

SHAHNAZ SHORO, *Honor Killing in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Cambridge Scholar publishing, 2017, 277 pages

The author brings up a topic of great interest for specialists, that of “honor killings”. Unlike other works addressing this theme, Shahnaz Shoro’s study is notable for the consistency of information on Pakistani society, in general, and particularly about the Sindh region. Moreover, the author puts the victims and the aggressors face-to-face through the interviews with survivors of honor killings (women who were declared *kari*) and the interviews with men who have committed honor killings.

The author’s choice for this theme was based on her life-long experiences. The case of the high school teacher killed by her husband because she was a “kari” (adultery woman), the perspective of the family and members of the community in which she had lived (women and men) about “supremacy of men over women”, the news from the newspaper or her travel in Sindh province, all those have put the author in contact with an increasing number of cases of women killed in the name of honor. The author's last encounter with honor killing was in 2004, during a trip she made with her children to Karachi (Sindh province). The intensity of the emotions experienced as a witness of a femicide had led to her choice of the so-called “honor killings” as the research topic for her doctoral thesis.

The author has structured her book in a way that makes it accessible both to the readers who are familiar with the subject matter and to those who came for the first time into contact with the issue of *honor killings*. The first part of the volume includes information about Pakistan and the Sindh region (known as an area where violence against women reaches high rates). The author gradually introduces the reader to the reality of traditional communities in Pakistan, insisting on describing the social, political and cultural contexts in which honor killings take place.

For the readers who came for the first time in contact with studies about this type of femicide, Shahnaz Shoro presents the main aspects of the relationship between violence, honor crimes and the Pakistani society. Being herself a woman who formed and lived in a traditional family/community, the author managed to objectively describe the cultural context of *honor killings*. The first element which the author has assessed as important to be discussed in order to make clear for any reader what is the meaning of honor crimes for Pakistani society is “the honor of

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men”. We find out the way in which “the honor of men” was defined in the community in which she lived:

In this highly patriarchal culture, honor was one of the most common words to be spoken not only by men but also by women. However, defining, describing and understanding the complex phenomenon of honour was beyond my capacity because in that particular society, honour had no limits. Men’s honour was the most fragile and scary phenomenon I had encountered; it was offended when a girl asked for the marriage of her choice, when a woman asked for a divorce from her abusive husband, when a woman laughed loudly or her head was uncovered or if she were dressed up; and endangered by girls’ education. Honour has certainly been the power in the hands of men to control women, both directly and indirectly (Shoro, 2017, p. 2).

Next, the author brought into attention the political context that had favored the women’s exposure to serious acts of violence and marginalization from the society. Through their enacted laws, the rule of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988) and that of the President Ghulam Ishaq Khan have contributed at the maintenance of a context which had favored honor killings. Only after intense debate of the international media about honor killings in Pakistan (1995) the Pakistani authorities (1997) had begun to be interested in this topic. However, the intervention of the Pakistani authorities in order to protect women was quite limited, this being the reason for which in 2011 Pakistan was ranked on 3rd place as the world’s most dangerous countries for women (p. 10).

A particular attention has been given to the description of the justice system in Pakistan and to the way in which there are investigated the cases of crimes framed by members of traditional communities as the so-called “karo-kari killings”. Shahnaz also describes in detail the legislation and legal system specific to Pakistan and the Sindh region. We learn as such not only about the formal justice system (the common law introduced by the British rule), but also about the informal justice system (*jirga*) or the “sub-legal system”. The author describes each of these justice systems which (in some parts of Pakistan) work together and which help to maintain honor killings. In some cases the formal justice system is powerless in rural areas where the *jirga* system exercised by *waderas* seems to control local institutions and authorities of the tribal areas (67). In fact, it seems that in these regions those who decide how to settle conflicts among community members, including honor killings, are so-called *waderas* (representatives of local elites who inherited power). In this context a person who committed a crime of honor can be considered innocent by the *waderas* (even if he/she had killed someone). However, there are also situations in which the person who committed crimes in the name of honor is sent to the formal justice system, but receives a small sentence (2–3 years in prison) for the murder committed (Shahnaz, 67).

The second part of the book contains information on the methodology and the results of the research made in the Sindh region. The choice of this province was not accidental. According to statistics, in this province there are recorded a high number of honor killings, so-called “karo-kari-killings”.

The author scientifically argues for the selection of techniques of research and for the principles underlying the selection of respondents (women declared *kari* who are placed under the law's protection and accommodated in shelters and men who committed honor killings). Shahnaz also outlines the protective measures she has taken for her own safety while she had travelled to selected locations for her field research. Also, a particular attention was paid to the description of the interviewed persons and the way in which the author had interacted with each person (taking into account the specificity of the place where the interviews took place (shelters for women, penitentiaries or hotels), local traditions/customs (related to women's clothing or the way in which they interact) or the personal schedule of each individual).

The author conducted interviews with 13 surviving women of honor killings (declared *kari*, but living in shelters for victims of domestic violence) and 13 abusive men who committed honor killings (some of them released and some being still into the prison). The interviews were structured in such a way which allowed to obtain information about the life before and after the marriage of survivors and aggressors, how the both categories of persons define violence and honor, their definitions and understandings of men and women, about adultery and honor killings. The survivors were also asked about the way in which they see their lives in the future and the aggressors were asked about their life in prison and their plans for the future (pp.76-77). In addition, the detailed (so detailed that leads to the reader the impression that he/she reads the author's own journal) descriptions of the way in which she had prepared the entrance in the field and the way in which she described her activity during making, transcribing and analyzing the interviews, one could assess this book as a valuable tool for any researcher preparing to do field research about honor killings.

It is important to notice the fact that the author is among few researchers who describe the way in which they were affected by the contact with survivors of serious acts of violence. The consequences she felt during the stages of interviews' transcript and analysis of the highlight important aspects of the research made in dangerous fieldwork. The difficulties experienced by Shahnaz draw attention to the difficulties generated by criminological investigations and to the need for expert (psychological) assistance during researches that put a psychological burden upon investigators.

Apart from the author's own contribution to the understanding of the values and norms of the societies where honor killings are still practiced, one could assess as remarkable her contribution to the understanding of the way in which victims and perpetrators live the experience of honor killing and how they plan their lives after the act of violence. For this reason, the book can be included in the bibliography for the courses of methodology, gender studies and criminology. The volume can be used as support not only for teachers, researchers, but also for the students of the faculties of sociology, criminology, journalism, legal sciences, political studies or social work.

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