

Framed Lives and Screened Deaths: Honour Crimes in World Cinema and Television



Edited Volume

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Overview

Over the past 100 years, so called 'honour crimes' (e.g. killings, acid attacks, forced and disguised suicides) have increasingly captured the attention of international cinema and media. These crimes are committed by a close male family member against women who are rape victims, are suspected or accused of having had premarital sex, or believed to have committed adultery, and are justified as a means of restoring the family honour purportedly ruined by the woman's actions.

An Amnesty International statement explains:

The mere perception that a woman has contravened the code of sexual behavior damages honour. The regime of honour is unforgiving: women on whom suspicion has fallen are not given an opportunity to defend themselves, and family members have no socially acceptable alternative but to remove the stain on their honour by attacking the woman.

(Amnesty International: Broken bodies, shattered minds - Torture and ill-treatment of women, Report, 6 March 2001)

Honour-based violence resides within the framework of patrilinear family structures, communities and societies. The justification for the perpetration of violence is the protection of a social construction of 'honour' as a value system, norm, or tradition. The term covers a spectrum of behaviours involving power, control, domination, and intimidation.

Every year, in countries across the Arab world, Turkey, Iran, some South and Central Asian countries, Latin America, East Africa and several European nations, thousands of women who reject tribal traditions, refuse forced marriages, marry according to their will or live independently, are murdered by their family members. Women who have brought 'shame' to the family's 'honour' are sentenced to death by family courts. Under special laws, the killers are given light sentences, sometimes with little or no jail time at all. The perpetrators often defend their act of murder by referencing their traditional practices and beliefs.

The injustice inherent in this prevalent, rarely denounced and leniently punished practice has surfaced in discussion about human rights, alerting filmmakers worldwide to this pressing issue. These directors actively denounce honour crimes, raising public awareness of both the victims and perpetrators explore the stories of communities marked by gender inequality and the patriarchal notion of honour as it permeates Western nations.

Honour killings are a persistent phenomenon in integrated democracies, where the worldviews of multiple generations collide. When families migrate to new countries, they bring with them their traditional honour codes and forms of punishment for women who are deemed to have tarnished their family's reputation. These practices inevitably cause intercultural and intergenerational clashes when young women, born and/or raised in the multi-religious and multicultural host country, aspire to education and career independence beyond the family, seek the freedom to socialize with other groups, and choose their own partner.

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The range of documentaries, feature and short films and TV dramas that draw on honour crimes has expanded in the past 25 years as cases are reported more regularly around the world. Some notable examples include the feature *When We Leave* (Aladag 2010), the documentary *Two Sides of the Moon* (Gould 2010) and the docufilm *A Regular Woman* (Horrnann 2019) all on the case of Hatun Aynur Sürücü (Turkey 1982 – Berlin 2005); the documentary *Banaz A Love Story* (Khan 2012) and the TV miniseries *Honour* (Laxton 2020) both on the case of Banaz Mahmod (Iraqi Kurdistan 1985 – London 2006); the short documentary *Saving Faces* (Junge and Obaid-Chinoy 2011) and the documentary *A Girl in the River* (Obaid-Chinoy 2015), both Oscar recipients; and more recently the documentary *@italiangirl-La storia di Saman Abbas* (Veronese and Bedini 2024) on the case of Saman Abbas (Pakistan 2003 – Novellara [Reggio Emilia] 2021). The filmmakers of these works clearly felt a responsibility to retell the compelling stories of the struggle for social and cultural integration in Western communities, while maintaining a respectful attitude towards the victims and avoiding the use of graphic images or dramatizing the events. Their films were expressions of human rights activism, giving voice to the marginalized as they chronicle the tragedy of the murdered women and their families. Both films and television series also problematized the complex family ties and emotions involved.

It is also crucial to address the fact that perpetrators of the killings are themselves victims of social beliefs and cultural traditions as their families put the burden and pressure of murder onto them.

"Honour killing is a tragedy in which fathers and brothers kill their most beloved, their daughters and sisters [...] Here, affection and brutality coexist in conflict and unity" (Shahrazad Mojab 2002 cited in Diane King 2008:320). Therefore, "Honour killings cause a double tragedy for families. The girls lie in the cemetery while the boys or men are thrown into prison" (Ayşe Önal 2008:255), as poignantly portrayed in the feature films *Land Gold Women* (Hari 2009) set in the United Kingdom, and *Cold Sigh* (Sedigh 2023) set in Iran. On the other hand, if a man chooses not to kill, he is belittled and humiliated by his community, as dramatically represented in the documentary *Maria's Grotto* (Khouri 2007) set in the West Bank.

This edited volume seeks to produce original, cutting-edge scholarship on the vast filmography (covering about 100 years with the first film in 1927 set in China, *Mr. Wu* by William Nigh, and the second in 1928 set in Ireland: *Hangman's House* by John Ford) that address the global practice of honour crimes. Directors from Asia, Australasia, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and North and South America bring distinctive cultural perspectives to the expanding spectrum of audiovisual representations through diverse narrative styles.

However, the fast-growing production of films on the topic also raises some troubling considerations. In some productions, the representations of honour crimes, whether based on real cases or fictionalized events, appear to have evolved into a new genre, comprising captivating dramas, crime and detective stories, thrillers and a sort of new noir. These depictions exploit the phenomenon and its actors, creating new villains and heroes, victims and saviours, turning honour crimes into a spectacle for world audiences. The horror of these tragedies has become the source for dark home entertainment for insatiable or desensitized crime story viewers.

Alongside highlighting the works of individual filmmakers who expose honour crimes, this

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volume seeks to promote a transnational and transcultural discussion of this phenomenon. Some preliminary works have paved the way for a multi-disciplinary dialogue concerning audiovisual representations of honour crimes (Laviosa 2010, 2012, 2015; Toumarkine 2011; Berghahn 2013; Böcking 2014; Pratt 2014). The book aims to gather scholarly work stemming from theoretical frameworks in anthropology, sociology, criminology, psychology, and law, while producing new research across disciplines such as the humanities, gender studies, film and media studies, and cultural studies. The objectives are to contextualize honour crimes; understand the historical and cultural reasons motivating this phenomenon; examine the various culturally specific ways these crimes are performed; and explore and discuss how they are featured in films, documentaries, and television series.

The underlying thesis of this edited volume will stress how cinema and television serve as sites of resistance against the cultural forces that constrain female sexuality and imagine it as a battleground for family honour, while also probing how some contemporary audiovisual productions may be said to exploit and spectacularize this tragic phenomenon.

Call for Contributions

We invite scholars, researchers, and practitioners to contribute original chapters that critically explore the intersection of multiple disciplines. Submissions should offer fresh theoretical insights or empirically grounded analyses that engage with how Honour Crimes are represented in international cinema and television, particularly in the contexts of family and community interactions. Contributions may include critical essays, case studies, interviews, or data-driven research. We particularly welcome work that addresses the critical role played by media in light of resurgence of new cases and their emotional, ethical, and relational implications. While the volume takes a global perspective, we strongly encourage submissions that reflect diverse cultural, regional, and contextual experiences.

Submission Process

Kindly submit an abstract of 300 words (maximum 3 films), along with a brief biography of no more than 150 words, highlighting your background, expertise, and experience. Please ensure that your abstract includes a concise introduction, objectives, methodology, and contributions to both academic knowledge and practical application.

Deadlines

- Abstract Submission Deadline: **2 July 2025**
- Notification of Acceptance: **30 July 2025**
- Deadline for submission of first draft: **30 October 2025**
- Full Chapter Submission Deadline: **15 December 2025**

Chapter length should be 8,000 words, inclusive of references. All submissions must adhere to academic standards of originality, rigor, and citation.

Contact information

Please send your submissions and any inquiries to Flavia Laviosa at flaviosa@wellesley.edu

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Flavia Laviosa is Senior Lecturer in the Department of French, Francophone and Italian Studies at Wellesley College. Her research interests are in Italian women filmmakers and representations of violence against women in world cinema. She is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies* and the book series *Trajectories*. She has also guest-edited the Special Issue of *Studies in European Cinema*, 'Cinematic Journeys of Italian Women Directors' (8:2, 2011), and edited *Visions of Struggle in Women's Filmmaking in the Mediterranean* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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