

Culture, National Minority and the State:
Working against the ‘Crime of Family Honour’
within the Palestinian Community in Israel

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Introduction

In 1998, on the evening of Eid Al-Adha,² Mithal Khateeb, a seventeen year old girl from a Palestinian Druze village in northern Israel, was killed by her brother while her family prepared for the celebrations. Mithal’s brother claimed he killed her in order to defend the honour of the family. In a public statement made to the media, the police characterised the crime as an ‘honour crime’. And at Mithal’s funeral, a police representative disclosed that Mithal was still a virgin at the time of the murder.

Two days before Mithal was killed, she was taken to hospital by her father, who wanted to know whether she was still a virgin. Her family suspected her of having relations with a young man from the village. The physician who was asked to perform the test refused. As Mithal was a minor, he was prohibited from performing such a test without an order by the police or courts. He directed the father to bring such an order from the city police. Attempts to obtain such an order often signal to the police a risk of potential harm to the young woman in question, especially when it is her own family requesting such an order.

Upon requesting the order from the police, Mithal’s father was told that he could only obtain one if he suspected rape and wished to file a complaint, which he

refused to do. In the presence of her sister, Mithal stated that she was afraid of returning home with her father due to the threat of violence from him and the rest of her family. She was sent to her sister's house in a nearby village for one night to give her father time to calm down, and was ordered to be taken back to her father's house the next day.

In accordance with those instructions, Mithal was taken back to her family home the following day. She was killed that night. There was no intervention by professionals, including the police or social workers, to prevent her return to the house.

This case, and scores of others, are indicative of the failures of the police and the professional system to protect and save the lives of many threatened women and girls. Such failures occur even though the law in such cases is clear, especially in the case of minors, and even though there is an existing infrastructure of safe houses and shelters to which the police can refer women and girls at risk. In the case described, the police did not seek professional help, nor did they direct her to a shelter, despite her statement that she feared serious violence.

There are approximately ten cases a year of Femicide [murder of women] among the population of Palestinian citizens of Israel. The community, the authorities and the media identify such cases as 'honour crimes'. The taboo about 'honour crimes' within Palestinian society in Israel was first broken in 1991 by Al-Fanar, a Palestinian feminist women's group, which organised a demonstration protesting the murder of a young Palestinian woman by her father and brother. Working against such violence in

the Palestinian community in Israel means tackling a social problem with cultural roots in a multicultural context, and within the day-to-day reality of a national minority living in a complicated political and social situation, influenced by a hostile state system that seizes any and all opportunities to control the future of this minority.

The Palestinian minority in Israel is a small community of some one million inhabitants living in rural and urban towns and villages. The community has gone through substantial changes since the Palestinian *Nakba*³ of 1948 and the establishment of the state of Israel. Palestinian society in Israel moved from the traditional leadership representing it before the state, to a more organised political leadership, developing the minority agenda and struggling for the collective rights of the group. In the context of such a political reality and a minority struggle seeking unity of the community at any price, women's issues – including 'crimes of honour' as violence against women - were marginalised and ignored for the sake of the general cause. Any effort to challenge 'honour crimes' was perceived as an effort to shatter the delicate balance between the different political and social groups inside the community.

The ways in which activists challenged the taboo, and the strategies we adopted to address the issue within our particular socio-political reality, are outlined below. This paper examines how the Palestinian community in Israel, particularly the political, social, and religious leadership, approach 'crimes of honour'; how the police deal with cases of Palestinian women whose lives are threatened; how the legal system, including the prosecution and the judiciary, deals with cases of femicide and 'honour crimes'; the nature and modalities of 'honour crimes' among the Palestinian

community inside Israel, including an examination of the profiles of perpetrators; and the effects of activism by women's and human rights groups in the last decade on preventing such crimes.

This paper draws on a variety of primary sources and secondary sources. The research team identified 58 cases of 'honour crimes' between 1984 and 2000, from the electronic court files, the media, and NGO archives. Permission was granted by the General Director of Courts to review and photocopy files from the archives of District Courts in different areas of Israel over the period 1984-2000. This effort yielded the records of only 25 cases due to the poor filing system; some of the cases could not be located at all, and other files contained only the judgment. The results of our analysis of these 25 case files are set out in Section A below.

Section B draws on a review of one daily and two weekly Arabic newspapers⁴ for the years 1994-2001, with a view to exploring the nature of press coverage of cases, victims and murderers, any statements made by public figures, and assessing the level of importance attached to the issue. The press review yielded more than a hundred items of relevance to our study, including news items of murder cases and their follow-up, coverage of activities by al-Badeel and others on the subject of 'honour crimes,' and analysis and features on the problem. A more limited review was made of the Hebrew press over the same period.

The archives of al-Badeel and of Women against Violence were a further source of material. Al-Badeel started in 1993 as a coalition of organisations combating 'crimes of honour,' and is discussed further in Section II below. Al-

Badeel’s archives include not only minutes of meetings and activity reports and evaluations through the years, but also all its correspondence and interventions with the Israeli establishment and various agencies on specific cases and on operational responsibilities.

SECTION A: Case Analysis

Profiles of the murderers

In all 25 cases for which records were accessible by the research team, the victim was killed by a relative, with the variable being whether only one or more than one relative participated in the crime. Nineteen of the murders involved a sole perpetrator, while six involved more than one. There were a total of 33 perpetrators in the 25 cases.

Table I: Murderer’s Relationship to the Victim in all 25 cases

Relation	No. of perpetrators in the 25 cases
Brother	13
Father	5
Husband	3
Cousin	3
Son	2
Sister	2
Mother	1
Uncle (Father's Side)	1
Uncle (Mother's Side)	1

Father-In-Law	1
Nephew	1
Total	33

Table II: Murderer's Relationship to the Victim in cases involving a single perpetrator

Relation	No. of perpetrators in 19 cases
Brother	8
Father	3
Cousin	2
Son	2
Husband	2
Father-In-Law	1
Unknown	1
Total	19

Table III: Murderer's Relationship to the Victim in cases involving more than one perpetrator

Relation	No. of perpetrators in 6 cases
Brother	5
Uncle (Paternal)	1
Uncle (Maternal)	1
Father	2
Mother	1
Sister	2

Cousin	1
Nephew	1
Total	14

The tables show the brother to be the most frequent perpetrator of ‘honour crimes,’ with fathers, cousins and uncles following. Arab tradition generally accords “ownership” over the woman to her birth family; relocation to her husband’s family is seen as an element of a temporary contract that can be dissolved by divorce. It is therefore seen as the responsibility of close male blood relatives in the natal family to ‘punish’ women, and it is their family’s honour that must be regained.

The case files showed that most perpetrators fell within the age group 18-25,⁵ the most common profile of a perpetrator was the victim’s youngest brother, aged in his early twenties. Older family members are generally needed for the financial support of the family; in some cases, the youngest of the family may be persuaded to make a false confession to safeguard an older member who is the actual perpetrator in view of the family circumstances. Younger family members are also less likely than older members to be married and have children; once released, after perhaps fifteen years in prison, they are able to start a new life, including getting married and having a family.

The Crime Scene

In the past, most ‘honour crimes’ were either committed in public or carried out in the family home and then announced in public by the murderer to the village and the rest of the family. In this way, the participating members of the family were

able to prove to society the ability of their men to control women's behaviour, and to deter other women family members from behaving in a way deemed dishonourable. By making the community aware of the crime, the honour and respect lost through the perceived acts of the victim were considered to be regained. However, the case files examined for this study suggest a move away from the home as the site of the killing to more distant locations, with no public announcement of the deed. One reason for this shift may be a growing fear of retribution from the state legal system should the killing occur in a manner so obviously connected to the family, for example by taking place at the family home. Thus, an attempt to avoid punishment might be one reason that some perpetrators chose to commit the murder in remote public spaces such as the beach or a forest. Nevertheless, in two cases we studied, the crime was committed during the day in the village square in front of passers-by, more in keeping with patterns in the past.

The Reason Claimed for the Crime

Table IV: Reasons Claimed for Murder

Reasons Claimed for Murder	No. of Cases
Relations with man other than the husband	5
Rumours of relations with men	3
Pregnancy outside of marriage	3
Losing virginity	2
Relations with men outside marriage	1
Prostitution	1
Dress code and living behaviour	2

Staying out late and smoking	2
Divorcing the husband	1
Leaving the house frequently	1
Refusing sexual relations in forced marriage	1
Complaints to Police and professionals about violence	1
Inter-religious marriage	1
Unknown	1
Total	25

In the majority of cases (those classified in the first six rows of Table IV) the ‘reason’ claimed by the perpetrator(s) for the murder was directly related to sexual relations outside marriage. There remains however a significant number of cases where this was not the case, supporting the notion that, over the years, the meaning of ‘honour’ has expanded to include any behaviour by women not approved of by family members, such as challenging male authority and taking responsibility for her own life. As women have gained mobility and freedom in decision-making, men in the family have increasingly felt their authority being threatened and have thus increased their control over women’s lives, punishing them for any behaviour that might be comprehended as expressing women’s sexuality. The development of new values in Arab Palestinian society in Israel which are weakening the patriarchal system can thus provoke adverse reactions; Hassan (1999: 307-356) expresses concern at new patterns of honour crimes in which men try to stabilise a changing world by using violence against women.

Previous Approaches Made by the Victim

The case files showed that five of the victims, aware of the danger they were in, had sought help from police/professional agencies and from other family members before they were murdered. It is of course likely that at least some of the other women were aware of the danger they were in, but did not find the courage to approach anyone. As for those that did, in none of the five cases did the families or the police or other professionals act to protect the woman who had approached them for help.

The lack of assistance by police in such cases is not uncommon. On at least two occasions al-Badeel provided the Ramleh police department with a list of women who had been threatened with death by their family and who were not being protected by the police – in 1997 through an official letter to the police and in 1998 at a special meeting of the Parliamentary Committee for Status of Arab Women headed by the then Parliament Member, Tamar Gojansky, convened in Ramleh and attended by the police, women from the community and Al-Badeel representatives. The list contained the names of women, known to al-Badeel and Women against Violence (through their crisis centre) who were reluctant to report to the police their fears and the potential danger they faced; despite the rumours being circulated inside the community and the women were thus known to most people they were not confident that the police would protect or save them. On the contrary, for these women reporting meant increasing the danger. Al-Badeel and Women against Violence subsequently documented at least five ‘honour crimes’ cases involving victims whose names were on this list. Their cases are not among the 25 examined in this section, due on the one hand to disorganisation in the Tel Aviv District Court archives compounded by a certain lack of cooperation on the part of the court, and on the other to the fact that

most of the cases remained unsolved by the police, thus no suspects were charged and no cases reached the court. The conduct of the police is examined further below.

The cases of Mithal Khateeb (above) and that of 21-year-old Massara Maadi are two among tens of cases known to Palestinian women's organisations where the police ignored the women's complaints and referred them back to their families or to well-respected figures in society who in turn handed them back to their families, and thus sent them to their deaths.

Charges

The charges submitted to the courts in the 25 cases accessed for this study included fifteen counts of first degree murder; five that began as murder charges but were subsequently reduced to manslaughter; two of grievous injury; one of attempted murder and one of causing death by negligence (the latter involving the same charges for three defendants).

In most of the cases reviewed, and others followed up by Women against Violence and al-Badeel, where the murderer confessed to the crime and was convicted of the murder, the police failed to pursue the investigation any further, including failing to investigate whether other members of the family were aware that the crime was to be committed. This approach to closing cases meant that many accessories to the murder escaped punishment.

In addition, concerns are also raised by the manner in which charges are modified in a number of cases. As an illustrative case study, we can look at the case of the death of Leila Keis in 1989 which involved her two brothers and a sister.

According to the court protocols, the charge sheets and the prosecutor's statements, Leila was forced to take poison on the understanding that if the poison did not work she would have to find another way to kill herself; some hours later her brother checked on her and she informed him that the poison had not worked and that she had tried to hang herself but had failed. He told her to wait for another three hours and if the poison had still not worked to take more. Five hours later he checked on her and found her trying to get out of a well three and a half metres deep into which she had thrown herself. He forced her to take more poison, asked their sister to watch Leila in order to avoid her accessing any medical help, disconnected the phone, and went and informed the other brother. The brothers visited the house in the afternoon of the following day, saw the suffering that Leila was in, and left her with their sister. Leila died at midnight, her body systems in total collapse.

In November 1999, the court laid charges of first degree murder against the older brother (under articles 300(a) and 301 of the Criminal Law 1977 (CL)), and manslaughter against the second brother and the sister (under articles 298, 262, 322, 29 CL). However, in May 2000, the charges were amended. The elder brother was charged with persuading or assisting a suicide (a felony under articles 302, 29 CL) and the other brother and sister with causing death by negligence (a felony under article 304 CL). The brothers received prison sentences of between **three and four years**. The sister, however, was not imprisoned following the intervention of community religious leaders who asked the court not to send her to prison because of the disgrace it would cause the family to have a woman member in jail. It is also worth noting that the brothers worked as members of the police force in a jail

The Law and the Courts

While there is concern regarding both the investigation of 'honour crimes' by the police and the reduction, in some cases, of charges from murder to less serious offences, when charges of murder (or attempted murder) do reach the courts, the Israeli judiciary do not easily allow consideration of issues of 'family honour' to be pleaded in defence by the accused. In some cases which we studied, the court, having examined all aspects of the crime and having pronounced its judgment, considered it necessary to generally address the question of 'honour killing,' so that its decision could serve as a warning to others and prevent them from taking another person's life claiming justification in upholding the tradition of 'family honour.' Such judgments also make it clear that these murderers should have no claims on the mercy or sympathy of the judges. A useful example is provided by a statement of the Regional Court of Haifa:

As a concluding remark in this judgment, we consider it necessary to state that one should never expect that in the juridical system of Israel we will recognise the issue of family honour as an extenuating circumstance, which could result in mitigating the charge in cases such as the one under consideration here at the moment from an intentional murder to a manslaughter. Such recognition would mean giving an official permission to each and every one to kill another person when 'family honour' is at stake. There is no way such statements can be recognised within the framework of our juridical system, and hence Israeli courts will not accept the claim of the defence that 'family honour' is an acceptable factor which should be taken into consideration when deciding on a judgment if the life of an innocent and unhappy person was taken.⁶

Intentionally causing the death of a person is classified as murder according to article 300(a)(2) of the Israeli Penal Law 1997. The requirements for a conviction of murder include proving 'intent to cause the death of a person.' Under article 301(a), an 'initial intent' to kill is present if there was a decision to kill another person, a preparation for the act, and if there was no provocative behaviour on the part of the victim that could have served as a motive for the murder. With regard to the latter, the prosecution needs to prove lack of provocation in order to show there was 'an initial criminal intent', which shaped the murderer's decision to commit the crime. From studying the cases, which served as a basis for this study we can conclude that the majority of defendants claimed that they did not have 'the initial intent' to kill because immediately preceding the murder, the victim provoked them so much that they lost control of themselves.

Legal tests have been developed to prove the absence or presence of provocation. Two such tests are required in order to reach a final decision – a subjective test, and an objective one. If both tests are satisfied and provocation is proven, the charge will be amended from murder to manslaughter, for which the maximum penalty is twenty years in prison (as compared to life imprisonment for murder).

The subjective test establishes whether or not the provocative behaviour did in fact influence the defendant to such an extent that it caused a loss of self-control on his part and made him commit the murder. This is a personal test that takes into consideration the specific circumstances of the event. It should determine whether the behaviour of the victim immediately preceding the moment of the crime caused the defendant to react in a violent way, thus establishing a cause-and-effect relationship

between the behaviour and the reaction to it. To prove that subjectively there was a provocation, it must be evident that the decision to kill the other person was spontaneous, and taken at a moment of loss of control. In the case of a man charged with killing his sister, the Regional Court of Haifa found that there had been no spontaneous provocation for the following reasons:

He who claims that he had been provoked must be able to prove that at the time when the murder was committed, there was a teasing and provocative behaviour on the part of the victim, which made him completely lose control of himself and react spontaneously. There is nothing in the story of the defendant that would justify the claim of a subjective provocation, which requires that the defendant prove a loss of self-control that would make the killing a spontaneous act, not based on a previous consideration.

In the case with which we are dealing here, the defendant went home and brought the knife, after he heard the deceased woman's words that provoked his anger. The killing of the victim was performed in cold blood and cannot be regarded as a spontaneous uncontrollable reaction.⁷

The objective test establishes whether or not it is possible to predict that a 'person from the specific settlement', were he in the defendant's place, would be likely to lose self-control and commit a murder. It is used to establish the kinds of behaviour acceptable in the given environment. The objective test is only applied once subjective provocation has been proven. So as to avoid unjustified mitigation of the charge from murder to manslaughter, the courts require a positive answer to the question whether a 'rational person' or a 'person from the specific settlement' would

react in the same way in the same circumstances. Here, the courts do not allow provocative behaviour to be classified according to the norms of certain sectors of the society or according to people's sensitivity to the opinion of community leaders, as, for example, in matters of family honour. It has been held that 'the objective test does not grant the option of classifying provocation by different sectors of the population or by sensitivity for the traditions of [different] sectors, such as decreasing honour of women.'⁸

The penalty for murder is a life sentence, which may be mitigated by the court in a limited number of cases (article 300(a)):

1. When a severe mental disturbance limited the ability of the defendant to understand what he was doing or how condemnable his deed was, or to refrain from committing the deed;
2. When the deed exceeded to an insignificant extent the degree of reasonableness required if pleading self-defence, necessity or coercion/duress
3. When the defendant was in a state of extreme psychological distress caused by the deceased's severe and prolonged abuse of the defendant or a member of the defendant's family.

Following the 1995 amendment of the Penal Law, which included the above-cited article, it is possible to reduce the length of the maximum punishment for murder, but only in cases where the ability of the defendant to take decisions was damaged as a result of a severe psychological disorder or because of a mental disability which significantly limited his ability to understand what he was doing, or

how condemnable his deed was, or how it could be possible to refrain from committing the deed. The courts tend to make limited use of this article, and in the judgment referred to above of the Haifa District Court explicitly asserted caution in regard to cases such as the 'honour killing' it was then considering.⁹

Where murder charges are brought in cases of killing in the background of 'family honour', the Israeli courts tend to impose the maximum penalty available in law. In imposing such sentence, the courts have expressed their clear objective of achieving not only punishment but also deterrence of such crimes:

The defendant decided his sister should die, even though she had not broken the law in any way. The defendant committed an act which is most condemnable and for which he deserves no pardon and no mercy. The defendant's use of the concept of an 'offence against family honour' as an excuse lacks any justification. It is the duty of the court to subject the defendant to the most severe punishment which the Penal Law reserves for cases when a human life was taken in an act of intentional murder, of which the present case is an example. Let it be known to every person that the argument of 'an offence against family honour' lacks any justification that could explain an act of violence of any kind whatsoever, especially the taking of a person's life. We regard the deed of the defendant as an abhorrent and detestable act of murder to be punished with all the vigour of the Penal Law, that is – with nothing less than a life sentence. This punishment should serve as a memorable discouraging example for both individuals and collectives. The sanctity of human life is not an empty concept, and whoever takes a

human life, should know that he will be punished with the utmost severity of the Penal Law.¹⁰

For its part, the Supreme Court has expressed its support of the tendency to apply the maximum punishment for violent crimes in the name of preserving family honour, in light of the significant deterrent impact of such cases.¹¹ The Supreme Court has also related its role to non-legal educational and developmental efforts, as illustrated in its ruling in a case where a man was charged with the attempted murder of his sister and sentenced to seven years in prison. In his appeal to the Supreme Court he claimed that his punishment should be reduced as he had acted in accordance with acceptable social norms. The court responded as follows:

[W]e are of the opinion, which we also expressed in this judgment, that the deed which the appellant committed is of the utmost gravity, and the social norm of preserving ‘family honour’ through violent action, which is still acceptable in this sector of society, is a false norm, and all possible steps should be taken to eradicate it. Clearly, this objective is to be achieved not only through penalising, but also, and to a great degree, by taking action in the sphere of education and social development, and the implementation of more advanced ideas.

Together with this, the Court whose function it is to preserve the rule of law in the state would fail in the fulfilment of its duty if it did not contribute to a change of these ideas, and an eradication of this false norm, by inflicting a preventive and exemplary punishment.¹²

In the case files that we reviewed, the courts declined to accept the various arguments put forward by lawyers for the defence, which included that the objective test was different for the Palestinians in Israel because of the pressure put on the defendant by traditions and culture; that the defendant was provoked by the victim's behaviour or lifestyle which caused loss of control; and the testimonies of social, political, and religious leaders explaining the traditions.

The Victim's Voice

What is clear in our review of the case files is a silencing of the victim's voice in court. Not only is the victim not physically present, but also her narrative and her story are not brought before the court. For the most part, the details that emerge about the victim are those given by the defendant, or by witnesses for the defence. While it is of course the case that the two sides in a criminal case are the state and the defendant, it remains the fact that in the records of proceedings and in the judgments, there is nobody to defend the victim's rights. In cases of attempted murder, a victim might be brought to court by the defendant's lawyers to tell the court that her relations with the defendant had improved, and that she had forgiven him and to beg the court for mercy. Thus, when the victim's voice was heard in court, directly or indirectly, it was used for the benefit of the defendant to seek a lighter punishment, either by proving her bad behaviour which had provoked him and 'forced' him to attempt to kill her, or by directly telling the court that he had changed and regretted what he had done to her. The social and family pressures exerted on the victim in order to achieve such interventions are clear from their testimonies. On the other hand, the systematic silencing of the voice of the murder victim, unable to defend or protect herself, is a violation of her rights even beyond her death.

SECTION B: The Palestinian Community: from Taboo to Opposition

In 1990 the first demonstration against ‘honour crimes’ was organised by the Al-Fanar organisation to protest the murder of a young village woman by her father, who claimed that he had to kill her after he realised that she was pregnant outside of marriage. Investigations revealed that the pregnancy was the result of rape by one of the woman’s relatives, a fact known to her father. At trial, the father’s defence team called as a witness the head of the Higher Follow-Up Committee representing the Palestinian minority in Israel. The witness, also a local Mayor, stressed that the father had had no choice, that what he had done was the only way he could continue to live in an honourable manner: ‘these are our traditions, and that is how we act.’

This was indicative of the dominant attitude towards ‘honour crimes’ among the Palestinian community at that time. Al-Fanar and a group of intellectuals and human and women’s rights activists initiated a petition asking for the resignation of this very public figure from his position. The petition attracted a lot of attention and was published as a paid advertisement in the newspapers. Although the called-for resignation did not follow, the effort began a certain momentum and established the visibility of the challenge to ‘crimes of honour’ that continues to this day.

At the beginning of 1993, about seven women and human rights activists established al-Badeel, a coalition to combat honour crimes. Over the years the coalition expanded to include more individuals and organisations, namely Women against Violence, the Arab Association for Human Rights, Kayan (a feminist

organisation), the Emergency shelter- Haifa, Assiwar, the Movement of Democratic Women, the Crisis Centre for Support of Victims of Sexual Assaults–Haifa, the Emergency Line for Victims of Physical Violence, and several individuals including social workers, lawyers, and writers. Eventually, excluding the representatives of the various organisations, more than 25 activists were involved in al-Badeel, pursuing a range of strategies to widen the constituency of those condemning ‘honour crimes’ and working to raise public awareness in the community of their dangerous effect on society as a whole. A petition was circulated for signature and published, along with several articles on the subject; demonstrations and memorials for the murdered women were organised; and open lectures and workshops were held in public halls and in high schools. In addition, advocacy interventions were made to stakeholders, parliamentarians, ministers, police officials and others. Additional attention was drawn to these efforts when those in the community who disapproved of them sought to attack demonstrators. The fact that the petition was published as a paid advertisement forced the press to take note of the issue, and more critiques developed as to how the media dealt with ‘honour crimes.’

In December 1994, al-Badeel held the first ever public meeting and study day on ‘crimes of honour,’ focusing on the various aspects of the problem and seeking to educate the public. Although this event placed the problem of ‘crimes of honour’ firmly on the public agenda of Palestinian society in Israel, at that point no political figure participated or took a clear position towards the issue. Efforts continued with the Higher Follow-Up Committee of Palestinians in Israel. A request by al-Badeel in October 1995 for the Committee to take an official position on ‘crimes of honour’ was ignored. In 1997, al-Badeel succeeded in getting the subject on the Committee’s

agenda but the resulting decision was very vague and the discussion included an intervention by a then leading of the Islamist movement (who was also a local mayor) to the effect that the women's movement should educate women in good behaviour.

However, changes in the positions of the Palestinians' political leadership were beginning to emerge. In 1997 the mayor of Nazareth participated in a memorial event organised by Al-Badeel at the offices of Women against Violence to commemorate the victim of an 'honour crime.' He told those present that '[w]e need to begin a serious discussion on these crimes [...] to bring the largest popular forces to combat them. Such a struggle for serious social change needs the biggest forces from the people.' He called on the Follow up Committee to translate condemnation of 'honour crimes' into 'actual positions in each crime and into a viable plan of action' (*al-Ittihad* and *al-Sinara* 02/02/1997).

Throughout 1997, members of parliament from the leftist Democratic Front for Peace and Equality addressed the issue of honour crimes by demanding clear positions from the religious leadership and assertive actions from the police. One Member of the Knesset, for example, 'demanded that the leadership from all the religions make every effort and work seriously against the problem of femicide against the background of family honour' (*al-Ittihad* 22/05/1997). The Islamist political movement was also obliged to address the issue; in an editorial in their newspaper *Sawt Alhaq Walhuria* (07/02/1997) they condemned 'crimes of honour' but blamed immoral behaviour and women's dress codes, stressing that if religious rules were followed these crimes would disappear.

Fresh impetus was added when in February 1998, the office of the President of Israel, Eizer Weizman, announced that in honour of Israel's fiftieth Independence Day, the President would grant amnesty to a number of prisoners, particularly those convicted in cases of 'honour crimes.' Al-Badeel initiated a petition to the President condemning his intentions and demanding that such plans be cancelled. Many people joined the initiative which was eventually successful in stopping the plan for amnesties. In September of that year, a number of prominent political leaders from the Democratic Front and the General Secretary of the Altajamoua Alwatani Party joined a demonstration organised by al-Badeel in Nazareth. By this time, it was clear that Palestinian society in Israel was witnessing a change in the attitudes of the leading political parties. Different political leaders began to take a more active role in relevant discussions at various parliamentary committees, demanding more active efforts from the police and welfare authorities to protect Palestinian women from 'crimes of honour.' The Islamist movement in the meantime maintained its position of condemning the killings but blaming the behaviour of women.

As for the media, the turning point in Arabic press coverage came in 1995, after the murder of Ibtihaj Hasson, when the media reported that the people of the village gathered around the body clapping and cheering the murderer. This tragic and ugly scene was the impetus behind a wave of articles by intellectuals and human rights activists condemning both this murder and honour crimes in general. Prior to this, the press mostly ignored such crimes, and when it did cover them did so in the inside pages in short 'factual' reports presenting the news of the murder, the identity of the murderer, and the reason provided by the latter for the deed. After 1995, press releases issued by al-Badeel and women's organisations such as Women against

Violence were given more space in the newspapers; these press releases included details on the victim, bringing her otherwise forgotten identity into view.

Criticism of the dehumanising approach of the newspapers gradually produced a different approach. Newspapers began conducting interviews after each crime, presenting the attitudes of politicians and religious leaders, mainly focusing on the issue of adultery and sexual relations outside marriage. This at the same time reinforced the mistaken public perception that every victim of an honour crime was a woman who had committed adultery or led a very open sexual life. At the same time, the media could not ignore the activists from al-Badeel and women's organisations and were obliged to give space also to their voices. By 2000, different versions of each story of an 'honour crime' were being presented along with more details on the victim, for example: 'Hussein used to beat and insult his wife (the victim) since their first year of marriage fourteen years ago; many times she needed medical care after he beat her, and it is clear that he stalked his wife even when she went on the roof to hang out the laundry (*Kull al-'Arab* 18/01/2002).

For its part, the Hebrew media almost ignored 'crimes of honour' as an issue until the late 1990s. This approach can be explained only by assuming that it regarded such incidents as an internal Palestinian issue not related to the general public debate and not connected to femicide in particular or gender-based violence in general. Such coverage as there was tended to be by way of a short descriptive report providing the name of the victim and reporting suspicions of the crime having been committed against the background of 'family honour,' with the murderer's stated justification. One outstanding exception to this pattern was a unique article published in Haaretz in

1990 by a Jewish Israeli columnist, Kobi Nieve; titled ‘Murder permitted, murder prohibited,’ the article considered the murder of Jamila Gaben by her father, the first case around which al-Fanar mobilised. The writer criticised the attitude of the Palestinian community in Israel and its leadership, arguing that ‘the way they would have protested and screamed in the case of murder of Arabs for being Arabs - that’s how they should have protested and screamed in the case of murder of women for being women[...] Those who justify the murder of women in the name of any religion or tradition justify, in effect, the murder of Arabs also in the name of religion and tradition, and the murder of Jews in the name of religion and traditions, and Armenians...’

As noted above, this article was very much an exception. More generally, and in contrast to their coverage of the murders of Jewish Israeli women following domestic violence, the Hebrew media did not carry out any further investigation of the cases they reported, nor did they seek to look at the story from other angles. Similar to radio and television reports, the size and placing of news of such crimes indicated that ‘crimes of honour’ against Palestinian women were assigned lesser importance than the murders of Jewish women in Israel; the latter cases tend to be headline news.

The activities of al-Badeel and other groups had a certain impact on coverage of ‘honour crimes’ in the Hebrew media, noticeable in the late 1990s, including through presenting the internal discussion within the Palestinian community on this issue. The media began reporting on activities organised against ‘crimes of honour,’ and from around 1998 the press began to approach women’s groups such as Women Against Violence when cases occurred, seeking expert opinions, statistics and

explanations. While previously the Hebrew media tended to present the problem as one of tradition, the inclusion of comments by and interviews with Palestinian activists led to the start of including criticism of police conduct and the operation of other governmental agencies in relation to the issue.

SECTION C: Conclusions

This overview documents a long process of progress in the struggle conducted within the Palestinian community in Israel against 'honour crimes.' The efforts started with a small group, but through the years managed to create a public discussion on different levels – among broad sections of the public, among the community's political and religious leadership, among parliamentarians, ministers, the police, judiciary and different state agencies.

If it is clear that the main catalyst was the creation of the coalition Al-Badeel, with a set of high profile and focused activities during the 1990s, it is also clear that the issues faded somewhat from the general public debate after the year 2000. Two main reasons can be identified for this; the first is the political and military context, which has produced an emergency situation, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, since the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada there in September 2000. Events since then included those of October 2000 when twelve Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed by the Israeli police force during demonstrations, the re-invasion by the Israeli armed forces of the Palestinian Authority areas (Palestine) and the growing humanitarian crisis in those territories. Against these events, the national political agenda has taken precedence over the women's social agenda. As has happened in the

history of other conflict areas in the world, Palestinian civil society forces invested their primary efforts in the national issue and struggle in what is a crisis situation. The second reason is also comparable to experiences elsewhere. The experience of working in a coalition (al-Badeel) was new for all those involved, and brought together a range of organisations and activists. The challenges of organising and managing the processes of cooperation, coordination, and facilitation were considerable, and at a certain point it became difficult for al-Badeel to continue to work as a coalition and to maintain the momentum of the work.

At the same time, the achievements of the active struggle of the previous decade are considerable, including the mainstreaming of the issue in the general activities of most civil society institutions and organisations, and influencing in some way the approaches of governmental and state agencies and the ways in which they engage with such crimes. 'Honour crimes' continue to occur, but those committed to their eradication, and indeed to the elimination of all forms of violence against women, now have considerable ground on which to build in designing and mobilising their interventions and strategies of response.

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² The Feast of the Sacrifice, of two of the most important religious festival in the Islamic calendar.

³ Literally, 'disaster' or 'catastrophe.'

⁴ *Al-Ittihad*, *Kull al-'Arab* and *al-Sinara*.

⁵ None were aged below eighteen.

⁶ *State of Israel vs. Husam Kinaan*, 20/02/1996 Criminal Case No. 163/94 (Haifa), per Judges M. Lindshtaus, B. Gilor, and S. Jubran.

⁷ *State of Israel vs. A'amir Hassun* Criminal Case No. 217/95.

⁸ *Azzam vs State of Israel*, Cr.M. 193/86, P.D. 41 (3) 343, 349.

⁹ *State of Israel vs. A'amir Hassun*, Criminal Case No. 217/95,.

¹⁰ *State of Israel vs. Hussam Ben Salih* Criminal Case No.163/94(Haifa).

¹¹ *Muhammad Kango vs. State of Israel*, High Court Precedent, Vol.92 (2), 1992.

¹² Supreme Court Case No. 233/85 Vol. B, 862.