When Honor Trumps Basic Needs: The Role of Honor in Deadly Disputes within Israel's Arab Community

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This article draws on the existing literature, interviews, and case study analysis to highlight the primacy of honor needs above health and safety needs in the context of honor killings and blood feuds among Israel's Arab community, including Muslims, Christians, and Druze. Assuming that individuals in conflict situations will generally act to satisfy more basic needs before they act to satisfy less basic needs, this article examines conflict contexts in which disputants perceive their honor to be a higher priority than their health and safety, and consequently, they tend to act accordingly to satisfy their perceived honor needs first, often ignoring obvious health and safety-related needs. Such insights could have important implications for scholars and dispute resolution practitioners studying and working within these conflict contexts.

Key words: conflict resolution, honor, revenge, identity, needs, priorities, Arabs, Israel.

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Introduction

Abraham Maslow's (1954) theory of needs postulates that as people attend to their needs, the more basic ones, such as survival and health (food, water, shelter) and safety (security), are met first. Other higher needs (e.g., belonging, esteem, self-actualization) will not be attended to until the basic needs are satisfied. Interpolating Maslow's set of identified, hierarchical needs to dispute contexts, it is possible to hypothesize that in the course of dealing with a dispute, disputants would be expected to deal first with the more basic needs, because until and unless the more basic needs are dealt with, no progress would be made toward being able to deal with less basic needs (Maslow 1954; Sites 1972).

Following this argument, it would stand to reason that the first needs disputants would attend to are needs related to their basic survival and security. But, in the course of researching the ways people in Israel's Arab community respond to specific types of disputes, particularly those disputes involving perceived offenses against family honor by female family members or violence against a family member, it appears that disputants in such situations position honor and identity as more basic needs than health and safety. Put simply, it appears that in the immediate aftermath of the eruption of those particular kinds of conflict, disputants in the Arab community in Israel tend to focus more on satisfying family honor and belonging (identity) needs, as perceived by them, while ignoring or allocating secondary or tertiary place to basic survival needs and health needs, such as safety, freedom from incarceration, economic security, etc. (Dodd 1973; Elster 1990; Barakat 1993; Anonymous 2002; Lang 2002; Gellman and Vuinovich 2008).

Honor killings involve a situation in which a male relative whose relationship can be traced exclusively through males (known as an "agnate" relative) murders a female family member (mother, daughter, sister) in order to restore what he perceives as the family's lost honor, because of real or alleged "improper" behavior on the part of the female family member — usually of a sexual nature. Here, in what may appear as a somewhat bizarre role reversal, the "perpetrator," as perceived by many family and community members, is the murdered female family member, and the perceived "victim" is the agnate family member(s) — along with the woman's entire clan — who then act to restore their lost honor by killing the allegedly errant female family member (Anonymous 2002; Hasan 2002).[1]

The act of restoring the family's honor by murdering the perceived female offender demonstrates the primacy of honor needs because it often takes place with total disregard to the almost certain severe ramifications of such an act, including almost certain destruction of the immediate family unit, extended incarceration for one or more male family members, severe financial hardship for the entire family due to incurred legal fees, and loss of income from one or more male family members.

"Blood feuds," the second type of conflict examined in this article, involve a situation in which a member of one extended family (clan, or *hamula* in Arabic) kills a member of another *hamula*. In the immediate aftermath of such a killing, the honor-restoring instinct of a victim's *hamula* is to seek revenge for the damage done to their clan's honor, regardless of the ramifications associated with such an act (Dodd 1973; Elster 1990; Barakat 1993; Lang 2002; Gellman and Vuinovich 2008). In such situations, male members of the victim's clan view every male member of the killer's clan as a legitimate target for revenge, by virtue of clan "circles of responsibility" (Lang 2002; Khneifes 2007).

In this context, it is noteworthy that those attempting or carrying out an act of revenge put *all* their own male clan members in mortal danger, because *all* male members of the disputing clan are obliged to defend each other with their lives and to avenge every attack with equal ferocity to restore *their* damaged honor. Furthermore, the legal ramifications of such a revenge attack often include lengthy incarceration of the perpetrators, along with severe economic losses, due to legal expenses — this without even removing the mortal threat of revenge counterattacks from all clan members (Jabbour 1993; Lang 2002).

This brings into consideration the question of the rationality (or lack thereof) of such actions, because it appears on the face of it that prioritizing honor needs as primary needs challenges concepts of rational behavior (rational choice theory) in dispute resolution contexts, as defined by Mitchel Nicholson (1991: 57): ". . . in general, people are rational beings, who could be assumed to choose rationally." (A thorough examination of this issue is intriguing but is beyond the scope of this article. Below I argue for the rationality of revenge, and ergo for the rationality of honor, a cultural construct designed to facilitate and enable revenge.)

In this article, I draw on the existing literature and case studies to examine the relevant basic theoretical concepts of honor, revenge, and forgiveness, and family and clan obligations to determine whether and how, in particular conflict situations, disputants indeed put their family's honor needs above their own and their family's health, safety, economic, and social needs.

The evidence shows that in the examined contexts, the need to restore honor is clearly selected as a higher priority need than the need to, for example, protect the relevant individual or group's physical and economic health and safety, and/or obey the law. Such an insight may help practitioners take a more informed and nuanced approach when working with disputants within cultures that prioritize honor so highly and find ways to take different prioritization hierarchies into account when participating in cross-cultural dispute situations within this, and similar environments.

Honor in Arab Culture

Literature Review

Many researchers have identified honor as central to Arab culture in general (Dodd 1973; Barakat 1993) and to Arab dispute resolution in Israel in particular (Kressel 1992; Gellman and Vuinovich 2008). Indeed, several scholars of Middle East disputes, honor killings, and dispute resolution, point out the predominant centrality of honor as *the* core value and motivator in Arab cultures (Dodd 1973; Kressel 1992; Abu-Nimer 1996; Lang 2002; Gellman and Vuinovich 2008). The literature has not examined in depth the ramifications of honor's centrality on the perceptions and/or actions of disputants, or on the priorities they assign to their various needs.

Similarly, scholars of Middle East cultures and of Middle Eastern dispute resolution traditions have highlighted the predominance of the family, with its strong patriarchal orientation, as a central social structure in many Arab cultures, including among Israel's Arab community (Jabbour 1993; Joseph 1996; Singerman and Hoodfar 1996; Giacaman, Islah, and Johnson 2001; Hasan 2002). Again, much of that literature does not examine the ramification of the centrality of the family — with its unique aspects of clan (*hamula*) identity — on the need choices of disputants and their behavior in certain dispute situations.[2]

Indeed, the literature contains significant examination of the interrelations within the traditional Arab family, the relations between male and female members, relations between women and their agnate relatives (father, brothers, and adult sons), together with robust analysis of aspects of shame and its impact on the perspectives of both genders within the family (Antoun 1968; Smith 1979; Haj 1992; Kressel 1992). But, here again, the literature includes no significant examination of the ramifications and the equally relevant impact of such intrarelations (of the male side of the family) on the need choices of the family's agnate relatives in the event of a perceived conflict.

Significant literature has also highlighted the centrality of family honor (Dodd 1973; Hasan 2002) and the position of the extended family (*hamula*) as a core component in dispute resolution in this region (Jabbour 1993). Several writers have examined aspects of Muslim and Middle Eastern traditional dispute resolution processes, particularly the prevalent inter- and intraclan dispute resolution tradition of *sulha*, including such practices within Israel's Arab community (Jabbour 1993; Abu-Nimer 1996; Irani 1999; Nathan 2005; Shapiro 2006; Pely 2008). The *sulha* is practiced with variations throughout the Muslim world; it employs third-party interveners, called *Jaha* (usually local dignitaries), who use a mix of mediation and arbitration applications to guide the disputants (particularly the victim's clan) through a process of gradual restoration of lost honor to a transformation from a desire to avenge to a willingness to

forgive. The process includes six task-specific stages: recruiting the perpetrator's family, recruiting the victim's family, fact finding and negotiations, determining the verdict, participating in a reconciliation ceremony, and participating in postceremony activities designed to ensure the durability of the agreement.

Most of these writers provide a general examination of the process and its possible relevance to other local and/or international dispute resolution practices. All have stressed the perceived infraction on a clan's honor as *the* major cause of conflicts, and the resultant desire for revenge (by the victim's side), but none have thus far explored the resulting prioritization of the honor-restoration need, as it expresses itself in the behavior of the disputants and the interveners.

Honor killing has also received broad treatment by several scholars (Barakat 1985; Ruggi 1998; Anonymous 2002; Hasan 2002; Warrick 2005). These examinations have spanned sociopolitical (Hasan 2002), sociolegal (Warrick 2005), and ethnographic aspects (Ruggi 1998). No scholar, however, has yet examined honor killings from the perspective of perpetrator's prioritization. This article seeks to partially cover this gap.

The Place of Honor

Identifying key concepts such as honor, family, revenge, and forgiveness; placing them in their relevant cultural and dispute context; and establishing the link between them are essential elements in any effort to understand how these key elements express themselves in the case studies presented later in the article, and how their expression creates a priority of needs that starts with honor, and only then accommodates what are typically considered to be more essential needs.

The place of honor is readily identified within Arab culture (Dodd 1973; Anonymous 2002) and within Arab dispute and dispute resolution traditions, such as *sulha*, in particular (Kressel 1992; Gellman and Vuinovich 2008).[3] Halim Barakat (1993: 44) places honor as one of the core values of Arab societies and links it to the Arab community in Israel. He wrote: "While values of honor, shame, and dignity, are adopted in this Arab village in Israel, nevertheless they are core values of contemporary social systems in the Arab world, whether in an urban, village or Bedouin community."

Mohammed Abu-Nimer (1996: 46) linked the utilitarian use of honor to dispute resolution in the Middle East when he wrote: ". . . the initiation and implementation of intervention are based on the social norms and customs of the society. . . . These values are maintained and preserved by the disputants in their social context. Even if a dispute is over scarce resources (such as money or debts, or land) values such as 'honor,' 'shame,' 'dignity,' 'social status,' and religious beliefs are at stake." Abu Nimer has specifically indicated here the competition between values such as honor and disputes over scarce resources (health and safety-associated needs), and the

importance that "preserving social values" has in framing the aligning of needs in the cultural context of such conflicts.

George Irani (1999: 9) linked constructs in Middle Eastern cultures, their impact on disputes and dispute resolution modes, and the centrality of honor in this context. He wrote: "Clientelism and the absence of citizenship in the Western sense of the word have profound implications for reconciliation and processes of conflict reduction in the Middle East. Private justice is meted out through a network in which political and/or religious leaders determine the outcome of feuds between clans or conflicts between individuals. Ideologies of honor and shame also play a key role in this context."

Local dispute resolution traditions, such as the *sulha*, recognize and utilize the centrality of honor in their efforts to manage and resolve blood feuds and other disputes (Khneifes 2007; Pely 2010).[4] Elias Jabbour (1993: 41), a long-time dispute resolution practitioner within the Arab community of the North of Israel, wrote: "Honor is, by far, the most important aspect of sulha."

One of the most vivid, and unfortunate, demonstrations of the centrality of the value of honor in the community of Arabs in Israel can be seen through the examination of honor killings. (Dodd 1973). These are tragic situations in which agnate relatives murder their own female flesh and blood (daughter, sister, and mother) in order to restore the honor of the family that the female relative is perceived to have violated and damaged (Hasan 2002). As the phrase "honor killing" implies, the act of killing is directly and specifically associated with the maintenance of honor.

The maintenance of honor and its expression through the phenomenon of honor killing finds an expression in the legal systems of several Arab countries, where honor is viewed and used as a formal cause of extenuating circumstance in murder cases. Article 340 of the Jordanian Penal Code recognizes honor as an extenuating circumstance in murder cases (Cohen 2001). The Jordanian, Egyptian, Syrian, and Lebanese penal codes provide for reductions or elimination of penalty for murders committed for reasons of honor (Warrick 2005).

It is important to stress, in this context and in light of sensitivities regarding such cultural constructs, that the positioning of honor within Arab culture in general and within Arab dispute resolution in particular is not an "orientalist" artifact manufactured by "outsiders" — people of Western origin with a view of Eastern cultures as naïve, irrational, and emotive. As the scholarship cited in this article indicates, plenty of "native" scholars, as well as "non-natives," have identified the same constructs. Furthermore, the perspective of their analysis positions these constructs as functional, rational, and considered elements of the examined phenomenon.

The Centrality of the Family

It is difficult to overstate the centrality of the family in Arab cultures and the impact that this centrality has on the perceptions of individuals, both of themselves, and of their relationship with the family unit. Peter Dodd (1973: 43) wrote:

> The family forms the core productive unit in Arabian society, and it represents the foundation for unity in the community. Members of a family share responsibilities and duties, and enjoy its successes and failures. They feel proud when a member of the family achieves success, and feel ashamed when a member of the family fails in a job or a task. If some member of the family makes a mistake, or does something shameful, this is considered a disgrace to the whole family. Therefore, the relationships between members of the family are simply relations between interconnected members of a cohesive unit. Each member plays his/her role, but remains closely linked to roles of the other members; like the father, the wife, the husband, and the children. Each one of them "lives" his character, but feels responsible for the others. His/her behavior affects all other members of the family. For example, when a girl misbehaves, she is not only violating traditions, but also bringing shame to the whole family. This is where the roots of the crimes of killing on the basis of honor lie. The family undertakes such a crime to attempt to re-establish its perceived lost or diminished honor.

The Arab community in much of the Middle East, including Israel, is structured along superextended family clan lines called *hamula* (plural *hamail*),which reflect the tribal herder traditions of the recent (and less recent) past. Each Arab village and town (less so in the cities) is a mosaic of large and small *hamail*. Individuals are intimately affiliated with their *hamula*. When an individual in an Arab community commits an infraction, it is the entire *hamula* with its "circles of loyalty/responsibility" (Jabbour 1993: 73) who can be held responsible for the act and for its consequences. It is, of course, also, the *hamula*, not the individual — in the form of the *hamula*'s leadership (primarily elders) — that is responsible for handling the resulting situation and that will ultimately make the effort, on behalf of the *hamula*, to manage/resolve the conflict using the traditional tool of *sulha*. Susan Nathan (2005: 118) has written: "The importance of the hamula cannot be overstated: it is the ultimate body to which members of traditional Arab society owe their loyalty."

As Dodd noted, the cohesiveness of the superextended family (clan) is connected to the functional interdependence of identities and perceptions. The connection is particularly strong between perceptions of the group's honor (both internally and externally) and perceptions of the sexual behavior (or misbehavior) of the clan's women. Elias Jabbour (1993: 69) provided additional insight on the linkage between traditional dispute

resolution and the internal cohesiveness of the Arab family when he wrote: "The collective responsibility of the extended family (hamula) in Arab culture toward all its members is one of the main factors that makes sulha work."

It is important to recognize that, in the same way that the *hamula* may be the key to resolving conflicts, it could also cause the eruption and consequent rapid expansion of some conflicts. The "group" social structure of *hamail* in Arab communities, together with the realities of living in close proximity, creates a social topography that, according to social identity theory, is conducive to out-group bias and to resulting conflicts. As Henry Tajfel and John Turner (1979: 38) wrote: "The mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the in-group."

The sense of collective responsibility is particularly strong within the relevant cultural units examined here (nuclear family and clan); when an individual commits an infraction, the dishonor caused by the deviation from the norm reflects equally on large circles of related kin, creating significant pressure to resolve the situation and regain the lost honor. Furthermore, the infractions committed by female members of a family (both nuclear and superextended) receive additional attention due to the particular communal focus on female-based shameful infractions as perceived causes of specially grievous loss of honor and the resulting need to respond to such infractions in a correspondingly harsh restorative manner, such as honor killings (Anonymous 2002; Hasan 2002).

The Place of Revenge

Among the Arab community of Israel, revenge is considered an organic part of life and an honorable choice in dispute situations: "To avenge the murder of a close kinsman is honorable; to fail to do so is dishonourable" (Lang 2002: 54).

Forgiveness (described below) is the only other acceptable path to restoration of honor, but whereas revenge is the "automatic" culturally prescribed solution, forgiveness requires the application of a highly ritualized reconciliation process, such as the *sulha* (which translates to "settlement" in Arabic). The process of *sulha* fulfills a unique function here in that it offers the disputants an alternate "revenge-to-forgiveness" transformation path, designed specifically to preserve, even enhance, the parties' honor, while substituting forgiveness for revenge through a set of complex ritualized steps.

Revenge is defined as ". . . the attempt, at some cost or risk to oneself to impose suffering upon those who have made one suffer, because they have made one suffer" (Elster 1990: 862). In the West, extralegal revenge without state sanction tends to be viewed as a largely irrational, primitive social ill, afflicting the weak of character and countered only by forgiveness.

Michael E. McCullough (2007: 5) described this view in rather dramatic fashion: ". . . revenge is an infection that invades a vulnerable host (perhaps one whose resistance to the infection has been weakened by a poor constitution or a bad childhood), releases a toxin that poisons the host morally, physically, and psychologically, and then wreaks destructive effects on the avenger and the objects of his or her vengeance — sometimes spreading from one host to another until the outbreak reaches epidemic proportions." He called this view "the disease model of revenge."

A competing view of revenge holds that both revenge and forgiveness are selected evolutionary adaptations or, in simple terms, that they are part of human nature. "The desire for revenge isn't a disease to which certain unfortunate people fall prey," McCullough (2007: 10) wrote. "Instead, it's a universal trait of human nature, crafted by natural selection, that exists today because it was adaptive in the ancestral environment in which the human species evolved."

Alan Hamlin used Jon Elster's definition of revenge as a foundation to a counterargument that demonstrates the potential rationality of revenge. Hamlin (1991: 375) argued that:

> The definition of revenge is taken immediately to indicate a *prima facie* difficulty for any attempt at a rational choice explanation of revenge. Revenge is backward looking, whereas rationality is forward looking — so the two fail to engage. . . . The fact that someone has inflicted suffering (of a particular type) on you may be a necessary condition for your taking vengeance on that person, but some further forward-looking condition may need to be satisfied before vengeance will actually be taken. This possibility is sufficient to open the door to possible rational choice explanations of revenge.

Hamlin linked revenge and honor, writing: "If honor is the key to understanding revenge, that is, the key to understanding the pattern of approval and disapproval associated with a norm-based practice of revenge — and I agree that it is — the behavior of revenge must be recovered from an analysis of honor" (Hamlin 1991: 377). This perspective is key to understanding the perceived rationality of honor in the examined contexts: if revenge is seen as rational, and if the preservation and restoration of honor is the cultural construct designed to facilitate and enable revenge (culturally), then, it is possible to understand why the restoration of honor is seen also as rational and as a basic need. This perspective challenges Elster's view of revenge as an irrational act, motivated, as Elster put it: "because they have made one suffer" (1990: 862).

There still remains the question of why revenge has been and still is a pervasive value and practice in the Middle East in general and in Israel's Arab community in particular, when compared to, for example, Western Europe. The explanation apparently involves understanding the difference

between the evolution of revenge behavior in tribal, nomadic herding cultures (e.g., in the Middle East), as opposed to that of stable farming cultures (e.g., Western Europe), combined with the persistence, in these communities, of postnomadic herders' tribal, clan-based, social structures. Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen (1996) and Jacob Black-Michaud (1975) argued that herder communities were vulnerable to theft of livestock, making it beneficial for them to cultivate a reputation for being the kind of people who respond fiercely to offense.

Farmers' existence is much less threatened by belligerent acts: take away a cow and the herder is permanently without livelihood; take away a crop and the farmer can grow another crop on the same soil. McCullough (2007: 53) wrote that: "Europeans who settled the American Northeast came predominantly from places such as England, Germany and Holland, where intensive farming was the traditional way of life — a way of life that didn't require people to be so obsessed with honor."

Other scholars (Brown 1968; Kim, Smith, and Brigham 1998; Kurzban, DeScioli, and O'Brien 2007) argued that retaliatory action by perceived victims is more likely to occur, and will be stronger when it does, when a familiar audience has witnessed the provocation or the attack. Most members of the Arab community in Israel reside currently in rural settings, where, literally, everybody knows everybody — and in many cases are related to them either directly or indirectly — thus intensifying the impact of witnessing an honor-damaging provocation or infraction: the victim knows that kin and neighbors have not only seen his hurt and loss of honor but are likely to spread the story throughout the community. Such a situation, thus, in the mind of the wronged individual, requires a swift, deterrence-inducing, revenge action.

Honor killings are a special type of dispute: between an agnate relative and his daughter, sister, and even occasionally mother (in the case of adult sons). If a woman, regardless of her age and/or marital status, is perceived by her agnate relatives to have committed a "dishonorable" act, in their eyes — and in the eyes of the community — such an act can bring severe and endless dishonor on the family's name (Anonymous 2002). The only way to expunge such a perceived damage to the family's honor is through an act of severe punishment — death in many cases — inflicted on the honor-besmirching female by her agnate relatives. The community is often supportive of such acts, and even if sometimes there is internal opposition inside and outside the victim's family, in most cases, both male and female relatives see the act of punishment as unavoidable. The act is similar in its motivation and rationalization to revenge, because it is designed to restore lost honor and deter other women in the family from similar behavior, much like acts of revenge (Anonymous 2002; Hasan 2002).

In an interview that I conducted with a group of nine Israeli Arabs (five women and four men), only one person (a man) voiced an objection

to honor killings. The rest of the interviewees, ages ranging from twenty-three to seventy-five years, expressed strong support for the act, based on preservative and restorative arguments, such as: "Wild weeds must be uprooted before they poison the trees they grow around" and "Being merciful only brings about more shaming behaviors like this."[5] This is, of course, anecdotal and is not a scientific sample.

The Place of Forgiveness

Theorists have viewed forgiveness through frames similar to those with which they have viewed revenge. Some have argued forgiveness represents an attempt to mask our primitive urges to revenge with a veneer of civility (Allport 1950). Others hold that, like revenge, forgiveness has its evolutionary function. "The capacity to forgive is every bit as authentic, every bit as intrinsic to human nature, and every bit as much a product of natural selection as is our penchant for revenge" (McCullough 2007: 13).

McCullough added additional insight to the behavioral context:

> Even though our basic behavioral inclinations are shaped by natural selection, we humans aren't slaves to our instincts. . . . Because our large brains enable us to reflect on our own condition, to view things from the perspective of other people, to reason about the causes of our behavior and the behavior of others, to exert control over our appetites and emotions in the service of higher ideals, and to inspire and persuade others to do the same, there is every reason to believe that we can construct social institutions that will encourage forgiveness rather than revenge (McCullough 2007: 19).

Forgiveness is a fundamental value in Arab culture (Abu-Nimer 1996). It is also connected to honor, in the sense that forgiveness is the only action other than revenge that can redeem the honor of a disputant. In order to forgive, disputants have to forgo revenge, the only other socially recognizable remedy to dishonor. But, where revenge requires only the action of the disputant(s), forgiveness requires the participation of the entire community, in a choreographed set of complex rituals, without which the restoration of honor will fail to materialize, leaving again revenge as the only option on the road to restoration of honor.

The *sulha* functions as a social mechanism for the promotion of forgiveness. When a conflict erupts, the clan perceived by the community to be the offending side (e.g., in the case of a murder, the clan whose member[s] are detained by police as suspects) approaches the local dispute resolution dignitary(ies) and requests that he/they initiate a *sulha* process. The dignitaries recruit the victim's clan into the process, establish a temporary ceasefire (*hodna*) and proceed (now they are called *Jaha*, or *sulha* committee) to meet in private caucus with both sides and with other

relevant witnesses, gather information, share significant tales of similar conflicts that were resolved, and generally imbibe the disputants with a sense that their honor will be restored and enhanced if they agree to forgive and reconcile — much more so than if they choose to avenge and retaliate. Though the *Jaha* has the authority to impose a verdict, it usually tries to achieve the disputants' agreement, and when that occurs, the community at large, along with the disputants' clans, is invited to a public reconciliation ceremony, witnessed by many dignitaries, who, by signing the reconciliation agreement in public, become communal guardians of the settlement. The *sulha* is Sharia (Muslim religious law)-based, but the practitioners are not religious leaders. Religious leaders (Muslim, Christian, and Druze) are, nevertheless, always present at the reconciliation ceremony to symbolize the coming together of the community and to help further cement the agreement.

Whereas forgiveness has largely been removed as a mandatory element from most formal legal systems, within the social and functional context of the *sulha* and within the culture that *sulha* operates in, forgiveness is everything. Without it there is no agreement, because without it, the torn social tissue is not considered mended. Jabbour (1993: 31) put it explicitly: "Sulha is first and foremost based on forgiveness. If the offended side does not forgive, there will be no sulha and there will be no peace." Indeed, one of the three central pillars of the *sulha* is *musamacha*, a declaration by the victim's father (if available, otherwise the closest male relative) that he forgives the killer/offender (F. Khneifes 2007).

This forgiveness is not limited to present disputants, but covers past, present, and future generations. The public, written, and declaratory nature of the forgiveness, as part of the *sulha* agreement and the *sulha* ceremony, takes it out of the private, personal domain and makes it a formal testimony of peace as a policy between the two clans in their entirety, with the community and multiple dignitaries as witness. The formal text is very specific: "This peace is valid for all those who are present here, and all those who are absent. For every embryo in the womb of its mother or for every sperm from the back of the father . . ." (Jabbour 1993: 53). This means that the community (and in particular the victim's family) has a ritualistic and a practical obligation to forgive (though, of course, not the duty to forget), and that the act of reconciliation is binding for the victim's entire "circles of responsibility" structure.

The practical meaning of the forgiveness in the *sulha* is, first and foremost, a cessation of the conflict between the families in the sense that the victim's side stops seeking revenge; effectively it means that the families of the disputants may return to live in the same neighborhood, trade with each other, establish or re-establish social contacts at various levels, and move about without fear of belligerent acts by any side.

The psychological component of the forgiveness means that the disputants cease viewing each other's kin group as enemies or disputants and treat them as equal members in the community with all privileges and duties, transcending the dispute and its memory of conflict. Even if one or more members of the victim's family do not actually forgive the offender and his clan, they will think hard and long before taking any retaliatory steps toward the other clan, because by doing it, they will bring dishonor on their own family and its leaders — and even worse, on a long list of community and regional dignitaries who are all signatories on the forgiveness agreement.

Forgiveness seems to have little or no role in honor killing situations. The question is: why is forgiveness an acceptable element of inter- and intraclan dispute resolution processes but is excluded as an option in disputes involving perceived damage to the honor of agnate relatives, within the much tighter circle of the nuclear family? Here (within the nuclear family) it appears that the option to forgive is painfully missing. Why do agnate relatives find it so difficult to bring themselves to forgive the perceived sexual transgressions of their female relatives in the same way they obviously can bring themselves to forgive near strangers for supposedly much harsher infractions, such as murder?

One possible explanation is that in a strict patriarchal culture, in addition to the specific need to recover lost honor caused by the infractions of women kin, there is a constant and enduring need to suppress any sign of female insubordination and to perpetuate male control (Hasan 2002). Therefore, the sanctions proscribed for anything associated with women are devoid of alternate, more accommodating, conciliation options.

Whatever the explanations, the analysis of this particular phenomenon is beyond the scope of this article.[6] The salient point here is that in *both* situations (intercommunal or intranuclear family disputes), disputants are essentially making choices that put their need to restore honor above all other needs, but in one conflict situation (interclan disputes), society has constructed a potential alternate route to reconstitute honor through forgiveness (*sulha*), whereas in the other conflict situation (internuclear family conflict between agnate relatives and their women kin), society preserves only one honor-restoration path — through extreme violence.

Case Studies: Prioritizing Honor over Other Basic Needs

To demonstrate the primacy of honor needs over those needs generally considered to be higher priority and more rational (i.e., health, safety, freedom from incarceration, ability to make a living, etc.), I have chosen to examine and analyze three case studies that exemplify situations in which such choices are likely to be made. The first is an honor killing in the Israeli-occupied West Bank village of Jiba, near the town of Jenin. The

second is the case of an attempted honor killing with a "twist" — in this case a man was targeted by the father of his perspective bride, following perceived sexual misconduct with his future mother-in-law. The third case study involves an extended tit-for-tat blood feud between two families that resulted in dozens of dead and wounded over several decades.

In each case, we can see that, faced with the option of satisfying such basic human needs as health and safety, by opting for a reconciliation or an otherwise nonviolent path, such as forgiveness, disputants instead selected options that fulfilled their perceived honor-restoration or preservation needs, in the process acting against what most in the West and most dispute resolution professionals would consider to be "their own best interests."

The Honor Killing of Nura 'Asa'asha

The facts of this case are horrifyingly simple. In February 1989, the family of Nura Asa'asha, age thirty-two and single, from the village of Jiba near the town of Jenin, in the north of Israel's occupied West Bank, discovered that she was pregnant outside of wedlock. Having obtained a confession from his daughter, Nura's father, Farid 'Asa'asha, gathered the members of his family and told them that "it is necessary to cleanse the name and restore the honor of the family and the hamula" (Hasan 2002: 15). The father, then, invited all the members of his *hamula* to witness the execution of Nura. At 8 P.M., after dozens of *hamula* members gathered in Farid 'Asa'asha's home, Nura was brought into the center of the room. Her father asked her to choose between being killed by an ax or by a rope. She chose the rope. Her father threw Nura to the floor, pressed her head to the ground with his foot, tied the rope around her neck and strangled her to death, to the cheers of his *hamula*'s men, who encouraged him to murder his daughter, by clapping and shouting: "harder, harder oh hero."

Nura's mother and sisters were present in the room as well at the time of her murder. They did not lift a finger to help Nura; on the contrary, they praised the father for killing his daughter and cleansing the family's honor.

When Nura was dead, the family continued to sit together and discuss the restoration of honor. After about two hours, the father and his son went to the home of the village's *mukhtar* (titular village leader) and notified him of the killing of Nura. The *mukhtar* came over to the family's home, viewed the murdered woman's body, and afterward, the father walked over to the nearby police station, in the town of Jenin and handed himself in (Hasan 2002).

The case of the murder of Nura 'Asa'asha demonstrates the selection of honor-restoration needs above health and safety needs. It is clear that in this case, Nura's father, indeed Nura's entire family, chose to satisfy their perceived honor needs prior to satisfying any other basic human needs. Indeed, the decision to murder Nura, to cleanse the family's honor, created a chain of thoroughly destructive processes within the family: the father

and his son went to prison for decades. They experienced loss of freedom as well as the dangers of an Israeli prison. The incarceration of the family's main breadwinners meant a loss of income for the family, and the additional expense meted on the family to deal with the trial and the legal expenses added another layer of hardship. It is also reasonable to assume that murdering one's own, loved, family member (a daughter and a sister in this case) can have a significant mental health impact on some of the victim's family members, particularly parents and siblings, although I do not have evidence of such effects. Again, the need to restore perceived lost honor obviously trumps all else.

Manar Hasan (2002) has contended that "women in the patriarchal family are sacrificed on the altar of 'honor' because that has a cheaper social price tag on the family," clearly positioning honor as a higher need than the survival needs of both men and women in the family. It is also important to stress that honor killings cannot be explained by jealousy. Interestingly, the husband of a "misbehaving" wife is not allowed to kill his wife as an act of jealousy, because it is not his honor, but the honor of the woman's agnate relatives, that was damaged.[7]

Honor killings are essentially crimes against the human rights of women (Glazer and Abu Ras 1994; Anonymous 2002; Agarwal 2008), who are murdered by their agnate relatives, in an attempt by these relatives to redeem or re-establish the family's honor on behalf of the entire family (Barakat 1985). The agnate relatives go to such extremes because they perceive damage to their own personal and family honor, usually associated with what they perceive as unbecoming sexual behavior on the part of the woman relative (e.g., adultery, relations outside of marriage, immodest dress code, etc.).

The Attempted Murder of Ramzi Safia

The facts in this case, which occurred in 2007, were investigated and made public by the police. Dr. Salim Safia, a respected gastroenterologist from the village of Kfar Yasif, in the northwest corner of Israel's Galilee region, went to great lengths to have his future son-in-law, his daughter's fiancé, a lawyer named Ramzi Safia, a distant relative of Dr. Safia, killed by hiring several hit men. The causes of the doctor's apparent determination to have his future son-in-law killed are not entirely clear, although rumors alleged that the fiancé had made sexual advances toward Dr. Safia's wife.

Before attempting to hire a police agent-cum-assassin, Dr. Safia allegedly had a bomb placed under Ramzi Safia's car. The bomb failed to explode and was subsequently detected and removed safely. Several weeks afterward, shots were fired at Ramzi as he was walking down the street near his family's home, and later, his family home, where he was staying at the time, was set on fire. Nobody was hurt in any of these incidents, but after an investigation the police focused on the father of the future bride as a suspect.

When the first three attempts to kill Ramzi Safia failed, Dr. Safia tried to hire a man to kill him for roughly $35,000. That man happened to be a police informant who informed the police about the plot. The police brought in a police agent, who pretended to be a professional assassin. Dr. Safia met the three men, gave the undercover officer two pictures of his intended victim and said he would pay the money after seeing a picture of Ramzi's dead body. At that point the police arrested Dr. Safia, and charged him with soliciting a murder (Koury 2007). He was convicted and sentenced to thirty months incarceration, and an additional year of suspended sentence. He was barred from practicing medicine and his daughter married Ramzi Safia anyway, and the couple moved away from the village.

This case represents a curious variant on the honor killing motif. It is unusual because the intended victim here was a man, whereas in the overwhelming majority of such "family honor" disputes, the victims are women. In addition, it is notable that protagonists in this case were an eminently respectable cast, including a physician, his wife, their college-educated daughter, and their future son-in-law, a lawyer. Nonetheless, Dr. Safia obviously felt that the family honor was damaged and in need of restoration.

Presumably, Dr. Safia knew that his actions could have severe consequences on several possible levels. Had his plot succeeded, his daughter's fiancé would have been killed, undoubtedly causing grief for her and for his future in-law's family and risking their revenge, which would have put Safia and his entire family in danger. But despite all these easily forecast risky physical and economic outcomes to Dr. Safia and his family, the doctor chose the path designed to restore his own and his family's honor, prioritizing the need for honor above and beyond many basic survival needs that are often regarded as instinctual.

The Blood Feud between the Abdel Kader Clan and the Al-Hariri Clan

The third case study involves the history and evolution of a conflict between two clans (*hamail*), the Abdel Kader clan and the Al-Hariri clan. Both *hamail* were originally from the village of Taibe, but following the first wave of retaliatory killings, the Al-Hariri clan moved away to the neighboring town of Um Al Fahem in a failed attempt, led by intervening mediators, to broker a traditional interclan reconciliation. The exile, originally thought to be temporary, but eventually permanent, was designed to separate the disputants in the immediate aftermath of the dispute, thus reducing friction and reducing the impetus for quick revenge attacks.

The first round of hostilities, revenge, and counter-revenge murders between the two families started in the early 1980s and continued for a decade, with a toll of twenty-one dead and twenty-six wounded. Nobody remembers what caused the conflict to erupt, but because both families

were involved in criminal enterprise at the time (and still are), it is reasonable to assume that turf war or some kind of a business deal gone sour might have been the cause, although bruised egos could easily have been the cause too.

Multiple conciliation attempts have failed since then, resulting in a decade-long chain of tit-for-tat killings. Eventually, the two sides arrived at a ceasefire and hostilities subsided until the conflict re-erupted in 1994 (Ben Zur 2006; Zinger-Heruti 2006). The second phase of the inter-*hamail* conflict allegedly started over an argument between two young drivers, one from the Hariri family and the other an Abdel Kader, over the right of way in a traffic junction. This round of the conflict exacted so far — it has not been resolved yet — a toll of thirty dead and thirty-nine injured.

Again, numerous additional attempts at mediation have taken place over the years, without much success. Several *hodna* (ceasefire) agreements were reached, only to be breached within a month or two by one of the sides. In total, this thirty-year-old conflict has killed at least fifty-one people and wounded an additional sixty-five people, including unrelated bystanders.

This blood feud represents an extreme example of an interclan dispute that escalated to a mutual retaliation bloodbath involving dozens of dead and wounded. Admittedly, the two clans are not "respectable" people; police claim that members of both are heavily involved in various criminal enterprises throughout the country and that the tensions between them may have included an element of turf war and other commercial disputes. But both observers and the disputing families themselves have admitted that most killings were carried out as opportunistic revenge assassinations, designed to redeem the disputants' honor. Despite repeated attempts over the years to resolve the conflict between the families and to bring an end to the bloodshed, every ceasefire agreement that was reached ended up with one of the parties breaking it due to what a police official called: ". . . an opportunity that occurred" (Zinger-Heruti 2006). That means, effectively, that the feuding parties found themselves in close proximity (e.g., driving along the same road) and found it irresistible to try to use the occasion to exact a quick revenge over the other clan.

Both sides are obviously willing to put their needs for honor and revenge above any other needs, including health, safety, and economic needs. The dispute puts literally every member of both clans at risk of assassination by members of the other clan, clearly threatening their ability to move about freely, work, and socialize. Elster (1990: 864) highlighted the importance of honor when he observed that: "In societies with a strict code of honor, the ostracism suffered by a person who fails to avenge an offence can be crippling." Ostracism can be in the form of refusal (by the other clan, and sometimes by broader segments in the community) to do business with the ostracized party (clan, in this case),

refusal to marry into the family, and even refusal by the local children to play with the clan's children in the street. These may appear as minor sanctions in Western urbanized context, but when your village, clan, and community are almost your sole frame of social reference, and when you hardly ever relocate far from your clan and family, such sanctions carry a significant weight.

This feud has clearly gone beyond a simple organized crime turf war, such as we have seen in places like Mexico, which, within the world of organized crime, can be ascribed to such rational motives as expanding profits, for example. For more than a decade, the areas of operation of both clans have been different so they do not threaten each other's economic interests, and the feud has not resulted in any significant change in the economic or operational status of either family (Ben Zur 2006).

This is, admittedly, an extreme case of the blood-revenge cycle, but the phenomenon, as a whole, occurs frequently within Israel's Arab community. There are currently multiple clans throughout the region whose members are actively involved in continuous tit-for-tat, honor-restoring, retaliatory attacks and counterattacks, spanning years, even decades.

Conclusion

This article drew on interviews, existing literature, and case study analysis to demonstrate that, in honor killings and blood feud situations within Israel's Arab community, disputants' sense of their own interests, as reflected by their choice of which needs to address first, indicate that honor is deemed to be a higher priority than basic survival needs such as the health, safety, freedom, and economic security of disputants and their family members. This calculation turns upside down the influential "pyramid of needs" identified by the pioneering developmental psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943) and also challenges many of the rational choice theories that have traditionally underpinned much of classic negotiation and mediation theory.

Such insight should help inform the perceptions of observers and students of such disputes, and their management and resolution practices, as well as the actions of interveners, both formal and informal, as they become involved in similar situations at various stages of their evolution. First and foremost, it would behoove researchers and interveners to recognize the primacy of honor as a basic need, and to fashion their examination and treatment of relevant events to accommodate this perspective. Furthermore, because honor is such a basic need in these cultural contexts, it may be more useful to try to channel it to less detrimental behaviors by working with secular and religious leaders to find ways to provide alternate cultural and behavioral outlets to honor restoration needs. Taking a clue from the *sulha* process, with its time-proven revenge-to-forgiveness transformative framework, underpinned by religious dogma, it may be

possible, through work with community leaders, to gradually reorient increasing segments of honor-related disputes in the direction of honor-based forgiveness.

Another essential element that may be employed to assist in mitigating the dangers of an honor-based perspective in the case of family-honor conflicts is the recognition of the need to separate the disputants immediately and maintain this separation while discussion of other options takes place. Achieving such a goal requires the participation and collaboration of official as well as unofficial elements within the relevant area such as police officials, judicial authorities, social workers and shelter-providing professionals, civic leaders, religious leaders, clan leaders, and even local political figures with potential influence on the offended parties.

NOTES

1. Manar Hasan (2002: 5), writes in *The Politics of Honor: Patriarchy, the State and the Murder of Women in the Name of Family Honor*: "Ikhlas Kana'an from Rama in Galilee was murdered in July 1994 by her 21-year-old brother because he and her family members believed she had desecrated the family's honor by her alleged misconduct. The act which caused her brother and family dishonor, it was later argued, was her decision to wear a mini-skirt."

2. Elias Jabbour (1993: 69) does connect between the clan and dispute resolution when he writes: "The collective responsibility of the extended family (hamula) in Arab culture toward all its members is one of the main factors that makes sulha work."

3. The *Palestinian Human Rights Monitor* (Anonymous 2002: 2) writes this about the place of honor in Arab society: "The focus on the value of honor has great importance in Arab society."

4. Farage Khneifes, second-generation *sulha* practitioner, and son of the late Sheikh Saleh Khneifes, former head of the Sulha Committee for the Arab Community of North Israel, added a functional dimension to the honor aspect within dispute resolution context: "In the Sulha, you have the coming together of several 'honors': that of the disputants, especially the victim's family, that of the Jaha, and that of the entire community. The trick is to guard and increase the honor of all parties together, so they all have a stake in the conclusion and maintenance of the Sulha agreement, because all parties gain honor by joining together for this purpose."

5. Based on the interviewees' explicit requests for total anonymity, the author refrains from providing any detail that may be used to identify the people involved.

6. Some scholars argue that the state and state policies toward minority communities may play a detrimental part in the perpetuation of honor killing behavior (Hasan 2002). This is an interesting point but is also outside the scope of this article.

7. "In all instances where a husband murders his wife, he violates her patrilineal family, no matter what the reason for the murder. As mentioned, it is not his honor that is injured, even in a case when she has been unfaithful to him, since his wife is not his absolute property but only handed over to him for his use" (Hasan 2002:10).

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