

# The Semiotics of Honor Killing & Ritual Murder

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Every ritual murder is a symbolic act. Murder in the form of terrorism, matricide, sororicide, filicide and particular acts of suicide are all obligatory rituals in the context of an Islamist code of conduct. This code, highly symbolic by nature, prescribes violent ritual practices sanctioned by cultural traditions and taboos. Explicit acts of mutilation inclusive of burning, stoning, disfigurement, dismemberment, beheadings, gouging out eyes, cutting out tongues, cutting off noses, slicing off ears and other atrocities are symbolic expressions specific to the perceived offense. Part one of this article introduces the concept of the Islamist symbolic code; a combination of tribal honor code, Sharia law and Islamic rites of purity that inculcate a shame based ideology triggered by sacred and profane symbols. Part two provides a symbolic analysis of "honor killings," the ritual murder and mutilation of primarily women, most often by family members for allegedly violating cultural traditions. Part three applies symbolic analysis to the ritual murder of enemies exemplified by a detailed analysis of the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks that involved ritualized torture. In the final section of this article honor killing, ritual murder and mutilation are characterized as acts of *iconoclasm*; the breaking and destruction of sacred objects and icons of power. It will be demonstrated that the primary motivation of Islamist atrocity is an irrepressible impulse to alleviate shame and a sacred duty to restore honor, serve vengeance, preserve purity, maintain tradition, and save face.

## **1. The Islamist Symbolic Code**

Symbolic codes represent a way of life, a common identity and worldview whose meaning is derived and expressed through shared symbols, myths, rituals and a complex of significant things and actions of a people within a historically given and changing world. Allegiance to symbolic codes produce a community of true believers and relate these believers to matters of life and death, to distinctions between good and evil, to social virtues, community relations and to past and present. The Islamist Symbolic code is a syncretic tradition that is principally a tribal honor code that evolved into Sharia Law while retaining the primal concepts of blood relations, honor and vengeance.

Tribalism is the foundation of the code, it establishes social and physical boundaries and

most significantly provides a shared group identity. Tribal societies are characterized by blood relations, common ancestry, unwavering loyalty, solidarity, conformity and most significantly an us versus them philosophy. "Tribal society is a closed order. Those within the tribe are deemed to be relations by blood, a family, by virtue of which they are to be protected and secured; those outside are strangers, and therefore suspected to be enemies." (1) Freedom of choice and individuality are discouraged and every intimate aspect of life is determined by the tribal code; who you will marry, where you will live, your religion, education, what you will eat and even the clothes that you wear. These and every other custom, ritual, tradition and taboo are dictated by the tribes' symbolic code. Although Islamists reside in numerous countries, use modern weapons, and live in a global technological world, they are fundamentally tribal. Islamists live by a code of honor and are willing to die and kill to preserve their way of life. They occupy a territory, defend sacred land and are guided by the law of the jungle in which each person unconditionally supports the tribe. If one person is insulted, the entire tribe is injured; if one person is esteemed the entire family is respected; humiliation and honor are felt by all. Tribalism is in direct opposition to a Western rational society that values individualism and freedom of choice.

Purity symbolizes the morality of the code; it functions to instill and enforce tribal traditions and taboos and is characterized by faith, righteousness, honor and cleanliness. Rites of purity are found in the symbolic codes of all known cultures and entail an idea, in one form or another, that the inner essence of man can be either pure or defiled. (2) Rites of purity also encompass sacred spaces and land which can be defiled and designated as unclean. The heart of the Islamist symbolic code is the strict observance of purification rites that entail everything from dietary laws to sexual prohibitions. Impurity represents a corruption of the soul and a desecration of the land through outside forces. Islamists aspire to be in a state of purity, good moral standing. This is achieved by following traditions and obligatory rituals such as daily ablutions (ritual washing), prayer, avoiding those things and people that are designated as impure (*najis*) and faithful adherence to all aspects of the code. Most significantly, rites of purity function as ritualization, a form of repetitive symbolic conditioning. This process is similar to cult indoctrination techniques that use words, images, symbols, and rituals to embed ideals that resonate throughout life. Ritualization is accomplished through multiple daily ritual washing, strict prohibitions on diet, designating natural bodily functions as intrinsically impure, and the calculated use of images, language, and rituals that demarcate specific things as unclean. The result of this process is that the human body is experienced as a source of shame, full of impurities that must be covered, concealed, and continuously purified. In psychological terms rites of purity serve to instill a visceral shaming code to thoroughly inculcate tradition and taboos, prevent any form of cultural assimilation, and to prompt warfare when territory (sacred land) is being threatened. This is achieved by uncompromisingly indicating specific behaviors as impure, designating others as filthy unbelievers who contaminate the purity of true believers and sacred spaces.

For Islamist true believers breaking tradition has serious consequences; the individual is designated as impure both physically and spiritually and the family and/or community loses honor. Ritual uncleanness is an impurity of the soul as much as of the body for this reason it cannot be washed away with water and soap. The ritually unclean person must be cleansed through strong rites.(3) Honor killing and ritual murder are essentially purification rites that remove specifically defined uncleanness. The nature of the accusation always entails a violation of purity which requires murder or mutilation to restore honor. The violence is ritualized and the method of operation entails a purifying agent such as water, fire, earth, or sacrificial blood to cleanse the stain of impurity. One cannot underestimate the power of impurity, it equates to the impact of evil. The accused are not only designated as impure but more significantly they symbolize evil in the form of contagious pollution that spreads through sin and corruption. Rites of purity are intertwined in fears of disease, expulsion, and eternal punishment, connecting taboo to terror. Purification rites are a form of symbolic conditioning that evolves into the natural instincts of true believers, a method of social control that prevents assimilation to other cultures, a system of demarcating territory as sacred land and the underlying mechanism of personal and cultural violence.

Honor symbolizes the virtue of the code; it functions to determine status, respect, and reputation for the individual, family and community and regulates every aspect of individual and group conduct. For Islamists honor is everything. Humiliation, shame and dishonor are to be avoided at all costs. "Honor is what makes life worthwhile: shame is a living death, not to be endured, requiring that it be avenged."(4) The Western concept of honor: integrity, sincerity, justice, dignity, and honesty does not equate to the Islamist concept. For Westerners peace means freedom; for Islamists peace means honor. The Arabic word for male honor is *sharaf* and for face is *wajh*. "The Western terms, "saving face," and "loss of face," describe concepts of honor and prestige that originated in the Eastern world."(5) Islamists' concept of honor and face is specific to the Arab world and interestingly employs visual symbolism to describe these significant concepts. "The Arab either 'whitens' the face (saves face), or 'blackens' the face (loses face). Face is the outward appearance of honor, the 'front' of honor which a man will strive to preserve even if, in actuality, he has committed a dishonorable act. In the Arab world 'honor' and 'face' are so closely related that the words are almost interchangeable. This "face," or "honor," is such an integral part of the Arab mind that a person is considered perfectly justified in resorting to deceit and falseness in order to 'whiten,' or save, their own, someone else's or the entire Arab world's face. The Arab mind is in perpetual motion-working against 'blackening' the face (losing face), and thus sculpts its words accordingly."(6) Honor is what defines Islamists as men and is achieved by fulfilling traditional masculine virtues, from being a warrior to fathering children, sons above all.(7) Honor for men is signified by characteristics of courage, bravery, heroism, power, virility, and strength. Any sign of weakness in word or action relinquishes honor. Honor for women consists of modesty, faithfulness and bearing children. Immodesty or unfaithfulness forfeits a woman's honor and shames the men in the family in whose keeping this honor is vested.(8) Mujahideen, soldiers of god, achieve honor through

warrior initiations, endurance rituals and ruthlessness in battle. Martyrdom in suicide attacks is a particularly high honor. The Western presence in the Persian Gulf, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the very existence of Israel are viewed as a shameful occupation of Islamist territory, a loss of face and a defilement of sacred land. This is an ongoing unbearable humiliation, a dishonor that must be avenged. It is a moral imperative for Islamist Jihadists to rid sacred land of infidel unbelievers and restore their honor through vengeance. Similarly, women who have allegedly dishonored their family must be killed to preserve the family honor.

Vengeance symbolizes the justice of the code, it functions to reinstate and protect honor, purity, and territory. Most significantly vengeance justifies violence and regulates social order. Vengeance is characterized by acts of retribution, bloodshed, and sacrifice. When land has been defiled through occupation and people of the tribe have been killed Jihadi warriors must avenge their death. This is the origin of blood vengeance, also referred to as blood revenge, and blood feud. Blood vengeance is the obligation to kill in retribution for the death of a member of one's family or tribe. "In tribal society, violence is a mechanism of social control... Should life be lost, the tribe is diminished and must exact retribution. The blood feud begins. The feud is not simply primitive barbarism but also a mediating process by which groups constrain each other to constrain their own members, by wreaking vengeance indiscriminately, anonymously, on any members of the rival group." (9) For this reason Islamists do not distinguish civilians from enemy targets or individuals from their relatives, they are all designated as members of the rival group. Islamists maintain the pre-Islamic tribal tradition of blood feuds. According to the honor code acts of violence inclusive of murder in the form of killing enemies, martyrdom in the form of suicide attacks, and honor killing in the form of killing family members are not only justified but required because the only way honor can be re-established is through bloodshed. Symbolically vengeance is a purification ritual that removes the stain and shame of being occupied by enemy forces or any disgrace brought about by a family member. For Islamist true believers blood purifies shame, murder cleanses disgrace, and violence purges humiliation, hence, justice is served, purity is reestablished and face is saved.

## **2. Sacred Violence - Honor Killings**

One primary purpose of Islamism is to protect the people of the code and their sacred land from designated enemies. Another significant aspect of the honor code is to maintain tradition and punish those who engage in taboo conduct. Although there are distinctions between the ritual murder of enemies and the ritual murder of family members both function to restore honor to the community and remove pollution from the tribe before it becomes contagious. Ritual murder of enemies is enacted by the warrior class mujahideen and is in the context of Jihad, holy war. The ritual murder of a family member is enacted by one or more fellow family members or tribal affiliates and is referred to as "honor killing." In the West honor killings are narrowly defined to specifically apply to women, but victims

include both males and females that allegedly have brought dishonor upon the family or community. The ritual murder of both family and enemies is about honor (purity) and dishonor (impurity). For this reason in both cases violence entails ritualized symbolic acts such as stoning, burning, beheading, mutilation, and body desecration. Ritualizing the violence is what makes it sacred and sacred violence is always justified.

Honor killings are sacred acts. When fathers, brothers, sons, cousins, and uncles kill their own wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters, it is a ritual murder that functions as sacrifice and expiation. The beloved daughters or wives are the sacrificial victims that must be killed to remove the stain of sin and restore honor and purity to the family. It is a moral imperative to remove the polluting evil that infected the weak female before it corrupts the entire family and subsequently the community. In the context of the patriarchal aspect of the tribal code, the polluting sin is always in the form of sexuality and specific to reproduction. The greatest female transgression in a patriarchal tribal culture is expressed in sexuality because the greatest male fear is not knowing who the father is. The sexual aspect of honor killings is evident in all cases. Either the daughter refuses to participate in an arranged marriage, elopes with a man of her choice, the virgin daughter is defiled, the wife commits adultery, or a woman is raped. In each case there is the possibility of an illegitimate child, a symbol of the ultimate taboo, pollution, chaos, evil, and possible destruction of the entire tribe. Even if intercourse does not occur, any impropriety that has the remote possibility of leading to sex with anyone other than the designated male is still a violation of the code. If a wife asks for a divorce she may meet another man, if a woman refuses to wear modest clothing she is making herself attractive to men, if a young man and woman fall in love without approval there is always the potential for illicit sexual activity which subsequently could bear an illegitimate child. The function of honor killings is to ensure the paternity of the child, hence the purity of the blood line. This is accomplished through strict traditions and taboos on sexuality of both men and women. Women are viewed as either pure or impure vessels and any hint of stain or inappropriate behavior taints the vessel hence the unborn child. Only children born in the sanctity of marriage to obedient women are pure and the Islamist definition of marriage includes as many as four wives. A bastard child represents evil and chaos and disrupts the integrity of the entire tribe. If there is any doubt whatsoever over the paternity, the woman, and sometimes the accused male and child are murdered. "From the tribal standpoint, the only way a family can regain its honor is to eliminate the women in question. "The law of the clan is sacred," notes Jibril, a Palestinian merchant. "A man is entitled to kill for his honor." Several Palestinians justified honor killings by equating a woman's reputation to glass, porcelain, or other fragile objects, stating, "Once broken, it is ruined. It cannot be fixed or repaired."<sup>(10)</sup> Honor killing is a righteous act of ritual murder because maintaining the purity of the patrilineal culture is sacred. The tribal honor code would have no meaning if tribes assimilated, bloodlines mixed and crossbred. Territory, boundaries, and traditions would be compromised and the culture would devolve into disorder and chaos. In this aspect honor killings function to prevent women from assimilating to Western culture.

The United Nations approximates that as many as 5,000 women are the murder victims of honor killings each year worldwide.(11) Since these crimes are rarely reported or listed as accidents or suicides the actual numbers are much higher.(12) Asma Jahangir, the United Nations special reporter on extrajudicial, summary, and arbitrary executions wrote in her 2000 annual report to the Commission on Human Rights that “honor killings tend to be more prevalent in, but are not limited to, countries with a majority Muslim population. She added that they have been reported in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, Uganda and the United Kingdom.”(13) More recent studies document cases of young Muslim women in many Western countries that have also been victims of honor killing in Germany, Sweden, and other parts of Europe, Canada, and the United States.(14)

Honor killings are extremely brutal and include everything from slitting the throat, beheading, whipping, lashing, beating, pouring acid on, stoning, shooting, stabbing, strangling, and burying or burning the woman alive. Women are frequently raped or gang raped before they are tortured and killed. In some countries honor killings are public spectacles with multiple members of the community participating in the ritual rape or execution. Stoning and being buried alive are some of the oldest forms of ritual sacrifice, beheading and slitting the throat is the preferred method for Islamic blood vengeance, shooting is a contemporary quick method, beating, stabbing, and strangulation is personal and hands on, acid and body dismemberment disfigure the woman and send a message to others, and burning is one of the strongest methods of purification. There are many women who are severely traumatized and disfigured who have survived these attacks.

Rape and gang rapes are referred to as honor punishments and in many instances are ordered by a tribal court, Jirga. The women are not always punished for their own crimes but often for the infidelities of their brothers, uncles and fathers. This corresponds to the tribalist aspect of the code in which any member can be punished to settle a feud even if they are individually innocent. This was exemplified by one of the rare publicized cases of the brutal gang rape of Mukhtar Mai in the southern Punjab village of Meerwala in Pakistan in June 2002. An unofficial tribal jury from the local Mastoi tribe ordered four of their own men to rape Mai as punishment for an alleged crime of rape committed by her twelve year old brother that had brought shame to the Mastoi clan.(15) In another highly publicized case six men kidnapped a sixteen year old girl in Habib Labalo village in southern Sindh province Pakistan in January 2007 because her cousin had an affair with a woman from their family. Two of them raped her and eleven others forced her to parade naked through the village streets before an older woman covered her with a blanket.(16) Hundreds of women are raped or gang raped in the Southern Punjab every year, afterwards many are then honor killed or commit suicide. Rape related honor killings in Libya started being reported by UN agencies and Libyan aid workers in June 2011. Libyan women and girls who are deliberately being raped in front of their fathers and brothers or who become pregnant through rape are being murdered by their own families. “To be seen naked and violated is worse than death



for them. . . . In Libya when rape occurs, it seems to be a whole village or town which is seen to be dishonored.”(17) The only method for the father to restore his honor is to kill his daughter. These honor killings are the result of Libyan Leader Colonel Gaddafi’s strategy to use rape as a weapon of war. “The International Criminal Court has reason to believe orders to rape were given, and the drug Viagra was distributed to fighters. A major in the Libyan army who has now deserted told the BBC the shipments of Viagra were widely known about. . . . The order to rape was not given to the regular army. . . . Col Gaddafi knew we would never accept it. It was given to the mercenaries.”(18) The girls and women are also contracting HIV Aids.

Historically rape has often been used as a weapon of war but the addition of Viagra represents new improved biological ammunition in the arsenal of psychological warfare. According to the tribal honor code rape is a form of punishment that not only shames the victim but also punishes the entire family who has to bear the humiliation. The basis for the taboo of rape is the threat that the girl will produce a child that is of another bloodline which would pollute the entire tribe. This is why rape victims are then killed by their own families, it is the only method of ensuring the purity of the community. Even if the raped women were not impregnated they are constant reminders of the disgrace. Psychologically this is stigma, symbolically rape is ritual defilement, an impurity that pollutes the entire family clan or tribe that can only be cleansed through bloodshed. Women are not the only victims of honor rapes, there have also been incidents of men being gang raped in honor punishments for breaking Islamist taboos. In May 2010 in Dasht-e Laili (Laili desert) of Jawzjan province, Northern Afghanistan a dozen farmers and shepherds raped two young men as a punishment for engaging in sexual relations with two young women. Their justification was that the punishment was meted out as an act of revenge for the sexual acts undertaken by the young men. The gang rape was praised by many members of the local community.(19) Gang rape is a fraternal ritual, often an initiation rite into manhood, proving masculinity, power and brotherhood, particularly in cultures that are hypersensitive to homosexuality. “When men are raped by other men, the overt, conscious symbolic meaning of the event is that they are being turned into women.”(20) Islamist culture is a pure culture of patriarchy, machismo and homophobia in which the worst humiliation is to be feminized. Rape as punishment is a life sentence of shame that can only be exonerated through stronger acts of violence.

Stoning, also known as lapidation or *rajm* in Arabic, is a group ritual, a form of capital punishment that is sanctioned by Sharia law as a communal execution that punishes men and women who are accused of committing adultery and sexual sins of fornication. Homosexuals and rape victims are also punished as adulterers and subject to being stoned to death. Stoning is legal in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Pakistan, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and Nigeria and practiced in Afghanistan, Somalia, and India with many incidents carried out by communities in other countries. “The Islamic Penal Code of Iran is very specific regarding the details of how stoning should be executed. Article 102 states that men

shall be buried up to their waists and women up to their breasts for the execution. Article 104 states, referring to the penalty for adultery, that the stones used should “not be large enough to kill the person by one or two strikes; nor should they be so small that they could not be defined as stones (pebbles.)”. In some cases, if a victim can escape from the ditch during the stoning, they will be freed. However, because women are buried up to their breasts and men only at their waists, women will have a smaller chance of escaping than men.”(21) The average execution by stoning is extremely painful, lasting at least ten to twenty minutes”.(22) The ritual varies depending upon the community and the Islamist group. In Iran there are so many cases that an organization titled, “The International Committee Against Stoning” was formed. Their website whose address is [stopstoningnow.com](http://stopstoningnow.com), currently lists 150 Iranian victims but claims there are many more.

In Afghanistan and Pakistan the Taliban often punish both men and women by stoning them to death. In August 2010 in the district of Dashte Archi, in Kunduz, Afghanistan, a twenty-five year old man named Khayyam and a nineteen-year-old woman named Siddiqa were arrested by the Taliban on the request of their families after they tried to elope. Siddiqa had run away after being sold into an arranged marriage against her will. Two Taliban Mullahs read the judgment of the religious court before the young couple was publicly stoned to death. Hundreds of villagers watched as Siddiqa was buried up to her waist in a four foot hole in the ground, then the crowd threw rocks at her head and body as she desperately tried to crawl free. After she collapsed, covered in blood, but still alive a Taliban fighter shot her three times in the head with an AK-47 while the crowd shouted *allahu akbar*. Khayyam was then marched in front of the crowd blindfolded with his hands tied behind his back, and then the villagers hurled rocks at his head and body until he was killed. In January 2011 a video of the entire incident was released on the internet.(23) In July 2010 in the upper region of Orakzai in Northwest Pakistan a woman was stoned to death by Taliban militants because she was seen being out with a man. A cell phone video of the incident was smuggled out of the country by a Taliban member who witnessed the stoning.(24) In April 2005, in the Urgu district of Northeastern Badakhshan province, Afghanistan, a twenty-nine-year-old woman known only as Amina was stoned to death after being accused of adultery by her husband. The man accused of committing adultery with her was flogged a hundred times and freed.(25) In a well-known incident in April 2000 the Taliban religious rulers stoned a woman to death at a sports stadium in Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan before a crowd of several thousand spectators.(26)

In Bashika, Iraq, in April 2007, a seventeen year old Yezidi girl named Du’a Khalil Aswad was stoned to death by her fellow tribesmen. A member of a minority Kurdish religious group, the Yazidis, she was condemned to death by her family and hardline religious leaders because of her relationship with a Sunni Muslim boy. The teenager was dragged from her house by nine men who threw her on the ground and joined a larger group of men who pulled up her skirt, beat, kicked and stoned her for half an hour until she died. A month later a video was posted on YouTube of the entire incident, showing the mob of men circling



her, throwing stones and photographing the attack.<sup>(27)</sup> Two Islamist groups in Somalia Hizbul Islam and al Shabaab, who merged in June 2010, also regularly stone people for adultery. In December 2009 a Somali man accused of adultery was stoned to death in front of hundreds of local residents by Hizbul Islam in Afgoye, a village twenty miles from the capital, Mogadishu. Mohamed Abukar Ibrahim, forty-eight, was buried in a hole up to his chest and then killed with rocks. The girl with whom he was accused of having an affair received one hundred lashes; she escaped being put to death because she was not married at the time of the alleged sexual relations. Both video and graphic photographs of the stoning and his mutilated body after the execution were posted on the internet.<sup>(28)</sup> In November 2009, in a small village near the town of Wajid, 250 miles North-west of Mogadishu, the al-Qaida linked group Al Shabaab stoned a twenty-year-old woman to death. The divorced woman who was accused of committing adultery was taken to the public grounds where she was buried up to her waist and stoned in front of a crowd of about two hundred people. "Her unmarried boyfriend was given one hundred lashes at the same venue. Under al-Shabaab's interpretation of Sharia law, anyone who has ever been married, even a divorcee, who has an affair, is liable to be found guilty of adultery, punishable by stoning to death. An unmarried person who has sex before marriage is liable to be given one hundred lashes."<sup>(29)</sup> In October 2008 a thirteen-year-old girl Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow was stoned to death by a group of fifty men in a stadium in the southern port of Kismayu, Somalia in front of one thousand spectators. She had been gang raped by three men and reported it to the Al Shabaab militia who control Kismayo. This resulted in her being accused of adultery. "A truckload of stones were brought into the stadium to be used in the stoning. At one point during the stoning, eyewitnesses reported that nurses were instructed to check whether Aisha was still alive when buried in the ground. They removed her from the ground, declared that she was, and she was replaced in the hole where she had been buried for the stoning to continue. Inside the stadium, militia members opened fire when some of the witnesses to the ritual stoning attempted to save her life, killing a boy who was a bystander. None of the men she accused of rape were arrested."<sup>(30)</sup>

Stoning is an ancient form of punishment that by its very nature is a communal sacrificial ritual. All members of the village are required to participate either actively or passively. Similar to a firing squad, the concept of stoning is that the individual that delivered the fatal blow cannot be identified and all participants are equal executioners. To try to prevent the punishment is a transgression in itself. A person who interferes with the ritual is an indication that the uncleanness has not been contained, a sign that he has been contaminated by the impurity of the original victim, hence also needs to be sacrificed. True believers actively participate either by enthusiastically cheering, videotaping the spectacle, or actually throwing the stones. The function of the stoning ritual is a communal act of expiation, expelling the pollution of adultery. The purifying elements are blood and earth. Ritualizing the violence justifies it and makes it sacred. Once the transgressors are ritually killed the impurity is removed, the taboo has been ameliorated and justice is served. Videotaping and photographing the ritual murders on cell phones is a new tradition, a

peculiar combination of primal tribal sacrifice and modern technology.

Although not a ceremonial ritual murder like stoning there have been some instances where women were buried alive in honor killings. In a remote region of the Baluchistan Province in Pakistan in July 2008 three teenaged girls and two women were buried alive after they were beaten and shot. The three girls aged between sixteen and eighteen were kidnapped by armed local Umrani tribesman and murdered in Baba Kot, a remote village in the Jafferabad district because they wanted to choose their own husbands. The girls were beaten and shot, but still alive when they were thrown into a ditch. When the two older women, relatives of the girls tried to intervene they were also shot and thrown in the ditch. They were all still breathing as mud and stones were shoveled over their bodies. The killings were defended by some politicians from Baluchistan and the brother of a provincial minister was allegedly among the tribesmen who killed the women. Reacting to a female colleague's attempt to raise the issue in parliament, Israrullah Zehri said such acts were part of a "centuries-old tradition" and he would "continue to defend them."[\(31\)](#) In February 2010 in Kahta, Turkey, a sixteen-year-old girl Medine Memi was buried alive by relatives because she talked to boys. Her body was found in a sitting position with her hands tied in a six foot hole dug under a chicken coop in the courtyard of her family's home forty days after she had been reported missing. The hole had been cemented over. According to post mortem reports the teenager had a large amount of soil in her lungs and stomach, had no bruises on her body and no sign of narcotics or poison in her blood, indicating that she was alive and fully conscious when she was buried. Medine Meme's father and grandfather were arrested for her murder. The girl had made several complaints to police before she went missing, saying that her grandfather beat her because she talked to boys only to be sent home. Her father told relatives that he was unhappy that his daughter, one of nine children, had male friends.[\(32\)](#) Although female infanticide was common in pre Islamic Arabia, specifically the practice of burying female infants alive, there is no modern precedent for teenagers and women. "Pagan Arab men used to bury their newborn daughters alive in the sand, out of shame for having something so low and disgusting like a girl instead of a son."[\(33\)](#) Strategically this is obviously a method to dispose of and hide the bodies. In other cultures live burials were an ancient form of sacrifice with various functions. Brides, concubines, and slaves were buried alive to provide companionship for the dead in the afterlife, prisoners of war were buried alive as offerings to gods and in some cases sacrificial victims were buried in building foundations as human pillars to ensure the buildings against disasters or enemy attacks. In the context of the Islamist code live burials are another method of honor killing. Like all honor killings they are purification rituals, in the case of live burials, earth is the purifying element. The daughter's mouth filled with dirt can no longer talk to boys; her father and grandfather effectively buried their shame.

Another archaic form of punishment is being burned alive and hundreds of women each year are disfigured and murdered by fire in honor killings. "Many of the murders are disguised as suicides or accidents with burning oil."[\(34\)](#) The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq

expressed serious concern over the rising incidence of honor crimes in Iraqi Kurdistan, confirming that 255 women had been killed in just the first six months of 2007, three-quarters of them by burning. An earlier report cited 366 cases of women who were the victims of "fire accidents" in Dohuk in 2006, up from 289 the year before, although most were not fatal. In Irbil, the emergency management centre had reported 576 burn cases since 2003, resulting in 358 deaths.(35) In 2006 in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq there were 400 cases of the burning of women.(36) "An employee at the hospital in Erbil stated that burnt women are brought in every day and the home minister in Kurdistan confirmed that this is something that happens daily in Iraqi Kurdistan. Many women die a short time after their arrival at the hospital."(37) In one of the cases the husband's motive for setting his wife on fire was that he did not think that he was the father of her baby. "Twenty six year old Najie had been married off to a man ten years her senior. They had only been married eight months before he set fire to her. Her husband watched as she tried to beat out the flames herself. Najie told a Kurdish journalist before her death, "He dragged me into the shower by my hair and threw oil on me. He gave me a lighter. He was holding matches. He said I had to light myself or he would do it himself. He lit the fire and watched while I tried to put out the flames. Then he drove me to the hospital and threatened me, saying that if I told anyone I would be killed with a poison injection."(38) In March 2009, a sixteen year old Muslim girl suspected of having a relationship with a boy was burned to death by four male neighbors in her village in Ghaziabad, North India. They came to the girl's house and demanded to know why the young man frequently visited her, and then the men beat her, doused her with kerosene and set her on fire.(39) In July 2011 in Hasanpur village in the Kithaur district of Meerut, India a girl was burned to death by her father and uncle for refusing to marry their chosen groom. Both she and her sister were scheduled to be married and told relatives that they were unhappy with the respective matches. They were both immediately beaten. After the beating Pooja drank poison and her father and uncle burned her alive in a silo instead of taking her to the hospital.(40) Symbolically women who are burned alive are human sacrifices that are being purified through fire. Fire is considered a powerful transformer of the negative to the positive. Because of such properties, fire is commonly found in purification rites throughout the world. In other cultures polluted persons may be required to walk around, jump over, or jump through fire.(41) Historically, burning a person to death was reserved for the most threatening evil, such as heresy or witchcraft and considered an extreme form of purification. In the context of honor killing the use of fire is not only symbolic but practical. Because most of the homes do not have electricity, every house has a large supply of oil, which makes it easier to conceal honor killings under the guise of suicide or kitchen accidents.

It becomes apparent that the type and severity of honor killing punishments are directly proportional to the amount of fear that the man or family has concerning their status in the community and the perceived threat to his manhood. The following are examples of honor killing cases that entailed stabbing, shooting, beheading, slitting the throat, hanging, and dismemberment. An "eighteen-year-old Palestinian man stabbed his teenage sister forty

times because of a rumor that she was involved in an extramarital affair. The family thanked God for her death. In an adjacent neighborhood, a sixteen-year-old boy killed his divorced mother, stabbing her repeatedly as he chased her into the street. The boy told authorities he was upset because neighbors were gossiping about her allegedly immoral behavior.”(42) “On May 31, 1994, Kifaya Husayn, a sixteen year old Jordanian girl, was lashed to a chair by her thirty two year old brother. He gave her a drink of water and told her to recite an Islamic prayer. Then he slashed her throat. Immediately afterward, he ran out into the street, waving the bloody knife and crying, ‘I have killed my sister to cleanse my honor.’ Kifaya’s crime? She was raped by another brother, a twenty one year old man. Her judge and jury? Her own uncles, who convinced her eldest brother that Kifaya was too much of a disgrace to the family honor to be allowed to live.”(43) “In Egypt, a father paraded his daughter’s severed head through the streets shouting, “I avenged my honor.”(44) A sixteen-year-old Palestinian girl became pregnant after being raped by her younger brother. Once her condition became known, her family encouraged her older brother to kill her to remove the blemish from their honor. Her brothers, the rapist and the murderer, were exonerated. The girl was blamed. “She made a mistake,” said one of her male cousins. “She had to pay for it.”(45) “An Egyptian who strangled his unmarried pregnant daughter to death and then cut her corpse in eight pieces and threw them in the toilet stated: “Shame kept following me wherever I went [before the murder]. The village’s people had no mercy on me. They were making jokes and mocking me. I couldn’t bear it and decided to put an end to this shame.”(46) “A twenty five year old Palestinian who hung his sister with a rope stated: ‘I did not kill her, but rather helped her to commit suicide and to carry out the death penalty she sentenced herself to. I did it to wash with her blood the family honor that was violated because of her and in response to the will of society that would not have had any mercy on me if I didn’t. . . . Society taught us from childhood that blood is the only solution to wash the honor.’”(47) In July 2011 a Jordanian man confessed to stabbing his twenty-two-year-old wife to death claiming that “he wanted to cleanse his honor after he suspected his wife of bad behavior.”(48) In July 2011 in Faisalabad, Pakistan a father killed six of his daughters because they were “without honor”.(49) There are hundreds of cases with similar statements that refer to shame, humiliation, blood, honor, and manhood.

Honor Killings have migrated to Europe and North America along with other Islamist traditions. There have been numerous incidents in Europe, Canada, and several in the United States. Due to the lack of understanding of these crimes they frequently go unrecognized or are relegated to a category of domestic violence. “Growing awareness of honor killings prompted Scotland Yard to establish a task force in 2004 to reexamine 109 homicides over the previous decade to determine how many were honor-based.”(50) One of the primary reasons Western investigators do not immediately comprehend the nature of these murders is that nothing in their culture prepares them for the prospect of multiple family members including women willingly participating in the murder of their own daughters and other relatives. In the West these crimes are designated as domestic violence and are perceived to be the result of an individual’s spontaneous violent rage instead of a

communally sanctioned, premeditated, ritual murder.(51) Izzat Muhaysin, a psychiatrist at the Gaza Program for Mental Health, has a better understanding than his Western counterparts when he “describes the honor killing culture as one in which a man who refrains from “washing shame with blood” is a “coward who is not worthy of living.” Many times, he adds, such a person is described as less than a man.”(52)

Honor killings are simply one of the purification rituals required by the tradition of the Islamist symbolic code. These purification rites are rooted in deep-seated concepts of honor (purity) and dishonor (impurity). Purification rituals serve to remove shame through the elements of fire, earth, water and blood. In Islam there are lengthy treatises on how to purify things that have become impure. There are four categories of purifying agents (*mutahirat*); 1) water is the primary agent, 2) fire or boiling water, 3) sunlight with other contributory elements such as wind and 4) earth which includes soil, rock, sand, stone, plaster, and lime.(53) Although blood is intrinsically impure (*najjis*), sacrificial blood is a purifying agent. Since blood represents both life and death, purity and impurity, the use of blood in purification rites is often central to the symbolic renewal process. Honor killings are essentially ritual murders, a sacrificial transformation, an expiation through death in which sins are expelled and purified by the victim’s blood. The purifying elements of blood, fire, and earth are evident in the various types of ritual murders such as stoning and live burials (earth), burning (fire), and stabbing (blood). In the cases of strangulation and hanging, the bodies are often maimed or have blood drawn in some manner. The mutilation and disfigurement of women who are spared death function as a form of symbolic warfare; they become living signs that advertise to other women that this is how you will look if you even consider conforming to Western customs. The ritual murder of women in honor killing is a sacrificial rite that expiates the sin, cleanses the family honor and reinstates manhood to male relatives. The men have reestablished control over the family bloodline and are safe in the knowledge that future children are their biological heirs.

### **3. Blood Vengeance: Ritual Murder of Enemies**

The ritual murder of family members protects the patrilineal bloodline by defending family honor and preventing women from assimilating to other cultures. The ritual murder of enemies protects the patrilineal bloodline by defending sacred land and preventing subjugation by other cultures. The disgrace of occupation evokes even stronger reprisals and more virulent acts of violence than the shame of family dishonor. Dishonor is magnified because the threat has greater consequences, the eradication of the entire culture. Hence, acts of blood vengeance are even more barbaric than honor killings. Frankly, if one can violently kill a mother, daughter, or sister than it is no problem torturing, mutilating, and killing enemies. The ritual murder, mutilation, and desecration of enemies can be analyzed in the context of the signs and symbols of honor and its corollary dishonor and their significance for the Islamist code. These signs have psychological, symbolic, and cultural attributes. According to the Islamist code honor is signified by stereotypical male

characteristics such as courage, bravery, heroism, power, virility, and strength; dishonor is signified by stereotypical female characteristics such as weakness, vulnerability, helplessness, and submissiveness. Honor is what defines Islamists as men and psychologically is experienced as dignity and pride; conversely dishonor is indicated by female traits of weakness experienced as humiliation and shame. Islamists are in a constant struggle with fear of disgrace and maintaining manhood, particularly those living in countries that they consider to be occupied or invaded by their enemies. Occupation equates to dishonor, therefore emotions of weakness, helplessness, shame are always just below the surface, triggered by a hypersensitivity to any real or perceived act of humiliation. Even a sideways glance can be misinterpreted as a questioning of manhood.

The Islamist code functions to cultivate this honor-shame paradigm so that boys will grow to be ruthless warriors that require blood vengeance to restore honor and maintain power. The fear of even the appearance of weakness or vulnerability provides one explanation for the extreme punishment of innocent women and the inexplicable torture of enemies. According to the Islamist code, mercy, compassion, sympathy, and kindness symbolize weakness; cruelty, brutality, violence, and atrocity symbolize strength. This explains inexplicable violent acts such as children joyfully participating in the dismemberment of a body, posing for pictures in front of mutilated corpses, and committing a ritual beheading at twelve years old. Children want to evince their strength and alleviate feelings of shame that have been inculcated since birth. Through murder and mutilation these children experience relief from a sense of incomprehensible humiliation, perhaps for the first time. Psychologically they equate their relief with violent atrocity. Symbolically blood cleanses their impurity. Culturally the violence is sanctioned and they are viewed as heroic. As they grow up it becomes natural and moral to punish disrespect with torture, mutilation, and ritual murder. The Islamist symbolic code is so ingrained that even moderate Muslims who have attempted to assimilate to Western culture revert back to violence when their manhood is challenged. This has been exemplified in many honor killing cases in Europe and North America. Particularly, the February 12, 2009 case in suburban Buffalo, New York of Muzzammil Hassan, who used two hunting knives to stab his wife more than forty times in the face, back and chest and then behead her while she was still conscious. Aasiya Hassan had filed for divorce a few days earlier. Muzzammil Hassan was viewed as the model of a moderate Muslim, a former banker who established Bridges TV network in 2004 to counter negative media portrayals of Muslims and to promote cultural understanding. Although he emigrated from his native Pakistan twenty five years earlier, when his manhood, reputation, and honor were in question his shame became so unbearable that ritual murder was the only way to alleviate the disrespect. Hassan did not just shoot his wife, he brought sacrificial knives and took her head with them, ritualizing the violence. Beheadings by their very nature are ritual murders. The purpose of the honor-shame paradigm is to ensure that violence will function as expiation. Blood cleanses shame, mutilation purges disgrace, murder feels good. Ritualizing the violence makes it sacred and sacred violence is always justified, alleviating not just shame but any sense of remorse. "Violence from the point of view of those who



engage in it, does not intensify shame, it diminishes it and even reverses it into its opposite, namely, self-respect.”(54) Hassan not only did not feel any guilt or remorse; his defense was to claim he was an abused husband, which from the moral perspective of the Islamist honor code was true. The fact that his wife reported beatings to the police and filed for divorce was felt as abuse and a humiliating attack against his honor requiring vengeance.(55) Hassan had been indoctrinated into the honor-shame paradigm during his first seventeen years growing up in Pakistan, and twenty five years in the United States could not deprogram the inculcated violence mechanisms that were triggered by his loss of face. He saved face by obliterating hers.

The Islamists’ honor code is calculated to intensify feelings of shame, ridicule, and disrespect that can only be alleviated through violence. A semiotic analysis of the victimology and amount of “overkill” in Islamist murders reveals a direct correlation between the specific types of mutilations and the perception of the threat. This is exemplified in the burnings, stonings, and disfigurements of honor killings and was epitomized in the torture, mutilation, and mass murder of 166 people by members of the Islamist Jihadist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, in ten coordinated shooting and bombing attacks across Mumbai, India on November 26-29, 2008. During the siege operation the Jihadists took the time to sexually humiliate, torture, and mutilate some of the victims before shooting them dead. Foreign nationals and Jews were specifically targeted. The doctors working at the hospital where the victims were taken said it was apparent that most of the dead had been tortured. One doctor who had conducted the post-mortem of the victims, said: “Of all the bodies, the Israeli victims bore the maximum torture marks. It was obvious that they were tied up and tortured before they were killed. It was so bad that I do not want to go over the details even in my head again.”(56) His claims were corroborated by the Intelligence Bureau during the interrogation of the only surviving terrorist, “During his interrogation, Ajmal Amīr Kasāb said they were specifically asked to target the foreigners, especially the Israelis.”(57) He confirmed that the Nariman House which was home to a Chabad house, a Jewish outreach center that housed an educational center and a synagogue, was the primary target. “Ajmal Kasab reportedly told the police they wanted to send a message to Jews across the world by attacking the ultra-orthodox synagogue.”(58) During the attack six of its occupants, including twenty nine year old Rabbi Gavriel Noach Holtzberg and his twenty eight year old wife, Rivka, who was six months pregnant, were sexually assaulted and their genitalia mutilated before they were killed.”(59) Their two-year-old son, Moshe, may have been beaten by the militants, his back was covered in bruises consistent with abuse.(60) Unconfirmed reports claimed that the Rabbi was castrated and the baby was cut out of the body of his pregnant wife. In a symposium on Islamic terror and mutilation Dr. David Gutmann, emeritus professor of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences at Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago, attributed the atrocities to “shame” cultures. “The torture, mutilation and murders documented recently in Mumbai are certainly not limited to Kashmiri Jihadists. During the Israeli War of Independence Jewish fighters, including female soldiers captured by Arab irregulars, were routinely tortured and

mutilated in the most obscene ways. . . . The Palestinians, along with the majority of Arab males, belong to what has been called a 'Shame' culture, in that they are quick to feel humiliated and equally quick to defend against the sense of insult. . . . By mutilating the bodies of their Jewish captives, the Palestinians metaphorically rob them of their manhood. . . . For the members of a Shame culture . . . the aim of torture is to reveal the cowardice and femininity of the foe, and in so doing to export the torturer's hidden shames onto the enemy, while co-opting his store of courage and hardihood—the masculinity—that he has given up, screamed away, under the knife. 'Clearly, he and not me, is actually the woman.' Islam does sponsor, more than any other religion, the Shame cultures which in their turn sanction these terrible rituals.”(61)

This psychological analysis is consistent with the honor-shame paradigm of the Islamist symbolic code. Dishonor is signified by female characteristics, hence, castration is the ultimate symbol of emasculation. Symbolically, “shame dwells not only in the eyes but also the genitals. The relationship between shame and genitals is so close and inextricable that the words for the two are identical in most languages” and the word shame is often used as if it referred only to sexual modesty.(62) Ritually the violence is a cleansing rite that restores honor and purity by removing the polluting organs, the sexual organs that signify masculinity, strength, and the reproduction of more enemy occupiers. Historically, castration was used to eliminate potential opponents. In the Byzantine Empire, for a man to be castrated meant that he was no longer a man, half-dead, “life that was half death”.(63) “Castration also eliminated any chance of heirs being born to threaten either the Emperor or the Emperor's children's place at the throne.”(64) In primal warrior rituals the function of dismemberment was to assimilate the strength and virility of the enemy into the warrior. Islamist mutilation has specific symbolic meaning, and historical and theological precedents in Islam, and has been committed in previous wars. The ten Islamist Jihadists who attacked Mumbai were born and trained in Pakistan where there is a long history of religious violence, genocide, and similar mutilations. During the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, a civil war between West Pakistan and East Pakistan allied with India, over 2.5 million Hindus alone were slaughtered by Muslims.(65) Robert E. Burns, the author of *Wrath of Allah* states, “The mutilation was disgusting: eyes gouged out, pregnant women disemboweled, male genitals cut off, women's breasts cut off.”(66) Although the terrorists were too young to have witnessed or participated in these atrocities, the handlers who sent them on the Mumbai suicide mission understood the strategic and symbolic benefits of mutilation. The recruits were trained by retired personnel of the Pakistan Army in combat and marine warfare and exposed to Jihadist propaganda that included highlighting alleged atrocities on Muslims in India.(67) “Kasab was indoctrinated into the hate-India campaign by making him believe that he would go to heaven (jannat) for his actions. Sources said that Kasab believed that it was God's wish that he carry out the attack. “He did not regret the act and insisted that his actions were not against Islam, which is against the killing of innocents, “According to sources, Kasab has not lost his composure and shows no sign of remorse. Kasab believed that his trainers were sent by god to help the 'jihadis' carry out these attacks.”(68) In less

than one year Islamists took a poor disaffected youth and turned him into a mass murderer who was convinced that his killing was righteous.(69) According to the Islamist code mutilation is not a barbaric act, atrocity sanctifies the violence and brutality is transformed into a sacred ritual that cleanses sin through bloodshed. For Kasab murder was not immoral but righteous blood vengeance that restored honor to Pakistani Muslims and the people of his village. Kasab was inculcated to believe that through murder and mutilation he would acquire strength, alleviate dishonor, and achieve heroic status as a ruthless Mujahideen warrior. Killing was an initiation ritual that transformed him from a poor village boy ashamed of his status in life into a man respected by Islamists all over the world. The Mumbai attacks were martyrdom operations, a suicide mission by young recruits who evinced the Islamist code of honor by engaging in blood rituals that simultaneously served as actual and symbolic warfare, sacrificial purification rites and warrior initiation rituals. The recruits were inculcated through shame and only murder could restore honor. On May 6, 2010 Kasab was sentenced to death and is awaiting execution by hanging; meanwhile he has become famous as the personification of evil and is often burned in effigy on the anniversary of the attacks and during Hindu festivals. On Dussehra, the culmination of the nine-day festival of Navaratri, marking the triumph of good over evil, huge effigies are burned of Kasab instead of the demon king Ravana. During the spring festival of Holi a 45 foot effigy of Kasab was burned in the traditional fire symbolic of the destruction of evil. Kasab's shame was purified through ritual murder, his victims bloodshed unleashed an epidemic of contagious evil that is being expiated through the fire of Kasab's effigies. Ritual murder in the form of terrorism precedes symbolic murder in the form of burning effigies which precedes ritual murder in the form of judicial execution. The reciprocal cycle of sacrificial violence, expiation and purification comes full circle.

#### **4. The New Iconoclasm**

Symbolically, mutilation is the archetypal sign of dishonor. From a strategic perspective a mutilated victim is forever stigmatized, a living personification of shame, a walking sign of dishonor, and a political advertisement of who is in power. Women are not only raped, tortured, and murdered in honor killings, many are deliberately disfigured. Appearance, particularly for women, is an important aspect of the Islamist symbolic code. Modesty is how women achieve honor and to appear in anything revealing brings shame not only for her but for the entire family. Any perception of impropriety necessitates severe punishments. Almost all Muslim governments encourage and even legally obligate women to dress modestly (hijab), at a minimum to wear a headscarf, in some countries a veil (niqab) and in others a full body covering (burqua). Wearing hijab is enforced by the Taliban regime, and is enforced in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in the Islamic Republic of Iran as a compulsory part of Sharia law. Punishments for women who appear in public without the prescribed Islamic dress include everything from public floggings, whippings, beatings, burning, disfigurement, and death.(70) Uncovered women are viewed as prostitutes and adulterers and the prevailing attitude is that if an uncovered woman is raped, she asked for it. In

September 2006 in a Ramadan sermon on adultery Australia's most senior Muslim cleric blamed immodestly dressed women who don't wear hijab for being preyed on by men. Sheik Taj Din al-Hilali alluded to the infamous Sydney gang rapes in 2000, committed by a group of fourteen Lebanese Australian men, suggesting the attackers were not entirely to blame. Sheik Hilali said: "If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside on the street, or in the garden or in the park, or in the backyard without a cover, and the cats come and eat it . . . whose fault is it, the cats or the uncovered meat? The uncovered meat is the problem." The sheik then said: "If she was in her room, in her home, in her hijab, no problem would have occurred." He said women were "weapons" used by "Satan" to control men. "It is said in the state of zina (adultery), the responsibility falls ninety per cent of the time on the woman. Why? Because she possesses the weapon of enticement (igraa)." (71) According to the extreme patriarchal aspect of the Islamist code women are exclusively sex objects whose sole obligation is to maintain purity and modesty; an uncovered woman is sexually arousing and responsible for unleashing uncontrollable evil. On February 11, 2011, when Egyptians were celebrating the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, the blonde haired blue eyed TV journalist Lara Logan who was reporting for CBS News was not wearing a headscarf. Being uncovered it was obvious that she was not an Egyptian Muslim woman, hence she was an open target. Logan was beaten and gang raped by a crowd of three hundred men who were screaming "Jew! Jew!" and "American bitch!" although she is neither Jewish nor American. While Western media seemed to be squeamish about reporting the facts, particularly since they did not fit in with their peaceful narrative of the secular pro-democracy demonstrators, YouTube and some Arab websites reported that at least six men raped her vaginally, and a number of men raped her anally. She was also masturbated and urinated on. There were reports that her left breast was bitten and that the entire left nipple was bitten off. One account claims that somewhere from six to fifty men might have sexually assaulted or beat the reporter. (72) In her one and only interview discussing the attack on 60 Minutes Logan did not provide details of the sexual aspect of the assault but described how her clothes were ripped off, she was beaten with flagpoles and sticks, how the men tried to tear off chunks of her scalp and literally tried to tear the limbs from her body. She remembers people taking cell phone photographs of her naked body and thinking that she was going to die a torturous death that would go on forever and ever. (73) There is no doubt that if she had not been saved by a group of women and twenty Egyptian soldiers they would have torn her limb from limb, which has happened in other Islamist attacks. From a Western perspective this was a crazed mob out of control, for Jihadists this was an acceptable punishment for an infidel unbeliever, an alleged Jew who is less than human, a woman who was not properly covered. They pulled that blonde hair right out of her head and more than likely kept it as souvenirs. What Logan did not understand is that women in Islam are explicitly sexual beings every part of whose body is thought to be erotic. The reason for being covered from head to toe is that a woman's entire body is viewed as private parts. So if you shake hands with her it is the same as touching her crotch. If she displays her hair, it is the equivalent of exposing her pubic hair. Every square inch of her is sexual. (74) Logan's gang rape was a primal fraternal ritual. Each assault humiliated her and

increased the status of the man. It was even reported that a young boy grabbed her breasts obviously wanting to prove his manhood. Not only will the offenders feel no remorse but they most likely boasted about the rape of the blonde infidel who dared to appear in public uncovered. According to the symbolic code the attack was justified and the men were not responsible because she unleashed evil in the form of uncontrollable sexual urges.

Disfigurement and mutilation is even more common than rape as punishment for not wearing hijab. In Pakistan, Kashmir, and Afghanistan, hundreds of women have been blinded or maimed when acid was thrown on their unveiled faces by men who considered them improperly dressed.”(75) Acid attacks are a popular method of punishment not just for not wearing hijab but also for refusal of arranged marriages; they are used in land and dowry disputes and most often by husbands who have accused their wives of infidelity. Schoolgirls have also been the victims of acid attacks simply for attending school. If the women and girls survive the attacks they are permanently disfigured and often blinded from the hydrochloric or sulfuric acid. Symbolically, acid is a burning ritual, purification through fire. Throwing acid on the face, the only body part permitted to be viewed in public, is intended to socially stigmatize the women, a message that they are of disrepute, bad character, outcasts who engaged in taboo conduct. These women are visible signs of dishonor. Erving Goffman in his classic text “Stigma, notes on the management of spoiled identity” writes, “The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.”(76) Stigma and dishonor are both the intent and result of rape and acid attacks.

Another common form of mutilation is gouging out the woman’s eyes and/or chopping off parts of the woman’s face such as lips, ears and most often the nose. In Western culture victims of domestic abuse and organized crime are also facially disfigured but typically as a result of being beaten or scarred with a knife. Cutting off the nose, lips, ears, tongues and gouging out the eyes has historical, symbolic and magical meaning in the context of the Islamist code of conduct. There are hundreds of women in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Turkey, and other countries who are mutilated for dishonoring their families. Most cases are not even documented; occasionally they are publicized through women’s and health organizations. In Afghanistan at the age of ten Bibi Aisha was sold to a Taliban fighter to pay off her father’s debt. Child brides are commonly sold into slavery and abused by the entire family. In 2009 at the age of eighteen after suffering years of beatings and torturous abuse she ran away and was caught. After being dragged from her house in the middle of the night she was judged by the local Taliban commander for shaming her in-laws. Punishment was immediate; her brother in law held her down while her husband cut off her nose and ears then left her for dead in the mountains. She managed to crawl to her grandfather’s house and her father got her to an American medical facility. Aisha was the



subject of an August 9, 2010 cover story for Time magazine and charities funded her facial reconstruction in the U.S. that involved a prosthetic nose. Most women either die from their injuries or live the rest of their lives in misery.(77) In September 2005 a Pakistani man hacked off the nose and sliced off the lips of his nineteen year old sister-in-law because she went to court to ask for a divorce.(78) In May 2010 in Chandigarh, India a nineteen-year-old bride and her mother-in-law were murdered and the husband was seriously injured by the father, brothers and uncles of the newlywed girl. Her family was angry when they eloped and the community became aware of the couple's pre-marital affair. They stormed into the mother-in-law's house with sharp weapons and guns, chopped off the girl's fingers and stabbed her in the neck and shoulder. There were deep wounds in the mother-in-law's eye sockets where they attempted to gouge out her eyes, the groom managed to flee with several gunshot injuries. They chose not to attack the grandparents.(79)

A 2009 documentary on Turkish honor killings described numerous murders in detail including an interview with the father of an honor killer in a village close to the Iranian border. The father describes how his son murdered his twenty-one-year-old wife Nazinme Alir because he suspected her of infidelity and was driven mad by the thought of his honor being betrayed; "his son gouged out her eyes, cut her tongue off and put her remains in a plastic bag before burning her. Nearly all the men in the village say they would kill their wives and daughters for honor-life without honor is not worth living." (80) In Pakistan in 1998 Zahida Parveen weighing less than 100 pounds and three months pregnant was bound, gagged, and hung upside down from a rope in her living room by her husband who accused her of having an affair. He beat her with a wooden ax handle, and then used a razor—he was a barber by profession—to cut off the lower lobes of her ears, cut up her tongue and slice off her nose. Then he used a metal rod to gouge her eyes out.(81) The severity of the brutality was most likely the result of him thinking that the baby was not his. In another atypical outcome Zahida Parveen went to the United States and was fitted with prosthetic eyes, ears and nose by former CIA disguise-maker Robert Barron, who was part of a US surgical team who donated their time.(82) In June 2011 thirty three year old Rumana Monzur, a Fullbright scholar and graduate student at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver was blinded and had her nose bitten off by her husband when she returned to her home country Bangladesh to write her dissertation. He flew into a rage after she showed him photos on her Facebook page, accusing her of having an affair. During the assault "her husband pressed his fingers into her eyes, gouging them out, gnawed at her cheek, lips, and nose, biting off bits of flesh, blood spilling throughout the room as Monzur flailed. Her daughter, Anusheh, stood in a corner of the room, screaming, as two household servants struggled to open the locked door." (83) Rumana returned to Vancouver, Canada in July 2011 for further treatment of her eyes.(84) After her husband was arrested for attempted murder he launched a smear campaign against her in the media, attempting to disgrace her for an alleged affair. In a rare display of support this was counteracted in social media where Monzur was defended on many Facebook pages. One Bangladeshi man wrote only, "Shame! Shame! Shame!" against her husband and "The day after the husband's allegations, a young



male Bangladeshi blogger, asked, “Whose face are we saving?” (85)

Women are not the only victims of honor killings, and these types of mutilations are not always specific to punishments for accusations of infidelity or refusals of arranged marriages. Men who refuse arranged marriages or who are accused of being traitors or spies, or simply designated as infidel unbelievers are victims of similar atrocities justified as legal punishments. There are numerous reports of eyes being gouged out, hacking off noses, cutting out tongues, castration, dismemberment, and disemboweling by Islamists all over the world. Similar to women this is part of the honor-shame paradigm. In November 2008 in Kandahar, Afghanistan, armed assailants attacked a farmer and gouged out his eyes in front of his family. The spokesman for the governor of Helmand Province blamed Taliban fighters who often brutally murder innocent Afghans they accuse of being spies. (86) In a tribal dispute in Multan, Pakistan in January 2007, fifteen men armed with small arms, daggers and axes cut off the ears and nose of a Pakistani man who married a woman from their tribe for love without their consent. She was spared only because she was not at home; however, they also chopped the ears off the man’s brother and cut off his mother’s hand. (87) In December 2001, gunmen flagged down a bus outside Kabul, Afghanistan and ordered all men who had shaved their beards to get off the bus, then proceeded to cut off the ears and noses of the six clean shaven men as punishment for defying the Taliban’s order to grow long beards. (88) In May 2011 an Assyrian Christian construction worker was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by Al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq. According to the Kirkuk police “his body was mutilated. His head was nearly severed off. He was tortured before he was executed. His eyes were gouged out, his ears were cut off and his faced was skinned. There were also signs of dog bites on the body.” (89) The worst atrocities are inflicted on Christians and Americans.

The Islamist code inculcates a hypersensitivity to shame and humiliation, a result of the symbolic conditioning of a shame-honor culture in which manhood is always in question. “Punishing others alleviates feelings of shame because it replaces the image of oneself as weak, passive with the contrasting image of oneself as powerful.” (90) The victims of these mutilations are always potential witnesses to the perpetrator’s unspoken and often imagined shame. In order to alleviate the feelings of humiliation and restore a sense of honor he has to destroy the organs that saw it, heard it, and could talk about it. Strategically it sends a message to others to keep their eyes shut, their ears closed and their mouth sealed, stigmatizing the victim as an adulterer, outcast, traitor, or spy. Symbolically the mutilation of eyes, ears, and tongues is the literal manifestation of see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. The specific mutilation of eyes and tongues were analyzed by prison psychiatrist Dr. James Gilligan who posited the significant role that shame plays in the motives for murder. When presenting the case study of a man who cut out the tongue and eyes of a woman he raped and murdered he states, “To understand or make sense of this man’s mutilation of his victim, which is senseless from any rational standpoint, we need to see it as the concrete, nonverbal expression of the following thought. ‘If I destroy eyes, I will destroy shame’ (for

one can only be shamed in the eyes of others); in other words, 'If I destroy eyes, I cannot be shamed'; and 'if I destroy tongues, then I cannot be talked about, ridiculed or laughed at: my shamefulness cannot be revealed to others.' The emotional logic that underlies this particular crime, then, which I call the logic of shame, takes the form of magical thinking that says, 'if I kill this person in this way, I will kill shame...' The fact that he focused his attention and hostility on his victim's eyes and tongue is a valuable clue to his corresponding preoccupation with and hypersensitivity to the fear of being overwhelmed by shame and ridicule." (91) The rituals surrounding violence, like all rituals, are profoundly symbolic and hence profoundly meaningful; they follow the laws of magical rather than rational thinking. "The mutilation served as a magical means of accomplishing something that even killing one's victim cannot do, namely that of destroying the feeling of shame itself . . . by means of ritual . . . the murderer can stave off the tidal wave of shame that threatens to engulf him." (92)

Cutting off noses, gouging out eyes, cutting out tongues, and mutilation of genitalia can be interpreted from more than just a psychological perspective of shame and stigma. Historically, particular facial mutilations were both political and a common method of punishment. In the Byzantine Empire any mutilation, especially facial wounds, would disqualify an individual from taking the throne. Blinding a rival would make it almost impossible for them to lead an army into battle and castration meant that he was no longer a man and eliminated any heirs being born to threaten the Emperor. Rhinokopia, cutting off the nose, was also a method of excluding persons from the imperial dignity, or to punish them for adultery. (93) The sin of adultery was drawn to the face, the invisible illegitimate sexual intercourse made manifest, the social capital of honor circumscribed. (94) Dr. Riffat Hassan, a Pakistani-born Islamic theologian, describes the connection between honor and the nose, "There's a saying in Pakistan that honor is like a person's nose. If a person dishonors you, they say that person has cut off your nose. It's a metaphor, but in Pakistan people actually do it." (95) Symbolically these mutilations are identical to acts of iconoclasm in which sacred objects and images of power are mutilated by having their noses, eyes and faces attacked. The term iconoclasm, is "derived from the Greek eikon ('image') and klasma ('Broken thing')", and is defined as "the breaking or destroying of images; especially the destruction of images and pictures set up as objects of veneration." (96) Honor killings, ritual murder and related atrocities are essentially acts of iconoclasm; people who have been mutilated are broken things. Similar to statues that have been defaced, women who have had their faces damaged are no longer objects of beauty arousing adoration, their value is diminished.

Significant parallels between the mutilation of images and the mutilation of people provide a unique understanding of the semiotics of honor killing, ritual murder, and violent atrocity. Identical to the mutilation of people, in many instances iconoclastic acts were construed as the punishment of images. Pamela Graves in an article titled "From an Archaeology of Iconoclasm to an Anthropology of the Body" describes how attacks on statues in sixteenth-

and seventeenth-century England were directed against particular parts of the body, the same parts to which capital and corporal punishment were administered. Statues were imprisoned, tried and sentenced as heretics, then burnt in staged public executions similar to the punishments of condemned criminals as witches, heretics, and traitors. There was also public dismemberment of images—the striking of the heads and hands from statues and obliterating their faces. Images were variously burned, drowned, and beheaded. In the Middle Ages images and relics of saints were ritually debased, humiliated, and physically assaulted. Graves demonstrates that the equivalence of punishments meted out to statues and offenders was based on an understanding of the relative role and value of the body parts. The seriousness of the crime was mapped out on the body.<sup>(97)</sup> “For the most serious of crimes, the most serious of penalties were reserved: the mutilation of ears, lips and tongue, the amputation of hands, feet and ears, the gouging of eyes, or death by hanging, beheading or other means. . . . Burning was for crimes requiring ‘extreme purification by the total elimination of the offender’s body.’”<sup>(98)</sup> “To put this in context, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a woman accused of whoredom or adultery was given the whore’s mark on her face, often a slit nose. To damage the nose on a male was to imply sodomy. This made the sins of the lower body visible on the face. Scholarly culture of the Middle Ages considered the beauty or physical integrity of the face to reflect the inner honesty and integrity of the soul and taught that facial flaws were signs of sin. Thus to damage or defile the face was to damage reputation and honor.”<sup>(99)</sup> The Islamist tribal code proscribes these Medieval bodily punishments for similar symbolic, judicial, and psychological reasons, essentially to stigmatize and shame the victim, purify the sin, and restore order and honor to the community. This is exemplified by an incident in Haripur, Pakistan in June 2011; Ansar Bibi, whose husband chopped off her nose after accusing her of having an affair, states “He should have ended my life, rather than leaving me to live with the stigma of being a woman of bad character,” His justification was that he had to save face, she claimed it was because she was unable to bear children.<sup>(100)</sup>

The parallels between iconoclasm and mutilation also entail more primal magical motivations for the disfigurement of both people and statues. Sympathetic magic is a primal tradition of magical thinking that implies that you can injure, humiliate, or murder a person by injuring or damaging an image of him. This is a classic expression of political iconoclasm: destroy the statues of power and you topple their control. “When a Pharaoh was hated, Egyptians destroyed their statues, hacked their faces from stone images and erased their names from cartouches because they believed that statues contained the spirit of a person. The ancient Egyptians believed that tomb statues could be transformed into living beings through a funerary ritual called the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony. The ‘living statue’ then served as an eternal home for the deceased’s soul. A tomb robber or a person anxious to destroy the soul of a dead enemy simply broke the statue’s nose to prevent the deceased from exacting revenge. Smashing the nose of the statue made it impossible for the figure to breathe; effectively ‘killing’ the statue. Eyes, ears, and mouths were also defaced to destroy the main senses. Symbolically the statues are being deprived of the sensory organs that

animated their life force, magically they are being killed. Mutilating the nose and mouth of the statue is the antithesis of the mouth-opening ceremony that brought the inanimate object to life, it is a ritual murder.”(101) Mutilating women by cutting off their ears, lips, and tongues, blinding them, and hacking off their noses symbolically reduces them to inanimate objects, statues that have no spirit.

The concept of image magic is the basis for the ritual execution and punishment of statues and is consistent with an honor-shame paradigm: “if one can be honored by means of an image, one could also be dishonored by one.”(102) Magical thinking is evident in the thousands of effigies burned throughout the world, the beating of statues with shoes, and the mutilation of images of powerful men. Protests that involve effigies are a public shaming of the person represented. The burning is symbolic and cathartic; a purification ritual that punishes the offense, expels the impurity and restores honor to the community.

Interestingly, attacks on images frequently focus on the face and particularly the eyes. In his book *The Power of Images*, art historian David Freedberg suggests that the eyes “are the clearest and most obvious indications of the vitality of the represented figure. The livelier the eyes seem the livelier the body. Take away the eyes and remove the signs of life. . . . Everyone senses that to deprive the image of its eyes, in particular, is to deprive it effectively of its life.”(103) Freedberg also describes attacks in which noses were destroyed, “The Virgin of Michelangelo’s *Pieta* looks too beautiful, so the man . . . breaks those parts which make her beautiful and therefore make her seem desirable. He destroys her face by breaking her nose . . . not only does she threaten the senses . . . she arouses carnality.”(104) The same iconoclastic impulse was evident in reports of Taliban cleric’s reactions to a 2,000 year old priceless clay statue of a seated bodhisattva that enraged them because it was mostly naked. The Taliban would slap the statue around the head and shoulders, causing museum workers to buy a glass case to protect it.(105) Iconoclasm, honor killing and bodily mutilation share the same symbolic and magical motivations: punishment, public humiliation, purification, and expiation. Eyes are gouged out and blinded with acid to destroy vitality; noses are cut off so the woman is no longer desirable; the body is visibly shamed, the spirit is broken. In protests effigies are burned, in honor killings women are burned. In magical thinking there is a conflation of image and prototype. “The people who assail images do so in order to make clear that they are not afraid of them, and thereby prove their fear. It is not simply fear of what is represented; it is fear of the object itself.”(106)

Islamists are no strangers to iconoclasm and Islam is an aniconic tradition. Muhammad himself removed the idols of the pre-Islamic Arabs from the Ka’abah in Mecca. Interestingly, he first attempted to strike out their eyes with his bow. Muslim iconoclasm derives from the Quranic prohibitions against idolatry. The famous Great Sphinx of Giza in Egypt was mutilated by a Sufi Muslim in the 14th century who chiseled away the nose because Egyptian peasants worshiped the Sphinx as the talisman of the Nile and brought offerings in the hope of increasing their harvest. In the broader sense, iconoclasm refers to religious and

political movements throughout history that encompassed not just the destruction of statues and images but also the destruction of churches, temples, and buildings that are symbolic of religious and political power. There have been thousands of incidents of Islamic iconoclasm, particularly conquering Muslim armies that destroyed Hindu and Buddhist temples, statues, images, and icons, then erected mosques in their place, in many instances building on the very foundation of the temples, sometimes using the same stones. This is the basis for one of the arguments against the ground zero mosque, that it is essentially another 'Victory Mosque' built on the remnants of sacred buildings destroyed by Muslim armies. Muslim iconoclasm is still very active today, for the same religious and political reasons, and is expressed in destroying sacred places and objects and in many image controversies such as the publication of Muhammad cartoons and the Muhammad episodes of the South Park animated television series. In Afghanistan in the 1990's seventy percent of the 100,000 relics in the Kabul Museum were looted and approximately 3,000 pieces were destroyed by the Mujahideen. Taliban officials hacked to pieces Buddhas and carvings and anything featuring the human form. In March 2001, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar issued an edict against un-Islamic graven images; as a result, the Taliban militia went across Afghanistan, destroying all pre-Islamic treasures and ancient sculptures. They used explosives, tanks, and anti-aircraft weapons to blow apart the Buddhas of Bamiyan, two monumental statues of standing Buddhas carved into the side of a cliff in the Bamiyan valley of central Afghanistan, built during the 6th century.

In Egypt edicts concerning idols inspired a new wave of iconoclastic attacks. In April 2006 Sheikh Ali Goma'a, the Grand Mufti of Cairo, issued a fatwa which declared it un-Islamic to exhibit statues in homes and although it did not specifically mention statues in museums or public places, it condemned sculptors and their work. This provoked much criticism and fear that the edict would encourage people to attack the thousands of ancient and pharaonic statues at tourist sites across Egypt. In less than two months after the fatwa a woman attacked three artworks in a Cairo Museum before security guards stopped her. She was wearing a burqa and screaming, "Infidels, infidels" during the attack. Her justification was that "She had been listening to the mufti, and was following his orders."[\(107\)](#) Now fears escalated from Egypt's antiquities being destroyed to Egypt becoming an Islamist State. In early 2011 both fears started coming to fruition. During the uprising that led to the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011, the Cairo museum was looted and vandalized. The media focused on the looting aspect and not the fact that vandals took the time to behead and mutilate mummies. Similar to the magical thinking of Ancient Egypt they were destroying the soul of their dead enemies by beheading the mummies. Egyptian fundamentalists have long objected to displays of mummies and ancient religious idols and not simply because of the Islamic prohibition of images. Statues, paintings, artifacts and mummies are totems from other tribes whose very existence is an ongoing humiliation. As long as the idols of other tribes exist the threat of insurrection exists. For this reason, there are legitimate fears that once the Muslim Brotherhood, now operating under the new name Freedom and Justice Party, is placed in power in Egypt that



they will conduct an iconoclastic campaign similar to that of the Taliban and will destroy the mummies, museums, pyramids, Coptic Churches, and other symbols of Egypt's pre-Islamic past, not to mention an escalation in the violent atrocities committed against Coptic Christians. Destroying the symbols of power is a classic sign of victory over the culture.

Iconoclasm is the manifestation par excellence of the Islamist symbolic code. Whether in the form of destroying buildings and statues, mutilating women, honor killing, ritual murder, or terrorism, for Islamists all violence is about restoring honor, serving vengeance, preserving purity, maintaining tradition, and saving face. Iconoclastic acts are a symbolic diminution of power, a deliberate infliction of shame, a public humiliation, and a loss of face. Enemies must be physically and symbolically broken. Idols worshiped by other religions must have their eyes, noses, and faces removed because they signify other traditions that threaten and mock Islamists. Women accused of violating customs must have their eyes, noses, and faces disfigured because they signify disrespect and noncompliance that threaten and mock Islamists. The imagined mockery is experienced as shame that originates and resides in the eyes of the statues and women; both innocent bystanders, they are silent witnesses of imagined disgrace, so they must be gouged out; the tongues that can make public the shame must be excised; the ears that hear the defamation must be cut off and the noses that represent honor must be slashed. Through these specific acts of mutilation the visible signs of shame are now successfully projected onto both animate and inanimate objects. Murder and mutilation in the form of honor killings, ritual violence and iconoclasm cleanses the taboo, breaks the power of the image and the spirit of the person. Without witnesses shame no longer exists. Honor and purity, the essence of the Islamist symbolic code is restored. Face is saved.

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