

**Special Report:**  
**Upsurge in "honor killings"  
triggers Palestinian calls  
for cultural changes, new laws**

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**Op-ed: "Every day more than one crime is committed against more than one woman... I shall criticize out loud the social culture that still seeks justifications for the murder of women."**

[*Al-Ayyam*, Aug. 7, 2012]

**Attorney: "A man who murders his daughter, wife or sister stays in prison only three months."** [*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 3, 2012]

**Lecturer on PA TV: "Part of our [Palestinian] identity is to kill women, to beat women..."** [PA TV (Fatah), June 24, 2012]

**Op-ed: "He already murdered his daughter [the first time]... when he married her off to a man 50 years older than her."**

[*Al-Ayyam*, Aug. 7, 2012]

by Itamar Marcus

Palestinian press reports about murders of Palestinian women by male family members, in so-called family "honor" killings, have been increasing. According to an op-ed in the official Palestinian Authority daily:

"The frequency with which crimes against women are committed is rising constantly, and every day more than one crime is committed against more than one woman..."

[*Al-Ayyam*, Aug. 7, 2012]

[Palestinian Media Watch](#) notes that the murders have been widely condemned by Palestinian officials and human rights activists, some of whom have called for new legislation and longer prison terms. Others have argued that the killings won't stop until

there is a change in Arab - Muslim culture.

An op-ed in the official Palestinian Authority daily said that legislation won't be effective unless there is a "cultural revolution" rejecting honor killings:

"There are some who even praise and glorify this [honor killings] as a manly, heroic act, turning it into an aspect of [our] culture that molds the character of Arab and Islamic societies.

If we wish to free our society from this crime's octopus grasp, we must first admit that without a cultural revolution that will cleanse our perceptions, our books, and our heritage from sanctifying murder performed in the name of Allah and honor... we will not be able to take a single step towards lessening this crime..."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 6, 2012]

An Israeli-Arab lecturer interviewed on PA TV likewise placed the blame on hundreds of years of Arab culture:

"Part of our [Palestinian] identity is to kill women... to beat women... Palestinian identity has its charms, but there are things that we have adopted from Arab culture for centuries that harm the individual and the woman."

[PA TV (Fatah), June 24, 2012]



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An op-ed criticized the "tribal mentality" that justifies the murder of women:

"Every day, more than one crime is committed against more than one woman... I shall criticize out loud the social culture that still seeks justifications for the murder of women. The rumors and justifications for murder heard after the killing of these two [victims] led a woman journalist to write an article demanding that we respect the reason for killing the girl [in Tulkarem]... As for the woman from Bethlehem who was murdered in front of people in the street without anyone trying to save her, people have already become experts at spreading rumors to convince us that her husband was right, and that there undoubtedly must be a reason that made the killing necessary... There is no justification for murder... and there is no country or country-in-the-making that still bases itself on the tribal mentality."

[*Al-Ayyam*, Aug. 7, 2012]

Others blame the Palestinian government and legal system for not punishing the crime

severely enough:

"Activist Khawla Al-Azraq...: 'The law reinforces violence against women, legalizes the murder of women, and protects the murderers, in spite of the amendments that the President [Abbas] has introduced'... Attorney Salwa Banura said that the law encourages murders, since arguments for leniency [mitigating circumstances] are accepted by the courts, and a man who murders his daughter, wife or sister stays in prison only three months, and is then released."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 3, 2012]

The Minister of Women's Affairs Rabiha Dhiab led a sit-down strike opposite the PA courts:

"Participants demanded legislation that would provide protection for women from violence aimed at them and to impose extremely heavy penalties on murderers of women."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 3, 2012]

***The following are longer transcripts of these recent statements, and additional documentation from the past two years about the problem of killing women in the name of family "honor" in Palestinian society:***

### **Blaming Arab and Muslim Culture**

An op-ed in the official PA daily blamed an outdated "culture that molds the character of Arab and Islamic societies."

*Headline:* "Violence against women - a legitimate crime!"

"Our [Arab and Muslim] societies consider the crime of violence against women, honor killings, and avenging the killing [of relatives], as legitimate, understandable and [part of] a unique heritage. There are some who even praise and glorify this as a manly, heroic act, turning it into an aspect of [our] culture that molds the character of Arab and Islamic societies.

If we wish to free our society from this crime's octopus grasp, we must first admit that without a cultural revolution that will cleanse our perceptions, our books, and our heritage from sanctifying murder performed in the name of Allah and honor... we will not be able to take a single step towards lessening this crime, even if the books of [new] laws reach the roof of Parliament and the civil courts (i.e., no matter how many civil laws are passed against it.)"

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 6, 2012]

An Israeli Arab university lecturer, Yusuf Jabareen, explained on PA TV that killing and

beating women is a negative part of Palestinian identity taken from Arab culture that has to be corrected.

**Yusuf Jabareen:** "Part of our identity is to kill women, for example, to kill women, to beat women..."

**PA TV host:** "You generalize."

**Jabareen:** "No. I don't generalize."

**Host:** "Not everyone is the same."

**Jabareen:** "Part of our identity is to attack women - we must acknowledge it. Every society has its defects and its charms. Palestinian identity has its charms, but there are things that we have adopted from Arab culture for centuries that harm the individual and the woman. For example, in recent months, look how many women were killed in Lod, in Ramle, and in Acre, and so on. That's part of our identity."

[PA TV (Fatah), June 24, 2012]

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A columnist in the PA daily condemned honor killings, calling them "racist murder":

"None of us who are alive can be honored as long as the mentality of racist murder, what is called honor killings, exists across the dark society... It seems that many of us still think of them [women] as the bent rib of Adam, void of intelligence or religion..."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 10, 2012]

An op-ed condemned "tribal mentality" that seeks to justify the killing of women:

**Headline:** "All excuses are rejected out of hand"

"The frequency with which crimes against women are committed is rising constantly, and every day more than one crime is committed against more than one woman..."

The latest two incidents, in which a girl in Tulkarem and a woman in Bethlehem were murdered, led to the writing of this column, in which I shall criticize out loud the social culture that still seeks justifications for the murder of women. The rumors and justifications for murder after the killing of these two [victims] led a woman journalist to write an article demanding that we respect the reason for killing the girl [in Tulkarem]...

As for the woman from Bethlehem who was murdered in front of people in the street without anyone trying to save her, people have already become experts at spreading rumors to convince us that her husband was right, and that there undoubtedly must be a reason that made the killing necessary...

There is no justification for murder... and there is no country or country-in-the-making that still bases itself on the tribal mentality. The law and the right to life must be respected, and the criminals must be punished. All excuses are rejected out of hand; we

refuse to agree to murder... We reject measures that protect the murderers, and the justifications that claim that this keeps the unity and cohesiveness of society, since our cohesiveness and unity will be strengthened only through justice."

[*Al-Ayyam*, Aug. 7, 2012]

Former PA Minister of Health condemned forced marriages of women to men "50 years older" in the following op-ed:

"In less than two weeks, there were two reports of women murdered for reasons that seem to be connected to honor. The last case, a woman from the Hebron district, was murdered by her father and brother after her husband expelled her from their shared home. This is the twelfth case since the beginning of 2012 of what has been called 'honor crimes.'

The father of the girl is now guilty of his daughter's murder, but in the indictment against the murderer, the father, it is not mentioned that this is not the first time that he murdered her. He already murdered the victim, his daughter and flesh and blood, a number of years earlier when he married her off to a man who was 50 years older than her. In other words, he married her to someone the age of a grandfather...

Unfortunately, the murderer didn't act alone and found partners to his crime: his son, the brother of the murder victim, and the corrupt doctor who agreed to write a death certificate. This shows that there is public support for violence against women and that the perpetrators of this crime are ready to prepare excuses and even cover it up forever, so that the criminals do not receive a proper punishment."

[*Al-Ayyam*, Aug. 10, 2012]

### **Blaming the legal system**

One murder given prominence in the PA press was the killing of Nancy Zaboun, a Palestinian woman murdered by her husband. According to the PA daily, her husband killed her because she wanted to work for a few days to earn money to buy her son a birthday present.

"Bethlehem district governor, Abd Al-Fatah Hamail, denounced the crime [murder of Nancy Zaboun by her husband because she wanted to work] and said that this act contradicts the customs of the Palestinian people. He stressed that the accused man would be brought to justice, and he spoke about the amendments which President Mahmoud Abbas has introduced into the lenient sections of [law regarding] murder [of women]; these assure that every man found guilty will receive his punishment, with no other consideration...

Expert and activist Khawla Al-Azraq criticized the use of the present law of personal status, saying: 'It is a disgrace that we are still using the law of personal status that was

legislated in the 1950's. This Jordanian law has already been amended a number of times in Jordan, but we are still using it. The law reinforces violence against women, legalizes the murder of women, and protects the murderers, in spite of the amendments that the President [Abbas] has introduced'...

Attorney Salwa Banura said that the law encourages murders, since arguments for leniency [mitigating circumstances] are accepted by the courts, and a man who murders his daughter, wife or sister stays in prison only three months, and is then released."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 3, 2012]

The Minister of Women's Affairs Rabiha Dhiab led a delegation that met with the President of the Supreme Court to demand "an end to the leniency employed in cases of honor crimes."

"Justice Farid Al-Jalad, President of the Supreme Court, met yesterday at his office in Ramallah with a delegation from the Ministry for Women's Affairs and from the Women's Union, headed by Minister of Women's Affairs Rabiha Dhiab... to discuss the causes for the recurrence of crimes against women, following the three latest crimes that took place in different cities in the West Bank and Gaza. The delegation stressed its faith in the Palestinian legal system and demanded an end to the leniency employed in cases of honor crimes..."

At the same time, a sit-down strike organized by Dhiab was held opposite the courts compound in Ramallah... in which participants demanded legislation that would protect women from violence directed at them and impose extremely heavy penalties on murderers of women."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 3, 2012]

## **New legislation**

"Representatives of a number of feminist institutes demanded the swift enactment of laws in the area of personal status to protect families from violence, along with steps to deter the killing of women. This was said during the demonstration yesterday in Ramallah... that protested the culture of crimes of murder against women for what is called "honor"... The organizer of the "Civil Organizations for Struggle against Violence against Women" explained that two women murdered in Bethlehem and Hebron had approached the police, but it did not supply them with protection and did not save their lives."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 10, 2012]

"President Abbas decided yesterday to appoint a legal committee, made up of his legal advisor, Hassan Al-Awri, and the Minister of Justice, Ali Muhana, to examine the law of personal status and others. This in order to improve the laws and amend them, so

Palestinian women's rights will be protected and defend them from oppression, violence, and discrimination. The president's decision comes following the increase in attacks and cases of murder of women."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Aug. 10, 2012]

### **Arrest of man who stabbed his daughter to death:**

"Commander of the Tulkarem police, Ma'aruf Al-Barbari, said... that on the second day of Ramadan, a father fatally stabbed his daughter several times, even though her family had celebrated her success in the matriculation examinations a day prior to her death, and she had achieved an average of 88.

He stressed that investigations were still going on to uncover the motives and causes for this chilling crime, and noted that the girl's father had been arrested. He called upon residents to act responsibly and not to rush to pass judgment on their children, and destroy the family. He stressed that following the so-called family honor killings of many girls, it turned out after pathological examination and autopsy -- that the victims were virgins."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, July 24, 2012]

### **Violence against women in PA society- past attempts at change**

While the subject of "honor killing" has received significant press lately, the problem is not new. Already in 2010, a Palestinian MP called for action noting that 62% of Palestinian women report they are "victims of violence." At that time, the spokesman of the Hebron police tried to minimize the problem saying that the severity of the reports are "exaggerations" and that men are also victims of violence by women.

"Sahar Al-Kawasmeh, member of the Palestinian Parliament noted that the percentage of Palestinian women who are victims of violence has reached 62%. Among these, 23% are subjected to physical violence, which is a worrying figure.

Ahmad Atawneh, Director of Public Relations for the Hebron police, said that there are exaggerations in the presentation of the severity of violence against women, and that the statistics that the police have compiled show that there exists counter-violence carried out by women against men."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, March 4, 2010]

In February 2011, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights published statistics on the frequency of "honor killings" and criticized the lenient prison sentences given by the courts, which view killing to defend "family honor" as an acceptable extenuating circumstance for murder:

*Headline:* "The phenomenon of murdering women - disregard for the law and reinforcement of traditions with no basis in religious law"

"Director of the Unit for Women's Affairs at the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Muna Al-Shawa, said that the Center is concerned about the recurring crime of murder of women in the Palestinian territories for so-called 'family honor.' This is a result of the immunity given to the criminal because of light sentences, such that the maximum sentence does not exceed three years [in jail] shortened [for good behavior], meaning, nearly 24 months...

Al-Shawa emphasized that according to the statistics of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, 13 cases of honor-killings took place last year. The victims included 9 women, a boy, and 3 men....

It is well-known that instances of murder of women are not a new phenomenon, but have been going on for many years. Several studies have been carried out on this issue, including special research carried out by the Project for the Support and Training of Women, as part of the Mental Health program in Gaza, in 2005... This research noted that all instances of murder for so-called family honor involve women [as victims], and do not involve men. Similarly, it turns out that instances of murder were carried out for various criminal reasons, but were attributed to family honor, so that the criminal would escape sentencing and would benefit from the extenuating circumstances awarded to him by law."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Feb. 13, 2011]

In May 2011, PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas was praised for introducing new legislation.

"Women's organizations, human rights organizations, workers' unions, the political factions and the various social organizations in the Hebron district have hailed the President's [Abbas'] decision to instruct the legal advisor to the Presidential Office to amend sections 340 and 98 of the Jordanian Penal Act 16 of 1960, which allows those who have carried out crimes of murdering women in so-called honor killings, to escape justice... The participants in the meeting once again demanded that the judiciary and executive branches [of the government] speed up investigation of the circumstances of the murder of the young woman Ayah Barad'iyya (21) from Zurif."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, May 15, 2011]