

HONOR CRIMES OF WOMEN IN ALBANIAN SOCIETY
BOUNDARY DISCOURSES ON “VIOLENT” CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore perceptions of two generations of men on the phenomenon of honor crimes of women in Albanian society, by analyzing in particular discourses on cultural and regional boundaries in terms of factors that perpetuate crimes in the name of honor. I draw on the findings from 24 in depth interviews, respectively 17 interviews with two generations of men who have migrated from remote villages of northern and southern Albania into periphery areas of Tirana and 7 interviews with representatives of key institutional authorities working in the respective communities. The conclusions reached in this study based on the perceptions of two generations of men in Albania suggest that, the ongoing regional discourses on honor crimes of women in Albanian society are still articulated by the majority of informants in terms of “violent” and “backward” cultural traditions, by exonerating the perpetrators and blaming the northern culture for perpetuating such crimes. However, I argue that the narrow construction on cultural understanding of honor crimes of women fails to acknowledge the gendered aspect of violence against women as a universal problem of women’s human rights across different cultures.

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Introduction

“Honor crimes are a form of gender violence rooted in the conceptions of family honor and shame” (Sally Merry Engle, 2009, p130)

The aim of this study is to examine the underlying factors that underpin honor crimes of women¹ in Albania and specifically to explore and analyze particularly how regional and cultural boundaries in terms of honor crimes are drawn from two generations of men migrating from northern and southern villages of Albania into periphery areas of Tirana.

Scholarly research on honor crimes pinpoints the great debate on relating such crimes to culture and especially to Muslim culture. Many scholars have examined the problems that emerge when Islam and Muslim societies are blamed for legitimating honor crimes. Thus, as Sen (2005) argues, Muslim societies are portrayed as inherently problematic by creating a dichotomy between the “primitive” and “backward” East and “superior” and “modernized” West, on the other hand. Instead, I argue that in Albania honor crimes of women are not related to Islam, but they are perceived as crimes perpetuated mainly by Albanian patriarchal traditions and especially from the inherited social norms and backward customs of the past that are more visible in northern Albania or northerners that migrate from rural north to the periphery of urban centers².

Furthermore, while coming to the capital city, these families bring with them their patriarchal mentalities, social norms and traditional ideologies, which do not always fit with the discourses of “modernity” of the capital city. So, most often in the formal and informal discourses, crimes of honor are perceived to happen in those cases when men realize that

¹ In this thesis I use the term “honor crimes of women” in the accordance with the explanation provided by Welchman & Hossain, 2005, which include a variety manifestation of violence against women such as “honor killings”, assault, confinement, required for the preservation of female honor.

² In the general, discourses in Albania people from northern Albania, or highlanders who have migrated mainly in peripheral areas of Tirana are considered more patriarchal and traditional in their perceptions. Public discourses on honor killing in Albania are an explicit way in which boundaries between ‘us’ ‘civilized’ and ‘them’ as ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’.

their wives, daughters or sisters are trying to become emancipated, which of course brings dishonor to them, their family and to the entire community. While, the younger generation is thought to adapt more easily to the modern values of the host city, the older generation has much more difficulties. Therefore, discourses on the integration of northerners in periphery of urban centers are framed around the presumed incompatibility of modernity and tradition, assimilation and adoption to the “modern” values of the host city, by creating in this way binary categories of “modern” south and “primitive” north.

Following the above logic, honor crimes in Albania are assumed to be perpetuated by the “backward” culture and inherited norms and customs of the past, especially in northern areas, which impose oppression and violence on women (Lubonja, 2003; Gjermeni & Bregu, 2003). In this way, crimes of honor seem to be tolerated in the name of “violent” culture and traditions of northern areas. However, Engle (2009) critiques the categorization of such forms of gendered violence as constituted by the cultural understanding, since it portrays culture as an unchangeable, remote in place and time, when in fact such practices are constantly changing and adapting to current trends and conditions. According to her honor crimes are a form of gender violence, which reflect “contemporary concerns about women’s sexuality and child-bearing” (Engle, 2009, p. 128).

I choose this particular topic, because despite the ratification of different legislations on domestic violence and joint coordination of state and civil society to combat domestic violence, honor crimes of women remain a widespread and sensitive phenomenon in the Albanian society. Nowadays, murders in the name of honor are considered even more brutal, degrading and inhuman than 20 years ago. Moreover, honor crimes of women in Albanian society are not addressed and recognized specifically from civil society or state institutions, since the reported cases of such crimes are explained by journalists and NGO representatives

working on women's issues mainly as domestic violence,³ or murders motivated by honor. Yet, no critical arguments are provided to explain the meaning of honor and honor crimes in Albanian society and why still some members of the society legitimize such murders in the name of culture and traditions. My research contributes to this literature by shedding light on people's perceptions on what perpetuates honor crimes and specifically, how is the concept of honor crimes implicated with cultural traditions and customs inherited from the past.

In the first chapter of the thesis, I will discuss the methodological issues, problems and ethical dilemmas of my study. In the second chapter, I will provide a general overview on the background on the situation of women in the society by focusing as well in the research on domestic violence, formal, informal law and social norms and relations in the Albanian society. In the third chapter, I will highlight the wide body of research on honor crimes, by exploring as well as the main factors, perpetrators and victims of such crimes. I will look also at the ways honor crimes differ from violence against women in general. Building upon literature on honor crimes in Muslim societies, I will try to answer what factors perpetuate honor crimes in Albania⁴ since it is argued that most often honor crimes in Muslim societies or by Muslim immigrants in developing countries are perpetuated by Islam. I pay attention to the similarities between national, regional and cultural identity boundaries between Muslim immigrants in western countries and northern Albanians, who migrate into outskirts of Tirana.

Moreover, in chapter four, I will map out different attitudes and perceptions of men regarding the understanding of honor in the Albanian context, its values, codes and its

³ However using the term domestic violence not only portrays violence as a private matter, but fails to acknowledge gendered nature of such violence (Engle, 2009). See methodological chapter for details

⁴ Nevertheless, in Albania honor killings/crimes do not imply exclusively murders of women by a male member in cases of perceived as actions that bring dishonor. It involves as well a murder of a man by a male member. According the Kanun's explanation, murders in the name of honor coined with the term "blood feuds" come as a result of murder, which is seen as a "deserved" punishment for the people who touched the honour of the family. See for example, (Krasniqi, 2003) and the report of Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Albania Blood Feuds, May 2008. However, in this thesis I will use the term "honor crimes of women" and "honor crimes" only in relation to violence and crimes against women.

importance for the family. Since the family reputation in society depends most often on the actions of female members of the family, I look at the ways how is perceived from both generations of men, a family whose social status is damaged from the so-called female's "transgression" of family honor codes. In this framework, I explore people's perceptions on honor crimes of women, reasons and factors that support and encourage such crimes. Then, in chapter five, I see how discourses on honor crimes are drawn by all my informants in regard to people living in the north and those living in the south. I explore particularly, the underlying reasons and perceptions why people tend to see northerners as more involved in such crimes, along with implications for drawing regional and cultural boundaries between south and north. Finally, in the conclusion section, I discuss how my findings contradict or support the existing literature on honor crimes, by coming up the main points and arguments.

Chapter 1. Research methodology

Since in this study I explore people's perceptions on the underlying factors that underpin honor crimes of women in the Albanian society I used the qualitative research method. Moreover, I used ethnography as a methodological approach, based on 17 in depth, semi-structured interviews⁵ with older and younger generation of men, who have migrated from remote areas of south and north of Albania into the peripheral areas of Tirana (Lapraka and Domje)⁶, as well as 7 in depth interviews with the representatives of the key institutional authorities in the respective communities.⁷ This target group involved local government authorities, professionals and representatives from commune council, police officer, directors of NGOs, teachers, social workers who work in these areas (see appendix A).

I have chosen open-ended, semi-structured interviews since I expected the respondents to be more flexible to answer in detail. In addition, these types of interviews allowed me to understand informant's in-depth perceptions and attitudes regarding honor crimes of women. Both, the first and the second target group of informants were selected through the snowball method, personal networks and contacts with the NGOs working in the areas. The length of the interviews varied from 1 to 2 hours. The reason for choosing peripheral areas of Tirana is that due to internal migration population in these parts is most likely to be heterogonous, since many people have migrated there from the north and the

⁵Even though I conducted overall 17 interviews with two generations of men, I did not take information from two informants Adi, 15 and Altin ,16 years old because the interviews were poor in information (Refer to methodological chapter for more information).

⁶As a logical division of age between the two generations of men, I took the period of communism since most often in Albania this period is mentioned also as a way to differentiate between the two generations of people. Thus, the younger generation born after the year 1981 fall in the age group 15 to 30 years old and older generation born before 1966 falls in the age group between 45 to 70 years old. In this way I can easily compare their perceptions in accordance to age and the experience of communist period.

⁷Domje is located in the Commune of Bexull (8 km away from Tirana). It is a place with high level of unemployment and poverty. Due to migration of people from remote villages (especially from north), Domje remains a place when traditional customs are still preserved in the extended family ties. Lapraka is a situated in the outskirts of Tirana (2km away). The recent population of Lapraka is still increasing, due to internal migration of people mainly from the north. It is known as an area with high employment, poverty, lack of infrastructure and social assistance. People refer to Lapraka as a place where the modern reality touch the tradition, due to the common conflicts from migrants coming from remote areas. Retrieved from <http://www.botasot.info/def.php?category=6&id=111399>; <http://www.forumishqiptar.com/showthread>.

south of Albania. In the general discourses, these people (mainly those from the north) are negatively stereotyped as, uneducated violent and the ones to be held responsible for crimes due to their “backward” social norms and traditions. Furthermore, secondary data of the academics on existing work on honor crimes of women such as books, articles from journals newspapers, reports and studies from NGOs were used as part of this thesis. I have monitored also some of the main daily newspapers in Albania for the period, January 2000- December 2004.⁸

Due to the sensitivity of my research topic, I noticed some concerns and implications, during my fieldwork, which I will briefly mention. Being a female researcher: Since I was a female researcher interviewing only male informants (in the first target group), I was concerned about the implications of my gendered position during the interviews. As Fontana and Frey (2003, p.64), point out “the sex of the interviewer and of the respondent does make a difference”. Given the fact of traditional gender role expectations in outskirts of Tirana, I was afraid how my gender might have influenced male informants, while talking about issues of sexuality and honor of women.

Unequal relationship: rural/urban : My position as a young, educated female coming from urban areas might have been perceived as a kind of separation and differentiation from my informants, who came from remote rural areas of Albania, to live in suburban areas of Tirana. I was concerned as well with the quality of the interviews, since some of the men (mainly youngsters from 15-17 years old) did not provide an in-depth analysis. Problems such as not answering the questions clearly, shifting the topic to something else, losing of the

⁸ In these daily newspapers, I see the representation of honor killings in Albania. These newspapers were provided from an Albanian NGO, Gender Alliance and Development Centre.

meaning during the narration of particular topic, providing very short and not in-depth answers and so on were prevalent during the interviews.⁹

North versus South dilemmas: Since, I was born and raised in a southern city of Albania; many informants might have perceived me as an “outsider”. I was concerned if such difference might have negatively affected the relationship and the interview process.¹⁰

Problems in interviewing the key institutional authorities in community¹¹ : A critical point during the interviews with the institutional authorities in the community was the hierarchical power relation. Since, they were in a more powerful position than I was¹², this situation might have been problematic in building an equal relationship and interaction with informants. As Portelli (1998) notes, unequal hierarchy of power can create barriers in the encounter between researcher and informants. Moreover, I could not interview the head of commune councils due to the disturbed situation in Albania with the upcoming local elections.

Reluctance to answer to sensitive questions and ethical dilemmas: Since my research could be considered a sensitive topic, I believe that it is also difficult to confront the informants with embarrassing questions such as sexuality. As I mentioned before, the issue of sexuality in Albania is considered somehow as a taboo topic and people hesitate to talk about such issues with outsiders.¹³As Ritchie (1995) points out, while confronting with embarrassing subjects interviewer’s response might be short, defensive and unconvincing. During the interviews, I observed that some of the men found difficulties to express

⁹ However, while working with uncooperative interviewees I tried to develop certain coping strategies such as moving to another approach, finding areas that interviewees like to talk and increasing the total number of interviews especially with the youth.

¹⁰ I observed that many of the informants (mainly from the north) were trying to look modern when talking about the old-fashioned traditions in the north, which I have elaborated more in the chapter 5 of my thesis.

¹¹ Interviews with the key institutional authorities in community were more as supportive and additional information to perceptions of men. I tried to explore and explain the issue of honor crimes by looking at different explanation from another outside perspective of key actors in these communities.

¹² I am talking mainly for local government authorities, and directors of organizations, who cancelled their interview many times, because I had quite comfortable interviews with other professionals.

¹³ This situation is even more difficult when we take into consideration other factors such as geographic location (rural areas), age (especially with the older generation) or gender differences .

themselves clearly, especially the older men tried to give short answers, use other words instead of virginity or infidelity such as “pure” or “infamy” “foolishness” “shameful act”. Many informants hesitated to keep eye contact during these question.¹⁴ Some of them tried to skip to another topic in order to avoid direct answers.

¹⁴ I observed this even among some of younger informants. See chapter 4 for more details.

Chapter 2. Background on the situation of violence against women and honor crimes in the Albanian society

In order to understand the concept of honor and honor crimes in Albanian society, it is necessary to provide a general socio-theoretical background for the position of women in the family and society as well as information on domestic violence and honor crimes in Albania. In this framework, I pay attention to Albanian formal law, informal customary law, social relation and traditional norms of the past. I explore also the phenomenon of honor crimes in Albania by monitoring the representation of some of the main newspaper articles on honor killing cases in Albania.

Albanian society reflects a strong patriarchal mentality according to which, men have a long history of domination and control over women (Young, 2001; Grate Intelektuale, 1998).¹⁵ Despite the recent changes and developments trends, the patriarchal mentality of Albanian society is deeply rooted in the old traditions that date back over 1000 years ago (Baban, 2003). Moreover, Miria (1996) argues that Albanian women are emotionally and physically violated, since for every action they should get approval by their husbands or fathers; otherwise, they are punished very harsh, if they try to challenge male authority. Even though, there are no accurate statistics on the domestic violence in Albania, many surveys and reports suggest that domestic violence continues to be a serious and widespread problem even nowadays (Haarr & Dhamo, 2009). A recent survey on domestic violence in 2009, reported that the prevalence of physical violence against women was 31, 2% (Haarr & Dhamo, 2009, p.21). Moreover, in a study conducted by the Association “*Refleksione*” resulted that 64 % of Albanian women that were surveyed, admitted that their husband had abused them (Haxhiymeri, Bregu, Burazeri, Gjermeni & Picari, 2006). Other data show that there are also a considerable number of women that have died due to direct actions of

¹⁵ Years ago, the only way for women to enjoy rights, was to become “sworn virgins” or “socially men”, by taking an oath of celibacy. For more information on Albanian sworn virgins see Young, 2001.

violence and in most of the cases the perpetrators were men (Zeneli, n.d, p. 28).¹⁶ However, even the prevalence of honor crimes in Albania remains problematic. The Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation (CNR) points out that, in 2008, there were 32 murders motivated by honor; and 36 honor crimes in 2009¹⁷ and between 1990 and 2009 there were 10 000 murders on honor, blood feud and revenge.¹⁸

2.1 Formal and informal laws along with patriarchal norms in Albanian society

As I argued previously in the introduction, honor crimes of women in Albania are seen under the framework of domestic violence and as such formal legal laws and institutional policies aim to combat violence against women and encourage gender equality. First, the Albanian Constitution is the highest legal act that sanctions the principle of equality and non-discrimination between men and women. It issues the respect and protection of dignity, human rights and fundamental freedom of individuals (Qendra e Publikimeve Zyrtare (QPZ), 2011). Second, the Civil Code (2001) recognizes women's rights in all the legal processes such as the right to file a suit or legally judge perpetrators (QPZ, 2003). Third, the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania (1995) defines the criminal, penal acts and sentences criminal contraventions. Under article 76, individuals that commit a purposeful murder are punished from 10 to 20 years of prison. Under article 78 pre-meditated homicides are punished by imprisonment from 15-25 years (QPZ, 2004).¹⁹ Fourth, the Albanian law "For Measures against Domestic Violence" (2007) is considered one of the most successful legal initiatives to combat domestic violence in Albania. This law is in accordance to the international legal standards on anti-discrimination and gender equality that are crucial to

¹⁶ According to the Medico-Legal Service in Tirana, during a period of 40 years (1958-1977) from the examination of 6 206 dead bodies, 20.65% of women have died due violence (Zeneli, n.d, p. 28).

¹⁷ Statistics on honor killings in Albania include both murders of men and of women at the same time.

¹⁸ Information from UK Border Agency, 2011.

¹⁹ However, there have been cases of honor killings of women, when perpetrators are sentenced less than the law prescribes. For example, the father executed R.Q a 16 years old girl, living in the outskirts of Tirana because he saw her getting out of a car at 4 AM. The Court condemned the perpetrator with only 16 months of prison, concluding that "he was gravely offended by the victim's behaviour", Diella, 09.2010

each country (Haarr & Dharmo, 2009). Finally, “Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women” ratified by Law No. 7767 in 1993 by the Albanian government aims to protect and promote women’s rights and gender equality in all spheres of life.²⁰

Furthermore, in Albanian customary/informal laws²¹, one of the most prominent and important traditional values of Albanian society is the protection of personal honor and dignity of the person, which was expressed also in different old proverbs²²(Elezi, 1997). Albanian Canons claimed that any person that tried to endanger the honor of the family was punished by death (Elezi, 1997). The roots of women subordinate status and their social exclusion in the society date back to the 15-th century, from the practice of Albanian customary law known as Canon of Leke Dukagjini.²³ Under Canon, women are considered a property of men (Gellci, 2005, p.22) who are supposed to follow their traditional gender roles of domesticity and nurturance (Baban, 2003). Moreover, Canon justifies and legitimizes the husband to beats up or kills his wife under circumstances of adultery and betrayal of hospitality (Dervishi, 2001).²⁴ The impact of Canon in the social life was so strong that even 30 years of communism did not eradicate its norms (Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, 2006). Dervishi (2001) points out that, during the last 8 years, it is observed a revitalization of Canon norms especially in rural areas. During the past few years, crimes in the name of honor from the revitalization of Canon are depicted not only in north but as well

²⁰ For more information on the periodical reports of CEDAW and on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in Albania see <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3b00f25d2c.html>
<http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=CEDAW/C/ALB/1-2&Lang=E>

²¹ Such as Canon Leke Dukagjini, Canon of Laberia, Canon of Scanderbeg.

²² Proverbs such as “Better dead and with honor, rather than alive and dishonored”; “The person lives only for the honor” “The one who beats, love you more” and so on.

²³ Canon of Leke Dukagjini is a customary law practiced since the end of 15-th century. Canon was responsible for regulating all aspects of life among people living in north Albania (see, e.g, Doll, 2003; Durham, 1908).

²⁴ Under Canon, before the wedding day, the parents of the bride put one bullet in their daughter’s dowry. So, if she is found guilty for infidelity or betrayal of hospitality the husband can shoot her with the bullet.

as in southern parts of Albania where northerners have migrated. Nowadays, crimes of honor are considered even more primitive, brutal and inhuman even though sentenced more.²⁵

In many cases, violent family crimes are perpetuated by moral norms deeply embedded in the tradition and patriarchal mentality, which reinforce the unquestioned power of the head of household who has legitimate rights to punish even by death other members of the family, whom by their behaviors might have “violated” the honor and dignity of their family (Gellci, 2005). Given Kore’s logic, (2005) the Albanian society considers the deviance from the traditional norms as an immoral behavior. Therefore, violence against women is legitimized when it serves to “wash away” the shame brought from a “dishonored act” of a female member of the family (Dervishi, 2001). This perception has been enforced even more during the last decade, when the older brothers have the “duty” to “save” their family’s honor if their sister brings shame to the family. For example, two brothers killed their sister in a village of Albania since she had intimate relationship with a boy. The “immoral” behavior of their sister had ashamed them in the eyes of the village, since they killed her to “put in its place” the “endangered” honor of their family (Kore, 2005, p.101). In this tensioned climate, many parents, especially fathers, justify and sometimes push their sons into violence towards their sisters and other female members in the family, especially in the villages (Dervishi, 2001).

2.2 Representation of cases of honor crimes of women in Albanian newspapers

In order to give a general overview for the representation of honor crimes of women in Albanian daily press, I have monitored some of the main Albanian newspapers during the period January-December 2000-2004. Some of the main titles are: “Jealousy massacres the

²⁵Information Retrieved on May 09, 2011 from <http://open.data.al/lajme/lajm/id/134/lang/en/Gjakmarrja-me-2011-vrasjet-me-mizore>, and (IMIR) (2004).

wife and the daughter [...] suspected in the infidelity of his wife”²⁶; “Husband hits wife with a sledge hammer: Suspected she was having an affair”²⁷; “Man kills wife: She left home for two weeks without asking his permission”.²⁸ Three brothers killed their sister and her lover for “honor”²⁹; “Man killed his wife because she had filed for divorce”³⁰; “She cheated on him then he chopped her with an axe as the only way to put honor in its place”³¹; “The father kills his daughter and her boyfriend”, his confession to his tribe: “My daughter dishonored the family”³²; “Massacre after the divorce, man kills his wife, his mother in law and himself”³³. Moreover, “The father shoots his daughter because she left home without his permission”. While the sister of the victim justified the murder by declaring: “the father took the right decision, he did his duty as a good parent of a daughter who dishonored the family”, and the brother of the perpetrator said: “It was no other solution than shooting, to put the honor in its place. We do not regret because she merited the death”.³⁴

From these cases, we see that honor crimes of women are justified from the so-called “deviances” of females from the norms of the family such as: suspecting or having an affair with a man, jealousy, marital infidelity, seeking divorce, leaving the house without permission and so on. Therefore, all women’s behavior seems to be under strict control and monitoring of the men of the house and any suspicion from the “normal route” which might “dishonor” the family is punished by death.³⁵

²⁶ “Panorama” 14 February 2003

²⁷ “Republika” 15 November 2001

²⁸ “Gazeta Shqiptare” 9 October 2001

²⁹ “Panorama” 16 October 2004

³⁰ “Republika” 5 December 2001

³¹ “Gazeta Shqip” 12 February 2000

³² “Panorama” 27 July 2003

³³ “Gazeta Shqiptare” 12 May 2000

³⁴ “Gazeta Shqiptare” 5 February 2004

³⁵ In fact, I was surprised to find out that many years ago in Albania women were publicly humiliated or stoned to death if they had cheated their husbands (Danemark et al., 1995). Nowadays, male members of the family kill women and girls in other inhuman and degrading ways with ax or hammer, chopped with knives or by even trying to burn them alive.

In conclusion, we can say that Albanian patriarchal mentality that supports men as the powerful head of the family and reserve an inferior position for women encourages violence against women, including here crimes in the name of honor. Many Albanians still follow the logic of patriarchal and misogynistic model of the family, which strongly preserves the traditional gender role expectation for both men and women. Patriarchal mentalities, values and norms are deeply embedded and inherited from the past, along with the practice of Albanian customary law Canon and traditional customs of the past. Moreover, other factors such as internal migration of people from rural areas into urban centers have all contributed to such crimes.

Chapter 3. Theoretical consideration : What does it mean to kill in the name of honor?

Cultural discourses and gender violence.

3.1 Women's body and sexuality

Many authors argue that in many societies the honor of the man, family and community is preserved through the sexual behaviors of female members (Engle, 2009; Sen, 2005). If women “violate” the unwritten laws and codes of honor, which are perceived to “damage” the social reputation of the family in the community by provoking a source of shame, they are killed in the name of honor, in order to restore the perceived “lost honor” (Siddiqui, 2005)³⁶. Although there are no meaningful statistics on honor killings, it is estimated that 5000 girls and women are killed worldwide in the name of honor every year (Haile, 2007, p.12).

Crimes of honor are defined as “actions that remove from a collectivity the stain of dishonor, both gendered and locally defined, through the use of emotional, social and physical coercion over a person whose actual or imputed actions have brought that dishonor: physical force may involve killing the transgressor of the code of honor” (Sen, 2005, p.50). The codes of honor and shame in many societies are the basis for women's traditional identity in private and public space. Since women are portrayed always as virtuous, any transgression from such norms is seen as a violation of her femininity (Cewla, 2005). A woman's body is considered the property of her family and later on when she marries, her body belongs to her husband. Thus, her responsibility lies on a preservation of her sexual honor, “bound to safeguard it for the men's sake under penalty of death” (Hoyek, Sidawi and Mrad, 2005, p.112). Therefore, many authors argue that honor crimes are the most explicit example of desire to control female sexuality, autonomy (Siddiqui, 2005; Engle, 2009),

³⁶ Siddiqui is one of the leading scholars on honor killings of women especially among Muslim immigrants

reproductive power (Ruggi, 2000) and the whole range of women's behaviors, including here patterns of movements and language (Coomaraswamy, 2005).

3.2 Honor crimes of women versus violence against women

In a general framework, honor crimes are defined from international movement against women's violence as instances of gender violence³⁷ and violation of human rights (Welchman & Hossain, 2005; Engle, 2009). However, honor crimes are typically represented by international activists as part of the larger spectrum of "harmful traditional practices", which are seen as "socially desirable acts that constitute moral and modest behaviors of women [...] designed to safeguard, restrict, and control women's sexuality" (Engle, 2009, p.127). Still, there is a debate whether or no to consider such crimes only as violence against women, domestic violence or to address them specifically (Sever & Yurdakul, 2001). There are different reasons mentioned by many authors, who differentiate honor crimes from domestic violence.

On the one hand, honor crimes are supposed to be carefully planned and committed most often by women's fathers, brothers or relatives, who usually do not regret the crime, but rather see themselves as victims of family honor and collective principles of a community, which sometimes consider them as heroes. On the other hand, domestic violence is considered more an individual reaction committed mainly from impulsive behavior of a husband or a boyfriend, who sometimes regret the crime, which is punished strictly by the society (Haile, 2007; Chesler, 2009). As I have argued even in the introduction, in Albania honor crimes are treated particularly under the domestic violence framework, since they are not recognized specifically.³⁸ The problem might be that crimes seen under the label of

³⁷ In accordance with international movement against women's violence I will refer to violence against women as a "gendered- based violence" or as "gender violence" (Engle, 2009, p.28).

³⁸ There is a controversial debate whether or no to use the term 'honor crimes' or 'domestic violence'. Many advocacy groups suggest the use of the term 'honor crimes' since, such crimes have certain related characteristics and need a different action plan than 'domestic violence', but on the other hand other critics

“honor” might emphasize more the “backward culture” and traditions, by paying less emphasis to the gendered aspect of violence. In her book “Gendered Violence: A Cultural Practice”, Sally Marry Engle (2009, p.26) pinpoints the implications for assigning honor crimes to “harmful” traditional practices since it “locates them in an unchanging culture implicitly assumed as backward and needing the “civilizing process” of modernity”. According to her, honor crimes are an explicit form of gender violence (2009).

3.3 Perpetrators, victims and reasons that encourage honor crimes of women

Many studies in Muslim countries show that female members of the family (mothers, daughters, sisters or wives) are most often victims of honor crimes³⁹ perpetuated mainly from male members (Cewla, 2005).⁴⁰ Among the main reasons that perpetuate honor crimes are marital infidelity and loss of virginity (Sen, 2005; Coomaraswamy, 2005). However, women are killed in the name of honor even for many other actions that are supposed to bring dishonor to the man, family or community, such as going out without permission, having a boyfriend, not dressing appropriately, deciding for one’s own partner (Welchman & Hossain, 2005), being subject of rape, seeking divorce (Cewla, 2005), or refusing a forced marriage (Robbers, 2008). Sometimes, rumors might become a necessary justification to perpetuate such crimes in the name of honor (Cewla, 2005), since they might damage women’s reputation in the community. Finally, female suicides are associated with such crimes (Welchman & Hossain, 2005). From the above examples, we can understand how women’s

argue that ‘honor crimes’ stereotype negatively Muslim culture (Terman, 2010). I believe that in reference to the Albanian society, the term ‘domestic violence’ might hinder the gendered aspect and the supposed influence of the community, traditions which are perceived to encourage ‘honor crimes’ of women. Moreover, the term ‘domestic violence’ which portrays violence as a private matter with more individualistic notions might be related most often even to other socio-economic factors such as unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, mental problems and so on (see, e.g.,Gjipali & Ruci,1994). However, having in mind the differences and implications of these terms, in this thesis I use the term honor crimes/killings in accordance with the terms used by many scholars arguing on such crimes, even though my argument is that honor crimes are a form of gendered violence. Further elaboration on this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis.

³⁹ However, in Albania men are also victims of honor crimes, a phenomenon known as “blood feud”.

⁴⁰ There are few cases in Muslim countries when women were involved in crimes of honor (Cewla, 2005).

behaviors and actions are under men's control and any "deviance" from the norms is harshly punished.

A considerable number of literature on honor crimes of women in different parts of the world maintain the idea that community pressure plays an important role in encouraging such crimes. Some of the main scholars that mention community as the main influence of honor crimes are Hoyek, Sidawi and Mrad, 2005; (Middle East), Gellci,2005 (Albania). Many other studies show that such crimes are justified most often with the idea of "cultural" attitudes and beliefs (Coomaraswamy, 2001; Arsovska, 2006) that sustain the patriarchal claims and norms of the society to maintain a powerful familiar structure (Ruggi, 2005; Sen, 2005, p.51). Other authors argue that norms and codes of honor are manifested not only in customary laws (Cewla, 2005), but also in the legal codes or juridical actions and decisions that offer mitigation of perpetrators of honor crimes by using the violation of honor as justification (Sen, 2005; Welchman & Hossain, 2005). Moreover, different studies have suggested that honor killings are related to other social, economic and political reasons (Welchman & Hossain, 2005; Coomaraswamy, 2001) such as poverty, ignorance, educational level, class position. Finally, one the most contemporary and complicated debate on the possible factors that encourage honor crimes of women is related to religion (Islam) and Muslim culture, which I will elaborate below.

3.4 Honor crimes in Muslim and non-Muslim countries: Albanian's case

The existing literature on honor crimes of women reports the contemporary controversies and preoccupations that associate such crimes primarily as practices related to Islam and Middle Eastern cultures (Sen, 2005; Chesler, 2009).⁴¹ For instance, western international discourses by the late twentieth century saw honor crimes as a phenomenon

⁴¹ Prevalence of honor killings are depicted in Muslim countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Morocco as well as in many immigrant Muslim minorities in countries such as Germany, France United Kingdom Netherland and Sweden (Coomaraswamy, 2001).

happening outside the west, something that was related to Islamic societies, “backwardness”, “otherness” and crimes (Kressel, 1981; Feldner, 2000). Consequently, Islam and Muslim societies⁴² are blamed for perpetuating and legitimating honor killing of women, and as Sen (2005), a leading activist in the international violence against women movement argues, as inherently problematic and “backward”.

However, a growing body of research rejects the idea of honor crimes as an Islamic practice (Welchman & Hossain, 2005; Hussain, 2006; Sen, 2005; Coomaraswamy, 2001). As Haile (2007) points out, such practices are forbidden in Islam and are not mentioned in Qur’an and prophetic tradition.⁴³ What is clear from the above arguments is the ongoing debate and criticism in the narrow approach of those studies that see Islam and Muslim culture as perpetuating honor crimes. Nevertheless, the problem is that by relating honor crimes with Islam and “backward” Muslim culture in opposition to the “superior” west culture, creates implications for fighting such crimes since as Sen (2005) argues fails to take into consideration the existence of such crimes in other non-Islamic societies.

In fact, evidence shows that honor crimes are not limited to countries with strong Muslim identity, since such crimes continue to take place even in other places, such as Latin America, Southern Europe, Northern India (Yurdakul and Korteweg, 2010) Mediterranean peasant societies (Peristianny, 1996) such as Albania (Patel & Gadit, 2008), as well as across different faiths (Chesler, 2009), cultures, religious and classes (Gill, 2009; Jafri, 2008). For example in India, honor is very important in maintaining the “material structures of ‘social’ power and social dominance” and any violation in codes of marriage can result in an honor

⁴²I want to pinpoint the implications of many scholars for using terms such as ‘Muslim/Islamic societies’, ‘East’ and ‘Arab world’, in an interchangeable way while discussing about honor killings of women . Using such terms in a interchangeable way as referring to a unity and sameness among such places, might be problematic because they might presume an ‘orientalist’ assumption. Yet, I believe that even though such terms might be motivated by benevolent strives to pinpoint a common problem (implications for relating honor killings to Muslim world), it universalize and homogenize such societies, or western culture itself. Further information is beyond the scope of this research.

⁴³ I found many different interpretation of Qur’an in terms of honor killings of women but such analysis is not in the scope of my research. For more information on the issue, see Welchman & Hossain, 2005.

crime, no matter if it happens in Hindu, Sikh or Muslim communities (Chakravarti, 2005,p.309).

In contrast, in Albania honor crimes are not seen as related to Islam as it was the case for Muslim countries.⁴⁴ Honor crimes of women in Albania are justified as part of inherited cultural traditions that impose oppression and violence on women (Lubonja, 2003; Gjermeni & Bregu, 2003). In Albania, the customary law Canon is very clear for the punishment of women in cases of “deviant” behaviors, as I have argued in the introduction chapter. While talking about the notion of shame in Albanian society, Nixon (2009) asserts the importance of family honor as a social force in the eyes of community. Subsequently, women’s actions that are seen as “damaging” the family honor are punished immediately, since a good reputation of the family depends on the community respect (Nixon, 2009).

3.5 Cultural boundaries in terms of honor crimes of women: Muslim immigrants versus rural migrants in Albanian society

In countries where is an immigrant population, “cultural relativism” is used in many ways to excuse crimes of honor as part of “backward” immigrant culture which marginalize the whole immigrant community (Yurdakul and Korteweg, 2010). A qualitative study on immigrant Muslims in the Netherlands and Germany by Yurdakul and Korteweg (2006) drew on public media discourses of honor killings of women on Muslim immigrant in the majority of population. They found out that bright and blurred boundaries were drawn among majority and immigrant culture in terms of culture, language, religion.⁴⁵ On one hand, bright boundaries rendered responsible ethnicity, national origin, religion (Islam) as the main causes

⁴⁴ Even though Albania is a country with the majority of population Muslim, it is known as a secular place ,since it exist a tolerance on religion practice. Retrieved from http://www.bertelsmann-transformationindex.de/fileadmin/pdf/Gutachten_BTJ2010/ECSE/Albania.pdf. Yet, people in northern Albania are mostly of catholic faith. In this chapter I would refer to places that institutionalize religion (Islam) in stronger ways than others as places with strong Muslim identity.

⁴⁵ While, bright boundaries emphasized sharp differences among immigrant and majority culture and as such assimilation was possible only through adaption of majority values such as langue and norms and the blurred boundaries, emphasized similarity and tolerance among majority and immigrant culture.

of honor killings and on the other hand, the blurred boundaries emphasized the violation of women human rights (Yurdakul and Korteweg, 2006).⁴⁶ Obviously, this study is a clear example how the dominant culture displays a cultural hierarchy and superiority as opposed to the “inferiority” of the immigrant culture. The power imbalances between “East” and “West” are maintained through the differentiation of “we” and them as “others”. Therefore, the notions of “others” in terms of honor killings create a binary opposition between “backward” east and “modern” west.

In a similar way, a study on the analysis of frames in domestic violence policy⁴⁷, carried by Krizsan, Bustelo, Hadjigianni, & Komoutsi (as cited in Verloo, 2007, p.151) showed that the practice of honor killings as a form of domestic violence was framed as an “immigrant problem”, since it was considered as “a problem of specific social groups having specific social norms within the society”, which of course was related to their “existing traditions, and cultural norms and taboos”. Again, as the authors further argued, considering social norms as the cause of the problem by holding responsible certain groups of people prohibited potential solutions (Krizsan et al., in Verloo, 2007).

In this framework, it is interesting to compare how honor killings discourses are drawn in terms of regional and cultural identity boundaries among northern and southern migrants in Albanian society itself. Many people from the rural north, who have migrated in peripheral areas of Tirana (including here Lapraka and Domje) are considered more patriarchal and traditional in their perceptions and attitudes than those who came from the south. They are identified most often as “highlanders” or a derogatory term “malok” that is the short form of highlander but, which is coined as well as with “silly”, “primitive”,

⁴⁶However, an important point to be made is that German Turks were more likely to draw blurred boundaries than German themselves and such boundaries were considered weaker in comparison to the bright boundaries (Yurdakul and Korteweg, 009).

⁴⁷ The authors analyzed the frames on domestic violence policy by examining national debates in six European countries and the EU.

“uneducated” and “uncivilized”.⁴⁸ Many residing inhabitants in peripheral areas of Tirana perceive these people as occupying their territories and bringing with them the crimes and all the bad things, which of course create a clash of mentalities. Special attention and programs from NGOs or other state institutions focus particularly in such migrant population, since they perceive them as the ones who need to be helped and educated in accordance to the “values” of the capital city. Therefore, these people face serious difficulties on the integration process; they are often humiliated and marginalized by other part of the so called more “educated” category of society. In her field research in Albania Schwandner-Sievers (2008, p.55), observed the implications for the cultural explanation and binary discourses on “modern” south and “backward” north, drawn in regard to violence:

Urban and southern Albanians today assign *kanun* practices to their fellow-nationals in the north, who are occasionally and derogatorily called ‘Chechens’ or ‘Malok’ (‘those from the mountains’), and who are also conveniently (and often illegitimately) held responsible for crimes in the country. The imputedly primitive and backward ‘internal other’ can thus be differentiated from a ‘cultured’ self (particularly in the south...).

Moreover, people from the north are stereotypically blamed for committing crimes of honor against women due to their patriarchal mentalities and legitimization of such crimes on the Albanian customary law Canon. So, the discourses on the “backward” north and “civilized” south reinforce even more the boundaries that exist between “us” and “them”, as it was the case of Muslim immigrant integration in the western countries. Even though, Canon is mentioned as one of the main factors that perpetuate honor crimes, other authors render responsible uncontrolled and fast urbanization (migration from rural areas to urban centers) which results in the appearance of the traditional mentality kept mainly in the villages especially from North Albania (Lubonja& Salvatici, 2000). An Albanian scholar on women’s issues, Shkalla (2008) argues that when people from rural remote areas come to

⁴⁸ In fact people living in Northern Albania have had less opportunities for a better future in comparison to south, due to their long history of isolation during communist regime, lack of infrastructure, unemployment, poverty and negligence of state policies. After the 90s, many people from North Albania and other remote areas have migrated to the rural areas of Tirana.

urban centers, the traditional is joined with the modern, leading to the conflict and transition of values. Therefore, in order to survive such pressure, justify aggressive behaviors and prevent the destruction of patriarchal and traditional values, these people have to return back to their previous customs, which lead to the phenomenon of re-traditionalisation (Shkalla, 2008).

To sum up, the general discourses and scholarly critiques in the phenomenon of honor crimes pinpoint the implications for relating such crimes with Islam and restricted to the Muslim-dominant societies. As I have argued until now, the problem is that if we relate honor crimes to Islam, than a binary is created between East and West on the other hand. The same logic follows the public discourse in Albania between “primitive” north and “modernized” south.⁴⁹As, Yurdakul and Korteweg (2010) argues, the problem is that by holding such negative view on the immigrant population, and I would add here also the migrant population in the Albanian case, it frames them and their culture as historically unchanged and fixed rather than fluid. Therefore, from the above arguments, it is quite problematic if we rely on cultural understanding of honor crimes. Neither Muslim culture, nor Albanian culture should be blamed for encouraging honor crimes; otherwise, we fail to acknowledge that such crimes are another form of gender violence across different cultures, religions and classes.

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that such binary discourses are observed even in other countries. For example, in her ethnographic research “East and West Kiss: Gender, Orientalism, and Balkanism in Muslim –Majority Bosnia-Herzegovina” Helms (2008, p.110) shows how binary discourses on modernity/tradition, east/west were articulated by Bosnians who portrayed Albanians and Montenegrins in their country as more “primitive” and “patriarchal” and on the other hand portrayed themselves as more “civilized” and “modern”. However, it is important to note that in my research such binary discourses were drawn among Albanians themselves.

Chapter 4. Notions of honor and collective shame: Honor crimes of women in Albanian society

Since honor crimes of women are justified in the grounds of protecting family honor and reputation, I find it necessary to explore previously men's perceptions and attitudes about norms and values of honor in the context of Albanian family and society. In this way we can better understand their perceptions regarding honor crimes of women in Albania, along with reasons that influence men to "take the law into their own hands" and "restore" the perceived "damaged honor" of the family. Consequently, through examining the narratives of the two generations of men, I point out the implications for assigning honor crimes to the community and "backward" culture and traditions. Finally, I address people's attitudes on perpetrators and victims of such crimes by coming up with the main points and arguments by the end of the chapter.

4.1 People's perceptions on the codes and values of honor in Albanian society

Honor is defined by Campbell (1974, p.193)⁵⁰ as an aspect of "integrity and social worth of the family" in the eyes of community and the defense of the honor is an indication of family "moral solidarity". However, many scholars argue that most often honor is referred in relation to sexual behaviors of women, such as sexual purity and fidelity of a married women (Ahmetbeyzade, 2008; Sen, 2005; Coomaraswamy, 2005).

The concept of honor was perceived to have different meanings and values from my informants, depending on the interaction of different norms, cultures, traditions and subcultures. Honor was defined by both generations of men with personal attributes such as, norms and character of the individual, loyalty, virtues and dignity of the person in the family and community. At the same time, all my informants defined honor with community

⁵⁰ Campbell (1974) in his book "*Honor Family and Patronage*", describe the life of a community of Greek Sarakatsan shepherds brining kinship structures, and social values based on the concept of honor and pride as part of their communal life.

perceptions and attitudes. They considered it a value that needs to be appreciated for others or as something that makes someone feel evaluated and respected in a community, which of course relates to Campbell's (1974) definition of honor.

Moreover, many informants related honor not only with the reputation of the family in the past, but also with its respect and social standing in the future. Therefore, we can assume that honor is understood as something related not only to individual principles, but also to the values that communities assign to a respective individual or family. Irind (25)⁵¹ explained this attitude better admitting, "if only one person knows that you are dishonored, it might not be a real problem. Yet, if many people know that you are dishonored, this might be a threat to your integrity".

Specifically, as I shall argue below, the younger generation of men was more likely to relate the concept of honor with the morality and control of female sexuality, confirming in this way the arguments of many of the above mentioned authors, who discussed honor in relation to female sexuality. As it is evident from many of the informants, an honored female was perceived to be a virgin before marriage and loyal during the marriage. On the other hand, the older generation of men was less likely to relate honor with sexuality of females, since they related it also with ethics of the individual and the family. Thus, Fation (45) indicated that:

Honor does not necessarily mean the honor of the woman or the honor of the man, nor does it mean the honor within the couple or individual honor. It means not to cheat on the partner, to be faithful and correct to him/her. It means to be sincere with other people in work, family and society.

Moreover, the older generation of men related honor even with the standards and morals at the national level. Thus, Cesar (68) claimed that honor means the "respect for the basic norm and morals of the individual, family and nation".

⁵¹ The names used for all informants are not the real names in order to keep the anonymity and the number in the bracket represents the age of the informants.

Finally, we can say that honor is a relative expression based on the individual beliefs and interactions of a set of values, traditions and customs, always changing within a society and in different settings. While many younger men related honor to female sexuality, and morality, the older men had a larger notion of honor by including personal ethics and morals on the national level. Therefore, for the older generation of men, honor does not always refer to female sexuality and body. It is also interesting to point out that, honor was seen by both generation of men with individual attributes and in relation to community attitudes, which Campbell (1974) defines as the status of the family in community which I will elaborate more in the forthcoming section.

4.2 The importance of honor for social reputation of Albanian family

In southern Europe the concept of family honor represented a moral construction of people's behaviors, norms or rules that were crucial to their acceptance and social reputation in collective society (Sen, 2005). In Albanian society a dishonored man and family was considered socially "dead" (Gellci, 2005). Honor, as Gellci (2005, p.25) further argues, represented "an epitome of set of human values: wisdom, balance, honesty, respect, friendship, courage and self dominance". Even though these statements refer to the perceptions of family honor in the past, I observed that many of my informants, especially older men, did have somehow the same beliefs for the concept of family honor in contemporary Albanian society.

In this framework, honor was defined by all informants as the most important and crucial element of the Albanian family. It was conceptualized as a value that people "fight for" and as a "precious" possession that needs to be appreciated and preserved for others, in order to have a powerful social standing in the community. Therefore, an honored and respected family was considered from both generations of men as a family with a good reputation in society, even though such arguments were more prevalent from the older

generation of men. While, Cesar (68) defined the family honor as a sacred treasure and part of supreme feelings, Erzen (58) claimed that “honor is inherited in our tradition and is the cornerstone of the family”. Likewise, Fation (45) admitted that “without honor you can not be successful either in personal or in public life”. On the other hand, even though the younger generation of men admitted the importance of honor attached to the Albanian family, they were more likely to argue for the changing nature of honor and its importance for Albanian family and society, which was not mentioned from the older generation. For instance, Laert (27) mentioned:

Nowadays in our society and community, family honor does not have the importance that it had for our parents or grandparents. I think it has changed a lot since our society has made further steps toward modernization and emancipation.

So, the above statement leads me to think that the younger generation of men saw the concept of honor as evolving with the emancipation of society toward modernization, which means that the more modern the society, the less important the family honor. This shows also that there is a difference in perceptions between the two generations of men. So, while the older generation, perceived honor as the cornerstone of the family and as an inherited value of Albanian tradition, confirming in this way Gellci’s (2004) arguments on the importance of honor for Albanian family, the younger generation perceived it as a more fluid concept, which is shaped, changed and constructed over time, depending on the cultural development and emancipation of society. Obviously, the above assumptions might show as well, the gap of perceptions that exists across the two generation of men in relation to family honor.

4.3 For whom in the family honor is most important?

In the Albanian society, honor has special importance for the man, since it shows his supremacy and superiority in the public space (Danemark, Soydan, Pashko & Vejsiu, 1995). In fact, according to Pitt-Rivers (1965), the honor of the man referred to his duty to defend

the sexual purity of all female members of his family⁵², since as Welden (2010) points out, any shameful act is directly linked to the man of the house, given that he is supposed to represent the entire family. If the man does not take immediate actions, he will be perceived as a weak man, unable to preserve his dignity in society (p.385). While the shame of women in Albanian society refers to their failure to protect virginity, the shame of men is related to their failure to defend sexual purity of female members of their family that is the family honor (Danemark et al., 1995). Likewise, while discussing about honor crimes among Muslim immigrants in UK, Siddiqui (2005) argues that men face pressure to conform to the traditional male values in order to preserve the honor and reputation of the family.

In a similar way as the above authors argue, both generations of men⁵³ admitted that honor was an important value for the man and especially for the head of the household that is the father and the husband, since he was conceptualized as the responsible person for the behaviors of other members of the family. For example, Andi (18) claimed that the man needs to show that he is a “real man”, “respected” and “virile”. Likewise, Albion (21) noted that “men have the need to feel pride and keep their heads up. If they are dishonored they feel worthless”. I think that such statements rest primarily in the construction of hegemonic masculinity, which defines males’ traditional gender role expectations in the family, with their ability to defend the family honor. Following this logic, Arni (24) argued that “the man feel the heavy burdens of shame more than the woman does, because the man is the head of the household, therefore he has moral responsibilities for the other family members”.

From this point, it is clear that the father or the husband is directly linked to the concept of honor, since he is known as the head of the household, or as a superior identity beyond the individual. In order to show the importance of family honor for the man of the house, Sabael

⁵² Pitt-Rivers in his article “*Honor and Social Status*” describe the value of the honor in Andalusian society (Spain).

⁵³ Even though, both generations considered honor to be of primary importance for men, the younger generation tried to make more elaborated arguments on this issue.

(20) pointed out that “the moral of the sister, mother and wife is the weak point of each man and especially in a place like Lapraka”, which clearly confirms what Pitt-Rivers assumed. It is also interesting to point out that, honor is considered as a “weak point” of the man of the house. It seems that he is the only responsible person for the behavior of each member of the family. Therefore, whatever “deviance” that female members of the family do from the “normal” route of family codes and rules is considered a problem not for the individual, but for the head of the household since he represents the entire family. The above statements support (Danemark et al., 1995) arguments on the pride and superiority of an honored man, if he is able to safeguard the sexuality of female members of the family. Honor, is therefore perceived as a “need” for a man, who use this concept to construct his virility and manliness, to show that he has pride, that he is respected, that he is above all a “real man” who takes care of his family. Of course, what is problematic with this model is that, ideas of masculinity and femininity are reinforced particularly through the traditional gender role divisions, which supports the hierarchical position of men and women in family and society.

4.4 Possible reasons that perpetuate honor crimes of women

Different authors (Ruggi, 2000; Haile, 2007, Coomaraswamy, 2005) argue that crimes in the name of “honor” are triggered by a variety of factors (most of them mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter), such as transgression of family codes and inappropriate behaviors of female members of the family, which dishonor the family in community by bringing shame. However, such crimes are most often related to female’s sexual restraints and are perceived to happen quite often in cases of marital infidelity and lost virginity (Welchman & Hossain, 2005; Nanes, 2003).

A vast majority of my informants believed that a typical case when a honor crime happens was when someone in the family behaves in contrast to the rules, customs and traditions of the family, kin or community, which was related mainly to female’s actions and

behaviors.⁵⁴ In this regard, Erion (18) made clear that “if the girl breaks the moral norms, rules and codes of the family she is shot by her father, brother, husband or any male relative in the kin”. In other cases women are killed even for “minor misbehaviors” that are supposed to break the order of the head of the family or give a “bad reputation” to the family (Zeni, 30). Many informants argued that such crimes happen in cases when the girls leave the house without the permission of the father.

A strong tendency among younger informants was to relate honor crimes primarily to female’s body and their sexual behaviors which confirms (Welchman & Hossain, 2005; Nanes, 2003) arguments. Such crimes were perceived to be perpetuated mainly from female’s sexual morality such as loss of virginity, marital infidelity, rape of a female member of the family and prostitution. For example, Erion (18) indicated that the concept of honor crimes of women is related to the “hymen and virginity of the girls before marriage”.

On the other hand, even though many older informants acknowledged female sexuality and behaviors as possible factors that encourage honor crimes of women,⁵⁵ they did not prefer to talk on such issues. They went beyond these arguments by mentioning alcoholism, thefts, disagreements, murders, incest, domestic violence, divorce and hypocrisy as other factors that enhance such crimes.⁵⁶

However, even though both generations of men thought of honor crimes of women in relation to their body and sexuality, they used different words to explain the same arguments.

⁵⁴ An interesting fact is that on the one hand, when asked about honor crimes in general, the younger generation emphasized more strongly honor crimes as a consequence of women’s sexual behaviors. On the other hand, the older generation mentioned many cases of men being victims of such crimes. However, throughout my thesis I address particularly honor crimes of women in Albanian society. Please refer to introduction for an explanation on honor killings of men in Albania.

⁵⁵ I believe that one possible explanation for the reluctance of the older men to talk about honor crimes in relation to female’s sexual behaviors, might be their conservative reluctance to talk about sensitive topic with outsiders, since, as I have mentioned in methodological chapter, sexuality is considered a taboo topic, especially in rural areas, among older generations and between males and females. On the other hand, younger men were more flexible to speak on such issues, even though I observed that one of the men (Beni, 23) would sometimes smile in an embarrassed way or would keep his head down to avoid eye contact, while talking on female sexuality.

⁵⁶ Moreover, a family is considered dishonored in different contexts depending on the customs and traditions of the family, kin and community Gezim (70).

While the younger men were more likely to use words such as, “the break of virginity/hymen”⁵⁷, “marital infidelity”, “having sex with someone”, “slut”, the older generation would most often use other terms such as “infamy”, “foolishness”, “the girl/ wife went with someone”, “cheating the husband”, “out of god’s way”, to describe some of the main reasons for honor crimes of women.⁵⁸

So, as it is made clear from the arguments of my informants, most often women and girls fall victims of honor crimes, not only when they fail to preserve their sexual purity and morality, but even in cases when they are perceived to “transgress” the family and community codes and norms.

4.5 What influences the persons to commit honor crimes of women?

As I previously mentioned in this chapter, lots of factors encourage honor crimes of women and among many others, community pressure was of particular importance even in Albanian society (Gellci, 2005). Other factors that were mentioned were cultural attitudes and beliefs (Coomaraswamy, 2001; Arsovska, 2006), patriarchal claims and norms of the society (Ruggi, 2005; Sen, 2005), customary laws (Cewla, 2005), legal codes or juridical actions (Sen, 2005; Hossain and Welchman, 2005), even socio-economic and political reasons (Coomaraswamy, 2001).

All my informants mentioned many cases of honor crimes that they had heard from the media. During the interviews, I found that some of the relatives of the informants have been victims of honor killings.⁵⁹ From the answers of both generations of men, many of the

⁵⁷ The exact word that was used in Albanian language was ‘*cipa*’, meaning the vagina membrane which is used more often in slang language with youngsters

⁵⁸ The use of the different vocabulary by older and younger men to express somehow the same thing, might be due to their age gap, conservative ideas on sexuality of the old generation, taboos on sexuality especially in rural areas and gender differences between me and older men. On the other hand, younger generation, were less reserved in their vocabulary, either due to their young age, or due to being in a close age difference with me as researcher. Further detail on this issue is elaborated in methodological chapter.

⁵⁹ The first case was R. Q which was shot by her dad because she returned home at 4 am in the morning. See for example <http://www.stophonourkillings.com/?q=taxonomy/term/124>. The second case was a girl that committed

above factors were mentioned to encourage honor crimes of women. I will briefly highlight the most important ones as below.

4.5.1 The impact of collective community, traditions and “backward” culture

In a similar way to many studies on honor crimes, community was perceived by both generations of men as the primary factor to encourage honor crimes of women. Moreover, many other informants I spoke to referred to Albanian backward traditions and customs (especially those practiced in north) as the main factors that perpetuate crimes in the name of honor. For example, Erion (18) explained the importance of Albanian traditions and the community opinion as the main factor for the identity that each of us has in public sphere.

Among other factors mentioned mainly from the younger generation of men from north and south as well as from some older men from the south were the “backward” mentality and culture, the norms and customs of that society where someone was raised as well as traditions and taboos. Such factors were perceived to be stronger in rural areas and specifically as I will argue in chapter five of my thesis, among northerners and those that come from the rural north in the periphery of urban centers. In a similar way with many informants, Edmonda (57), the Director of a Women’s Shelter in Tirana, argued that primarily the cultural model transmitted by their parents, family, kin and members of the community influences persons to commit crimes of honor. Furthermore, she asserted that the roles and models of the “virile man” influence perpetrators of such crimes.

a suicide due to the physical, emotional and psychological abuse of her parents after she left home for several days with her boyfriend. Another case was a boy who shot his mother and sister for immorality.

4.5.2 Albanian customary law Canon

One of the main factors for honor crimes of women mentioned by the majority of both generations of men was also the Albanian customary law, Canon of Leke Dukagjini⁶⁰, which I have elaborated previously in the introduction.⁶¹ Many informants considered Canon as an old and inherited custom that should not exist in the modern area of the 21st century. Other informants pointed out the importance and practice of Canon times ago, when there was no law, but they critiqued its existence nowadays, in a civilized society.

However, as it is shown from the narrative of an older man who has migrated from the northern areas to the outskirts of Tirana, Domje (Gezim, 70), there is a belief that the problem does not exist in the Canon, but in its interpretation, since people do not read Canon as they should. In his narrative, he supported Canon as an important value of northerner traditions. He justified it by saying that people can not kill someone without any strong reason. He explained that “since the state did not operate as it should to punish those who are guilty; people are somehow obligated to go in self-judgment and kill for protection of their honor” (Gezim, 70). From his narrative, it is shown how people can justify Canon by blaming the failure of the state to punish criminals, which I elaborate in the forthcoming section. In fact, I expected somehow that the older generation would be more conservative to preserve old customs and norms such as Canon but, I was really surprised with the answers of two young informants, who were pro the practice of Canon nowadays⁶². For example, Arni (24) argued that:

⁶⁰ In fact, Canon was forbidden during the communist period, but its practices started recovering in the early 90s, in most of the north of the country. In a way, the Canon today is used to justify violence against women (Amnesty International, 2006, p. 64).

⁶¹ As I previously mentioned in introduction section, according to Canon, husbands are justified in killing their wives under circumstances of infidelity and betrayal of hospitality

⁶² I believed that, both informants did not know too much information about Canon, but then when asked about what they already knew, they told me some of the main assumptions and laws provided in Canon.

It should be called the Canon of honor since most of the laws are all about honor. I think that the laws of Canon should continue to exist. Every family and family member should have its own Canon, its own moral laws.

What surprised me more was that it was not only the older generation that tried to support the Canon, but also even the younger generation, which of course is in contradiction with the general assumptions that the older generations are more likely to preserve their social norms and customs in comparison to the younger generation.⁶³ This finding show that certain social norms and customs in Albanian society such as Canon might continue to exist and be legitimized, since they are not confined only to the older generations of men, but such perceptions are represented even in the younger generations.

4.5.3 Failure of state: Weakness of the laws and removal of capital punishment

While arguing about the possible factors that encourage honor crimes of women, the older generation of men blamed the weakness of laws and especially removal of capital punishment. In their narratives, they referred to the communist period, when such crimes were a rare phenomenon due to stronger laws and capital punishment. However, they did not deny the possibility that during that period, such crimes existed, but they were a rare phenomenon and people seldom heard about them. Cesar (68) argued that “honor crimes might have happened even during the communism, but we never got a chance to hear about them. People were brainwashed; they did not need to know”.

Moreover, the above arguments were confirmed even by many of the institutional authorities, who also supported the idea that during communism such crimes were frozen due to the strong laws and capital punishment. In a similar way, Lubonja & Salvatici, (2000), argue that during the communist regime in Albania, violence against women and especially

⁶³ When asked why was it important that Canon continue to exist they claimed that Canon was a customary law that place importance to honor, which was considered by both of them as one of the most fundamental values of a respected family in community.

honor killings was a phenomenon kept mainly inside the walls of the house. Such issues were considered taboo since nobody dared to make them public.

4.5.4 Emigration

Emigration was another factor that was perceived by the older generation of men to perpetuate honor crimes of women. Most of them argued about the double sexual standards applied to women and not to men. Thus, while men are allowed to have many sexual partners abroad, they expect their wives or sisters to remain sexually pure. According to one of my informant “ men go abroad for many years to work and provide money for their family, but they forget that their wives have physiological needs and the moment that they hear some rumors, they perpetrate extreme crimes” (Nerim,61).

I think that from the above assumptions it is clear that the double standard of sexual behaviors is applied to women and not to men. As I shall argue, sexual behaviors of women and men are vital in the construction of gender roles expectations for both women and men. Yet, if women fail to safeguard their virginity they are victims of many violent crimes perpetuated mainly by male family members.

4.5.5 Socio-economic, political and personal factors

In a similar way to men, the key institutional authorities argued that perpetrators of honor crimes feel the pressure of society, which might ridicule, tease and despise them if they do not take any action to move the person that had caused the shame. Nevertheless, institutional authorities were more likely than men to blame other economic, psychological and social factors such as low level intellectual background, economic and psycho-social problems, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, unemployment and poverty.

From all above arguments I observed that a vast majority of both generations of men perceived crimes in the name of honor in Albanian society as a phenomenon perpetuated

mainly from the “violent” and “backward” culture and inherited values especially in northern areas that reserve a subordinate position for women in family and society. However, these discourses as I will argue below and in more details in chapter five are problematic in framing honor crimes of women under the “veil” of “violent” culture.

4.6 The cost of defending family honor: Why “washing the shame with blood”?

While talking about family honor, Campbell (1974) argues that the defense of family honor is a sign of family mutuality, solidarity, reputation and integrity in the community. The family status in the community is perceived to be retained most often by the honor and respectable behaviors of female members of the family and any actual or perceived “deviance” from the family rules is punished by death since it damages the family reputation in the community (Ruggi, 2000). Thus, killing of the woman is not only supposed to remove the ‘collective shame’ that her behaviors brought, but it serves also a social advantage: regaining respect in the society (Sen, 2005, p.51). In this way, the perceived ‘lost honor’ could be regained by making the crime visible in the community (Sliman, 2005).

As I mentioned before in this chapter, community is perceived by both generations of men somehow as one of the main driving forces that prompt individuals to extreme actions such as honor crimes. In consistence with previous scholars (Sen, 2005; Ruggi, 2000; Haile, 2007), all the informants admitted that a dishonored family is perceived by the community as worthless and not respected. In order to show the force of the community in the enhancement of such crimes, Gezim (70)⁶⁴ recalled from his past:

If women would do something that was considered a shame for the community, the villagers would remove the family from the village if the honor was not “put in its place”. If the family did not leave the village, then they threatened to set the family’s house on fire.

⁶⁴ Gezim (70) recalled from his past that if a dishonored man did not revenge the community did not respect and support the him any more. In order to make this person feel shameful among other people and force him to “put the honor in place” he was given coffee under his knees, which is an old northerner tradition to make someone feel disrespected

So, overall the pressure and prejudices by the society are supposed to reinforce such crimes, since they were perceived by many informants to endanger family reputation. While Laert (27), assumed that a family can not have a quiet life any more after being perceived as dishonored, Beni (23) stated that the family faces pressure from the society since they can not stand the fact that others can tease them. When asked about why such persons need to commit honor crimes many informants believed that such crimes happen because the family needs to preserve and regain the “damaged honor” and reputation in the society. Similarly, Erion (18) maintained that the family would retain its honor and pride the moment they punish the person that has brought the shame. Following the same argument, Fation (45) argued that the visibility of honor crimes is much more prevalent than other crimes because the family want the community to know that “blood has washed away the shame”, so that they can regain the respect.

I think that what is particularly interesting in these arguments is the idea that “collective shame” is “wiped away” through public visibility of such crimes in the surrounding community. Thus, it means that the family will “rest in peace” after this action, because the perceived shame that the woman has brought in the family or community is removed by the act of killing. Obviously, the family could not support the heavy burdens of rumors on its shoulders. As many of my informants explained, the visibility of honor crimes is important since the community becomes aware that the honor is regained and shame is removed. This means that, the family status and reputation in a community is again restored as soon as the dishonored person is removed. In this regard, many institutional authorities admitted the price that a person has for living for community. In her account, Oriona (27), the Director of youth organization near Lapraka was explicit about the reasons that honor needed to be “put in its place”:

In order to avoid the negative perceptions and judgment of the society, in order to fulfill our egoism and pride and in order to show in front of the community that they [perpetrators] have values that need to be appreciated in this society so that they can be accepted and respected.

Moreover, from the answers of both generations of men, it was clear that the stain of shame, the heavy burdens and pressure the family face from a dishonored female member, since the family itself is ridiculed, despised and excluded from all of social events of the society. These narratives confirm Sommers (2008, p.40) arguments that if a dishonored men in Albania did not put the honor in its place he was considered “disgraced”, “low class” and “bad. Interestingly, many informants argued that once the shame is brought to the family, it can not be “wiped away” so easily without punishment of women. Therefore, as many informants assumed, it is just through the death punishment that family honor and respect in community is regained, which means that “blood needs to wash away the shame” since as (King, 2008, p.318) argues “without the murder the family would carry an irretrievable damage to its long lasting reputation”.

4.7 Perceptions on perpetrators and victims of honor crimes

Honor crimes of women have a special importance for construction of manliness since “to be man” as Campbell (1974, p.269) argues does not only mean to be courageous, but also it involves the ability of the man to do something effective about the surrounding dangers and problems. While on the one hand, men are associated with qualities of manliness, women on the other hand are associated with qualities of sexual shame (p.270). When asked about the possible persons that commit crimes of honor many informants perceived the men as the primary perpetrators involved in honor crimes since they were seen by many informants as naturally driven toward aggression and since honor has special importance for men in order to feel respected in their community.

However, as I have argued above, honor crimes serve also another function in the construction of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. As one of the informants noted “even though one man might be in prison for committing a honor killing, the society would think that he was a “real” man with honor and “*namus*”⁶⁵ (Arni, 24). Since perpetrators are surrounded by the “heavy burdens” and judgment of the society, both generations of men thought that it was difficult for them to be logical in front of the supposed pressure of community and backward traditions. In his account, Nerim (61) justified such crimes with the idea of emotional and psychological trauma that shake individual’s consciousness and make perpetrators illogical to reason or control their emotions and fury. According to Gezim (70), “if someone’s dignity is shaken and he could not raise his head any more, than he is obligated to take the honor by death”. Likewise, Tani assumed:

Everyone can kill in the name of honor because it has to do with emotions and outburst of anger. It is justified because it is not pre-mediated murder. I can be one of these persons next day. They feel the pressure of the family, community, culture. They are the real victims (Tani, 52).

Yet, I was surprised to find out that even the younger generation of men justified such crimes in the same ways. They did not try to blame or judge such persons, even though they admitted that other simple solutions might have been available, like divorce in the case of infidelity. Thus, (Sabael, 20) claimed that “they [perpetrators] have had a very strong reason for committing such crimes. In fact, they are not killers since they are influenced by the emotional breakdown”.

However, some other informants were skeptical to the idea that the individual should think and act in a subjective way independently from the judgment and influence of the society. Given the pressure of Albanian cultural traditions, the individual was perceived to face difficulties to be independent of the outward influences. Finally, another informant

⁶⁵ *Namus* is an Albanian word derived from Turkish, in order to emphasize honor of the man

blamed the fact that in Domje and in general in Albania people live for others and not for themselves:

It is nonsense. If you need to do something, you should do it because you want it but not because someone else is telling you to do it. This mentality is too early to be applied to Albanian society and especially in Domje. We are surrounded by the heavy burdens of the judgment of the community (Zeni, 30).

On the other hand, victim of honor crimes were perceived with weak character since they were perceived to be the person that lead to such crimes. “They have a weak character because they lead to the actions for their infidelity (Erion, 18). In this framework, Zina (55), the head of social and economical unit in Lapraka argued that victims of honor crimes are prejudiced by the rest of the society. They are seen sometimes as causing such crimes since in Albania men consider women their property as something that needs to be protected. For the rest of the informants, the victims or the survivors of honor crimes should be supported from the state social mechanism from the family and community.

To sum up, both generations of men saw honor as one of the most important value of Albanian family since any person that tries to transgress the codes of family honor is punished by death. Thus, the phenomenon of honor crimes of women was seen from the majority of younger generation of men mainly in relation to the control of women’s body and sexuality, which confirms also the explanations of many authors mentioned above. Nevertheless, the older generation of men was less reluctant to talk about women’s sexuality, since they perceived honor crimes in relation to a variety to other reasons that can negatively effect the public reputation of the family.

As it is evident from the several comments made from all informants, community, patriarchal traditions and social norms, values and cultural models inherited from the past were perceived to be the main factor that motivates individuals to commit crimes in the name of honor. Though, I agree with these arguments, I am doubtful as to what extent we can

blame totally the culture, values and tradition of the past especially patriarchal customs in northern Albania inherited from social norms and customary law Canon as I will argue in the next chapter in more details. In a similar way Sen (2005, p.61) argued that “ making culture the prime explanatory variable fails to account for the way cultural histories justify, excuse and formalize forms of violence against women in many places”.

It is quite interesting to note how some of the informants blamed primarily the, community and culture rather than the perpetrators of honor crimes who were perceived to be the “ real victims” since they were under the pressure of society or under the emotional breakdown, which of course made some of the informants justify their extreme actions. Thus, the displacement of blame continues to shift from murderers to the state failure and emigration, even though that does not resolve the issue of the “backward” culture. This is also another way to exonerate the perpetrators and justify such crimes in the name of community pressure, tradition and preservation of male authority and dignity in community. From this point of view, I believe that, if we try to see such crimes in the cultural framework, it seems that individuals do not have a solution, they are just “victims” of the old norms and customs inherited from the past, so they are not to be blamed; culture and traditions should be blamed. Therefore, we are left with the dilemma of blaming the “backward” culture and the tradition. I do not claim that such judgment and perception is wrong, but if people put too much emphasize on them, it seems that the individuals can not enact agency upon their actions. It is like a self-fulfilling prophecy that people can not escape.

The problem is that when violence against women is framed as a pattern of tradition then, the tradition itself seems to be imagined as “native, timeless, and unchanging” (Kogacioglu, 2004, p.120). I would rather say that even though, community, traditions and culture play an immense role in perpetuating such crimes, they are not the only ones to be blamed. Individuals are responsible for their actions and in reference to other authors (Sen,

2005; Siddiqui, 2005) I believe that perpetrators can very often try to escape punishment by blaming their traditions in order to justify and legitimize their crimes.

Chapter 5. Honor crimes of women in terms of regional and cultural boundaries

5.1 Discourses on the “backward” north and the “modern” south

Since the first target group of my research was mainly men, who have migrated from remote rural areas of Albania into the peripheral areas of Tirana, I was particularly concerned to explore the ways men’s “pre-existing traditional mentalities”⁶⁶ in terms of honor crimes contradicts with the “modernist ideologies”⁶⁷, or how these mentalities are absorbed and assimilated with the modernist ones. Thus, in the first part of this chapter, I see how cultural and regional discourses on honor crimes of women are drawn from both informants coming from the north and from the south and how the intersection of age might influence such discourses. Then, in the second section of this chapter, I explore how the two generations of men perceive and draw boundaries between people coming from rural north and south of Albania into periphery of the capital city, while talking about crimes in the name of honor.

In the general discourse in Albania, it exists a common stereotype for people from the north and those from the south, which I have explained in more details in the introduction. In fact, when asked about the cases of honor crimes in Albanian, many informants referred to rural and northern parts of Albania as areas where such crimes happen most often. In this account, people living in the north were perceived to be less tolerant than those living in the south and more prone to obey customs and old traditions. It is important to point out that,

⁶⁶ I refer to pre-existing traditional mentalities to certain modes of behaving and social structures, that follow strictly the traditional gender role expectations, where values, norms and social roles can be understood in term of patriarchy and dependency. I borrow as well Apter’s (1969) term of traditionalism as “validation of current behavior by reference to immemorial prescriptive goals” (p.83).

⁶⁷ I refer to modernist ideologies to the less rigid traditional gender role expectation, more freedom for people’s actions and behaviors and when values, customs and social roles change in relation to the so called “western styles” and independence of individuals. I borrow as well Apter’s (1969) term of modernity which “presupposes a much more remote relationship between antecedent values and new goals” (p.83).

both the informants from north and south assigned honor crimes mainly to the northern areas of Albania⁶⁸. More specifically people from the south referred to individualistic attributes of the highlanders (northerners) as possible factors that predispose them most often to commit such crimes, along with their “backward” customs and traditions inherited mainly from Canon. For example, Tani (52) thought that honor crimes are more common among highlanders since they were perceived to be ruder, backward and less educated. Similarly, Beni (23), believed that such crimes happen most often in isolated and remote rural areas especially in the north, since people are not open-minded in contrast to those from the south who are more emancipated.

Many other informants from south admitted that such people were perceived by others as ignorant, wild or called under the label “malok”, the ones who come from the mountains and occupy the urban territories. Following this logic, another informant (Erion, 18) was even harsher while discussing for northerners. He asserted that, “these are people who commit honor crimes of women because of their patriarchal mentality. I would rather let them be in their way, we can not deal with them because they can not understand since they are thickheaded”.⁶⁹ Moreover, many southerners perceived Albanian customary law as an old “backward” tradition that influences northerners to commit horrible crimes in the name of honor.

Moreover, in contrast to what I expected, people from the north themselves, especially the young generation of men blamed the “backward” traditions, Canon and social norms in the northern areas. For example, Zeni, (30) who has been in London for two years, thought that such crimes happen mainly in the north because, “they [northerners] still live

⁶⁸ Such discourses were made mainly from both generations of men from the south and younger generation of men from the north.

⁶⁹ Moreover, many of my informants from the south perceived such crimes happening more often in rural areas especially in northern Albanian where the husband is still the head of the family and the wife has to obey to him. Such areas are perceived to be influenced as well by the laws of Canon that is highly discriminatory to women.

like in the 50s with the old backward traditions and mentality. It is like a chain that they need to fulfill, in order to preserve what they already had as a tradition in the past”.

One other informant from north, explained the reason why he thought that such crimes happened more often in the north, which of course, created again the idea of “backward” traditions in the north:

If a woman from the south cheats on her husband, people would say that she damaged herself, but if she lived in the north then the damage is even worse. She has damaged her family, kin, community and has brought shame on them. Therefore, they [the family members] need to have someone to put the justice in its place, because in the north people are more conservative to their old traditions (Irind, 25).

Hence, from the above statement it is clear the distinction made between people living in the south and the north of Albania. Obviously, the case of the woman who cheated on her husband is perceived differently in the south and the north of Albania. If she is considered to have damaged herself in the south, this means that the self-judgment is rather inward and individualistic. Yet, if the woman cheats on her husband in the north, she has committed a grave damage not only to herself, but to the family and community, which is an outward judgment. Therefore, while in the first case, her moral juridical system is herself; in the second case, the community serves as a juridical system that “upholds” the honor and “punishes” everyone that tries to break the so-called “order” of community mores and rules.

In fact, in contrast to the general beliefs held by men from the south and those from the north, many of the key institutional authorities believed that such crimes happen mainly in rural and poor areas of Albania.⁷⁰ Even though, they would sometimes mention Canon they preferred not to draw cultural and regional boundaries.⁷¹ For example, the director of

⁷⁰ Though, many of them did not see any difference between north and south, since they believed that such crimes happen in all regions of Albania, the teachers in Domje (Lindita, 28) and the social worker in Lapraka (Besa, 30) mention that most often such crimes happen in north.

⁷¹ As I have previously mentioned the aim for involving the opinion of institutional authority has been with the idea to provide more supportive arguments to the phenomenon of honor killings from another more professional level. Any further analysis and critiques of their statement is beyond the scope of this research, which means

Women Shelter in Albania, Edmonda (57) explained that, “extreme cases have been localized mainly in rural and poor areas, less developed economically and socially endangered, even though such crimes have happened in all areas of Albania north and south”.

Therefore, from the above arguments we can say that both men from the north and the south saw the phenomenon of honor crimes as happening most often in the northern areas. As I previously discussed in the 3rd chapter of my thesis and as Schwandner-Sievers (2008) field research in Albania confirmed, the general discourse and stereotype among people living in north and those living in south, create a binary between “modern” south and “primitive” north. However, in contrast to Schwandner-Sievers (2008) fieldwork research, I found that even people from the north, living in the outskirts of Tirana, tried to blame northerners, even though not the same way as southerners. More specifically, informants from the north tried to blame northern traditions and customs for enhancing such crimes, but not in terms of personal attributes of individuals. On the other hand, southerners blamed both the personal characteristic of northerners along with their “backward” culture. In this framework, it is important to point out how the discourse on the culture is used again to justify and legitimize honor crimes of women.

5.2 Albanian’s struggles between pre-existing “traditionalist” mentalities and “modernist” ideologies

Due to internal migration, especially after the 90s, the population in the outskirts of Tirana is more heterogonous, since many people have migrated there from the north and south villages of Albania (mainly from the north), bringing with them their patriarchal mentalities, social norms and traditional gender ideologies, which do not always fit with the discourse of “modernity” of the capital city. Likewise, a report prepared by Adriana Baban

that I refer to their statements to support/ contradict or add more information to existing arguments made primarily from men.

(2003) shows that one of the most important features of the Albanian transitory period is the internal migration of people coming from remote villages toward urban areas. Along with unemployment and poverty, these people bring with themselves traditions, mentalities customs and lifestyles which result sometimes in aggression toward other people (Baban, 2003). Moreover, Shkalla (2008) mentioned that along with the political and economic transition, our society is faced with a transition of values due to internal migration of people from remote villages to urban centers. When the tradition is joined with modern, it forms the process of re-traditionalisation, as a way to justify extreme crimes of people coming from villages and help them survive in the fast influence of modernity (2008).

It is interesting to note how many of the informants draw sharp boundaries between northerners and southerners and at the same time blamed northerners as the responsible persons for the honor crimes, not only in their place of birth, but even in places where they come from remote villages to the periphery of urban centers such as Lapraka and Domje. In fact, both the older and younger generation of men from the south thought that such crimes happen most often not only in rural areas and the north, but as well in peripheral areas of Tirana mainly among northerners, since these people feel a distance from the majority of the population.

Northerners that have migrated from rural and remote villages to peripheral areas of Tirana were seen as more inclined to commit honor crimes of women. This was mainly because, according to my informants, they are faced with a pressure and tension to keep their tradition or adapt to the “modern” values.⁷² They can not face the reality which is quite different to their previous background, so this leads to the degradation of their behaviors. In accordance with this assumption (Tani, 52), originally coming from the south, stated “they [northerners] came from a better life but are faced with a worse reality. Most of the times

⁷² When asked about what they meant with modern values many informants perceived them with the modern lifestyles and freedom enjoyed especially from by youngsters and females in the capital city, less interference in personal life, more emancipated and civilized, welcoming “western styles”.

they manifest primitive behaviors such as honor crimes, so others see them as outsiders”.

Likewise, Sabael (20), again from south, stated, “northerners are disadvantaged and prejudiced since they keep the traditions and their customs. Of course that they have difficulties to be integrated and assimilated in comparison to us that come from the south”

Another older man, Nerim (61), who was actually from the south but living in Domje, gave a similar reason. He believed that northerners need to be integrated in the new reality, which is different from the previous place:

Previously in the place of origin they [northern men] were used to their wife staying home, they were not used to their daughter going out to a party or speaking to someone that they do not know because there all the marriages were arranged. These men cannot imagine and stand their wives and daughters becoming emancipated like having a boyfriend or going out. It is a threat to their ego, to their masculinity, identity. These people are not used to accept such changes and therefore they go to extreme actions to show that they have still control, they have power, and they are still the leaders.

As I previously mentioned, people coming from rural remote areas, particularly from the north were perceived to have difficulties with the assimilation of the “modern” values of the capital city, which make them to face pressure and demonstrate “primitive behaviors” such as honor crimes of women.⁷³ I was surprised to find out that such references were made not only by informants from the south, but from informants that had come from the north themselves or whose family has migrated in periphery of Tirana years ago. Zeni (30) also emphasized that “they [northerners] come from an isolated and traditional mentality of north areas which is totally different from their new reality”. He made a similar connection between northerners and people from third world countries who migrate to western countries:

Whatever immigrants do to improve the situation in western countries they are prejudiced and discriminated the same as northerners that migrate in Tirana since both of them [immigrants and northern migrants] do not show civilization by committing grave crimes in the name of honor.

⁷³ In order to understand informant’s attitudes to this phenomenon I tried to do indirect questions in order to avoid ethical problems. So, instead asking how are you perceived from the majority of the population I asked them how are perceived people that come from remote and rural areas to peripheral areas of Tirana and especially those that come from the north

It is interesting to pinpoint the similarity that Zeni (30) made between people migrating to western countries and northerners that have migrated to the periphery of Tirana. This assumption might come since he has been an immigrant himself in London and he might have faced this discourse in that country, which interestingly comes back to my theoretical background chapter on the stereotypes and discourses of Muslim migrants to western countries. Even though, Zeni's origin is actually from the north, it seems that he wanted to distance himself from "those backward northerners" and may be portraying himself as "modern" and "emancipated", since he mentioned in every moment how people should be assimilated and leave their "old-fashioned" and "violent" traditions. I think that part of the reason might be the idea that he is a young man who has emigrated in a developed country and therefore wanted to present himself as modern and open -minded. Moreover, as I will argue below, the younger generation is more flexible to adapt to the values of the host country or city where they migrate. Thus, Irind (25), whose family migrated in Domje when he was in his fifteens explained in details his attitudes:

They [northerners] are prejudiced but not without reason. I believe that when you can go and meet these persons back in their home in north you would see another image of those persons, values, morals, honor, hospitability, because they feel better in their house when they are the leaders of the family. Here in Tirana such people are deformed and formed again from the cultural shock they face. Everything that had special importance in their previous place does not have such importance when they come here [Domje]. They have invested their whole lives and energy for such values and when these values are endangered they feel threatened and worthless. In order to preserve their dignity and traditions they are obligated in any ways to attract attention through violent and protective ways in order to destroy what is considered as "the modern values" which makes them feel like outsiders.

This means that man's access to power and his feeling of dignity depends on the preservation of traditional gender role hierarchies. If he comes in the different environment, his manliness is endangered, since he might experience a "crises of masculinity". So, the violence is therefore justified as response to preserve his culture along with gender hierarchies.

In fact, some of the informants thought that the northern mentality has been changed throughout time. For instance, Irind (25) explained that until 10 years ago, northerners were widely perceived as land grabbers, rough people, uneducated and anti-social, but now this mentality has slowly changed. According to him, northerners were more prone to be assimilated than before, which of course contradicts the assumption of the southerners that people from the north could not assimilate with the values of the modernity. In fact, this assimilation was perceived to be much more difficult for the older generation. Many young informants believed that for the younger generation it is not difficult to be assimilated and adopt the “modern values” but the older generations are not tolerant to such changes. For example, Cesar (68) also from the north, but actually living in Domje, emphasized the northern traditions as part of their identity:

We are born and raised according to our traditions in the north and we can not pretend that they do not exist. They are rooted deep down in our minds and spirit. They [traditions] are in every action that we do, in every behavior and movement and will continue to exist until death. We have all these values and it is up to us how we can use and interpret them. Some people choose violent ways and some others less violent [...]. We might say that honor and respect might be more important in our areas [northern areas] and traditions but this does not mean honor crimes are important as well.

Therefore, from the above examples it is shown that the older generation of men is perceived to have more difficulties to leave their old traditions and norms and behave in accordance to the values of the capital city, because such traditional values have special importance for them and are rooted in their ways of thinking and behaving. It is also interesting to note how Cesar (68) defined the traditional values like honor as part of their group identity as northerners, but at the same time his account shows that he might be aware that crimes of honor are “wrongly” interpreted as north tradition. This is also the reason that he relies on the individual choice to choose the right way.

In a similar way to men, the key institutional authorities argued that people from the north are often discriminated against, prejudiced and labeled in negative terms, which serve as an

internal pressure for such a person to demonstrate negative and aggressive behaviors till to crimes. For example, the police officer in Domje, (Keli, 39) admitted that people from the north need to work with two standards to keep the balance. First, they should not reject all their traditions and customs and on the other hand, they should adopt some modernist values since they live in the capital city.

Finally, I must say that I was surprised to find out that, younger generation of men coming from north themselves did not hesitate to blame somehow in the same way as southerners, people coming from the north to the outskirts of Tirana. However, none of them referred to themselves as “we”, like the old man Cesar (68), but they all referred to northerners as “they”. The reason for such reference might be that my informants that come from the north themselves did not see themselves as part of that “backward” target group of northerners. Even though they come from the same origin, they might have not preferred to be part of the “insiders”, but rather distance themselves from the “other northerners” and present themselves as already assimilated with the modernist ideologies. However, while trying to figure out their attitudes in such issues such as honor crimes I noticed a contradiction in their answers. For example, Irind (25) pointed out:

My family and relatives have emigrated as well from the north, but when you live for along time here [in Lapraka], you understand that you have to loose some of your customs in order to be more civilized as others. Otherwise, others might make fun of your old-fashioned traditions.

In another episode the same informant told me about the case of his relatives who had killed his daughter because she got out of her boyfriend’s car at 4 am in the morning and rejected to marry the man her father had chosen for her (an emigrant she had not even seen before in her lifetime). Therefore, Irind (25) told me that such persons still live with the backward traditions and patriarchal mentalities of the north.⁷⁴ Even though, I didn’t ask him he kept

⁷⁴ In fact he was telling me all the time that he considered such persons as schizophrenic. When I asked what he meant by that he said that schizophrenic in a sense that they can not leave their backward and primitive customs and norms inherited from north. He considered them as addictive to that backward mentality.

talking all the time how careful and emancipated he was with his wife and daughter as he gave them freedom and did not interfere in their private life like many of his northern relatives do.

In conclusion, we can say that both men from north and those from south blamed the patriarchal traditions and social norms in northern Albania for perpetuating such crimes. However, informants from the south were more prone to blame personal attributes of the northerners which of course, I believe makes them look as naturally backward. The problem is that such attitudes essentialize northerners and their so-called “violent” culture and customs, by creating in this way binaries of “modern” south and “backward” north. Moreover, from the arguments of the section two, it seems that those people coming from rural areas of the north are faced with a cultural shock/clash when they come in the urban reality. My findings support Baban (2003) and Shkalla (2008) arguments on the implications when tradition is faced with modernity, which according to many of my informants led to extreme actions of individuals in order to survive the pressures of the modern values. This situation was perceived from both generations of men from the south and the younger generation of men from the north as a clash between the urban and rural reality when people want to assimilate, but on the other hand can not leave the traditional mentality of the family where the individual was raised and educated. Therefore, I think that such persons seem to dispel the dilemma of their identity constructions which is already formed from the past traditions, but which is always fragile and prone to change to the new values of modernity.

However, such dilemmas are even stronger in the older the generation than in the younger generations. It is argued that as an adult immigrant rejects cultural assimilation in the host society he strengthens even more the “original cultural group-identity” as a defensive way of such pressure (Welden, 2010, p.386). Such persons expect their native-born children

to behave in accordance to the values and the norms, which were originally part of the family in their home country. However, in contrast, the younger generation is integrated and assimilated more easily with the values of the host society (Welden, 2010, p.386). In a similar way to Welden's (2010) arguments, my findings support the idea that the older generation of men finds more difficulties than the younger generation to assimilate with the modern values and throw out their customs and traditions.

Nevertheless, in contrast to what I expected, older men from the north did not made any reference in terms of expecting their children to behave according to the values and traditions of the north, although they clearly admitted that their traditions and norms were deeply rooted in every action and will continue to exist until death. I think that, in difference with younger generation, older men worshiped their traditions and they did not thought of them as backward or as encouraging honor crimes, but rather as important to their "group identity.

So, I argue that as far as there is a clash between modernity and tradition, it will be as well a clash between younger and older generation in terms of assimilation with the modern values and ideologies and on the other hand, preservation of the "pre-existing" mentalities and traditions. Referring back to Engle (2009) arguments on violent cultural practices, it is necessary to understand the implications when one's "backward" culture or failure to assimilate to "modern" values is used as a way to legitimize aggressive behaviors such as honor crimes, which of course are a form of gendered –based violence against women across cultural boundaries. Moreover, it is not quite sure that even after abandoning their backward cultural practices and adopting the modern values, violence against women will not continue to exist any more. This might not be the case, because violence against women is a universal problem affecting women all over the world and as Gill (2009) argues happening across cultural, ethnic, class, and religious lines.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I explored the phenomenon of honor crimes of women in the Albanian society based on perceptions and attitudes of two generations of men, who have migrated from remote northern and southern villages of Albania into the peripheral areas of Tirana (Domje and Lapraka). Based on the findings of this research, I argue that the ongoing discourses on honor crimes of women in Albanian society are still articulated by the majority of informants in terms of “violent” cultural traditions, inherited mainly from the northern areas, where the family honor and social reputation of the family in the community is highly retained through the sexual morality and honor of female members of the family.

From the narratives of all informants, we can say that honor has a special importance to Albanian family and society. It was perceived as value inherited and maintained from the past and as such, it was considered the cornerstone to the family social standing in community. While the younger generation perceived honor and honor crimes of women in terms of control of women’s body and sexuality, the older generation had a more elaborated concept on honor crimes by including a whole range of behaviors that damage the family reputation in the society. The majority of informants thought that any action of female members of the family that is supposed to dishonor the family in the public space leads to so-called honor crimes of women. Such crimes were perceived to rest on the notion that women have violated the rules and codes of honor that maintain the respect of the family within the community.

As it was clear from the answers of all informants, a dishonored family in the community is prejudiced, despised, ridiculed and neglected by others. Therefore, following the narratives of both generations of men, honor crimes happen in cases when the family reclaims the lost honor by “washing away the shame with blood”, killing therefore the

woman who is held responsible for bringing shame and provoking rage on the family. Only in this way, the family could regain its respect and restore its lost honor in the community.

My findings show that, honor crimes of women in Albania are perceived by the majority of informants from the north and the south as a phenomenon that is encouraged primarily by the surrounding community and “violent” northern culture. In one hand, both generations of men from the south assigned honor crimes to “backward” northern culture and personal characteristics of people from north in general, by seeing them as primitive, stupid, uneducated, conservative, ignorant and violent in contrast to those living in south who were perceived as more “civilized, educated and modern. On the other hand, the young generation of men from the, in difference from those from the south assigned honor crimes mainly to their “violent’ and “backward” culture.

Moreover, honor crimes were perceived to happen most often among people that come from the north into periphery areas of urban centers. However, while coming in the capital city these families bring with themselves their norms, traditions of their pre-existing mentalities, which according to my informants sometimes are in contradiction with the so-called “modernist ideologies” of the capital city. So, all informants, except older men from north argued that such people undertake extreme actions such as honor crimes of women due to this “cultural shock” or the pressure when confronted with a new “modern” identity, which is different from the previous culture when they were born and raised. Therefore, in order to survive in this “modern” reality they regress to their old tribal customs and norms, which is important to their “group identity”.

However, my analysis shows that the younger generation of men was most likely to adhere to a “modern identity”, which was considered against the “old-fashioned” norms and customs of the past. As I have argued till now, the problem is that if we relate honor killing crimes to northerners, then a binary is created between the north as “primitive” and

“backward” and the south as “superior” and “modern” on the other hand. Discourses on honor crimes serve then as cultural and regional markers of “modernity” and “tradition”.

Consequently, these discourses define the so-called honor crimes as northern cultural practice, by essentialising in this way the northern culture as inherently problematic and violent which was considered also as one of the major implication by many scholars (Engle, 2009; Kogacioglu, 2004). Nevertheless, I believe that discourses on “violent” culture and “backward” traditions might serve as mitigation for honor crimes of women, by justifying such crimes as a “cultural phenomenon” and perpetrators as “victims” of this “backward” culture. Therefore, I think that perpetrators of honor crimes should be strongly punished and not tolerated or mitigated any more as the “victims” of “violent” culture. Yet, I suggest that future research on the so-called honor crimes of women in Albania would need to take more consideration for a larger target group by comparing perceptions of people from urban and rural areas, involving also women and other important institutional authorities working on women’s rights along with intersections of class and religion.

In the light of my analysis, I think that honor crimes of women in Albania are neither all about inherited “backward” traditions and customs of the past, nor all about “misogynistic” and “violent” culture, but they are about power and desire to control woman’s body, sexuality and all her patterns of her behavior, confirming in this way the arguments made by many leading scholars on violence against women movement (Engle, 2009; Ruggi, 2000). Such crimes, have to do with the gender role hierarchies and expectations, which place the man as a superior and powerful head of the household, whose legitimate power could not be questioned, whose manliness and virility depend on the his ability to safeguard and monitor women’s behavior and in his capacity to punish whoever “ stains the family honor”, be this his mother, sister , daughter or wife. Moreover, I would rather say that the practice of honor crimes is not all about obeying some old inherited traditions and tribal

customs where individuals are “trapped” to kill in the name of honor female members of the family and kin. These oppressive practices rather lie on the concept of the woman as commodity of the man, of the enduring power of the family and on the unquestioned authority of the “patriarch” who posits woman in a subordinated position in the family and society.

Turning back to my theoretical arguments on the implications of cultural construction of honor crimes, the problem is that if we see honor crimes as perpetuated by the “backward” culture and traditions, then we are removing the blame from the individual to the culture, providing in this way a legitimatization of such crimes and perpetrators in the name of the “violent” culture. I believe that, as Engle (2009) made clear in her article about violent cultural practices, honor crimes are a form of gender based violence, since they reflect the hierarchical gender position of women and men in the family and society. Framing the so-called honor crimes in the light of inherited “backward” traditions fail to look at the gendered aspect of violence against women as a universal problem of violation of women’s human rights.

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Appendix A
Information on Informants

Informants	Age	Occupation	Education	Place of origin	Place of residence
Zeni	30	Worker	Secondary ed.	North	Domje
Gezim	70	Retired	Primary ed.	North	Domje
Erzen	58	Driver	Secondary ed.	North	Domje
Beni	23	Student	Secondary ed.	South	Domje
Cezar	68	Retired	Primary ed.	North	Domje
Nerim	61	Employed in state inst.	High ed.	South	Domje
Laert	27	Owns a small business	Secondary ed.	South	Domje
Fation	45	Worker in factory	Secondary ed.	North	Domje
Albion	21	Student	High ed.	South	Domje
Arni	24	Student	Secondary ed.	South	Lapraka
Sabael	20	Student	Secondary ed.	South	Lapraka
Erion	18	High school student	Secondary ed.	South	Lapraka
Andi	18	High school student	Secondary ed.	North	Lapraka
Irind	25	Unemployed	Secondary ed.	North	Lapraka
Tani	52	Construction worker	Secondary ed.	South	Lapraka
Adi	15	High school student	Secondary ed.	North	Lapraka
Altin	16	Has abandoned school	Primary ed.	North	Lapraka

Institutional authorities	Age	Occupation	Education	Palace of origin	Working Area
Xhoana	56	Local authority representative	High ed.	South	Domje
Keli	39	Police officer	High ed.	North	Domje
Lindita	28	Teacher in school	High ed.	South	Domje
Besa	30	Social worker NGO	High ed.	South	Lapraka
Zina	55	Local authority representative , Social economic and protection unit	High ed.	North	Lapraka
Oriona	27	Director of Youth NGO	High ed.	South	Lapraka ,Domje
Edmonda	57	Director of Women's Shelter in Tirana, Albania	Post Graduate ed.	South	Lapraka, Domje