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## **Nomen et omen: Reframing the sogenannter-Ehrenmord Discourse in Europe**

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*Die Sprache der Herrschenden wird zur herrschenden Sprache.*

Karl Marx, „Die Deutsche Ideologie“

The last year has witnessed three sensational trials involving the murders of young women of migrant descent in EU member-states. Despite half-hearted claims to the contrary, these cases have been singled out as "further proof" that some foreigners, especially Muslims, have no place in otherwise law-abiding, democratic countries like Germany, Britain and Denmark. The case of Faten Habash (22), bludgeoned to death in May 2005 by her Christian Palestinian father for falling in love with a Muslim, received little notice; the others made the international press.

One of nine children, Hatun Aynur Sürücü was born in Berlin on January 17, 1982 to Kurdish parents; she was forced to leave the Gymnasium at 16 to marry a cousin in Turkey. She divorced her abusive husband, returning to Germany to give birth to a son, Can, in 1999. A naturalized citizen, Sürücü was "bestens in die deutsche Gesellschaft integriert" – a single mother training to become an electrician. In April 2006, her youngest brother, Ayhan (by then 19) was sentenced to nine years and three months in prison, for killing her at a Tempelhof bus-stop with three shots to the head on February 7, 2005. Brothers Mutlu (26, also a German citizen) who secured the weapon, and Alpaslan (25), who helped to plan the execution, were acquitted – because the state was not able to prove their involvement (cs. Fücksel/Bebber 2006; Bullion 2006).

In Britain, Samaira Nazir (25), a “strong-willed businesswoman” with a degree from Thames University, rejected family-selected Pakistani suitors in order to marry an asylum-seeker of a different caste. She died in April 2005 as a result of 18 stab wounds and three slashes to the throat after being “summoned” to the family home in South-hall/London. Her brother Azhar (30) and a cousin (17) were convicted of her death in June 2006; the former faces 20 years, the latter 10 years imprisonment (cs. Butt 2006). The trial involving Ghazala Khan’s death marks a “turning point in Danish judicial history” – despite threats to the jury. A Danish citizen, Ghazala was living with her mother and sister in Pakistan; she fell in love with an Afghan she met on the plane to Copenhagen (necessary to renew her visa for Pakistan). She was gunned down two days after eloping, on September 23, 2005; her family had hunted her down and invited her to a “reconciliation meeting” at the Slagelse train-station. Also shot twice, her husband survived. Mobile phone records revealed constant contacts among the plotters. Nine persons were convicted: Kahn’s father, brother, aunt, mother’s brother, father’s brother, older and younger relatives of the aunt, and two family friends, including the taxi driver who helped to track her down (cs. Lueber 2006).<sup>1</sup>

### Reading of a murder – more than a problem of speech

“Honor killings” are now being framed as a human rights issue. As one UN worker stressed: “Naming the problem and bringing international attention to it highlights the refusal of some of these governments to shine any light on their failure to protect their own citizens.” (Honour Crimes 2006). *Nomen et omen*: This is exactly why we must stop labeling these tragedies “so-called honor killings.” These heinous acts have as little in common with honor as ethnic cleansing does with neighborhood-beautification campaigns. They *are* directly connected to dowry deaths, unexplained “suicides,” crimes of passion, and female infanticide. Let us call these acts by their real name: *femicide, domestic homicide, or crimes of shame*. Any use of the word “honor” subconsciously re-inforces a sense of moral righteousness among persons who justify such deaths, at the same time the “so-called” label exonerates everyone else from national responsibility.

By presenting these cases as religiously motivated (i.e., by way of Islamic fundamentalism) or culturally pre-destined, feminists buy into *the same private/public distinctions* that used to keep police from interfering in “family affairs” – until the woman was dead. Over 90% of all females murdered in the United States are killed by their partners. That figure alone makes “domestic disputes” a national issue demanding a systemic response. European feminists incensed by such crimes should be the first to demand that *all* trials involving women killed by “family members” receive equal treatment, that is, “headline” coverage in local newspapers. Instead, feminist rhetoric, as Birgit Rommelspacher (1995) observes, has been tainted by far-right discourse re-invoking ethno-nationalism; some even label themselves *white German Christian*

*feminists* vis-à-vis Muslim women, affirming stereotypes (religion = culture, West vs. the rest) intended to divide and exclude.

The supposedly left-enlightened *tageszeitung* (*taz*) offers one example of how women can be hoodwinked into the dominant discourse. Following Sürücü's death, Jan Feddersen and Martin Reichert interviewed "expert" Necla Kelek whose sensationalized writings regarding women and Islam, e.g., *Die fremde Braut* (2005), are at odds with her empirical findings on the subject (cf. Zaptcioglu 2005). Mirroring the title of her recent book (vgl. Kelek 2006) – "Es sind verlorene Söhne" – the tone of the interview (*taz* vom 23.09.2005), was polemical, the questions downright stupid. "Was war die Sünde der Hatun Aynur Sürücü?" Hatun's sin? Bad enough that she was murdered – in this case, the victim is rendered the guilty one, while perpetrators are merely "lost," thus worthy of empathy. Rather than ask hard questions about causes and effects, *taz* reporters draw on vocabulary guaranteed to invoke religious stereotypes. The real issues, alienation and aggression deriving from a lack of effective integration policies, are never raised. "Aber müsste es nicht für die Brüder unerträglich sein, die eigene Schwester prügeln, gar töten zu müssen?" Unbearable for beaters, required to kill? All world religions, including Islam, instruct their followers „thou shall *not* kill." Murder is presented here not as a crime but rather as a categorical imperative inherent in family relations. Do reporters assume that these males, unlike their German counterparts, lack the free will differentiating humans from other species? "Ist der weibliche Orgasmus, ist der Spaß ihrer Frauen eine Dimension unter türkischen Männer?". Who cares about the sex lives of these murderers? What gives any man the right, or the power, to control female sexuality in the first place?

Hatun, Samaira and Ghazala made clear personal choices. We *dishonor* their courageous efforts at self-determination by classifying their deaths in terms used by their killers. It is unclear why their mothers have been exempted from prosecution, though they did nothing to deter their sons and husbands, or to warn their daughters about the real purpose of "reconciliation" visits. European courts consider these women just as invisible, submissive and incapable of independent moral judgment as the men who carried out the executions – no better than the Sharia legal code that deems women's legal testimony only half as good as man's. If German jurisprudence prevents convictions of anyone other than the person who fired the gun, perhaps it is time to amend the law to include other types and degrees of collaboration – as appears to have been done in Denmark.

Why is it that ethnic minorities repeatedly denounce the immorality of women – "the whore lived like a German" (*Spiegel* online 2005) – but never castigate the honor or morality of the men who dominate the host culture. Migrant communities of all sorts use their women to assert their moral superiority over Western culture, in reaction to discrimination, degradation and subordination in the host state. Obviously the ethnic patriarchs need to learn that MEN still control the advertising, the fashion world, prostitution rings, and even the porno industry in western societies (Beate Uhse is the

exception that confirms the rule). The male desire to control and exploit female sexuality is not limited to migrant groups; it is the *sine qua non* of traditional masculine identity.

Then why are these murders treated as sensational events deriving from “foreign cultures,” when they actually testify to violence against women *across all cultures*? (vgl. Weichman/Hosseini 2005) In the Bundesrepublik, battered women shelters were created in the early 1970s to rescue natives, not foreigners; East German shelters opened in 1989, and rapidly filled to capacity. Even Sweden reports mounting abuse, 22,400 cases in 2003, up from 14,000 in 1990 (cs. Alvarez 2005).

### Gaps in the German law

Forced marriages are tolerated in Germany by way of perverse “residency permit” regulations, in the name of constitutionally protected “family unification.” According to Foreign Ministry data, 21,447 Turkish citizens entered Germany under family unification in 2001. There are no reliable statistics on forced marriages, characterized as “a modern form of slavery”; the number of brides exported back to Turkey is also unknown. A 2002 survey led the Berlin Senate to “guestimate” forced marriages at 230 among local 16-22 year-olds.<sup>2</sup> In a 2003 Family Ministry study, half of the 150 women polled admitted their parents had chosen their partners; a quarter had not met their spouses prior to marriage, twelve were married against their wills (cs. Kelek 2005; Inci 2005). Exporting parents “un-register” (*abmelden*) daughters under the age of 18 to preclude their return – §44 of the Aliens Act automatically cancels residency permits for persons who do not re-enter within six months. Only citizenship can ensure unlimited return, should women choose to flee. Though a necessary condition, citizenship is not a sufficient guarantee against discrimination, xenophobia and violence against women. Despite Danish citizenship, Khan was sent “back” to Pakistan under the age of 18, presumably by her father.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of relying on implicit protection against *Nötigung* under §240 of the German Criminal Code, forced marriage merits “a law of its own,” imposing criminal sanctions on all who profit from such unions through dowries, cash or work permits. Berlin Justice Minister Karin Schubert advocates amending the Civil Code, allowing nullification of such unions up to three years (instead of one); modifying residency rules to allow for a later return (three months *after* dissolution); granting residency rights to imported brides even if the marriage lasts less than two years, to meliorate the dire consequences they face as “damaged goods” if forced to return to home villages; and terminating inheritance rights for parents and other relatives.<sup>4</sup> One partial solution would be to raise the minimum age for “marriage” purposes; spouses must be 24 to enter Denmark, 21 in the Netherlands. Partners should be required to provide full support, including a separate dwelling, to prevent exploitation by in-laws.

### Necessary demands, absurdities and missing action

Part of the solution lies in educating girls about their rights, sensitizing personnel at schools and consulates, and prosecuting *all* family collaborators. The real problem rests elsewhere, however: namely, with men of all ages. What is it about *male socialization*, German and otherwise, that reproduces a belief in male dominance, moral superiority, and intolerance of female self-determination? In a world increasingly dominated by profit-mongering, women have limited “market value”, i.e. as sexual objects or as reproductive machines. Traditional perceptions of women as the property of men, to be traded away as “brides”, have merged with new forms of female commodification. This applies not only to forced marriages but also to the ludicrous tendency among Western men to “mail-order” brides out of catalogues from Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe – not to mention the larger problem of delete female commodification through sex-trafficking.

These murders have evoked absurd political responses: The CDU in Berlin used Sürücü’s murder to demand binding religious instruction in schools, though 40% of Berlin pupils already exempt themselves from state subsidized religion classes. The last thing this family needs is more religion: Mutlu is described as “der mit langem Haar und Bart *wie ein strenggläubiger Muslim wirkt*” (my emphasis); this is a sweeping stereotype that could also apply to ex-Bundestag president Wolfgang Thierse! He is further characterized as “fromm”, although prosecutors found no direct links to fundamentalist mosques. The Greens called for independent residency rights for “ausländische Ehefrauen” (cs. Küpper 2006; Lueber 2006). Sürücü was neither married nor a “foreigner” the time of her death.

Following the recent *Integrationsgipfel*, Peter Uhl (CSU) demanded “das klare Bekenntnis zu Sanktionen”, while Edmund Stoiber (CSU) proposed cutting social benefits 30% for persons refusing to participate in integration courses *that do not yet exist* and for which there seems to be little money. Still others, stressing Sürücü’s “German/Turkish” roots (though Turks persecute Kurds), saw a chance to oppose Turkey’s EU application. Federal Integration Commissioner Maria Böhmer (CDU) urged all schools to require singing of the national anthem to foster integration. I sincerely doubt that singing *Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit* or *God save the Queen* would have saved any of these women. Had the Nazis neighbors forced their way in as Samaira thrust her bloody arms out the door, screaming for help before she was dragged back in by her hair, at least one might have survived.

Sürücü reported several death threats to the police, who took no action. Missing are tough national laws and court-ordered bans – without exception – on contacts between family members and women who reported intimidation or threats; they should be coupled with automatic arrest for persons violating these bans. Secondly, all three countries need hotlines *and* mentors for young women at risk, visible at every school, mosque, and Ausbildungsplatz. Thirdly, all youth and educational ministries need to

adopt immediate, pro-active, school-based (re)socialization and integration programs for youth of migrant background, with special focus on males. Schools should be required to investigate sudden female withdrawals from school. Fourth, elected officials need to dialogue with “moderate” Imams who attest that nothing in the Quran mandates forced marriages or these killings. These imams should be assisted in publicly renouncing such deeds as *Schandemorde*, as crimes that shame the perpetrator families.

Last but not least, German feminists, especially, need to start identifying with their own nation, in order to hold *that* nation accountable for gender-sensitive migration and integration policies. Stop blaming other countries, cultures and religions. The real story here is that Germany, Denmark and Britain *failed to defend women who were their own citizens*. None of the “recommendations” thus far treat these women as such.

Too many feminists are missing a chance to use real political voice. Don’t let *your* country get away with murder.

## Notes

- 1 Details provided by Hanna Petersen, Professor of Law at the University of Copenhagen
- 2 Interview with Sabine Kroker-Stille, July 1, 2005
- 3 Press reports are unclear on this point, but Prof. Petersen suggests he may have done so to keep the family females compliant with Pakistani traditions.
- 4 Schubert introduced a Bundesrat proposal in June 2005, subsequent to expert hearings in Berlin and North Rhine-Westphalia (draft documents 15/3544 and 15/3274).

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