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## For honour's sake<sup>1</sup>

### *On honour and gender in Nasim Karim's Izzat*

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**ABSTRACT** This article discusses the problems that arise in the encounter between an intact honour culture (Pakistani) and a weakened honour culture (Norwegian). In the novel *Izzat* (1996) honour performances are largely connected to the question of gender, and de Figueiredo examines particularly the conflict unfolding in the relationship between father and daughter.

**KEY WORDS** honour culture | conflict | gender | forced marriage

When a family migrates, a whole life is transported across oceans and borders. Whatever they may leave behind, they will always bring with them a set of values and an identity associated to some extent with their culture and origins. Confronted with a new country and a new citizenship, this set of values is not necessarily immediately jettisoned and replaced with another. The attachment to the culture of the old country often remains strong and is part of a person's cultural identity. This feeling of identity is not without its problems. The members of a migrant family often end up adapting to different degrees and at different speeds. Children and adolescents may not feel the same sense of belonging to the old country that adults and old people do and will therefore often identify with their new homeland more quickly and to a greater extent. At the same time, family affiliation and loyalty to parents and grandparents are important. The basis for conflict is particularly great when two very different cultures meet. What challenges do the younger generation encounter when their family's values collide with their own? What if the values in question threaten their freedom and wellbeing? In such cases, especially where loyalty and love are involved, there is a double conflict and a risk of being alienated and ostracised by the cultural communities of both their country of origin and their adopted country.

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1. This article is translated by Richard Burgess.

In this article I will examine the issues that arise when an intact honour culture meets one that has become attenuated, taking as my point of departure Nasim Karim's novel *Izzat. For ærens skyld* [For honour's sake] from 1996. In this novel, conceptions of honour are closely connected to issues of gender and this double conflict unfolds especially in the relationship between a father and a daughter. In looking more closely at this double conflict, I will draw especially on the theories of James Bowman and Unni Wikan. On one hand, the conflict stems from the fact that an intact honour culture is a typically male domain where honour is restricted to men. On the other hand, it is precisely this male honour culture that the main character opposes when her affiliation to an attenuated honour culture like the Norwegian one, leads her to assert other norms and values. What is the outcome of this conflict? Could it be said that the novel holds a concept of honour that also includes women? Does a transformation of the concept of honour take place during the course of the novel? If so, in what way?

The two sources I draw on here, James Bowman and Unni Wikan, represent two rather divergent views of honour. Although their definitions and concepts overlap, their basic attitudes to the consequences of honour are quite different. It is necessary to establish these two attitudes before moving on to an analysis, because their different approaches to honour will also colour the present discussion. Unni Wikan is a Norwegian sociologist who has done much research on Islam, the Middle East and Arab cultures. On the basis of her discussions, which I will be quoting from in the following, an understanding of honour is important if we are to grasp the conflicts that arise when 'æressamfunnet møter velferdssamfunnets forståelse av grunnleggende menneskerettigheter' [the honour culture meets the welfare society's understanding of basic human rights] (as expressed on the back cover of *Om ære* [About Honour] 2008). So far this accords with Bowman's theory. He writes that it is crucial to understand the concept of honour in order to understand the conflicts Islamic cultures have with Western cultures, 'where honor has been disregarded or actively despised for three-quarters of a century' (from the back cover of *Honor*, 2006). But while Wikan is consistently critical to honour culture and its consequences for gender equality, welfare and democracy, Bowman wishes for a revitalised honour culture in the West. Bowman is an American writer employed at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a Washington-based, conservative organisation that gives lectures and publishes texts exploring themes related to society and politics. Their slogan is 'Defending American Ideals' (EPPC, 2017). Bowman relates honour theory to topics like the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Second World War, the 9/11 terror attack and the war in Iraq. When he writes about Western culture, it is primarily American culture he is referring to.

His attitude to women is also different from Wikan's. Bowman associates women with pacifism, which he is highly critical of, and he believes one should be aware of the dangers of women having full participation in the political process (2006, 231). He also argues that modern society should allow for gender-based differentiation. Furthermore, he wants to see a revitalised honour culture where masculine honour incorporates primitive concepts of honour that today exist in subcultures like street gangs (2006, 323). Such attitudes are not shared by Wikan, who, in spite of showing a great appreciation of strong honour cultures, is critical of the patriarchal view of honour we find there. She writes that honour 'historisk sett er koblet med vold og overgrep' [is, historically speaking, linked to violence and abuse] (2008, 15), and there is little sign that she regards this as something requiring revitalisation in the West.

## ABOUT THE NOVEL

*Izzat. For ærens skyld* was published in 1996.<sup>2</sup> Nasim Karim is a writer and lawyer, and, according to the text on the back cover, her intention with the book was not to focus on one individual case, but to describe the difficult reality that many experience. So rather than aiming to tell one woman's story, it tells several, thus throwing light on important social challenges like forced marriage. The book is a fictionalised account of the author's own experiences – Karim had her own forced marriage annulled in 1995 (Wikan 2008, 249).

In the novel we meet Noreen, who has fled from a forced marriage in Pakistan. A retrospective and thus omniscient first-person narrator reveals an adolescence consisting of cultural conflict, eating disorders, bullying and abuse. The narrative is retrospective and told chronologically, with proleptic touches, e.g. 'if I'd known, I would never have gone' (p. 5). Noreen grows up in Norway and the first half of the book is set there. The child welfare services intervene after the father starts beating her, and she ends up at a children's home. When at the age of seventeen she is reunited with her family, she travels to Pakistan with her father. This turns into a nightmare where suicide attempts and a romantic infatuation lead to her brother, and later her father, maltreating her and forcing her to marry. This happens without her friends, relative and acquaintances in Pakistan intervening. She manages to escape to Norway, thus severing her bonds to her family. The novel is a clear criticism of gender roles in a patriarchal Pakistani honour culture. While Noreen and her father represent opposing views regarding honour, the other char-

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2. In my analysis I refer to second edition, published in 2009.

acters – Noreen’s mother, her younger sister Iram and her elder brother Amir – appear rather one-dimensional. Her mother and sister are the weepy and powerless women, while the brother stands as the defender of the traditional honour culture. As such he is a clear antagonist to the norm of the novel.

Karim makes no secret of the fact that she has a clear political and moral message. With its pathos-filled sentences and its in-depth descriptions of Noreen’s emotional life, the rhetoric of the novel can be quite intrusive: ‘Hvordan kan jeg trives med mitt liv, når ensomhetsfølelsen preger hver eneste dag?’ [How can I enjoy my life when every day is full of loneliness?] (p. 68) and ‘De kunne prøve å forstå, og det gjorde de, men de kunne aldri føle smerten’ [They could try to understand, and they did, but they could never feel the pain] (p. 65).

Pathos can have an important role to play in a work written to persuade. Martha Nussbaum writes in *Poetic Justice* that the novel as a genre gives insight into something fundamentally human, even if the main character’s life is quite different from the reader’s:

Novels [...] speak to an implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them, but who is also situated elsewhere and needs to be informed about the concrete situation of the characters (1995, 7).

The novel can be seen as a contribution to ethical literature, i.e. literature that has something to say about right and wrong. Nussbaum states further that ‘[...] novel-reading will not give us the whole story about social justice, but it can be a bridge both to a vision of justice and to the social enactment of that vision’ (1995, 12). An optimal reading of *Izzat* would thus lead to the readers, having gained insight into Noreen’s fate, wishing to improve the situation of women in the same predicament. With such an explicit message, the novel’s language and symbolism has a persuasive function rather than a literary one. Clear indications are given of where the sympathy lies and the reader is in no doubt about what Noreen feels. Sentences like ‘Jeg vil ikke leve som dette!’ [I don’t want to live like this!] (p.122) and ‘Jeg har aldri følt meg så liten og fornedret’ [I’ve never felt so denigrated] (p. 111) recur in the novel. Noreen’s parting challenge underlines this: ‘Det er ett spørsmål jeg vil stille til de familiene som har gjort – eller vil gjøre – noe slikt mot sine døtre, et spørsmål dere vanskelig kan komme utenom: HVA OVERLOT DERE OSS TIL?’ [There’s one question I’d like to ask the families that have done this – or are going to do this – to their daughters, a question you simply can’t evade:

WHAT DID YOU LEAVE FOR US? HUME KIS KE SAHAREH CHORAH THA? (p. 144). The challenge is directed at an imagined reader who has not understood how destructive honour culture can be for the woman. What is perhaps obvious for a Western reader (for example, that a forced marriage is experienced as insulting), is perhaps not so obvious for those Karim is trying to influence with her novel, and clear, pathos-based rhetoric can therefore be appropriate.

It is also worth discussing whether the book is in fact a novel. It depicts actual events, as Karim has openly admitted, and in many ways has more in common with a documentary or an autobiography. Calling it a novel protects the author, since the case is sensitive and personal, but the language, the narrator and the thematic realism are such that the book could just as well be read as a documentary. A documentary book is often a literary narrative about personal experiences. Autobiographies written by young people are often concerned with a particular event, the event that defines the book, with the person's upbringing and past used as a kind of explanatory backdrop for the event. Another example of the genre is Malala Yousafzai's memoir *I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban* (2013), which deals with her experiences in a country where the Taliban were gaining increasing control until she protested, nearly losing her life in the process. Here the defining event is the day she was shot on the school bus in 2012. For Karim, the defining event is her forced marriage and, not least, the fact that she manages to escape and have the marriage annulled in court. She gets to tell her story and can thereby help and inspire others in similar situations. Authors like Karim and Malala have a desire to tell their story and inspire others to fight for freedom of speech and women's rights. Using the genre label 'novel' doesn't make the intention any less obvious in this case. The book can also be read as a contribution to the political debate about the social position of Pakistani/Muslim women and it can provide an important voice in political discussions concerning immigration.

The reception of the novel has for the most part been concerned with the events it depicts; in other words, it has been political rather than literary in focus. The daily newspaper *Aftenposten* writes, for example: 'vi har å gjøre med et meget ungt menneske som ønsker å oppnå forandring. [...] Boken glir rett inn i den norske debatten om gjensidig respekt' [We are dealing with a very young person who wants to change things [...] The book is highly relevant to the current Norwegian debate about mutual respect] (Brekke 1996, 24). The reviewer of another daily, *Dagbladet*, writes that it is 'en av de viktigste bøkene som utgis denne våren. Den burde bli pensum i så vel skoler som hjem i Norge' [one of the most important published this spring. It ought to be required reading in both schools and homes in

Norway] (Eide 1996, 33). In other words, we are to learn from it. *Izzat* went straight to fifth place in daily newspaper VG's book ranking and sold well (Rehman et al. 1996, 48–49). The book led to Karim being awarded a prize for gender equality in Buskerud county in 1996. She writes openly about a subject that has been something of a taboo in Norwegian-Pakistani circles. The book also resulted in a fatwa being issued against her so that she had to go into hiding and live at a secret address. When the novel was published, forced marriage was still relatively new as an issue in Norwegian courts. In 1993 Norway became the first country in the world to outlaw forced marriage (Wikan 2008, 248). Wikan writes about the first court case concerning forced marriage in modern Norwegian history in which a Norwegian girl, 'Sima', was forced to marry in Pakistan but managed to escape to Norway (2008, 248). Through *Izzat*, Karim helped to throw light on forced marriage as a social problem. Unfortunately, according to Wikan, several politicians from the immigrant community denied any knowledge of forced marriage in Pakistan. She also claims that the problem was categorically denied at the highest level until recently (2008, 249). Although Karim's court case took place in the 1990s, and Wikan's book was published in 2008, forced marriage remains a problem that is often not discovered or not dealt with. There are many hidden statistics here. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs reports that there are no reliable figures for how many people in Norway are subjected to forced marriages. In 2014 the Expert Team for the prevention of forced marriage and genital mutilation assisted in 93 cases in which forced marriage was carried out and 70 cases in which it was considered there was a danger of forced marriage (BUFDIR, 2016).

## ABOUT CONCEPTIONS OF HONOUR AND GENDER

The American writer James Bowman defines honour as '[...] the good opinion of the people who matter to us, and who matter because we regard them as a society of equals who have the power to judge our behavior' (2006, 4). This society of equals can be called an honour group. But in an honour group like the one operating in *Izzat*, we find not equality, but hierarchy. The honour group consists primarily of men in the same family or the same caste. The role of the woman in the honour group is to protect or renounce the man's honour. Writer and professor Kvame A. Appiah emphasizes that an honour code doesn't have to apply equally to everyone: 'An honor code requires specific behaviour of people of certain identities: different identity, very often, different demands' (2010, 176). The honour code says something about who has honour, how it can be achieved and how it can be

lost. To understand how the novel relates to honour and gender, we need to define the honour code of the community and the individual. Noreen describes honour like this:

Æresbegrepet, 'izzat' på urdu, betyr enormt for menneskene i mitt miljø. I deres samfunn er du ingenting uten ære. Har du ære får du respekt, og jo mer ære du har, jo større omgangskrets og respekt får du. Uten ære blir du sett på som en fallen person uten moral, og du står uten respekt og venner. Dermed betyr tap av ære også tap av venner, familie og respekt (s. 7).

[The concept of honour, 'izzat' in Urdu, has enormous significance for people in my community. In their society, you are nothing without honour. If you have honour, you have respect, and the more honour you have, the greater your circle of friends and the more respect you have. Without honour you are regarded as a fallen person without morals, and you are left without respect and friends. Losing honour therefore means losing friends, family and respect (p. 7).

We can see from this that honour is not synonymous with respect, but respect can help strengthen honour. Neither is it the same as morality, but someone who has lost honour lacks morals in the eyes of others. It is also worth noticing that she writes 'their society', rather than 'our society'. She is alien to the concept of honour in a culture she otherwise identifies with. Later in the book she describes how girls from Pakistan are victims of honour culture. Here she calls Pakistan 'min del av verden' [my part of the world], which illustrates a sense of belonging. She also includes Iranians, Turks, Moroccans and Indians in the honour group. Although it is attitudes to women specifically in Pakistan the novel is critical of, affiliation to the group depends on gender attitudes rather than nationality: 'Det samme æresbegrepet, izzat, blir en trussel mot dem. Jentene gråter mens foreldrene sier "vi er nødt"' [The same concept of honour co, izzat, is a threat to them. The girls weep while the parents say 'we have no choice'] (s. 9).

Social anthropologist Unni Wikan's theory is the one that best defines the honour culture we encounter in the novel: 'Menn har ære, kvinner har skam [...] I noen samfunn anses kvinner endog å være uten ære. I kraft av sitt kjønn har de ingen selvstendig ære. Kvinner inngår i sine menns ære, de bærer i seg menns ære' [Men have honour, women have shame [...] In some societies women are even seen as being without honour. By virtue of their gender, they have no independent honour. Women are part of their menfolk's honour, they carry their menfolk's honour within them] (2008, 9). To understand the concept 'izzat', it is not enough to

simply translate it. To understand the logic of honour in many non-Western societies, we must, according to Wikan, employ two honour concepts, *namus* and *shirif* (Turkish, Persian and Kurdish): *Namus* is the honour you either have or don't have – it cannot be increased, only be lost or preserved. *Shirif* is the honour you might have more or less of and it is similar to social position, reputation or prestige (Wikan 2008, 12). *Izzat* is the same as *namus*. This can partly explain the father's motivation when he breaks with his own morals to preserve his honour – 'mister du *namus*, mister du alt' [If you lose honour, you lose everything] (2008, 12). But the father's honour is also connected to *shirif* – in Pakistan everything can be bought for money, he tells Noreen, and her father is wealthy. He also fears losing his wealth, since he has experienced poverty. However, he doesn't hesitate in giving Noreen financial support. For example, he tells the bank manager in the town where Noreen is living that 'Dersom Noreen trenger penger, må du gi henne det. Og dersom hun ikke har penger igjen på sin egen konto må du bare gi henne penger fra min. Penger må ikke få være noe problem for henne' [If Noreen should need money, you must give it to her. And if she doesn't have money in her own account, you must just give her money from mine. Money must not be a problem for her] (p. 77). He has honour to his credit in both senses of the word, but fear of dishonour is stronger than fear of a loss of reputation. Wikan argues that dishonour is central to an understanding of this society: 'Samfunn der æren står så sentralt at den overskygger livet [...] kan ikke forstås med mindre vanære legges til grunn som begrep. [...] et begrep om ærens absolutte bortfall: ingen ære' [Societies where honour has such a central position that it overshadows life [...] cannot be understood without giving the concept of dishonour a fundamental position [...] a concept of the absolute loss of honour: no honour] (2008, 12)

*Izzat* – the central honour concept of the novel – signifies a male, patriarchal honour culture that for Noreen exists in other parts of the world than Norway. It doesn't concern her, but 'the others'. However, gradually it dawns on her that her behaviour as a woman is crucial to this honour culture, that her father's honour depends on her own acquiescence to the male collective and the way she interacts with men. Wikan calls this 'sex honour'<sup>3</sup> and argues that this sort of honour is 'selve aksen som livet sentrerer rundt' [the very axis around which life revolves] (2008, 17). James Bowman refers to David Pryce-Jones<sup>4</sup>, who argues that, in what he calls 'pre-Islamic' honour culture, shame and honour define the roles of women and men.

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3. She has borrowed the term from the Danish-Syrian-Palestinian writer and politician Nasr Khader.

4. Pryce-Jones, David. 2002. *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.



Honor for the female consists in modesty and faithfulness, the bearing of children [...]. Immodesty and faithfulness forfeits her honor and shames the men in the family in whose keeping this honor is vested. Men must put the lapse right at all costs, if need be killing the dishonored woman (2006, 27).

For Noreen the consequence of this honour culture is forced marriage. She is aware that forced marriage occurs in her culture, but has no idea that it will have any bearing on her. It is uncertain whether forced marriage has been her father's plan the whole time and whether that was the reason he chose to take her to Pakistan. It is hinted at already in the second chapter when her father angrily exclaims: 'Det er din skyld at vi er her. Hadde du ikke gjort som du gjorde, hadde jeg ikke behøvd å ta deg med til Pakistan' [It's your fault we're here. If you hadn't done what you did, I wouldn't have had to take you to Pakistan] (p. 19). The father's accusation, which seems to come from nowhere, implies that he knew the whole time that the trip to Pakistan would be fateful for Noreen. She also knows that her uncles expect her to marry, but it is when she tries to commit suicide for the third time that her father makes the journey and the process is initiated (p. 100). Her father first pressures her and then finally orders her: 'Du må gifte deg! Det er mitt siste ord' [You must marry. That is my last word] (p. 118). This followed by torture and violence. The wedding is a nightmare: '300 mennesker står og ser på et lik som bringes inn av sin far. Ingen gjør noe for å hjelpe meg, men alle vet at jeg blir tvunget til dette' [300 people stand watching a corpse being brought in by its father. No one does anything to help me, but everyone knows I'm being forced to do this. (p. 118). The description of the wedding is one of the most shocking in the book. Although honour killing doesn't occur in *Izzat*, it is likely that this would have been the consequence if Noreen had not finally acquiesced. Forced marriage is not murder, but the parallels are striking – in one sense her life is ended. There is no sign that there is anything she could have done to avoid the situation. Although she is chaste and avoids contact with men, she is not 'modest' – her behaviour is at odds with the honour code because she speaks her mind and is independent. She reflects over this herself: 'At jeg tenker annerledes enn pakistanske kvinner er tydelig. Jeg oppfører meg annerledes, tenker og sier ting som provoserer mennene her – og jeg må innrømme at jeg av og til gjør det med vilje, og liker det' [It is evident that I think differently to Pakistani women. I behave differently, I think and say things that provoke the men here – and I have to admit that I sometimes do it purposely, and enjoy it] (p. 82). She constantly stretches the boundaries, but first oversteps them when she falls in love with an American. What triggers the violence and rage is that she confides in her brother, Amir. Now

Noreen fully realises the cultural differences at play: ‘Jeg forelsket meg i en gutt jeg hadde vekslet to setninger med og sett på avstand noen ganger. Jeg ville aldri gått lenger enn det av hensyn til min fars ære. Likevel var det utilgivelig, og måtte møtes med en reaksjon’ [I fell in love with a boy I exchanged two words with and seen from a distance a few times. I would never have gone any further than that out of consideration for my father’s honour. Even so, it was unforgivable and had to be punished] (p. 103). Until then she had been used to making her own decisions, whether it was her repeated suicide attempts or the decision to contact the child welfare service.

Wikan argues that ‘vold, terror og æresdrap ikke skyldes islam, men bunner i forstokkede tradisjoner som holder mennesket fanget i en slags kollektiv vilje i enkelte samfunn, et ærens imperativ’ [violence, terror and honour killing are not due to Islam, but stem from hidebound traditions that in certain societies keep the individual trapped in a form of collective will, an imperative of honour] (2008, 19). It is important to emphasise that the honour culture *Izzat* provides insight into is not a religious phenomenon that can be linked to Islam or other religious beliefs. Religion doesn’t play a crucial role in the conflict. Noreen is a Muslim who prays to God right up until the day she is forced to marry and loses her faith. Bowman describes honour as a sort of cultural currency, rather than something religious: ‘Honor is the cultural currency in which the ordinary people of Pakistan, like those in other honor cultures, trade [...] Although religion has been tied up with it since the seventh century, it is not religious in origin’ (2006, 19). The honour code is the result of a strong honour culture. Wikan writes that ‘Æreskulturer har sin opprinnelse i samfunn der staten sto svakt og slekten eller klanen borget for medlemmenes velferd og trygghet’ [Honour cultures have their origin in societies where the state was weak and the family or clan guaranteed the welfare and security of its members] (2008, 266). On this basis she mentions several reasons why this honour culture can flourish when confronted with a modern welfare state: it gives power to men, it maintains control through fear, it legitimises violence and allows the interests of the collective to take priority over freedom of the individual. ‘Kontroll over kvinner er spesielt viktig fordi kvinner føder barn’ [Control of women is particularly important because women give birth to children] (2008, 267). It is no coincidence that Noreen is married to a relation, thus maintaining her father’s legacy within the honour group. Cultural conflict can also help us understand why her brother, who is, after all, well integrated, chooses to identify with such an honour culture rather than rebel against it. As Wikan points out: ‘I en situasjon der mange menn med innvandrerbakgrunn er marginalisert, avmaskulinisert [...] blir æreskulturen en kilde til identitet’ [In a situation where many men from immigrant

backgrounds are marginalised, demasculinised [...], honour culture becomes a source of identity] (2008, 267).

### THE TYRANNY OF THE FACE

According to Wikan, forced marriage is connected to the politics of integration: 'Kontroll med ungdoms ekteskap intensiveres i mange grupperinger i vår tid, og foreldre er under sterkt press [...]. Ekteskap er blitt en migrasjonsstrategi, og tvangsekteskap føyer seg inn i denne formelen' [In many groups, control over young people's marriages has intensified in recent years, and parents are under a great deal of pressure [...] marriage has become a migration strategy, and forced marriages are part of this formula] (2008, 256). A deeper insight into the father's integration process might give greater understanding of the pressure he is under. He has lived in Norway for 20 years and has a good command of Norwegian. According to conversations Noreen overhears, some young people call him a 'pakkis' [Paki]. He also experiences that a colleague at work refuses to cooperate with him – and looks at him with hatred in his eyes (p. 22). Whatever the pressure that arises from being in an integration situation, forced marriage in this case is primarily the result of a fear of dishonour. The father's fear of condemnation by the family is expressed in his question: 'Hvordan skal jeg vise ansiktet mitt for familien min?' [How can I show my face for my family?] (s. 19). His fear is connected to the fact that Noreen, having lived at a children's home, has become more Western in outlook. She doesn't cover her head with a shawl and she admits to saying things that provoke Pakistani men (p. 82).

Her father's betrayal comes as a surprise to Noreen. Throughout her childhood, they have had a close relationship, and she loves him dearly, even towards the end of the novel. Although she is aware of the honour code of her caste and family, she reacts with disbelief when he chooses to follow it. How can it be that a father that until now has showered his daughter with love is suddenly willing to destroy her? For Noreen personally, this is a central question, as well as being an important issue in the discourse concerning honour-based family violence and honour killing. Wikan comments on the duality of honour: 'Ære handler om respekt i egne og andres øyne. Æren har altså både en indre og ytre dimensjon' [Honour is about respect in one's own and others' eyes. Honour has both an inner and an outer dimension] (2008, 13). Noreen's father shows a clear conflict between this inner and outer sense of honour. Although the family's honour is important to him all through the novel, it doesn't get the upper hand until Noreen brings dishonour on him. It seems to cause him pain to batter Noreen and force her to marry, at least as

regards the inner dimension. He repeatedly bursts out in fits of weeping (p. 115, 118, 120, 139) and appears genuinely distraught. When Noreen meets him again after having fled and annulled her marriage, his physical decline is striking: ‘Han virker ti år eldre, og er blitt mye tynnere. Ti år eldre på under et år. Min gud, hva er det som har skjedd med ham?’ [He seems ten years older and is much thinner. Ten years older in less than a year. My God, what’s happened to him?] (p. 138). It also appears that he learns from his mistakes to a certain extent, when he chooses not to let his youngest daughter Iram endure the same fate as Noreen (p. 143). His self-respect, i.e. the inner honour, is jeopardised for example when he uses violence to ‘persuade’ Noreen to marry and thereby strengthen the outer honour. The father is a pious man, he asks God for forgiveness (p.115) and claims that he is acting against his own wishes: ‘Jeg ble tvunget til å gjøre det slik’ [I was forced to do it like that] (s. 112). The father’s inner honour collides in several ways with the outer honour that belongs to the collective and family sphere.

Bowman points out a distinction between honour and ethics:

[...] it is useful to distinguish between honor and ethics. It is sometimes necessary to put loyalty to principle ahead of loyalty to the group, but even the highest-principled whistleblower or informer is likely to find himself regarded as a ‘rat’ and a traitor by the conflicting standards of honor (2006, 4).

Although the father for ethical (as well as personal) reasons doesn’t want to maltreat Noreen and force her to marry, his loyalty to the honour group is stronger than morality. In other words, the outer honour is the stronger. It is almost the object of worship and is associated with the divine in the sentence ‘Pappa ofret meg på ærens alter’ [Dad sacrificed me at honour’s altar] (s. 7). The code functions as a sort of law for him – it is not just about a desire for respect, but also about a deep fear of losing it. In his definition of honour, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer emphasises the central role played by fear: ‘honor, taken objectively, is the opinion that others have of our value, and taken subjectively, our fear of that opinion’ (sitert i Stewart 1994, 14). Social anthropologist Frank H. Stewart refers to Professor Moritz Liepmann who divides honour into “‘objectified honor”, which is a person’s good reputation’ and “‘subjectified honor”, a person’s sense of their own worth’ (1994, 15). Noreen’s father finds himself in a conflict between these.

It can seem as if it is primarily fear that makes Noreen’s father give the honour code of the collective priority over individual morality – fear of being ostracised, of losing status, of losing face in relation to his family. Bowman links the Islamic

concept of honour to the concept of 'losing face', which is similar to dishonour, loss of honour. (Bowman uses the term 'Islamosphere' in reference to the Islamic world, which thus includes Pakistan.) He refers to the Egyptian Mansour Khalid who argues that 'This 'tyranny of the face' leads an Arab to do everything possible not to show his troubles to those close to him, let alone his enemies' (2006, 27).<sup>5</sup> So maintaining honour involves appearing unaffected. This would go a long way towards explaining the father's behaviour in the scene where Noreen is battered; he grabs the stick and beats her, and doesn't look sad until he comes into the room where her wounds are being treated (p. 112). The father weeps at night, allowing his conscience to gnaw at him – but he shows no sign of regret to his family in Pakistan. Here Bowman refers to David Pryce-Jones who writes that 'Lying and cheating in the Arab world is not really a moral matter but a matter of safe-guarding honor and status [...]' (2006, 27).<sup>6</sup> To complain to his family, to ask that things be done another way, to show that his love for Noreen is stronger than his desire for honour – all this would lead to a loss of face. The tyranny of the face holds sway over him.

It is easier to understand his actions if one looks more closely at how his life has developed. He doesn't adapt to his new homeland as easily as his daughter and therefore experiences alienation. He has high status in Pakistan because of caste, money and gender. His caste gives him respect, money gives him opportunities and control, while gender gives automatic status and authority. He loses much of this in Norway. Caste means nothing to Norwegians, his money doesn't represent wealth here. Although his status as father and head of the family gives him authority in the home, this doesn't apply outside it. Representatives of the welfare state, such as teachers, child welfare officers and psychologists have the power to take his daughter away from him, to give her the right to disobey him and thus bring dishonour on his family. In a strict honour culture, losing honour means losing everything, and therefore he stops at nothing to remain this outer honour. It becomes more important than morality and more important than Noreen. Although he experiences regret and grief, it doesn't change his actions. It is also important to emphasise that forced marriage is not the norm in Pakistan either – the father's actions are controversial in both countries. Noreen reflects over this herself:

Innvandrerens ideal er ofte det landet de en gang reiste fra. Det mange ikke tenker på er at de tyve, tredve årene som er gått siden de reiste har det skjedd en

5. Khalid Mansour, 'The Sociocultural Determinants of Arab Diplomacy' i George N. Atiyeh (red.). 1977. *Arab and American Cultures*. Washington: American Enterprise Institute. pp.123–142.

6. Pryce-Jones, David. 2002. *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

del forandringer også i hjemlandet. Folket der tar del i utviklingen, mens de som lever i utlandet kanskje forholder seg til en kultur som er foreldet.

[The ideal for immigrants is often the country they once left. Many of them forget that much has changed in the old country too during the twenty or thirty years since they left. People there have changed with it, while those living abroad perhaps relate to a culture that is obsolete] (p. 62–63).

So the father's concept of honour is not synonymous with Pakistani honour culture – it has been strengthened and made obsolete through his distance from his home country. Even so, we see that the Pakistani members of his family also support his actions. Nobody says anything or tries to help Noreen.

Honour killing and rape are other negative consequences of a strict honour culture, in addition to forced marriage. When a woman's honour is the property of her menfolk, her loss of honour impacts on the menfolk. Bowman reflects over rape and honour killing and argues that such cases (not least the statistics concerning rape in Pakistan) must be seen on the background of cultural honour:

The taint upon the woman's honor remains the same either way. Our individualistic, post-honor sensibility reaches out to the notion of 'consent' in order to explain what otherwise seems incomprehensible. But in honor cultures, a woman's honor belongs to her husband or father, and the dishonor of any sexual contact outside marriage, whether consensual or otherwise, falls upon him exactly alike, since it shows him up before the world as a man incapable of either controlling or protecting her. Dishonor is more like a fatal disease than a moral failing (2006, 18).

Noreen has not been raped. If she had been, it would have been after entering marriage and her family would have regarded it as permissible, and her lack of consent would have had no significance. In fact, both the father and the brother even ask the husband to rape her (p. 124). If she had been raped outside marriage, for example by the American she is interested in, it would be reasonable to suppose that it would have been highly detrimental to her father's honour.

## A DOUBLE CONFLICT

As a multicultural person, Noreen faces a double challenge. She is alienated from both Pakistani and Norwegian culture. This is the background on which the double

conflict of gender and honour plays out. Her lack of a cultural foothold gives her a feeling of exclusion and she becomes desperate to fit in. So she does what is required of a woman in Western culture – she puts on a pink dress (p. 20) and she goes on a diet. The notion that a beautiful appearance will lead to greater acceptance in the group can be seen as a pretty universal challenge for women. The pressure to have a perfect body leads to her developing anorexia, triggered by a comment from Turid, a girl whose approbation she yearns for: ‘Noreen, du hadde vært mye penere hvis du hadde vært litt tynnere’ [Noreen, you would be much prettier if you were thinner] (p. 38). What starts as a way of gaining acceptance, ends up giving her a feeling of control: ‘Anorexiaen ga meg også et bevis for at jeg var sterk – jeg kunne hvis jeg ville’ [My anorexia proved to me that I was strong – I could if I wanted to] (p. 50). The need for strength and control over her own body can probably be linked to the inner conflict that arises from her being a girl with a modern, Western conception of honour in an alien, patriarchal honour culture. In the family it is her father’s conception of honour that prevails. Puberty leads to an escalation of the conflict. Fearing that Noreen will become like other Western girls, her father starts maltreating her and calling her names like ‘whore’ (p. 52). However, her father’s honour means a lot to her, even after she contacts the child welfare services. She abstains from alcohol and pretends to her uncles that she is still living at home. She rejects boys, fearing for rumours: ‘Og et slikt rykte ville, uansett hva sannheten var, skade pappas ære. Det kan jeg ikke ta sjansen på’ [And whatever the truth of it, a rumour like that would damage Dad’s honour. I can’t risk that.] (p. 81). She gives her father’s honour priority over her own will, thus participating his honour group. This participation stems from love:

Jeg er veldig stolt av pappa, og tenker ‘min pappa’. Han er pappaen min, og jeg er hans lille pike. Vi har alltid vært spesielt knyttet til hverandre. [...] Ingenting skal få komme mellom oss igjen, absolutt ingen skal få lov til å ødelegge det forholdet vi har tenkt å bygge opp. Ingen!

[I’m very proud of Dad, and I think ‘my Dad’. He’s my Dad and I’m his little girl. We’ve always been very close [...] Nothing must be allowed to come between us, and nobody must be allowed to spoil the relationship we are going to build. Nobody!] (p. 11–12)

This love also involves fear – the fear that it will be lost. By participating in her father’s honour group, she can keep his love. ‘Ære betyr mye for pappa, og gjør jeg noe som kan skade pappas ære vil jeg miste ham for alltid. Det kan jeg ikke

gjøre. Jeg er altfor glad i ham til det, så alt jeg kan gjøre er å innrette mitt liv på hans premisser' [Honour means a lot for Dad, and if I do something that damages Dad's honour, I might lose him forever. I can't do that. I'm too fond of him for that, so all I can do is to accommodate my life to his terms] (p. 13).

Bowman argues that even if one cannot accept the premise that a woman's honour is the property of her husband or father, one can understand how Western popular culture (which he calls a 'post-honor society') represents a threat to a traditional honour culture (2006, 25). A woman's honour is, according to Bowman, traditionally connected to her virtue: 'the basic honor of the savage – bravery for men, chastity for women – is still recognizable [...]' (2006, 5). Noreen is 'en jente med tanker om likestilling i et pakistansk hjem' [a girl with ideas of gender equality in a Pakistani home] (p. 5). When on a school trip she is spied on in the shower by two boys, she reacts with desperation. Her reaction is not connected to gender or nationality – it is a violation of her private life. It doesn't result in a feeling of shame or dishonour – she feels hurt. It would appear that her virtue is not associated with an inner feeling of honour, but rather belongs in the patriarchal idea of honour.

Noreen finds herself in a conflict between several honour codes: The first is the code of the Pakistani man, which I have already described. The second is the honour code of the Norwegian man, which is not defined in the novel. It functions as a contrast to the Pakistani code, when for example the Norwegian ambassador in Pakistan sacrifices his sleep and his Whitsun holiday to help her when everyone else has betrayed her (p. 130). The third honour code is that of the Pakistani woman, whose honour belongs to men. In other words, it is not her own, and thus not really female. Virtue and self-sacrifice brings honour, and the status and reputation of the husband or father is of great importance. When Noreen first arrives in Pakistan, she thinks the women look up to her because she is both Western and Pakistani and can move between male and female domains. People talk about her, saying 'Hun er født og oppvokst i Norge, men likevel kjenner hun våre skikker. [...] Hun er så pen, snill, flink og klok, hun har en rik far som elsker henne, og hun tar utdanning' [She's born and brought up in Norway, but still knows our customs [...]. She's so pretty, kind, clever and wise, she has a wealthy who loves her, and she is getting an education] (p. 81). This admiration is probably just an illusion. The esteem she receives is ultimately just connected to her father's honour, and it disappears as soon she breaks with their customs and ends up in conflict with her family. This is evident during the wedding where everyone behaves as if they are witnessing a happy event, in spite of the fact that Noreen is in tears during the whole ceremony (p. 118). Noreen's independence and Western affiliation no



longer has any significance – they don't respect Noreen as a person, they admire the wealthy, successful and compliant bride Noreen. Ultimately it is to a large extent the code of the Norwegian woman she relates to, a code that is not necessarily connected to honour. Is it possible to use the concept of an honour code at all in a attenuated honour society, especially one where there is more or less gender equality? According to Wikan, honour is a gendered concept: 'Grunnet sin langt mer fremtredende rolle i det offentlige liv, har menn langt fler muligheter til å høste ære. [...] Kvinner inngår i sine menns ære' [Because of their much more prominent role in public life, men have many more opportunities to gain honour [...] Women are part of their menfolk's honour] (2008, 9). In a society where women have gained a prominent role in public life, a remodelling of the concept of honour is perhaps required.

What is apparent is a universal and unchanging aspect of the concept of honour, namely the need for acceptance. It is a purely human need. Perhaps honour can be linked to a set of values where acceptance, respect and freedom can be said to be included. This set of values is not really linked to gender. In Noreen's eyes this honour is about fitting in, about being good at school. Having control over her life, which she achieves by dieting and doing well at school, gives her a sense of coping. It is a complicated conflict because the honour codes contradict each other in many areas. For a Norwegian woman, honour is perhaps not really worth taking into consideration, since the desire for independence, for example, is more important. But the idea of complete freedom for a woman is at odds with the father's concept of honour. For Noreen, as long as she takes her family into consideration the different sets of values are incompatible.

Wikan writes that '[æ]ren har en ytre dimensjon som dominerer over den indre. Samfunnet – æresgruppen er et bedre begrep – betinger hva du får av ære' [honour has an outer dimension that dominates the inner one. The community – the honour group is a better term – determines how much honour you gain] (Wikan 2008, 13). In liberal, Western societies, the freedom of the individual has a central position and the inner dimension will in many cases be the stronger. Where the individual is strong, the power of the community will often be weakened. Bowman points out that, in an honour group, subordinating oneself and sacrificing one's needs for the group will be seen as honourable: '[...] disloyalty and selfishness will be correspondingly dishonorable' (2006, 4). In other words, the inner dimension doesn't have much leeway in a strong honour culture. Noreen's conflict between an inner and an outer dimension becomes insoluble. As long as it is the honour group that determines the honour she is granted, she will be left without individual honour – which in turn is incompatible with Western values.

Wikan emphasises that the need for esteem is universal: ‘Vi er alle avhengig av andres vurdering for vårt syn på oss selv – vår selvfølelse og selvrespekt. Men i vestlige liberale samfunn står individet friere til å velge hvem hun eller han vil forholde seg til [...]’ [We all depend on the appraisal of others for our view of ourselves – our self-esteem and self-respect. But in liberal, Western societies the individual has more freedom to choose whom she or he wants to relate to [...]] (2008, 13). Noreen chooses to relate to her father because of her love for him and also chooses to accept his idea of honour, right up until it goes too far and she realises that she must break with him if she is to live as a free individual. Noreen wins this struggle by managing to flee and start a new life. But there is no honour in her victory. She reflects over this when she meets him again: ‘Du tenkte hele tiden på din izzat – hvor mye ære har du nå?’ [You were always thinking about your izzat – how much honour do you have now?] (2008, 139). She associates the concept of honour with her father and the family in Pakistan, and it now has a destructive rather than a positive function in Noreen’s life. The values she gives priority to are freedom, recognition and respect. Although she is concerned with a sort of honour – the sort that involves fitting into a chosen group (e.g. her class at school) – I cannot see that she has any clear concept of honour. She is hurt by racism and mobbing, but when she does anything for the sake of honour, it is never her own sense of honour. Due to her negative experiences with the patriarchal honour culture, Noreen’s concept of honour will be a form of ‘anti-honour’, i.e. an opposition to honour itself.

### A FEMALE CONCEPT OF HONOUR?

Within the patriarchal honour culture we meet in *Izzat*, there is little room for a female concept of honour. The community of women that is established there can seem successful, provided we keep menfolk out of the picture and focus on the Pakistani women that have accepted the conditions of the honour culture and their code of honour towards each other. Two representatives of these women are Sadia, Noreen’s Pakistani girlfriend, and Emal, who is married to her brother Amir. Both appear contented. However, this honour group can hardly be called female, existing as it does on men’s terms. Noreen tries to understand Emal, who didn’t lift a finger to help her, but finds it a step too far: ‘Hensynet til pappas ære var viktigere enn hensynet til mine følelser eller hennes egne meninger’ [It was more important for her to consider Dad’s honour than my feelings or her own opinions] (p. 133). Sadia is a rather different case here, expressing a desire for rebellion without finding the courage to act on it: ‘Gjennom andre venner får jeg høre at Sadia gråter

fordi hun ikke kan møte meg. Hun fantaserer om at jeg vil dø, men som kvinne i Pakistan kan hun ikke gjøre noe for å hjelpe meg. Hun kan ikke slåss mot de mektige mennene' [I learn through other friends that Sadia cries because she can't meet me. She fantasises that I will die and that, as a Pakistani woman, she won't be able to do anything to help. She can't fight against all those powerful men.] (p. 113). Noreen's personal honour concept has been formed through growing up in Norway and this makes her different from the Pakistani women. In Norway, liberal values and the notion of freedom have a strong position. The individual has more freedom to choose community affiliation and can thus adapt more easily to a community if its honour code matches one's own. Family honour is also a factor in Western society, but the power of the family has been weakened. The central position of the individual means that self-realisation and finding one's own path is regarded as honourable, rather than sacrificing values for a (male) authority. Bowman argues that Western culture poses a threat to strict honour cultures:

We do not have to approve of either honor killings or of strict sexual segregation or of the assumptions of ownership involved in the attribution of a wife's or a daughter's honor to her husband or father in order to understand the very real threat posed by Western popular culture – which owes its existence to the freedoms unique to our 'post-honor society' – to the survival of any society bound together by the canons of honor (2006, 25).

Growing up in Norway, Noreen has learned to regard education and independence as honourable, both for men and women. In Noreen's family, that honour is associated with the menfolk – if they have money and a good education it gives the woman status, while neither she nor the menfolk gain any honour from her standing on her own two feet. Thus the attenuated Norwegian honour culture represents a threat to her father's honour, because her independent choices don't match his notion of what is right.

Can we speak of a woman's honour in the context of the collective Western concept of honour? In a society where there is virtually gender equality, does a woman participate in a traditional idea of honour (which is basically patriarchal) or does she have her own? If so, her honour must be independent of the man's and thus no longer gendered. As I mentioned to begin with, James Bowman connects women's honour and modern feminism to pacifism and argues that those that worry about the consequences of pacifist foreign policy should see the dangers, and not just the advantages, of women achieving full participation in the political process (2006, 321). He also argues that there may be a place for gender differentiation in a mod-

ern society and that women can find pride in traditional roles as wife and mother. His depiction of Western society, which he calls ‘soft’ and ‘feminized’ (2006, 323) represents a clear criticism of feminism expressed in a desire for a revitalised honour culture where masculine honour incorporates primitive concepts of honour that today exist in subcultures like street gangs (2006, 323). It seems unlikely that there is actually room for feminine honour in Bowman’s ideal society – the role of wife and mother can, of course, be gratifying, but it is still dependent on the masculine. His theory substantiates the point that honour belongs to the man as long power does. According to Wikan, honour is about power and pain. ‘Makt, fordi det er en elite eller de innflytelsesrike som setter standardene for hva som skal gjelde. Smerte, fordi æren har sin pris. [...] Andre kan måtte bære byrden av den enes kamp for, eller streben etter, ære’ [Power, because it is an elite or those with influence who set the agenda. Pain, because honour comes at a cost [...] Others may have to bear the burden of one person’s struggle for or pursuit of power] (2008, 9). The issue of honour and gender is thus inextricably linked to the issue of power. The question of what impact women’s power has, is a controversial one. Is pacifism feminine? Isn’t it possible for a woman, be she head of state or ordinary citizen, to have Bowman’s basic need for ‘reflexive honour’? It is unlikely that only men have the need to protect their honour, or the honour of their country or family.

Since the concept of honour historically has been associated with men, there is a need for a reformulation. Indeed it is worth asking whether there is room for the concept in our Western society at all. For Noreen, however, it is real enough, since the concept has such a strong position in the culture she comes from. *Izzat* resembles a political pamphlet – it demonstrates how a skewed distribution of power in an honour culture that favours men has fatal consequences for the weaker party. It is an incitement to political struggle, to social change, and it ends by addressing men themselves in a final appeal:

Derfor må dere foreldre tenke dere om. Vil dere ødelegge deres døtre? Hva betyr mest – ære eller liv? Avgjør hva som er rett! Ikke vær med på å skape mer urettferdighet enn den som allerede finnes. Det er ikke verdt det! [...] Ikke la det bli en tapssak! [...] HVA OVERLOT DERE OSS TIL?

[So you parents must think again. Do you want to destroy your daughters? What is most important, honour or life? Decide what is right! Don’t help to create more injustice than there is already. It’s not worth it! [...] Don’t let it become a losing project! [...] WHAT DID YOU LEAVE FOR US?] (p. 144).

Rather than suggesting an alternative feminine concept of honour, the novel shows how honour can be a threat to women and a challenge to men, a challenge to change their traditional, patriarchal honour culture.

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