Murderous Honor Past and Present: Webster's Duchess of Malfi and Contemporary Crimes of Honor

Sarah Youssef, University of Cologne, Germany

Abstract:
The United Nations estimate around 5000 yearly cases of 'honor killings' worldwide, numerous NGOs and human rights activists guess that the numbers of crimes committed in the name of 'honor' is closer to 10 000. 'Honor killings' are not limited to class, geography or gender (although the majority of the victims are women) but a socio-political issue that needs to be addressed globally. Current cases of Banaz Mahmod (UK) and Arzu Ö. (Germany) received wide media coverage. One of the finest Jacobean plays, John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi, becomes exceptionally relevant when looking at the relationship of 'honor', family, justice and women's rights then and now.

1 The freedom to determine your own life is a human right. Violence against women encompasses crimes allegedly committed in the name of 'honor', such as 'honor killings',

> assault, confinement and imprisonment, and interference of marriage, where the publicly articulated 'justification' is attributed to a social order claimed to require the preservation of a concept of 'honour' vested in male (family and/ or conjugal) control of women and specifically women's sexual conduct: actual, suspected or potential. (Welchman and Hossain 4)

In communities where the concept of woman as property is supported, male honor is defined through the female body. This implies that murders committed in the name of 'honor' are not perceived as crimes, and therefore a judicial issue, but as a family issue. The term 'honor killing' is frequently attributed to murders committed within minority communities of the Middle East and Asia (Welchman and Hossain 9). But crimes committed with the "mitigating value" 'honor' are not exclusively committed within these, dominantly Muslim, communities (ibid.). According to Welchman and Hossain the terminology regarding those crimes is connected to stereotypical assumptions. Therefore the same crime committed within western cultures is referred to as a 'crime of passion' (13). This difference in terminology is closely linked to defense strategies, since crimes committed in the name of 'honor' are premeditated and crimes of 'passion' are not. Regardless of this terminology, in 2000 the United Nations included both 'crimes of passion' and 'crimes of honor' in resolutions on violence against women (Welchman and Hossain 10), hence underlining the fact that terminology does not absolve the crime.

2 In recent years ‘honor killings’ have gained increased attention from the public, media and politicians. According to the Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Right Organisation (IKWRO), based in the UK, there is a yearly average of twelve reported murders committed in the name of ‘honor’ in the UK. The case of Banaz Mahmod, a 20 year old woman of Kurdish origin, who was tortured and killed by her own family in 2006, gained a lot of public attention and led to a heightened awareness towards crimes of ‘honor’ in the UK. The numbers in Germany are similarly shocking. According to the Bundeskriminalamt, the criminal police of the federation, 125 cases were reported between 1996 and 2005 with increasing numbers. On November 21, 2007 Aylin Korkmaz was attacked by her husband in southern Germany with two knives and stabbed 26 times in her upper body and face. In the following trial her husband stated that she had ‘dishonored’ him by divorcing him five months prior to the deed. The court ruled 13 years for attempted murder. Instead of hiding her 260 stiches that will always document the wounds inflicted upon her body, Korkmaz went public: she wrote a book, attended numerous interviews and is still frequently seen advocating for women’s rights. Recently another case, the trial against the murderers of Arzu Ö. has drawn increased media attention and has once again led to a greater public interest in ‘honor-based’ violence against women in the Western Hemisphere. The 18 years old Arzu was abducted by her brothers and shot because the family disapproved of her German boyfriend. However, a recurrent problem is that many women are taken abroad to be killed, and thus just disappear (Brandon and Hafez 52). The cases of Aylin and Arzu are only two of the United Nations’ estimate of around 5000 yearly cases of ‘honor killings’ worldwide.

3 The rising number of so-called ‘honor killings’ necessitates that governments and human rights activists have to look beyond Muslim and minority communities and address this violence as a socio-political issue on a global scale. Consequently, crimes committed in the name of ‘honor’ have been addressed by the United Nations for the better part of the past three decades. Jane Conners states that the United Nations approach to violence against women “has transformed from one centered purely on the advancement of women, crime control and criminal justice and addressed predominately within the UN entities concerned with those issues, to one which incorporates a human rights perspective” (22). In 1975 the World Plan of Action adopted by the First World Conference on Women, which was held in Mexico, did not explicitly refer to violence against women but rather addressed the issue in terms of “dignity, equality” or “security” of women (22). Five years later at the Copenhagen Conference a resolution on “battered women and the family” was included into the final report of the conference (ibid). But it was not until 1985 that violence against women was

truly addressed as an international issue. The “Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace” states:

> Violence against women exists in various forms in everyday life in all societies. Women are beaten, mutilated, burned, sexually abused and raped. Such violence is a major obstacle to the achievement of peace and the other objectives of the Decade and should be given special attention. Women victims of violence should be given particular attention and comprehensive assistance. To this end, legal measures should be formulated to prevent violence and to assist women victims. National machinery should be established in order to deal with the question of violence against women within the family and society. Preventive policies should be elaborated, and institutionalized forms of assistance to women victims provided. (Paragraph 258)

Hence the subject of ‘honor’ crimes has emerged as an international concern beyond its initial address a decade earlier. Crimes against women in the name of ‘honor’ are recognized as a violation of human rights. Additionally the UN and non-governmental institutions are particularly interested in renegotiating terminology, since the use of the term ‘honor’ functions as a justification and absolution of the crime.

4 According to the Human Rights Watch Oral Intervention at the 57th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, ‘honor’ crimes “are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members who are perceived to have brought dishonor upon the family” (Item 12, HRW). Welchman and Hossain state that there is no agreement on the definition of ‘honor killing’, yet there are aspects that assist in clearly differentiating domestic violence and femicide from ‘honor-based’ violence (HBV). ‘Honor-based’ violence is a very specific case of gender-based violence against women, where the term honor needs to be seen as a symbolic term pointing to a legal defense strategy of the perpetrators and encompassing specific social and cultural markers of the community in which the crime was committed. In this context man's honor is defined through the female body, hence any transgression from the gendered norm is regarded as dishonoring the male representative of said norm. Honor here is regarded in terms of a value-system and a tradition to be protected and reinstated if needed. Joanne Payton, information and research officer at the Iranian and Kurdish Women’s Rights Organisation (IKWRO), describes how the word ‘honor’ is defined differently for men and women of Arab and South Asian communities, stating

> ‘Honour’ in its more feminine aspect is located in the negative, passive characteristic: stoicism, endurance, obedience, chastity, domesticity, servitude. In its more masculine form it features active and positive qualities: dynamism, generosity, confidence, dominance and violence. Female ‘honour’ is static: it can neither be increased nor

> regained, and once lost is lost forever. […] The positive, autonomous male 'honour' of any man, family or tribe is built upon the foundation of the negative, dependent female 'honour' of female relatives and tribeswomen, just as a trader's reputation is based on merchandise. (69)

Hence male honor is defined through activism, and confidence, as well as through the degree of passivity among the women in the family.

5 Historically, violent abuses of human and civil rights especially against women are issues that have existed for a long time. Gender-based violence is also a recurring theme in literary and dramatic traditions. In fact, theater and cinema, among the arts, offer a great opportunity for the exploration, analysis and reflection on the complex phenomenon of 'honor killing'. In Western dramatic history, we can find numerous examples of literary texts that deal with gender-related issues of 'honor' and violence. The Early modern period has been a particularly prolific time in this respect, with tragedies like Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), Middleton's *The Changeling* (1622), and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612).

6 John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* is a tragedy about the murder of the Duchess of Malfi, in revenge of her alleged sexual transgression and secret marriage to the subordinate household steward Antonio. The play is especially interesting in comparison to contemporary cases of 'honor killing' and the perception of femininity. More than any other Jacobean play *The Duchess of Malfi* addresses issues of gender norms, social mobility, madness and revenge in a unique and hybrid form. The eruption of violence is continuous, vibrating through the play from early on, reaching its crescendo with the death of the Duchess in Act 4. By marrying Antonio and bearing his children without her brother's consent and after numerous initial warnings not to stray from the social norms and political expectations of the time, the Duchess has 'dishonored' the family represented by her brothers, and thus her social as well as political position. The plot structure builds on the aftermath of her choice, the discovery of her pregnancy and finally her brother Ferdinand's order to have her psychologically tortured an eventually killed, elevating her to the position of a martyr. The persistent stereotype of the "lusty widow" (1.2.259) within early modern English culture, repeatedly used by her brothers to describe the Duchess, functions as a catalyst for the ensuing violence. Male honor during the seventeenth-century was a commodity well worth fighting for. In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Richard exclaims in the very first act "take honor from me, and my life is done". In this patriarchal society, gender norms implied that men were the head of the households and the women, being the 'inferior sex', were limited in their possibilities beyond bearing children. Women with a high visibility such as queen Elisabeth

had to emphasize their exceptionality in order to counter rising gender anxieties. Thus, *The Duchess of Malfi* as a woman of high social standing, who acts according to her own desires and marries behind her brothers' back, trespasses each and every social and gendered norm of the period. In addressing the issue of the Duchess' widowhood Jennifer Panek suggests that Jacobean men, "when faced with the threat of a woman who was legally, economically, and sexually independent […] constructed and deployed the notion of the sexually rapacious widow as a kind of ideological substitute for the official male control from which she had slipped free" (324). Panek states that a "man's conquest of a wealthy widow" was a male fantasy enacted on the Jacobean stage (325). Honor, wealth and general status of a man were translated into sexual subordination of women and their gendered role in the family. In *The Duchess of Malfi* these household power relations are at the center of the conflict between the Duchess and her brothers, the Cardinal and Ferdinand.

7 The story of the Duchess is about love and corruption, power and submission, cruelty and passion and most of all the status of women. The Jacobean play can be analyzed in terms of a sociological or psychoanalytical inquiry regarding the motivations of the two brothers taking revenge on their sister's secret marriage. Yet, at the same time the play can also be read as the documentation of an 'honor killing'. In the context of the rising number of 'crimes of honor' today, the considerable renewed interest in the play does not come as a surprise. Contemporary transnational migration has reintroduced patriarchal notions of honor. Living under globalized conditions there are groups of minorities who justify crimes of 'honor' with reference to the necessity of upholding cultural traditions. However, as Webster's play shows, these practices are not limited to minority groups, but have been prevalent across Europe for centuries. The renewed interest in Webster's play in recent stage productions, starring Judi Dench (1971), Helen Mirren (1980) and Eve Best (2012) in the title role, thus sheds light on the continuity of gendered norms across historical and cultural differences.

8 'Honor-based' violence characteristically not only occurs within the family structure but also in the wider community. In the first act of *The Duchess of Malfi* Ferdinand orders Bosola to

> live i'the'court here and observe the Duchess,
> To note all the particulars of her haviour:
> What suitors do solicit her for marriage
> And whom she best affects. (1.1. 245-248)

Ferdinand, seeing his sister as his property, concludes his address to Bosola by stating that he would "not have her marry again" (1.1. 249). Critical readings of the play have explained this

behavior sociologically by dynastic considerations as well as psychoanalytically by Ferdinand's supposedly incestuous feelings for his sister. But more important than the latter speculations seems the fact that the widowed Duchess is not to choose who and if she would like to marry again. This 'law of honor' is emphasized by the exchange between the Duchess and her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, who attempt to regulate her behavior during their absence (1.1.285-298):

> **Ferdinand** Marry? They are most luxurious/ Will wed twice. […]
> **Duchess** Diamonds are most value/ They say, that have passed through most jewellers' hands.
> **Ferdinand** Whores, by that rule, are precious.
> **Duchess** Will you hear me?/ I'll never marry.
> **Cardinal** So most widows say, / But commonly that motion lasts no longer/ Than the turning of an hourglass: the funeral sermon,/ And it, end both together.

The idea of female promiscuity and changeability necessitating male surveillance seems uncannily close to current cases of 'honor killings'.

9 Similar to the Duchess, Banaz Mahmod also knew "what man is" (1.1. 286) Although Banaz was not a widow, she was married and therefore sexually active. Marriage, similar to the Jacobean era, has to be seen here as a passage from youth and innocence to womanhood. Banaz' case gained wide media attention, not only because it took four years to bring the perpetrators before the court, but also because of the documentary film *Banaz: A Love Story* (2012) by Deeyah, international music artist and activist turned filmmaker, who has been subjected to 'honor'-related abuse and threats herself during her music career that led to her early retirement from the music industry. Banaz Mahmod was a Kurdish born, young woman, raised in the UK from the age of 10 onwards and married at the age of 16 to a man from her clan. In her marriage, she was abused and raped until she left her husband after three years hoping to find shelter and safety in her parents' home. That in itself brought 'dishonor' to the family. When Banaz then fell in love with Rahman, a boy from another Kurdish clan, she was killed by her father and a hired group of men.

10 Status, gender, family and clan affiliation play a crucial role in 'honor-based' violence. Lawrence Stone states that "in the sixteenth century, kin groupings remained powerful in politics [and] much of the political in-fighting of the century revolved around certain kinship rivalries […] In local affairs, kin ties undoubtedly continue to be important well into the eighteenth century" (126). Thus Ferdinand's desire for his sister is primarily politically motivated. Family ties did not only ensure the kin's wealth, but also underlined belonging in terms of moral and traditional values. The same can be claimed for current

reasons of ‘honor-based’ violence. In 2008 the Centre for Social Cohesion published the book *Crimes of the Community: Honour-based violence in the UK*. Here, James Brandon and Salem Hafez address all aspects of ‘honor-based’ violence, such as ‘honor’ killings, forced marriages, ‘honor-based’ domestic violence and female genital mutilations. One of the consequences of losing one’s ‘honor’, be it that of the male head of the household or of the whole family, is ostracism by family and community, stating that “families whose honour has been damaged can be ignored and ostracized by other members of the community. Their children may also be rejected at school by fellow members of their cultural, ethnic or religious group” (8). The predominately male fear to lose face in front of the community by losing control over the female family members is the catalyst to committing horrendous ‘crimes of honor’.

11 The status of women of immigrant families, such as Banaz Mahmod, is clear to all members of the family. ‘Honor-based’ violence is not defined by class, but by the role assigned to women in the community. Often women are ‘imported’ from abroad, kept illiterate and alienated from the new culture so as to be sexually submissive and fulfill household duties. Banaz Mahmod said in one of the found recordings, which were made by her boyfriend at the hospital after her father’s first failed attempt to kill her, that “when he [her husband] raped me it was like I was his shoe that he could wear whenever he wanted to. I didn't know if this was normal in my culture, or here. I was 17” (as quoted in Tracy McVeigh). [1] Banaz was forced into a marriage within her own group and class. Considering that the vast majority of ‘honor-based’ violence can be found in families with migration background, usually from socially disadvantaged classes, one could come to the false conclusion that ‘honor killings’ are class-based. However, the first case of ‘honor killing’ that made international headlines was the murder of the Saudi Princess Misha’al Bint Bin Mohammed in 1977, showing that the crime is not limited to minority groups or a class. In 1980 the documentary *Death of a Princess* by British documentary filmmaker Anthony Thomas was aired, which led to severe diplomatic problems between Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. The film documents the life and death of Princess Misha’al and tries to shed light on her life and her death. More than thirty years later the circumstances surrounding her death are still unclear. As the film shows, there are claims that she and her lover were murdered on a car park in Jeddah, while others insist that she was killed at the airport in Saudi Arabia visiting home during her term break from Lebanon (where she did or did not attend University), and still others maintain that she was taken in front of a judge, where she repeated three times the phrase “I have committed adultery” and was then publicly

executed. Allegedly there are images of her execution. Considering that in all footage her face is covered, it is hard to confirm whether she was killed or, as suggested by still another reading, sent to a mental institution in Switzerland.[1]

12 Towards the end of the first act of *The Duchess of Malfi*, shortly after the brothers have left, the Duchess proposes to Antonio, thus - much like Banaz - choosing the man to love - and, in the case of the Duchess, to marry. In a hidden ceremony behind closed curtains the Duchess and Antonio are wed and consummate their marriage. The second act of the play revolves around the discovery of the Duchess' pregnancy. Suspecting that "the young springal cutting the caper in her belly" (2.1. 155) the brothers' spy, Bosola, puts her to the test by offering her apricots which were said to induce labor. After her "greedy" consumption she breaks out in cold sweat calling out to her husband: "Oh, good Antonio, I fear I am undone" (2.1. 162). Ferdinand's earlier threat has come true: "yet, believe't,/ Your darkest actions, nay your privat'st thoughts,/ Will come to light" (1.1.307-9). Ferdinand has asserted his belief in his right to know everything about his sister, to own her, Consequently, Bosola's knowledge of the Duchess' secret marriage, her overstepping the boundaries of female passivity, marks the death sentence of the woman who has brought dishonor to the family.

13 The belief in the men's right to choose the sexual partners of the women in the family, and hence to own and control their bodies is a decisive marker of 'honor-based' violence. According to Baker et al. in "Family Killing Fields: Honor Rationales in the Murder of Women" the concept of 'honor' implies that "the behavior of another becomes an essential component in one's self-esteem and community regard. This understanding is distinct from the notion that 'honor' rests solely on the individual's own behavior" (165). Banaz knew her death was coming. In some of her recordings she predicts that they (her father and her uncle) will kill her. In 2006 Banaz disappeared. She was only found four months later, tortured, strangled, dismembered and stuffed in a suitcase.

14 According to Valerie Plant "each family that chooses to act on that perceived obligation [to reinstate the family honor] approaches the situation differently, and there are many reported variations [of how women are killed]" (112).[2] In an online search one will find numerous videos of stonings that have been recorded on mobile phones by onlookers and participants. To the extent that the 'dishonor' becomes public, the reinstatement of the family

[1] During my research in 2009 Anthony Thomas sent me a personal copy of the documentary, since it cannot be purchased. Yet, a full transcript of the docu-drama can be found on the PBS Frontline webpage: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/princess/etc/script.html

[2] Hence, as seen in the case of Banaz, by slaughtering her, she was dehumanized and thus eradicated from the family tree in order to reinstate the family 'honor'.

'honor' has to become public as well. In the 2008 motion picture *The Stoning of Soraya M.* the cruel theatricality of the event is foregrounded. Soraya is deliberately wrongly accused of adultery by her husband, since she refuses to divorce him. She is brought into town, half buried in a public place, and then stoned to death in a painfully long sequence. Since she 'dishonored' all males of her family, the first stone is offered to her father, followed by her sons, her husband, until finally the rest of the community is permitted to take part in her murder. Her aunt is not allowed to bury her, as the body of an adulteress does not deserve to be buried. Nevertheless in defiance, her aunt is able to save bones and parts of her body from the dogs and to bury them. Reports of stonings claim that the victim sometimes has to endure the stoning for almost half an hour before death occurs. The way in which the film shows the stoning scene in agonizing length is reminiscent of the footage found of the Yezidi girl Du'a Khalil Aswad.[3]

15 One of the recurrent problems of bringing justice to victims of 'honor killings' are the penal systems, where the defense often relies on colonial Laws, such as the French Penal Code of 1810 which is still part of numerous Arab states' legislation, that seem to absolve the committed crime (Welchman and Hossain 16). As stated before, in Europe a frequent defense strategy is to either call it a 'crime of passion', thus not premeditated, or, as in the case of Arzu Ö. take the 'cultural' background into consideration. Although in both cases the murderer is prosecuted the crime itself is thus presented as justified or is not addressed as a violation of human rights. In this context Jane Conners refers to Article 4 of the United Nations Declaration on Violence Against Women, which states that

> states should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to the elimination of gender-based violence against women, and should exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the state or private persons. (25)

In countries where laws derived from nineteenth-century British colonial law are still in use (Warraich 79), or in Arab countries like Jordan which use the French penal law, the line between right and wrong is blurred for those committing the crime. Ayse Onal's book *Honour Killing: Stories of Men Who Killed* (2009) holds ten stories based on interviews Onal conducted in prisons with men who killed in the name of 'honor'. The majority of the interviews end without any display of remorse from the murderers, since the deed is seen as just and even lawful. The same can be seen in the corruption of justice in *The Duchess of*

[3] CNN airs potions of Du'a Khalil Aswad's stoning. www.youtube.com/watch. [last accessed 15.03.2013]

Malfi. Already in Act 1 Delio foreshadows the perversion of justice by stating about Ferdinand: “Then the law to him/ Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider:/ He makes it his dwelling, and a prison/ To entangle those shall feed him (1.1. 169-72). Ferdinand uses the law for his own benefit and becomes a victim of his own corruption. In Act 4, after the Duchess' murder, he admits this by stating “Did any ceremonial form of law/ Doom her to not-being?” (4.3. 292-3). But it is Bosola who viciously tries to justify the murder by stating “the common bellman/That usually is sent to condemned persons” (4.2.164-5), appointing himself to an executioner sanctioned by the law and not hired by the “thief” (4.3.299) as he refers to Ferdinand shortly after. The motivations today are similar to those Ferdinand names: “To bring her to despair” (4.1.113). Ferdinand draws a sadistic pleasure from the torture of the Duchess, but rather than succumbing to the pain, she insists: “I am Duchess of Malfi still” (4.2.134). It is said that the Saudi Princess was the beloved granddaughter of the King. In the documentary film about her, one of the witnesses states that the King was begging his granddaughter not to repeat the confession of adultery three times, but that she would not comply. The princess did not bow her head and deny her lover, and thus had to die. She displayed the same passion as the Duchess in remaining faithful to her choices.

16 The brothers in *The Duchess of Malfi* literally and figuratively unleash hell on earth in the fourth act. Ferdinand, in particular, attempts to rationalize his mad rage to which we are already introduced in Act 2.4 after he has learned about the Duchess' transgression:

> **Ferdinand** […] I could kill her now/ In you [Cardinal], or in myself, for I do think/ It is some sin in us heaven doth revenge/ By her.
> **Cardinal** Are you stark mad?
> **Ferdinand** I would have their [children] bodies/ Burnt in coal pit with the ventage stopped,/ That their cursed smoke might not ascend to heaven;/ Or dip the sheets they lie in, in pitch and sulphur,/ Wrap them in’t and then light them like a match;/ Or else to boil their bastard to a cullis/ And giev’t his lecherous father to renew/ The sin of his back. (2.4. 63-73)

Ferdinand’s vivid imagining of how to take revenge and punish the Duchess and her children, seems horrifyingly close to actions used in ‘crimes of honor’. Victims of ‘honor killings’ have been known to have been buried alive, burned alive or, as was the case of Banaz Mahmod, raped for two hours and then strangled and beaten to death. One of the few survivors of an ‘honor killing’ is Souad, who describes her ordeal of being a victim of her family’s wrath in her memoirs *Burned Alive*. In the book Souad tells the harrowing story of how she was set on fire by her brother-in-law after her family learned about her pregnancy. In Webster’s play the brother meets his sister in darkness before the execution of the vicious act, which he terms “[…] the honorabl’st revenge,/ Where I may kill, to pardon” (4.1. 33-4).

Ferdinand's alleged objective is the preservation of the family bloodline. Balizet states that "ideals of masculine and feminine honor were articulated in terms of blood purity and the shame of social dishonor met its 'cure' through the purging of diseased, impure blood" (24). Thus, only the deaths of the Duchess, her husband Antonio, and their children can reinstate the family 'honor'. Ferdinand is determined to make the Duchess suffer by presenting her with the horrifying spectacles of a dead man's hand (4.1. 44) and her seemingly dead husband and child. Torture is one of the methods used in 'honor-based' violence. When the Duchess is faced with the murder of her family she yearns to join them, but Bosola tells her that she has to endure the pain to which she replies "that's the greatest torture souls feel in hell,/ In hell: that they must live, and cannot die" (4.1.68-9).

17 'Honor killings' are frequently located in communities with minority groups. Islam is often associated with violence against women, since the perpetrators of 'honor killings' often call upon the Quran to justify their actions. During a recent visit to the Saladin Citadel of Cairo I was almost ambushed by a woman who gave me numerous free Islamic books published by the Conveying Islamic Message Society (CIMS). One of these books was *Women in Islam: The Myth and the Reality*. The chapter on adultery opens with the following text: "Adultery is considered a sin in all religions. The Bible decrees the death sentence for both adulterer and adulteress (Lev. 20:10). Islam also equally punishes both the adulterer and the adulteress (Quran 24: 2). The short chapter then continues with a quotation from Deuteronomy 22:22: "If man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel". This is followed by a quotation from Leviathan 20:10: "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death". Interestingly enough no direct quotes from the Quran are used, but to underline that the Quran "never considers any woman to be the possession of any man" (28) Azeem quotes Quran 30:21 "and among his signs is this, that he created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and he has put love and mercy between your hearts: truly in that are signs for those who reflect". In fact the Quran does not speak of a death sentence but "the woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication,- flog each of them with a hundred stripes" (Quran 24: 1-2). Welchman and Hossain state that a number of "renowned Islamic leaders and scholars have publicly condemned this practice ['honor' killing] and clarified that is has no religious basis" (13), thus directly contradicting the stereotype of a violent and oppressive attitude of Islam towards women.

18 *The Duchess of Malfi* is a play about an ‘honor killing’. The honour-terminology here is significantly linked to Ferdinand’s continuous address of the Duchess as his property, and his subsequent control over her sexuality. The honor of the brothers and their family is thus defined through the Duchess’ body. When the Duchess is pregnant Ferdinand does not recognize the female body as nurturing and loving but as a formal disgrace of the family. Banaz left her husband and chose a man of her own, the Saudi princess committed adultery by falling in love with another man. The alleged transgression from gender roles is not the sole reason for violence against women. Numerous abuse and rape victims commit suicide, being aware of the ‘honor’ concept in their families and communities. This is often referred to as ‘honor suicide’, when the family members (especially of rape victims) give the woman the option of killing herself. This enforced ‘honor killing’ enables them to remain ‘innocent’ of the murder. Ferdinand offers the Duchess a knife, giving her the opportunity to kill herself, yet she denies. ‘Honor-based’ violence is a violation of human rights. It has to be addressed openly in a socio-political context, in which awareness can be raised and help can be offered. According to the United Nations there are about 5000 premeditated murders committed in the name of honor yearly. At least ten percent happen in the Western Hemisphere.

Works Cited

Abdel Azeem, Sherif. *Women in Islam.* Alexandria, Egypt: Conveying Islamic Message Society. Print. Online Access: www.islamic-message.net/cims/default.aspx.

Baker, Nancy V., Peter R. Gregware, et al. “Family Killing Fields: Honor Rationales in the Murder of Women." *Violence Against Women.* 5.2 (1999): 164-184. www.sagepublications.com.

Balizet, Ariane M. “’Drowned in Blood’: Honor, Bloodline, and Domestic Ideology in *The Duchess of Malfi* and *El Médico de su honra.*” *Comparative Literatur Studies.* 49.1 (2012): 23-49.

Brandon, James and Hafez Salam, ed. *Crimes of the Community: Honour-based violence in the UK.* London: Centre for Social Cohesion, 2008.

Connors, Jane. “United Nations approaches ‘crimes of honour’.” *'Honour' Crimes, Paradigms, And Violence Against Women.* Ed. Lynn Welchmann and Sara Hossain. London and New York: Zed Books, 2005. 1-21.

Hossain, Sara, and Lynn Welchmann. "Introduction: 'Honour', rights and wrongs." *'Honour' Crimes, Paradigms, And Violence Against Women.* Ed. Lynn Welchmann and Sara Hossain. London and New York: Zed Books, 2005. 1-21.

"Item 12 - Integration of the human rights of women and the gender perspective: Violence Against Women and 'Honor' Crimes." *Human Rights Watch Oral Intervention at the 57th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights.* 6 April 2001. www.hrw.org [last accessed 15 March 2013]

McVeigh, Tracy. "'They are following me ': chilling words of girl who was 'honour killing' victim." *Observer* [London] 22 September 2012, n. pag. Web. 15 Mar. 2013. www.guardian.co.uk.

Panek, Jennifer. "'My naked weapon': Male Anxiety and the Violent Courtship of the Jacobean Stage Widow." *Comparative Drama*. 34.3 (2000): 321-344.

Payton, Joanne. "Collective crimes, collective victims: a case study of the murder of Banaz Mahmod." *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam.* Ed. Mohammad Mazher Idriss and Tahir Abbas. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011. 67-79.

Plant, Valerie. "Honor Killings and the Asylum Gender Gap, 15 J.". *Transnat'l L. & Pol'y.* 109. (2005): 109-129. www.law.fsu.edu/journals/transnational/vol15_1/Plant.pdf.

Stone, Lawrence. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800. London: Weidenfeld, 1977.d

United Nations. Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE). *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade For Women: Equality, Development And Peace Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985.* New York: United Nations, 1985. Web. www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/nfls/Nairobi1985report.txt.

Warraich, Sohail Akbar. "'Honour killings' and the law in Pakistan." *'Honour' Crimes, Paradigms, And Violence Against Women.* Ed. Lynn Welchmann and Sara Hossain. London and New York: Zed Books, 2005. 78-110.

Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi.* London and New York: New Mermaids, 2005.