

CONSTRUCTING THE “HONOR KILLING”
AN ANALYSIS OF FRAMING IN SWEDISH NEWSPAPER MEDIA

by

JULIA EDLUND

Submitted to the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts

Sabanci University

September 2013

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APPROVED BY:

Prof. Dr. Halil Berktaş.....
(Thesis Supervisor)

Dr. Ateş Altınordu.....

Prof. Dr. Ayşe Öncü.....

DATE OF APPROVAL:.....

Abstract

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Julia Edlund

Turkish Studies M.A. thesis

Supervisor: Prof. Halil Berktaş

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This thesis aims to analyze how Swedish media construct news about the murder cases within ethnic and/or religious minorities in the Swedish society which are declared to be “honor killings”. The intention is to examine how ideas about concepts such as gender, culture, religion and violence might influence such constructions through different shapes of media bias. The main argument presented in the thesis is that media has an important role in shaping opinion among the public and therefore has a responsibility to be aware of the message that is communicated as well as of how that message might be received.

In order to analyze the Swedish news paper media a discourse analysis and an analysis of headlines has been conducted on the three largest daily newspapers with in Sweden, all with different regional and ideological profiles. The main goal with analyzing headlines was to understand when and why the “honor” aspect of a crime was emphasized in news articles. The main goal for the content analysis was to make visible patterns of framing in the news reporting on cases of “honor killings”. One of the findings of the thesis was that xenophobic and Eurocentric language is existing but rare. However the results showed a tendency in the Swedish newspaper media to sensationalize the “honor crime”. Such search for sensation might add negative attention to already vulnerable minority groups in the Swedish society.

Keywords: Newspaper media, ”Honor killing”, Women’s rights, Framing.

Özet

Julia Edlund

Türkçe Çalışmaları M.A. Tez Çalışması

Süpervizör: Prof.Halil Berktaş

Eylül 2013

Bu tezin amacı İsveç medyasının İsveç toplumu içindeki etnik ve/veya dini azınlıklar arasında gerçekleşen ve "Töre Cinayeti" olarak adlandırılan cinayetler hakkında yaptığı haberlerin yapısını ve nasıl oluşturulduğunu analiz etmektir. Çalışmanın odak noktası cinsiyet, kültür, din ve şiddet gibi kavramlar hakkındaki düşüncelerin, medyanın değişen önyargıları ile bu tip yapıları nasıl etkileyebileceğini incelemektir. Bu çalışmada öne sürülen en önemli argüman ise medyanın kamuoyu oluşturmada önemli bir role sahip olduğu ve bu nedenle kamuoyuna vereceği mesajlar ve bu mesajların insanlar tarafından nasıl değerlendirileceği konusunda sorumluluk sahibi olması gerektiğidir.

İsveç yazılı basını değerlendirilirken hepsi birbirinde farklı bölgelerden ve ideolojik profillerden seçilmiş üç adet günlük gazetenin hem haber içerikleri hem de kullandıkları manşet ve haber başlıkları analiz edilmiştir. Manşet ve haber başlıklarının incelenmesinin temel amacı işlenmiş olan bir suçun ne zaman ve neden "namus" yönü ile vurgulandığını anlayabilmektir. İçerik analizinin temel amacı ise, medyada "namus cinayetleri" çerçevesinde verilen haberlerin başlıca özelliklerinin görünür kılınmasıdır. Tez çalışması sonucunda elde edilen en önemli bulgulardan biri, Avrupa Merkezli ve Yabancı Düşmanlığı içeren bir dilin var olduğu fakat bu dilin çok nadir kullanıldığıdır. Bununla beraber sonuçlar gösteriyor ki İsveç yazılı medyasında "Töre Cinayetleri"ni sansasyonel şekilde sunma konusunda bir eğilim mevcuttur. Bu tarz bir eğilim hali hazırda hassas olan İsveç'teki azınlık grupların negatif tepkisine neden olabilir. Anahtar Kelimeler: Yazılı medya, Töre Cinayetleri, Kadın Hakları, Önyargı

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Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

This MA thesis intends to elucidate the relations between gender, ethnicity, religion, “culture”, and violence in the Swedish news paper media. Further it intends to shed light on how these concepts become intertwined within the concept of the “honor killing” through two methods of media analysis. I want to identify possible ambiguities between norms and notions connected to these concepts by applying different theories of communication to the case of Sweden and Swedish media.

My main question is to what extent media framing is present in the Swedish Medias construction of news about “honor killings” as well as what shapes such framing might take. I explore previous scholarly work conducted on concepts stated above and link such work to the recent debates on media and honor in Sweden in order to come to a conclusion by analyzing the current media situation. What does the debate on “honor killings” look like today and how is it constructed in the media?

The notion of “honor crimes” have been widely debated in Sweden since the case of Fadime Sahindal in 1999, a young woman active in fighting for women’s rights who was killed by her father in Uppsala. Like no other, the debate on “honor crimes” made visible the flaws in the way the government and institutions were dealing with issues such as multiculturalism, racism as well as violence towards women. This debate was, and still is, to a large extent taking place in the Swedish news paper media.

Violence against women is a big problem in the Swedish society. Problems with racism and Islamophobia exist as well. Although these two forms of discrimination are

separate a clash appears at times in the strive to prevent these problems. The “honor killings” does at times create such a dilemma where protection of minority rights brings about discrimination towards women. This situation is not original for Sweden, but due to factors which will be discussed further in the thesis, I argue that Sweden constitutes a platform for this dilemma to become a serious problem if a balance cannot be found and media can have an important role in supporting and maintaining such a balance. I argue that the media plays a crucial part in the shaping of public opinion and in influencing how the concept of “honor killings” is approached and discussed among the public. By selecting what events to publish, actors creating media construct an image of the “honor crimes”. The result of such a selection is what I will analyze in this thesis.

As for the empirical importance, my thesis can add to the research within the field on women’s and minorities rights in general and the debate on “honor” in the media in particular. There are plenty of studies looking into similar discourses as what is presented in this thesis but very few studies are conducted on the concept of honor in the media in Scandinavia.

Many young individuals still live under threat and are victims of violence in Sweden as well as in other parts of the world. Simultaneously the society is becoming more globalized, information reach more people much faster and Xenophobia and Islamophobia is gaining ground in Europe. Therefore I am of the opinion that we have to keep making research on these topics in order to fight discrimination towards women as well as ethnic or religious minorities. It is important to learn how such societal movements are visualized in media and to keep a discussion going of how it might affect readers

All conclusions, arguments and generalizations I present will only be considering the process of news making, not the legal process following a murder. It is not the concept and nature of the “honor crime” or the way concept is approached by other actors in the society I study, but rather exclusively the coverage of “honor crimes” in the media.

This introduction includes a presentation of my material and method as well as a presentation of the murder cases which have most frequently appeared in the media during my period of research.

Chapter two consists of a literature review of previous scholarly work on “crimes committed in the name of honor”. First I will present the three main perspectives for research on “honor crimes” which are: The cultural perspective, the gender perspective and the intersectional perspective. Following is a presentation of how different scholars define the “honor crime”. In the next part I present a background on scholarly work on crimes committed in the name of honor in Sweden. There have been several startling murder cases in Sweden which have stirred great debate in the Swedish media as well as in the academic world. The next part is on multiculturalism and the tendency in Sweden as well as in other countries to be lenient towards perpetrators of “crimes committed in the name of honor” in order to avoid discriminating against minorities. In this part I also emphasize the difference between leniency in court and neutrality in media. In the last part of chapter two I present scholarly work on Eurocentrism, colonial discourse and the tendency to look for an “other” to blame for problems in ones society.

Chapter three consists of a literature review on media bias, mainly in relation with concepts such as migration, religion, ethnicity and “honor crimes”. I begin by gathering different scholars’ interpretation of media bias in general and framing of news in particular. Framing of news is the form of media bias that will receive the highest degree of attention in this thesis since it is useful to understand news topics surrounding themes like “honor crimes”. Following is a passage on media effects. “Media effects” is a complex topic but I have limited my literature review to cover academic work on media effects in relation to the themes of this thesis. Finally a passage on honor in the media will present previous studies and results from research conducted on “crimes committed in the name of honor” in international media and discussions about such work.

In chapter four I present the results of my research starting with the headline analysis. It is possible to see in this chapter how the Swedish media tend to attach importance to murders where an “honor motive” can be claimed. Comparing with other headlines it is also possible to argue that the newspapers consider “honor crimes” to be sensational enough to gain extra readers. Following is the results from the discourse analysis. This part will be presented through citations organized within categories where a short explanation of results will follow. Among other things it can be seen that the Swedish media has similarities as well as differences with previous studies on international media. The debate about how to balance the risk of discriminating against

women and encourage xenophobia is prominent in the articles analyzed.

In the fifth chapter I will discuss the results in relation to the literary review and in the sixth chapter conclusion can be found followed by bibliography.

1.2 Material

Parts of the research conducted for this thesis was made during the spring of 2012 for a research paper at Sabanci University with the name “Framing the honor killing”.

For my newspaper analysis I have chosen the three largest newspapers in Sweden. Dagens Nyheter (DN) is the largest Swedish daily newspaper which had a circulation of approximately 285 700 in 2011. Aftonbladet, the largest Swedish evening-newspaper had a circulation of approximately 271 700 in 2011. Göteborgs-posten, the second largest daily news paper in Sweden had a circulation of approximately 215 600 in 2011.¹

Dagens Nyheter is an independent liberal daily morning newspaper based in Stockholm. Göteborgs-posten is a liberal daily morning newspaper based in Gothenburg. Aftonbladet is an openly Social democrat daily evening newspaper. It is based in Stockholm but is also printed in regional editions.²

These three papers provide the highest possibility for me to, within the time- and space restrains of this thesis, generalize the results and draw conclusions. These three papers do not only cover the largest amount of readers but also readers from different groups within the Swedish society. They provide a regional and an ideological variety as well as a diversity of journalistic styles.

My timeframe of analysis has been from January 1st, 2011 until June 1st 2013 for the study of headlines and from January first, 2010 until June first 2013 for the discourse analysis.

I have looked at the online version of the newspapers where I have searched for news containing the word “murder” (mord) for the headline analysis and the term ”honor killing” (hedersmord) for the content analysis. I searched for the word “honor killing” since the goal of this paper is to examine how the concept of “honor killings”

1 TU 2012, 5

2 Nationalencyklopedin

is being framed. I do however want to stress the complex nature of the phrase. It is a very generalizing word which can refer to many things and can evoke a wide variety of emotions. The complexity of the term will hopefully be made clear throughout this thesis.

1.3 Method

My research will be conducted in two parts. The first one is of a quantitative nature where I go through all article-headlines referring in any way to the word “murder” during the time span stated in the passage describing material, and count how many of those articles mention the motive, or reason for the crime within the headline. Further I will continue with counting how many of those are mentioning the word “honor”. This I will do in order to learn if there is an “over use” in the media of the concept “honor crime” and “honor killing” for effect-seeking purposes.

In the second part I will analyze the text with a method inspired by critical discourse analysis. That implies that I presuppose that media construct events rather than reflect them.³ My analysis in this second part of my study is not to be restricted by any dominant theme. I am rather looking to see in what way the crimes are described and explained, how are the perpetrators and victims portrayed and what actors and patterns are considered important? I will keep in mind theories and arguments by scholars presented in the following chapters but also have an open mind for other patterns. Many studies have been conducted on international media and its perception of “honor related crimes” but mostly on American, British as well as German cases. I want to find out if similar conclusions can be drawn for Swedish media, or if Swedish perceptions of “honor killings” are different.

Arguments supporting my approach and choice of method can be found in the literature reviews.

³ Reimers 2007, 240

1.4 Case Studies

As a background and in order to give a context to citations further into the thesis I will provide a short summary of the cases which were covered most frequently in the Swedish media during the period of my study.

The case of Maria

Maria was 19 years old when she was stabbed to death in her apartment in April 2012. During a couple of years she and her younger brother stayed with their father in Iraq. During that time Maria was raped and forced to marry an older man. She managed to escape and returned to her mother in Sweden. Reportedly she had been feeling scared and threatened but whether or not those threats came from relatives and her former husband in Iraq or/and from her brother and mother in Sweden is not clear for the public. Her brother was sentenced to 8 years in prison for the murder, a sentence which was later decreased to 4 years in youth care due to his young age.

The case of Abbas Rezai

Abbas Rezai was murdered in November 2005 by the family of his girlfriend. The brother of the girl confessed to the murder and was found guilty. Suspicion was also directed towards the girl's parents but their involvement could not be proven. In 2011 a new trial was held which is the reason the case was brought back into the spotlight. A new trial was held because the brother, who finished his time in custody and was to be deported from Sweden, changed his story and accused his parents of the murder. In the end the parents were convicted to prison and deportation. The case was unusual in several ways. It challenged the gender roles of the "honor crime" discourse since it was an "honor killing" with a male victim and the mother of the girlfriend had an active role in the murder. Another aspect which attracted attention was the brutal nature of the murder.

The case of Manidja

When Manidja was at the age of 20 she was forced to get married during a trip to Pakistan. Her new husband then returned with her to Sweden. The husband accused

Manidja of not being a virgin when they got married as well as for having an affair. He repeatedly raped and battered her and in August 2012 Manjida tried to leave. The husband found her in her mother's apartment where he murdered her. Manjidas sister witnessed the murder and tried to call for help. The husband was sentenced to lifetime in prison and deportation.

The case of Jian

Jian was murdered by her adoptive father in 2010. He stabbed her to death in the stairwell of her house. The father himself reported that the reason for murdering Jian was based on honor. Jian had been married but went through with a divorce after she was accused of having an affair. Her ex-husband and her brothers dissociated themselves from the murder. The fact that the brothers condemn the murder has caused large interest in the media since it does not correspond with the common view of what an honor crime "should" look like.

The case of Sara Mohammed Ali

Sara was born in the Kurdish region of Iraq but escaped to Sweden in 2008 after her father would not let her marry the man of her choice. After three years in Sweden she was convinced by her family to visit but upon her arrival her phone was confiscated and in September 2011 she was killed. The investigation of Sara's murder has been canceled since cooperation with Iraqi police is not leading anywhere.

The cases of Pela and Fadime

Pela Atroshi, 19, was murdered by her relatives when visiting them in Iraq in 1999. Her sister witnessed the murder and testified in the Swedish court. Her two uncles were sentenced to lifetime in prison and her father, who confessed to the murder, is still in Iraq.

Fadime Sahindal, 27, was killed in 2002 by her father. He was sentenced to lifetime in prison. The case of Fadime received plenty of attention in the media and raised awareness about the threat which many young women were living under. Fadime had gone public and told her story before the murder.

These two cases have inspired the foundation of the association "Never forget Pela and Fadime". The members of the association are working with spreading a greater knowledge about "honor crimes".

Chapter 2

The “Honor Crime”

2.1 Research perspectives on crimes committed in the name of honor

Looking at recent academic history and the study of “honor killings”, there are three main approaches, or perspectives that try to explain and understand the concept. Research conducted on the topic can often be traced to one of the following perspectives which all address the “honor crime” from different points of view. These three perspectives correlate with the debates in Swedish media and can provide support for a deeper understanding of those debates.

2.1.1 The cultural perspective

This perspective has, during the past years, commonly been used by anthropologists and ethnologists in order to analyze and understand the concept of “honor” in general, as well as “honor” in relation to violence. A focus in the cultural perspective is to look at “honor crimes” not as being region- or religion specific, or as being connected to a certain area of the world. From a cultural perspective “honor killings” should rather be understood as a behavior that arises in specific cultural environments, environments which can be created within groups of people belonging

to all religions.⁴ What characterizes the cultural perspective is that “honor related crimes” are seen as a culture specific expression which can be found in many different contexts. What can be considered problematic with the cultural perspective is that by accepting that “honor crimes” derive from cultural milieus one simultaneously excludes the possibility of analyzing the possible effect that the social context in which a family finds themselves, for example as a minority group within a society. Attention is fully focused only on the relation between family members, not on the family’s relation to the society.⁵ The negative effect that this perspective can have is that blaming honor crimes solely on culture, might contribute to the stigmatization of specific minority groups in a society and especially vulnerable individuals within a minority group.

2.1.2 The gender perspective

In opposite to the cultural perspective, the gender perspective looks at the crimes as part of global patriarchal tendencies of violence towards women, where the power of men is centered on the female sexuality. According to this perspective “honor related violence”, just like other forms of violence towards women cannot be understood by analyzing “cultural behaviors” but rather by seeing cultures as part of a historical, social institution. The scholars supporting this perspective are critical of the way that the cultural perspective often describes “honor crimes” as an “exotic” crime which is considered worse than other violence against women. When a crime is committed by someone from a certain minority group, that act of violence is often presupposed to be caused by culture while similar crimes among the majority groups are not. The gender perspective rather analyzes “honor crimes” by looking at the similarities between honor related violence and other shapes of violence towards women.⁶ It is often argued by scholars supporting this perspective that honor and shame are central in crimes against women all over the world.⁷

In Sweden, (as well as in other countries) some advocates of the gender perspective have argued that the term “honor crime” should not be used at all because

4 NCK, 2010, 20-21

5 NCK, 2010, 23

6 NCK, 2010, 25-26

7 Mayell, 2002, 1

the use might further stigmatize immigrant groups. This objective however has received critique from within those immigrant groups where young women have argued that treating all kinds of violence against women as the same might increase stigmatization of immigrant groups, and at the same time, decreases the support for the girls (and sometimes boys) who are actually victims of this specific form of violence.

2.1.3 The intersectional perspective

In the intersectional perspective scholars are trying to reconstruct the understanding of what the word “honor” means. This is not a word as other words with a concrete meaning. The concept of honor can mean different things to different individuals. It does not correlate with culture or gender exclusively but can also include other concepts such as for example class, status, ethnic discrimination, economy, and post colonial power relations. This creates an impossibility to understand “honor crimes” only from the perspective of culture.⁸ If arguing that “honor crimes” are caused by culture specific norms, or only by tradition, the consensus would be that it can be stopped by modernization and enlightenment. Such arguments deny the social and political dynamics that allows this kind of violence to persist. That is why the intersectional perspective wants to look beyond culture.

Advocates of this perspective neither find the gender perspective satisfying in explaining the origin of “honor related violence”. Gender, as well as honor, is not a concrete concept but have different meanings in different contexts. The category of gender is closely connected to other categories. Violence against women therefore needs to be explained by taking into account a variety of different aspects, where culture and gender are crucial but other variables such as politics, racism and economy, are considered as well.

8 NCK, 2010, 29-30

2.2 Definitions of the concept “honor crime”

Until not very long ago the United Nations (UN) were referring to “crimes of honor” and “honor killings” as crimes belonging within the framework of violations of the human rights. In 1999 there was a change and “honor crimes” started to be defined within the framework of violence against women. Following is the definition provided in the UN report:

Honour is defined in terms of women’s assigned sexual and familial roles dictated by traditional family ideology. Thus adultery, premarital relationships (which may or may not include sexual relations), rape, falling in love with an “inappropriate” person may constitute violations of family honour.⁹

One of the individuals struggling to put “honor crimes” on the agenda was the former UN rapporteur on violence against women, Radhika Coomaraswamy. She was active in the late 1990s with introducing the concepts of “honor killing” and “forced marriage” as important issues to discuss within the discourse of support for women’s rights. Before her initiative “honor related violence” had widely been considered to be private, cultural practices that international organizations should tolerate. This kind of tolerance towards cultural differences does however tend to marginalize or ignore women’s rights.¹⁰

Aisha Gill argues that the aspects of honor related crimes, differentiating them from other forms of domestic violence, are among other things that it occurs within collective family structures, communities and societies, and that it includes a pre meditated act with the goal of restoring the societal structure where honor is the value system, norm or tradition.¹¹

Although numerous scholars provide their definition of the concept, the “honor killing” is very complex and charged with many meaning and emotions. One cannot be

⁹ Welchman & Hossain 2005, 5

¹⁰ Welchman & Hossain 2005, 5

¹¹ Gill, 2011, 221

sure of what honor means since the concept means different things to different individuals. The feeling of “honor” is highly individual. That is why Welchman and Hossain calls for caution when using the phrase. They argue that:

The definition of “crimes of honour” is by no means straightforward, and the imprecision and “exotification” (in particular in the West) of its use are among the reasons for caution in use of the phrase¹²

Agreeing with the call for caution when discussing “honor related crimes” is Aisha Gill. According to her there is no definition of “honor crimes” which can represent both an insider and an outsider perspective of the concept. This however does not mean that there is no such thing as “honor crimes”. She is choosing to define the problem in a different way, by removing focus from certain cultures. She states that there are acts of crime committed towards women which should never be accepted in any culture. Some of these acts are committed on the basis of “honor structures”, and others are not. The actions that are considered to stain female honor can vary a lot. The codes of honor are decided by the social groups to which the women “belong”, with or against her will. When breaking these codes of honor there may, or may not be a punishment waiting her. This punishment can entail that the girl is not allowed to see her friends; that she is forbidden to go to school; that she becomes isolated; that she gets beaten, or in the worst case that she gets killed.¹³

Razack as well provides an argument explaining why it is important to be cautious with what definition one uses to describe the concept of “honor crimes”. She argues that the estimation and analysis of “honor crimes” easily gets infused with the moral panic over uncivilized Muslims. When constructing the crimes as “honor killings” these murders are not understood as illustrations of violence against women, like other instances of such, a violence that minority as well as majority cultures often fail to prevent and condemn. According to the author what defines “honor crimes”, and distinguishes them from other similar crimes in the West, is actually the origins of the crime. Presumably, then, when a man kills his wife because he suspects her of infidelity and of bringing shame upon him, this crime cannot be called an honor killing because the man acts as an individual and his actions are unconnected to his family,

¹² Welchman & Hossain, 2005, 4

¹³ Gill, 2006, 2

community and culture. This distinction however ignores the fact that many other crimes of violence in *majority* cultures are culturally approved by the community as well. This distinction does on the other hand reify that "they" are stuck in pre-modernity while "we" have progressed as fully rational subjects with the capacity to choose moral actions, even if those actions are bad ones.¹⁴

2.3 "Honor killings" in Sweden

The concept of "honor based violence" reached the political agenda of the West in the late 1990s through the work of the UN. Around the same time two murders of young women in Sweden started the debate on what the media would describe as "honor killings".

In 2002 Fadime Sahindal was murdered by her father in Uppsala, Sweden. This murder has gained great attention all over the world and opened up for the discussion in Sweden of a "new" type of violence against women which would get the name "honor killings". The murder gave rise to strong reactions from the media and from a government which until then had had been silent on the issue.

This was not the first time Sweden heard about "crimes committed in the name of honor" but there was something about the case of Fadime which triggered a different reaction. Perhaps it was the fact that she for quite some time had been speaking publicly about how her family was threatening her, and about the lack of support she received from the society surrounding her. She tried to open the eyes of the government as well as the public to the conditions of what she argued was an "honor culture". Only days before her death she spoke in the parliament about the pressure that she, and other young people in similar situations, were living under.

Since the death of Fadime the "honor crime" is a frequently recurring topic in Swedish news. Many different voices take part in the debate on "honor crimes" and how the concept should be approached. One strong voice in the Swedish media has been the one denying that honor crimes are different from other forms of violence

¹⁴ Razack 2004, 152-153

against women. This group argued that it would be racist to refer to “honor killings” as originating from a specific culture. Then there is the group from the extreme right who with xenophobic insinuations did what they could in order to create separations between the Muslim immigrants and what they believe are the “true Swedes”. Political parties in Sweden have in fact used “honor killings as a part of their race/ethnic card in order to increase votes.¹⁵ A third opinion was voiced by young females who said that they also come from families where the concept of honor is very powerful. They argued that it is wrong to pretend that “honor killings” can be dealt with in the same way as other forms of violence against women. They called for education and an increased knowledge among the police and in the courts about the patterns of honor crimes. Now ten years later the debates in Swedish media have not defused, and “the honor killing” is still a topic that provokes opinion and discussion.

In 2007, a study of Swedish newspaper coverage on the case of Fadime Sahindal was published by Eva Reimers. Her study showed that at the time of the murder the common understanding was that immigrant cultures were based upon patriarchal values while the Swedish culture embraced equality. In practice this resulted in the idea that violence against women where the perpetrator was an immigrant was believed to be sanctioned by cultural and/or religious heritage. If the perpetrator was “Swedish” on the other hand, it was assumed that the blame was on the man and his individual psychological state.¹⁶ During the years following there has been intense debate on topics such as feminism, equality and racism and perhaps today it has been made clear that Sweden is not a country free from inequality and patriarchal structures. It remains to be seen whether or not the same debate has reached the media reporting on “honor crimes.”

2.4 Multiculturalism and the fear of racism

In the late 1960s, as a response to the failure of assimilation of immigrants in northern Europe, multiculturalism emerged as a policy that recognized the diversity of different groups in a society. It might be described as the right to be different.

¹⁵ Hellgren & Hobson 2008, 387

¹⁶ Reimers 2007, 240

Generally multiculturalism was not adopted as an official policy, but rather influenced the development of new policies taking into account ethno-cultural diversification. At times these policies enabled interpretations of anti-discrimination laws which allowed leniency towards members of minority groups when they broke otherwise universal laws. The problems of multiculturalism is that if/when the cultural values of the minority communities are at odds with concepts of human rights, respecting those cultural values actually leads to discriminating members of that minority community since they are not given the same human rights as other citizens.¹⁷

Though the word “multicultural” has a positive connotation in many contexts, in the context of political policy it is today criticized and often referred to as a failure of integration. However, in Sweden similar structures are still present. In her article “The killing seemed to be necessary” Åsa Eldén presents a court case where the presence of multicultural structures is very clear. A man killed his daughter. Circumstances of the crime justified the verdict of murder, but still the court found the man guilty of manslaughter, not murder. The man’s Arab cultural affiliation was considered by the court and became an extenuating circumstance.¹⁸ This is problematized by the author on several levels but clearly it is a case where traces of multiculturalism can be found and the victim is not granted the same rights as other citizens.

Even though multiculturalism is no longer practiced I would still argue that there are still similar structures present in the discourse and debate on honor crimes in Swedish media today. There is a clash in Sweden between the willingness to deal with crimes such as violence against women on the one hand, and the fear, at times perhaps exaggerated and at times justified, of adding to the already existing discrimination of minority groups within the Swedish society on the other hand. This struggle of balancing the risk of supporting racist ideas and protecting victims of violence is not a problem reserved for Sweden only. In an article by Meeto and Mirza on gender, violence and multiculturalism the dilemma is described as follows:

In vulnerable communities there are tensions between protecting Muslim men from racism of state agencies and negative media representation on the one hand, and the need to raise the issue of gender violence and protect women’s rights in these

¹⁷ Dustin & Phillips 2008, 406

¹⁸ Elden 1998, 89

communities on the other. [...] there is a fear amongst some that putting honour crimes on the public agenda might cause a dangerous backlash in the immigration debate and heighten xenophobic sentiments against asylum seekers.”¹⁹

2.5 Eurocentrism, colonial discourse and the search for an “other”

I would like to start this passage with a quote by Edward Said.

Colonial discourse is of particularly great significance because of its depiction of “subject” and “object”. The subject of colonial discourse, which is based on Western values, is “we”, which is presented as being superior to members of Eastern cultures, and the object is “you” or “the other” which is mainly passive and negative, as determined by Western values. Such Orientalism is a style of thought based on an epistemological and ontological separation of “East” and “West”. It aims to keep the East under the control of the West for economical and cultural reasons.²⁰

In her article “Imperiled Muslim women, dangerous Muslim men and civilized Europeans: Legal and social responses to forced marriages” Sherene H. Razack provides a quite pessimistic view of the relations between minority and majority groups in Western societies. She is asking the question: ”how can we acknowledge and confront patriarchal violence within Muslim migrant communities without descending into cultural deficit explanations [...]?”

She argues that there is a policing of Muslim communities which is organized under the logic that there is an irreconcilable culture clash between the West and Islam. Muslims are considered to be tribal and stuck in a pre-modern society possessing neither a commitment to human rights, women’s rights, or democracy. It is the obligation of the West to defend itself from these values and to assist Muslims into modernity, by force if necessary. The body of the Muslim woman, a body fixed in

¹⁹ Meetoo & Mirza 2011, 45

²⁰ Said, E in Devran, 100-101

Western imaginary as confined, mutilated, and sometimes murdered in the name of culture, serves to reinforce the threat that the Muslim man is said to pose to the West.²¹

Further Razack is discussing the idea of *Neo-colonialism*. In societies there are only hosts (the majority group) and guests (the minority). The West is no longer invading Southern/Eastern countries and forcing them to adopt Western values, but still similar rules apply within the “Western” countries. The guest – the immigrant, is always going to stay non-Western and should show gratitude and praise the host country and its culture. The host on the other hand makes up the rules which the guest must follow gratefully. The hosts can instruct and determine the conditions of daily life and the guests should respect this.²²

The level of Neo-colonialism described here could probably not be directly applied to Sweden today but the theory can absolutely be useful when trying to understand certain behaviors and patterns in the society, not the least in the media.

The colonial discourse, or perhaps to a higher degree the relationship between an “us” and a “them” is frequently brought up by scholars conducting research on the concept of “honor”. One of those scholars is Meltem Ahiska who argues that “the East” is often studied in contrast to “the West”. This binary creates a concept of insiders and outsiders where some countries, such as Turkey, are struggling to enter the group of insiders but rather often get left behind. According to her theory Turkey has not reached the level of “modernity” necessary to be a part of the West. Even when non-Western countries start the process of modernization they still can’t get rid of the label of belatedness.²³

Bringing forth similar arguments are Steyter and Wills:

“As critical race scholars have noted, the rhetorical of the West’s response to the Oriental Other draws upon long-standing binaries by which the West defines the East as alien to its norm; the barbarian East is seen, through its essential nature as fundamentally opposed to the civilized West, locking the two in a relationship so initially hostile that it precludes any solution other than a bifurcated crusade or cleans model in which difference is eliminated either through conversion or

²¹ Razack, 2004, 129-130

²² Razack, 2004, 145

²³ Ahiska, 2003, 353-354

destruction”.²⁴

Again this is an argument which might seem extreme and drawing on historical perceptions of East and West. But when looking at international media and its descriptions of “honor crimes” it is clear that we need to consider these relations in order to understand and explain the language used in such.

In his book *Understanding Global News* Jaap van Ginneken tries to explain this tendency to separate the world to an “us” versus “them”, and in this case the “East” versus “West” binary which is brought up by many scholars. He writes that psychologists for a long time suspected that the mind to a high degree functions by efficiency and therefore tends to encode the world through polarities. The mind also tends to connect the polarities in sequential or hierarchical strings which can easily become connected to valuations such as good, or bad. A key categorization is “us versus them”.²⁵ He argues that a person’s identity is to a large extent a product of the combination of such categorizations. Who we are is to a great extent a reflection of who we are not. He argues that Eurocentrism is still a part of our everyday life, partly through the media. There is a constant sense of superiority of European culture and people.²⁶ When learning about other customs in other parts of the world we often create an opinion of these customs by comparing it to our own patterns. In our minds there is a constant process of normalization and alienation.²⁷

This is not a psychology paper and one might question the simplicity in the way Ginneken explains the human mind. However to some degree the arguments are useful in the context of this thesis. Especially when considering the enormous amount of information that reaches us every day. Even if we don’t necessarily create the polarizations ourselves it might be easy for us to accept such polarizations when they are offered to us by media. It is a comfortable way to organize the inflow of information. And the “us versus them” binary is not unusual when explaining tendencies among groups; on the contrary many scholars argue that we tend to define ourselves by defining the other.

Ginneken further argues that contrary to the notions of South and North, the

²⁴ Steuter & Wills, 2009, 2

²⁵ Ginneken, 1998, 197

²⁶ Ginneken, 1998, 213

²⁷ Ginneken, 1998, 16

notions of East and West are “floating categories”, they have no fixed natural reference point and therefore they become arbitrary as well as more sensitive to ideological overlays and imagination. From a Eurocentric viewpoint the East is often affiliated with connotations such as conservative, old, overpopulated, and despotic while the West is often mentioned in terms such as progressive, democratic, open minded and enlightened.²⁸ It is not rare that Eurocentric tendencies such as these are still found in international media, an argument which is also supported by the work of Dicle Koğacioğlu.

In her article “The tradition effect: framing honor crimes in Turkey” it is written that the case of Fadime Sahindal has brought the issue of “honor killings” to international attention”. Koğacioğlu seriously criticizes the tendency to blame “honor crimes” on traditional rules and as an alternative explanation she refers to several institutions which according to her are guilty in making it easier for this kind of violence to endure in Turkey.

One of the institutions Koğacioğlu brings up is the international media. She claims that the international media is taking part in shaping a problematic definition of “honor crimes”. She argues that international media often is portraying “honor crimes” as something backwards and medieval, and that they are portraying Turkey as uncivilized and “behind”. It is very problematic that the international media takes part in categorizing honor crimes within the discourse of the doubtful “East versus West” and “tradition versus modernity” binaries instead of referring to the crimes as a part of the global problem of violence against women.²⁹

The examples from news articles presented by Koğacioğlu are clearly expressing an “we and them” binary where “we” (the West) need to protect ourselves from “them”, (the Muslims). By using this binary the message is conveyed to Western societies that they can disconnect themselves from the problem of honor crimes since it is not actually a part of “their” society but something brought by the immigrants.³⁰

A case study which exemplifies this discussion is an article about news reports on “honor killings” in Germany and the Netherlands by Anna Korteweg and Gökçe Yurdakul. They have investigated to what degree boundaries are being placed between

²⁸ Ginniken 1998, 8-9

²⁹ Koğacioğlu, 2004, 138-139

³⁰ Koğacioğlu, 2004, 138-139

immigrants and the majority society in the two countries, to what degree the “us versus them” binary is stressed in their news media. The authors have used a method where they analyze if the articles are containing ”bright” or ”blurred” boundaries between different groups in the society. If the articles are written with bright boundaries it implies that there is a sharp distinction between insiders and outsiders. Blurred boundaries on the other hand imply tolerance and unspecified rules for which, and how many, groups an individual can belong to.³¹

In her article “Representations of an Honour Killing” Ewa Reimers questions why the case of Fadime Sahindal gained so much attention in the media, when a large amount of cases of women killed by a person close to them does not even make it into the paper. Her conclusion was that in media accounts Fadime was turned into a martyr for the Swedish way of living, she was made into a victim of her family’s culture. The media fell right into the trap and used a problematic, sometimes racist discourse that is so often occurring in the world media.³²

³¹ Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009, 219

³² Reimers 2007, 252

Chapter 3

The Media Bias

When analyzing news it is important to consider a number of questions. To what extent is it possible to report the reality of an event? Is there even really one reality? Is it possible to be neutral? How are journalists, as well as the rest of us, affected by our history and or society? Do we frame our knowledge based on existing presumptions about the state of things?

I would argue that it is pointless to discuss the existence of neutral or unbiased media. What is important however is to understand how the media deals with the news-flow. By providing research on such topics the public can be given a chance to be more critical of what they read and in that way have better use for the media.

There is no clear way to measure the effect of media on the individuals reading newspapers or watching news broadcasts. However most scholars agree that a regular intake of news based information does have an effect to the opinions of the public. I am a firm believer in the power of the media and the role media has in constructing news and shaping the image of specific events or phenomena.

3.1 Framing of the news

In his book *The Sociology of News* Michael Schudson describes how factors such as history, social structures, media effect and media bias can affect the way journalists portray specific events.

Schudson argue that no newspaper can be positively neutral. According to him there is no neutral way to portray news. There is always someone “behind” the news making and there is always an active choice behind what should be published and how it should be published.³³ Schudson is employs the term framing of news when describing media bias. Framing is a collective term for the unintentional strategies used by journalists and editors to choose and present news. Since publishing an article of every event happening in the world is not realistic a selection has to be made, this selection will be the frame within which the news are chosen. Framing is therefore a term less strict and deliberate than bias.³⁴

Even within the limits of framing however it is possible be more or less conscious of one’s own framing process. Political and economical factors are obvious reasons that might influence the framing of news, but social structures, news tradition and other external factors are aspects journalists/editors might not be aware of.³⁵

Fridkin Kahn and Kennedy have done research on more technical aspects of framing of news. Even though their research mainly covers political news they still provide arguments relevant for the topic of this thesis. They argue that front page placement and headlines are crucial for selling newspapers or making people read news. Research shows that front page news as well as articles with eye-catching headlines are more likely to be read than other articles.³⁶ Further more they argue that it is rare for journalists to voice their own opinion about certain events. Due to the norms of professional news writing they rather use sources and citations in order to

³³ Schudson 2003, 33

³⁴ Schudson 2003, 35

³⁵ Schudson 2003, 37

³⁶ Fridkin Kahn & Kennedy 2002, 383

provide an opinion.³⁷

In the process of making their choices Ginniken argues that there is a notion among many journalists and other groups of professionals that they are “free” from influence and able to say and write what they want. However he, just Schudson, is of the opinion that there actually are a great number of psychological and social mechanisms which affect their actions. Everyone in the world bring with them a certain world view, which affect how they view events. This world view will help them make certain choices about which news should be emphasized and which should be ignored.³⁸

There are many studies conducted on the framing of news as well as on the effects these framings actually have on people’s thoughts and opinions. Baldwin Van Gorps explains the concept as follows in his article on the constructionist approach to framing: ”The frame manifests itself in media content through various framing devices, such as word choice, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments, and visual images”³⁹.

Further on in the article Van Gorp argues that the media not rarely is affected by so called ”frame packages” distinguished mainly by the promotion of a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.⁴⁰

H. Denis Wu adds to the debate by arguing that: “The picture of the world presented in the news of every country’s media is inevitably distorted in the sense that people, countries and events are often reported unevenly.”⁴¹

Wu is using the term “gatekeeping” to explain what lies behind this uneven reporting and these hidden structures that shape media coverage. The “gatekeepers” are those involved in news gathering and distribution and that provide the readers with news that reflect a collective judgment of what is newsworthy and what is not. Wu argues that the gatekeepers among other things tend to choose events which reflect

³⁷ Kahn & Kennedy 2002, 384

³⁸ Ginneken, 1998, 15

³⁹ Gamson & Lasch 1983 as cited by Van Gorp, 2007, 64

⁴⁰ Entman 1993 as cited by Van gorp, 2007, 65

⁴¹ Wo 2000, 110

unexpectedness, conflict and discrepancy.

Providing a similar argument about which topics are more often chosen for publishing is Leo Bogart in his article “The pursuit of sensation”, where he argues that the media is permeated by a sensationalism that seemingly becomes more and more noticeable. There is an attempt to capture larger and larger audiences and this has caused the media to press further against currently acceptable boundaries.⁴² By using the American case Bogart argues that violence and sex are important themes for success in building an audience. Issues such as drama, conflict in clash of personalities and values creates attention. There is a human appetite for sensation which highly influences the media.⁴³

In his chapter “How the media report race” Peter Braham is also brings up this aspect of journalism. He stresses that writing news is not only about providing facts to the people. Journalists also choose how the facts will be presented. He argues that there are specific frameworks which the readers find especially interesting. These frameworks or themes can vary in time and place and it can be profitable for the newspapers to use the themes which are considered to be extra interesting by the public. Braham is using the framework of race as an example – if the concept of race is considered to be extra newsworthy at the time being, the journalists are more likely to use the ”race angle” of an event.⁴⁴

In his article on the portrayal of Turkey in British news Yusuf Devran has similar arguments. He states that there is nothing neutral or rational about the media. He argues that the media rather function to reproduce already existing ideologies. The media is doing so by using specific styles of speech, arguments, ideologies, themes etc. Devran also argues that the Western media has a high degree of influence since it is considered “the truth” to so many people and it effects the public’s perception of the world.⁴⁵

⁴² Bogart, 1999, 279

⁴³ Bogart, 1999, 286

⁴⁴ Braham, 1982, 274

⁴⁵ Devran, 100-101

3.2 Media effects

To what extent do the media contribute to our image of the world? This is a question which is broadly discussed among scholars of communication studies. I, together with many scholars, am a firm believer in the power of the media and argue that it to some extent does affect our view of the world. To strengthen this argument I here provide a few scholars view of media effects, especially in relation to immigration, integration and minority groups.

Basic framing approach assumes that the effect of the media lies within the description of an issue or the label the issue receive in news coverage. The approach of agenda setting however looks on story selection as the determinant of public perceptions of the importance of the issue. Advocates of effects of agenda setting assume that media can make certain issues or aspects of issues more accessible for people and thereby influence how they form attitudes towards events. Framing on the other hand has an applicability effect. Framing rather provides a suggested connection between two or more concepts in a way that, after exposure, leads to the audience accepting that those concepts are in fact connected.⁴⁶

Media informs us and raises our awareness of events happening all over the world, but they also contribute to constructing our knowledge about the world by selecting information and emphasizing events in various ways. The media can also reinforce existing attitudes and opinions with regard to certain events and beliefs about rights and wrongs. This holds true with regard to one's own country as well as foreign countries, as it is also the media who informs us about immigration statistics, the cultural history of recent immigrant groups or processes of integration.⁴⁷

Even though there are different opinions about how big of an effect the media has on the opinions of the public, most scholars would agree that there is at least some degree of effect. UNESCO has declared that media has a crucial role in encouraging or combating racial prejudice and Harold Evans argues that the way media publishes

⁴⁶ Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007, 14

⁴⁷ Zentrum für Turkeistudien 1995, 4 in Gardner, Karakaşoğlu & Luchtenberg 2008, 122

news about ethnic groups can in fact affect ethnic tension.⁴⁸

It is important to take into account that the intended message of news is not always the same as the message that is received by the reader. News coverage might have a different effect than what was planned for. Ginneken argues that one has to make a distinction between the covert/implicit/intended aspects of the media message and the covert/implicit/unintended aspects. It is important as well to make a distinction between one's own interpretation of the message and the one of the receiver. It is not rare that these two does not coincide at all. This problem is especially often occurring when a news message travels from one culture to another or from one subculture to another.⁴⁹

3.3 Honor in the Media

“How can they do this to such a young girl? They must be barbaric!”

This kind of rhetoric can still be found in international media reporting on “honor related violence” today. The images provided underwrite a sense of superiority, and legitimize the practice of treating minorities as inferior. According to Aisha Gill we should ask ourselves why the media perpetuates negative stereotypes of minorities. She argues that by misrepresenting crimes against women from ethnic minorities, the media is in danger of misrepresenting entire cultures.⁵⁰

When reporting on events involving minorities, especially when reporting on “honor crimes”, the media easily fall back into old habits, using the binary of “East and West” or “them and us”. These binaries are a part of the history of the societies that today's journalists, the journalists reporting on “honor crimes” belong to.

Ginneken argues that the supposedly objective vocabulary considering “ethnic minorities” is actually often overlaid with different ideological twists and turns. He is pointing out that there is no politically correct label to be used since the effect of the label depends on the reader concerned. A seemingly objective label might cause

⁴⁸ Braham 1982, 282

⁴⁹ Ginneken 1998, 192-193

⁵⁰ Gill, 2006, 5-6

undesirable connotations and unintended effects. There is simply no neutral and non-complex way of writing about specific countries and peoples.⁵¹

Considering the case of the British press Meeto and Mirza also argue that “honor crimes” often get sensationalized and the coverage tends to encourage cultural stereotyping of “the other”.⁵² A problematic generalization exists in the way British news paper media describe the victims (mostly female) of “honor killings” which reminds us of a colonial jargon which should belong to the past. They argue that two dominant roles are assigned to the young women. One is the role of a romantic heroine, carrying through the struggle of becoming a part of “the West” against her cruel father or family. The other is the role of a victim, yielding to the backwards tradition of her family’s culture. Similar to colonial times, the female victim is made into a symbol of the struggle between East and West. They become stereotyped and racialized victims rather than active individuals.⁵³ The authors also discuss the role media plays in public perception of risk for women. They ask the questions of how perception of risk is constructed, selected for concern, and legitimated for public attention. They argue that the Muslim women’s risks are selected over others right now in the media. The positive side of increased attention given to “honor killings” is that it has opened up a discussion about human rights for minority group women; however it is also exacerbating the fear of “the other”.⁵⁴

In the debate on the effect of news reporting of “honor crimes” the opinions are quite diverse among scholars. Some argue that the portrayal of “honor crimes” in the media actually can have a very negative effect where they make the situation worse for victims of “honor crimes”. By using a language which sensationalize the murders and increase the fear of “the other” in the reporting they contribute to the image that these crimes are a cultural custom that has nothing to do with the “Western” society. This attitude disables the society from approaching the problem which can be solved and that is a part of our society.⁵⁵

On the other hand some scholars seem to have a very strong belief in the positive effect of news reporting on “honor crimes”. In her article on news portrayal of violence

⁵¹ Ginneken 1998, 13-14

⁵² Meeto & Mirza, 2011, 54

⁵³ Meeto & Mirza, 2011, 55

⁵⁴ Meeto & Mirza, 2011, 54

⁵⁵ Meeto & Mirza, 2011, 56

and women Elizabeth Carll even argues that the relatively recent development where news media has started to report on "honor crimes" might be helpful for the victims:

"[...] the media now publicizes these "honor killings" and this horrific practice has been raised in public forums and discussed in newspapers and radio. Ultimately this exposure will help change the role of women in family and community relationships."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Carll, 2003, 1606

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Headlines

In this chapter I will provide the results of my analysis of headlines from the three newspapers I have chosen for my study. From all articles relating to the word “murder” published during my chosen time span I have sorted out those referring to a motive or reason of the murder within the headline. I have additionally sorted out the headlines mentioning the word “honor”.

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, headlines are crucial parts of the construction of news and can affect their salability. The headline is the first thing the reader will see when opening up a paper or entering a news-website and it is the headline that will decide whether the news-consumer finds the article worth reading. My goal with analyzing headlines is to investigate if/how the headlines are framed. More specifically I will investigate whether “honor related crimes” are used as a fashionable, sensational, or effect-seeking theme in order to attract readers.

Paper	Articles marked “murder”	Articles with the reason in the headline	Headlines with “honor”
DN	3636	35	17
GP	3219	16	11
AB	2573	14	7

When looking at the results of this part in my research one can see that in Dagens Nyheter (DN) there were 3636 newspaper articles during the period of research that related to murder in any way. Out of those 35 had the motive/reason for the crime stated in the head line. Out of those 35, 17 had the word “honor” in the headline. In Göteborgs-Posten the equivalent numbers were 3219 articles where 16 stated the motive and the word “honor” was present in 11. In Aftonbladet there were 2573 articles, 14 stated the motive and in 7 one could find the word “honor”. Over all then it is clear that for the most part, motives and reasons for murders are not stated in the headline of the articles reporting on the case. When the motive is stated in the headline almost half of the times the motive/reason is considered to be related to honor.

Göteborgsposten:	
Headlines where the word “honor” is mentioned:	Headlines where other motives are provided
“With current policies, more honor killings are waiting” ⁵⁷	“One more arrested for robbery-murder” ⁵⁸
“Youth care for honor-killing sister” ⁵⁹	“Accentuated punishment for “mistake-murder” ⁶⁰
“New trial for honor killing” ⁶¹	“Entrepreneur killed at home in robbery-murder” ⁶²
“Close to 1000 honor killings in Pakistan” ⁶³	“Back in trial for contract killing” ⁶⁴
“Severe punishment for attempt to honor killing” ⁶⁵	“One arrested after Nazi-murder” ⁶⁶
“Accused of honor killing in Jordan” ⁶⁷	
“Parents on trial for honor killing” ⁶⁸	
“New trial for honor killing” ⁶⁹	

⁵⁷ Göteborgsposten 26/4 2012

⁵⁸ Göteborgsposten 9/5 2013

⁵⁹ Göteborgsposten 9/5 2013

⁶⁰ Göteborgsposten 6/5 2013

⁶¹ Göteborgsposten ¼ 2013

⁶² Göteborgsposten 27/3 2013

⁶³ Göteborgsposten 22/3 2012

⁶⁴ Göteborgsposten 12/9 2011

⁶⁵ Göteborgsposten 19/4 2012

⁶⁶ Göteborgsposten 24/11 2011

⁶⁷ Göteborgsposten 25/7 2011

⁶⁸ Göteborgsposten 13/6 2011

⁶⁹ Göteborgsposten 13/6 2011

“Last day of trial for honor killing” ⁷⁰	
“Son testified about honor killing” ⁷¹	
“Knowledge about honor can save lives” ⁷²	
Dagens Nyheter:	
Headlines where the word “honor” is mentioned:	Headlines where other motives are provided
“Emphasizes honor-motive in trial” ⁷³	“Prosecutor: Daughter is the spider in the web in revenge-murder” ⁷⁴
“Honor-related violence is a too narrow concept” ⁷⁵	“Dog in leash might be reason for ax-murder” ⁷⁶
“Severe punishment for honor killing attempt” ⁷⁷	“Settled who guilty for drug-murder is” ⁷⁸
“Close to 1000 honor killings in Pakistan” ⁷⁹	“Was talking to boy, killed with acid” ⁸⁰
“Lack of support to victims of honor crimes” ⁸¹	“Woman-killing: With shame as the distinguishing mark” ⁸²
“Fadime was killed for honor” ⁸³	“Cannibal-killing investigated in Brazil” ⁸⁴
“Many “honor-crimes” in Pakistan” ⁸⁵	“Arrested for sex-murder of 98-year old” ⁸⁶
“Family convicted for honor-killing in Belgium” ⁸⁷	“Life time in prison for British racism-killing” ⁸⁸
“Honor-killer was denied to see his son” ⁸⁹	“One more arrested for Nazi-murder in Germany” ⁹⁰
“Honor-killer will appeal” ⁹¹	“One arrested after Nazi-murder” ⁹²
“Elisabeth Massi Fritz: legislate against honor-crimes” ⁹³	“Brutal racist-crime in Moscow” ⁹⁴
“Denies participation in honor-crime” ⁹⁵	“Might be preparations for a political murder” ⁹⁶
“Libyan rape-victims killed for honor” ⁹⁷	“Mental illness behind murder of child” ⁹⁸
“Honor-case tried a third time” ⁹⁹	“Long sentences for Russian racist-killings” ¹⁰⁰
“Youth care for honor-killing of sister” ¹⁰¹	“Murdered after breaking up” ¹⁰²
“Honor killing caused discussion” ¹⁰³	“relatives demands answer about Nazi-murders” ¹⁰⁴
Father convicted for German honor-crime” ¹⁰⁵	“Attack on emo-rocker hate-crime” ¹⁰⁶
	“Boys killed in circumcision-rite” ¹⁰⁷

70 Göteborgs-posten 21/6 2011

71 Göteborgs-posten 14/6 2011

72 Göteborgs-posten 7/5 2013

73 Dagens nyheter 25/11 2012

Aftonbladet:	
Headlines where the word “honor” is mentioned:	Headlines where other motives are provided
“Judge: It is an honor-killing” ¹⁰⁸	“Police investigates cannibal-murder” ¹⁰⁹
“Honor made 220 women burn themselves to death” ¹¹⁰	“Man arrested for robbery-murder” ¹¹¹
“Father appeals against honor-killing verdict” ¹¹²	“Seven killed in fight for Himalayas Viagra” ¹¹³
“New trial for honor-killing” ¹¹⁴	“Announced she was moving out- got strangled” ¹¹⁵

⁷⁴ Dagens nyheter 27/4 2012

⁷⁵ Dagens nyheter 26/4 2012

⁷⁶ Dagens nyheter 2/12 2012

⁷⁷ Dagens nyheter 19/4 2012

⁷⁸ Dagens nyheter 30/11 2012

⁷⁹ Dagens nyheter 22/3 2012

⁸⁰ Dagens nyheter 1/11 2012

⁸¹ Dagens nyheter 19/1 2012

⁸² Dagens nyheter 27/4 2012

⁸³ Dagens nyheter 19/1 2012

⁸⁴ Dagens nyheter 14/4 2012

⁸⁵ Dagens nyheter 20/12 2011

⁸⁶ Dagens nyheter 23/3 2012

⁸⁷ Dagens nyheter 13/12 2011

⁸⁸ Dagens nyheter 4/1 2012

⁸⁹ Dagens nyheter 13/11 2011

⁹⁰ Dagens nyheter 12/12 2011

⁹¹ Dagens nyheter 6/7 2011

⁹² Dagens nyheter 24/11 2011

⁹³ Dagens nyheter 23/6 2011

⁹⁴ Dagens nyheter 22/11 2011

⁹⁵ Dagens nyheter 15/6 2011

⁹⁶ Dagens nyheter 13/9 2011

⁹⁷ Dagens nyheter 14/6 2011

⁹⁸ Dagens nyheter 10/8 2011

⁹⁹ Dagens nyheter 13/6 2011

¹⁰⁰ Dagens nyheter 11/7 2011

¹⁰¹ Dagens nyheter 7/5 2013

¹⁰² Dagens nyheter 28/6 2011

¹⁰³ Dagens nyheter 22/4 2013

¹⁰⁴ Dagens nyheter 6/5 2013

¹⁰⁵ Dagens nyheter 4/2 2013

¹⁰⁶ Dagens nyheter 4/4 2013

¹⁰⁷ Dagens nyheter 16/5 2013

¹⁰⁸ Aftonbladet 10/12 2012

¹⁰⁹ Aftonbladet 14/4 2012

¹¹⁰ Aftonbladet 18/3 2012

¹¹¹ Aftonbladet 24/1 2012

¹¹² Aftonbladet 28/6 2011

¹¹³ Aftonbladet 15/11 2011

¹¹⁴ Aftonbladet 1/4 2013

¹¹⁵ Aftonbladet 7/11 2011

“Maria was honor killed by her brother – today he was sentenced to 8 years” ¹¹⁶	“Was killed because of love” ¹¹⁷
“Stabbed woman might have been honor killed” ¹¹⁸	“Was killed for 200 kr” ¹¹⁹
“Wrong to speak about honor when women are murdered” ¹²⁰	“The medicine made me kill” ¹²¹

Table 4: Headlines for Aftonbladet

What we can see when reading the headlines is that a very small percentage of the articles mention the reason/motive in the headline at all. Overall however, the clear majority of articles where the motive/reason for a murder is stated in the headline are reporting on “honor killings”. Yet another aspect is that out of the articles where honor is not mentioned in the headlines a large number are unusual cases, sensational, one might say. Only two of the articles were reporting on a domestic killing where no reference was made to honor or to the cultural or geographical background of the persons involved. The conclusion we might draw from this is that in the majority cases of deadly violence towards women, the motive is not considered interesting enough to bring up in the headline. When there are indications that “honor” might be involved it is however considered interesting enough.

4.2 Discourse analysis

My goal with the discourse analysis is to understand how the news papers portray the crimes and to shed light on how concepts such as gender, culture, religion and violence are interpreted within the context of media and honor. In Göteborgs-

¹¹⁶ Aftonbladet 29/1 2013

¹¹⁷ Aftonbladet 13/6 2011

¹¹⁸ Aftonbladet 7/1 2013

¹¹⁹ Aftonbladet 10/4 2013

¹²⁰ Aftonbladet 20/5 2013

¹²¹ Aftonblad 8/1 2013

Posten 30 relevant articles were published under the category of “honor killing” during the specified period, in Dagens Nyheter 50 relevant articles were found and in Aftonbladet 40.

I will present my results through quotes from the articles. The quotes are organized into categories based on the patterns and themes I distinguished while reading the articles.

4.2.1 It might be an “honor killing”

In a number of articles the journalist use quotes categorizing a specific murder as an honor killing before the investigation has been finalized.

I guess this is what people mean with the term honor killing. The girl has dishonored him in his role as the head of the family. That is his view on this whole thing.¹²²

The murder of a 21 year old woman in Katrineholm this Monday might be related to honor. He (referring to the perpetrators lawyer Bo Johansson) believes the motive might be connected to honor.

- I am not sure if the crime fulfills all criteria needed in order to be classified as honor-related but it seems to be something in that direction. Says Bo Johansson according to persecutor Anna Carlsson Lund, the motive has not yet been clarified.

The murder might be related to honor but it could also be something else. It is still not clear what the motive is, she says.¹²³

On Wednesday the murder was described as an honor killing in numerous comments, but the police has not yet confirmed that claim. As for the arrested woman, the police does not want to share what her relation to the victim was.¹²⁴

¹²² DN, 62-åring häktad för hedersmord i Katrineholm, 18/11 2010

¹²³ DN, Kvinns död kan vara hedersmord, 17/11 2010

¹²⁴ DN, Kvinna anhållen efter knivmord, 26/4 2012

The prosecutor earlier stated that there is information that indicates that it might be an honor killing, and in the verdict one can read that the man wanted to purify and restore his honor.

- There are elements which could be honor related. I would not call it a classic honor killing where the family often is involved. This is something coming from himself, he felt offended and wanted to restore his honor, says Carin Lantorp.¹²⁵

The woman who last Monday was stabbed with a knife at Myrorna (a second hand store) in Västerås might be the victim of an honor crime.

This is confirmed by the police.

– We have information which indicates an honor problem. The detainee had a relationship with the woman, says the prosecutor Carin Lantorp, in a press release from the police.¹²⁶

An important aspect of the trial has been the question if the deed should be seen as an honor killing or not. Prosecutors and police does not have any proof supporting the claim but the honor killing theme is pursued by the plaintiff representative of the murdered 19-year olds half sister, Elisabeth Massi Fritz. She mentions that several witnesses, independent of each other, have stated that the murdered 19-year old was considered as dirty, a whore, and a disgrace to her family.

”Rosén criticized his colleague for using the term ”family” mechanistically and stressed the fact that police and prosecutor, in spite of thorough investigations, not in any way had been able to tie the mother to the crime.

He stated that the siblings’ mother divorced the father after being battered. The mother was apparently also very active in her effort to arrange the return of her daughter and son to Sweden from their father in Iraq.

A part of what Massi Fritz described as honor culture could, according to Rosén, just as well be seen as normal parental concern and care for their teenagers.¹²⁷

Reoccurring in the articles reporting on “honor killings” is the tendency to state that the crimes are caused by honor codes even though such a motive has not been confirmed. Adding to the problem here is the fact that there is no clear, universal

¹²⁵ Aftonbladet, “Döms till livstid för knivmord på myrorna” 28/5 2013

¹²⁶ Aftonbladet “Knivhuggna kvinnan kan ha hedersmördats” 17/1 2013

¹²⁷ Göteborgs-Posten “Advokaten vill att 17-åringen frias” 10/12 2012

definition of “honor crimes”. The lack of such a definition opens up for speculation and interpretations which might further worsen the situation. In one of the quotes it is even stated that it is not a “classic” honor killing since the family was not involved. Rather it is a man who acted on his own, without any social or cultural pressure. What then makes it an “honor killing” except for the fact that the perpetrator comes from a minority group?

4.2.2 It is an “honor killing”

There are also articles where there seems to be a very strong need to emphasize that specific murders are in fact, without a doubt, ”honor killings”.

The murder on Abbas Rezai was a so called honor killing. [...] there is no doubt that honor is the reason of this murder.¹²⁸

It is an honor killing, it is as clear as a bell.¹²⁹

Considering all those who are actual victims of honor crimes I am extra pleased, says Massi Fritz. The fact that neither police nor prosecutor has been willing to state that there is an honor-motive is, according to her, “close to a breach of duty.”¹³⁰

In this paragraph it is possible to find quotes where the need for emphasizing the “honor aspect” of a crime is seemingly very strong. Yet again, since there is not a clear unified definition of the concept of honor crimes it is called for to ask the question of what facts these quotes are based on and why there is a need for the powerful statements.

4.2.3 Defining the “honor killing”

In many articles there are detailed definitions of what an “honor crime” actually

¹²⁸ Aftonbladet, ”Hedersmotiv bakom mordet på Abbas”, 5/7 2011

¹²⁹ DN, ”Föräldrar anklagas för hedersmord”, 13/6 2011

¹³⁰ Aftonbladet “Maria hade kunnat leva” 29/1 2013

is. Some of the articles provide a clear and non-judgmental definition while others portray a more problematic definition with factual errors.

Before a so called honor killing, which is most common in Turkey's mainly Kurdish South Eastern part, a so called family council appoint one family member to kill a female relative who according to them has stained the honor of the family, usually by engaging in an illegitimate relationship.

The custom has also been put into practice in the case of rape victims or women that simply have been talking to strange men."¹³¹

The UNFPA estimates that approximately 5000 women around the globe are killed in the name of honor every year. It happens most frequently in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. In a recent study conducted by two Indian lawyers it is estimated that at least 1000 honor killings take place in India every year. Not only women but also men are *killed*.¹³²

That shame can turn one of the conditions of evolution, the protection of offspring, upside down says something about the strength of socially constructed ideas. But socially constructed ideas are just that, constructed. That means they can be changed. But then it is important that the surrounding world does not yield in the fight for women's and girls' human rights or their rights to choose their sexuality.

Most people have ideas of shame and honor. Notions of what is shameful and attempts to control others perception of one's own honor are common and worth to ponder over and problematize for each and every one of us.¹³³

In an honor culture, control of girls' and women's sexuality is central and connected to the collective. Virginitiy and chastity is important and the family reputation depends on the behavior of the females. Especially the honor of the male is dependent on how the collective judge him. It's important that a teenage daughter stays a virgin until marriage. At the same time, in Sweden the dominating norm is that sex before marriage is ok.¹³⁴

¹³¹ DN, 16-årig flicka begravdes levande, 4/2 2010

* This is a translation from a turkish newspaper later published in Sweden. It is therefor written from a turkish perspective.

¹³² DN, Deras kärlek tvingar dem att fly, 27/10 2010

¹³³ DN, "Tyst heder, högljudd skam", 14/1 2012

¹³⁴ DN, "Med vreden som drivkraft" 22/5 2012

But an honor killing is not something that can easily be pushed to the side and dismissed like a bizarre and strange cruelty happening somewhere else. Pillay emphasized and stressed that international legislation states loud and clear that it is the responsibility of every state to protect women against discrimination. Examples of so called honor crimes can be found all over the world, but countries in the Middle East and South Asia have been singled out as the areas where the phenomenon is most frequently occurring.¹³⁵

Many articles try to provide a definition of “honor crimes”. It is understandable that in order to create an understanding of what has happened definitions are added to the news articles. In some cases they do just that – provide an understanding of the crime and the complexity of the “honor” concept. Others however do the opposite and rather add to the confusion by trying to define something which does not have a clear definition.

4.2.4 The true “honor killing”

In several articles it is debated what a “proper honor killing” should look like. The discussion was triggered by the case of Jian. Her father claimed that the reason for the murder was that the girl had dishonored him; the brothers, however, condemned the murder. This created a debate about what makes a “true honor crime”.

The 62 year old adoptive father claims that he acted on his own accord when he stabbed Jian, 21, to death in the stairwell in Katrineholm. The reason was that she had dishonored him. But experts, people surrounding the family, and even the 62-year olds lawyer believe that others at least must have given their approval. [...] Jians adoptive brothers have strongly dissociated themselves from the father’s deed.

We are totally against it and will never forgive him, says the big brother Rushdi. [...] There is never a single perpetrator. I don’t believe that a father wakes up one day and gets the idea that he should murder his daughter. There is always a plan behind such an act, says Sara Mohammad. (From the association Never Forget Pela and Fadime.) [...]

¹³⁵ Göteborgs-Posten “FN: Hedersmord dödar tusentals” 4/3 2010

- What happened is not an honor killing. It is an infected relationship between father and daughter, says Taki Mohammed, who says he is a close friend of the family.¹³⁶

- It's a normal murder. The family is distancing themselves from the father, says a man close to the family.¹³⁷

This is a good example of how established the expression “honor killing” has become. People have an image of what an “honor killing” is supposed to be like and they do not acknowledge that “honor crimes” is not a homogenous group of crimes where every perpetrator is thinking in exactly the same way.

In murders within the majority community in Sweden, the media and the public are often eager to emphasize the individuality of the killer, but here, the opposite situation is occurring: It is argued that the family must have known what the father was planning, or otherwise it can't have been an honor crime. The comparison between the “honor killing” and the “normal” killing is also present in one quote, subsidizing the image of murders as polarized into two groups - the murders “they” commit, and the “normal” murders “we” commit.

4.2.5 The “honor killing” and the “other killing”

I have here collected statements highlighting the difference between “honor killings” and other murders - in definition, in origin, and in degree of awfulness.

The most extreme form of assaults is the one that goes under the name honor killing¹³⁸

Honor killings are the most extreme form of gender related violence, a man kills a female relative because she has tainted his honor.¹³⁹

- We have opened our eyes to the characteristics of honor crimes and we have

¹³⁶ Aftonbladet, Pappan var inte ensam, 21/11 2010

¹³⁷ Aftonbladet, Manifestation mot våldet, 20/11 2010

¹³⁸ DN, ”FN: Hedersmord dödar tusentals” 4/3 2010

¹³⁹ Aftonbladet, “Hedersvåld botas med integration”, 18/11, 2010

learned that the unthinkable can happen: That parents kill their own child, says inspector Martin Permen.

-It's hard to imagine a more ruthless deed than this, says Massi Fritz and refers to the murder as a "brutal assassination".¹⁴⁰

These statements provide an image of the "honor killing" as a crime worse than any other crime that can be committed. In the third quote a police man is insinuating that "honor killings" actually opened his eyes to the idea that parents can kill their children, making it sound like such an act has never been committed in Sweden before. As if it is rather an act brought here by immigrants, a statement which naturally would be false.

To many it appears incomprehensible that something as diffuse as honor can justify murdering one's own family members, says Michael Högberg. The big difference is that those who use violence in a usual secular "Swedish" family do something shameful. Violence in the name of honor on the other hand is sanctioned, yes even encouraged by a whole family.¹⁴¹

I'm begging you to realize the seriousness in the fact that there is a crucial difference between the murder of a daughter which is collectively determined, and the murder of a woman resulting from a conflict between two individuals.¹⁴²

Patriarchal norms are assuredly the reason behind close to all violence men expose women to, including honor violence, but there are fundamental differences between the reasons and forms of the violence! Honor- and chastity norms are just as important as patriarchal norms when it comes to honor related violence. Patriarchal structures alone are not enough of an explanation for honor related violence. It would be a betrayal towards all women descending from chastity cultures, if the honor related violence was placed on equal footing with the domestic violence existing all over the world.

To make the honor related violence understandable knowledge as well as subtle intuition is needed. In Sweden Swedish women have been exposed to, and are

¹⁴⁰ Göteborgs-Posten "Kräver fängelse för systemmord" 18/1 2013

¹⁴¹ DN "Med vreden som drivkraft" 22/5 2012

¹⁴² Göteborgs-Posten "Arvet efter Fadime har förskingrats" 21/1 2012

being exposed to, deadly violence by men close to them but honor killings have never existed in this part of the world.¹⁴³

Should honor crimes lead to a stricter sentence than normal murders? All murders, independent of the motive, should normally result in the most severe legal punishment. Honor killings however should have less extenuating circumstances, since they are premeditated and thorough. They are not impulsive deeds but planned actions where the perpetrator in consultation with family members abuses the trust of the victim to get close to her and take her life.¹⁴⁴

The differences between a normal crime and an honor crime are however big. One difference is that honor crimes are committed with the motive of regaining the lost honor of the family, in normal crimes this has no importance.¹⁴⁵

It is a normal murder, the family condemns the father.¹⁴⁶

Several things need to be pointed out here. The first is the tendency to make generalization about the nature of “honor crimes” as well as “other crimes”. To argue that all honor crimes are always accepted and even encouraged by a whole family, at the same time as arguing that violence within a “secular Swedish family” is always considered shameful is problematic. Family structures in general are very complex and do not all function in the same ways. Another generalization is made when stating that “honor crimes” per se need to be considered to have less extenuating circumstances, instead of looking at every case individually.

The last point to be made here is to elucidate the use of the concept “normal murders”. This as well appeared in one of the earlier quotes. This tendency sheds light on the indolence with which the everyday violence committed towards women in Sweden is perceived, to the degree that it is considered “normal”. At the same time such comments show the tendency of sensationalizing the “other” and their crimes.

Stieg Larsson, the now departed writer of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* was a strong voice in the debate on violence against women. In one of the articles he

¹⁴³ Göteborgs-Posten “Sluta förklara Fadimes död på fel sätt” 20/1 2012

¹⁴⁴ Göteborgs-Posten, “Kraftig straffrabatt skickar fel signaler” 21/5 2013

¹⁴⁵ Göteborgs-Posten “Erkänn hedersbrott i svensk lagstiftning” 2/5 2012

¹⁴⁶ Aftonbladet “Manifestation mot våldet” 20/11 2010

presented the following argument about “honor killings” where he questions the ongoing debate and media coverage.

Honor killings are repugnant – but why are they considered so sensational when the hundreds of cases every year, where originally* Swedish men murder or abuse women, are forgotten or explained away. Is it because they are encouraged by family and friends?

But when Swedes* murder women, it is often network crimes where men have each other’s backs and help each other to cover their tracks: An honor culture of hating men.¹⁴⁷

4.2.6 Articles using an “us versus them” binary and highlighting the importance of traditional structures in “honor killings”.

A “culture clash

Honor crimes may have their origin in culture clashes. A family or extended families from a culture where family hierarchy and family ties are more important than anything else, come to a modern welfare country where girls can get educated, have boyfriends and stay out late. In traditional cultures that kind of behavior is considered hurtful to the family honor. Sometimes it goes so far that the girl gets killed. That is what happened to Sara, Pela, and Fadime.¹⁴⁸

This quote comes from an inspector working with “honor crimes”. The article provides an image where “honor crimes” are caused by the clash between “old, traditional cultures” and “modern welfare states”. This binary is discussed by Dicle Koğacıoğlu. According to her research this explanation of “honor crimes” is one of the reasons why the process of stopping the killings from happening is moving forward so slowly.¹⁴⁹

The quote further indicates that “honor crimes” then only can take place in

¹⁴⁷ DN, Daniel Poohl (red): “En annan sida av Stieg Larsson. Artiklar och andra texter”, 12/4 2011

¹⁴⁸ DN, Hedersmål prövas för tredje gången, 13/6 2011

* In the article the word “kärnsvensk” (Swedish to the core) was used.. It has the meaning of “people without any family or kin members from other nationalities”. * A slang word, normally used by immigrant teenagers towards what they consider to be “Swedish” people, is actually used here.

¹⁴⁹ Koğacıoğlu, 2004, 139

welfare states, where this clash occurs. That is a claim which is obviously is not correct. In Hillary Mayells article on “honor crimes” it is stated that this kind of violence can be found in countries such as Bangladesh, Great Britain, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey, and Uganda.¹⁵⁰ These are countries with very different policies for social security.

The quote also refers to “traditional cultures”. I would then like to ask the question, what is a “traditional culture”? Traditional culture is a very vague definition which hardly can be consisting of a homogenous group of people Are they all finding these specific behaviors unacceptable.

An integration-problem

Honor crimes exist all over the world, from Jordan to Haiti. It is not a Swedish problem, but here, at home, it decreases with increased integration.¹⁵¹

Just looking at the title we can find a severe problem. The title of this article (“*Honor crimes are cured with integration*”) gives the impression that the author sees “honor crimes” as a disease which can be cured by integration into the Swedish society. In the actual quote, the author declares that honor killings exist all over the world and then presents two “non western” examples. Finally it is declared that “honor crimes” are not a Swedish problem. This article stresses the difference between the “West” and the “East” and uses an Orientalist approach. It also implies that the Swedish society don’t have problems with patriarchal structures and violence towards women.

An immigration-problem

The police do not confirm that the stabbing should be considered an honor killing. Still, the question of how well equipped the society is to handle this kind of crimes is brought to the fore.

Astrid Schlytter argues that honor crimes have increased as a result of the migration patterns during the recent years. In a recent report the council of crime prevention pointed out that the police are not always able to see the patterns behind an honor crime and therefore might miss the comprehensive picture of the

¹⁵⁰ Mayell, 2002, 1

¹⁵¹ Aftonbladet, Hedersvåld botas med intergration, 18/11 2010

oppression the victim was exposed to.¹⁵²

In this article we see a case of the strategy of blaming all problems in the society on immigration policies. It is argued that the reason we see a higher number of “crimes committed in the name of honor” is the migration patterns. Nowhere is it mentioned that other structures in the Swedish system are to blame for the failure to protect victims of honor crimes.

A Muslim problem

She (Sara Mohammad) claims that this kind of violence has many similarities with other forms of violence which men expose women to. Patriarchal structures are always present. The crucial difference is the religious norms that rule in some Muslim environments.¹⁵³

Honor killings are not connected to a specific culture, class or ethnic group. I exist among Muslims as well as among those belonging to religious minorities in the Islamic world. Most common however are these forms of violence among illiterate Muslims in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Honor killings existed in Middle East before the birth of Islam. The phenomenon did not appear among immigrant groups in Sweden! Immigrants from earlier mentioned areas brought the “custom” with them here.¹⁵⁴

In the first quote we can see that Mohammad acknowledges the importance of patriarchal structures in the existence of honor crimes in Sweden. What is not acknowledged however is the fact that honor crimes are not limited to “Muslim environments”. The second quote is more complex and vague. First it is argued that “honor crimes” are not associated with a specific group but later moving on to stating that they are limited to Muslims as well to minorities within the Islamic world. Finally it is stated that “honor crimes” existed already before Islam and therefore it is not a Muslim problem and not a problem which emerged within Sweden.

¹⁵² DN “I spåren av hedersbrottet: Risker ansvar för socialtjänsten” 26/4 2012

¹⁵³ Aftonbladet, Ingen vågar göra något åt hedersvåld i Sverige, 20/11 2010

¹⁵⁴ Göteborgs-Posten “Sluta förklara Fadimes död på fel sätt” 20/6 2012

A Middle Eastern problem

The Honor-culture in the Middle East is an atrocious remnant from the old, patriarchal Bedouin-culture. Unfortunately it is still practiced in some countries since it has become a natural part of the lifestyle and is interlaced with certain religious perceptions. It is also frightening that the number of honor killings in Middle East, and globally, seems to have increased in the past decades.” [...]”It is mainly the powerful social pressure from others close to the men that causes them to commit these atrocious crimes. The social pressure is extremely strong in this collectivistic culture in the Middle East, to be excluded from one’s social network is a catastrophe. It can also be pointed out that Christians in Middle East commit honor crimes as well since they are a part of the social pressure in this ”honor culture”.¹⁵⁵

In this quote the author once again fails to acknowledge how societies today allow “honor crimes” to go on. Instead it is blamed on old patriarchal structures from the Bedouin-culture. The quote also lifts the blame from the perpetrator by arguing that the social pressure is too strong to resist. Arguing that that old Bedouin traditions of social pressure is what lies behind the crimes is not helpful when trying to prevent further incidents to happen in the future.

Noticeable is also the last sentence, where it is written that Christians as well commit “honor crimes” crimes, but only because they are affected by the “Muslim” social pressure hanging over them. This is giving an image of the Christians being victims of Muslim structures which they are unable to get away from.

A widespread problem

Since the case of Fadime, there has been an animated debate in Sweden about if we should be talking about honor killings and honor based violence.

To plenty of us, this cruel and primitive way of punishing young women, trying to live their lives and love the men of their choice, had nothing to do with honor.

But this debate did not lead to any result. Still today the word “honor killing” is used without reflection by police, prosecutors and courts. Media is using it as well as scholars and governments.

It seems like the Swedish society just gave up and accepted a to us strange cultural custom that has nothing to do with religion but only serves the purpose of

¹⁵⁵ Göteborgs-Posten “Hedersmord kräver stora insatser” 2/5 2012

“saving the families honor” in the case that a woman (usually it concerns women) has broken the patriarchal code where the family is in charge of her lifestyle and choice of husband.¹⁵⁶

The following excerpt comes from an interview with a man of Iranian origin living in Sweden and his daughter. It is an example of the problems an unbalanced media reporting on “honor crimes” can result in.

- Surely many men have a bad attitude towards women, that applies to both Swedish and Iranian men. But I was very sad when well educated Swedes asked me how I treated my daughter. [...]
It made me feel bad to so often be held responsible for an honor culture which I did not agree with.¹⁵⁷

Mohsens daughter who also is a part of the interview adds:

- I believe that the media has an important role in associating men from the Middle East with honor based oppression. There are gender equal men in Egypt, Tunisia, and Iran, even if they are not as numerous as here in Sweden. At the same time there are many Swedish men that oppress their women and daughters, even abuse them. We need to be able to see that the issue is complex and stop associating people’s actions with their ethnic origin.¹⁵⁸

Another voice critical towards the tendency to put large focus on “honor” in trials:

Attorney Urban Jansson is of the opinion that the honor related motive which has been classified as an aggravating circumstance in the district court does not exist.

-We are looking for explanations, but there are no motives. What has been presented is general images of what honor related violence looks like. The siblings however are the core of this family and they loved each other and he would never hurt her.

According to Urban Jansson the district court came to general conclusions based on the background of the prosecuted.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Aftonbladet, “Fel att prata om heder när det är kvinnomord” 20/5 2013

¹⁵⁷ DN, Skrivandet förenar familjen, 11/1 2012

¹⁵⁸ DN, Skrivandet förenar familjen, 11/1 2012

¹⁵⁹ Göteborgs-Posten, “Advokat underkänner hedersmotiv” , 22/4 2013

4.2.7 Critique of the fear

Heavy critique has been directed towards the Swedish government and its institutions for not wanting to, or knowing how to, deal with the existence of “honor killings”. This inability is often explained by fear of being accused of being xenophobic or Islamophobic when targeting an already vulnerable group in society. The newspaper articles present many examples of this critique;

It is not a pretty picture when the politicians are looking the other way. [...] Is it possible that the politicians and journalists are scared of being accused of racism or Islamophobia? [...]”During 2007 and 2008 young immigrant women started to fall off balconies all of the sudden. Left in the apartments were fathers and brothers who claimed that the woman killed herself. Not a single case led to persecution.¹⁶⁰

The political courage needed to do something about this unacceptable situation does not exist in Sweden today.¹⁶¹

Her experience is that she has to tussle with the sensitivity of the issue, since honor crimes have strong ties with culture in different regions.

- The fear of being called racist or islamophobic creates a big obstacle, says Sara Mohammad. It is a fact that racists and islamophobes exist in Sweden but the discussion has become distorted. [...] We have to take the fight and make human rights into something global.¹⁶²

In one article the previous Swedish minister of equality, Nyamko Sabuni is being interviewed.

Things have to change. Human rights must apply to everybody in our country. Today this is not always the case. Because of fear there is still a harmful respect for traditions which we would never accept for ethnic Swedes.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Aftonbladet, Ingen vågar göra något åt hedersvåld i Sverige, 20/11 2010

¹⁶¹ Aftonbladet, Ingen vågar göra något åt hedersvåld i Sverige, 20/11 2010

¹⁶² Aftonbladet, “Hänsyn till hederskultur är rasistiskt” 14/6 2011

¹⁶³ Aftonbladet, “Sverige klarar inte att stoppa tvångsgiften”, 20/3 2012

-There exists a fear and cowardice when it comes to breaking the silence and discuss honor related crimes. That is a betrayal towards each and every one of the victims of honor crimes, says Fritz.¹⁶⁴

And yet again, this is not solely a result of the honor-culture but also of the "good" Swedish non-interference integration politics which do not only tolerate honor norms but even supports those who create the norms with tax money.¹⁶⁵

It is positive that such a constructive critique is directed towards government and institutions. Many state the importance of respecting human rights for everyone and that is indeed an important focus to have. The situation must become better for young individuals living under threat in Sweden. A balance is needed where such a protection can exist without "honor crimes" being exploited in the media.

4.2.8 What should be done?

To follow up on the critique in previous passage there are also several suggestions of what can and should be done to find a solution to the problem. Politicians need to take the norms and values that justify the murder of a daughter seriously before those norms push a family, or parts of a family, far enough to take the decision to restore the honor by sacrificing a relative who has been accused of violating the good reputation of the family.¹⁶⁶

Lotta Sonemalm is considering adding the offence "honor crime" to the legislation, just as was done with stalking.

– We are talking about honor crimes, but there is nothing called honor crime in our legislation, she says.¹⁶⁷

-My clients are pleased. It's a severe penalty that is completed with deportation and the district court is stating that there is an honor motive, says lawyer Elisabeth Massi Fritz who represented the family of the murdered 22 years old

¹⁶⁴ Göteborgs-Posten "Åklagaren: Åtalad ljuger om system" 26/11 2012

¹⁶⁵ Göteborgs-Posten "Fler hedersmord väntar med nuvarande politik" 26/4 2012

¹⁶⁶ Göteborgs-Posten "Fler hedersmord väntar med nuvarande politik" 26/4 2012

¹⁶⁷ DN "Manifestation för mördad kvinna" 2/5 2012

woman. It is important that the honor motive is stated since it is an “aggravating circumstance”, says Massi Fritz.

-The woman has been controlled. Her life has been restricted. She has been suspected of adultery. What later occurred was a brutal execution of a young woman who solely wanted to live a humanly life in Sweden where she could make her own decisions.

-It is important to show other victims that we are not tolerating this. That is why it is also important that prosecutors dare to state the motive when an honor crime occurs and that the district courts dare to state it in their verdicts, says Massi Fritz.¹⁶⁸

The responsibility for establishing a practice for how these bestial crimes should be punished lies on the shoulders of the Supreme Court. For my own part I will start a campaign against the words honor killing, honor crime and honor culture. Remove these words from the Swedish language.¹⁶⁹

Is it of importance that the district court gives importance to the motive? Yes it is. Partly because honor motives as well as hate crimes are aggravating circumstances.¹⁷⁰

Apart from criminalizing forced- and child marriage, honor crimes must become a part of the Swedish criminal code. A sign is needed from the society showing a disassociation from honor crimes. To live within an honor context and to be exposed to honor related crimes can lead to very serious and offensive consequences for the victim. The threat is always serious and calls for active measures.¹⁷¹

We will probably see more honor crimes in the future where the perpetrators are teenagers. A family planning to kill a daughter will naturally choose young family members to carry out the deed, knowing that the penalty will be negligible. What does this tell us about the high-flown speeches about vigorous efforts to stop the honor related violence?¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Göteborgs-Posten, “Livstid för hedersmord och våldtäkt”, 3/1 2013

¹⁶⁹ Aftonbladet, “Fel att prata om heder när det är kvinnomord” 20/5 2013

¹⁷⁰ Aftonbladet “Maria hade kunnat leva” 29/1 2013

¹⁷¹ Göteborgs-Posten “Erkänn hedersbrott i svensk lagstiftning” 2/5 2012

¹⁷² Göteborgs-Posten, “Kraftig straffrabatt skickar fel signaler” 21/5 2013

Many would like to see that “honor crimes” are defined and made a part of the Swedish criminal code. This would naturally make it easier to punish the crimes but in order for such a measure to be done there needs to be a definition of what an honor crime is, something that does not exist today. There are split opinions of if there even should be such a definition. It is important that prejudice and generalizing ideas, such as we can see in some of the quotes above, are not allowed to influence the courts.

Critique is also directed towards the “honor concept” per se. An argument supported by several scholars such as Aisha Gill.

4.3 Discussion

Considering my purpose with this thesis which is to shed light on the connections between concepts such as gender, culture, religion and “honor” within the Swedish newspaper media discourse, several things can be stated about the results of my research.

Considering the result of the headline analysis as well as part of the content analysis I argue, borrowing Peter Brahams expression, that there are tendencies in the newspapers of using an “honor angle” in the portrayal of some murder cases in order to create sensational news.

When reading an article about a crime, one is often looking to find information about the classic questions: “What”, “when”, “where”, “how”, “who” and “why”. Going through all headlines, related to murders during the time span of my study, questions such as “who”, “what” and “where” were often answered in the headline. Quotes such as “woman killing”, “knife killing” or “Gothenburg killing” were frequently reoccurring. As stated earlier, only a very small number of headlines gave an answer to the question “why”. Out of the few articles providing such an answer, a clear majority answered the question with one specific answer: because of honor.

It’s possible to speculate why the reason so often is provided in cases of “honor crimes” I argue that it is likely that the “honor angle” is emphasized in order to draw attention and gain readers. As Wu and Bogart argue, violence is a theme which is often

successful when building audiences. Issues and events reflecting conflict, discrepancy, drama, and conflict in clash of personalities and values feed the human appetite for sensation and therefore create attention. “Honor crimes” can be considered to have the qualities to fit in to such a pattern.

One could argue that the papers use the word “honor crime” not for effect-seeking purposes, but simply because it is considered to be a fixed concept for describing a specific category of crimes. If that is the case however, it calls for reflection over what such a concept means and what message it projects. As argued by Reimers as well as other scholars, media needs to have awareness when writing about violence towards women about the message they convey and how it might be received, it might not always be received in the way intended.

As discussed in some of the articles, the words “honor killing” and “honor crime” are being questioned. Referring to violent crimes with the term “honor crime” might be problematic for different reasons. To begin with, it monopolizes the word “honor”. Honor is a word that for many means something positive and beautiful and has nothing to do with violence. Media however has, through news construction about “honor killings” been very effective in connecting the word with something negative.

The Swedish newspapers seemingly had an eagerness to connect honor related crimes with the perpetrators “culture” while violence committed within majority groups in Sweden is usually not connected to such concepts. Focusing to a high extent on the “honor motive” might overshadow other possible explanations for a crime. Gill goes as far as arguing that the term “honour-based violence” should be abandoned. One reason for her argument is that no honor can be involved in a murder and such a term plays down the severity of the crimes and belittles their victims.¹⁷³ Similar arguments could be found in the articles as well. The following quote comes from a column in *Aftonbladet*:

When I see the word “honor” I think of something positive, something “honorable” ,about ethics, morals and respect. “Honor” for me is something desirable, a goal worth striving towards. But with the meaning the word has in Sweden today, I can never use it again, nowadays “honor” is associated with violence, murder, and death. The word “honor” has been trampled and soiled,

¹⁷³ Gill, 2011, 220

since today it is only used in contexts such as “honor crime”, “honor killing” and “honor culture.”¹⁷⁴

Another complexity of the “honor” concept is that by choosing to use the word “honor killing” in the context of murders within certain immigrant families one does, with or without intention contribute to the differentiation between crimes. The discussion will become absurd and distorted if we start measuring suffering and differentiating murders of women as more or less horrific.

Many actors cited in the newspaper articles argue that we have to see the differences between honor crimes and other kinds of violence against women; they argue that this is in fact a practice which did never exist in this part of the world.

Considering the occasionally low sentences in Swedish courts judging on “honor crimes”, the murder investigations leading nowhere, and the empty promises from the government about protection of individuals living under threat, it is not only understandable, but perhaps necessary that women who themselves have been living under threats from their families use the media to say “look at what is happening! Do something!

What is interesting is that in many previous studies of international media and “honor crimes”, scholars have stated that newspapers are publishing articles where a colonial discourse and Eurocentric language is used and where strict boundaries are placed between minority and majority cultures. In Swedish media I found that such language is rather rare but when it does occur, the most “harsh” statements and language actually come from those who have the most knowledge about “honor crimes”. They are lawyers, journalists and human rights activists working with helping girls living under threat of being victims of “honor related crimes”. Often they themselves are first or second generation immigrants in Sweden with roots from what they call “honor cultures”. These individuals are the ones calling the “honor crimes” “the most extreme form of violence” and referring to them as a “Middle Eastern” or “Muslim” practice. It seems as if these women have taken the Orientalist, colonial discourse and transferred it into their own in order to receive a reaction from the public and the government. It is hard to say how deliberate this is, but perhaps they use Eurocentric language as a response to the inability to provide proper support to the possible future victims of “honor crimes” in Swedish society. These actors do not have

¹⁷⁴ Aftonbladet, “Fel att prata om heder när det är kvinnomord” 20/5 2013

the fear of being accused of being racist, and therefore they are the ones who can break the silence and demand a change from the Swedish society.

These individuals without a doubt do not have any intention of propagating xenophobic values. This does not mean however that their words cannot be used or understood in that way. Some of the statements could be adding to the discrimination of the people they are actually trying to support and protect – the women living under threat. As Ginneken argues, the intended message is not always the same message that is being received.

It is argued in the articles that “honor crimes” is a form of violence towards women that has never existed in the “Western” part of the world. That it is violence specific to Middle East or “Eastern cultures”. It might be true that the same exact arguments to motivate murder and the same involvement from family members have not been common in Western Europe throughout history. However the concept of honor has, and still is very much present. To fully understand this practice, we need to see how it correlates with patriarchal structures and behaviors all over the world. Looking at history and at the structures of the society we live in today, we can as a matter of fact find actions that seemingly revolve around similar issues and problems as “honor crimes”.

Dr. Zahira Latif brings up the example of the “gentleman duels” in 15th century Western Europe. This tradition was indeed a brutal manifestation of honor which often resolved in a fight to the death. Stories of honor and death were not rare in literature of medieval England.¹⁷⁵ These medieval practices might not seem relevant to the study on modern day honor killings but it shows the presence and importance of honor as a concept.

Perhaps the “honor/shame motive” is not so different from other motives of violence against women in Sweden. Dr. Anna Carline is bringing to our attention the frequent use of “provocation defense” in Western courts. She is questioning the double standing of Western courts and Western media in their strong condemnation of honor crimes but leniency when “Western honor” is at stake. “Honor killing verdicts” are reserved for cases involving minority groups. The Muslim man is stereotyped as violent and dangerous while the Western man is labeled as non-sexist and non-

¹⁷⁵ Latif, 2011,

violent.¹⁷⁶

It is often argued, so as well in my primary sources, that one cannot compare honor based violence with “normal”, domestic violence emerging from a conflict between a man and a woman. I would argue that you can very well compare it but you cannot argue that they are exactly the same. I am taking an intersectional stand here arguing that both of these forms of crimes emerge through a patriarchal structure but later different societies have created their own structures and patterns of violence, or to use popular discourse, cultures of violence. Those patterns can be influenced by other aspects as well, such as class, economy, immigration etc. I argue that we should not dismiss the idea that there are cultural elements involved in “honor crimes” that needs to be taken into account in order to be able to prevent further incidents. In the same way I argue that cultural elements can be involved in other crimes as well. In the struggle to prevent “honor related crimes” the patriarchal structures which substantiate violence against women in most societies needs to be taken into account as well.

Aisha Gill argues the following:

It is precisely because the notion of honour underlies so many forms of gender-based violence across the world that honor based violence cannot be studied, or even understood, in isolation from other forms of violence against women and the particular societal contexts in which such violence occurs.¹⁷⁷

I find support for my argument in Carlines research as well. She argues that motives for murdering women in the “West” might not be directly connected to male honor, but they are connected to other patriarchal expressions of male possessiveness, jealousy and anger, emotions often linked to the male honor. Another similarity between “honor crimes” and other occasions of violence against women is that blame often indirectly is directed towards actions of the victim instead of the actions of the perpetrator. At times the shame is in fact put on women for “failing to live up to societal expectations of appropriate scripts of femininity”¹⁷⁸

Another aspect frequently brought up in scholarly work as well as in the newspaper articles, is the question of defining “honor crimes”. How can the “honor

¹⁷⁶ Carline, 2011, 83

¹⁷⁷ Gill, 2011, 220

¹⁷⁸ Carline, 2011, 85

crime” be defined? Who should define it? Should there even be a definition?

The lack of a definition creates an uncertainty of how to approach the concept. The effort which is put into defining what an “honor killing” is in the Swedish media is interesting. The image of “the honor crime” seems to be quite narrow in the Swedish society in general; it seems to be a general opinion that the “honor killing” equals an “immigrant perpetrator”. If a man from the majority population in Sweden was under the impression that his wife or child dishonored him and therefore murdered them would that then be considered an honor killing? Or is the definition provided by the Swedish media too narrow to include anyone who cannot be described as an “other”? Perhaps such a crime would rather fall under the description of what is referred to as a “normal” murder committed by a crazy man.

Emphasizing the honor motive is repeatedly and strongly encouraged in the newspaper articles. Many scholars argue however that the focus put on the “honor aspect” may do more harm than good. The victims risk becoming exposed to a double discrimination - the threat within their families and the incapability of the host country, in this case Sweden, to provide protection for them.

Meetoo and Mirza argue that essentially honor crimes are actually justifications for male violence, and a motivation to why women are unable to escape domestic violence. Only when referring to crimes committed by religious or ethnic minorities is the honor concept considered to have an effect.¹⁷⁹

I argue that it is important to separate media from major institutions and actors such as government, police, courts, municipality workers, teachers etc. Naturally these groups have to gain knowledge about “honor crimes” as well as about other forms of discrimination and violence. There is a need for a better system that can prevent crimes and protect the young individuals who are living under threat within their own families. But, the media does not have the same function as previously mentioned actors, and over-emphasizing the existence of honor crimes can have negative consequences. Many minority groups within “Western” societies are already constantly in the spotlight, and constantly being connected with violent acts such as terrorism or vandalism. Of course media should not avoid these specific cases but there is a need to avoid exaggerating the importance of ethnicity or religion in criminal cases.

The media need to be sensitive and careful in order to give a crime attention

¹⁷⁹ Meetoo & Mirza, 2011, 43

without adding to xenophobic currents in the society. My impression is that the newspaper media in Sweden is not being sensitive enough. Rather I get the impression that the newspapers take every chance they get to use the concept of “honor crimes”.

I have argued throughout the thesis that there is a tendency in the Swedish Media to exploit “honor crimes”. This however might naturally mirror the interest and fascination among the public. There are also Orientalist features in this fascination with honor crimes. Honor crimes are described as different from other “normal” murders against women. One quote even describes it as “the most extreme kind of violence against women”. As if this kind of murders are worse than a father or husband murdering a woman for other reasons.

Adding to the argument that the media use the “honor angle” in a sensationalist way, I also argued that one reason for this might be that it is born out of a frustration among women’s rights activists working with cases of “honor crimes”. That it is a reaction to the government inability to prevent these crimes and protect women in the risk-zone. But is this enough of an explanation?

That argument explains some of the bold statements which can be found in my articles but it does not explain the tendencies to sort all murders into “honor killings” and “the other killings”. And it does not explain the exploitation of the “honor concept” where it is seemingly used in a sensationalist way in order to gain readers.

Understanding why a paper wants to use sensational, fashionable themes is not hard. But let’s go deeper and try to understand why “honor crimes” are considered to be fashionable and sensational. The problem is not only the newspapers and their choice of news. Yes, media does construct events, but their interest is in selling papers and getting people to read their news. We can’t solely blame the news for the editors for the bias, but we also need to question ourselves why we find it fascinating to read about these topics.

As stated previously in the thesis humans are often fascinated with violence, and specifically stories of violence grounded in some kind of conflict in interest or belief. Perhaps the research of Meyda Yeğenoğlu can provide yet another clue. In her article “Return of the religious” she is among other things asking: “Whether the Orientalist configuration (which some tend to believe belongs to the past) is definitely over and done with or whether it keeps returning in different guises”

In this article she is discussing the European identity and its relationship to religion, especially Islam. She argues that there is an assumption in Europe that the “West” is exemplary in maintaining modernity and secularity and that Islam can be seen as the “constitutive other” of Europe. The concept “constitutive other” refers to the idea that a social identity is defined by differentiating itself from what it excludes – exclusion is therefore always a part of its constitution.

Is it possible to transfer this idea to the case of Swedish news paper media and its fascination with “honor crimes? Can we consider “honor crimes” to be a part of the culture of the constitutive other? Perhaps the “immigrant violence” helps defining the Swedish individuality as well as what “Swedishness” really is? One can also connect This argument to Ginnikens theories about categorization. He as well as Yeğenoğlu argues that our perception of other “cultures” and behaviors is created by comparing it to our own.

If this theory would be true some might not feel the need to define the “Swedish” patriarchal structures, or the “Swedish” violence against women. It is enough to define what it is not - it is not based on honor. Honor is not a cause for Swedish men murdering Swedish women. Is it possible that by defining what we are not we stabilize the image of ourselves? Exploiting what we are not will therefore also be more exciting to read about since it’s not a crime of our own.

This is a suggestion provided to explain why the newspapers might be seeking an effect by using the “honor crime”, as well as to why it might be an effective tool to gain readers. It is after all a common pattern in the history to be fascinated by the unknown.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Concluding the results of my research for this thesis I would like to begin with following quote by Aylin Akpınar:

It is unfortunate to polarize the debate of women's abuse in the migration context either by blaming "immigrant cultures" or by stating that "honour" has nothing to do with the murder of a young immigrant woman whose parents have tried to bring her up in a patriarchal tradition operating within the code of honor and shame.¹⁸⁰

In my study I have presented several examples of newspaper articles in order to make visible possible framing in Swedish Media's coverage of "honor killings". It's clear throughout the study that exploitation exists of cases where an "honor angle" can be found Swedish media.

I would however like to stress that the Swedish news coverage on "honor crimes" was not solely of a problematic nature. Compared to previous studies and examples of international media reporting, the newspaper articles I studied often provided a balanced and ethically correct portrayal of the murder crimes, where voices supporting different perceptions of the issue were allowed.

I would argue that generally the young individuals who were victims of honor

¹⁸⁰ Akpınar 2003, 426

killings were rarely portrayed only as victims. Rather they were described as the persons they were, not as slaves under their culture.

There were no cases of straight forward xenophobic, Islamophobic or racist comments to be found in the articles, and only a few cases of colonial/Orientalist discourse was present. The framing in Swedish newspaper media was for the most part rather subtle and indirect. What is encouraging to see as well is the great devotion to the cause of fighting “honor crimes” in a non-discriminatory way, and the willingness to open up a fruitful discussion.

It is clear that the lack of a definition of the “honor killing” creates debate in media. Irrespective of one’s own opinion on the question of the need for a universal definition it is clear that in Sweden, the “honor crime” is a concept affected to a very high degree by other concepts, in particular “gender” and “culture”. Different actors are struggling to define the honor killing and trying to understand and make sense of it. This ambiguity can be seen in the media more than anywhere else.

The strong fear among governments and institutions to bring the discussion of honor crimes to the surface is indeed a problem. Respect for different cultures is important but not if it makes perpetrators get away with threats and violence, not if young individuals get hurt. This fear should not be allowed to influence the police and the judiciary system. However, the same fear can also be a sign of the willingness to blur the lines between different nationalities and religions. It might be a part of the reason why the discussion on “honor crimes” in Sweden did not tip over and reach an even more hurtful level, in the media, in the government, and on the streets.

After all when considering the results of my study, one can see that the number of articles using a strong “they versus us” binary is quite few. Not many articles refer to “honor crimes” as a cause of tradition, a non western problem, a dangerous threat to our society, or similar expressions. Strikingly Eurocentric or discriminatory quotes are rare. There is however a quite large number of articles which seem to be using honor crimes as a fashionable framework – a theme which draws readers to buy newspapers. I argue that this in itself is a case of framing which creates a differentiation between crimes “they” commit and crimes “we” commit. It is also possible to distinguish an inclination in Swedish media to take claim of the concept and construct news as if they are the ones to define what honor is and what an “honor killer” looks like. There is a

fascination and strive to understand the “honor crime” which seem to be rare in other shapes of domestic violence.

I am not joining forces with those who are arguing that honor crimes are in no way different from the majority of murders of women committed in Sweden. However I equally do not want to organize murders against women into two groups: the “honor killings” and “the rest”, because that binary is strikingly similar to an “East vs West”, “them versus us” perspective. The argument of Aisha Gill stating that there are crimes committed which should never be accepted, wherever they take place, and whoever commits them, is according to me more useful in this case.

Swedish media as well as other actors such as police, school, courts etc. is stuck between two “evils” and has to find a way to balance the risk of discriminating ethnic and religious minorities and the risk of not providing protection to women who are threatened by violence. All different actors will approach the dilemma of the “honor crime” in different ways. In this paper it is the media that is in focus. The media, especially evening newspapers such as Aftonbladet with its regional coverage, does reach people who might have no other source from where they learn about minority religions or customs. In times such as these where xenophobic parties are gaining ground, wrongful or exaggerated portrayal of immigrants can be dangerous. With that said, a very important aspect in a democracy is freedom in the media. I am not lobbying for a biased media avoiding certain topics or crimes. However what the media can do is to be careful with what language and what content they present and let the tragedy of every specific case be allowed more space than the frame into which it may or may not be placed by the society.

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