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Book Review: 'Honour' Killing and Violence: Theory, Policy & Practice

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'Honour' Killing and Violence: Theory, Policy & Practice, Edited by: Aisha K. Gill, Carolyn Strange, & Karl Roberts, 2014, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 244 pp., \$35.63 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-137-28955-1

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'Honour' Killing and Violence, aims to provide a multidisciplinary approach and adds context to a sensitive topic and timely issue within the international discourse. International scholars are writing from backgrounds in criminology, sociology, psychology, women's and gender studies, english, history, policing and law while positioning their expertise to make sense of so-called "honour killings" in theory, policy, and practice. In the introduction one of the editors, Gill emphasizes the main purpose of the edited volume. She states "[t]his volume argues that the problem should be instead approached from a multidisciplinary perspective, attentive to the intersection of a range of causal factors and inclusive of a wide range of both proven and promising interventions" (p. 1). Aside from this, she recognizes that there is not one factor that can explain this "complex phenomenon" and thus it is crucial to draw on expertise from a wide range of disciplines to advance the field (p. 1). This is exactly what this volume sets out to accomplish by making a unique contribution on a complex subject, by combining data and theory from various disciplines.

The introduction provides a road map of the chapters that are grouped into the two main sections of the book which are, I) Conceptual Frameworks and II) Operationalising/Practices of Honour and Violence. Both sections of the book have five chapters. The book is organized around these two sections aside from the introduction on 'Honour' and 'HBV' which addresses some common assumptions and highlights key concepts surrounding 'honour' and 'shame.' Gill explains the concept of intersectionality based on her expertise, to link the concepts of gender, honour and HBV. In doing so, she demonstrates how the meaning of 'honour' varies and cannot be easily understood when translated due to the loss of meaning (p. 2). Startling estimates from the United Nation (UN) on honour killings are presented to contextualize how this continues to be a problem not only for certain nations (e.g. Middle East and Asia), but worldwide. The UN statistics estimates of 5,000 women murdered in the name of honour are widely cited. However, such statistics should be understood with caution as Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod² and other scholars remind us, these figures have remained static for the last decade or so.

Nevertheless, numerous strengths are found in the volume. The authors tendency to draw attention to both the media and political discourses internationally where reported cases as well as policies influence the on the ground practical work to address HBV (e.g. policing and enforcing laws) is extremely important to the ongoing debates and discussions in many countries. Other nation states may draw or learn from the approaches taken to address the complexity of 'Honour' Killing and HBV. However, critiques are provided by the contributors of both

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² Abu-Lughod, L. (2011). Seductions of the 'honor' crime. *Differences: Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 22(1), 17-63.

discourses as they do recognize that it has not been effectively understood why HBV occurs and instead advances in policy and practice continue to focus on the simple cultural explanations. Some policies in various countries are pointed out (see Chapter 7), and unfortunately some countries use racist and discriminatory approaches to separate violence in ethnic communities from mainstream communities. As it is stated extensively throughout the book, cultural and simplistic explanations to justify violence tend to misrepresent certain religions, cultures, and communities that comprise of ethnic and immigrant individuals living in some multicultural societies. This edited book considers more complex understandings of HBV by focusing on intersections between various factors that are not always easily explained or interpreted as underlying causes of violence (e.g. gender, socialization around gender, family dynamics, migration, class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and notions surrounding “honour” or acceptable/inacceptable behaviour). The state’s role is also put forward in understanding the current debates in the field of HBV. Readers will benefit from what other nation states have done, particularly when some such as Canada a multicultural state continues to struggle with the phenomenon (e.g. issuing strong warnings against newcomers). Chapter 7 on Scandinavian Policies found in Sweden, Norway and Denmark along with chapter 10 comparing Germany and Britain could assist Western nations like Canada in rethinking the approach taken or not taken. The final chapter 11 examines the media coverage of high profile cases which are urging the Canadian government to take a stance. These chapters contribute to the state’s discourse which influences the practical on the ground work around prevention/intervention.

When presenting contributions from a wide range of scholars, including fields such as history, policing and criminology there appears to be an apparent disconnect when trying to bridge these disciplines together. For example, the historical lens chapter (3) suggests a need for historical evidence to shed light on the contemporary cases of HBV. While chapter (4) provides a more psychological theoretical framework to explain why HBV occurs it does so by briefly presenting the limitations of existing theories. However, while presenting downfalls behind these theories and the need for a psychologically oriented theory, the “history of HBV across societies” (p. 65) is missing in the discussion. Chapter 3 a historical lens to HBV is preceded by Chapter 4 where the contributor appears to bring a psychological perspective to HBV. This is one example of how the chapters while grouped into the two sections are disjointed. There are only few incidents where the contributors of various chapters make reference to the other chapters, for example, chapter 11 speaks to claims made in previous chapters about Muslim women’s bodies fitting the state interest (p. 232). Often times, this is found to be usefully done to avoid repeating ideas or to reference a point made elsewhere. In other words, readers would not benefit from reading the chapters in chronological order and can read the book in any order as it will still make sense. Thus, I would suggest the chapters be regrouped into a number of different sections. For example, the Introduction would remain on its own. While Part 1) Historical and Conceptual Frameworks would include in this order chapter 3, 2, and 5; Part 2) Criminal Justice and Legal Approaches with chapters 4 and 6; Part 3) Nation Policies with chapters 7, 10, and 11; Part 4) Practices and Responses with chapters 8 and 9 to be followed by a concluding chapter. However, this order could change as chapter 5 might be placed in Part 2 and chapter 11 could be placed in Part 4. Although Gill, Strange and Roberts collection includes valuable contributions the volume lacks connections between chapters as well as a concluding chapter to bring together the main argument.

Additionally, there is a significant depth of knowledge surrounding the topic with the intentions to tackle the issue as being a part of the broader spectrum of violence against women.

The latter issue is communicated well across all chapters. Another challenge (related to the one stated above) is that contributors present different data and theoretical perspectives from select countries. Thus, the reasons to leave out a wide range of scholars, writing in various disciplines internationally is not fully understood when trying to bridge disciplines and scholars internationally in the field with a common ground. Interestingly, no chapter has co-authors which could have been one attempt to integrate a sociologist, criminologist or historian to approach 'Honour' Killing and HBV from a disciplinary approach while using the same data or theoretical perspectives. Instead the edited volume consists of a number of different chapters, each written by contributors from their respective disciplines using data and theoretical perspectives found there. Thus, apart from these few recommendations a more accurate title of the volume would be helpful to readers. A title with an emphasis on the unique contributions in this book and the main argument as well as the term honour based violence. The recommended title of the volume would be: *Multidisciplinary Perspectives of 'Honour' Killing and Honour Based Violence: In Theory, Policy & Practice*.

Overall, despite these few shortcomings, this book presents a strong theoretical and practical account of a complex and challenging form of violence against women or domestic violence, to academics and community service providers. Since, Welchman and Hossain's (2005) *Honour: Crimes, Paradigms and Violence against Women*, a book that is referenced throughout this current one, this recent publication is the most up to date response to understanding HBV. It offers a historical perspective to a contemporary issue 'honour' killings, which as highlighted throughout the book continues to receive extensive media and political attention on an international scale. Additionally, with the price of \$35.63, the book would be useful to academic and community scholars writing in the area. The contributors in this volume and the editors have produced a thought-provoking collection that makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature on the topic. Thus, this edited collection would serve a wide readership beyond academia and into the wider community to serve the general public's understanding of the issue and front-line service provider's perspectives. This book would be a valuable tool or manual for front-line service providers, such as the police given the few cases the contributors draw on that really brings the issue to light (see Chapter 6, 9 and 10). Chapter 9 in particular uses a case to illustrate the responses to 'Honour' Killing and HBV and some of the ways it was mishandled by professionals. More discussions like this would be important to bring forward to ensure that service providers do not repeat the steps taken. Considerable thought has been given into producing such a challenging piece on a controversial issue that will make academics and service providers re-think their approach or response to HBV.