



An explanation of honour-related killings of women in Europe through Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and masculine domination

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Abstract

This article aims to explain the lethal violence against women observed in certain contexts in recent years. It analyses the phenomenon of female homicide victimization through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence. The principal manifestation of homicide of female victims explored in this article are honour killings in migrant communities in Europe, a culturally specific form of gender-related homicide. The concept of symbolic violence partially explains the honour-related violence within the framework of patriarchal theories and emphasizes the function of direct violence against women as a patriarchal backlash in a situation of structural changes in gender relations. Applying Bourdieu's theory to honour killings in Europe will explain the dynamics of violence against women in a situation where symbolic patriarchal power is undermined, due to new structural conditions, and offer guidelines on context and agent-focused approaches to tackling the phenomenon.

Keywords

Bourdieu, female homicide victimization, femicide, honour killings, immigrants, symbolic violence, violence against women

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Introduction

Over recent years we have observed a growing interest in violence against women and gender-related killings of women (Council of Europe [Istanbul Convention], 2011; Manjoo, 2012) within the international community and among domestic policy makers in several countries. While much attention has been paid in Europe to intimate partner violence, there are other forms of femicide not traditionally associated with Europe, such as honour killings, e.g. the murder of Kurdish-Iraqi teen girl Heshu Yones by her father in 2002 for wearing western clothes and having a boyfriend, which should not be overlooked in light of globalization and immigration. Media reports have documented a recent rise in these kinds of killings in Europe, although exact figures are difficult to obtain due to the nature of these crimes (Chesler, 2010; Tremblay, 2014; Williams, 2011).

Honour-related killings of women are part of a wider global patriarchal phenomenon of violence against women that cuts across race, class, religion and age (Meetoo and Mirza, 2011: 45). Violence directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence affecting women disproportionately, of which honour killings are an example, has been recognized by the United Nations as a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men. In that sense, it constitutes a human rights violation that states are obliged to prevent, investigate and punish, even when these acts are committed in the private sphere and with non-state agents being involved (CEDAW, 1993). Since the early 1990s, there has been a growing concern within the United Nations about violence against women issues in general, and specifically honour crimes. The relevant bodies that addressed the problem were the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee, the Human Rights Committee replaced by the Human Rights Council through the actions of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, and the General Assembly, which passed several resolutions referring to honour-related violence (HRV) (UN General Assembly, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008). Currently, there is a strong consensus within the international community as to the necessity to combat and eradicate HRV as a severe violation of human rights that cannot be justified by any reference to honour, cultural or traditional values (Connors, 2005).

Though violence against women (VAW) was belatedly recognized as a serious human rights problem and a form of discrimination, it was formerly considered, even by women, as a normal, merited occurrence and a private issue in which the state should not interfere. Symbolic violence against women, exerted through common schemes of perceptions of social world, educational system and religions, without resorting to direct violence, was instrumental in maintaining patriarchal power and domination.

This article documents some cases of honour killings in Europe and demonstrates how Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence can improve our understanding of why this particular form of femicide occurs in Europe, where the specific context of immigration weakens the symbolic patriarchal dominance over women. Using Bourdieu's concept could help understand different dynamics and justifications for honour killings in the immigrant context: it proposes that a new social context of immigration has weakened the symbolic power of masculine domination over women in immigrant communities, a state which may result in stricter control over women, or trigger violent responses to

some women's behaviours that would not have been considered a threat to male honour, prior to immigration. Historically speaking, honour killings were justified only in two situations: pregnancy out of wedlock and non-virginity of a bride; however, in the cases of honour killings in Western Europe there has been a transformation of motives. Bourdieu, who was one of the most important sociologists of the 20th century, provided insightful analysis about power transfer within society and how social order is maintained. His influential concept of symbolic violence appears particularly useful in explaining gender power relations and their correlation to social dynamics.

Honour-related killings of women in Europe

Honour-related violence is a continuum of violence perpetrated against females within the framework of patriarchal family structures, communities and societies, where the main justification for the perpetration is the protection of the social construct of honour as a value system, norm or tradition (Gill, 2011: 219). On that continuum, honour killings constitute the most extreme of a wide range of violent and abusive acts. HRV also includes assaults, confinement and interference with the choice of marriage, as well as simply the rigid control of everyday life (Kvinnoforum, 2003). Other forms include physical manifestations, such as female genital mutilation, or throwing acid on women (Siddiqui, 2005: 263; Welchman and Hossain, 2005: 4).

Honour-related violence comprises highly gender-specific forms of violence, with respect to both victims and offenders. Although men may be victims, women are the primary targets because honour killings are closely related to gender roles and culture and are perpetrated predominantly by men. Where men are victimized, it is through their connection to the 'wrong' woman (Kvinnoforum, 2003: 12, 13; Wikan, 2008: 56). Where a woman participates in an honour killing, she does so to uphold patriarchal rules (Pervizat, 2011). It can be assumed that honour killings are both an expression of patriarchal power to keep women subjugated and a manifestation of punishing women for insubordination. They are deemed to be the 'just deserts' for challenging the patriarchal order and 'tarnishing' the family's (male) honour.

The concept of honour in its traditional meaning (Stewart, 1994; Wikan, 2008: 53) is closely related to reputation and vested in male control over female sexual behaviour and gender roles – typically female virginity and chastity (Welchman and Hossain, 2005). When a woman transgresses gender expectations (even unwillingly, e.g. by being raped), the honour of her male family members is perceived as being threatened, so they resort to killing her in order to restore their honour-reputation and confirm male supremacy. The man's honour is thus founded in his capacity and power to protect and control his family, particularly with regard to gender-normative roles (Wikan, 2008).

It is assumed that the motivation for honour-related killings is misogyny and preservation of the patriarchal order; this form of violence therefore falls within the definition of femicide defined by Radford and Russell (1992: 3; Welchman and Hossain, 2005: 7), namely as a misogynist killing of women and the ultimate end of a continuum of violence against women, as well as being a form of sexual violence. It similarly constitutes a recognized form of femicide in the Vienna Declaration on Femicide (ACUNS, 2013: 4), which defines femicide as the killing of women and girls because of their gender.

The notion of a continuum draws all of these expressions of violence into one spectrum, with the softer forms of violence, indirect, or less palpable nuances, at the outer edge of the VAW scale. They all derive from the same rules of patriarchal order and symbolic masculine domination, which, if not endangered or challenged, do not need to be reaffirmed or restored by resorting to killing a woman.

While not supported by or directly related to any one religion, HRV is particularly widespread in strongly patriarchal and traditional societies where Islam is the prevailing religion – the most affected countries being: Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Pakistan and Syria (Welchman and Hossain, 2005). As a result of migration flows in recent decades, this phenomenon has appeared in Western European countries. Women's advocacy groups and extensive media coverage of certain cases have increased awareness of the problem of violence against women within immigrant communities, both at domestic and international levels.

There are no reliable global estimates for honour killings: in 2000 the United Nations Population Fund (2000: 29) estimated that there were some 5000 honour killings annually worldwide, however, in Pakistan alone, approximately 1000 honour killings are reported annually. Thus, the figure of 20,000 honour killings a year, provided by journalist Robert Fisk (2010), may be closer to the mark. In Turkey, the government figures from 2003–2010 indicated a 1400% increase in the number of women murdered (Tremblay, 2014). In 2007 alone, there were 231 honour killings in Turkey (Council of Europe, 2009). In the UK, there are approximately 12 honour killings every year, although the source for this figure is unclear (Williams, 2011).

The following cases are examples of high-profile honour killings in Europe that serve as the basis for the theoretical analysis below.

The first high-profile honour killing in Sweden occurred in 1996. Sara, a 15-year-old Kurdish-Iraqi girl, was killed by her younger brother and her cousin for being too 'Swedish' (Wikan, 2008). The girl did not wish to comply with the strict authority and control of her family exercised by her father. The murder of Fadime Sahindal, a Kurdish-Turkish girl, by her father in 2001, electrified Swedish society. Fadime was killed not only for refusing to marry the man chosen for her, but for going public with her story and exposing her family's 'dishonour' (Hellgren and Hobson, 2008; Wikan, 2008). The 'dishonour' was caused by the daughter challenging the family's authority. Although Fadime had already been expelled from her family, her father felt he needed to restore his honour by killing her. Her murder and the media coverage of her death transformed her into an icon as a 'martyr who died for speaking out against patriarchal oppression of her culture and who sought an independent life outside familial boundaries and control' (Hellgren and Hobson, 2008: 391). Fadime was a normal girl with an immigrant background who was killed for wanting to live her own life and make her own choices, like any other Swedish woman.

In Great Britain, there were four prominent cases of honour killings. One was the murder of 19-year-old Rukshana Naz of Pakistani origin, killed by her mother and her brother for seeking to divorce the man whom she had been forced to marry at age 15. Another case was 17-year-old Shafiea Ahmed (whose family was also from Pakistan), killed in 2003 for not conforming to parental authority and refusing to marry the man chosen for her (Gill and Brah, 2014). Kurdish-Iraqi Heshu Yones was murdered by her

father in 2002 (the first time the British media used the term ‘honour killing’) for wearing western clothes and having a boyfriend in high school (Begikhani, 2005; Payton, 2011). Lastly, 19-year-old Kurdish-Iraqi Banaz Mahmood was killed by her father for falling in love with a boy and seeking to divorce the man she had been forced to marry at 16, who also abused her physically (Payton, 2011). Banaz’s father’s honour had already been ‘tainted’ when Banaz’s sister had left the family and moved in with a man she chose independently; Banaz’s father felt he could not permit an affront to his authority by another daughter.

Finally, the most prominent honour killing in Germany was the murder of 23-year-old Hatun Aynur Sürücü, a German girl of Turkish-Kurdish origin, by her younger brother, for ‘behaving like a German’: divorcing her husband and seeking an independent life beyond her family’s control.

Aside from concern over the occurrence of these acts, western countries’ responses to honour crimes also highlighted some inherent problems in addressing violence against women by the dominant groups within immigrant communities. Initially, the problem of VAW within immigrant communities had been instrumentalized, not only in order to critique multicultural politics and as a call to protect minority group women, but also in anti-immigration discourse (Okin, 1999). In general, the lack of intervention by public authorities in immigrant communities’ internal problems has led to tolerance of practices that are harmful to vulnerable members within these communities. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that several European governments have, at various points, addressed this problem as a serious one and introduced measures aimed at counteracting these forms of violence and protecting immigrant women (Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2010). Examples include: police officers receiving special training to tackle honour-related cases and to provide protection for victims (e.g. the UK police created a special unit to deal with forced marriages), awareness campaigns, and government funding of civil society organizations for women’s rights and migrant women.

Similarly, following international pressure or advocacy by local women’s groups, policy makers in countries where so-called honour crimes are an endemic phenomenon have broken with the prevalent and tacit tolerance, acknowledged the problem and taken public action to put an end to the perpetrators’ impunity (Abu Hassan and Welchman, 2005).

Theoretical analysis

While the current human rights and political discourse still focuses primarily on direct forms of violence against women (Council of Europe, 2011: Preamble, Istanbul Convention; UNGA, 1993), one needs to bear in mind that, in social sciences, direct violence is considered only one of the tools employed by patriarchal structures to keep women oppressed and subordinate to men. There are diverse processes of invisible violence, structural, symbolic, or normalized violence of ‘everyday life’, that maintain domination of one group over another (Bourgois, 2009). One of these tools elaborated by Bourdieu (1989: 22) is the concept of *symbolic power* and violence, which emerged from his analysis of power and domination and their social reproduction in modern societies.

According to Bourdieu (1991: 166; 2006: 244), symbolic power is a power of ‘world-making’, the power to impose upon other minds a vision of a world and social order,

older or new social divisions, based on race, religion, origin or gender as a legitimate and natural one. Symbolic violence is exerted through the schemes of perception, thoughts and actions (*habitus*), the cognitive structures, by means of which we perceive the social world as legitimate and 'natural' that are shared by all members of society. Symbolic violence thus encompasses all the acts of domination, hierarchies, subordination, which are, at the same time, the acts of cognition and recognition (Bourdieu, 2006: 244). Symbolic domination, its divisions, classifications and hierarchies are imposed upon us by the linguistic structures we use, the educational system, religion, family structures and state power (Bourdieu, 1991). Masculine domination is assumed to be a fine example of symbolic violence.

Although some critics found analogies drawn from pre-modern Kabyle culture irrelevant in post-modern ones (Mottier, 2002), Bourdieu's analysis does appear relevant to the mechanisms of HRV and causes that trigger HRV, particularly in the immigration context in western countries, because it explains the relationship between honour, masculinity and violence. HRV does not in itself constitute a symbolic violence but, rather, a cultural one (Galtung, 1990); albeit, codes of conduct can be both cultural and symbolic, while the concept of honour constitutes an important symbolic capital.

Bourdieu's key concepts associated with symbolic violence of misrecognition, *habitus*, consent, complicity and *doxa* thus prove useful in explaining how masculine domination works in interpersonal and generational relations around HRV.

According to Bourdieu:

The precedence universally accorded to men is affirmed in the objectivity of the social structures and the productive or reproductive activities, based on a sexual division of the labour of biological and social production and reproduction which gives the better part to men, and also in the schemes immanent in everyone's *habitus*. (Bourdieu, 2001: 33–34)

Patriarchal order in traditional societies is vested with the objectivity of common sense: an obvious, practical and unquestionable consensus on the sense of social practices and gender relations that is also shared by the dominated group. The symbolic violence of masculine domination is thus implemented through the very basic acts of cognition that are, in fact, acts of practical recognition, *doxic* acceptance – a belief that does not need to be thought and affirmed as such (Bourdieu, 2001: 34). *Doxa* signifies an unquestioned truth – any belief or value taken for granted in any particular society, an experience by which the natural and social world appears as self-evident, something that goes without saying, or even thinking (Bourdieu, 1977). Patriarchal domination and subjugation of women in honour-driven societies is a *doxa*. In honour-driven societies, killing a woman who stained the family honour through conducting extramarital relationships is believed to be a deserved punishment, the correct thing to do under such circumstances. It is why the perpetrators of honour killings jailed in Turkish prisons are extolled by inmates and families and 'walk in glory' (Onal, 2008). Fadime Sahindal's father showed no remorse during his trial; indeed, he could not understand what he had done wrong (Wikan, 2008).

However, it would not be feasible to uphold this order without the consent and participation of the dominated group itself: its complicity is an important element of wielding

symbolic power (Bourdieu, 2006: 243). Indeed, women as a disadvantaged group themselves contribute to the power relations in which they are kept, insofar as they unwittingly apply cognitive categories constructed from the perspective of the dominant to the relationship of domination, thus rendering them as natural (Bourdieu, 2001: 35). The magic of symbolic violence drives the dominated through the *habitus* towards tacit acceptance of the imposed limits. The complicity of some women in upholding patriarchal order may also take the form of active instigation, or even participation in honour killings.

Since the effects and conditions of efficacy of symbolic violence are durably and deeply embedded in the body in the form of dispositions and imprinted in the minds of the dominated, it can persist, even when the social conditions that shaped the structures of domination undergo change (Bourdieu, 2001: 39).

Another important agent of the social reproduction of gendered order, apart from family structures, church (religion) and educational system, is the state – public institutions and judicial power (Bourdieu, 1989: 21; 2006: 265); this is particularly prominent in ‘honour-driven’ societies. The concept of ‘honour’ is there being used to legitimize the oppression and subordination of women, and moreover, in countries where cultures of ‘honour’ are endemic, the entire social structure and public apparatus seem to contribute to, and participate in, carrying out and continuing HRV. Just to give an example, in a study into the occurrence of HRV in Pakistan, Khan concludes:

Honour crimes against women are physically committed by the family men, socially accepted by the immediate community, religiously facilitated through discriminatory teachings and dictates, legally recognized by the lawyers and judiciary, and politically endorsed by the patriarchal institutions of the state (such as legislature, police, and political parties). (Khan, 2006: 130)

Hence, the basic tool to keep women subordinated is not actually direct, but ‘symbolic’ violence, i.e. *habitus* and *doxas* – the mental schemes of thought and comprehension that men and women share about the concept of gender and its configurations, perceiving the world through these lenses. The *habitus* and *doxa* organize action within the field of gender relations. This does not mean that Bourdieu minimized or downplayed the role of physical violence. Physical or direct violence towards women, rape, exploitation, battering, etc., may be viewed as an extension of ‘symbolic’ power exerted by the dominant over the dominated (Bourdieu, 2001: 34):

Honouring a vital symbolic good is firmly connected to notions of manliness or virility and domestic, legal and educational strategies for controlling kinswomen. (Bourdieu, 2001: 48)

‘Manliness’ denotes not only sexual and social reproductive capacity, but also the capacity to fight and exercise violence in order to assert and maintain status, i.e. to defend one’s honour; physical violence offers a very rudimentary means of proving one’s virility among other men and maintaining status.

Given that one of the essential determinants of being a ‘real man’ in patriarchal societies is perceived as the exertion of control over the female members in the group (family/

clan/tribe) and their reproductive capacity (Lerner, 1986), its absence poses a threat to masculine identity, self-esteem and position in the group. In solid and stable society, the subordination of women is sustained by means of more or less nuanced, tacit and natural symbolic violence, without necessity to resort to harsher measures. However, a woman who challenges the social order in her behaviour wittingly or unwittingly, also challenges the virility of men of her family and inherently provokes them to counteraction, in order to demonstrate to the group (other men) that *they* are still 'real men'. If a man cannot control the sexual behaviour of a female in his family, it threatens his honour and masculinity and thus his status in the community in the eyes of other men. He must restore his honour through violence against the woman who threatened his status.

Some critics accuse Bourdieu of lack of a convincing account of social change, an overemphasis on the structure and downplay of the agency of social actors and gendered nature of subjectivity (Mottier, 2002: 353–354). However, irrespective of whether agents are autonomous or only driven by the *habitus*, I would argue that his theory is useful in understanding honour killing committed by immigrants in Western Europe, as an outcome of loss of objectiveness of those structures where immigrants were shaped and socialized and because of the loss of symbolic power they used to wield in the field of gender power relations.

Honour killings as a patriarchal backlash and failure of symbolic dominance

Considering Bourdieu, and given the nature of symbolic violence and the relationship between masculinity and violence, I argue that direct violence against women can be interpreted as an extension of male dominance over women and is employed when traditional notions of gender, especially manliness, are challenged and male dominance is threatened. In these circumstances, men resort to direct violence as a means to assert their superiority. This is likely to occur when changes in the fabric of social reality create dissonance between the *habitus*, the schemes of perceiving the world and gender relations.

In such circumstances, social and material conditions change rapidly and cease to correspond to established perceptions and understanding of the world. The objective structures that shaped dispositions and *habitus* have lost their objectivity, and these dispositions are no longer valid in new settings. The framework of male dominance, based on the concept of masculine honour, is no longer relevant in new structural conditions and the patriarchal ideology is undermined (Hunnicut, 2009: 555). If we empower one gender that used to be inferior and subordinated, legally, economically and socially, this will undermine the structural basis for privileges of the other. One example of women's empowerment undermining male privilege is the way education and/or mass media have influenced women's expectations of life, marriage (e.g. love-match marriage) and increased the awareness of their rights (Khan, 2006: 166); another is women's economic empowerment. Some 'gender-neutral' structural factors, e.g. urbanization or technology, have also impacted on gender relations.

In Bourdieu's words, the structure of relation of forces that is constitutive of the field has changed. Immigrant women from illiberal societies come under the influence of liberal *habitus* in western countries that accords them more power – and less to the men.

Honour killings and male vulnerability

Honour killing satisfies two component elements of 'being a real man' in honour-driven societies. The first is control over or domination of women; the second is the capacity to fight and exercise violence. The weaker the symbolic, patriarchal power over women, the harder it is to exert control over them and the greater the threat to male domination, and subsequently, the higher the chance of the exercise of violence in order to reassert domination. This constitutes the root cause of the relatively high incidence of HRV among migrant communities in Europe. Migrant men feel anxious about the influence of the host culture on their sisters and daughters, so they use violence against them when they fear they might become too 'western/European/Swedish/German', etc., or to intervene directly to prevent such a possibility. If their female relatives or wives become too westernized, independent, free, disobedient, and transgress cultural gender norms, they fear it will cause them to lose face and be dishonoured in the eyes of others. In fact, this anxiety makes it more likely that these men will resort to violence and the 'honour' rationale in new countries than in their countries of origin (Wikan, 2008: 69). HRV in Europe is, therefore, a reaction within traditional groups to transforming gender roles and to the refusal of some women and girls to follow the conservative order of symbolic dominance, which is highly oppressive to women; the man then punishes the disobedient female by employing direct violence to maintain and reaffirm the patriarchal order. This provides a cogent interpretation for the killing of Shafiea Ahmed, Fadime Sahindal, Banaz Mahmood, Rukshana Naz, Heshu Yones, as well as many other young women in Europe in recent years, in the name of so-called honour. All these victims came under the influence of a new, more liberal *habitus* and challenged the patriarchal and oppressive order of their families' culture.

All these young women and girls refused to conform to their families' patriarchal order. Their tragic stories also demonstrate the shifts in power relationships between immigrant parents and their children (Darvishpour, 2004): gender conflicts thus overlap with generational ones, particularly between parents and daughters. Children tend to integrate better within the new society than their parents. Young women brought up in the new country and exposed to the host society's values are no longer willing to follow their parents' hierarchical, patriarchal family order. The corollary is: the greater the social exclusion and discrimination faced by first- and second-generation immigrants in the new society, the more tightly they stick to their communities and the greater their dependence on their cultural values (Björling and Förberg, 2005); this is how migrants deal with the transformation of symbolic and cultural capitals. Daughters, as the dominated group raised in a new culture – exposed during their socialization to alternative, more attractive values and lifestyles, and achieving higher levels of education than their parents – are no longer willing to follow and obey their parents' values. However, masculine domination is still being exercised over them: their menfolk attempt to maintain the traditional culture they believe constitutes part of their identity.

Changed material-economic relations and modernization processes in traditional and conservative societies have led some women to challenge the symbolic order through their behaviour, thus threatening the privileged position of men. Resorting to direct violence as a way of controlling and oppressing women is embedded in masculine

domination; it is a type of extension of symbolic violence that traditionally keeps women in an inferior position to men. Resorting to direct violence against women is more likely in situations where existing methods of asserting male power have been weakened, due to rapid social changes or other social and cultural contexts, such as the growing empowerment of women.

As was stated earlier, the motivations behind 'honour killings' in the immigrant context are quite different from traditional ones. Historically, in the Arab world, the 'honour killing' of a woman was justified only in two situations: pregnancy out of wedlock, or discovering on the wedding night that the bride was not a virgin. Later, laws in Arab countries expanded the concept to killing an adulterous wife, thus confusing the concept of honour crimes with crimes of passion (Abu-Odeh, 2010). We can, however, observe that the scope of behaviours threatening family honour and triggering honour killing has been expanded dramatically in modern Europe. Honour killings may now be motivated not only by evidence of extramarital relationships, but also by females being 'too western', refusing arranged marriage, or seeking divorce, etc.: it appears that any behaviour by which a woman manifests her agency and asserts autonomy can serve as motive.

Perhaps, in the new context of western culture, the system (the dominant culture) empowers/reinforces the women, while simultaneously undermining patriarchy and masculine domination, particularly in comparison to the immigrants' homeland. Positions in the field of gender power relations are thus being transformed. Women, particularly younger ones, find increasing opportunities to exercise their freedom, *ergo* 'dishonour' their family. Control over them thus needs to be more rigid and a threshold of lethal 'dishonour' is no longer objectively determined, but evaluated every time this equilibrium is at stake. Additional 'at risk' circumstances also come into play here, particularly their reputation in the eyes of their peers, such as in the killing of Banaz Mahmood. Fadime Sahindal went public with her story and 'brought shame' upon her family – with outcomes far worse than her act of rebellion, *per se*.

It is important to note that gender conflicts arising within immigrant communities occur in two overlapping dimensions. On the one hand, clashes increase as immigrant women in the new country acquire more rights, relative freedom, and as they become more independent economically and refuse to accept the homeland's cultural codes. This is particularly true for girls who grew up in Europe and never knew their homeland (Darvishpour, 2004; Hellgren and Hobson, 2008). On the other hand, the advancement of gender equality in the context of migration is accompanied by a crisis of masculinity among males in the new setting. Indeed, we can observe a breakdown in masculinity and a growing sense of malaise among some migrant men, caused by a combination of social exclusion, precarious positions, liberalization of sexuality in wider society and women's empowerment (Abbas, 2011). In the absence of other sources of social validation or recognition, they perceive honour, control over women, and perhaps their ability to protect them from the evils of wider society, as core components of their self-esteem. The social and cultural pressures of western liberal societies impact negatively on the masculinities of first- and second-generation immigrant men from traditional and honour-driven societies: their manliness is threatened.

Discussing the backlash hypothesis

It is significant that where structural changes are not necessarily followed by ideological changes, they can lead to tensions and an increase in violence against women. Thus, narrowing structural gender inequality while perpetuating patriarchal and hegemonic masculine order can increase rates of violence against women. Male insecurity, arising from the social demands of patriarchies and an inability to fulfil cultural prescriptions associated with notions of 'being a real man' – a superior achiever, provider, protector – may lead to frustration that can serve as an undercurrent, motivating violence against women (Hunnicut, 2009: 561).

Within the feminist analysis of violence against women in the patriarchal framework, explanations focus on gendered social arrangements, dominance and power (Dobash et al., 1992; Hunnicutt, 2009), where patriarchy is defined as a set of social arrangements that privilege males, and where men as a group dominate women as a group, both structurally and ideologically (Hunnicut, 2009: 557).

The symbolic power of masculine domination does not fit into the new social setting and honour as a symbolic good is no longer validated/legitimized by the state and the dominant culture, or even condemned, although it remains an important value among peers in immigrant communities, particularly when they do not possess their other, former social, economic or cultural capitals. Often, actors best adapted to the old setting will experience the most difficulty in adapting to new situations: their dispositions and *habitus* are rendered dysfunctional and their attempts to sustain them only make things worse and create increased frustration (Bourdieu, 2006: 230).

British scholar Naila Kabir (1999: 23) argues that male violence can mean both an assertion of power in the absence of change, and/or an attempt to assert that power in response to changes in women's agency and empowerment. I would add that violence may sometimes be exercised in order to prevent or avert such changes. It seems that the nature and context of HRV in western countries is triggered exclusively by essential changes in women's agency or status, the anticipation of those changes and their negative impact on masculinity. By anticipation, I mean that general, indirect fears and anxieties, or even distant examples of other women, may lead to the exercise of violence against female relatives as an example for others. Thus, while condemning honour-related violence and killings, we need to grasp that the distinction between various forms of gender-related killings of women due to honour-related violence, together with their context, demands to be addressed differently from other forms of male violence.

One might argue provocatively that the intensification of honour-related violence in relevant communities is an indicator affirmative of social change, transformation of gender roles and an attempt by women to assert their rights. Since the use of physical violence in honour-based societies is deeply rooted in notions of honour and manhood, resorting to violence could be perceived as a means of defending the dominant status in an imperilled situation (i.e. men employ violence against women because women have become increasingly empowered). In Bourdieu's framework of analysis, the *doxa* of strong and traditional patriarchal domination is challenged by new social contexts and the empowerment of women. Thus, when the symbolic power of the dominant decreases

due to structural change, direct violence provides the means to reassert dominance and confirm masculine honour.

That argument is consistent with the patriarchal framework of analysis of violence against women, particularly the backlash hypothesis, whereby an increase in gender equality may result in higher rates of violence against women and female homicide victimization (Gartner et al., 1990; Russell, 1975; Williams and Holmes, 1981, cited in Vieraitis et al., 2015). Little evidence exists to support the backlash hypothesis: most studies are based on measuring gender equality by socio-economic indicators in western countries (Hunnicut, 2009: 561–562; Vieraitis et al., 2015), while overlooking ideological factors. However, it has not yet been proven irrelevant to traditional honour-based societies in non-western countries, or immigrants from these societies in western countries. On the assumption that honour-related violence or honour killings as an expression of reassertion of and response to a threat to masculine domination are more likely to occur when the symbolic power of patriarchy is weakened, due to transformation of positions in the field of gender power relations, the backlash hypothesis may be pertinent.

High rates of violence against women among immigrant communities could be interpreted as an indicator of social change and a transformation of gender relations. However, its prevalence still makes the empowerment of women more dangerous and threatens the process by which empowerment of women undermines the patriarchy. Beyond the individual harm to a woman's health, or life, that each act of violence against women produces, another worrisome dimension of the prevalence of VAW, and honour killings, specifically, is the *macro-structural effects* of individual acts of violence. Honour crimes are committed in order to restore honour to the family/clan and wash away the shame brought by the transgression of women in the group. However, each honour killing results in either the physical elimination of the victim, or other forms of 'incapacitation' of subordinate women. The outcome is one less 'rebellious' female with the capacity to challenge the existing patriarchal order within the group. Furthermore, women and girls who may be capable of challenging the social order in the future are reined in: by witnessing the distress of one victim of honour killing, they are effectively discouraged from following her example – this is termed general deterrence. The assumption that fear of punishment will prevent others from committing similar acts is a fundamental principle, not only of the criminal justice system, but of mechanisms of social control. The more severe and inevitable the penalty for transgression, the more efficient the deterrent.¹

Deterrence is possibly the most important underlying consequence of gender-based violence, triggered by traditional attitudes by which women are deemed inferior to men. It perpetuates and helps sustain women in subordinate roles, as emphasized in international human rights documents (CEDAW, 1993: 1, 7, 11).

The third factor

Moreover, as noted by MacKinnon (1991: 1303), gender bias permeates law enforcement: where the legal system is dominated by the members of the group engaged in the aggression, many formally illegal practices are seldom deemed to be against the law. The immanent schemes of domination, honour beliefs and gender roles are shared by police officers and judges; they shape their reactions to honour-related violence and the killing of women. A study from Afghanistan (Baldry et al., 2013) showed that the rule of law

(i.e. punishment according to the crime committed) is subject to the influence of male honour beliefs when female behaviours threaten masculine honour. A confession of adultery by a female victim of intimate partner violence produced more lenient attitudes towards violence against women: this, in turn, lowered police officers' inclination to intervene by taking the aggressor into custody and providing support to the victim. The criminal justice systems in western countries are similarly permeated by gender bias and often fail to provide women with the protection from violence to which they are entitled. Banaz Mahmood reported threats from her family on several occasions prior to her death, but police protection was refused (Payton, 2011). The fathers of Banaz Mahmood, Heshu Yones, Shafilea Ahmed or Fadime Sahindal were sentenced to life imprisonment; however, for many years (prior to 2000), various European courts had been receptive towards legal defences based on grounds of culture, tradition or honour, and acted with leniency towards perpetrators of honour killings (Gill, 2011; Kabani, 2004; Maier, 2009; Siesling and Ten Voorde, 2009).

The patterns of male domination and female subordination are deeply rooted in the mindsets, the *habitus* in Bourdieu's terminology, of both men and women, and of law enforcement practice (Bourdieu, 2006: 249). The eradication of violence against women will never happen without changing awareness and challenging the existing *habitus* and schemes of thinking about gender and masculinity. Every act of violence against women is embedded in a larger social organization (Hunnicut, 2009). Honour killings in the context of immigration highlight patterns of patriarchal, symbolic domination, including within the dominant culture of western countries. Moreover, sexist ideologies might also persist in western societies and many of them go unchallenged (Cacho, 2012; Walters, 2011); nevertheless, liberal western democracies do provide women with more tools to denounce and struggle with inequalities.

Conclusion

'Honour killings' and other manifestations of honour-related violence have recently become an issue of great interest worldwide, both in countries where they are endemic and in immigrant communities in western countries. The concern has been triggered by rapid social changes that have altered gender relations in deeply patriarchal communities and undermined masculine domination.

In this respect, violence against women becomes a manifestation of a crisis of masculinity triggered by rapid economic change, warping male identity and encouraging violence and misogyny. Patriarchal ideology in the mindsets of men is perceived as endangered when the surrounding social reality no longer corresponds and the dominated group have access to more social, economical and symbolic resources/capital. This holds true in both developing and developed societies, traditional and modern communities.

It appears that achieving gender equality and tackling violence against women need to occur not only through the empowerment of women, transforming their *habitus* and providing support when they need it, but also through discussing and reshaping male identity and males' *habitus* in the field of gender power relations.

Shall we then go further and follow Bourdieu's call for symbolic revolution, triggered by the feminist movement? It would not be just about a 'simple conversion of consciousness,

but a radical transformation of the social conditions of production of the disposition that lead the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant' (Bourdieu, 2001: 41–42).

Specific conclusions can be drawn from the implications of this call. If we wish to address the causes of gender-based violence and femicides and to eradicate them, we should thus act to transform the attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices towards gender roles associating violence with manliness/virility, which prevail in most societies. This is relevant both to western and non-western societies and is evident in analysis of responses to HRV in migrant communities. Providing immediate support and protection is also crucial, although the real challenge lies in long-term measures – transformation of attitudes, prejudices towards gender relations, stereotypes, and disconnecting masculinity from domination over women. Rule of law and laws protecting women from violence are not enough: it is vital to improve current notions of honour/manliness that view violence and control of women as an important and constitutive element thereof.

It is clear that in western countries, too, the public apparatus and judicial power are permeated by stereotypes and gender bias and have tolerated such violence. Moreover, for a long time, they refused to accord women in minority communities protection of their rights. Only recently have the debates sparked by honour killings and honour-related violence begun to shape new institutional approaches to the problem of violence against women and femicide.

Any measures and shift in a symbolic power therefore need to be addressed in three parallel domains and involve three social agents in the field of gender power relations: protecting women, acting to change male behaviour and mindsets, plus the state dimension: legislation, public officers and officialdom, which are deemed to be the organizing structure of social reality.

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Note

1. Yet it is believed that the more effective means of deterring people from committing crimes is the certainty of penalty, rather than its gravity (Wright, 2010).

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Résumé

Cet article a pour but d'expliquer les violences mortelles commises contre les femmes ces dernières années. Il analyse le phénomène des femmes victimes d'homicide en empruntant la théorie de la violence symbolique de Bourdieu. La cause principale des homicides de femmes, envisagés dans cette étude, est le crime d'honneur commis dans des communautés immigrées en Europe, une forme spécifique de meurtre sexuel liée à la culture. Le concept de violence symbolique permet d'expliquer en partie les violences infligées au nom de l'honneur dans le cadre des théories de la société patriarcale et de mettre en évidence le rôle de la violence directe contre les femmes dans la réaction patriarcale aux changements en cours dans les relations entre les sexes. L'application de la théorie de Bourdieu aux crimes d'honneur en Europe permet d'expliquer les causes de la violence contre les femmes dans le contexte de cette remise en cause du pouvoir symbolique du patriarcat et de proposer une démarche basée sur le contexte et les agents pour lutter contre ce phénomène.

Mots-clés

Violence contre les femmes, violence symbolique, Bourdieu, immigrants, fémicide, femmes victimes d'homicide, crimes d'honneur, violences infligées au nom de l'honneur

Resumen

Este artículo busca explicar la violencia letal contra las mujeres observadas en ciertos contextos en los últimos años. Se analizará el fenómeno de los homicidios con víctimas femeninas a través de la lente de la teoría de la violencia simbólica de Pierre Bourdieu. La principal manifestación de homicidios de mujeres víctimas exploradas en este trabajo son los crímenes de honor en las comunidades de inmigrantes en Europa, una forma culturalmente específica de homicidio por motivos de género. El concepto de violencia simbólica explica en parte la violencia relacionada con el honor en el marco de las teorías patriarcales y hace hincapié en la función de la violencia directa contra las mujeres como una reacción patriarcal en una situación de cambios estructurales en las relaciones de género. Aplicando la teoría de Bourdieu para honrar asesinatos en Europa le explicará la dinámica de la violencia contra las mujeres en una situación en la que se socavó el poder patriarcal simbólico, debido a las nuevas condiciones estructurales y las directrices de la oferta en el contexto y los enfoques centrados en el agente para abordar el fenómeno.

Palabras clave

Violencia contra las mujeres, violencia simbólica, Bourdieu, inmigrantes, feminicidios, homicidio con víctimas femeninas, crímenes de honor, violencia relacionada con el honor.