In 2010, the UK police reported that around 2800 honour based crimes occurred. Of that, 11 were attempted and 18 were actual murders. Honour based violence or killings are defined simply as crimes committed in order to protect or defend the honour of a family or community. Over the last 5 years, various charities have noticed an increase in calls to their respective helplines and have noticed an increase in calls from people worried about their family or community. Over 10,000 crimes occurred. Of that, 11 were attempted and 18 were actual murders. They continue, “we would define honour as the (always) outdated notion of chastity for women and dignity for men. Since women are imagined to hold the ‘honour’ of the men in their lives in the palm of their hands (or more specifically, between their legs) and men are expected by their communities (and their gods) to keep women in line...often with violence. The only ‘damage’ a woman or girl being sexually active (whether of her own free will or not), or listening to western music, or dancing, or singing, or learning is that it tarnishes the reputation of the family in the eyes of the community”.

Not only do TSF discuss the concept of honour in detail but they describe how in their opinions as radical feminists that “a feminist who is also a theist must necessarily be operating under SEVERE cognitive dissonance”. An ex Muslim I spoke to, using the online alias ‘The Secular Brownie’, also upheld this same opinion, passionately arguing in his online podcast, “how are you supposed to interpret it (the Quran) in a feminist lens?”. In the audio recording, he authoritatively guides us through several verses in the Quran, all that he mention condemn the female expression of sexuality. So as a response he repeatedly asks, “what Islam are they (Muslim feminists) following?”

The expression of sexuality is a sin in many monotheistic religions, Islam included. The female is largely restricted from any form of expression at all in the Quran, therefore any that would freely demonstrate sexual liberation would also be undoubtedly forbidden by default. For example, women in the Quran are often only referred to as the wife, daughter or otherwise property of a male, implying her sexuality is also under the ownership of this male. So by showing freedom and independence in her sexuality, a Muslim woman would therefore disrupt the customs of ownership the Islamic holy book promotes and as a result tarnish the honour of a Muslim man.

Yet it is not just women who uphold the concept of honour in some Muslim communities, it is almost everyone, since “you are a representative of the collective (family) and anything you do harms the honour of that collective” according to turned apostate ‘The Secular Brownie’. He goes on to explain that “as an ex Muslim, my apostate identity and being out about it would harm my parents honour, they’d be seen as bad parents instead of I would be seen as a grown adult capable of making his own decisions”. Adding that “in regard to sexuality and honour “in Islam, honour killings aren’t explicit, but Islam encourages you stone those who have sex outside of marriage, bring this mentality into clan based societies, and you’ll have a dangerous combination: aka honour killing”.

Sara Ashencan Crabtree, a professor in Social Sciences and Social Work instead proposes that we strip these crimes back to their original acts, labelling them simply as domestic violence or murder, stating that “once you get rid of the honour bit, there’s really nothing honourable about that, it’s foul. That really carries a strong message”.

She goes on to discuss the importance of patriarchy in debating the issue, focusing primarily on “the oppression and the way girls and women as they have always been used as pawns in a much bigger game, which is actually a patriarchal game”. She goes on to explain that honour crimes are being committed in the name of honour when religious figures, such as the Imam, not only fail to condemn but actually encourage violence to defend honour?

Though not all Muslims take precedence of violence or opinions, many other ordinary Muslims. A spokesperson from the support organisation The Salam Project sheds light on the current situation, they are a group who offers advice and assistance to Muslim women who have been affected by honour based violence, with their main aim to get victims to safety. They notice “it’s getting worse”, continuing “up north it’s worse and it’s like it’s unspoken”, providing an example of a young woman who was unhappy committing to marriage and so spoke to her local Imam, expressing her concerns. The Imam responded, suggesting the woman go through with the marriage, but then turns to the family and in a different language says, “if it was my daughter I’d kick her down the stairs” under the impression the woman wouldn’t understand him. Is it then surprising that violent crimes are being committed in the name of honour when religious figures, such as the Imam, not only fail to condemn but actually encourage violence to defend honour?

In 2010, the UK police reported that around 2800 honour based crimes occurred. Of that, 11 were attempted and 18 were actual murders. Honour based violence or killings are defined simply as crimes committed in order to protect or defend the honour of a family or community. Over the last 5 years, various charities have noticed an increase in calls to their respective helplines and while at face value this seems like a success, in the fact that more people are calling for support, this represents only the surface of a problem deep rooted into a culture. “Human well-being is placed a distant second to the archaic notions of ‘honour’ that a community holds more sacred than life, liberty, or happiness” explains the three-member anonymous activism group The Skeptic Feminist (TSF) about the concept of honour in the Islamic Community. They continue, “we would define honour as the (always) outdated notion of chastity for women and dignity for men. Since women are imagined to hold the ‘honour’ of the men in their lives in the palm of their hands (or more specifically, between their legs) and men are expected by their communities (and their gods) to keep women in line...often with violence. The only ‘damage’ a woman or girl being sexually active (whether of her own free will or not), or listening to western music, or dancing, or singing, or learning is that it tarnishes the reputation of the family in the eyes of the community”.

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