

**HEGEMONIC  
MASCULINITY,  
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WOMEN**

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# **HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY, DOMINATION, AND** **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

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## **Introduction**

There are many theories to explain the existence and the extent of the problem of men's violence against women. Some theories focus on the individuals and look for personal explanations such as the use of alcohol or drugs, the victim's actions, mental illness, stress, frustration, underdevelopment, and violent families of origin. Men's violence can also be studied from a sociological point of view. According to this approach violence against women is endemic to the social condition of women and men, across time and culture (Websdale & Chesney-Lind, 1998 p 55). Hearn (1998 p 29) warns that there are great dangers in separating violence off from the rest of social relations between men and women, since this separation can be a major way in which men reproduce violence as definers and constructors of violence. Likewise, Dobash and Dobash (1983 p 14) argue that investigations that attempt to abstract physical violence out of its social settings and focus primarily on the backgrounds or personal characteristics of individuals are not likely to lead to an elucidation of interpersonal violence. They further argue that this patterning of violence is what makes it intelligible and explicable. In effect, focusing on the specific individual manifestations of men's violence to women as a social problem places individuals in a wider context and makes it possible to consider the nature of violence as a dynamic process affecting the lives of men as well as women. Such a contextual approach includes an analysis of factors such as the dynamics of gender relations within a society, the impact of cultural beliefs and values on violent behaviour (Dobash & Dobash, 1992 p 253). A contextual approach in studying men's violence towards women can also include the study of social

constructions of both 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. This in turn entails considering men's power relations to women, and the social development of boys and men in the general context (Hearn, 1996 p 101).

This is the approach I will take in this paper to explain particular incidence of men's violence against women in the Middle-Eastern families. My premise is that the cultural configuration of gender and gender practice in the hegemonic masculinity is crucial in the production and reproduction of men's violence against women.

In this paper, the concept of violence includes physical violence, mental and emotional abuse. All these forms of violence are "designed to control, dominate and express authority and power" (Hanmer, 1990 p 08.)

To understand the familial masculinity in the Middle Eastern families, first we need to have an understanding of Middle Eastern pattern of gender order. Historically, this pattern has been functioning through the overall subordination of women and dominance of men. Here, sex determines the roles and behaviours of individuals. Accordingly, values, customs and laws are based on sex differences, with men being the powerful and the dominant, and women being the weak and the subordinate. This pattern, still in force in many Middle Eastern societies, particularly in rural and tribal areas, has commonly been named as 'patriarchal'. In this paper, however, I have opted for John Remy's term; 'androcracy', which, I believe, better characterises the pattern of gender order in these societies, and is more helpful in clarifying various representations of masculine domination and violence in this context. According to Remy (1990:43), androcracy, or 'rule by men' takes two forms: *patriarchy* (rule of the fathers), and *fratriarchy* (rule of the brotherhoods). Androcracy is fostered in a social system in which family is indeed an institution of male dominance, the most influential perhaps. As Connell (1995 p 18) notes:

The authoritarian type [of masculinity] was a masculinity particularly involved in the maintenance of patriarchy: marked by hatred for homosexuals and contempt for women, as well as more general conformity to authority from above, and aggression towards the less powerful.

In this context, "conformity to authority from above", to adapt Connell's terms, means that senior men of a family have authority over everyone else in that family including younger men and women, who are in turn subject to forms of control and subordination (Moghadam, 1993 p 104). Senior men, it is believed, make reasonable and rational decisions with the collective good of

the kin in mind. So, other members must accept those decisions and carry them out.

The notion of 'senior men' must be put in the context of extended family in kinship-ordered society, where the subordination of women and domination of men are also linked to the reproduction of the kin group (Moghadam p 105). In extended family, there is no one single man as patriarch or *fratrist*, rather there are a number of male members, who exert their control as 'seniors' and/or 'elderly'. Arenas in which men deploy their dominating power over female members of the family are often related to women's economic status or their sexuality. Men decide, for instance, when it is appropriate for a woman to get married and to whom she should get married. Or, they decide whether it is appropriate that a female member of their family undertake a job outside the household.

Such familial 'strategy' is backed by socio-cultural dynamics of gender practice, by which men are entrusted with means of safeguarding family's social position through control over female members. Women are regarded as weak and emotional, and thus incapable of making any important decision on their own. It is generally accepted that the most important capacity for women is to be good wives and mothers. Therefore, their activities must be confined, as much as possible, to the private/domestic sphere. Such debates on sex differences, mainly premised upon theories of biological dissimilarities between men and women, are conducive to the allocation of different roles in the family<sup>1</sup>. The changes that have taken place in the technological and economic order of Middle-Eastern societies have done little to erode the foundations of sex-biased pattern of the family. Particularly in rural and tribal areas and among working-class families, where such changes have had the least social impact, this pattern has remained almost intact.

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<sup>1</sup> I do not have enough space here to discuss Islam's attitude towards male-female sex-based role difference. Yet, it must be mentioned that such religiously justified ideologies are mainly rooted in the *interpretations* of Islamic teachings. Throughout history, the science of interpretation of Islam has been monopolized by men. That is to say, the majority of Muslim scholars, whose interpretations are followed by people, are men. Obviously, it has been to their interest to preserve the well-established patriarchal structure of the society that has a history longer than Islam itself. In any event, Islamic rules and teachings, particularly where there have been ambiguities in the meaning of a specific rule, have been interpreted in a way to guarantee the dominating position of men.

As Connell (1995 p 83) observes: “patriarchal definitions of femininity amount to a cultural disarmament that may be quite a physical kind.” He further notes that two patterns of violence against women follow from this situation: violence as a means of sustaining dominance and violence as a way of claiming or asserting masculinity. Within the context in question, these two patterns are closely correlated and may function interchangeably.

Before going on to discuss the patterns of violence against women in Muslim family, I shall look into one important component of the definition of femininity in Muslim societies, that is, female sexuality, which is of central significance in analysing the types of violence that is the concern of the following part.

## **Female Sexuality against Masculinity of Control and Degradation**

Historically in the Middle East, it is the domestic field, i.e. the private sphere (*haram, hareem*), in which sexuality is established and practised. Outside of this field, sexuality is practically denied. Female sexuality, in particular, is not only denied but also proscribed as it is regarded as potential source for chaos, that is, social disorder. Therefore, control over their sexuality is considered essential (Moghadam p 108)<sup>2</sup>. Public sex-segregation, still in force in some countries in the Middle Eastern societies, is partly based on this conception.

Existence of women as potential sexual objects for men is a fundamental element of hegemonic masculinity. Central to this is the idea that women’s main role is to provide heterosexual men with sexual validation, and men compete with each other for this (Donaldson, 1993 p 645). In other words, women are ‘objects’ for men’s sexual pleasure. As Donaldson further observes: “competition [over women] and homophobia are the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity”. Thus, such competition can be interpreted as competition for ‘the objects of sexual pleasure’. These objects are regarded as the ‘property’ of the family and senior family men, who, in a hierarchical order with the father being on the top, exert their privileged control over this property. Marriage is the only institution that legitimises the possession of this object by a stranger (i.e. a man outside the domestic field) for sexual

pleasure, bearing in mind that marriage is another arena for senior men to exert their privileged power.

A woman's extra-marital relationship with a man would be dangerous for her male family members, threatening their position in two ways: first, it proves that they do not have enough control upon the female members, and second, as a result of failure in having enough control, it reflects that they have let a man put his hand on their 'property' without asking their permission (an essential prerequisite of marriage.) These are degrading for a *man*. However, the interesting point is that the woman is always to blame for that, since it is believed *women* goad men into such illegitimate and immoral activities<sup>3</sup>.

Having set up female sexuality in this way, men assume, as a quintessential masculine matter, the obligation of controlling it. Otherwise, they will be branded by other men as 'coward' or 'careless' for their dereliction of this duty<sup>4</sup>.

Men not only have the duty to control female sexuality to prevent 'chaos', but also they are under the obligation to react if a female member of their family disrespects the values of the society by her involvement in an extra-marital relationship, or any other act that is deemed immoral according to the androcratic standards of the family and/or the society. I will describe two arenas in which men's duty to react becomes more significant:

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<sup>2</sup> For female sexuality in Muslim society, see Mernissi (1987).

<sup>3</sup> I must emphasize that I am not concerned with the problematic effects of free sexual relationship between men and women, which I do believe entails social disorder. Rather, I am challenging those ideologies for exclusion and oppression of women that see female sexuality as *potentially* dangerous and thus tend to oppress and seclude women on this basis.

<sup>4</sup> It must be noted, however, that when we speak of men's control women's sexuality, we must not slide into the conclusion that 'sexual intercourse' is the sole subject of control. In effect, men are entitled to control anything that can be somehow correlated to female sexuality. For instance, men decide upon women's social dressing code. They decide what sort of women's garment is sexually seductive and thus forbidden to wear in public. This is independent from what the State might proclaim as moral or accepted. Therefore, various forms of women's garment may be found in different Muslim countries. It ranges from a simple headscarf to long all covering-up black veils (*Chador*) in Iran, *Burqa* in Afghanistan, and *Purdah* in Pakistan. This diversity is partly due to the fact that every society has its own standards as to what better covers women up, so that the likelihood of 'chaos' taking place may be minimized in this way. Men decide upon the dressing code and enforce it themselves.

## 1. Pre-Marital Relationships

I must begin with the importance of Middle-Eastern women's pre-marital virginity. In effect, for most of them virginity before marriage is perhaps the most cherished physical possession, and their chances for a 'desirable' marriage depends more on this physical condition than on any qualification they may have. There are cultural ideologies for the necessity of women's virginity before marriage. According to one of such ideologies the bride's virginity before first consummation by the groom guarantees her future fidelity and commitment since she has not known any other man to compare his husband with (Azari, 1983 p 109). In effect, strictness on women's virginity before marriage is premised upon historically constructed ideologies. It is a heritage of agrarian society when a predisposition to male dominance in that patriarchal society was situated in relation between the peasant household and the world of landlords and the state and in the reproduction of kinship-ordered groups, wherein women were exchanged and men were the transactors. As mentioned earlier, women are treated as men's properties, whose value as a 'suitable bride' is dependant on whether she has been 'used' by another man before coming into the hands of the husband, as the only legitimate 'owner' of a woman's sexuality. A non-virgin bride is regarded as 'second-handed' and as such some men avoid accepting them as their wife. Given that in the context of this study, women's social position is highly dependant on their marital status, for a woman the fact that she can hardly get married due to her non-virginity before marriage, is nothing less than punishment. Therefore, it is not surprising that in such circumstances, some women, under the psychological pressure of having no prosperous marriage in prospect, choose to commit suicide or leave their family or community.

Aside from ideologies asserting virginity as a symbol of virtue and chastity, women's virginity has a two-fold correlation with men's masculinity. As already stated, it is not acceptable for some men to marry a woman who has previously given sexual pleasure to another man out of marriage, for it is essential for them, as an indication of masculine achievement, to be *the first* man who possesses the bride. Virginity is so important that in some areas it is a tradition that the groom, upon the first consummation, must show to his family (usually to his mother) waiting outside the bridal chamber, a tissue with the bride's post-penetration vaginal blood on it. If the bride is found not virgin, the groom sends her back to her family to let *them* make the appropriate

decision on this matter. In some countries the groom is legally entitled to annul the marriage in such circumstances.

Women's pre-marriage virginity has impact on the masculine identity of members of her family of origin as well. For a father, it is very important that his daughter remains virgin before the first consummation by the groom. It shows that he has had enough control upon her, he has protected her well, and thus his domination has been well established. Women's non-virginity before marriage, on the other hand, negates all this; indicating that the father has not had enough control upon her.

## **2. Adultery**

By adultery, I am referring to the act of sexual intercourse between a married woman and a man other than her husband. Adultery is one of the gravest disrespects for moral values in Middle-Eastern families. In some countries (e.g. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), it is legally punishable by death penalty for the adulteress and the adulterer, should he be married as well. However, adultery is not always reported to authorities. Therefore, it is not always up to the State authorities, namely the police and the courts, to decide on adultery and its probable punishment. Particularly in rural and tribal areas, such cases are handled as private matters that do not require State's involvement. Family men (usually the husband, or the father) assume the right to decide whether adultery has taken place. Strong evidence or proof is not normally required, as in many cases their decision is founded upon mere rumour or their own imagination of adultery. The punishment is performed by either the adulteress' husband or her family members. In effect, all male members of the adulteress' family are under social, cultural, religious, and, sometimes, the legal burden of wiping off this 'stain of shame' from their family, to show their commitment towards the values of their family or kin group.

Now, I shall turn to analyse a type of men's violence against women, which can be construed as a manifestation of men's struggle to assert their masculinity.

## Honour-Killing

Honour-killing refers to the act of murdering a woman who has actually breached a social norm of female sexuality or is merely under suspicion of acting as such. It is still sporadically committed in the Middle East and South Asia, from Palestine to Pakistan, circumscribing lives of women. In Jordan, official figures show that an average of 25 women die every year in honour-killings. In 1997, in Souran province of Turkey 34 cases of honour killing were reported. In this area, from 1992 to 1998, there were 104 reported cases of honour killing, of which 31 victims were under 18-years-old (Dara, 2000). In 1997, it was estimated that some 300 women were killed in the name of 'honour' in one province of Pakistan alone. According to 1999 estimates, more than two-thirds of all murders in Gaza strip and West bank were most likely 'honour' killings (UNICEF, 2000). Such figures, however, do not show the real extent of this phenomenon, since most of the cases of honour-killing go unreported or are disguised as an accident.

Honour-killing is always committed by men. It is a 'masculine homicide' and has its sources in the willingness of male members of the family to lay down challenges to their masculine position both within the family and the society. Method of killing includes beating, shooting, stabbing, burning, stoning, strangulation, and decapitation. Honour-killing may be committed collectively or individually. Usually, a kind of family council or informal gathering of senior men decides on the punishment and determines who must perform it.

Women's sexuality is another vital source of this type of violence. Usually, an actual involvement in an extra or pre-marital relationship, either sexual or a simple romance, creates the motivation. However, in some accounts a mere suspicion that a woman is in such a relationship might compel a man to punish the suspicious woman. In one account, in January 1999, Ghazala, a Pakistani girl, was set on fire and burned to death, reportedly by her brother, because her family suspected she was having an illicit relationship with a neighbour. Her burned and naked body reportedly lay unattended on the street for two hours as nobody wanted to have anything to do with it (Amnesty International, 1999). Sometimes, honour killings are carried out on the flimsiest of grounds, such as a man's imagination that his wife is betraying him. Also, in some accounts no sexual relationship is involved, but a woman's dating somebody or even talking to a stranger may make a male

family member is the ground for punishment. In October 1993, for example, Kazima in Malakan village of Khalifan in Turkey was killed by her brother, Salam, because she talked with a boy (Dara, 2000). In some extreme accounts, women are killed because they were raped. In March 1999, Jamilla, a 16-year old Pakistani girl, was shot dead after she told her tribe that she had been raped. The tribal council of senior men decided that she should die as she had brought shame on the tribe (Amnesty International, 1999). In this example, the girl's losing virginity is considered as 'chaotic'; but not that she has been raped. She was punished because of losing virginity by provoking the rapist by her own sexuality and bringing shame onto the family.

The cultural ideals of hegemonic masculinity are crucial in supporting this type of violence. These ideals praise credible competing violent identities for men. They are featured both inside the family, that is, by the conceptions of caring father, brother, son, uncle or cousin; and outside the family, i.e., in ancient myths, poems, stories, and films. An ideal can be a man who heroically defends his honour by killing his wife or sister whom, *he* believes, is in relationship with a man or is in love with him. Younger men in particular are constantly compared by their peers and family members against these ideals, though the level of men's sensitivity, dependency and exposure to these ideals varies largely from one society or class to another.

As already mentioned, in some accounts of honour-killing, women are victimised by their brothers. Therefore, it is of utility to examine the relationship between fraternal masculinity and honour-killing. Fratriarchy, as a part of androcracy, is a mode of male domination concerned with a quite different set of values from those of patriarchy (Remy: 44), most important of which is that the *fratrist* is preoccupied with matters other than paternity and providing for a wife and family. In the context in question, however, the duty of 'the guardian of the moral code of the family' is the one he *does* share with the father. Yet, the way in which the fratrist conceives this duty varies from the father's conception. In effect, in most of the cases in which the brother is the assassin, the self-interest of the fratrist is favoured over the interests of the family or the tribe. This interest has to do with the position of the fratrist in the 'men's league'. Remy (1990 p 44) defines men's league as:

A place where those males who have earned the right to call themselves *men*, or are in process of attaining this emblem of privilege, gather. [It] is the building or space in which men meet, talk, work, and play. It is the pivot of domination.

Honour-killing, in a sense, reflects the demand of a group to do as *they* please (c.f. Remy, p 45). To recapitulate, it is to the interest of the fratrist, as a member of the dominant men's league, to act upon the expectation of that group, otherwise he would be expelled from it. When a female member of the fratrist's family or tribe is involved in a romantic or sexual relationship, or there is a rumour thereof, the league demands the fratrist to react as the guardian of the moral code of his family. Thus, it can be argued that honour-killing is in fact a traditional 'testing' rite for the fratrist. Passing the test by using manly violence is a proof of his masculinity.

Almost the same explanation applies to the cases in which the husband is the assassin. Yet, the married man, as the legal head of the family, enjoys the rights and obligations, which the fratrist does not. Besides, he has interests in his family life, to which his wife plays an important role. Therefore, the rational husband must, prior to making decision on killing his offending wife, make a balance between several different interests: family interests and men's hut interests. This may render the life of the married man to schizophrenic one. The stronger the ties with the men's league, the higher the pressure on the husband to prove his gender identity to this group. Thus, when a man kills his wife under the name of honour, it can, among other factors, be ascribed to such psychological fray.

## **The Law**

Before going on to say something about the legal response to honour-killing in the Middle-East, the following observations must be taken into consideration:

1. Middle-Eastern States are dominated by men – they are characteristically patriarchal.
2. There are wide variations in the gendered division of labour and power between different parts of the State.
3. Those parts of the State that are more concerned with repression and violence are, more or less, male-dominated. This includes the police, the courts, the lawmakers, legal advisers and counsels.

There is no consensus among Middle-Eastern States as to how respond to honour-killing. In countries such as Iran and Pakistan where strict religious

laws are in force, 'honour killers' can get away with it. The Islamic Penal Code of Iran (IPC), which is thoroughly founded upon Islamic (*Shari 'a*) law, provides that a married woman found guilty of adultery shall be sentenced to death penalty (Article 83). Article 226 of this code provides that any person found guilty of murder will be sentenced to death penalty only where, according to the *Shari 'a* law, the victim had not been determined as 'deserved to be killed' (*Mahdour-ol dam*). It follows that when a man kills a woman on the mere suspicion that she was involved in an extra-marital relationship, he can get away with it, should he later convince the court that he had enough reasons to believe his suspicion was true. Indeed, the practice of some Iranian courts denotes that in such cases, it is not necessary to prove that victim was actually engaged in extra-marital relationship.

By way of example, I will briefly present a case brought before an Iranian court:

Khalil, aged 21, is charged with murdering his married cousin whom he was suspicious of having extra-marital sexual relationship with another man that had brought shame on him and the family. He has strangled her by using her own headscarf.

The woman's father says that his son-in-law [victim's husband] had come to him on the night of the incident, saying that he wanted to divorce her. The father tells him: "if you've seen her with a man, why haven't you killed her right away?" Then, after an hour, the husband goes back to him to let the father know his daughter was killed. Khalil, the murderer, claims that he was aided by the victim's husband holding tight the victim's hands while he was trying to kill her.

The verdict:

The lower court sentenced Khalil to death penalty, according to Qessas [eye for an eye] rule of the IPC. The Supreme Court quashed this sentence on the following grounds:

"Firstly, because of religious beliefs that consider these actions deserved to be punished by death, or even *require* such punishment, secondly, according to religious, *Shari 'a*, and legal rules, which consider a married man's or woman's extra-marital relationship as [an offence that is] punishable by death penalty and this belief has been developed throughout the society; it is strongly likely that this homicide has been committed upon the murderer's belief that the victim was '*Mahdoor-ol-dam*' (deserved-to be- killed) and as a result according to the rules of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) the maximum penalty shall be the payment of *diyah*<sup>5</sup> and not capital punishment [...]" (Baazgir, 1997 pp 236,284).

Similar lenient and discriminative rules apply to those who kill unmarried women on the basis of illicit sexual relationship. As mentioned earlier, usually the murderers are members of the victim's family, namely, her brother, uncle

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<sup>5</sup> Money paid the victim or his/her relatives as a form of compensation.

or cousin, and, in most of the cases, they act upon the order of senior men of that family. When arrested and brought before the court, they are pardoned by the victim's family. Given that according to Islamic law the capital punishment can only be implemented where the (immediate) relatives of the victim give their consent to it, if they choose to pardon the assassin, he will not face such punishment and sometimes no punishment at all, as it is up to the judge to decide whether other types of punishment such as imprisonment may be used instead. In Iran, in such cases the maximum imprisonment is 10 years. In Lebanon, as a result of the amendment in the law in 1999, such assassins will no longer be pardoned, but their motive will still be taken into account as mitigation and instead of death penalty they can end up with just a few months in jail (BBC News, 2001). The same approach is taken by the Jordanian law (Article 340 of the Penal Code of Jordan), and the Pakistani law.

Some legal systems provide the husband with legal right to kill his wife, should she be found in an extra-marital sexual relationship. For instance, according to the Article 630 of Islamic Penal Code of Iran: "whenever a man finds his wife committing adultery, being aware of her willingness [towards the adulterer], he may kill both of his wife and the adulterer at the scene. Should the woman be under duress, he may only kill the man [the adulterer][...]" Encouraging a man to kill his wife is not in the interest of the family. Besides, a schizophrenic man cannot easily distinguish between sexual intercourse and non-sexual intimacy. There have been cases in which a man kills his wife due to his mere imagination that the woman was involved in sexual intercourse with another man, while there was nothing more than a mere conversation going on between her and the man in question. Such legal provisions are indeed manifestations of institutionalised violence against women in hegemonic masculinity where the interests of men, as the dominant, are preferred to the rights or interests of women as the subordinate.

## **Paternal Masculinity: Masculinity of Domination**

By paternal masculinity, I am referring to the rights and obligations of a man with regard to his offspring. It must be noted that in Middle Eastern families,

paternity is not different from fatherhood, for in Islamic law, which regulates the family law and familial relationships in the Middle-East, no social connection is conceivable for a man with a child born outside of marriage (natural child). Thus, the biological father of the child *must* be the man married to the mother

Patriarchal ideologies of women's subordination are of central significance in constructing 'fatherhood' in the Middle-Eastern family unit. These ideologies have their roots in on-going debates on sex difference that give rise to the concept of 'sex role'. Here, being a man or woman means enacting a general set of expectations, which are attached to one's sex (Connell, 1995 p 22.) In the same way, representations of masculinity and femininity must live up to the expectations. This applies to the social and legal regulation of the care and control of children. Beside his economic responsibility to provide economic welfare for the family, the father is under the obligation of maintaining his offspring's interests at all time. To perform this obligation, he enjoys a number of rights. For instance, he can do commercial transactions on behalf of his children. With regard to his female offspring, however, he is entitled to intervene in more personal matters, the most important of which is marriage. In effect, Islamic marriage law is a domain of paternal domination. The father has the power to act on behalf of his daughter, or to prevent them from acting against his will. For instance, according to the Islamic rules, the father has the right to give off his daughter to marriage while she is under the legal age, though the marriage cannot be consummated until she reaches the legal age and gives her consent to it. Another example is the father's permission to his daughter's marriage. A Muslim girl's marriage is not religiously valid (though it may be legally effective), unless her father or her paternal grandfather expresses his consent to it<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> This rule is premised on an interpretation of a number of Koranic verses. Another basis for this rule is what the scholars tend to consider "the girls' benefit". According to one Islamic scholar (Imam Muhammad Abu Zuhrah, 1957, cited in Mehrpour, 2000 p 58):

Girls, and women in general, do not know men appropriately, since they are usually either housekeepers, veiled and unaware of the outside world, or, even when they appear in the public, they are affected by their emotions and not well aware of the tricks and secrets of the real life. Thus, it is to their benefit that their guardian [i.e. the father or the paternal grandfather] gets involved in choosing their husband as he can make decision without being influenced by unrealities. Besides, marriage is in fact a relation between the two families [of the bride and of the groom], so the guardian is an interested

The father's arbitrary rights to make such decisions on behalf of his offspring is another patriarchal privilege for men, based upon a patriarchal ideology that men are rational while women are emotional and thus unable to make appropriate decisions (Connell, 1995 pp 82,164). In this system, the father is responsible but not accountable, for his decisions are always to the interest of the family. Father's control on other members of the family, particularly the female members, is construed as valuable representation of responsible masculinity, while his 'accountability' is not.

## **Forced Marriage**

Forced marriage is a manifestation of a familial order, which takes paternal right to its extreme. It involves the marriage of (often young, sometimes as young as nine- year-old) women to men they do not know (often older than them), whom they have never seen and with whom they do not want to be. Forced marriage differs from "arranged marriage" in that the latter embraces a process of negotiation and/or prior consultation between parents and their children, while forced marriage, being more unusual than arranged marriage, often involves coercion in the form of emotional blackmail, physical constraints, confinement, physical violence, abuse, abduction, and murder of the individual concerned. Although common among Muslim families, forced marriage was not introduced by Islam, nor was it endorsed by this religion<sup>7</sup>, as it occurs within diverse cultures, traditions, nationalities, races and religions other than Islam as well. Historically, forced marriage has its roots in ancient tribal societies, where women were exchanged as an object for different purposes such as establishing peace or confirming the friendly relationship between tribes. Similar purposes, by and large, are still pervasive in some regions in the Middle East. Women may be forced into

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party anyway, and thus shame or honour of the marriage will affect his life as well.

<sup>7</sup> Abu Huraira (a famous *sunni* reporter of the sayings of the prophet) reported Prophet Muhammad as having said:

A woman without a husband (or divorced or a widow) must not be married until she is consulted, and a virgin must not be married until her permission is sought. They asked the Prophet: How her (virgin's) consent can be solicited? He (the Prophet) said: That she keeps silence (Translation of Sahih Muslim, The Book of Marriage (Kitab Al-Nikah), Book 008, Number 3303).

Or Abdullah ibn Umar, another well-know reporter, has reported the Prophet as having said:

"Consult women about (the marriage of) their daughters" (Translation of Sunan Abu-Dawud, Marriage (Kitab Al-Nikah), Book 11, Number 2090).

marriage for economic reasons. Poverty and unemployment threatens men's familial models of working-class masculinity, in a context where "traditional ideals of paternal masculinity and male familial commitment are based on the centrality of work." This in fact threatens the accounts of male control and 'breadwinner' masculinity. Thus, by forcing his daughter into marriage, the father pursues a twofold economic purpose:

- To diminish the economic pressure on himself, as one of the members of the family goes away, so he can spend more on other members, and moreover, as is often the case, in exchange for his daughter he receives a considerable amount of money from the groom or his family;
- To maintain or restore his paternal authority over the female members that might have come under threat because of his poor economic situation.

The following narrative illustrates this:

An 11-year-old [Iranian] girl who was forced to marry to her 28-year-old cousin has appealed for divorce to a court. She describes her story as follows:

I was married off to a man to whom I had no feelings. He was a wealthy man and used to come around to our house quite often. After a while my parents said that they want to marry me off to him. When they told me about it, I cried and begged them to let me carry on with my studying at school. But they refused. When they couldn't manage to get my consent after a couple of weeks, they forced me to do so. I never forget the day when we were supposed to conclude the marriage. On that day my father beat me up insomuch as I stand on my feet. [After three months she escapes from her husband's house and with his brothers help who was on her side, she could encourage her parents to agree with her getting divorced] (*Sobh-e-Khanevadeh*, Iranian daily news paper, 1(139): 29 August 1998, p 12).

Forced marriage is sometimes justified by referring to the family or tribe's interest.

The followings are two traditional forms of forced marriage<sup>8</sup> that are performed on this basis.

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<sup>8</sup> It might seem that these two types are 'arranged marriage', as they involve a form of contract between the two families. However, it must be noted that the consent of the woman has no place in the conclusion of the contract. As a result a woman is in fact forced into accepting her cousin or a member of another tribe as her husband. Thus, they cannot be categorized as arranged marriages. Besides, as we shall see, if the woman retains from acting upon the decision made by the senior men, she will be violently forced to do so.

### *Babyhood Betrothal*

In a sense, Middle-Eastern family, typically in rural and tribal areas, can be characterised as endogamous. Here, cultural values encourage marriages within the lineage, because the interest of the tribe or the communal group rests on blood ties. Accordingly, men are entrusted with the duty of favouring and performing lineage marriage in order to maintain 'property' within the family. This duty is in fact another privilege for dominant men and an integral part of their masculine identity.

Betrothal is a prevalent tradition in rural areas and among tribal families, according to which a baby girl becomes betrothed, normally by her father, to one of her relatives (usually her cousin) as soon as she is born. This is done to save the family, clan, or tribe from strangers or "outsider blood" (see Kordvani, 2000 p 3). There is a common belief among those tribes that a girl must only marry to her cousin once she comes to the age of marriage:

A young man must understand that his (female) cousin is his '*property*'. Our tradition endorses this. Senior men of every tribe like to keep their property within their tribe, so they marry off the girls [who are considered as property] to someone belonging to their own tribe (Kar, 2000 p 63 – interview with a tribal man from southern Iran).

### *Khoon- Bass (Stop Bloodshed)*

This is a tradition among some Middle Eastern nomads and tribes<sup>9</sup>, which normally takes place when a member of a tribe kills a man from another tribe. Then, the tribe to which the murderer belongs must 'give up' at least one young women to the victim's tribe, otherwise bloody hostilities may arise between those two tribes that may last for years. Here, women are exchanged as the price of compromise, which is often made by senior men of the two tribes. Those women chosen as the price of the compromise have no right to object. Some women, however, do not surrender easily to such traditions. Cases have been reported in which women committed suicide to avoid forced marriage. Also, there are cases in which women were subject to various types of violence by their male relatives (usually father and brother) merely because of their refusal to give consent to such marriage (Kar, 2000 p 62).

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<sup>9</sup> This tradition is called '*Fasl*' (Settlement) among some Arab tribes (Kar, 2000 p 41).

How might we make sense of these traditions in relation to violence? Forced marriage comprises the creation of the conditions of violence, potential violence – in that women are aware if they refuse to give consent to the marriage, they will face punishment; – and/or neglect, i.e. women's needs and rights are neglected as they cannot choose their spouse according to their own principles and criteria (C.f. Hearn, 1994 p 736).

Forced marriage is an institution of paternal domination. As already mentioned, in the context of this study, the notion of men as *fathers* has been historically constructed in a way to ensure the presence of dominant father. Throughout history, there has been a common belief in the context in question that families need father, not only for the psychological and economic well being of the members of the family, but also for the sake of the interests of society as whole. The father's decisions are in the interests of both his family and the society to which he is associated, and bring 'stability' to the household and the society. As such, women's refusal to act upon the father's wish is, in the ultimate sense, regarded as a threat to this stability. Thus, to prevent instability, the father has the legal and cultural power to force his daughter, a female family member, to behave as *he* sees appropriate. To this end, he can use all the possible means including violence.

In some countries such as Iran, girls as young as 9 years of age or even younger may be given to marriage by their fathers. Although such marriages are be legally voidable should the girl refrain from giving consent after coming of age; the subordinate position of women does not allow them to take advantage of this legal right, for it will be considered as 'disobedience' or 'moral misbehaviour'; ensuing severe punishments ranging from house confinement to different forms of violence exercised by the father or brother(s) to make her obey the father's decision.

## **Concluding Remarks**

In this paper, the focus has been centred on two forms of men's violence against women in the Middle East have been studied that are rooted in the masculinist sexual ideologies of hegemonic masculinity. I have tried to establish a relationship between the cultural conception of femininity, and men's violence. It has been demonstrated that in the context of this study, femininity infers weakness and provocation of sexual chaos, while masculinity

refers to powerfulness and rationality. This configuration of femininity in the gender practice is the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity and legitimises the naturalisation of men's domination upon women and normalisation of the violence used for sustaining the domination. The structure of the family is equally crucial in cultural dynamism of the hegemonic masculinity in the Middle East. Extended family, which is the prevailing structure where the types of violence in question occur, involves a hierarchical pattern of men's authority over female members of the family. This pattern embodies men's responsibility to protect, control and whenever appropriate, to punish the female members. However, men are responsible not only towards their family, in its nuclear sense, but also towards a bigger group, known as the league. To become or remain a member, a man must follow the rules and pass the requisites of the league, one of which is to exert controlling power upon female members of the family and to punish defiant women. Committing violence against women in a prescribed, formalised and theatrical fashion, both in cases of honour-killing and forced marriage, is largely correlated to the fact that deviation from the norms of the league will cause a man losing his membership in the 'good society'. In this way the use of violence is ritualised and receives cultural support.

Within the legal discourse, it has been shown, the law, as a means of institutionalised power, generally follows the cultural ideals of men and masculinity in constructing normative familial masculinity. In fact, the representations of sexuality to be found in the Middle Eastern legal discourse hold out beliefs about self, subjectivity and society which link up with cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity. This is particularly true where the law appears to have its foundations in the religiously justified ideologies of dominant masculinity, which, due to their allegedly divinely formation and development, make it rather impossible for any imminent change to take place in the current conceptions 'good masculinity' and 'bad femininity'. Here, the function of the law appears to be 'to regulate' violence against women, but to 'eliminate' it. As such, men's violence against women as a means of control continues to be recognised as legally 'legitimate' with no dramatic change or improvement to the advantage of women in prospect.

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