

What lessons do we learn from Du'a's murder?

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30 Apr. 07

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[International Campaign against killings and stoning of women in Kurdistan](#)

Du'a Khalil Aswad, the 17 year old Yezidi Kurdish girl was murdered by stoning to death for the so-called honour killing on or around 7 April 2007, according to a public statement by the [Amnesty International](#) on 27 April 2007. Honour killing is not new and it is not limited to a certain ethnicity, nationality, religion or region, but it has been practised in many parts of the world. It is apparent that these kinds of killings are widely practiced in Eastern and especially Muslim communities; however, there are evidences of other cultures such as Sikh and recently Yezidi religion.

The case of Du'a was one of the cruelest killings of this kind as she was stoned to death by a group of eight or nine men, according to Amnesty International, at the presence of a huge crowd of hundreds of people in the town of Bashika, near the city of Mosul. However, the video film which was widely published on the internet and the wide media reactions to this brutal killing, made it to look as a unique crime which have never been heard about it before. The bitter reality is that this crime is not unique as there are many crimes which go under carpet because there is nobody to film it or report it. Nowadays, at the age of information and globalization, technology and media can reach many remote parts of the world, people may hear or see things that otherwise they could not hear about it at all, or at least until few years later. The Amnesty International declares that:

There are frequent reports of "honour crimes" in Iraq - in particular in the predominantly Kurdish north of the country. Most victims of "honour crimes" are women and girls who are considered by their male relatives and others to have shamed the women's families by immoral behaviour. Often grounds for such accusations are flimsy and no more than rumour.

These kinds of crimes have deep roots in our culture, in our way of thinking, in our relationship with women and in our general view of the role of women in the society. It can be argued that, there is no one single reason for them or one single group, religion or ethnicity which can be held responsible for such crimes. It is a notion of power and control from men over women. Geraldine Bedell, in an article published in the Guardian, Sunday 21 November 2004, states that:

There is a deeply embedded notion in our culture that men experience passion, while women excite it - which meant that, until recently in Britain, men who killed their wives could claim provocation. There is also a common idea that it is possible to own another human being.

Although, nowadays many good people condemn these acts, however the unjust treatment of women by men is still widely accepted. There are few women and girls who revolt against the norms of the traditional society, otherwise the outcome could be much more. This could be now more widened because of the imbalance

development of the information technology which does not come in line with the traditions of some communities. To be more specific, satellite dishes and internet connections reach every corner of the globe; however, the other necessities of economic, cultural, educational and social development remain as they were decades ago. This imbalance development may bring clashes between people or generations, and may stimulate acts which are not accepted by the traditional society and cause chaotic incidents. At the same time, women are also responsible for a great deal of these acts. Women were supporters, whistleblowers or even perpetrators in many occasions. Aisha Gill of the University of Surrey noted, from her work experience with South Asian women, that 'female loyalty to honour-related violence is deemed to be a sign of warmth and goodness. Women in particular are brought up to believe that the welfare of the group should take precedence over that of the individual'. Although this view is about the South Asian women but it exactly fits the position of the Kurdish women in the traditional society also. Bedell argues that honour killing is about the position of women in the society in general:

"Honour killing is not about one woman, or about 10, it is about an entire gender," Diana Nammi says. "What honour killing does is to make women's lives conditional - on wearing the right clothes, on not speaking too loudly, on not being seen with the wrong person, not even being the subject of rumour, for rumour is enough to stain the family's honour.

Honour killing is mostly accepted by the community, or at least by the majority of members of that community as a 'collective decision' on those women who violate the traditional values of their community. Many states, openly or tacitly may sanction honour killing, however they may close an eye on the act, as Bedell mentioned:

The Turkish penal code has no specific clause relating to honour killing, but the judiciary commonly hands down lesser sentences or even acquittals where there is "assault on a family member's manhood." The Jordanian penal code specifically accepts that the "purifying" of wrong to a tribe is necessary: when honour killings come to court (which they do infrequently), the sentence averages about 6 months.

In The Kurdish region of Iraq, it can be argued that there are many developments and many respectful people have been working to eradicate honour killing and to abolish such an excuse and make murder the only word for killing a human being, no matter be a male or female. However, as Amnesty International reported, 'while the Kurdish authorities introduced legal reforms to address "honour killings" they have, however, failed to investigate and prosecute those responsible for such crimes'. The reason is that legislation and law are not sufficient and there are much to be done in order to change the mentality of the legislators, politicians, leaders, police and the wider community towards women's position in the society. In this respect, it can be argued that the problem of honour killing is the responsibility of us all. We are all guilty for the deliberate killings of women and girls as long as it finds grounds in the society and we cannot do something about it. The victims of honour killings, even in the Western societies rarely receive the justice they deserve:

What is it about the power of shame that drives a father, brother, even a mother to slaughter a close family member? In the UK alone, 117 murders are being

investigated as "honour killings." But over-sensitivity to cultural differences means that many victims are denied the justice that they deserve.

It is virtually impossible to estimate the international scale of honour killings; the UN has estimated as 5000 cases a year, however, there are so many cases go unreported or unregistered. Bedell continues to comment on honour killings as part of an international injustice against women, by saying that:

Honour killings are, clearly, specific to certain communities. But not so long ago, British women could be locked in mental asylums for getting pregnant out of wedlock; in living memory in the UK, it was preferable to have a daughter who was mad than one who was bad.

However, these reports are not brought here for making an excuse for honour killing and making it more acceptable and normalizing it. The aim behind it is that honour killing cannot be eradicated by legislations or campaigns only. It is a social construction that, unfortunately, supported by many people, despite the wider condemnation of a single brutal killing which is filmed and published. Honour killing should be eradicated in the mentality of our children, in the daily routine of our young girls and boys and in the streets, markets and neighbourhoods, through better education and teaching the principles of a civilised society. If we only react to a video film or a brutal killing and neglect the daily incidents which indicate that there are grounds for such acts, we cannot learn any lessons from any honour murder, including Du'a's. Many groups campaign for women rights but they need more support from governments and the public:

The most effective campaigners against honour killings have been South Asian, Middle Eastern and Kurdish women. Murder is murder and, as Mike O'Brien pointed out when he was Home Office minister, in the matter of honour killings, multiculturalism has too often become an excuse for "moral blindness." [Bedell, 2004]

These acts can be abused for other ends and by other groups who could be in favour of such killings if it happens to them. They may answer killing by killing innocent people because they belong to that religion or group. The Amnesty International reported the killing of '23 Yazidi workers', as retaliation by a 'Sunni armed group', as the statement announced, which means that there are people who try to use such acts as an excuse for their sectarian or tribal hatred. Du'a's murder is not the first and there are no indications to show that it will be the last. In order to eradicate honour killings in a society different government and non-government agencies should work together in order to control the mentality which provide the ground for such atrocity to grow. The government, it is argued has a big responsibility to organize investigation committees and to enforce law and order, however government decision or law is not sufficient if it is not supported by a wider sector of the society, Bedell concludes by saying:

In the end, honour killings will only be eradicated when power over women is not seen as central to a man's self-respect, and domination of women and girls is not seen as reassuring social glue.

An open letter to Clive Stafford Smith a human rights lawyer

Tuesday, September 05, 2006

KurdishMedia.com - By Ata Mala Karim

www.klawrojna.com 06 Sep. 06

I saw your name in the Independent's the good list 2006 of 'fifty men and women who make our world a better place'. You deserve it as a human rights activist for many years part from your 50 pages defence of Saddam Hussein; which I believe is either a mistake or something else. It is your responsibility to explain which one is right.

As a Kurd and as a victim of torture, I had tried to contact you when I was in Saddam Hussein's jail in Kirkuk, which is known as the 'Enterprise of Special Investigations' together with many other prisoners who were convicted of the following serious crimes: asking for freedom of press, rights of the Kurdish children to be educated in their own mother tongue, reading Marxist literature, writing poems, not being ready to go to war, being freedom fighters or helping the freedom fighters, not joining the Arab Bath Socialist Party and etc...

At the 'Enterprise of Special Investigations' we had no right to talk even to the guards. We were out twice a day for toilet which should only take few seconds because of the great number of us and as a means of torture. At other times we were provided with buckets in our rooms. We had to look at the ground only and it was the most serious offence to look at the guard. Every day in the morning they read some names loudly and those people were out. After blindfolding them they had asked them few questions and when they did not like their answers they started using the following methods of torture:

1. Beating the subject by water pipes by two strongly built men each from one side.
2. Using electrical shocks on the tongue, the anus, and on the genitals.
3. Putting the subject's genitals in a knot and lifting it until he was unconscious.
4. Beating the subject's sole of feet by water pipes or electricity cables by two men from both sides known as "falaqa"
5. A subject was blind folded in a room and they tortured somebody else till he hear his sufferings and bring his morale down.
6. Hanging the subject by a rope from behind and beating him from both sides regularly.
7. Burning the subject's body by cigarettes.
8. Threats of rape and attempt to rape.

All these kinds of torture were practiced while the subject was naked as he was born.

This list is not exclusive as there were many other ways of torture practiced against

other prisoners. You may ask the 'Medical Foundation caring for Victims of Torture' if you need further information about me and my colleagues. Unfortunately we could not contact you at the time and when you heard about Iraq you did believe that only Saddam and a handful of his men need human rights not others.

Dear Sir,

In 1988 Saddam ordered his men to bombard Halabja by chemical weapons and killed more than 5000 men, women and children. People from Halabja had tried to contact you at time but it was in vain. Again when you prepared your 50 pages document to defend Saddam you did not know about Halabja or you thought it was merely propaganda.

Do you know anything about Anfal? Do you believe that the man you prepared 50 pages to defend him had ordered his men in 1988 to capture 182,000 men, women and children to bury them alive in the deserts of Arabia. All but few most attractive girls who sold them in an open market to other brother Muslim Arab countries to employ them in their nightclubs and brothels.

Did you hear of the 8000 Barzani men, women and children who buried alive in the desert just because they were from Barzan a small town in Kurdistan? Do you know who Ali Hassan Al-Majeed is? Do you know why he is known as Chemical Ali!?

I feel sick when I see the best human rights defenders are ready to defend Saddam and try to minimize and simplify his crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity. When first time I heard about human rights in my small village it sounded like a miracle. We could not contact anyone like you to defend us. We could not watch TV to see countries which we did believe human rights was their concern. We had only a radio to listen to it secretly. We were dreaming we could talk to the radio, to tell them we are Kurds; we have not the minimum rights of human beings. We are tortured, killed and they practice genocide against us. One day our dreams come true. We have satellite dishes and internet in our hands, but unfortunately by this time the human rights see Saddam as a victim.

Saddam and his followers are criminals of war, criminals against humanity and those who practiced genocide and race cleansing against the Kurdish people years before the American war. Anybody who tries to attract the emotions of the world against America's policy may make a deadly mistake if he uses Saddam as an example.

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It is time for Kurdish women to tell their stories ... Ata Mala Karim

www.klawrojna.com 29 June 2006 KurdishMedia.com www.kurdmedia.com

Wednesday, July 12, 2006

It is not far behind for history when English women have started to tell their own stories about domestic violence and abuse in the 1970's. In the 1970's with the growing of feminism in the UK the English women were invited to tell their own stories. What was very interesting in those stories was the fact that when they were

talking about their hard lives in the present, they took flashbacks to their miserable lives in the childhood.

Muncie & McLaughlin (2001) argue that although domestic violence is recognized long before child abuse, however when women told their stories about domestic violence they revealed that they have experienced sexual and physical abuse as children and domestic violence as adults. So, the feminist activists in the 1970's England did not only bring domestic violence to light but child abuse as well; which was a hidden crime behind closed doors.

Family is traditionally known as a place of privacy and safety in contrast to the dangerous outside world. People usually feel safe when they are at home or even close to home, however family can be a dangerous place and a site of crime. Crime such as child abuse; physically, sexually, emotionally and mentally are mostly practiced at home, although this is not specific as child abuse may happen at care, and other places such as schools, churches, mosques and in the hands of the criminals justice officials. Domestic violence does not need any further explanation, as it is a specific crime for home and family, both traditional and contemporary friendship relationships.

Hale et al. (2005) mention some reasons for domestic violence such as low socio-economic status, dysfunctional families, pathological and medical reasons, patriarchy, the marginal role of women at home, alcoholism and drug addiction, weak community sanctions and male culture- machismo. If we look at the Kurdish society we can easily recognize many of these groundings for domestic violence, as well as some other conditions not mentioned or known by the authors.

Honour killing is part of Kurdish tradition both at home and in the Diaspora. Many articles are written regarding honour killing and many researches have been carried on in that field. Honour killing is a brutal crime, a worse kind of crimes and of murder as well. It is one of the most pre-planned and deliberately executed murder crimes. However domestic violence is not only murder and so called honour killing, it may have many forms from rape within marriage, physical abuse, mental abuse and emotional abuse.

Kurdish family, same as other cultures, is known as a safe castle against the dangerous outside world. However there are many crimes which happen behind closed doors and within that safe castle, without any interference from the criminal justice agencies. Muncie, McLaughlin (2001) argue that if a man hit another man in the street it is well recognized as assault and crime, however if a man hits his wife or children it is known as a private matter; dealing with a trouble child, taming a bad wife, discipline, stress and etc... It can be argued that even honour killing is widely accepted in the eastern communities as a right of a man to take care of the so called honour of his family or relatives by killing a woman who has sex with a man outside of marriage. In this situation instead of blaming and criticism he may get a lot of support from the community. It is worth mentioning that there is evidence of some progress in this area; however it is still in its primitive stage.

Even in the developed industrialized countries domestic violence is widely practiced, however not all of it is reported to the police for many reasons, such as shame, to keep the family together, economical reasons, not wanting to hurt the husband, believing it is normal and it is her fault, so blaming herself, not seen and even when seen not considered as a crime. [Muncie and McLaughlin (2001)] In the Kurdish society, same as all the other oriental societies, marriage is not always a private relationship between two adults, but there are so many traditional and tribal ties which put it in a tight net that it is difficult to flee away from it. The relationship is considered as a

relationship between the wider families of cousins, far cousins, uncles, aunts and all the other relatives. In this context any criticism of the husband is an insult against the man's wider family which may bring bigger problems for the woman's wider family. In this case many Kurdish women keep their problems for themselves and suffer in silence.

I have not a full investigation or research of the way the criminal justice agencies, the police and the courts deal with domestic violence in Kurdistan right now. From my personal experience as an adult male member of that society I have a lifelong wealth of information about domestic violence in the Kurdish society.

Since the uprising of 1991 a feminist movement in Kurdistan grew and it can be argued that they have contributed to the awareness of women and men as well in that society of the dangers of fatal abuses such as honour killings, girl circumcision, forced marriage, under age marriage and domestic violence. However, unfortunately these women organizations are part of the political scenario and it is apparent that each political party has its own women organization, such as Zhinan from the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and Afratan from KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party). Ironically both Zhinan and Afratan mean women in Kurdish language and they choose two synonyms to make them recognized as two different organizations. In some regions of Kurdistan they use zhin (singular of Zhinan) for married women and Afrat (singular of Afratan) for female adults in the society, same as woman in English. The other political parties have formed their own women organizations and it is interesting to know that the Workers Communist Party called their organization the Neutral Women's Organization, but it is very difficult to find a real Neutral organization in Kurdistan!

Kurdistan now has a unified regional government, they are planning for unification of all the government institutions, they have a president, prime-minister and a parliament; so it can be argued that it is time for Kurdish women to form their own independent professional women society far from the political parties and the political conflicts. They can concentrate on women rights and lobby for reforms in the Kurdish parliament for the benefits of women, regardless of their political or ideological belongings.

If Kurdish women have a chance to tell their own stories in their own words, we will realize how they are oppressed and how much they suffer. Without research and data, without campaigns and lobbies, without a voice to represent them, only a small minority may know about domestic violence, or more specifically, few people recognize it as a crime and even anti-social behaviour and deviance.

It is obvious that domestic violence and child abuse is not specified to the eastern or the third world countries, it is present almost everywhere, but by different degrees. A research in the UK in 1999 has revealed that:

- One in four women experience domestic violence.
- Every week two women are killed by their current or former partners.
- Everyday thousands of children witness cruelty and violence behind closed doors.
- One fourth of all violent crime is domestic violence.

[Muncie, & McLaughlin, 2001]

It can be argued that domestic violence and child abuse in the Kurdish society needs scientific and field research. Children and the younger generation need better education and training in order to know their rights and the rights of others. Women have to get a chance to express themselves and have a voice to be heard outside the political circle of the political parties. Without a good progress in the fields of women

and children rights any argument about human rights in Kurdistan is just waste of time and paper and nothing else.

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The position of the Kurds in the Sunni and Shiite conflict

Sunday, March 12, 2006 KurdishMedia.com - By Atai Mala Karim

Violence and especially interior wars are highly destructive. They affect the lives of hundreds of children, disabled, women and elderly who have no any physical contribution to those bloodied conflicts. We, as humans of the 21st century, have to stand against any bloodshed anywhere and anytime. However, the current situation in Iraq as fighting between Shiites and Sunnis is just about to become, or it is, a nationwide civil war. This situation may arise some questions for the Kurdish people. The first question is that: If the Sunnis and the Shiites continue to fight each others in a continuous civil war, what the Kurds have to do? Should Kurds exercise their right to self-determination, i.e. independence, join the conflict and fight one side against another or remain neutral, and the latter is the most likely scenario. The second question is that: if Sunni and Shiite communities have reached an agreement, how the Kurd can be reassured that they are not the scapegoat; as we have seen it many times during the contemporary history of Iraq. It is apparent that both sides of the conflict have their own expectations and their own views of the Kurdish issue. The Sunnis have ruled Iraq for over 80 years and the results were genocide in the shape of Anfal and the chemical bombardment of Halabja. The Shiites have been oppressed, so they need the attention of the Kurdish people. The Kurds have offered them any kinds of help and assistance. However, when Saddam's government collapsed the Shiites started perceive Kurdish people as their enemy; this is clear from the acts of their Prime Minister, Jaffari. Kurds have been suffering in so called Iraq. Hopefully the bloodshed between Sunni and Shiite communities will not continue and they decide to live in peace. However Kurds do not want to be the scapegoat for their peace agreement. At the same time if Sunni and Shiite communities continue to fight, the Kurds have the right to declare their right to self determination.