives commit honour violence to cleanse the family’s name and reputation (Keeping, 2012; Meeto & Mirza, 2007; Tripathi & Yadav, 2004).

If a man refuses to punish a female relative, he risks losing his own social position and may be labelled as weak and unmanly by other men in the community. This is a further disgrace that represents a severe wound to a man’s pride (Araji, 2000; Schliesmann, 2012). As Tripathi and Yadav (2004, p. 73) argue “Under whatever name, honour crimes against women are committed worldwide. They occur whenever a man regards a woman as his property and seeks to uphold this false assumption by cruel and abusive force”. The fact that when women challenge “honour-related violence and other forms of gender-related abuse” this often places them in an even vulnerable situation where their human rights are further violated” (Gill, 2006, p. b9), means that the cycle of violence is all but impossible to escape. Moreover, women often play a key role in supporting honour crimes against other women. For some women, supporting honour-based violence may be the only way they can protect their own honour and position within the family (Baker *et al.*, 1999; Kirti *et al.*, 2011). Thus, research and policy should not focus solely on male perpetrators, but also look at how women are complicit and, sometimes, even actively involved in honour killings, though they rarely take a direct hand in the violence itself.

Case study 1: The Murder of Jaswinder (‘Jassi’) Kaur Sidhu

Twenty-five year old Jaswinder was from a respectable ‘Jatt’ (peasant-farmer caste) Sikh family living in Maple Ridge, British Columbia, when she was murdered for eloping with and marrying an auto-rickshaw driver from a lower caste: who her family did not approve of (Dawson, Sewak & Singh, 2011; Viridi, 2012; for a detailed discussion of elopement see Ballard, 2011; Kirti, Kumar & Yadav, 2011). On a visit to India in 2000, Jaswinder was kidnapped in front of her husband, Sukhwinder Singh also known as Mithu, and later killed (Dawson *et al.*, 2011). The murder was plotted by her mother and uncle who was a well-established and respected member of a local Sikh temple. While her husband survived the injuries he sustained trying to prevent his wife’s kidnapping, he remained aware of the continuing danger he was in. Indeed, Jaswinder’s family later brought charges of rape against him. Although he maintained his innocence, claiming that this was an attempt to punish him for marrying Jaswinder, he was convicted of these crimes in India. Jaswinder was also forced by her family to sign a fake document in Punjabi, which stated that she wanted the marriage annulled (Dawson *et al.*, 2011).

As Vishwanath and Palakonda explain, “Since inter-caste marriages tend to weaken the differences existing among the different caste groups and disturb the caste hierarchies, marriage or a love affair between a high caste girl and a low caste boy is always contested and criminalized” (2011, p. 390). Besides caste differences Jassi and Mithu shared the same surname even before marriage which is culturally prohibited because of potential blood relationships (Dawson *et al.*, 2011). Jaswinder’s family believed she had offended against their patriarchal values and violated the concept of caste honour in a socially unacceptable way, in the process dishonouring the whole family (Kirti *et al.*, 2011; Meeto & Mirza, 2007; Vishwanath & Palakonda, 2011).

Jaswinder’s murder attracted significant media attention in Canada. Two recent documentaries, *Murder Unveiled* and *Escape from Justice*, examined the case. A petition website *Justice for Jassi* has also been set up, and a book of the same name was published in September 2011. Still waiting for justice for Jaswinder, her husband currently lives in his village in Punjab and has refused to re-marry. After spending four years in India’s jail he was finally released in 2008. His Canadian hero Harbinder Singh Sewak, a publisher of the *South Asian Post* and one of the three authors’ of, the previously mentioned book, *Justice for Jassi*, hired professional lawyers in India to prove Mithu’s innocence for the falsely implicated rape case. However, in 2012 Jaswinder’s mother and uncle were arrested for plotting the murder on Canadian soil then carrying it out in India. This case is unique in Canada for encompassing a crime committed abroad. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) are now concluding a long investigation examining how crimes committed in the name of honour have been planned in Canada, but carried out elsewhere (Dawson *et al.*, 2011; Viridi, 2012).

This well-documented case, the first of its kind to receive substantial media coverage in Canada (Boesveld, 2012; Dawson *et al.*, 2011; Schliesmann, 2012; Viridi, 2012), was followed by more than a dozen further reported honour killings (Papp, 2010).

Case study 2: The Shafia case

On 30 June 2009, Zanib Shafia (age nineteen), Sahar Shafia (age seventeen), Geeti Shafia (age thirteen) and their father’s first wife Rona Amir Mohammed (age fifty) were found dead in the Kingston canal (Fournier, 2012; Schliesmann, 2012). Mohammad Shafia was ashamed of his daughters Zanib, Sahar and Geeti because they desired freedom, had boyfriends, skipped school classes, and wore makeup and ‘inappropriate’ clothing. Similarly, he despised his first wife, Rona, for having proved unable to conceive. He, his son and second wife decided that in order to restore the family’s honour it was necessary to kill all four women (Schliesmann, 2012) and they were killed. Often families try to punish transgressions against the honour code before these become public knowledge to pre-emptively protect the family’s social standing (Baker *et al.*, 1999).

The ensuing trial had a major influence on the way the public viewed the role of Canadian criminal law in protecting victims and those at risk. Moreover, the Shafia case marked a shift in awareness about honour killings; when Jaswinder was murdered in 2000, there was little mention of the role of ‘honour’, though the term figured dominantly in the reporting of the Shafia trial in 2012. The media coverage of these cases shaped and defined how the Canadian public understands honour-based violence. Critically, the Canadian media tends to frame honour killings in a way focused on immigrants’ socio-cultural values and traditions, rather than looking at the broader continuum of violence

against women and girls, especially domestic violence, which occurs across all demographics.

Defining and conceptualizing honour killings: A Canadian perspective

“There is no honour in killing, so let us banish this oxymoronic statement from our Canadian lexicon and from our understanding of violence against women,” argues Alia Hogben (2012, p. 39). The very use of the word ‘honour’ creates the idea that these horrendous crimes are in some way honourable and justified (Ballard, 2011; Dustin & Phillips, 2008; Fournier, 2012; Gill, 2009; Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012; Meeto & Mirza, 2007). However, “there exists no honour in domestic violence, honour killings and crimes, but only shame” (Vishwanath & Palakonda, 2011, p. 395). Murder, especially premeditated murder, should never, even by implication, be construed in a positive light (Hogben, 2012; Keeping, 2012; Meeto & Mirza, 2007; Schliesmann, 2012).

Most so-called honour killings are premeditated, in that, family members often meet not only to determine what punishment is necessary to restore the family’s honour in the specific circumstances prevailing, but also to decide how to carry out the crime (Keeping, 2012; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001; Sev’er, 2005a). For example, in the Shafia case Mohammad and his son met to plot out the murders (Schliesmann, 2012), though in other cases, including Jaswinder’s, the family may hire “professional assassins to do the dirty work” (Keeping, 2012, p.11).

Perhaps the term ‘patriarchal homicide’, suggested by criminologist Bryan Hogeveen (personal communication, 14 November 2012) would be a good alternative as it captures the gendered nature of the crimes in question. Similarly, Sev’er and Yurdakul (2001, p. 994) argue, that because honour and murder are mutually exclusive instead of interrelated, ‘patriarchal killings’ is a less problematic term. Alia Hogben, Executive Director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, argues that the Shafia case was referred to under the rubric of femicide, though she prefers the term ‘customary killing’ to capture the importance of norms and traditions underlying such crimes (Boesveld, 2012, p.3): “Femicide, as a definition, avoids inferences about the motives of the killers, and clearly states that violence is used as a tool against females, and murders are the extreme end of the continuum of violence against women and girls” (Hogben, 2012, p. 39). Here, Hogben stresses the difficulties inherent in differentiating so-called honour killings as specific form of violence against women requiring a unique category separate from domestic violence (Dustin & Phillips, 2008; Findlay, 2012; Reddy, 2009).

Honour killings occur around the world (Gill, 2006; Kirti *et al.*, 2011; Sev’er and Yurdakul, 2001; Tripathi and Yadav, 2004) across ethnic, class and religious boundaries (Gill, 2009; 2010). However, the association of ‘honour’ with the ‘exotic other’ means that calling these crimes ‘honour killings’ often serves to perpetuate stereotypes regarding minority ethnic communities, especially Muslim and South Asian ones (Gill, 2006; Keeping, 2012; Schliesmann, 2012). As Tripathi and Yadav (2004, p. 64) argue

a jealous husband in the United States may be driven to the same acts of violent rage as one in Pakistan or Portugal, but such attacks tend to be taken more seriously by authorities in developed countries where women are more educated about their rights[.]

Although honour-based violence takes places in a wide variety of contexts, the gender dimension of this form of violence does not vary. However, the fact that different types of behaviour may trigger honour-based violence complicates the way honour killings are defined and addressed. As Hogben (2012, p. 43) argues

Many people, including media, academics and professionals are trying to build a list of so-called 'honour killings' using their own criteria of defining characteristics. This is dangerous and incorrect, as Canada does not keep distinct statistics under the category of honour killing [.]

This may be a deliberate decision due to underreporting or the labelling of cases as homicide. Hogben (2012) argues that the estimation of honour killings is troublesome especially without official statistics being kept, but does not elaborate as to why. This is a concern as statistics on honour crimes in Canada continue to vary dramatically and sources are often unreliable as well as misleading. Honour crimes may be under or over-represented by statistics. Although twelve seems to remain the common number of cases there have been indications of thirteen or fifteen honour killings since 2002 (Hogben, 2012; Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012; Keeping, 2012). For example, Papp (2012) states that twelve cases have been identified as honour killings while three other murders classified as domestic violence could be also be considered honour crimes. Without official statistics it becomes difficult to define and classify these murders in the Canadian context. Few scholars have examined the various working definitions in use in Canada (Ballard, 2011; Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012; Hogben, 2012; Keeping, 2012; Kirti *et al.*, 2011), while only a handful of studies (Keeping, 2012; Schliesmann, 2012) have focused on the State's response to, and prosecution of, premeditated killings of family members motivated by notions of shame and honour.

Ultimately, the general consensus appears to be that honour killings are best described as part of the continuum of domestic violence (Fournier, 2012; Findlay, 2012; Hogben, 2012; Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012; Meeto & Mirza, 2007; Reddy, 2008). Moreover, there are strong instrumental reasons for pursuing this line of argument. When specialist services do not exist, subsuming honour-based violence under the existing domestic violence rubric ensures that victims can still receive support.

Are honour killings a sub-type of domestic violence?

Canadian scholars Jiwani and Hoodfar (2012, p. 2) question why honour killings are considered separate from other murders; "what is to be gained by framing the murders of the Shafia women and girls as honour killing rather than simply defining them as acts of femicide (the murder of women and girls solely on the basis of their gender)?" Keeping (2012) examines whether honour killings fit within current models of domestic violence and, if so, why they are often identified separately from these crimes. She concludes that honour killings are not 'another form of' domestic violence, so the fact that they are addressed separately in Canadian case law is appropriate.

The three elements Keeping (2012) highlights to distinguish honour killings from domestic violence are that honour killings are (i) motivated by a perceived need to restore honour that (ii) is legitimised by others from the same culture and, thus, (iii) these crimes tend to be both premeditated and committed by family members, since lost honour must be restored from 'inside' the family. Various scholars (Chesler, 2009; Fournier, 2012; Meeto & Mirza, 2007) concur with this reasoning, further arguing that other types of

domestic violence in Canada are not motivated by 'honour' and are usually neither premeditated nor carried out by more than one family member. As Chesler (2009) points out, honour killings are often undertaken with the consent of at least several members of the family and with the support, rather than condemnation, of the wider community. The key expert witness in the Shafia trial, Professor Shahrzad Mojab, made similar points in explaining why the Shafia murders were unique from most other homicides and crimes of passion in Canada (Fournier, 2012).

However, proponents of treating honour killings as a form of domestic violence argue that both are carried out in private and, irrespective of the specific motivation behind the crimes, they involve extreme violence against women (Kirti *et al.*, 2011). Gill (2009) and Reddy (2008) agree that it is better to classify honour crimes as a form of gender-based violence motivated by male perpetrators' concern with the female victim's behaviour. While men do fall victim to honour-based violence, the vast majority of victims are female and the vast majority of perpetrators, male (Reddy, 2008; also see Ballard, 2011). The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy discussed the issue of honour crimes for the first time in November 2000; since then so-called 'honour crimes' against women have been seen as a complex "form of domestic violence, i.e. violence against women in the family or community" (cited in Tripathi & Yadav, 2004, p. 74). This helps to focus attention on the key role that gender plays in these crimes, demonstrating how they grow out of women's oppression and broad gender inequalities (Tripathi & Yadav, 2004).

As Gill (2009, p. 479) emphasizes, the notion of honour is "deeply embedded in the larger operations of patriarchy," thus honour-based crime is similarly gendered. Araj (2000) points out that it is surprising that it has taken so long to connect the notion of honour to violence against women. What has yet to be explored in sufficient depth is whether it is family honour that men seek to restore when they commit 'honour' violence or patriarchal power. If power and control tactics (e.g. extreme forms of violence) are being used to protect the honour of the family and the community in a way that serves to restore male dominance, status and patriarchal power, why are honour killings not routinely considered an extreme form of domestic violence (see Pope, 2012)? These extreme acts of violence are in fact the very definition of violence against women and the gendered power struggle characteristic of a patriarchal society. Some men reinforce their power tactics by dominating women who are resisting power over themselves and trying to practice freedom. A failure to categorize honour killings under domestic violence rubric often means that this form of gendered violence is interpreted as a problem that only happens in certain cultures or communities. If honour killings were culturally based then they would happen a lot more frequently and there would not be any fathers in the cultures concerned who would support their daughters when their needs and wishes diverges from the prevailing socio-cultural norms.

The danger in blaming or socially constructing honour killings as a problem of the 'Other' creates an 'us versus them' divide that complicates efforts to define and effectively address the problem (Gill, 2006; Hogben, 2012; Sev'er, 2005a; 2005b). As Hogben argues, this puts the gaze on the 'Other', rendering "these murders exotic, foreign, and alien to Western culture as if the West is free from all forms of patriarchy" (2012, pp. 38-39). The association of the term 'honour killings' with, variously Islam and Sikhism, has led many Muslim and South Asian advocacy organizations in Canada to make public statements about the fact that these murders have nothing to do with the teachings of the Quran

(Boesveld, 2012; Chesler, 2009; Hogben, 2012; Keeping, 2012; Schliesmann, 2012; Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2001; Viridi, 2012). As Sev'er and Yurdakul argue (2001), when we focus on the role of culture and/or religion in honour killings, we fail to address patriarchy and gendered power structures. Blaming certain cultures “ignores the fundamental issue of patriarchy, tribalism, control and power over women” (Hogben, 2012, p.39).

Discussion

Frontier Centre for Public Policy (FCPP) report “Culturally-Driven Violence Against Women: A growing problem in Canada’s immigrant communities” by Aruna Papp (2010) aims to highlight the rise of violence against women. The case studies illustrate honour killings in Canada with three objectives. First, to examine cultural factors that contribute to abuse of South Asian women, second to offer policy recommendations to the Canadian government and third, to encourage an understanding of gender-equality in Canada as well as to support immigrant families integration in Canadian society. Unfortunately, Papp’s (2010) report seems to separate Western forms of abuse from culturally driven behaviour and in doing so suggests that the majority of honour crimes occur in the South Asian immigrant community. The fourteen legal, preventative, and protective recommendations in the report challenge the government’s stance on the issue although they do not explicitly recognize honour killings as gendered violence in all communities. However, Canada’s Department of Justice has yet to issue any policy statement about how to address honour crimes in the Canadian context (Fournier, 2012), while the 2009 Citizenship Guide issued by the Government only mentioned honour killings. Thus, the Canadian Government’s response to honour killings seems to be lagging behind media and public’s outcry. The fact that relatively few cases (twelve) have been reported in Canada in the last decade (Jiwani & Hoodfar, 2012; Papp, 2010) has meant that tackling this form of gender-based violence has not been a priority for policy makers or the Government. However, Status of Women Canada has devoted a significant amount of funding to not-for-profit projects concerned with ‘honour’ (see Status of Women Canada website: <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/> for a complete list of funded projects). Through these projects recommendations are to be offered to ensure that young girls and women at risk have access to appropriate services and are protected from violence.

Opinion remains split over whether new laws are needed to tackle honour killings or whether such directed measures would serve in fact to create new problems (O’Neill, 2012; Wilton, 2012). As a feminist, Snider (2006) argues that we can try to change the law but we do not know what the outcome will result from such a change. For instance, new laws might create a greater divide between mainstream society and women of color/women from minority ethnic communities. O’Neill’s powerful warning sums up the potential for further marginalizing minority groups (2012):

Let’s not go that route. A murder is a murder. Let’s not separate us as new immigrants or ethnic groups from the rest of Canadian women. It doesn’t matter which culture, which religion or which ethnic origin we come from; the same laws should apply to us.³

³ Source: Muslim women's group opposes addition of honour killings to Criminal Code. Retrieved from <http://www.canada.com/life/Muslim+women+group+opposes+addition+honour+killings+Criminal+Code/3275824/story.html> 11 March 2014.

As the Canadian Government's position on multiculturalism is that citizens and newcomers should fully participate in society and obey Canadian laws, including those concerned with domestic violence, there is no need to make honour killings a separate offence *if* the law on murder and associated crimes is sufficiently developed and robust. Thus, the Shafia case was handled under the rubric of 'extreme domestic violence', though this term was never explicitly used (see Hopper, 2012), showing that such cases can be dealt with effectively within Canada's existing criminal justice framework.

Focusing on developing and refining existing legislation, rather than creating new criminal offences, seems to be the most popular approach among experts across a range of countries (Fournier, 2012; Keeping, 2012; Wilton, 2012). Generally speaking the state's response is limited and it would be difficult to create new laws in light of the relatively few cases occurring in Canada. Creating new laws would be a long journey similar to how the feminist movement pushed for recognition of domestic violence as a public rather than private issue. There are no flaws with how the Canadian criminal code punishes perpetrators committing such serious crimes and if a new law was implemented for honour killings it would be discriminatory. A new law with the use of the term "honour" would support notions of honour used to control a woman's behaviour or actions. The new law would ignore the larger context of gender based violence and further perpetuate stereotypes or imply that women of color from certain cultures are seen to be different from mainstream women who suffer from similar acts of violence. In creating a greater divide between mainstream society and women of color it would suggest that the latter are at greater risk for honour crimes. When making new laws there is therefore a potential to further marginalize individuals based on culture, religion or ethnic origin. A new law may also indicate that certain groups of people in Canadian society, newcomers, are not obeying the current law which justifies a need for a new law to prevent offences committed by immigrants.

Conclusion

Defining 'honour killings', within the context of honour and patriarchy is not easy. However, gender emerges clearly as the critical factor, indicating that this, instead of culture and religion, is a better place to begin trying to understand why these murders occur. The fact that "the definition of violence against women is broad enough to encompass all forms of violence done to women and girls" (Hogben, 2012, p. 40) focuses attention on the commonalities between gender-based forms of violence that reveal the deeper structural inequalities that legitimise and perpetuate these crimes. This is a far firmer foundation from which to explore whether 'honour killings' are more about restoring family honour or the difficulty male relatives experience when their patriarchal power is challenged.

Continuing to use the term 'honour killings' keeps the issue separate from broader debates about violence against women. However, some people fear that reclassifying these crimes might lead them being taken less seriously than other forms of violence against women (see Keeping, 2012). Nonetheless, cases like those of Jaswinder and the Shafia family demonstrate that the motive behind some killings is the control of women's behaviour after they have challenged patriarchal values, including the prevailing honour code: Viridi argues that "to safeguard *izzat*, men are expected to control women since a

misstep jeopardizes family status in the community” (2012, p. 6). These murders are not solely about restoring honour. Instead, they emerge from the patriarchal structures that the men and women involved are socialized into, but which victims choose to challenge, refusing to accept their subordinate status and their male relatives' dominance.

In the supposedly multicultural West, cases like Jaswinder's demonstrate how the police and other statutory agencies often fail to protect victims and those at risk. Jaswinder did make written and verbal reports to authorities, including immigration officials in Canada as well as in India, but they were not taken seriously enough and the minimal protections offered by the authorities ultimately failed to save her life (Dawson *et al.*, 2011).

In Canada's increasingly diverse and multicultural society there is a need for the police to develop effective policies to identify and respond to honour-based violence without creating an 'us versus them' divide. In other words, immigration officials and police officers must be able to make sense of these cases as part of a human rights problem; training must be developed to help those in positions of authority to identify what to look for and what questions to ask so as to protect those at risk without stereotyping all men from certain minority communities. In this regard, the creation of more effective risk assessment tools is likely to prove vital. As Findlay (2012) shows the Shafia daughters (Zanib, Sahar and Geeti) were also failed by Canadian authorities, including those associated with their school, child-protection services and a women's shelter (see also Fournier, 2012; Schliesmann, 2012). Boesveld (2012, p. 2) recently explored the different positions activists have taken on the outcome of the trial. While some have argued that the Shafia girls were not protected by their community others questioned whether they would have received more effective protection from the authorities if they were white. “It is not enough to condemn the crimes without developing specific strategies to prevent their occurrence and to deal with perpetrators and their supporters”, stresses Kirti *et al.*, (2011, p. 350).

This requires educating relevant professionals so that they are more sensitive to the risks in order that they are better able to avoid making mistaken and undue allowances for culture and religion. Instead, professionals need to understand how and why the problem is deeply rooted in patriarchy, which is trans-cultural (Boesveld, 2012). At the same time, training programmes must recognize that victims and those at risk face context-specific challenges; these must be taken into account for any attempt to address honour-based violence to be effective.

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