THE HONOUR/SHAME COMPLEX REVISITED: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE MIGRATION CONTEXT

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Synopsis — This article is based on the life histories of two immigrant women of Turkish origin living in Sweden. Fictive names are used in the article. The women are given in marriage at a very young age to attach them to men who will take over the function of their control from their fathers. By analyzing the life histories with the help of Delaney and Bourdieu’s theoretical approaches, I try to explain the implicit idea in the honour/shame complex whereby protection of women is maintained through control on their sexuality. The control is accelerated to the extent that women live in “immigrant enclaves”. The function of women as carriers and bearers of group identity gains importance in case of the “immigrant situation” where ethnic identity becomes an issue to consider. Women are abused when they violate the boundaries of the definition of acceptable femininity by their ethnic community. © 2003 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Fadime, a 25-year-old woman of Kurdish origin who migrated to Sweden from Turkey as a 7-year-old with her family, was shot to death by her father on 21st January 2002. Since 1998, she had been threatened with death by her father and her brother as she had not complied with her family’s wishes to marry her cousin, but had fallen in love with a young Swedish man. The young man, Patrik, died in a tragic traffic accident in 1998, but neither Fadime’s father nor her brother stopped threatening her. Fadime chose to publicize her case to get public support and told her story to the Swedish Parliament 2 months before her death. She thought that her story could pave the way for increased understanding of violence against immigrant women in Swedish society. She fled from her hometown Uppsala where her parents, sisters, and brother lived and lost contact with them. As she was feeling very isolated and was longing to see her mother, she went to Uppsala but was shot down in front of her mother and two sisters.

In her testimony to the Swedish Parliament, Fadime explained the patriarchal cultural tradition of her upbringing, whereby female sexuality was relegated to male control according to the code of honour and shame. She also emphasized the fact that her family needed more help to get integrated into Swedish society. As she said to the Swedish Parliament:

If my parents had received support and help from a national organization, for example, the Kurdish organization, this did not need to happen (i.e. Fadime says that she would not need to fly from home and lose contact with her parents. A.A.). If society had taken the responsibility and helped my parents integrate better into Swedish society, maybe what happened to me could have been prevented. What has happened to me cannot be changed, but I think it is important to learn a lesson from my case so that similar cases can be prevented in the near future. (Sahindal, 2002)

Fadime’s case has led to increased interest among Swedish people as to how immigrant and refugee women, who live in Swedish society, are coping with their lives. According to de los Reyes, Johansson, Knocke, Molina, and Mulinari (2002), Fadime’s tragic murder started a debate in Swedish society on violence against women, on culture, and patriarchy. They wrote an article in the daily Swedish
newspaper *Aftonbladet* under the title “Valdet mot kvinnor ar problemet” (Violence against women is a problem). They state that the Swedish debate has been polarized between two positions in relation to Fadime’s murder. Whilst some explain violence against immigrant women as part and parcel of the universal patriarchal domination, others use cultural reductionist explanations. The defenders of the first position, especially the Swedish ROKS (The Public Organization for Women and Girl Shelters), are inclined to think that “honour” has nothing to do with Fadime’s murder and that the explanation of such a murder cannot be relegated to immigrant cultures but to patriarchal culture in general. On the other hand, those who use cultural reductionist explanations are inclined to think that Swedish values about gender equality are superior to values, which discriminate female gender in “immigrant cultures” and that when immigrants comply with the “superior” Swedish values about gender equality, the problem will be solved.

The cultural reductionist position in the Swedish debate on violence against women assumes that on one side there is the homogeneous Swedish culture, and on the other there are “immigrant cultures”, be they Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic, or Islamic, and that there is no interaction between these cultures. The implied assumption is that because humans are inherently ethnocentric, relations between cultures are by “nature” hostile, and thus different cultures are incomensurable (Stolcke, 1995, p. 5).

In my view, it is unfortunate to polarize the debate of women’s abuse in the migration context either by blaming “immigrant cultures” or by stating that “honour” has nothing to do with the murder of a young immigrant woman whose parents have tried to bring her up in a patriarchal tradition operating within the code of honour and shame. A feminist perspective on violence against women in the migration context necessitates sensitivity to the definition of culture. In the cultural reductionist position on Fadime’s murder, there is an inherent bias of the “cultural fundamentalist” approach. The anthropologist Stolcke (1995) has coined the term “cultural fundamentalism” as a new construction of exclusion in Europe. As it is politically incorrect to talk about racial difference in the modern age, Stolcke thinks that:

Instead of ordering different cultures hierarchically, cultural fundamentalism segregates them spatially, each culture in its place. The fact that nation-states are by no means culturally uniform is ignored. Localized political communities are regarded by definition as culturally homogeneous. Presumed inherent xenophobic propensities—though they challenge the supposed territorial rooting of cultural communities, since they are directed against strangers “in our midst”—reterritorialize cultures. Their targets are uprooted strangers who fail to assimilate culturally. (p. 8)

Yuval-Davis (1997a, p. 63) prefers to call the same phenomenon “ethnic fundamentalism” by emphasizing “immutable collectivity boundaries” and the process whereby ethnic (group) identities are reified and essentialized as a defense reaction—in the case of immigration—to the process of assimilation. Alund (1997) points to the fact that a culturalist tendency is strongly present in the Swedish academic and public discourse in general. She says:

Classification of people in terms of culture and of cultures in terms of ethnicity...promotes a hegemonic social order and legitimizes the exclusion of ethnic minorities, not least minority women. (Alund, 1997, p. 139)

Yuval-Davis (1997b, p. 17) brings to our attention the fact that multiculturalist integration policies simultaneously include and exclude immigrants and/or minorities by “locating them in marginal spaces and secondary markets, while reifying their boundaries”. Fadime by her remarks in the Swedish Parliament points to the fact that her parents have become victims of such policies. According to Alund (1999, p. 154), the question is to acknowledge cultural specificity by taking into consideration social inequalities within the framework of an “interrelated spectrum of structural inequalities” in the host society.

Therefore, we cannot combat violence against women in general and so-called honour killings in particular by ignoring the fact that there is a patriarchal cultural code coined by several researchers (Baştug, 2002; Giovannini, 1987; Kandiyoti, 1987; Lazaridis, 1995; Lindisfarne, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997b) as the honour/shame complex, which is approved and practiced by some males and females as a means of controlling female sexuality in parts of Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean regions. As the construction of gender identity, that is the construction of different femininities and masculinities, takes different forms in different historical epochs and geographical spaces, it is necessary to have a cultural analysis without falling into a cultural reductionist trap. It is equally important to understand violence
directed towards women as part and parcel of the construction of masculinity in all forms of patriarchal orders albeit under different structures. Therefore, the control of women’s sexuality in different forms has to be analyzed by locating it on a continuum of patriarchal domination, which may end up in violence. In this context the honour/shame code can be analyzed as a subcategory of patriarchal domination (Baker, Gregware, & Cassidy, 1999; Ilkkaracan, 2002; Sev’er & Gökcçek, 2001).

Baker et al. (1999) insightfully argue that, traditionally in Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean cultures (also in Latin American peasant societies, southwest Asia, various Indian castes, and Chinese elites), girls’/women’s sexuality is controlled collectively by the girl’s parents and/or in-laws. For example, when a woman “misbehaves”, challenging her husband’s authority, first of all her parents and her natal family are held responsible. Whereas in Western nations (their focus is on English speaking countries), this control responsibility is shifted to her husband or lover, which in practice means the lack of community involvement.

They suggest two possible explanations for this shift: Firstly, due to the diminution of extended family relations and the domination of nuclear family households in Western societies, the male/husband in each family becomes devoid of the support of other men’s alliance and thereby becomes the sole representative to maintain control of women’s sexuality. Secondly, in Western societies, the ideology of individualism extinguishes and the ideology of individualism flourishes, which in turn means that the husband’s personal privilege becomes more explicit (Baker et al., 1999, pp. 173–174). They (ibid, p. 178) further argue that despite this shift of the control responsibility from collective to individual men, “control and shame” remain two significant interrelated dimensions of the so-called honour/shame code. Women’s increased autonomy and threatened traditional male privilege due to increased acceptance of women’s human rights put men into a potential shameful position “of holding unwarranted privilege”. Thus, individual men may resort to violence—especially in times of economic and/or social stress—towards women to protect their honour or, in other words, not to experience shame. So, in Western societies, “it is the husband, boyfriend, or ex-partner who punishes violations of patriarchal norms” (Baker et al., 1999, p. 178).

Today, feminists in Turkey, organized in foundations such as “Mor Çatı” (Purple Roof Women Shelter), Women Solidarity Foundation and Women for Women’s Human Rights, or in networks such as the Network of Feminist Lawyers, are trying to combat violence against women, and particularly honour killings, by arguing that such crimes should not be mitigated by subordinating them to the patriarchal cultural tradition in parts of Turkish society, despite the fact that many public prosecutors, who are generally male, give a reduction in the abuser’s sentence by referring to cultural tradition. It is possible in Turkey to hear a public prosecutor admitting that he gave a reduction in the sentence due to honour killing as the killer felt himself obliged to kill his sister if she, for example, escaped with a lover. A news item was published in the daily Turkish newspaper, Milliyet on 22nd March 2002 under the title: “Savcidan katıle töre indirimi!” (The Public Prosecutor gave a reduction in the sentence to the criminal due to tradition). The paper stated that many Turkish legislators reacted against the reduction in the sentence given by the Public Prosecutor to the 22-year-old murderer who killed his 20-year-old sister as she tried to escape to her lover. There are legislators who are critical of the fact that provocation can be a mitigating justification for a reduction in sentence. They claim that some lawyers make use of the provocation in their defense as the definition is based on the understanding of provocation in Turkish society. When family honour is at stake, it is considered severe provocation.¹

Ilkkaracan (2000, pp. 238–240) states that an extra-marital affair of a husband or wife is considered severe provocation, although officially there are no restrictions for a woman or a man to engage in a relationship with a man or a woman before, after, or during marriage. However, culturally men’s extra-marital affairs are commonly accepted whereas women’s extra-marital affairs are almost taboo. Especially in the eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey 66.6% women think that they would be killed by their husbands and/or their families if they committed adultery. If not killed, women expect their husbands to beat them up or divorce them in case of a suspicion of an extra-marital affair. On the other hand, again 66.6% women living in the eastern and southeastern regions in Turkey are unaware of their legal right to divorce their husbands in case of adultery.

Pervizat (2002, pp. 18–21), who is a women’s human rights defender, points to several cases related to honour crimes in Turkey. The cases range from ‘honour killings’ to the execution of men in the name of honour, murder of babies born out of wedlock² by their mothers, forced suicides of “dishonourable” women and forced abortions. According to Pervizat, there are various factors, which inhibit the eradication
of so-called honour crimes. Some of these factors have to do with the deficiencies and misuse of the justice system in Turkey besides the absence of specific laws in the Penal Code regarding ‘honour killings’. Other factors have to do with the patriarchal cultural tradition in Turkey, which motivate some young boys to take pride in honour crimes. In some regions in Turkey, an honour crime is regarded as a rite of passage into manhood.

According to the new Turkish Civil Code, which came into force on 1st January 2002, men are not juridically considered heads of households in contrast to the old civil code, thereby “...Turkey has become the only predominantly Muslim country that has legally established the full equality of men and women in the family” (Ilkkaracan, 2002, p. 770). However, patriarchal values still dominate in Turkish society, especially in relation to family relations. For example, Arat (1994, p. 49) states that 56% of the men living in western Turkey and 73% of the men living in the eastern regions in Turkey believe in their absolute legitimate authority over their wives. More important than that, 36% of the men living in western Turkey and 57% of the men living eastern Turkey believe that they have the right to beat their wives if they do not obey them. Interestingly, DİE, The State Statistical Institute (1996) statistics reveal that in a population of married women between 15 and 49 years old, 71% of the rural women agree with their husbands’ right to beat them if they deserve it, and 38% of the urban population of married women between 15 and 49 years old believe in the same statement. Sev’er and Gökçeççek (2001) point to the fact that major actors of the criminal justice system in Turkey such as lawyers, judges, legislators, police and gendarme (federal police/army combination) are men who hold patriarchal stereotypes and thus they have strong respect for the “privacy” of the family and for men’s culturally legitimized superiority. For example, when a woman runs away from her abuser she may be delivered back to her husband or her family even when her life is in danger.

THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

I suggest that, in order to understand violence against women in the migration context, we must first understand the construction of masculinity and femininity in all patriarchal orders as a dichotomy, whereby masculinity is overvalued and femininity is undervalued. Secondly, we have to understand the symbolic role attributed to women as carriers and bearers of ethnic (group) identity, which makes them responsible for the transgression of group boundaries, whilst men of a given ethnic group are held culturally responsible for the definition of gender norms. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) state that:

The boundary of the ethnic is often dependent on gender and there is a reliance on gender attributes for specifying ethnic identity; much of ethnic culture is organized around rules relating to sexuality, marriage and the family, and a true member will perform these roles properly. Communal boundaries often use differences in the way women are socially constructed as markers. (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 113)

In the migration context, so long as ethnic communities feel discriminated against in host societies, there is a risk that members of ethnic communities who hold conservative patriarchal values will turn inwards and continue exerting pressure on females by holding onto patriarchal values which are remnants of a rural/feudal culture.

It is generally agreed that migration is a process, which can simultaneously bring gains and losses for immigrant women as well as men (Abadan-Unat, 1977; Akpınar, 1998; Erman, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Kibria, 1990; Kiray, 1976; Koçoğlu, 1991; Tienda & Booth, 1991). Ethnic community and ethnic family values are challenged in the context of foreign cultures (Akpınar, 1988). First of all, migration is a “gendered and gendering” process in the sense that males and females enter into migration with different chances and migration also induces new arrangements in gender relations (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992, pp. 397–398). Second, migration is a potential identity crisis generating process in the sense that every immigrant finds herself/himself forced to find an answer to the question ‘who am I’ in the new cultural context (Alund, 1985, p. 20). Thirdly, migration is prone to situations of uncertainty with regard to the future and whether the time abroad is permanent or temporary (ibid). All of these aspects turn migration into a stressful process (Akpınar, 1988). In migration countries, females’ entrance into the labour market doesn’t automatically mean greater power because of the low status of their jobs and the segregation in labour markets according to gender and ethnicity (Akpınar, 1998). Yet, females’ entrance into the labour market in conjunction with males’ declining economic resources can lead to the diminution of male dominance in the family (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992, p. 412; Kibria, 1990, p. 14). However, it is also pointed out that patriarchal beliefs do not disappear but persist for a long time among

In my study of Turkish immigrants in Gothenburg/Sweden in relation to their family problems, I found that there was a basic conflict between the family-centred values of Turkish immigrants and the individual-centred values in Swedish society (Akpinar, 1988). Both Turkish men and women identified themselves with their families and thus their unsuccessful marriages created emotional disturbance. Turkish family norms sanctifying the family were also found to have an effect on marital conflicts. Later on, I collected life histories of 15 Turkish divorcees living in Stockholm. They were both first- and second-generation immigrant women with urban and rural backgrounds. I tried to understand Turkish women’s perception of their migration, their divorces, their family and working lives. I also wanted to understand the different ways by which women have tried to resist the subordinations to which they have been subjected. An inquiry into the honour-shame complex as a theoretical framework regarding divorcees’ lives in Sweden was not an explicit question in my research agenda. In the process of collecting life histories, I became aware of the honour-shame complex concerning especially young rural second-generation women’s enforced marriages.

When I was interviewing women in their homes individually, I let them know that I was a researcher and that I was interested in their life stories about their marriages and divorces. Each interview took 2–4 h depending on the talkativeness of the informant. My feeling was that my informants used their narratives as an opportunity to sort out the conditions and the persons they thought had played significant roles in their lives.

My observations and my research data in Sweden, in line with other ethnographic material, reveal that young second-generation immigrant women from mainly rural backgrounds, unlike their mothers who remain Turkey-oriented, want to move toward settling but they are critical of the fact that they still have not secured their connections with the host society (Berg, 1994; Engelbrektsson, 1995; Narrowe, 1998). The interests of these young women collide with the interests of the ethnic community as they have expectations to become freer than their mothers through their marriages and migration experiences. Resistance by these young women to their ethnic community’s subjugation is part and parcel of their wish and effort to get integrated into the host society.

By contrast, first-generation elderly women of especially rural origins who have migrated through family-stage migration by following their husbands, try to keep their families together and not lose their authority over their children.

CONTROL OF WOMEN’S SEXUALITY AS A TOOL OF MASCULINE DOMINATION

In this article, I first theoretically elaborate the implicit idea in the honour/shame complex, which is the “protection” of women through controlling their sexuality. This is practiced in several ways: gender segregation, early marriages, and enforced arranged marriages, as well as endogamous marriage rules and practice of sex only within marriage. Secondly, in order to illustrate my arguments, I will analyze the life stories of two young Turkish immigrant women living in Sweden, who told me about their enforced arranged marriages, which ended in divorce and led to their being abused.

In Turkish culture singleness is not prized (Delaney, 1991, p. 107), and being a divorcee is considered traditionally an anomalous deviant behaviour, which disturbs the order of social life. A divorcee is a woman who is not under direct protection of any man. This is why she has to be especially careful. By her activities, she may bring disgrace not only on her natal family but also on her ethnic community. The existence of social control in the “immigrant situation” can be explained by the fact that most Turks are living in ‘immigrant enclaves’ or ‘Turkish enclaves’ in Swedish suburbs where everyone is a “significant other” (Köksal, 1986).

In the context of migration, the Turkish ethnic community is vulnerable to defilement through Turkish women’s various activities that can be perceived as breaking a certain set of group rules, values, and loyalties. In this sense, women are perceived by the Turkish ethnic community as being the defenders of “the ethnic community” or “the immigrant family” of values regarding marriage and sexuality in Swedish society. My argument is in line with the anthropologist Goddard’s (1987) explanations of the conscious and unconscious reactions to women’s sexuality in her discussions of the honour/shame complex and group identity in Naples, Italy:

…women who are the reproducers of the group are at the same time, in a patrilineal society, outsiders. So women are themselves potentially dangerous for they are the margins of the group, being within and yet of the group, being outsiders
to the group and yet crucial for its survival. (Goddard, 1987, p. 190)

Goddard (1987, pp. 184–185) goes on to argue that in societies where the establishment and maintenance of hierarchy is achieved through marriage, women are seen as carriers of group identity. Women are valued as mothers and guardians of the group, so they are the bearers of values based on self-sacrifice, generosity, and devotion. Motherhood is crucial for women to achieve full status, but more important than that is their being chaste. On the one hand, women are idealized as mothers; on the other hand, they are seen as dangerous because they can bring disgrace to the group by breaking the rules. So, they must be protected and controlled. In Turkish and in other Middle-Eastern cultures women’s premartial virginity is an asset not only for the individual woman but also for her family because it is an “index” for masculine reputation (Abu-Odeh, 2000; Cindoğlu, 2000). Abu-Odeh (2000) points to the main function of virginity as “the production of the public effect of virginity”:

The hymen, in this context, comes to have the double function of being a mark of virginity and of delineating the boundaries of the body that is called female…culturally because the culture does not go out of its way to find means of marking the male body as virginal. (Abu-Odeh, 2000, pp. 370–371)

Cindoğlu (2000, p. 216) informs us of Turkish women from various social classes who in contemporary Turkey utilize medicine to “repair” their virginity through medical operations and of doctors who are involved in this “survival strategy for women who are living in patriarchal gender ideologies with double standards”.

Women have the capacity to provoke crisis in the ethnic community through their sexuality. Turkish divorcées from rural backgrounds living in Swedish suburbs where Turkish ethnic communities are concentrated are vulnerable to social control and consequently to being stigmatized as women who have failed. The women who escape being stigmatized are mostly urban and not living in Swedish suburbs where there are ethnic community concentrations (Akpinar, 1998). Likewise, in the case of rural migrants in Turkish cities, Ermanci (2001, pp. 124–25) mentions the local migrant community’s disapproval of ‘their women’ working outside the home, and migrant women’s preference not to live in the same neighbourhood as their fellow villagers.

HONOUR/SHAME COMPLEX AS A PATRIARCHAL CULTURAL CODE

Delaney’s (1991) work, The Seed and the Soil. Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society, is the main reference for my analysis of gender and ethnic identity constructions in the migration context. Delaney has questioned the meaning of gender and procreation according to both Turkish males and females. I argue that the male/female hierarchical dichotomy is implicitly linked to the honour/shame complex, whereby honour is seen as the attribute of men and shame of women. Through controlling female sexuality, men and women are constituted as complementary contrasts to each other.

Delaney (1991, pp. 34–35) argues that the honour/shame complex is inextricably attached to sexuality, which in turn is attached to procreation. Procreation or “coming into being” is explained differently in different cultures and by different religions. Considering religion as a cultural system, Delaney sees a relation between what she terms the “monogenetic theory of procreation” and the theological concept of monotheism, which is common in the three monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. She shows how the specific theory of monogenesis is the key to understanding asymmetrical power relations between men and women as encoded in the notions of honour and shame.

Monogenesis and monotheism are two aspects of the same thing—an ideology that contributes to and supports men’s superiority in all things social. The value of both men and women lies in not what they do but in what culturally speaking they are (…) What they are depends on their perceived role in procreation. (Delaney, 1987, p. 45)

Delaney goes on to state that notions of paternity and maternity depend on women and men’s perceived procreation roles. In this sense, honour is essentially concerned with the legitimacy of paternity, because:

Despite the close connection between mother and child, maternity has been associated with giving birth and giving nurture, while contrary to the evidence of the senses, paternity has meant the creative, life-giving role. Paternity is overdetermined, and in proportion so too are the social measures constructed to ensure the legitimacy of paternity. (Delaney, 1987, p. 40)

In general, honour and shame are social evaluations (Peristiany, 1974). In Turkish culture, different
words are used for honour: şeref and namus. Şeref refers to a man’s reputation as a participant in the community, whereas namus refers to “his reputation as determined by the chastity of the women in the family” (Özgür & Sunar, 1982, p. 350). Delaney argues

A man who is namussuz (without honour) cannot possibly have şeref but a man who is namuslu (with honour) does not necessarily possess şeref. In other words, namus (honour related to sexuality) may be the more basic. The confusion or conflation of these interrelated but separable forms of honour has marred the discussion of this topic. (Delaney, 1987, p. 36)

Antropologists (Peristiany, 1974; Pitt-Rivers, 1963) have considered the honour/shame complex as a distinctive feature of mainly Middle Eastern and Mediterranean societies. Their focus has been on social structure, politics, economics and ecology rather than on sexuality itself. In a revised version of a former article, in Swedish titled “Hederskans-lan” (The Sentiment of Honour), Bourdieu (1994) mentions the male/female dichotomy in the Algerian-Berber context. Here, femininity is implied in the notion of h’urma-haram taboo or ‘the left sacred’ and masculinity in the notion of nif, the sentiment of honour, or the ‘right sacred’. Bourdieu asks

How is the sacred (h’urma-haram) defined that which honour has to protect and defend? To this question the Kabyle wisdom has the answer: “the house, the woman, the gun”. Gender’s polarity which is so strongly emphasised in this patrilineal society, is expressed in the division of the system into two by representations and values according to two complementary and antagonistic principles.

(Bourdieu, 1994, p. 50)

Haram means taboo or forbidden in Arabic and it implies the female universe, the private, closed, inside; against the male universe, the public, open, outside.

In Masculine Domination, Bourdieu (2001) brings to our attention similarities between the European tradition and the Algerian-Berber tradition regarding the appearance of the anatomical difference between the sex organs as the natural justification of the socially constructed difference between the genders:

Manliness, virility, in its ethical aspect, i.e. as the essence of the vir, virtus, the point of honour (nif), the principle of the conservation and increase of honour, remains indissociable, tacitly at least, from physical reality, in particular through the attestations of sexual potency-deflowering of the bride, abundant male offspring, etc.—which are expected of a ‘real’ man. Hence the phallus, always metaphorically present but very rarely named, concentrates all the collective fantasies of fecundating potency. (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 12)

Delaney (1987, p. 36) also emphasizes that sexuality is a distinctive feature of the honour/shame complex and explains why “honour is primarily an attribute of men and shame of women, or why male honour is so inextricably tied to women”.

According to the symbolic logic that Delaney derives from Douglas (1966), ‘group’ can imply inclusion at different levels starting from the woman’s body and expanding to include the family, the house, the kinship group, the village, the region, the nation. According to Douglas, society inscribes the rules and norms in the human body. Females have open bodies but males have closed bodies. Just because the female body is symbolized as open, the female can be symbolically polluted. The crucial point in Douglas’s use of symbols is the analogy made between the body’s boundaries and social boundaries in relation to notions of purity and pollution. Notions of ‘good woman’ versus ‘bad woman’ and ‘pure’ versus ‘impure’ are created in accordance with this dichotomy. Through their sexuality women represent the privacy and intimacy of the group and ‘the group’ is vulnerable to defilement and can be polluted by women having sexual relations with outsiders.

Callewaert and Petersen (1995) refer to Bourdieu’s “La Domination Masculine” (2001) and state that the construction of ‘habitus’ in Mediterranean societies implies that only males as actors set up the rules of the game in social arenas reserved only for men. However, these social arenas may vary; they range from economics to politics, religion, art, science, and war. In this game, women are used as “objects”, which reflect men’s pictures of their ideal selves. Women have to modify themselves according to male norms with their bodies and souls. Masculinity in this sense cannot be constructed without women taking part as objects. At this point, Bourdieu’s analysis comes closer to Delaney’s in that honour is a male, not a female attribute. Males’ honour can be defiled in an exchange between men where women are used as “objects”.

All cultural systems, which depend on the superiority of men, are based on similar household systems. The symbolic oppression of women by which women are objects for exchanges and alliances is the
principle for the establishment of patriarchal society. Patriarchy is therefore most apparent in societies where the only accumulation of capital, which is possible and permitted, is the accumulation of symbolic capital. In such societies, women are capital investments to be protected, and men’s honour is achieved through control of their women.

Bourdieu’s (2001, pp. 50–51) analysis of manliness and violence in Masculine Domination is a good example of the functioning of the honour/shame complex as he sees male privilege attributed to the men of honour as a trap in the permanent tension imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances. Whereas a woman is defined essentially by having a negative honour, which can only be defended or lost:

Like honour—or shame, its reverse side, which we know, in contrast to guilt, is felt before others—manliness must be validated by other men, in its reality as actual or potential violence, and certified by recognition of membership of the group of ‘real men’. (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 53)

Bourdieu describes manliness as a relational notion, socially constructed in front of and for other men, as the active social reproductive capacity and the capacity to fight and to offend. Manliness is at the same time constructed against femininity, in a kind of fear of the female, which is considered a source of weakness but armed with magical power. We know from the myth of origin that women have weapons such as devilish cunning. Within this mythico-ritual system of oppositions, man is linked to woman on the side of good faith and naivety. As such, men are vulnerable and women are the embodiments of the vulnerability of honour.

Traditionally, in religious rural Turkish contexts, social intercourse between unrelated men and women is considered almost the same as sexual intercourse. In order to preserve their families’ reputation, girls and women participate in their own enclosure by wearing a headscarf and trying not to have eye contact with men. It is thought that the “eye of desire” (a man’s eye) can bring about a woman’s defilement. By her own enclosure, a girl demonstrates that she is ‘closed’ and ‘pure’ as opposed to ‘open’ and ‘impure’. A girl is preserved in this state until ‘turned over’ to the ‘protection’ of her husband through marriage (Delaney, 1991, p. 42).

In Muslim belief and Islamic cultures, the seed-soil theory of procreation is dominant. According to the Qur’an: “Women are given to you as fields to be sown, so go to them and sow (your seed) as you wish” (cited in Delaney, 1991, p. 30). Delaney argues that the symbolic understanding of the procreation process has been similar in cultures that have been dominated by the Greco-Roman/Judeo-Christian traditions. In Muslim societies, the ‘seed-soil’ theory of procreation has particular characteristics, which can be explained as the essence of the honour/shame complex. Delaney points out that Turkish female villagers use the word ‘field’ to describe their role as women:

The important distinction between soil and field is enclosed or ‘covered’ by ownership. Analogously, the female soil must be enclosed if a man is to know unquestionably that the produce, that is, the child, is his own...A woman’s value, in Turkish village society, therefore depends not so much on her fertility, her intrinsic nature, but on whether she is able to guarantee the security of a man’s seed. (Delaney, 1987, pp. 38–39)

This means that women are valued as potential repositories of seed; their value depends on their virginity before marriage and their fidelity after marriage. Women’s chastity is important because what is at stake here is the potential security of men’s seed and their lineage (Delaney, 1991, p. 41). The ‘chastity of women’ must be assured by externally imposed restraints because women are believed to have no internal, self-restraints. While Mernissi (1975) argues that in Arab culture, female sexuality is viewed as inherently insatiable, Delaney (1991) argues that in Turkish culture male sexuality is viewed as inherently insatiable and female sexuality as unpredictable (to the extent that women’s sexuality can be considered as autonomous). Whatever the explanation, the outcome is the same: protection and control of women’s sexuality.

Engelbrektsson (1978) explains the symbolic logic behind the double sexual standard for female and male sexualities by referring to the ‘women and field’ analogy:

Foreign seed...that is seed from any other than a woman’s husband contaminates the field forever making the woman permanently defiled. Since a man does not receive any substance from the woman with whom he copulates, he doesn’t become defiled by having intercourse with a defiled woman. (Engelbrektsson, 1978, p. 137)

Delaney (1991) argues that male and female functions in the procreative process are symbolic reconstructions of the division of the universe. In procreation, both female and male functions are
necessary and complementary but differentially valued in that a man through his seed has 'creative', 'life giving' ability, whereas a woman like the field is 'receptive' and enclosed or 'covered' by ownership. Male’s role in procreation is felt to be godlike, and thus it is more valued than females:

...if fertility were the most important issue one might expect less emphasis on the virginity and purity of women. The primary issue, I suggest, is a woman's ability to guarantee the seed of a particular man; it is because of this that she becomes valuable. (Delaney, 1987, p. 39)

In this worldview, a man’s honour is inextricably tied to a woman and can be harmed only through the behaviour of his woman and children. A man loses his honour if he cannot assure and protect the boundaries of his woman. So, the other side of the honour/shame coin is female shame. Not only men’s but women’s value in procreation is valued; in other words, they are valued as mothers but their contribution to the substance of a person is not viewed as essential, only secondary, pertaining to this world and not eternal (Delaney, 1987, p. 41).

This reasoning is derived from the symbolization of the female body as diffuse, without boundaries, which in turn implies that the woman is less able to discern the boundaries between right and wrong.

TESTIMONIES OF TWO YOUNG IMMIGRANT WOMEN

In the rest of this article, I analyze the life histories of two young immigrant women, Ayla and Semra, to demonstrate the implications of the honour/shame complex in husbands’ abuse of their wives. These cases demonstrate the symbolic notions of masculinity and femininity. I want to show how the honour/shame code lies behind the lifelong socialization of Turkish girls becoming women. In the following life story Ayla is given in marriage to an elderly Turkish man against her wishes. What happens to her in her marriage is illustrative of the honour and shame code.

AYLA, THE BLACK SHEEP IN HER FAMILY

Ayla’s mother was a factory worker in Sweden and she cannot take care of five children. Therefore, Ayla was brought up in a smaller town in Turkey by her grandmother and her aunts. When she was 15 years old, she joined her parents in Sweden, but soon realized that she was alienated from them. They were living in an ‘immigrant suburb’ where there was rigid social control and segregation in the Turkish community. She said:

I realised that I had a freer life in Turkey. There, at least, I had male classmates whom I could talk to. I could not get along with my parents in Sweden. Turkish immigrants who came from the village told my mother to give me in marriage and they started exerting pressure on her. I refused to be friends with Turkish girls and turned to other immigrant girls. Turks in the community started spreading gossip about me that I was meeting boys. The gossip soon reached the town in Turkey. A few years later we went to Turkey for a summer vacation. My grandmother and my aunts convinced my mother to give me in marriage while in Turkey by mentioning the gossip which has reached them. My mother in turn convinced my father. So, they gave me to an elderly man despite all my protests...

We can see the mistrust between Ayla and her mother. Her mother as well as other elderly women represent the traditional/rural values that she has become alienated from. Women-centred kin networks and mother–daughter relationships, which originally functioned as a support mechanism, prevent younger women from testing alternative life styles in the context of another culture. Ayla has not challenged the norms of segregated interaction between men and women. That is, she is not meeting any boyfriend but her mother suspects that she is. The fact that she is interacting with other immigrant girls threatens the tight-knit ethnic community. By making friends with other immigrant young women, Ayla can learn other norms and can challenge the norms of her own ethnic community. Group control inhibits Ayla’s mother from believing in her own daughter and encourages her to act according to the norms of the group: that is, to give young women in marriage at an early age.

Let’s hear the rest of Ayla’s story in her own words:

I came to Sweden, rented a flat and bought furniture. My husband was telling me all the time that I was not a ‘proper woman’. I was not a woman at all. He was going to teach me how to be a woman. He tried to challenge my self-confidence. The fact that I wanted to attend higher education was too much for him. He told me that he came to Sweden to earn money. In fact I was both studying and cleaning whereas he had not found himself a job. I was doing cleaning in order
not to be at home. He wanted me to work harder. I was getting up 3.00 a.m. in the morning and cleaning from 4.00 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. I was attending school between 8 a.m.–4 p.m. I had another cleaning job between 5 p.m.–8 p.m. He started beating me. My mother didn’t believe me when I told her that he was a bad person. She said that he could beat me because he was my husband. Finally I decided to commit suicide. One day I climbed on the window and I told my parents that I was going to jump down. Neither my parents nor our neighbours could hinder me. Finally they called a young woman my own age. She called an ambulance and we went to a hospital. Then I didn’t go back home. The hospital personnel helped me to go to a Women’s Refuge. I told them that I wanted to move to a small town where there were no Turks. I lived alone for a year and a half in a small Swedish town. It was difficult to live alone. I helped another young woman to escape from home and she took shelter in my room. I was attending high school and living in a student dorm. Eventually I started longing for everything Turkish, Turkish food, Turkish music, Turkish people. I contacted my mother but I didn’t tell her where I lived. We went to Turkey. My parents were both sad and ashamed because I was living alone. I had become ‘the black sheep in the family’. When they understood that I was not going to reconcile with my ex-husband they started pressuring me to marry another man in Turkey. But all the time I was afraid that every single man was going to marry me for the sake of my passport. How should I be sure? I didn’t want to live alone, it was boring but at the same time I was behaving as I wished. I was saying to myself that I would never marry. But I met a Swedish boy at school and everything changed. He was very clever and handsome. Everyone was talking about him. When I met him I decided that he would be mine…

Ayla convinced the Swedish boy to marry her and later on she convinced her parents to move from the immigrant suburb and return to Turkey for the sake of her younger sister’s upbringing.

There are three significant themes in Ayla’s life history. The first theme is her husband’s attitude. He says that he is going to teach her how to be a woman, telling her that his beatings are “pedagogical, … steps in the paternal upbringing of the not-yet-adult, not-yet-mature woman, the process of her becoming a woman in the correct fashion, according to the rules” (Lundgren, 1992, p. 146). According to Ayla’s mother, her husband can beat her because he is the man who has the right to control his wife’s body and manners. Her husband knows that his power comes from his being a man and teaching Ayla how to be a woman is his mission in this marriage. In his worldview, his honour is inextricably tied to Ayla and he has to protect the boundaries of ‘his’ woman. Ayla challenges his mission by not being the woman he needs her to be and in return she is abused more. Finally, she manages to escape from home. But the fact that she has left her husband becomes a problem for her neighbours. They press her parents not to let her divorce because they are afraid of her setting a bad example for their daughters. By escaping from home, Ayla has defaulted. Ayla’s parents support her husband because they believe that she has insulted her husband by not being a proper woman.

The second significant theme is her father’s and her brother’s refusal to harm Ayla to protect their honour in spite of the ethnic community’s involvement in Ayla’s case. She tells:

I escaped from home with the help of the Swedish authorities. They helped me to find a place to live and kept my address secret. I was a student and I did not have to pay for the lawyer’s fee…The villagers had asked my husband to do something after I left him. He had refused to do anything by saying that I have a father and a brother who should do something. My father said that he would never do a bad thing, especially to his own daughter. My brother also refused to do anything even if I became a prostitute. Then the men from the community decided to do something and started tracing me…

To have a better understanding of the internal conflicts in the patriarchal systems, we should consider the construction of different masculinities as well as femininities. Kandiyoti (1996, p. 198) suggests that “power relations among men, as well as different patterns of personality development, construct different masculinities”. In order to situate masculinity in Turkey and in the Middle East, Kandiyoti explores intergenerational relations among men as well as between men and women, and points to a ‘weak’ masculinity regarding the socialization of young boys who have to know their place in relation to their fathers and elder brothers:

… one variant of this (male A.A.) violence may be traced to men who re-create their own early passivity, by forcing others to take the one-down position. This replay of earlier weakness may, by imposing it on others, help men both to relieve
and exorcise those experiences. (Kandiyoti, 1996, p. 207)

The feelings of powerlessness by some immigrant men due to their vulnerability to unemployment and/or loss of authority over children is pointed out by several researchers (Akpınar, 1988; Erman, 2001; Kibria, 1990). I would argue that keeping control of ‘their space’ by controlling ‘their women’ can compensate for feelings of powerlessness for some immigrant men. We have also learned from Ayla that, in order not to be ashamed in front of their ethnic community, her parents preferred to return to Turkey.

The third significant theme is her becoming a role model for her younger sisters. She has also become a key support person for another younger immigrant woman who is trying to challenge patriarchal norms. My observations and analysis of life histories have shown that, in the context of migration strategies, the search for a bride among close kin has been challenged, though it has not disappeared. As such the essence of the symbolic construction of relations between inside and outside is also challenged. The most important strategy is to create connections with a family living in Sweden through arranged marriages. Since a Swedish passport has become a valuable asset, Turkish girls and women who have residence permits in Sweden have also become aware of their ‘value’ and they have themselves started taking the initiative in bringing Turkish men to Sweden. They can bring men who are their fellow villagers because they have to respect their boundaries. The Turkish word for divorce, dul, is used interchangeably with the word for widow, implying that a divorcee lacks social control like a woman whose husband died. Thus, traditionally, both divorcées and widows are encouraged to remarry. Young Turkish girls are given in marriage at an early age to conform to the honour/shame code and its violation brings unanticipated and tragic consequences. This is what happened to Semra whose life story I have chosen as the second example.

SEMRA, THE REBELLIOUS YOUNG WOMAN

Semra was living in a village in Turkey where families start to search for brides for their sons at a young age. She told me about the preparations for her wedding and her migration to Sweden as a young married woman.

My father took me from school when I was fourteen as if I had become mature. I waited for a year at home and married in the summer of my fifteenth birthday. As I was not supposed to migrate to Sweden before I was eighteen, my parents pretended that I had turned eighteen. My husband’s parents asked my parents for their consent. They were rich. They owned many flats and shops in Turkey although they lived in Sweden. I also came from a big family. Everybody knew us in the village. I wanted to study to become a police-woman. However, it did not happen. I got married but realised that I did wrong a week after my marriage. My in-laws wanted me to cover my head; I wanted to be a ‘modern’ woman... They were having a vacation in Turkey and they had to go back to Sweden. I stayed with my husband’s grandparents. Then I went to my father and said: “I am afraid, don’t send me back. They are suppressing me”. My father replied: “You got married a month ago. You do not know each other. Things will be better. I cannot welcome you back. I will be ashamed. What will everyone say? I will rather kill myself than call you back”. A few months later I went to Sweden... My husband had a Swedish girlfriend... He was never at home. He was only nineteen. His parents had forced him to marry. I was together with my in-laws all the time but I seldom met my husband. Meanwhile, an incident happened related to my skirt. We were visiting some neighbours; I was wearing a skirt and I had to bend my knees. When we came back my father in-law beat me by saying that I had shown my legs. I said a bad word to him. He called my husband and he beat me too. I fainted. My mouth was full of blood. They called an ambulance. They brought me to a hospital’s emergency service. The following day they called my brother. A Swedish lady came from the Women’s Refuge. There was a doctor and police. They asked me how it happened. My brother warned me not to tell the truth. He told me that things would get better. I lied to the police that I fell on the floor as it was slippery. I came home after staying in the hospital for a few days... Like Ayla, Semra has an individualistic orientation toward life, certainly in comparison to rural familistic values. Her father decides that she has become sufficiently sexually mature to get married; her emotional maturity, like Ayla’s, is expected to develop within marriage. As long as she is an unattached girl, she is a source of anxiety for her parents.

Within the context of their family relations, girls are relatively free to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the marriage
proposals they are offered. Semra does what is expected of her by accepting her marriage but she realizes soon after getting married that it is not what she wants. She realizes that she does not want to be the woman she is expected to be. It is expected that her gender identity, just like Ayla’s, will be constructed according to the rules of the honour and shame code. But Semra has become aware of her subjugation in her marriage and she starts to resist. She does not know what price she will pay. Semra’s father cannot welcome her back because it is a matter of honour for him. His daughter’s wish to make a choice with respect to her marriage and the consequences of this marriage/divorce is a sign of his success or failure to compete politically and economically with the groom’s family. Because both families are rich, it may be even more important for Semra’s father to confirm to the ideal of “hegemonic masculinity” implied within the honour/shame code. In other words, economic and/or political competition is simultaneously a competition for ‘honour’ for men:

Conversely, women often have more personal autonomy (but little else) when the men of the household with which they are associated are poor and vulnerable to the machinations of other men. (Lindisfarne, 1996, p. 86)

Lets hear the rest of Semra’s story:

The situation continued. I was studying Swedish and my teacher was very worried about me. She kept asking me about the purple marks on my face. I couldn’t stand it any longer and one day I talked to her. I told her that my brother believed my husband could beat me as I was his wife. I asked her where I could go if I left home. My teacher told me that I could go to the social services. She helped me to find a social worker. I told her that I did not want to go back home. They placed me in the Women’s Refuge. I was already three months pregnant. They contacted my brother; he came and took me to his house. I stayed with his family until I gave birth to my child. He was suppressing me. I wanted to live alone. We quarreled a lot but I managed to move to my own flat. He said that I would never come back if I moved away. Meanwhile I made friends with other immigrant girls. They were going out and dating. They arranged a date for me with an immigrant boy. We went to a restaurant. People saw me there and gossip started. Some of my friends were taking care of my child. I started drinking as well. My brother heard and he warned me about my friends. I was living on the ground floor. One day my brother broke the balcony door and came inside. I came home at night. Just as I stepped in, he beat me. It was dark. He beat me as soon as I opened the door. He said I had become a prostitute. Everyone was talking about me. Then he took me to his house by force. Not only my brother but his wife beat me as well. I told him that he was not my brother any more. I told him that he never asked me why I was going out. Maybe I liked going out. He said that I was crazy. He locked the door so that I would not escape. They were living on the first floor. I jumped out of the balcony and injured my foot. Still, I ran to a shop in the town centre. I told the shop owner that my brother would kill me. He called the police and they took me to hospital. The police asked me if I wanted my brother to be put into prison. I did not want that, of course. I asked them to warn my brother not to touch me, to leave me alone. The rumours about me reached Turkey. My family was calling, convinced that I had become a prostitute. I was left all alone. I didn’t know enough Swedish to contact people. I was going to Swedish courses but I couldn’t learn anything because I couldn’t concentrate. My life continued as it was since then.

Gossip and stigma in a Swedish suburb where many Turks live has become a mechanism for the control of women by men as a group but also among the women themselves as a punishment for those who deviate from the norms (Hannerz, 1980, p. 187). Not only Semra’s brother but also his wife beats her when she escapes from her abusive husband. Women are also involved in the patriarchal control of women’s sexuality; they too internalize the honour/shame code and accept the abuse of a woman who deviates from the norms. In traditional rural Turkish culture, there is a belief and saying that “When a woman leaves her family, only her corpse can come back”. This saying points to the ideal practice of virilocality, whereby upon leaving her natal household, the bride is expected to serve her husband’s family (Ilcan, 1994). Socialized in this tradition, Semra’s brother tries to do his best to keep Semra within her marriage. Semra is abandoned in Sweden. Co-villagers and her relatives stop talking to her. They think that she is a prostitute:

I could not even talk to my own brother. I started asking myself: Was it me who had gone too far, or were other people ignorant? I went to Turkey for a vacation. There, I have my mother, father and my
other brothers and sisters. I had good relations with them. My father agreed that it was his mistake. He said that it was his fault to give me so young in marriage. But I thought all the time, why was I abandoned? I had not got anything in life that I had wished for. I came to Sweden very young, then I was suppressed. Then people spread rumours about me. I could neither have a profession nor a family. These thoughts occupied my mind. Two years ago I locked myself in my flat for a whole year. I left my child in Turkey. I could not take care of my child. I was at home all the time. They came from the Social Service and broke the door down to come inside. I went out only in the evenings when it was very dark. I bought cigarettes and came home. I did not eat, nor drink. They were afraid that I had died... After separating from my husband, he and his family said that the child wasn’t his. When the child was six months old, they wanted to have a blood test. The test showed that the child was his. A year ago, while I was in Turkey my ex-husband appealed to the court. He accused me of having kidnapped the child to Turkey. He wanted the custody of the child. Social Service found me a lawyer. They knew everything about me and they supported me... My ex-husband accused me of not being a good mother as I was going out. He thought that in the future Turkish people would say that the child’s mother was a prostitute and this would affect his reputation. He was thinking of himself. In the court he said that he was thinking of his future... I don’t think that I may lose the case but I have problems with the Turkish community. They may in the future say that my child’s mother is a prostitute.

Semra has clearly internalized the code of honour and shame as a mechanism of inner control in constructing her gender and ethnic identity. She asks herself whether she has gone too far to break the community’s codes of behaviour. As a woman, she is obliged to protect her community values by controlling her family’s and her own boundaries, i.e. her sexuality. Although she knows that she wants to be a ‘modern’ woman, she does not know how far she can go in order to be accepted by her co-villagers as a ‘proper’ woman. In Semra’s case, we have a father who after a while regrets that he has given his daughter in marriage at a young age. Does this mean that he has changed? Does he not care about the honour/shame code any more? An answer could be found in the explanation that masculinity is not an ascribed but an achieved status (Kandiyoti, 1987, p. 327). Hegemonic masculinity construed in line with the honour/shame code is the ideal but at the same time it defines a range of appropriate behaviours (Lindisfarne, 1996, p. 88). We have seen that Semra’s father thought first of all of his public image when he refused to call Semra back, but probably her abuse, her isolation and stigmatization urged him to reconsider the consequences of his wish to conform to the ideal of an honourable man.

When I asked Semra how she overcame her desperate feelings, she told me:

I thought a lot. I thought that I couldn’t continue this way. Nobody would help me if I didn’t help myself. It wouldn’t help if I thought all the time: why aren’t they talking to me, why is my brother like that, why are they calling me a prostitute. I thought for a year. I didn’t talk to anyone. Maybe you won’t believe me. It is unbelievable. I decided finally that it was not worth considering them. Other people directed my life; my life was in their hands, I would like to study and to have a profession. I would like to marry someone I like in the future. Instead I only survived for the last eight years in spite of all the gossip about me.

When I reminded Semra that she must be lucky because at least her parents have supported her, she mentioned her older sister who was living in the village in Turkey:

My sister is eight years older than me. She is thirty-four years old. She finished high school. She was a successful student. She also had contacts with some political parties. She was like a man. She quarrelled with my father a lot. She wanted to study at the university instead of getting married. My father approved neither her attending to a university nor her working outside. She had to stay at home and take care of us... She taught me many things. I used to call her when I was too desperate. She told me: “you are alone in the world and the people who are gossiping about you are ignorant. You need to have direction in your life. You wouldn’t let yourself be affected by their gossip. You have to find something to do. You are living in Europe and you have many opportunities that I don’t have in the village”. She supported me a lot even if only by phone. She does not talk to my brother in Sweden. She accuses him of not supporting me when I was beaten. She also fought against my father when he wanted to give me in marriage. She was like a mother to me. But she could not stop my marriage... She is now
working as a shop assistant in the village. Everybody knows how daring she is.

When I asked Semra why she could not herself resist her marriage she said:

I am a weak person. She is strong. She would never let herself be subjugated. I was young and ignorant. There is also fault in me. A wedding was waiting for me, they would buy me nice clothes and jewelry. I was tempted. . . .

Semra’s life history shows that, if it were not for the support she received from her older sister in the village in Turkey, her isolation in Sweden would be worse. Although Swedish social assistance is very valuable, it is not enough to help a stigmatized young Turkish woman overcome her loneliness. More than that she needs and searches for support in her more intimate social networks; relatives are used as a basis of comparison and contrast with one’s own way of life (Bott, 1957).

Semra’s older sister is clearly a politically conscious person. She has thought of alternative ways of living although she was brought up in the village. However, Semra thinks that her sister is strong like a male and thereby admits that the dominant norm of being a female in the village is submission to parents’ authorities. There is also a limit to her older sister’s wishes as she cannot fulfil her dreams of going to university. Her courageous personality puts her into a deviant position, of a man-like woman.

**CONCLUSION: MALE ABUSE OR CONTROL OF FEMALE BOUNDARIES**

Ayla and Semra, the young rural Turkish women who live in Sweden, are committed to the love ideal in marriage as an alternative to the suppressive patriarchal relationships they find themselves in. In their interactions powerful figures, a male partner, other significant men, a father-in-law and/or a mother-in-law control them. Their own mothers, fathers, or brothers are involved in the control of these young women’s sexuality. The love ideal appeals to young women as a way of mitigating the power of these figures.

Gender norms in the Turkish cultural context consider marriage in the private sphere as a lifelong contract and prohibit public intervention into the private sphere. This helps to strengthen men’s power and women’s subordination in marriage. For example, in 1987, a judge in a District Court in Turkey referred to a traditional Turkish proverb, which says “You will not spare the litter from the woman’s womb nor the cane from her back” as grounds for the court’s justification of male abuse. The underlying gender norm in this proverb says that a woman should be beaten, that her only task is to give birth, and that she has to be kept under control. Many Turkish women protested against this justification of male abuse and demonstrated in the streets (Mor Çatı, 1988).

The Norwegian feminist sociologist Eva Lundgren (1995, p. 247) who has studied the gender aspect of abuse, states that male abuse occurs when women violate the boundaries of the definition of acceptable femininity. Though male and female genders are constituted as complementary contrasts, men control the norms of femininity. Women can be beaten if they do not fulfil the accepted norms of what a woman should and should not do. Moreover, women themselves often internalize the norms of acceptable femininity dictated by the patriarchal system.

Ayla’s and Semra’s life histories show that they react to their surveillance by challenging the norms of acceptable femininity. Consequently, they are beaten. When they don’t surrender, they pay the price by becoming outcasts.

According to Lundgren,

This in turn, is in an internal relationship to that which gradually appears to be the overarching project for the man: to shape his gender, to constitute himself as a man, to design masculinity, through his control over the woman and over femininity, which he acquires through violence. (Lundgren, 1995, p. 247)

When Ayla challenged her husband’s mission to make a proper woman of her by escaping from home, he is shamed because he has not been able to control her. Being unable to protect his honour, he has put himself in the position of a woman. He is therefore shamed. Ayla, on the other hand has taken the matter in her own hands by escaping from home. As such, she has behaved like a man:

And it is impossible for a man to be a man in interaction with a woman like that. ‘Masculinity’ is primarily shaped in relation to woman, as difference, in contrast to being a man, the other. (Lundgren, 1995, p. 246)

Yet, Ayla’s husband refuses to do anything to defend his threatened honour. He says that Ayla has a father and a brother to protect their honour. When both of them refuse to do anything to defend their
honour, the men in the neighbourhood decide to look for Ayla to defend the honour of the neighbourhood. Individually men may refuse to do anything about their honour, yet, it is group pressure or the definition of honour as symbolic capital, which has to be protected: to protect their reputation, the men in the neighbourhood must control Ayla’s boundaries.

Semra’s is controlled not only by her husband, but also by her father, her brother, and her father-in-law. In her marriage, she was an ‘object’ exchanged between men, all of whom are responsible for controlling her sexuality in order to protect their own honour. When Semra realizes that her marriage is wrong, she tells her father not to send her back to her husband’s family. But her father thinks his honour is most important. As an honourable man, he has promised Semra to another honourable man and he will put himself into a shameful position if Semra comes back. Here both the constitution of the male/female dichotomy and Semra’s objectification as a female in exchange between several male alliance is demonstrated. What is at stake here is the men’s honour, which is inextricably tied to a woman’s sexuality.

To summarize, the asymmetrical/hierarchical power between males and females is characterized by women’s greater responsibility for transgressing group boundaries and men’s cultural responsibility for the definition of gender norms. In the migration context, Turkish women are perceived as responsible for the maintenance of the norms for the definition of femininity, which is the basis for the group’s delimitation. This in turn depends on the honour and shame code whereby men’s honour is defined in relation to women’s behaviour.

Sev’er and Gökceçik (2001) suggest that we should find ways to dissociate the definition of honour in relation to women’s body and behaviour to combat violence against women. Although it is not easy to combat centuries-old prejudices, there is a necessity to re-educate both men and women, old and young, about the equal value of females and males in procreation and in social life. There is a necessity to mobilize men as well as women to combat violence by building men’s networks all over the world. Male-Front against Violence which started in 1993 within the Swedish movement Radda Barnen (Save the Children) is working to re-educate men to take responsibility against violence.

Misiowiec (1997, pp. 30–33) states that upon their migration, some women may find themselves for a period in a cultural and social no-man’s-land. Either they lack knowledge of their rights because they are marginalized (especially if they are not working), or their husbands hinder them by using blackmailing strategies irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. It is not unusual to observe men, irrespective of origin, bringing women into the host society and getting rid of them after having abused them, to bring new wives. Sev’er and Gökceçik (2001) suggest that, a solution could be to automatically offer abused women refugee status. Among developed nations only Canada applies such a criterion. According to the Violence against Women Act of 1994 in the U.S.A., to ask for a residence permit by themselves women have to either prove they have been battered or have to be married for 3 years (Misiowiec, 1997, p. 33). In Sweden, women have to be married for 2 years, which means that abused women have to put up with men’s violence for a long time (Akpınar and Karam, 1999, p. 57). A hope for younger generation immigrant women is that, since they are living in ethnically mixed societies, they become aware and critical of the discrimination they face both in their ethnic groups and in the host society.

On the other hand, Butegwa (1999) argues that the concept of women’s human rights is vulnerable because of the international community’s biased emphasis on civil and political rights at the cost of economic, social and cultural rights. Whereas, the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights of women is necessary for all human beings’ dignity and security because it is impossible to separate between different forms of discrimination and violence. According to El Saadawi (1998), international violence, state violence, and the violence by husbands or fathers are all related. In the same manner, it is impossible to separate sexual violence from economic violence (Akpınar and Karam, 1999, p. 35).

The issue is changing the perception that women are fundamentally of less value than men. It is only when women and girls gain their place as equal members of society and not as second class citizens that violence against women can be overcome.

ENDNOTES
1. It is stated that, “…the penalty for premeditated murder is 24 years in prison. If the crime takes place within the family, then this is an exacerbating circumstance and the punishment is life imprisonment. Severe provocation can reduce a life term to 15 years. When one adds subsequent processes to reduce the sentence, then the killer can go free after 6 years. There are also reductions for age. As in most places, honour killings are generally carried out by someone young who is able to take advantage of the one-third reduction in the sentence”. (Excerpt from “An honor killing: She fled, her throat was cut” Düzkan & Koçali, 2000, p. 386).
2. In line with the reform of the Turkish Civil Code 2001, “The concept of “illegitimate children”—that is children born out of wedlock—has been abolished and the custody of these children is given to their mothers” (Ilkkaracan, 1999, p. 127 – 143).

3. The Swedish ethnologist Svanberg (1988, pp. 44 – 47) informs us that the number of immigrants from Turkey is around 20,000. This is an ethnically mixed group of people including “ethnic Turks”, Kurds, Christian Assyrians, and Syrians besides others. According to the Immigration Office statistics from mid-1980s, 6000 of the 20,000 are counted as “ethnic Turks”, which is a heterogeneous group of Sunni Muslims and speakers of Turkish. A very large number of people in this group come from Kulu and Cihanbeyli districts in the province of Konya in Central Anatolia. Turks from Kulu are especially settled down in Stockholm. The Turkish political scientist Alpay (1980) points out that the largest number of Turks from both rural and urban regions of Turkey have migrated to Sweden through chain migration.

4. According to Bourdieu, ‘habitus’ is a social practice, which implies a manner of acting and reacting. Habitus affects habits and use of language and even ways of taste such as food and music, but there is always a difference between group habitus and individual habitus. People’s experiences are almost never the same in the sense that habitus is not totally determining future action and reaction patterns (Bourdieu, 1990).

5. Article 124 in the Turkish Civil Code which came to effect on January 1st, 2002 says that: “A man or a woman is given judicial permission to get married only when he/she has completed 17 years of age. In extraordinary circumstances, the judge can permit a man or a woman who has completed 16 years of age to get married. If possible, the parents or the guardian are consulted before judicial permission is given”. The legal age for marriage was previously 17 for men and 15 for women.

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