

Suruchi Thapar-Björkert
Conversations across Borders: Men and Honour Related
Violence in U.K. and Sweden

Abstract

This paper engages with debates on honour related violence (HRV) in the U.K. and Sweden and positions these debates within the broader context of media representations and multiculturalism. The paper highlights two interrelated arguments. First, though academic and policy interventions have made HRV more visible, they have inadvertently reproduced an anti-male rhetoric that fails to expose the vulnerability of men and the shifting subject positions that men can occupy in relation to HRV; as perpetrators, as victims, as observers or as agents of change. Second, these interventions fail to acknowledge that male initiatives to challenge practices of HRV are extremely important to break cycles of gendered violence. In relation to the latter, the paper critically engages with the *Sharaf Heroes Project*, a unique male intervention in Sweden that works preventively with young boys and men towards challenging and changing attitudes on honour-related violence.

Keywords

Honour Related Violence, vulnerability, Sweden, U.K., Sharaf Heroes, media, multiculturalism

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Suruchi Thapar-Björkert

s.thapar-bjorkert@bristol.ac.uk

Introduction

Critical engagement with media representations and discourses on multiculturalism have challenged the ways in which ethnic minority cultures and ethnic minority women are positioned in relation to Western liberal democracies and white western women. However, these debates have inadvertently focussed on dichotomous constructions of either female 'victimhood' or the vilification of ethnic minority men as 'violent'. (see Volpp 2001, also see Razack 2008). In particular, ethnic minority men seem to occupy a fixed subjectivity within these debates- as a 'perpetrator'. Consequently, this has drowned progressive initiatives emerging from within ethnic minority communities. This paper will thus highlight a significant gap in these analyses- the role of men as initiators of progressive strategies to combat HRV.

The paper will be divided in the following way. In the first section, I will briefly analyse some comparative definitions and conceptualisations of HRV. In the second section, I will analyse media representations in relation to HRV. The third section will outline some of the fragile links between multiculturalism and gendered violence. In the fourth section, I will critically engage with the unique efforts of a specific men's project, the *Sharaf Heroes*.

Methodologies and Definitions

The research on which this paper is based emerged from a Swedish government funded project (2004–05); *State policy, strategies and implementation in combating patriarchal and 'honour-related' violence in U.K., Sweden and Turkey*. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with an array of stakeholders in statutory and voluntary organisations in the U.K., Sweden and Turkey, though this paper draws on interview data from the U.K. and Sweden only. Professionals working at the interface of policy and practice were specifically interviewed and this data was analysed in conjunction with Swedish government fact-sheets, reports from Swedish Counties Administrative Boards and media representations in broadsheets and tabloids. Only the names of respondents who requested anonymity have been changed.

Nearly all respondents expressed difficulties and ambiguities in defining and conceptualising what constitutes HRV. Indeed, the difficulties in defining HRV has had implications for state intervention in terms of policies and prosecution, and in devising appropriate methodologies to measure the extent of the problem. In 2002, following the murder of Fadime Sahindal (a 26 year old girl of Kurdish ethnicity), the Swedish government (2002)¹ identified HRV as a practice confined to ‘strongly patriarchal families’. This position was broadened in 2003/2004 and HRV conceptualised as a practice where ‘the everyday lives of girls and young women...are subject to extreme rigorous control, lack of freedom, coercion, threats and violence...by their families’². This definition was supported by governmental bodies such as the County Administrative Boards (Länsstyrelsen) and The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) who highlighted the importance of identifying the specific characteristics of HRV in order to avoid conflation with general ‘patriarchal violence’. A narrower definition ‘minimizes the risk of making invisible those exposed to violence with an explicit *honour* motive and with the support and acceptance of the collective’³.

In the U.K, organisations such as *Southall Black Sisters* conceptualise HRV as a form of domestic violence since ‘...singling out honour killings risks promoting a racist agenda rather than gender equality’ (Gupta and Hutchinson⁴, 2005, 8; also see Gupta 2003, 3). However, Diana Nammi from the *Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation* (IKWRO) argues that to incorporate honour killings under the umbrella of domestic violence is wrong because ‘honour killing is a deliberate act, a planned killing and the perpetrator is actively looking to kill’⁵. Increasingly, honour violence is being discussed in terms of forced marriages since ‘forced marriages have an element of honour in them...honour is used to justify violence and the burden of honour is placed on women’ (Vinay Talwar, Forced Marriages Unit)⁶. I would suggest that the most convincing approach is Violence Against Women (VAW) which states that acts committed in the name of honour (such as FGM, honour killings) are not that different from other acts of violence against women (Kelly and Lovett 2005). Keeler (2001) points out that if we limit our focus, we will not be able to develop an overall accurate understanding of violence against women, but will contribute to the invisibility of one or more aspects of it’ (Keeler, 2001, 7). Also an ‘integrated approach’ does not differentiate between violence against women in Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) communities and in dominant white communities since differentiations could re-inforce power relations between men and women of different ethnicities (see Beckett & Macey 2001; Meeto and Safia Mirza 2007).

Media representations in the U.K. and Sweden

Discussions on oppression and violence against ‘women of foreign origin’ or ‘immigrant women’ were brought to public attention in the 1990s with the murders of Sara,

Pela Atroshi and Fadime Sahindal in Sweden. When Sara (15 year old of Kurdish ethnicity) was murdered in 1996, the focus was more *on the individual*. Sara's brother (who committed the murder along with his cousin) is described as a 'difficult boy' (*strulig kille*) and the rector of his former school describes him as broken (*trasig*), from a hard background (*jobbig bakgrund*) and with large knowledge displacements (*stora kunskapsluckor*)⁷. When Pela Atroshi (19 year old of Kurdish ethnicity), and Fadime Sahindal were murdered, the media debates projected the idea of 'culture' – how the concept of 'honour' was something that belonged to the 'Kurdish culture'. For example, the murder of Pela Atroshi, was referred to as 'the Kurd murder'⁸ and the planned killing of Pela in Dahouk, (a Kurdish part of Iraq) reinforced the perceived differences between 'Kurdish culture' and 'Swedish culture'. The uncles (Swedish citizens) who killed Pela were tried in the Swedish court for murder and given life sentences whereas Pela's father was tried in a local court in Dahouk and sentenced to five months in jail on parole. This, also 'highlighted the distance between gendered norms and legal practices in the immigrant's country of origin and those practiced in Sweden' (Hellgren and Hobson 2008, 391).

In all the three cases, a debate on immigrant men and boys who 'can't accept the girls' wishes to choose their own lives' was raised. A discourse of 'modernity' where 'Pela and Fadime were murdered 'because they want to live their lives as modern women...in modern Sweden' was juxtaposed to a discourse of an archaic 'tradition' adopted by their Kurdish community (see *Aftonbladet*, January, 23, 2002:29)⁹. Similarly an article in *The New York Times* (July, 2002), 'Lost in Sweden: A Kurdish Daughter is Sacrificed' portrays Fadime as 'a symbol of second generation immigrant success' but whose 'very desire for independence... turn(ed) her into the tragic emblem of a European society's failure to bridge the gap in attitudes between its own culture and those of its newer arrivals'. Kamali (2003), argues that a cultural explanation is commonly provided when speaking of honour violence, while 'culture' is never mentioned in connection with 'Swedish' men beating 'Swedish' women (2003, 23)¹⁰. Kamali suggests that a more productive way to approach these issues would be to focus on structural forms of systematic discrimination and its exclusionary consequences for immigrant communities.

Other analyses also contest these culturalist explanations (see Larsson & Englund 2004). *Uppsala Nya Tidning*, (2002) (a local newspaper from the same town that the Sahindal family lived) published an article which emphasised how violence perpetrated by 'immigrant men' was projected as a consequence of a lack of 'integration' with Swedish culture (cited in Reimers 2007, 247). For example, it was stated that 'Fadime's father, Rahmi Sahindal, had little interest in *becoming Swedish* (and)...clung hard to their Kurdish identity, living as part of a patriarchal clan' (New York Times, July, 2002). Thus non-integrated foreign men are threats to women, 'not primarily owing to these men's gender, but to their culture' (Reimers 2007, 247).

The difficulties associated with culturalist-essentialist explanations were reflected in media debates on honour killings in the U.K which has adversely heightened the sense of insecurity and fear of the 'other' (Majid and Hanif, 2003). A wide coverage was provided by the tabloid press in the U.K (Daily Mail 2003, The Sun, 2003), following the death of Rukhsana Naz from Derby in 1998 and Heshu Yones in 2002. Honour Killings were projected as a feature specific to the 'other' ethnic minorities in Britain, evident in phrases such as a 'clash of cultures', 'fanaticism in other faiths', and 'barbarism' (The Mirror 2003). For example, the U.K. judge, Neil Denison (QC), in Yones murder trial stated: 'In my view the case was a tragic story of irreconcilable *cultural differences* (my emphasis) between traditional Kurdish values and the values of Western society' (The Observer November 21 2004). Such statements, made by the U.K. judge, have in the past, influenced the judiciary and the police to proceed cautiously on 'murders' where cultural practices are involved and fuelled the belief that there are irreconcilable differences between cultural values of some ethnic groups and the values of Western-host society. However, repetitive physical, sexual and emotional abuse is a feature of life for many white majority British women as it is for women within minority cultures. Dobash and Dobash (1992) narrate some horrific incidents of women being kicked, raped, punched, exemplified in statements such as:

'I had a poker thrown at me because his tea was too weak- he just takes it for granted... if you are married, you'll have to accept. Its part of being a wife' (Dobash and Dobash 1992, 3).

Both incidents are part of the same patriarchal culture; both may in their own manner be culturally sanctioned (for e.g. not performing the cultural expectations of a wife or not being an obedient daughter).

Some common themes emerge in these discursive representations. First, the cultures are presented as neatly, prediscursively individuated from each other, in which the insistence of 'difference' that accompanies the 'production' of distinct 'cultures' appears unproblematic; and the central or constitutive components of a 'culture' are assumed to be 'unchanging givens'. This then re-enforces 'essential differences' between Western cultures and Non-Western cultures (Narayan 2000, 95, Rosenberg 2005). Second, existing scholarship has pointed towards the prevalence of gendered and sexualised violence in the white Swedish population (and in the U.K.) but which is not approached in a cultural and essentialist manner (Mulinari 2004, Apkinar 2003, Kurkiala 2003).¹¹ Incidents of domestic and sexual violence in the West are frequently thought to 'reflect the behaviour of a few deviants-rather than as part of our culture'. In contrast violence in immigrant communities 'are thought to characterise the culture of entire nations' (Volpp 2001, 1186). Third, over-emphasis of one form of violence over the other obscures and normalises

white women's experiences of violence and highlights violence in minority cultures as 'peculiar'. Furthermore, it compartmentalises violence as a feature of either gender or culture.

Let us now examine how similar ambiguities and tensions in relation to culture, gender and violence are inherent within the liberal multicultural projects. The debates presented in the next section could be seen to be more relevant to the U.K. as arguably, in Sweden, 'not minority rights but integration has been the mainframe' (Hellgren & Hobson 2008).

Tensions within Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is about cultural diversity, that is, culturally derived differences and 'although members can share their society's dominant system of meanings and values...they can carve out 'semi-autonomous' spaces within it (Parekh 2000, 3). Multicultural approaches emphasise a person's 'right to be different' (Kymlicka 1995) and in the language of multicultural politics, 'cultures' are commonly conjoined with 'communities'. What 'community' lends to 'culture' is the implication of an organic association of people with shared interests, experiences and 'social closeness' (Uguris 2000, 53). Thus the 'cultural community' of multiculturalism is a bounded and unified collective of shared (cultural) experience and (cultural) needs. What the 'cultural community obscures', however, are the tensions, conflicts and differential power relations within social groups. Arguably the first violence encountered in our examination of multiculturalism is the symbolic violence of this misrecognition and oversimplification of what would be a dynamic and evolving form. It is in this context that the political theorist, Susan Moller Okin (1999) explores the supposed irreconcilable tensions between feminism and multiculturalism in her essay, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' More specifically, Okin questions the claim made by multiculturalism (within the context of liberal democracies), that 'minority cultures or ways of life are not sufficiently protected by the practice of ensuring the individual rights of their members, and ...should be protected through special group rights or privileges (Okin 1999, 10–11, also see Spinner–Halev 2001, also see Pollitt 1999). Though Okin's (1999) analysis highlights the widening gender inequalities (particularly in the private (domestic) sphere), through the preservation of cultural group rights, nonetheless, her analysis served as a point of departure for many scholars who argued that there was a presumption within Okin's analysis that, first, minority cultures are more 'patriarchal', and sexist than Western liberal cultures and second, her analysis assumes 'internal homogeneity' within communities. (Volpp 2001, 1185–1190). It was argued that feminism/multiculturalism is premised on a binary logic that parallels the limitations created by projecting cultural relativism and universalism as irreconcilable (Rao 1995) and in

these binary constructions, ‘the values of Western liberalism are reified, defined as the opposite of culture’ (Volpp 2001, 1203).

Importantly, the critique of media representations and the tensions inherent within feminism vs multiculturalism debates reflects a certain node of convergence. In both cases, the argument is against an essentialised and an internally homogenous ‘cultural’ identity which promotes ‘culturalisation of differences’ (Ålund 1999) or presents Western women as the embodiment of liberation. I want to extend this idea, specifically in relation to honour violence, which to some extent have become invisible in these dominant debates. First, as individuals we occupy locations of multiple (and conflicting) identities (see Uguris, 2000, Beckett & Macey 2001) and reductively opposing ‘race’ and ‘gender’ (as Okin’s 1999, analysis does) suggests that women in minority cultures need to get rid of their ‘cultures’ in order to eliminate gendered oppression. An over focus on cultural practices conceals the hidden forces of structural forces which shape gendered oppression (for e.g.. colonialism, globalisation). If cultural violence (violence of cultural practices) is the subject of discussion, then we need to understand its workings in association with structural violence which shape gendered positionalities. Second, ‘gender’ (and ‘gendered subordination’ means the subordination of women) in these debates often means ‘women’ or when the concept of gender is evoked relationally, it is about women as ‘victims’ and male as ‘oppressors’. Not surprisingly, in most analyses on honour violence, men occupy a fixed ‘perpetrator’ identity and even when men act differently, for example as agents of emancipatory change; their efforts are not taken seriously.

Where are the men?

The greatest hesitation among organisations, academics and activists in the British context has been to involve men in combating violence. Though practitioners in the U.K. recognise that men can be victims of honour violence they suggest that men and women face honour violence differently. As Saba Johri from *Imkaan*¹² states:

men also come under pressure for upholding honour and respectability but not to the same degree that women are expected to uphold. Women experience penalties for transgression that may not be imposed on men’ (Saba Johri, *Imkaan*).

Similarly, the *Southall Black Sisters* argue that men tend to have greater power within the community and are able to escape some ‘honour’ pressures. When men transgress, the family is quicker to forgive them. Men also have more economic freedom than women, and can take decisions to leave their family more easily than women, if it becomes difficult for them. Nasir Afzal from Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) suggests, that ‘even when the male was a victim of honour violence, the motivation for the attack was the

woman...but the bulk of cases would involve women' (Nasir Afzal, CPS). Ian Lewis from Renaissance Chambers argues that in the context of HRV,

'There are male victims ... males who are associated with the female...in an adulterous relationship or an elopement, the male victim would not be the immediate family member but the man outside the family, the outsider who is threatening the honour of the family by associating with the woman victim...' (Ian Lewis, Renaissance Chambers)

In a recent trial in the U.K, a young man, Arash Ghorbani-Zarin, 19 years old, was found stabbed 46 times in a car in Rosehill in Oxford. The Iranian Muslim had a relationship with the sister (Miss Begum) of his killers, brothers Mohammad Rahman, 19 years old, and Mamnoor Rahman, 16 years old. They were allegedly ordered to kill Mr. Ghorbani-Zarin, due to the 'shame and dishonour' brought to the family by his relationship with Miss Begum whose father had planned for her to have an arranged marriage (BBC News, 4th Nov, 2005).

Despite acknowledgement of male 'victimhood' in U.K. there is no organised involvement of men in combating violence. There are 'male dominated organisations' such as *The Muslim Parliament* and *The Council of Sikh Temples* who have spoken out eloquently on the subject of HRV, but they are very different from the men's groups in Sweden (Nasir Afzal, CPS). These organisations have argued that religious faith cannot be used for committing violence. As Afzal comments:

There are very few males who stand up on the stage that condemn the issue of HRV...but there is a desperate need in U.K. to have male-role models but these role models should come from the community themselves...' (Nasir Afzal, CPS)

In relation to this, even the role of 'self styled' community leaders has been questioned by organisations such as the *Southall Black Sisters* who see these leaders as presenting 'the most patriarchal and conservative forces in the community' (Siddiqui 2005, 270). Community leaders, as self-styled gatekeepers, it has been argued, can often use the liberal discourse of multiculturalism to support acts of oppressive behaviour and physical violence towards young women and young boys (see Johal 2003).

However, despite these ambivalences, we need to create political spaces where the community leaders can see HRV as a breach of women's rights without associating any interventions to that effect as an attack on the community's culture or religion.

Moreover, if we are combating, what we recognise as gender-based violence, then men should be given an opportunity to share that political responsibility.¹³ This is important for three reasons. First, an over-emphasis on men as perpetrators, could lead to men be-

ing projected as always a part of the *problem* rather than as part of the *solution* (own emphasis). Commenting on specific endeavours to build a dialogue between men on the subject of violence, Lise Berg, the former Swedish cabinet member¹⁴, argues that ‘men must be just as involved in the work of creating gender-equality’ (Berg 2004, 199). If transforming gender relations can help end gender-based violence then ‘...one of the most urgent tasks is for men to change men, ourselves and other men’ (Hearn 1998, 2; also see Connell 2003, Ferguson et al 2004).

Second, viewing honour violence ‘as a problem created by men’ does not enable us to analyse the various subject positions that men can occupy in relation to HRV: as perpetrators, as victims, as ‘silent’ witnesses and as combatants. Men are culpable in honour violence and also vulnerable from that violence (also see Sundaram and Jackson 2006). Men can and are victims of HRV especially in terms of sexual orientation¹⁵; they can be punished for economic violations (e.g. theft); for associating with women victims (also see Siddiqui 2005) or men can be victims of gender patriarchal norms which disciplines younger members of the family, irrespective of their gender. Men are often coerced to kill their own sisters and many men commit crimes under fear or threat of violence. They often dare not say ‘no’ because of cultural pressures and in some families, men, who adopt a ‘modern, unprejudiced approach’ towards their sisters, can be ostracized (Al-Baldawi 2004, 152). Rana Hussein in the context of Jordan states, ‘men are also victims...the family comes and tells them that if you do not kill her...people are going to look down on you...they are going to spit on us (Hussein 2004:17). Men can also be forced to marry their cousins or girls ‘they don’t love’. Often younger male members of the family are at times expected to ‘own’ the honour killing, thus protecting the ‘real’ perpetrator, such as the father or the mother (Wikan 2005). Kandiyoti (1996) argues that intergenerational dynamics between men often position younger men in a ‘one down position’.

Third, if we acknowledge that honour violence is associated with the exercise of power by men over women, then not engaging with men would mean operating through two static and oppositional models of understanding- men as having power and women as powerless. Thus to view HRV solely as a women’s issue or to focus on women only, is not a sustainable solution. Campanile(2001) argues that if you need to ‘build equal relations’, then it, ‘is not a struggle of women against men, or young people against adults, but rather a question of everyone taking on the responsibility for deconstructing domination and building equal relations’ (Campanile 2001).

The lack of political will to involve men (and especially ethnic minority men) in the U.K. or support endeavours that prevent gender based violence, has to some extent been addressed in Sweden and, in relation to this, let us now examine a male initiative in Sweden, *The Sharaf Heroes*. The Swedish Government supported the organizing of men against violence and since January 2003, 11 million SEK has been distributed to associa-

tions testing new methods and models to prevent and combat violence in the name of honour¹⁶.

The Sharaf Heroes (Sharaf Hjältar) Project in Sweden

In 2005, the former Swedish minister, Jens Orback¹⁷, called for a joint meeting of various men's organizations¹⁸, to build a common platform and sustainable effort to tackle 'patriarchal violence'¹⁹ He stated:

Men must learn to see how they are themselves part of the problem. Men have to take responsibility...men cannot remain neutral. If men don't see the superiority and subordination they are a part of, and don't commit themselves to break down structures, these structures will remain (Jens Orback).²⁰

What is implicit in Orback's arguments²¹ is that an approach should be devised to combat both direct violence (direct physical assaults and killings), and structural violence (power inequalities in social structures and oppression). Otherwise as Galtung (1969) argued, '... (we may) be catching the small fry and letting the big fish loose' (Galtung 1969, 172).

The Sharaf Heroes (SH) cannot be regarded as a men's organization but rather a men's project that works preventively for changing attitudes towards honour violence. It is organized on a 'voluntary' basis and the initiative comes from an established group, *Elektra* at Fryshuset in Stockholm²². The first group was created in 2003 by Arhe Hamednaca (Eritrean ethnicity) and Ahmet Benhur Turkoglu who conceptualise honour violence as 'honour related life' since it is the entire life that is 'controlled and oppressed'. Supporting the expanded definition of the Swedish government fact sheet (2004) which identifies men as perpetrators and victims of violence, Arhe Hamednaca states:

The worst thing that could happen to a boy, when a sister commits a crime...is that the entire family sits down and decides that it is his task to kill the girl. He is forced to do it. And I think that most of them do it against their own will...The grade of victimhood may not be the same as the girls', but they are victims too.

SH aim to work preventively to educate young men and boys (17 years onwards) to become role models, who work within the families in the 'segregated immigrant-dominated areas' which adhere to an 'honour culture'. As Ahmet with reference to the work of young boys states:

The families are influenced and treat their children differently. And that is because of one individual in the family...they change the attitudes of their friends. ...some of them cheered when Fadime was killed. But now they fight for women's rights. So the change may happen.

The school is seen as an important site to create a 'Sharaf Heroes group' as schools can provide 'a 'neutral zone' for discussions about integration, gender equality and family relations' (Al- Baldawi 2004, 153). Moreover, schools offer a hospitable terrain to nurture a gendered dialogue, between young people, on the subject of violence. Kaufman (2001) argues that, children are often socialised into expectations of behaviour by our society at a young age' (Kaufman 2001). It is within the school 'that the basic values of our society are transmitted; it is here that girls and boys learn about the equal rights and responsibilities of all people' (Berg 2004, 198). Kickis Áhré Álgamo from Rikskriminalen suggests that the government should implement the Sharaf Project in every school. 'One needs to have 100% of the community to combat violence, not only 50%'²³.

Though the efforts of SH is remarkable, few men and boys choose to voluntarily commit themselves against the oppression of women. Azam Karai at *Linnamottagningen* provides two main reasons why men do not organise voluntarily (for e.g. Kvinnors nätverk). First, there is still a wide belief that HRV 'mainly concerns the woman...and not [the men] directly'. This is a reflection of the embedded patriarchal attitudes where men think that since violence affects women only, it is the responsibility of women to organise against it. Second, the social stigma attached to men working on this issue deters men. For example men working on HRV have been referred to as 'without honour', 'whore customers', 'fags' and their identity and sexuality as 'real men' questioned. Berkowitz (2004) reiterates that men who work to end violence against women are challenging the dominant culture and the understandings of masculinity that maintain it. Male activists are 'often met with suspicion, homophobia and other questions about their masculinity' (2004, 4). To digress from a specific gendered construction of 'masculinity' (specific roles, behaviour and codes of conduct) may heighten men's vulnerabilities (also see Espen 2006). For example, they may be made to feel as less of a man by other males in the community, ostracised by the community or even subjected to violence. Thus men can experience power and powerlessness at the same time (powerlessness in front of other men or powerful in relation to one's sister), and this still needs to be recognised. At the same time if only women 'own' violence, then they encounter the risk of isolating themselves in a struggle that can be enriched through men's involvement. Talking specifically about changing attitudes of young men, Crooks et al (2007), working within a pro-feminist framework, identify three ways that men can engage in anti-violence initiatives: through treatment programmes for batterers, which are integrated into a responsive criminal justice system; through playing an active role in addressing violence

against women in their professional and personal lives and thirdly men who are not violent in their relationships but who have not yet made a personal commitment to be part of the solution for ending violence against women (Crooks 2007, 218).

Both Arhe and Ahmet suggest that their positionality as immigrant men has facilitated their interaction and dissemination of ideas among their audiences. They have been able to approach youths in ‘suburbs, ghettos such as Norsborg, Hallunda and youth recreation centres’, which they argue would have been difficult for a ‘Swede’. They argue that a ‘Swede’ would encounter hostility from ‘immigrants’ (for example at youth recreation centres) since they *do not know* enough about ‘their (immigrants) way of life’. On the other hand, the SH themselves have received mixed reception from the public. They have been threatened and many social groups have viewed their efforts as ‘working against culture and religion’. They have encountered statements such as: ‘You are a traitor; you betray your own people; you betray the culture you grew up in...and our women should not play sex as Swedish women’. More pertinently women have spoken against their efforts and defended their religion and culture which challenges the discursive representations of HRV where women are projected as in need of ‘saving’ from the ‘barbaric’, ‘fanatic’ men (see Razack 2008). Elden (2004, 93–95) refers to the ‘cultural context of honour’ as a normative framework of interpretation in which the behaviour of the individual (woman) cannot be separated from the honour of the collective (of men). Elden argues that Arab and Kurdish women in Sweden use the concepts of ‘Swedish’, ‘Arab’ and ‘Kurdish’ as ‘contrasts’ and though the substance of the contrast remains constant, its loading may alternate between ‘positive (safety, community, love) and negative (limitations, constraint, subjection).

Though SH have received international attention, they generate mixed reactions among individuals from both Statutory and Voluntary organisations in the U.K. For example, some individuals working in organisations such as *Imkaan* see SH as ‘vigilantes’ and though this organisation views the contribution of men as important, they emphasise that ‘men’s engagement should not be at the cost of women’s involvement’. Even the subject of representation can become contested, -‘who speaks on behalf of whom?’

Engagements/Disengagements: The Sharaf Heroes Project

The Sharaf Heroes project is a ‘preventative measure’ and as argued elsewhere (Thapar-Bjorkert 2006), ‘protective’ measures (such as sheltered housing, professional/psychological treatment) have to be placed in conjunction with ‘preventative’ measures for combating HRV. Some distinguishing features of the SH work can be identified as follows—first, they have broadened the definition of HRV from physical acts of violence to include everyday forms of ‘oppression’ as a form of violence. This is important because coercion, intimidation and threat of violence reflect the insidious working of symbolic violence,

which is often unrecognisable. Ahre Hamednaca explains that there are a lot of ‘girls of foreign origin’ who do not have the right to decide over their own lives. They may not always be exposed to violence, but they could be controlled and monitored in other ways. However, it’s only when a girl resists that it erupts in violence and then becomes more public and visible to the society. Thus he claims that it is wrong to mix up ‘honour related life’ with ‘patriarchal violence’ which he claims affect women of Swedish ethnicity. Ahre states:

...the Swedish woman of today – she has the basics, she can choose her future...whether to get an education, whether to leave home, whether to get a husband, children... ..But the other part: the woman living under honour related life. She has no chance. She is oppressed from the start. Somebody owns her. She does not own her body. That is the difference.

Second, they explain ‘patriarchal violence’ as more ‘individual’ as opposed to HRV which involves the ‘collective’:

...the difference is that when Kalle kills Kerstin it is individual. He does it himself...But honour related violence is collective... the entire family sits down and decides that I should do it [kill the girl/woman] against my will to save the family honour. (Ahre Hamednaca)

SH have usefully highlighted the opportunities and basic needs available to women of Swedish ethnicity which are denied to immigrant women living ‘under honour related life’. In relation to violence they reiterate the ‘individual’/white/ Swedish vs the collective/ ethnic minority dichotomy. While this is not untrue, it is still difficult to conceptualise both these forms of violence as anything different than patriarchal violence.

Third, SH are critical about the way in which HRV has been explained as a ‘clash of cultures’²⁴ and would rather like to understand the problem as a ‘clash with universal human rights’.

‘I don’t think that my culture clashes with your culture. When I speak of the rights of children and the rights of women...that is not Swedish culture to me. That is universal rights, you see? (Ahre Hamednaca)

The human rights discourse is important for a number of reasons: first, it bridges the ‘space between race and gender, without trampling on the rights of black and minority communities’ (Siddiqui 2005, 279). Second, assertions for human rights at an international plane break down culturally relativist arguments and foregrounds social justice for

all, irrespective of class, race and gender. But, there are difficulties with the SH proposal of upholding human rights. First, the human rights discourse incorporates a broad canvas of rights and legislations and it is often difficult to disentangle human rights violations, which are committed by the representatives of the state and those that are committed by non-state actors. As Ahmed Annaim(2005) points out, 'human rights are by definition intended to protect people against excess or abuse of the powers of the state...crimes like homicide are not human rights violations unless committed by agents of the state'. Though women's rights advocates have challenged this distinction, Annaim argues that 'the human rights approach should be seen as only one option among others' (Ahmed-Annaim 2005, 71). The human rights approach should supplement, not undermine, other alternative approaches. Second, though human rights are universal in form and intention, they are particular in their use, bounded in scope and scale by cultural norms and geo-political situations. Arguably it could be useful to relate human rights to values that are recognised by the community itself and a more persuasive (through cross-cultural human rights dialogue) rather than a compulsive strategy in promoting human rights would not meet as strong a resistance as the absolutist universalist approaches (also see Scheinin 2002).

Assigning the category 'oppressed' to individuals who perceive their social reality differently can be disempowering as well. I illustrate this through a conversation that Ahmet has with a girl in Rosengård, in Malmö, who did not want to be perceived as oppressed and opposed the ideas of the SH:

Ahmet- Here I come, fighting for the rights of woman and then I get attacked by a girl. As soon as I started to talk to her, I understand that they are so oppressed -*they don't understand that they are oppressed* (my emphasis).

Girl- I'm getting married soon.

Ahmet 'Oh yeah, that's good! Have you been going out for long?'

Girl-'No.'

Ahmet- 'But then how are you going to get married?'

Girl-'Well, dad showed me three guys and I got to choose which one to marry!'

Ahmet-That is her freedom. – To choose one out of three. That's her interpretation of freedom. That just gives a quick picture of how they live.

The analysis of this exchange is problematic as we cannot impose ideas of freedom and equality on individuals whom *we* perceive as ‘victims’. The meaning of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ is subjective and time contingent. Individuals in different societies and of different ethnicities, within one country, can understand ‘oppression’ differently.

I also consider their understanding of the ‘family’ problematic. According to Ahmet many of the young girls and boys he meets do not associate positive qualities with being ‘Swedish’. Ahmet states:

You don’t defend yourself but you defend your family. Because you are brought up to defend the family. The family is the most important thing, more important than society, in their opinion. That is why. And the first argument you hear when talking to boys is: ‘But what do you mean? Should I make my sister a whore? Let her out to fuck whoever she wants? Is that what they’re after? If it is a girl, it is the same. ‘What, are we bad because we don’t behave like Swedish girls?’

Several ideas are entangled in the above quote. First, I don’t think it’s problematic, as Ahmet thinks, that his respondents defend their families. Making judgements or adopting an oppositional discourse on (to) the ‘defend(se) of the family’ can be perceived as a ‘cultural attack’ by some immigrant groups. Also we need to bear in mind that familial networks are often the chief building blocks of social capital for immigrant communities, even though paradoxically, most HRV is carried out by family members. There is also a risk that if some affluent families move away from ‘deprived’ residential areas, they leave behind a section of Swedish population who could be in a less advantageous position (for example, less affluent or experiencing problems associated with marginalisation). The latter, then are seen, as representative of ‘Swedishness’ and this could explain the heightened insecurity of specific immigrant communities. In this social context, it is understandable that if an ‘immigrant’ girl has a ‘Swedish’ friend, she might risk getting a bad reputation, and may generate problems in her immediate family and wider immigrant community. As Ahmet affirms:

So in these areas there is a rumour that if these immigrant girls have Swedish friends, then the girl gets a bad reputation. And she will find it difficult to get married in the future. So they didn’t want their daughters to have anything to do with the Swedish girl, which is a pity.

Sharaf Heroes project is an initiative that comes from individuals from within the community and aims at engaging with the community. However, it is also important to emphasise that ethnic minority communities are not homogenous entities but have differences on the basis of gender, generation, socio-economic background, and nature of mi-

gration and current position in the labour market. These larger structural issues can impact differently on individuals within the community and can influence their attitudes towards violence.

Conclusion

For a sustainable struggle against gender-based violence, a more concerted effort needs to be made at both academic and policy related work to facilitate and sustain a shift from 'mainstreaming gender' (which unfortunately led to approaches centred around women only) to 'mainstreaming men'. We need to create political spaces for male initiatives; to see men as agents of change; as participants in reform and potential allies in search for gender justice. If one of the aims of our struggle against gendered violence is to create a new model for empowered women, then we also need a new model of masculinity- one that sustains itself, not through dominance over women but through collaboration.

Male projects that are promoting gender-equitable behaviour among men should be politically supported since they can be 'lonely' voices in the field of violence. Securing gender equality is not about disempowering men but working *with them* to dismantle power hierarchies. In the U.K there is still hesitation to involve men in combating violence. In contrast, the SH in Sweden is a positive initiative to combat HRV, even though it is ambiguous and contradictory.

Notes

- 1 Regeringens insatser för utsatta flickor i patriarkala familjer, Fact Sheet, Februari 2002.
- 2 Regeringens insatser för ungdomar som riskerar hedersrelaterat våld, Fact Sheet, November 2004.
- 3 Länsstyrelsen i Stockholms län (2005)18 projekt till stöd för flickor och unga kvinnor, p.7.
- 4 Barristers at Renaissance Chambers, a leading family law cohort which includes a team of immigration practitioners.
- 5 Personal Interview with Diana Nammi.
- 6 Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) interfaces between the Home Office (HO) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Also see *The Independent*, 'A Question of Honour' (10.2.08)
- 7 See *Dagens Nyheter* (Dec 22:1996) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (Dec17:1996).
- 8 See *Expressen*, 21 Jan 2000.
- 9 In the British media the rationale provided is that of 'a crisis of modernity'. Patel (1997) describes how in the early nineties in Britain, an Asian man established himself as a 'bounty-hunter', offering his services to local Asian families whose daughters and wives had chosen of their own right to move away. Quality 'newspapers referred to him as a 'mediator' who was 'salvaging' Asian marriage from the *crisis in modernity*'.
- 10 'Ny utredning om diskriminering, integration och makt' Pressmeddelande 22 december 2003, Justitiedepartementet.
- 11 In a report for National Council For Crime Prevention (BRÅ, 2002:14), Lotta Nilsson, points out that in four counties in Sweden: Stockholm, Gotland, Dalarna and Östergötland, one percent of working women were exposed to violence within intimate relationships in one given year.

- 12 *Imkaan* is a national policy training and research initiative in the U.K., dedicated to providing support and advocacy to the specialist refuge sector, supporting Asian woman and children experiencing violence.
- 13 There have been initiatives to involve men such as the *White Ribbon Campaign*, initiated in Canada in 1991, www.whiteribbon.ca.
- 14 State Secretary for Integration, Democracy, Gender Equality and Sports.
- 15 Regeringens insatser för ungdomar som riskerar hedersrelaterat våld, Fact Sheet, November 2004.
- 16 'Initiatives to help young people at risk of violence and oppression in the name of honour, *Fact Sheet*, January 2007.
- 17 Minister for Democracy, Metropolitan Affairs, Integration and Gender Equality.
- 18 The national organisation, 'Mens Network' (Manliga Nätverket), serves as an infrastructure for organisations in other parts of Sweden, (such as Piteå, Malmö, Lund, Västervik) to combat men's violence against women.
- 19 *Ny plattform för män mot kvinnovåld*, *Dagens Nyheter*, 20050318
- 20 Inbjudan till presskonferens – Män om mäns våld mot kvinnor, Pressmeddelande 17 mars, 2005.
- 21 *Ny plattform för män mot kvinnovåld*, *Dagens Nyheter* (050318)
- 22 www.elektra.nu/db/artiklar/sharaf.htm.
- 23 Interview with Kickis Åhré Ålgamo.
- 24 Interestingly, a psychotherapist from 'Save the Children (Rädda Barnen), Sweden, states that they use the phrase: 'Are you a girl, living in two cultures and want to talk about it?' ('är du flicka, lever i två kulturer och behöver prata om det?'). The psychotherapist believes that girls and boys do not want to conceptualize their lived realities in terms of 'honour violence'.

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Suruchi Thapar-Björkert currently holds a senior lectureship at University of Bristol at the Department of Sociology. Her research falls in four specific areas: Gendered Discourses of Colonialism and Nationalism, Gendered Violence in India and Europe, Gender, Social Capital and Social Exclusion and Qualitative Research Methodologies. She has published widely in refereed journals such as *Feminist Review*, *Women's Studies International Forum*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *Women's History Review*, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* and *Oral History Journal*. She has made several media presentations to Radio Feminist ATTAC, BBC Radio Bristol and BBC World. In 2005, she completed a collaborative Leverhulme Trust funded project titled, *Gender, Social Capital and Differential Outcomes*. This research has been published in journals such as *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and *Sociological Review*. In 2006 she completed a project with Integrationsverket, Sweden called *State policy, strategies and implementation in combating patriarchal and 'honour-related' violence*.