



# HONOR CULTURES: AN OUTLINE OF THE IDEA AND ITS RELATION TO VIOLENCE AND CRIME

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reviews honor cultures understood both as phenomena, as well as a more or less conceptualized idea in social sciences. It tracks down the first traces of honor cultures that emerged even before the change from nomadic to sedentary lifestyles of humans. Although honor cultures seem to have been functioning in different parts of the globe for ages, it was in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries when scientists started to conceptualize and research this idea more thoroughly. What makes it still relevant nowadays is its relation to crime, and the use of violence as a tool to preserve, protect, and survive. As long as such cultures still exist, it becomes more and more difficult to reconcile the right to preserve cultural identity with the very limited tolerance of violence and its ongoing criminalization in modern societies. The research was based on source-text analysis, as well as interviews held in detention centers of different types.

**KEYWORDS:** Honor, Honour, Honor culture, Honor sentiment, Violence, Delinquency, Crime, Honor killings

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The tales of honor societies date back much before humans started sedentary lifestyles (Stewart 1994). Various aspects of honor have been present in classical works of literature since the beginnings of Western civilization. Nonetheless, the idea of honor cultures emerged and started becoming more visible in public discourse at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spiking in popularity in the last three decades (Ngram 2024). Honor cultures have become a subject of study mainly by anthropologists and social scientists. Edward Evan Evans-

Pritchard, influenced by prominent Polish anthropologist, Bronisław Malinowski and British physician and ethnologist, Charles Seligman among others, analyzed Northern-African pastoral societies where honor-related practices occurred (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1940a). In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Julian Pitt-Rivers analyzed Mediterranean societies, indicating that honor may function as an idea preserving social order (Pitt-Rivers 1963, 1977). In the 1990s, Frank Henderson Stewart studied Bedouin tribes and even distinguished some particular types of honor, such as horizontal and vertical (Stewart 1994). Focusing on criminological and psychological perspectives, Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen explored honor cultures.

At the same time, aggression and violence were inherent in the lives of honor societies. These could serve many different purposes: protecting property, families, tribes, and even nations at a later time. Lewis A. Coser states at least three important social functions of violence: as a form of achievement, a danger sign, and a catalyst (Coser 1966). Violence may provide economic gains, manifest power, and serve as a tool for conflict management and resolution. Often violence has been also used as a tool for vengeance, which involves a subjective sense of honor or honor sentiment.

Honor is an idea as old as Western civilization, but a sense of honor must have accompanied humans since the beginning of the formation of primal societies. Being strongly connected to reputation, integrity, self-esteem, and the image of oneself and others, honor probably played a significant role in a social sense. That would mean the emergence of social structures, oftentimes hierarchies, and social status accordingly. In this context, a potential use of aggression and violence as a threat could also play a relevant role in enforcing social control. On one hand, there was fear of shame, loss, and dishonor that could result in social exclusion and stigmatization. On the other, there was an opportunity to advance in the social hierarchy. The feeling of fear implies additional, psychological functions of aggression and violence. It may contribute to forming personality, and identity, placing individuals in roles of control, dominance, or submission. Aggression especially fulfilled the adaptive function of humans across their development throughout the ages (Atari 2018).

So there are at least two relevant dimensions or ways how the sense of honor affects human existence. The first way refers to the self, and identity, and is very individualistic. The second way embraces the social structure and group-forming mechanisms, and it is quite communitarian. But has it always been like this? How can honor cultures, which are usually very traditional, be related to modern society? Have honor cultures survived or evolved? What about their use of violence in the Western world where, despite it being rather prevalent, governments tend to rule violence out?

## 2. FROM THE IDEA TO THE CULTURE OF HONOR

At the turn of the first and second decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an American Washington and Lee University-based philosopher, William Lad Sessions, published a book entitled *Honor for Us. A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defense* (Sessions 2012). Even though honor was earlier a subject of different studies, this work draws attention to quite specific types and variants of this concept, asking about its current status. There is personal honor, referring to an individual, but implying also a more social aspect. Then there are a few concepts peripheral to honor: *conferred*, *positional*, *recognition*, *commitment*, *trust*, and *deviant honor*. Finally, Sessions points out different areas where honor is prevalent: among warriors, in sportsmanship, patriotism, academia, or professional activity. This analysis opens space not only for strictly philosophical insights but may also be interesting for the history of ideas and intellectual history.

The Enlightenment brought about a revival of thinking about honor. The reflections of one of the most prominent thinkers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, namely Immanuel Kant, largely coincide with the most contemporary meaning of honor (Welsh 2008, 96, sq.). There appears to be a certain intellectual bond between thoughts on honor in the past and nowadays. In general, one may refer to the following spectrum. On one extreme pole, there is a readiness to sacrifice one's life for the cause; on the other there is doubt, not to say cowardice. Against this background, there appears the issue of status granted by the group, the need to defend this status, to maintain restraint and distance while at the same time maintaining freedom of action. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant also writes about the love of honor (*honestas interna, iustum sui aestimum*) acting as an antidote to mendacity and false modesty, which elevate a person in the perfection of his/her character, determining value accordingly (Kant 2015).

In contrast to the spectrum above, Stewart, who is closer to the ethnographic paradigm, proposes a division into vertical and horizontal instead of internal and external, personal or social honor. Although the subject of the book concerns the Arab understanding of honor, and specifically how it is understood in nomadic Bedouin tribes, it also proves useful in the Western context. Stewart's research focuses predominantly on anthropology and law. He claims that "in other words, the common Western notion of honor is applied cross-culturally." He argues for this by the fact that this concept occurs in an almost unchanged form in many various linguistic traditions, perhaps with the special case of German (*Ehre*), where the Latin affinity is not as direct as in others, and which he examines perhaps most thoroughly.

Nevertheless, further variants of honor are distinguished between cultures. In Arabic culture, honor has separate equivalents for men and women. The

form of *ird* is an honor code for women, which is not identical to the Western understanding of virtue or chastity, because it refers mainly to spiritual and emotional aspects. Among the Bedouins, there is also a separate male version of the honor code called *sharaf*, which includes, among other things, taking care of female honor. It is indeed controversial to equalize these concepts, as Michael Herzfeld warns in his comparative studies on morality (Herzfeld 1980, 339-351).

Bearing that in mind, Stewart refers to German authors and literature, where there exists vast semantic variety that can be clarified by using syntactic criteria (Stewart 1994, 30). He presents the history of honor reaching back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and pivotal German-language works, drawing the decline of its contemporary meaning with regard to previous centuries in favor of personal honor, which he identifies with the horizontal approach (*horizontal honor*). Its features match the definition proposed by Sessions, while Stewart additionally mentions vertical honor (*vertical honor*). This type of honor is dependent on personal variant and refers to interclass relations. This approach is more hierarchical, so distinctions, prizes, and awards are more frequent in this case. What seems relevant to notice is that hierarchy does not imply a lack of respect. By vertical-horizontal distinction, Stewart sees honor as a useful tool for investigating just emerging social structures (ibid., 63). Making further references to Ludwig Feuerbach, Immanuel Kant, and Joseph Gabler, Stewart concludes that it seems unlikely to defend honor in the sense of functioning as law (ibid., 151-153). The conclusions arising from the comparison of Arabic and Mediterranean cultures indicate only that honor is a foundation for the right to respect and to be respected. It seems to be a cornerstone for culturally diversified interpretations and conceptualizations of dignity as well.

The foundation for further distinctions of honor variants would be honor sentiment, which appears even before socialization begins. Children are quite fragile when it comes to the feeling of shame and being ashamed. Such a feeling seems quite natural, as humans are social creatures. Along with the social development of an individual – education, upbringing, enculturation, and other socializing processes – personal and social honors evolve. Additional filters for their shapes would also be personality, individual traits developed by individuals, and their unique life experiences. As personal honor triggers one's morality, and probably forms *Weltanschauung*, social honor involves ethics. In contrast to moral judgments and decisions that apply rather to one's conscience, ethics implies consequences in the form of punishments, legal sanctions, and socially-related consequences. Vertical or social comprehension of honor is connected to different social groups, classes, and even professional groups that share particular honor codes. Every single person can have their sense of honor, but in a social sense, differences in their understanding may vary a lot.

The first part of Sessions' work includes notions related to the concept of honor, the second part refers to its semantics, while the third part is a discussion and polemics about the future of honor for the West, specifically Western civilization. Just in the introduction, Sessions claims that he hopes that "By exhibiting honor as a *normative* concept, [...] we might come to see its value for us as well as for others" (Sessions 2012, 2-4). Honor seems to be a matter of reputation that sometimes can be undeserved or straightforwardly bad. Ironically, particular people or deeds, although worthy and valuable, may be condemned, while villains and wicked individuals may be glorified and praised. The major cause for such switches is the social context. It determines what or who is worthy at a particular moment, and what is the current value system. Moreover, different forms of social organization, such as family, tribe, clan, religious group, economic and political organizations, the military, but also gangs and criminal organizations can significantly affect the perception of honorability. As all these above change over time, it seems essential to ask about the current status of honor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2022, Patricia Mosquera writes about honor as a multifaceted concept. Her research

provides empirical support for the honor-as-multifaceted approach and demonstrates the centrality of honor codes in a variety of psychological and social processes, including personality, the negotiation of gendered roles within the family, attitudes toward in-group members, emotions in response to threats to collective honor, intergroup conflict, the negotiation of power in intergroup relations, in-group identification processes, and prosocial motivations (Mosquera 2022).

Sessions recalls Peter Berger and Tore Aase's seminars with the memorable question, "Is honor a pre-modern weed in a modern garden of dignity?" (Sessions 2012, 5). The word 'dignity' has become more and more popular in modern times, and is consequently pushing honor out of the main discourse. Times of chivalry, duels, and tournaments belong to the past. The West also went through the Enlightenment period that aimed to civilize conflict and violence. As modern governments, laws, but also new institutions of prison appeared, it was no longer necessary to torture and flaunt violence to enforce justice or manifest authority – when speaking of the West. At the same time, conflict and dishonor usually still meant bloodshed. But what about emotions, feelings, all those sentiments related to winning or losing honors? Tore Aase indicates that the semantics of honor have shifted to the idea of dignity, as more frequently in use, but not completely.

In modern Western societies, and especially liberal democracies, honor does not seem like an appealing idea. Mostly because of its outdated references to tradition, hierarchy, military, or cultural homogeneity. What makes

honor today a bit archaic are moreover clearly and rather strictly defined social roles, classes, and social status connected with them.

This thought has been analyzed from a macrosocial perspective by Miguel E. Basáñez and Ronald F. Inglehart in the book entitled *A World of Three Cultures: Honor, Achievement and Joy* (Basáñez & Inglehart 2016). The authors depict the role of values over the centuries with strong references to Max Weber and Alexis de Tocqueville. From the methodological point of view, their research is mostly qualitative but quantitative as well, aimed at delineating three major culture clusters: honor cultures putting political authority in the first place, then cultures of achievement accentuating economic growth, and last but not least, cultures of joy where social interactions are valued the most. Depending on the values accepted by citizens and their cultural identity, adaptation to one of these three models will vary. The process of transmitting values is long-term and occurs through multiple channels: through family, schools, media, religious institutions, forms of leadership, and law. Values do not remain constant but are subject to constant change. In particular, politicians and social leaders can influence cultural changes to promote and achieve set goals, such as economic growth, democratization, or equity. The authors introduce two methods of measuring development: the *Objective Development Index* and *Subjective Development Index*, which seem innovative from the cultural research point of view. The first combines factors such as health, education, income, gender, equality, political rights, and civil liberties; the second uses the responses provided in the *World Values Survey*.

When it comes to the socio-cultural context of honor, it should be stated what the characteristics and features of honor societies are. The authors indicate crucial historical moments at this point, such as the Agrarian Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Second World War. As a reference, they use Daniel Bell's work from 1976, where a well-known typology of cultures has been proposed: preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial (ibid., 115). These are also the ones used in the *World Values Survey* methodology. The WVS is a vast project aiming at investigating the values and beliefs of citizens of different countries, and how they transform and affect the social and political lives of societies of a particular country. And this informs the quantitative part of the study. The data is displayed in numbers, based on answers given in the survey. These refer to – among other things – the role of god, faith, men and women, politics, and children in families.

As a result of the juxtaposition of the three types of culture, the authors conclude that honor cultures can be characterized by strong attachment to religion. Accordingly, religion affects social organization. Such societies also share the conviction that religion should play a relevant role in public life. For example, the WVS suggests that politicians who openly declare religiosity are more effective than those who are atheists (ibid., 120).

The next characteristic of honor societies or cultures is a tendency to accept hierarchies. In comparison, cultures of achievement are much more egalitarian. It is interesting how the relationship between parents and children appears in the study. According to honor cultures that accept hierarchies more, children are expected to love and display respect to parents regardless of who they are. Another important factor is the upbringing of children in the spirit of obedience and sense of duty. Furthermore, such parental relationships interact with the preferences of the state system. Strong leaders are preferred, who do not have to struggle with governments, parliaments, or even democratic elections. Therefore, forceful solutions to resolve conflicts are favored, as is the use of military means, and in a global perspective, governments based on a military regime are highly promoted.

The tendency to prefer hierarchical structures as well as forms of social organization affects the understanding of gender roles. In such a sense, genders are rather strictly assigned to particular social roles. Among honor cultures, men should fulfill the roles of political and business leaders, while women should take care of homes and childcare in the first place (*ibid.*, 116). Other questions concerned whether men or women are better politicians, whether women want to have a house and children or to develop a career first, and whether children in kindergartens with working mothers suffer more than those of non-working ones. There were also questions about the use of physical punishments among partners and towards kids, and if these are in any way justified. Researchers asked about academic education – if it is more important for boys or girls. When they asked women if they are fulfilled with having children, nearly eighty percent answered affirmatively (*ibid.*, 119).

Additionally, what characterizes honor cultures is the special care and protection of women, especially because of their roles as mothers. When not taking up any jobs because of childcare, they seem to be more dependent on men who are obliged to provide and protect. At the same time, economic dependency triggers a higher risk of economic violence. Not only husbands but fathers and brothers are seen as co-responsible for women's wellbeing and safety. Still, this model is very patriarchal. Along with respect for women, there is no or little acceptance of alternative and informal forms of cohabitation. Homosexual relationships and behaviors are even stigmatized.

The abovementioned characteristics put stress on the importance of family among honor societies. The idea of family is here understood traditionally and patriarchally while social roles are delineated very clearly. But change occurs in new circumstances and contexts of the functioning of such societies. The authors of the WVS noticed that when humans move to more urbanized areas, increase their level of education, turn from the agricultural to the service sector, and increase their monthly income, then both men and women tend to loosen their morals (*ibid.*). Attachment to strong family bonds coexists with

lesser attention put on individual interests and needs. When asked about life goals, the respondents often claim that these entail bringing pride to parents.

Basáñez and Inglehart point out that honor cultures stretch back to the oldest times, when humans had to coexist with animals. There are some analogies between human and animal societies. Alpha males usually led groups, provided evolutionary and genetic variety, as well as dominance (*ibid.*, 120). The organization of societies based on authority and respecting tradition is common also nowadays, but some relevant changes started to appear along with the emergence of rationalistic and Enlightenment thought. This overlapped with industrial revolutions that speeded up the process of changing previous lifestyles. As Heinrich Rickert and the Baden school of Neo-Kantianism would probably claim, this process also involved shifts in understanding values. Throughout the revolutions, values were increasingly oriented toward the properties of objects, their achievement, and possession (*ibid.*). The new era of steam engines and heavy industry, together with the futuristic visions of philosophers and artists, meant redefinitions of value systems eventually. Cultures that cultivated traditions of authority and honor usually settled areas where natural resources were limited. Therefore, honor was needed to compete. The authors point out Africa, Islamic states, orthodox Christian, and Hindu areas as places where honor societies function most. Indeed, the majority of countries included in the WVS that display most of honor cultures' features are non-European ones. Scores higher than average belong to such countries as Malta, Russia, Armenia, Moldova, Hungary, Latvia, and Belarus. Poland is right in the middle, while Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden display the least features of honor cultures (*ibid.*, 121). Generally, socio-ecological circumstances may have played an important role in forming honor cultures (Uskul & Cross 2020).

Today, the Western world is going through another, fourth industrial revolution (Schwab 2017) marked by AI development, machine learning, robotization, and other complex processes affecting the lives of whole societies soon. Nevertheless, an earlier significant shift was connected with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Bringing Central Europe and the West together implied political, economic, and moral transitions for post-Soviet countries. The model of a democratic state system was developed more or less painstakingly, which meant, among other things, a return to political pluralism, as well as an opening to the free market. Although the capitalist system is perhaps the only one from a historical perspective that has allowed the masses to protect themselves from the specter of hunger and poverty, it also contributed to a cultural change – societies began to take a course of development increasingly toward a social model oriented towards the possession and achievement of goods (Hendrickson 1992). Unlike in Western countries, where capitalism had been developing for a longer time, in Central and Eastern Europe, it appeared almost over-



night. This kind of 'shock therapy' forced citizens to change their way of thinking, as well as to reevaluate the existing axionormative systems. It often posed a significant challenge to the adaptive capabilities of individuals and societies. As a consequence, some of them adapted to the new context, while others became excluded, and even became involved in criminal activities.

There is a particular thing, among others, that characterizes modern Western societies, and that is the criminalization of violence. The more complex societies become, the more laws are introduced, including regulations of the use of force, aggression, and direct coercion. A critical examination of honor cultures and especially their use of aggression was made by Mark Moritz (Moritz 2008, 101):

Here I consider as honor cultures those cultures that have what Stewart calls a code of reflexive honor: that is, a culture that demands a counterattack on the part of a man whose honor has been impugned and in which a failure to do so results in the loss of honor (1994: 145–47).

A feature of many honor cultures is that men are prepared to use violence and even die to defend their reputation as honorable men. Moreover, aggression in these specific contexts is institutionalized, regarded as legitimate and necessary by the society at large. Other features associated with many, but not all, honor cultures include a concern with the chastity of women, extreme vigilance about one's reputation and a sensitivity to insults, male autonomy, patrilineal kin groups, and assertive and often violent relations outside of the kin groups. [...] Honor cultures have generally been associated with societies in which the individual is at economic risk from his fellows and the state is too weak to protect the individual's property [...]

The above quotation may suggest a conclusion that honor cultures usually functioned in conditions of limited resources, therefore violence and aggression as tools of protection were not only allowed but legitimized as well. Furthermore, differences between older and contemporary societies may lead to potential conflict and cultural clashes.

Although honor cultures existed for ages, scientific conceptualizations of this phenomenon appeared quite recently. The idea of honor cultures is prevalent in philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology and cultural studies, or pedagogy and education sciences. It differs from dignity and victimhood cultures and may be described by the following characteristics. Honor cultures care about religiosity, allow hierarchies, and respect tradition and family bonds. Parents are respected unconditionally, while children are brought up in the spirit of duty and obedience. Honor cultures are also exclusive rather than inclusive. For example, sexual minorities are rather not tolerated.

When it comes to governing societies, strong, authoritative leaders are favored, which means antidemocratic and authoritative tendencies. Male roles

are linked with providing and protecting, while female roles are focused on childcare and the home hearth. This affects the approach to education – it is perceived to be more important for boys than girls. Despite patriarchy, women are especially protected. The ethos of motherhood is therefore commonly cultivated.

From today's perspective, honor cultures, especially those most traditional, may be also perceived as controversial. First of all, because of approval for forceful and even military methods of resolving conflicts – preferred forms of governance are thus rather based on authoritative, even military regimes than democracy. Secondly, the allowance to use aggression may result in sanctioned violence, including domestic violence. The abovementioned studies revealed a certain level of acceptance for using force against a partner or relatives. Many acts of aggression or violence were relatively normalized in pre-modern societies, but today's perspective opens new questions and problems to consider.

### 3. HONOR CULTURES, CRIME & VIOLENCE

Different cultural, historical, or political contexts usually determine if something is assessed as good and bad, moral or immoral, right or wrong, etc. but this is not the task for the history of ideas, nor for intellectual history. The idea of honor cultures is still being researched and investigated. New problematic fields are still emerging, and the discourse is likely to sparkle rather than fade. The perspective of recent societal changes highlights issues especially important for legal, criminological, and educational discourses.

Among the many variants of honor, there is one broadly described by William Sessions mentioned above. It is deviant honor. This can be referred to the sociological theory of deviance, where all other than conformist behaviors are perceived as deviance from social norms and values (Merton 2002). But:

What does it have to contribute to our understanding of deviant honor? Perhaps less than one might hope. First off, deviance-theory embraces a vast array of phenomena as diverse as crime, delinquency, suicide and drug addiction, but also sometimes including mental illness and retardation, physical handicaps, sexual orientation, nudism, "infamous occupations", and even some aspects of racism, sexism, terrorism and the like.

[...]

Further, sociologists are not agreed on the very concept of deviance. They do agree that deviance is normative deviation from social norms, rules or standards, not statistical averages; that deviance comes in degrees; that it is socially, culturally and temporally relative; that it cannot be viewed solely as

an individual or arbitrary phenomenon but “reflect[s] patterns and processes of social definition” (Sessions 2012, 46-47).

As it has been stated earlier in this paper, one of the characteristics of honor cultures is the inclination to use aggression and violence as a multitool for conflict management, protection, or manifestations of power. At the same time, to achieve similar goals, tolerance towards the use of violence becomes inversely proportional to the preference for conversation, negotiation, mediation, and discussion, namely, non-violent means. What seems to be important to notice is that the use of force and even violence are still legalized by the state in some circumstances. So there are two contradictory contexts for honor: the past, where violence was normalized, and the present, where it is criminalized or institutionalized. There are also two facets of deviance: positive and negative. Negative deviant behaviors are well known, these are crime, drug abuse, prostitution, vandalism, and many others alike. Positive deviance is linked with behaviors falling out of the norm but still beneficial and desirable for society, e.g. the military, firefighters, blood donors, policemen, etc. Many of these activities are truly needed, although those who engage in them are the minority. Accordingly, honor-related behaviors may include both sides of the coin: morality, ethics, and actual laws in general. Honor is a normative concept, omnipresent throughout the ages, which means it has actively taken part in shaping social norms. The category of deviance seems not dependent on the nature of honor itself but on the social contexts in which it exists.

In the article by Przemysław Zdybek and Radosław Walczak, entitled “Does the Culture of Honor do well in Poland? A Replication Study on the Culture of Honor while Accounting For Gender Role Differences” published in *Family Forum* in 2019 (Zdybek & Walczak 2019), one can find questions about the culture of honor in Poland. The authors inquire about men’s honor culture, with special attention put on the manifestation of aggression as an answer to public provocation, and the role of women among honor cultures. They define it as permissive towards violence to protect and defend people and property. Sometimes, from the perspective of honor culture, it is even required to act in such a way. Otherwise, honor in the sense of social reputation may be endangered. Moreover, the circumstances may be defined by the low efficacy and reach of laws (ibid., 114-115).

The gender factor seems to be relevant as well. It is inappropriate for women to use violence. The allowance for men is supported by different archetypes, such as warrior, hero, gentleman, or *macho*. The use of violence was rationalized and even legalized, as stated above. Social functions, such as the military or police, are still domains where male employment predominance is present.

In 2015, Mark Cooney wrote a book entitled *Honor Cultures and Violence*, where one can find two comprehensions of honor: contemporary and historical (Cooney 2015). The first one means mostly fairness, honesty, and a trait of character. The traditional, historical comprehension refers mostly to social status, will, and the ability to use force. There are two major types of situations where force and violence may be used: among men, as a reaction to attack, theft, insult to the family, nation, or even gang; and violence against women who have somehow disgraced, insulted, posed a threat to men's social status or lost their chastity. As Cooney noticed, most honor cultures have inclinations to use various forms of violence, while nowadays this is especially visible among Muslim traditional families inhabiting their own as well as Western countries. In all likelihood, in the West this phenomenon is even more visible due to more laws regulating the use of violence, including its domestic variant.

Honor cultures have been the subject of other studies. Researchers from French and North American sites categorized culture types into honor cultures, dignity cultures, and face cultures (Jingjing 2017). The authors claim that this categorization is gaining popularity nowadays (*ibid.*, 713). They are especially interested in face and honor cultures. The first is especially prevalent in Asian countries. Concurrently, honor cultures can be ascribed to many other geographical areas, such as the Middle East, North Africa, Latin America, some Mediterranean areas, and Russia.

Dignity cultures assume the inherent dignity of all human beings, which suits individualistic and egalitarian Western societies. Face cultures rely on being perceived well by the community, which corresponds with the collectivist ideas of the East. Basic concepts describing this type of culture are hierarchy, humility, and harmony. Accordingly, the understanding of honor itself is formed both by an individualistic and communitarian assessment (*ibid.*, 717-718).

The links between honor and violence can be also found in the phenomenon called honor killings. Raghu Singh defines these as "the murder of a woman or girl by male family members. The killers justify their actions by claiming that the victim has brought dishonor upon the family name or prestige." (Singh 2024). The specificity of victims means that societies where honor killings are most frequent are patriarchic ones. Women seeking divorce, having sex outside marriage, or bringing shame to the family's honor are usually the victims of such crimes. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that "as many as 5,000 women are killed annually for reasons of honor", mostly in the Middle East, and South Asia, "with nearly half of all honor killings occurring in India and Pakistan" (*ibid.*). Women are not just killed brutally. There are other related crimes, such as beating until death, burning, shooting, stabbing, and forced suicide. Some penal codes, such as the one in

Jordan, “exempts from punishment those who kill female relatives found ‘guilty’ of committing adultery, and Article 76 of the temporary penal code allows defendants to cite ‘mitigating reasons’ in assault crimes” (ibid.).

Honor killings can be seen in Europe and the Western world, too. The British organization Karma Nirvana created an interactive map where all known or suspicious cases of murders in the name of honor are listed. There are at least several dozen of them (Karma Nirvana, 2024). In most cases, family members have committed these murders.

Moreover, other violent and criminal behaviors may be linked to honor. Amiya Bhatia et al. propose a category of ‘honor-based-violence’ (HBV) which, besides homicides, includes violence against children, family rejection and control, exclusion from education, forced and early marriage, emotional violence (harassment, blackmail), female genital mutilation (circumcision), gang membership, hymen exam or reconstruction, sex work, and (forced) suicide (Bhatia et al. 2024). The authors found out that such crimes were also committed in Western countries such as the USA, Australia, Italy, New Zealand, and Sweden. This latter country’s government currently faces a huge problem with a rise in criminal behaviors in general. Most of the perpetrators of crimes, such as murder, manslaughter, and attempted murders, are migrants. As Göran Adamson noticed, “crime propensity among non-registered migrants is significant.” (Adamson 2020). The intense migration that Europe and the USA struggle with nowadays may be also a factor for the increased number of honor-based-violence cases. Cross-cultural differences combined with insufficient multicultural education, reintegration and readaptation programs, lack of legal knowledge, or even essential skills enabling migrants to take up jobs may pose a threat to social security. I think that the lack of such initiatives in public policies, as well as huge cultural diversification in a short period, can result in increased cases of violence, including honor-based violence. Although confirmed numbers of honor-related abuse – e.g. in the UK – oscillate around 2500-3000 cases (UK 2024) per year (between 2021 and 2024), many may remain reported. Therefore, the overall scale may be underestimated.

In the past few years, I had a chance to interview prisoners, ex-prisoners, youth staying in juvenile detention centers, and prison guards about honor. In the group of about thirty interviewees, the vast majority of those involved in crimes claimed that they have honor, and it still exists, especially in gangs and organized crime. In individual in-depth interviews, I asked about the elements that characterize honor cultures, according to the criteria mentioned earlier. It turned out that they kept silent and uncooperative with the representatives of government authorities – especially those who declared belonging to informal criminal groups. Moreover, many of them respect hierarchy, prefer patriarchy with strictly divided male and female roles, allow the use of violence, and

declare themselves as believers (Christians mostly). Given word is highly valued even among common criminals. Over half of the interviewed criminals presented negative attitudes toward homosexuality and shared a belief that it is men's role to protect women's chastity.

On the contrary, prison guards in most cases claimed that there is no 'honor among thieves.' Maybe older criminals (aged 50+) still share this value, but the younger ones are focused mostly on achieving economic goals and gaining power. Today's manifestations of the former honor culture of prisoners are mainly limited to symbolic value. There is still a specific language – prison slang, tattoos, or daily habits and rituals. Some prisoners still share secret codes of values but these are rather in decline compared to the situation from thirty to forty years back.

The difference in opinions arises most probably from the fundamental discrepancies in individual understanding of honor. Prison authorities identify honorability with respect for the law, while criminals form completely alternative axionormative systems. They also can share codes and systems that fulfill the criteria of honor cultures, although contradictory with societal norms and values. As a result, one can speak of fulfilling the definition of deviant honor in this case. Criminal cultures and organizations may also rely on the sense of honor. Although this study does not allow for such a generalization to the entire criminal community, it may suggest the importance of honor for at least some of them. This in turn implies the need to conduct further, in-depth research in this area. Especially, because many criminals do display characteristics of honor cultures, at least in the context of Central Europe. By better understanding of this matter, probably it would be also a chance to develop more efficient methods of resocialization.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions that can be drawn from the above considerations refer to at least a couple of aspects. First of all, honor is a multidimensional and polysemic notion. Its semantics may vary according to historical momentum, and cultural and geographical contexts, although predominantly it refers to the reputation of individuals or social groups, from family to community. Among these groups, there are also criminal organizations, such as gangs or mafia. A specific type of honor among criminals is called deviant honor. Despite functioning beyond legal codes, it is still based upon one's sense of reputation.

Second of all, honor as a normative concept functions among specific cultures. These are rather traditional, and patriarchic, and allow the use of violence in some circumstances. Honor cultures still exist, and are noticeable in Western countries, but prevalent in the Middle East and Southern Asia. They

have played a significant role in shaping societies and especially providing security in harsh conditions. The use of violence was quite common and served multiple purposes.

Thirdly, as contexts change throughout the ages, modern Western societies have developed more laws, and they are more urbanized, multicultural, and educated. Compared to traditional societies, contemporary ones are relatively safer and wealthier. Social mobility is much greater nowadays, which favors migration, multiculturalism, and last but not least – axiological pluralism. Modern societies have developed laws that criminalize the use of force and violence. At the same time, state institutions still have some rights to use these, but only under strict regulations and control.

So as honor cultures do not exclude violence, there might be conflicts between written laws, codexes, and cultural customs. Traditional honor cultures allowing violence contradict with the overall civilizational tendency to criminalize and stigmatize any form of violence, outside the jurisdiction of the state in particular. There are still many examples of abuse in the name of honor.

But does the mean that we should abandon honor *en bloc*? Many positive aspects of it constitute families, societies, and the sense of identity of human beings, among others. Honor has been embedded in the West since the beginning of this civilization. Moreover, honor cultures do not always have to be connected with violence, while contemporary public discourses tend to depict honor in the context of honor killings. It would be rather helpful to invest in well-thought-out public policies, intercultural education, and legal awareness to prevent deviant behaviors, namely honor-based violence and abuse. The future will show if cultures of honor will transform, evolve into functioning following laws, or become an outdated “pre-modern weed in a modern garden of dignity.”

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