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“The Martyr of Dawn”: Femicide in Jordanian Media

Introduction

On December 3rd, 2013, Jordanian media buzzed with coverage of a homicide. The female victim was 20-year-old university student Noor Al-Awadat, who was stabbed to death in a bus station while on her way to university. The accused, a 22-year-old man, allegedly fled the scene, only to be captured six hours later. The crime was widely reported in Jordanian media and conflicting accounts of the circumstances, motivations, and results of the investigations soon followed. The contradictions in media coverage created an aura of suspense and uncertainty around what happened on that fateful morning, until eventually the media were banned from publicising the proceedings of the trial.

Media treatment of various criminal activities has been the subject of much Western scholarly research focusing on UK, American, and Canadian media. Researchers studying patterns of crime representation in the media have found that the focus is often on violent crimes more than crimes against property (Doob, 1985; Sheley and Ashkins, 1981), that the risks of crime reported in the media far exceed real risks reflected in

official statistics (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Howitt, 1998), and that crimes are widely covered in all types of media (Reiner, 1997). The ‘distorted’ image of crime conveyed in the media has also been found to have an impact on public knowledge and perception of crime (Durham et al., 1995; Reiner, 1997). In Durham et al.’s words, ‘the misrepresentation of crime types, as well as of offender and victim characteristics, is important because large numbers of citizens obtain their information about crime from the mass media’ (Durham et al., 1995: 145).

More specifically, media analysts and criminologists have also engaged with questions of female homicide in the media. Carter has found that female homicide is overrepresented in British tabloid press, leading women to fear rape or death as the likely outcomes of instances of sexual violence (Carter, 1998). Scholarship on victimhood has identified the tendency of news media to classify female victims of sex crimes as either ‘virgins’ or ‘whores’ (Benedict, 1992). In Greer’s words, ‘these binary oppositions do not necessarily result from individual journalistic malice. Rather, they arise from the gender-biased nature of language and prevailing myths about women, sex and rape’ (Greer, 2007: 40). Peelo, writing about the objectification of homicide victims as either angels or heroes, regards this as a ‘part of a social process of neutralizing anguish’ (Peelo, 2006: 165). Dowler et al. also recognise that while female victims of crime are more newsworthy than male victims, their newsworthiness is contingent upon

their social status and their proximity to the image of ideal victims (Dowler et al., 2006).

Within studies of Arab media, analyses focusing on news media portrayals of crime and in specific violence against women are virtually non-existent. One study by Halim and Meyers analyses news coverage of violence against women in three Arab countries in the Gulf. The study focuses on English-language newspapers in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait and concludes that coverage routinely focuses on the perpetrators and silences the female victims. Moreover, Halim and Meyers find that the violence itself is minimised (Halim and Meyers, 2010). Similarly, an analysis of the religious and medical discourses used by Jordanian media in coverage of several phenomena centred on women's virginity finds that these discourses are represented as uncontested 'truths'. It is argued that coverage of so-called honour crimes focuses on proving the victims' 'innocence' through the use of medical authority to declare them virginal (Mahadeen, 2013). In a loosely related study focusing on Swedish media representations of a particular so-called honour crime which took place in Kurdish communities in Sweden, Reimers argues that the Swedish media present the crime in cultural terms, thus ignoring possible connections with wider manifestations of violence against women in Swedish society (Reimers, 2007). Clearly, then, there is a sizeable gap in our

understanding of just how Arab news media address violence against women, in all its forms.

The present paper offers a conceptual and comparative analysis of Jordanian news media coverage of Noor Al-Awadat's murder alongside so-called honour crimes. Al-Awadat's murder is conceptualised here as a mega murder, while so-called honour crimes are conceptualised as routine murders (Soothill et al., 2002). These crimes are treated here as femicide, a distinct and extreme form of sexual violence against women (Carter, 1998; Radford and Russell, 1992). Radford defines femicide as 'the misogynous killing of women by men' (Radford, 1992: 3). In adopting this label, Radford places these murders on a 'continuum' of sexual violence' (Kelly, 1988: 74) that emphasises the sexual politics underlying them. Recognising these murders as femicide also highlights the 'dissonance between women's and men's perceptions of the social world' (Radford, 1992: 3). However, Radford's definition of femicide, and indeed Kelly's conceptualisation of the continuum of sexual violence, do not take into account woman-against-woman murders which can be equally seen as manifestations of patriarchal sexual violence, even if practised by women themselves. For instance, while the grand majority of so-called honour crimes are committed by men against women, there are recorded, albeit rare, cases where they have been carried out by women against women in what can be understood as an extreme form of bargaining with

patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988). Further, Shalhoub-Kevorkian offers a more expansive definition for femicide that takes account of the ‘long, draining process of death’ experienced by female victims as a result of fear, threats, and social pressure (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003: 605). She defines it as ‘the process leading to death and the creation of a situation in which it is impossible for the victim to “live”’ (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003: 600). This reconceptualisation of femicide renders the experiences of and the language used by victims threatened with death in Arab societies particularly visible. Shalhoub-Kevorkian thus calls for the studying of ‘the language of honor that ends in the nonlanguage of death’ (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003: 591). For the purposes of this paper, the term femicide will be applied in a way that is sensitive to these considerations. It is understood here as a violent process leading to the killing of women as well as the killing itself, which are both reflective of gender inequality under patriarchal systems.

Background: Noor Al-Awadat’s Murder and So-Called Honour Crimes

Coverage of Noor Al-Awadat’s murder started on December 3rd, 2013. In early reports published in local news websites, coverage was limited to stating that the body of a

female university student was found stabbed in a bus station in Zarqa, Jordan's second largest city, early in the morning of that day. A bus driver had found the body inside his bus and then called the police. As more information surfaced, the media began to focus on specific information: the victim was a student of Shari'a, she was veiled, and she had sustained multiple stab injuries to her body and face. On the ground, Noor's tribe resorted to burning tyres and blocking streets in an effort to put pressure on the police to find her murderer. Later that day, the media were reporting the capture of the suspected murderer, as well as conflicting information about his occupation as a bus fare collector (a job that carries classist and negative connotations in the country) or as a student at the same university as the victim. By the following day, anonymous sources from the Public Security Directorate reportedly dismissed rape or theft as motives. In subsequent reports, more details surfaced about the violent nature of the crime, fuelled by the accused's confession. Both Noor's and the accused's tribes (as well as the police) resorted to tribal customs to curb further violence by brokering a temporary agreement. However, the motives behind the crime were still unclear. The media reported theft and revenge for being rejected as a suitor as the accused's motives, but these were not confirmed by official sources at the time. In January 2014, the accused was charged with homicide with the intent of theft as well as indecent assault and attempted rape. In addition to this, his profession as a bus fare collector was confirmed. On February 20th, 2014, the Criminal Court issued a ban on media coverage of the proceedings of the trial.

On the other hand, the scenarios of so-called honour crimes in Jordan vary. While much of the scholarly literature engaging with the subject has focused on the legal frameworks licensing this form of femicide and failing their victims (Araji and Carlson, 2001; Becknell, 2005; Nesheiwat, 2004; Warrick, 2005), other works focused on the role played by politics of gender and sexuality in perpetuating these crimes (Abu Odeh, 2010; Amado, 2004; Faqir, 2001). The prevalent understanding of so-called honour crimes is that they are acts of killing of a woman by one or more male family members for trespassing, or being suspected of, trespassing against socio-sexual norms. Often, this translates into actual or suspected or rumoured pre- or extra-marital sex. This understanding derives from traditional views of honour which see it as bound with women's sexual morality and specifically their virginity if they are unmarried.

However, as Shalhoub-Kevorkian aptly demonstrates, honour is an elastic concept and breaching it can take an infinite number of forms ranging from absence from the home to the woman asserting her will in marriage (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). In Jordan, an average of 20-25 so-called crimes of honour is recorded annually. And despite efforts to raise awareness of these crimes and to change the laws that trivialise them (Articles 340 and 98 of the Penal Code), a recent study showed that a large proportion of Jordanian teenagers believed that 'killing a woman who has dishonored her family is morally right and justifiable' (Eisner and Ghuneim, 2013: 415). Not surprisingly, the study also found

that such attitudes were rooted in beliefs supporting patriarchal authority and control of female sexuality.

Methodology

The present study interrogates the relationship between patterns of reporting femicide in Jordanian media and the wider fixation on women's sexual morality and acceptance of violence against women in Jordanian society. Although it does not exhaust all media coverage of femicide, it considers two prominent types: the murder of Noor Al-Awadat and so-called honour crimes. The study compares and contrasts media coverage of Noor's murder to coverage of so-called honour crimes in order to articulate their gendered points of convergence and departure. As such, this is a study of media representations of this extreme form of sexual violence against women, and not a study of this form of violence per se.

The investigation is guided by the following questions: In what ways is media coverage of Noor's murder similar or different to coverage of so-called honour crimes? To what extent is this coverage imbued with notions of 'ideal' and 'culpable' victims? How does media practice in reporting femicide fit in with wider social narratives around violence against women and women's sexual morality in Jordan?

This paper is based on close readings of news and opinion columns focusing on Noor's murder, obtained from a number of Jordanian news websites (Ithar News, Sawalief, Alghad, Alhayat News, Saraya, Allofjo, Alwakeel News, Assabeel, Khaberni, Addustour) spanning December 2013-February 2014. A total of 26 texts were obtained for analysis through a keyword search using Google for such terms as 'Noor Al-Awadat', 'martyr of dawn', 'Zarqa bus station murder', and 'murder of Aal Al-Bayt student' (the search terms were naturally in Arabic, and are translated into English here for clarity). The selection of texts was thus informed by their relevance to the case and by their contribution to the construction of the mediated narrative about Noor's murder. The texts were organised chronologically and according to their correspondence to the different stages of coverage: breaking of the news, emerging details about the victim, legal and other ramifications, capture of the murderer, and motives. Following this, they were collated to reveal salient themes that were then analysed from a critical feminist perspective.

The other set of data was obtained from coverage of so-called honour crimes for the period 2008-2014 in some of these websites (Khaberni, Alghad, and Addustour). A total of 16 texts were selected for analysis based on their relevance and date of publication. Key concepts guiding the analysis were derived from Soothill et al.'s work on media homicides (Soothill et al., 2002, 2004), as well as criminological engagements with victimology and the media (Christie, 1986; Greer, 2007; Peelo, 2006). These concepts

were applied in conjunction with an understanding of these murders as instances of femicide; an extreme manifestation of sexual violence against women. Underpinning those methodological choices were the procedural guides for feminist critique and methodology advocated by Stewart: focusing on invisible or ignored issues that touch women's lives and their struggles against devaluation and powerlessness and placing a particular emphasis on power relations and gender (Stewart 1994): in this instance the emphasis was on these struggles and power relations as they appear in mediated locations and broader social contexts in Jordan.

Mega Murder vs. Routine Murders

While it has been confirmed in numerous studies that serious personal crimes make for high priority news items (See, for example, Dowler et al., 2006; Katz, 1987; Peelo et al., 2004; Sacco, 1995; Sheley and Ashkins, 1981), it is equally widely known that not all homicides are covered in the media. Those that are covered, as Soothill et al. have found, can be classified into mega-, mezzo-, and routine cases (Soothill et al., 2002). In their ground-breaking study of homicide and the media, they distinguish between these different types based on volume of coverage and argue that cultural and social contexts determine whether a homicide achieves mega status in the media (2002). Furthermore, they find that cases that are classified as mega murders become ingrained within the

public's wider understanding of homicide and influence future journalistic decisions. In effect, mega murders 'become, in time, our 'general knowledge' of killing' (Soothill et al. 2002: 420). This classification of media homicides is helpful in understanding the mediated perceptions of homicide in society and the media's role in constructing these. In the cases studied here, it is instructive to compare and contrast Noor's murder with so-called honour crimes in order to draw conclusions about their relative importance and wider social impact.

The murder of Noor Al-Awadat garnered much media attention in Jordan, fuelling repeated coverage of emergent details and even sparking debate in the country on such issues as daylight saving time and the government's performance. These conditions match what Peelo (2006) has identified as characteristics of mega murders in that they stay in the limelight due to continuous developments and bring to surface social tensions. The crime even sparked tribal tensions when Noor's tribe took to the streets to exert pressure on the police, and later revealed the extent of tribal influence and the (rather limited) reach of the law when a tribal truce was brokered to prevent revenge violence. These ramifications combined with the fact that Noor's murder claimed unparalleled news space in December 2013 and in the following months qualify it to be classified as a mega murder. According to Soothill et al, unusualness is also a major contributor to the formation of mega murders in the media (2002). In this instance, coverage of Noor's murder was not only repetitive and widespread across various media

but the singular violence of the crime itself caused it to stand out. Noor had suffered a number of stab wounds, some of which were in her face — which left her maimed. The sheer brutality of the murder was further amplified by the circulation of a video recorded on a mobile phone's camera, purporting to show Noor's blood-soaked body upon its discovery. It later emerged that the video was not of Noor, but that horrific sight and the graphic descriptions of the crime had lasting effects.

The unusualness of Noor's murder and the brutality of her death were matched by a pronounced departure from media norms of crime reporting in Jordan. Noor's picture and a couple of YouTube interviews with her father and other members of her family also made the rounds on Jordanian news websites. Soon after, Noor was nicknamed 'the martyr of dawn' in the media, in reference to the time of her death and to her chastity. The symbolism in the nickname cannot be missed and has helped package Noor's murder as an issue of extreme public interest.

But if Noor's is a mega murder, how can we classify so-called honour crimes? These, too, are often extremely violent, bring to the surface social tensions, and routinely get media coverage. The other similarities discussed earlier between so-called honour crimes and Noor's murder further complicate their classification. But a closer investigation reveals key differences. First, owing to their continuous appearance in Jordanian media, so-called honour crimes have mostly lost their shock value. The repeated use of specific medical and religious discourses in their coverage has rendered

them unremarkable (Mahadeen, 2013). Second, while they are often as violent as Noor's murder (and indeed even more brutal in some cases), they are not perceived as all that odd. Due to the predominant discourses on female sexual morality which license violence against women, so-called honour crimes are normally portrayed in the media and generally perceived as justified and even deserved (Mahadeen, 2013). This is, of course, not unique to Jordan. As Peelo et al. have maintained, 'society does not really believe killing to be wholly wrong on every occasion' (Peelo et al., 2004: 258). In Jordan, the litmus test is the victims' sexuality.

Finally, routine media practice and the mere suspicion of illicit sexual behaviour leads to anonymising the victims of so-called honour crimes in the media in an effort to protect their family's reputations. In Noor's case, her full name and the name of the accused were revealed in the early days of coverage, further testifying to the uniqueness of her murder. Taking into account these differences, it is argued here that so-called honour crimes are, in Soothill et al.'s terminology, 'routine cases' where normalised and standardised media practice applies to their coverage (2002). It is worth noting, however, that it cannot be said that so-called honour crimes were always routine cases. In fact, their emergence in Jordanian media was gradual and it took time for them to achieve routinisation.¹ The classification of Noor's murder as a mega case and so-called honour crimes as routine cases has implications for the media and the public's

perceptions of their seriousness, and further for their understanding of the gravity of femicide and violence against women in Jordan.

Ideal vs. Culpable Victims

Establishing that Noor's murder and so-called honour crimes are classified differently is not sufficient to illustrate the disparities between the two types of femicide. The heavy focus on the victims' sexual morality is a tool used to construct the ideal or culpable victim in each case. Christie describes the ideal victim as 'a person or category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim' (Christie, 1986: 18). Without a doubt, the construction of Noor's image as an ideal victim aided the rise of her story to become a mega murder. As Greer notes, media reporting creates a 'hierarchy of victimisation' and for a victim to be seen as ideal is to 'attract massive levels of media attention, generate collective mourning on a near global scale, and drive significant change to social and criminal justice policy and practice' (Greer, 2007: 22). But while this case did indeed generate extraordinary levels of media attention and spark waves of public sympathy, it is unclear at this stage whether it has inspired any changes to the social and criminal justice policy in Jordan. The single change that can be seen as spurred by the crime was the government's compliance with public pressure to reverse its earlier decision on

Daylight Saving Time. In October 2012, the Jordanian government had decided to maintain Daylight Saving Time (summer time) throughout the year, much to the distress of many Jordanians who repeatedly complained about this. Two months later, Noor's murder gave the final push for the anti-DST campaign, as it was argued by many that Noor was especially vulnerable at that early hour of the morning due to the application of Daylight Saving Time. The clocks were set 60 minutes backwards a couple of weeks after Noor's murder.

The construction of Noor's image as an ideal victim was apparent from early reports which broke the news of her murder. At this stage, the news focused on her university major:

Security Forces found the body of the student of Sharia at Aal Al-Bait University inside one of the buses in the old bus station in Zarqa city (Khaberni, 2013)

Security sources stated that the body belonged to a girl majoring in Sharia at Aal Al-Bait University (Alhayat News, 2013)

A few days later, the focus shifted to her mode of dress:

The pain soared the minute pure Noor was found. Lying on the asphalt, her books still close by, her warm blood covering her body and her face, her veil not fallen despite her resistance (Al-Zoubi, 2013)

The bus driver was stunned by the presence of the bleeding girl [in his bus]. She was wearing a hijab and a *jilbab* [a long dress worn by some Muslim women] whose colours he could not distinguish because of the blood [covering them] (Al-Batieh, 2013)

And to her personal and moral conduct:

The same sources have stated that the girl 'N.A.' belongs to one of Bi'r Al-Sabi' tribes and has a good reputation (Rumman, 2013)

According to those close to the victim-- her female friends, teachers, and relatives-- she had good morals and belonged to a family that had the same (Ithar News, 2013)

The construction of Noor's image as a devout Muslim (she studied Sharia and was not only wearing the hijab –Islamic hair cover—but also the *jilbab* –a long dress that covers the female body entirely), and a moral person. The specific type of morality addressed here is sexual morality; reports focused on her reputation and on her behaviour vis-à-vis socio-sexual rules. These key features function, as Peelo argues, as 'shorthand symbols, making it easier for readers to know [...] when to identify with the good and worthy' (Peelo, 2006: 163). In other words, the readers are told that Noor was a good girl, and therefore did not deserve to die in such a horrible way.

We can thus place Noor at the top of the hierarchy of victimisation in Jordanian media. Here was not only a visually devout Muslim girl, but one that chose to study Shari'a and had an impeccable reputation. But even though Noor's adherence to socio-sexual mores was established through the focus on her dress, reputation, and studies, one news website went further than that to confirm she was literally a virgin:

According to an informed security source, preliminary forensic investigations " [quotation virgin a performed on the body [...] revealed that the girl died " marks in the original], and that she was not "sexually" assaulted [quotation marks in the original] and was not raped (Ithar News, 2013)

This certification of virginity through the use of the ‘hymen status line’ (Mahadeen 2013: 83) is commonplace in coverage of so-called honour crimes. To have the line here adds further proof of Noor’s chastity and good manners and is a novel extension of its use. It is telling that only one news website chose to use the hymen status line, however. On the one hand, it can be read as additional confirmation of Noor’s image as an ideal victim. But on the other hand, the absence of the hymen status line in the vast majority of news reports covering Noor’s murder signals that it was not deemed necessary to begin with. And even when the circumstances of the crime became clearer and the court brought charges of indecent assault and attempted rape against the accused, the hymen status line continued to be absent from virtually all media accounts. It was following these charges that the criminal court ordered the ban on media coverage of the trial, arguably to maintain Noor’s image as the media had constructed it: pristine, chaste, and an ideal victim. In addition, there can be no doubt that after the announcement of these charges the reputation of Noor’s family was to be protected particularly since she was identified.

In contrast to Noor’s case, victims of so-called honour crimes are almost never portrayed as ideal victims. They are twice removed from this status: first through the circumstances leading to their death, and second through their portrayal in the media *as victims of so-called honour crimes*. In the first instance, the media often report the

circumstances surrounding a so-called honour crimes in partial terms. In particular, the emphasis in the phrasing used is often on the victim, portraying the murder as a 'reaction' to the victim's provocative actions. For example, the actions of the victim are clearly charted in the following excerpt from a media report:

The source told Khaberni that the girl used to visit an older man related to her, and it seems they started a relationship. Asking to remain anonymous, the source added that the girl became pregnant and was put in prison. Later on, according to the source, the girl was released and lived with the man whom she married. But three months later on last Wednesday, her brother killed her much to the surprise of the family (Khaberni, 2012)

However, victim-blaming is not exclusive to Jordanian media. As Dowler et al. maintain, 'the media frequently hold female victims responsible for their victimisation while reducing or mitigating the perpetrator's responsibility' (Dowler et al., 2006: 841). This tendency to blame female victims is very visible in reports on so-called honour crimes.

In the second instance, by being framed *as victims of so-called honour crimes*, the women are disadvantaged by default. On top of the biased phrasing of news reports, the

mere fact that the victims' 'honour' was under suspicion by their male relatives (and families more generally) casts them in a negative light. Because of their removal from the image of the ideal victim, the women who lose their lives in so-called honour crimes never become famous like Noor, their stories never achieve mega murder status and they remain routine and overlooked. In Greer's words, 'those victims who cannot be "idealised" - because their image or background does not match the preferred profile - will generally attract neither sustained media attention nor widespread public and political outcry' (Greer, 2004: 117).

Since victims of so-called honour crimes are presented in the media as culpable victims, worthy of blame for their own murders, their sexual morality is questioned. But because of mounting international pressure on Jordan to abandon its leniency towards honour murderers, Jordanian media have become increasingly sensitised to the issue. The hymen status line emerged as a result of this newly-found, but very affected, sensitivity. The routine use of the hymen status line in media coverage of so-called honour crimes serves four main purposes: it clarifies to some extent the circumstances of the crimes to the reader (for instance, by confirming or denying that penetrative sex had taken place if the victim was 'caught' in the act), it establishes the victims' culpability or innocence, it reinforces commonly held notions about the centrality of the hymen as an indicator of virginity and, media professionals hope, if the victim's hymen is still intact it garners

sympathy for the victim and may lead to rejection of so-called honour crimes (Mahadeen, 2013). It goes without saying that using the hymen status line to achieve these goals is highly questionable and even counterproductive. By using this line Jordanian media effectively classify all unmarried victims of so-called honour crimes as culpable, responsible for their own murders, and shift the blame and emphasis of coverage from the killers to the victims. Using the hymen status line also cements the equation of an intact hymen to virginity, and therefore honour, in the Jordanian public consciousness. This equation clearly does not work in cases where the victims are either married or previously married. Thus, instead of rejecting so-called honour crimes explicitly and unequivocally, Jordanian media condone the crimes based on the perceived sexual morality of the victims, evidenced in their hymens above all else. The media invite readers to do the same through their use of the hymen status line: if the victim's hymen is still intact, readers are implicitly urged to sympathise with her and to condemn the crime. Interestingly, there are no reports that include a hymen status line that does the reverse of confirming the victim's virginity, as in, a line that verifies that the hymen was broken.

It can be maintained then, that the hymen status line is selectively used by Jordanian media in order to move victims of so-called honour crimes (culpable victims) closer to the image of the ideal victim. But as the discussion above illustrates, the only scenario

where the hymen status line is effective is if the victims are unmarried and have never been married. In other cases where the victims are married, divorced, or widowed, the hymen status line cannot apply. In these cases, which constitute a sizeable segment of reported so-called honour crimes, Jordanian news media fail to channel the hymen status line and therefore fail to crack the image of culpable victims that defines these women. Perhaps because of these limitations of the hymen status line, its use is noticeably declining and a different authorial technique is being introduced in news reports. Increasingly, the concept of honour and the hymen status line itself are being replaced by news reports attributing femicide to ‘familial disagreements’. Without much other detail, this nascent authorial technique masks the circumstances of the crimes and obscures the sexual violence that underlies them. With the sterilised language of ‘familial disagreements’ the gendered politics of femicide are hidden and the enduring centrality of honour and sexual morality as drivers for sexual violence is omitted from Jordanian media. In effect, this change is a reversal of that moment when so-called honour crimes were recognised as a specific and inherently different type of homicide in Jordan, worthy of the media and the public’s attention. That clarifying moment ushered an era of reporting on so-called honour crimes, and while these were soon routinised and bound with the hymen status line, they were at the very least rendered visible.

But the Jordanian context stands out for its explicit emphasis on the victims' virginity. This emphasis on virginity is manifested through the use of the hymen status line particularly in coverage of so-called honour crimes. It reinforces patriarchal notions about women's sexuality, femininity, and women's place in Jordanian society. The fact that the lives of unmarried victims of so-called honour crimes are portrayed as worthless unless their hymens are intact is not only shocking but also indicates the normalisation of violence against women in Jordanian media and society. In Noor's case something similar, although not as extreme, happened: she was deemed a worthy victim because she was perceived as virginal and chaste.

Femicide, Sexual Violence, and Jordanian Media

In the introduction to this paper, femicide is presented as a violent process leading to the killing of women as well as the killing itself, which are both reflective of gender inequality under patriarchal systems. This understanding synthesises Radford's and Shalhoub-Kevorkian's conceptualisations of the term (Radford, 1992; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). By applying this term as a conceptual tool for analysing the murder of Noor Al-Awadat and so-called honour crimes, the sexual violence informing these murders is exposed. This is especially relevant because these crimes appear to be different on the surface. For example, Noor's murder is not inspired by the excuse of

cleansing the honour of the family whereas so-called honour crimes usually are. Also, while so-called honour crimes are usually committed by relatives of the victims, Noor was murdered by someone who was not related to her. But despite their differences, these two forms of homicide share much in common that enables us to recognise them as femicides. In both cases, the victims are female, the perpetrators are male, and the victims' sexual morality take centre stage in media coverage. These conditions are significant because they are enabled by existing gender inequalities that inspire violence against women.

But the greatest common denominator shared by these murders is that they fall on the continuum of sexual violence. In Noor's case, indecent assault and attempted rape preceded the killing thus placing the crime easily on the continuum. In so-called honour crimes, the desire to control the victims' sexuality drives the murderers to punish these women by taking their lives. These conditions meet the basic definition of sexual violence offered by Kelly as 'the abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force men use to control women' (Kelly, 1988: 76). What is striking in Jordanian media treatment of these crimes is that they do not recognise so-called honour crimes as manifestations of sexual violence against the victims, but as instances of the victims trespassing against socio-sexual norms. In contrast to this, once the introduction of new charges in Noor's case indicated that sexual assault took place, the mediated

canonisation of Noor had reached such a level that even this could not tarnish her image.

Furthermore, media coverage of femicide does not exist in isolation from social and legal contexts in Jordan. The interplay between social values and legal frameworks in the country has been explored by Warrick, who found that Jordanian law on murder ‘does not merely serve the interest of public safety; it also feeds a debate about the permissibility of the extrajudicial killing of women in order to benefit society by preserving certain norms of sexual behaviour and social control’ (Warrick, 2005: 343). A similar thing can be said of media coverage of so-called honour crimes in Jordan, both when the hymen status line is used and when the crimes are attributed to ‘familial disagreements’. This coverage does not merely serve the purpose of informing the public, but also shapes the public’s perception of these crimes in a way that licenses femicide in the first instance, and carefully conceals it in the second. A similar interaction can also be said to exist between the media and the judiciary, whereby the two influence each other to the benefit of the gendered status quo. The court’s banning of media coverage of the trial in Noor’s case once new charges were introduced is one example of the give-and-take between the media and the legal system in Jordan. Noor became an icon of chastity in the media, and the court was well aware of that and moved to protect this image.

Conclusion

While the subject of violence against women in Jordan has been broached in the literature, little scholarly attention has been paid to the role of the media in perpetuating or challenging Jordanians' views on the subject. Numerous studies have demonstrated that domestic and family violence is accepted in Jordanian society (Al-Badayneh, 2012; Btoush and Haj-Yahia, 2008; Haj-Yahia, 2002; Khawaja et al., 2008; Morse et al., 2012; Oweis et al., 2009) and others have investigated the social acceptance of so-called honour crimes (Araji and Carlson, 2001; Faqir, 2001). Thus in a society where violence is normalised and accepted at the familial, social, and legal and state level (Amawi, 2000; Warrick, 2005), it becomes even more crucial to understand the media's complex contribution to public knowledge and attitudes towards femicide, arguably the most extreme (or 'final') form of sexual violence against women. This paper presents a new dimension to the scholarly debate on this topic.

The two types of femicide examined here are found to be different in their classification and the hierarchy of their victims. So-called honour crimes, on the one hand, are treated as routine cases in the media and their victims as presented as culpable by default. Due to pressures to condemn these killings, Jordanian media attempt to move some of these victims closer to the ideal by using the hymen status line to confirm their

chastity/purity/worthiness. The murder of Noor Al-Awadat, on the other hand, developed into a mega case widely covered in the media and Noor's image was successfully constructed as that of an ideal victim. In many ways, Noor morphed into a saint-like icon in Jordanian media. The fact that the hymen status line was not used in reporting her killing and that the sexual violence preceding her murder did not tarnish her idealised image testifies to the uniqueness of her case. The mainstreaming of Noor's murder through humanising her (by publishing her name, picture, and interviews with her family) stands in stark contrast with the marginalisation, and most recently the retrogressive concealment, of victims of so-called honour crimes. The mediated differences between the two cases can conceal the fact that they are instances of sexual violence suffered by women in a patriarchal society. And perhaps this is the point: by holding Noor up as an ideal victim and by turning her murder into a mega case Jordanian media seized an opportunity to pass themselves off as sympathetic with female victims, as condemning sexual violence when committed in an unusual, news-breaking way and against an ideal type of victim. Simultaneously, the media continued to blame victims of so-called honour crimes, to reduce their murders to routine stories, and in recent months, to render them completely invisible. The message here is that, to Jordanian news media, all femicides are not created equal.

Notes

¹ The emergence of coverage of so-called honour crimes is credited to Rana Hussein, a reporter for the English-language Jordan Times. Hussein identified certain female homicides as related to honour and began to report on them in 1993. Gradually, reporting on so-called honour crimes began to feature in Arabic language print media in Jordan and assumed a standardised form, with the hymen status line becoming a key fixture.

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