

## HONOUR AND SHAME IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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### ÖZET

#### Orta Doğu Kültür Kuşağında Şeref ve Utanç

*Bu yazının temel konusu, Türkiye'nin de içinde yer aldığı Akdeniz ve Orta Doğu kültür kuşağında bireyler arası mahrem ilişkilere damgasını vuran ahlakî ve davranışsal bir çifte standarttır. Ataerkil sembollerin tartışmasız bir ağırlığa sahip olduğu bu kültür çevresinde ortalama erkek tipinin kadınlara bakışını karakterize eden birbiriyle çelişik iki uç noktaya rastlanır. Toplumsal normlara tam olarak uyan ortalama bir erkek, bir yandan kendi yakını ve akrabası olan kadınları başka erkeklerin ilgisine karşı aşırıya kaçan bir kıskançlık duygusuyla korumaya çalışırken, diğer yandan, fırsat bulabildiği ölçüde yabancı kadınları baştan çıkarmaya uğraşır. Günlük yaşamın akışı içerisinde özümsemiş olan bu ahlakî ve davranışsal çelişkinin kökenleri araştırılmıştır.*

*Bu makalede, erkeğin mahrem alanda üstlendiği rollerin ve cinsellikle ilgili olarak edindiği değer yargılarının toplamına şeref yasası (code of honour) adı verilmiş; kadının sergilemekle yükümlü olduğu uyum, saygı, vakar ve utanç davranışları ise iffet yasası (code of modesty) kavramıyla ifade edilmiştir.*

*Şeref ve iffet yasaları arasındaki güçlü bağlaşıklıkım nedenleri tarihsel bir spektrum izlenerek açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Kadınla erkek arasındaki doğal işbölümü, kıt geçim kaynaklarının paylaşımı çerçevesinde sürüp giden kabileler arası savaş ve rekabet durumu, Orta Doğu bölgesinin pek çok kültürün geçiş ve hareketlilik alanı olması gibi etmenler üzerinde durularak, hem söz konusu ahlakî ve davranışsal çifte standart hem de kadınla erkeğin mahremiyet rolleri arasındaki farklılık ve (bu farklılığa rağmen oluşan) bağlaşıklık üzerinde analitik bir çözümleme denemesi yapılmıştır.*

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## Introduction

The male mind and conduct in the Middle East are largely characterized by a conflict which takes the form of a double-standard. This imposes upon average man the pursuit and seduction of others' women, while urging himself to be extremely intolerant towards other men in case they are occupied with similar exploits with the women who are related to him either by blood or by marital bond.

Almost every man in the Mediterranean and the Middle East is conditioned, from his early youth, to be manly, valiant and virile both in spirit and action. Being a skillful hunter of women occupies an important place among the requirements of these male qualities. To put this more precisely, a man should pursue sexual access to the women whom he is not forbidden to by cognatic or affinal incest. However, he is extremely jealous of, and hostile to, the similar pursuits of other men towards the women who are related to him by blood or by matrimony.

This kind of a double-standard can amply be observed in such societies of the region where sex segregation is an integral part of everyday social life. Even in Turkey, one of the few (if really any) states in the world to have formally and voluntarily bestowed its female citizens with their emancipation, a woman unaccompanied may be disturbed by some men in several ways for sexual purposes. But the same men are most of the time extremely eager to marry virgins, and are careful enough to accompany and protect their women (wife, daughter, sister, etc.) against similar disturbances. In her discussion of the relation between patriarchy and virginity Fatima Mernissi satirizes this phenomenon as follows:

As to Mediterranean men, trained to seduce, pursue and dominate women and incapable of conceiving of love as a total and profound exchange between two equals, they will continue to penetrate stitched hymens, as artificial as their relationships with women<sup>1</sup>.

Today, the cult of virginity and similar aspects of social and cultural tradition seem to us irrational, obsolete and even antiquated. But, the majority of the Middle Eastern male population is still an antiquarian of these antiquated values. Is this simply because of the fact that the men living in this part of the world do not have the sufficient wisdom to notice the very conflict between their obsessive desire to touch the women of others and to keep their own women untouched? Do they not see that this is an ungentlemanly way of mutual treatment, or that this is just the opposite of

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<sup>1</sup> Mernissi, F. in Al-Hibri, A. *Women and Islam*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1982, p. 180.

fair play? Doubtless, the answer to this question should not be "yes"; had it been so, the present article would have been unnecessary.

A further question to be posed here is formulated by Fatma Sabbah:

Why are silence, immobility, and obedience the key criteria of female beauty in the Muslim world where I live and work?<sup>2</sup>

Sabbah's question can be translated into present context as "why are women closely associated with the concepts of shame and chastity which are two of the principal ingredients of sexual honor?"

Trying to answer these questions, the present paper aims to show the organic relations between the *code of honor* and the *code of modesty*, and some of the basic processes which create such strong relations between the values and norms of the two sexes. The code of honor is a general concept referring to the male values and conduct in sexual morality whereas the code of modesty is a common name for female behavior and understanding in sexuality<sup>3</sup>.

### **Social Versus Sexual Valuation of Women**

In the Islamic Middle East and the Mediterranean women are seen as the "women of men" while men are seen as the "men onto themselves." In other words, women make up the inferior sex. The relations between men and women are therefore unequivocally hierarchical. According to Fatma Sabbah:

The relationship between the sexes is nothing but a reflection and incarnation of the fundamental relationship between God, the Master, and his slave, the believer. One of the relationships between the sexes, as Islam has designed and affected it, is that this relationship is shaped according to the desire of the master, the husband. The women's desire is never directly expressed. It is unheard except when expressed through the mediation of the master<sup>4</sup>.

A similar valuation of the sexes and of the relations between them is to be found among the Greek Sarakatsani who live in the Zagori Mountains. The Sarakatsani commonly believe that women and goats are governed by the devil and are identical with each other in that both are greedy, impatient, noisy in suffering a pain, etc. On the other hand, men and sheep are

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<sup>2</sup> Sabbah, F. A. *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious*, New York, Pergamon Books, 1984, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Abu-Lughod, L. *Veiled Sentiments*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, Passim.

<sup>4</sup> Sabbah, F. op. cit., p. 81.

governed by the angel, and have the opposite qualities, i.e., both are mature, solemn, docile and noble in many respects such as in suffering a pain<sup>5</sup>.

Women are so inferior in status compared to men that it is quite unacceptable to kill a woman when a murder is to be retaliated. Likewise a woman is not expected to carry out a retaliation<sup>6</sup>. What is more, to beget a female child for a man, and to give birth to her for a woman, are almost equally shameful<sup>7</sup>. Within the present context, the most interesting instance is that a man from Tonya, a small rustic settlement in northern Turkey, counted only his sons as his children; while mentioning his daughters among his animate riches like "two cows, sixteen sheep, five daughters, etc"<sup>8</sup>.

Women's secondary position can also be observed in the *code of honor* which is one of the most widespread way of communication. This code is an automatic compliment to the inadequate laws and social institutions. The simplest definition of honor is given by the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* as follows:

The notion of honor has several facets. It is a sentiment, a manifestation of this sentiment in conduct, and the evaluation of this conduct by others, that is to say, reputation. It is both internal and external to him—a matter of his feelings, behavior, and the treatment that he receives<sup>9</sup>.

The phenomenon of honor, just like the cult of virginity, is an all-male concept. A man is endowed with honor, it is believed, by such desirable values as masculinity, prowess and autonomy. Since these values are highly competitive, a man has to live on a strict diet of conduct in order to have them adequately. A proto-type, who can best exhibit these qualities is called the *man of honor*.

The man of honor, among the Awlad Ali, a branch of Egyptian Bedouins, for example, is one who can carry out his responsibilities towards his dependants, and effective control over them. Additionally, he is a generous, valiant, intimate and wary person. On the other hand, women of the Awlad Ali share the same beliefs with men about the value system<sup>10</sup>. Thus, normally, honor as the highest, most ideal and all-male value in the Mediterranean and the Middle East cannot be expected from, and sought in,

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<sup>5</sup> Campbell, J. K., *Honour, Family and Patronage*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Tezcan, M., *Kan Gütme Olayları Sosyolojisi*, Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Yayınları, 1972, p. 39-40.

<sup>7</sup> Campbell, J. K., op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Tezcan, M., op. cit., p. 36-37.

<sup>9</sup> 'Honour', *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 6, p. 503.

<sup>10</sup> Abu-Lughod, L. op. cit., p. 88-89.

the action of a woman who is seen as a member of the inferior sex. As a matter of fact, women are said to have no honor. In this context, Black-Michaud suggests that:

Women have no honor. But they have "shame" or sexual modesty, the feminine counterpart and compliment to honor, which both they and their menfolk must do their utmost to defend<sup>11</sup>.

It is quite interesting that female sexuality and sexual conduct are by all means very important contrary to the extremely low valuation and status-position they acquire in social hierarchy. Indeed, female sexuality in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, more than elsewhere, is an enticing danger. For example, among the Sarakatsani of the Zagory Mountains in Greece to break a betrothal contract or not to consummate it with the expected marriage is considered a very grave affront to the agnates of the girl, and is usually punished with a vengeance killing<sup>12</sup>. A more interesting point in the same community is the illicit sexual relation committed by a woman before or after marriage. Her act not only makes her risk the death in the hands of her own relatives, especially her patrikin, but also degrades the value of her descendants to the nil. As Campbell has succinctly stated:

A mother who is thought to have lost her virginity before marriage, or afterwards, to have been guilty of adultery, or even an apparent inclination towards it, infects her children with the taint of her dishonor, and however these children may conform to right ways of behavior, they cannot retrieve the reputation of their family<sup>13</sup>.

Above all, women in the area under consideration are a good source of conflict and even of violent feuds between families, groups and clans. An oral insult, an abduction, an amorous scrutiny is enough for a quarrel to burst out and to cause long-lasting hostilities and bloody feuds<sup>14</sup>. In Tunisia, for example, the cult of virginity is so important that it urges many gynecologists to create artificial hymens in order to protect women against the wrath of honor tradition<sup>15</sup>. What are the genuine causes of all the more susceptible and even sensational interest in female conduct and sexuality in the Mediterranean and the Middle East?

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<sup>11</sup> Black-Michaud, J. *Cohesive Force: Feud in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1975, p.218.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, J. K. op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> Black-Michaud, J. op. cit., passim; Tezcan, M. op. cit., Passim.

<sup>15</sup> Mernissi, F. in Al-Hibri A. op. cit., passim.

What is more, the irreconcilable conflicts and feuds, which are caused by women's sexuality, make up an important portion of honor problems. A concise expression of this issue is provided by Black-Michaud:

...(A)lthough women stand, as it were, outside the system of reciprocal prestations in violence which is feud..., they are nonetheless thought as one of the main factors contributing to the continuation of hostilities between groups<sup>16</sup>.

Their contribution to feud may come out in various forms: abduction of a girl, adultery, rape of a woman and other grave or minor affronts to a woman may cause immediate or latent feuds. Assaults and harassment directed towards women call for a harsher vengeance killing. For example, Campbell<sup>17</sup> distinguishes between the vengeance killing over land disputes and the vengeance killing over sexual insults. When a chain of vengeance killings of the former kind takes place, the community remains indifferent to which party is right or wrong; It generally favors the winning group. But, as to the vengeance killings that stem from sexual insults, the community reverses its attitude, and becomes very sensitive to who is right and just. It protects the affronted party. Mainly for this reason, voluntary exiles usually practiced in order to prevent retaliation after a killing of the first type are not followed by a new killing; but abstention and voluntary exile cannot prevent retaliation after a killing of the second category.

Women's participation in, or contribution to, feud is not always casual. Women are a good helper of their men in laying ambush to kill their enemy<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, they are seen as the perfect agent of ending hostilities and feuds. That the aggrieved party gives one of their girls in marriage to one of the closest marriageable male kin of the victim is a commonplace in the Middle East. In addition to this reconciliatory mediation of women, there is a more abstract and symbolic one which is described by Tezcan as follows:

In some villages of Muş, (a small city in eastern Anatolia), when a guilty man sends his wife as a mediator to the offended party, the latter accepts peace because the former's sending his wife means sending his honor<sup>19</sup>.

All such critical meanings attributed to female sexuality and conduct are a consequence of the very nature of the sexuality itself (especially women's sexuality). "The private parts are the seat of shame," says the

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<sup>16</sup> Black-Michaud, J. op. cit., p. 217-218.

<sup>17</sup> Campbell, J. K. op. cit., p. 201-202.

<sup>18</sup> Tezcan, M. op. cit., passim.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p., 40.

*International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*<sup>20</sup>, "vulnerable to the public view and represented symbolically in the gestures and verbal expressions of desecration. In their association with the excretory function they are the source of pollution." More precisely, the two important adjectives describing the nature of female sexuality in the Middle East are "dangerous" and "devilish".

With the first menstruation, a girl enters a new phase of her life. Now she has to be extremely careful in, and responsible for, her acts. Any contact with strangers may cause gossip about her reputation. The need to keep her untouched, and to protect her against the evil attention of the opposite sex creates a tension which can extinguish only through segregation<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, she has to control her sex-linked conduct not only in presence of strangers but also in some practices of everyday life. For example, she has to abstain from doing certain things or approaching certain objects both animate and inanimate. A typical example of her abstinence can be observed among the Sarakatsani women:

...(W)omen, particularly married women involved in sexual intercourse, or girls during their menstrual periods do not approach the sheep unnecessarily. A woman is careful not to cross directly in front of a flock, partly for the practical reason that it breaks the smooth rhythm of its grazing but also because her presence in some way affronts the sheep and might cause disease<sup>22</sup>.

Likewise, women in rural Anatolia are forbidden, until their post menstrual periods, to slaughter animals for the nutrition of their families.

Thus, both the lower position of women in society, and the potential danger as well as the devilish qualities attributed to the nature of their sexuality make them internalize and obey many seemingly irrational restrictions. Virginity, faithfulness, veiling, segregation, denial of sexuality and deference are only some of the qualities and attitudes expected from them. How and why the code of modesty is connected with, or even determined by, the code of honor will be analyzed in the section to come.

### **Women and Honor**

For whom could the capacity of a Muslim girl to self-determination in her sexual acts be dangerous? What evil could there be in her premarital sexual exercise? Why must she remain virgin until the nuptial night? Why is

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<sup>20</sup> 'Honour', *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 6, p. 505.

<sup>21</sup> Minai, N. *Woman in Islam*, New York, Sea View Books, 1981, p.100.

<sup>22</sup> Campbell, J. K. op. cit., p.31-32.

the result so catastrophic when a man other than her husband begets a child onto her, although the child is still a child, healthy and innocent? In short, why does female sexuality have some particular social meanings?

What gives female sexuality its social aspects and contents is the way society is organized in the Middle East. Kinship, family and community are the essentials of social organization in the area. A person can exist only within his or her family, group or clan. What the person does closely concerns his or her immediate relatives, and vice versa. The fact that the Middle East is an arid section of the world makes life difficult, generally keeping it at a minimum subsistence level. Natural traits of the region are an obstacle to a greater accumulation of capital which in turn would enhance socio-economic development, social differentiation, and stratification. Thus, the aridity of the region creates small-scale agricultural production which is run by extended families<sup>23</sup>.

The geographical aridity of the Middle East brings about not only a small-scale agricultural economy, lack of accumulated capital and minimum social differentiation, but also insufficient formal social institutions, weak laws and poor state control as the superstructural reflections and consequences of the former. In such an extremely vulnerable environment family and group solidarity comes to be vitally important for an individual. Therefore, every act, or attitude, or quality contributing to the formation and consolidation of this solidarity will highly be valued.

The purity in genealogy and descent line of the family contributes greatly to, or maximizes, the family honor. Perhaps this is why a pure genealogy among the Awlad Ali plays an important part in regard to the concept of honor. As stated by Abu-Lughod:

The critical term in the Awlad Ali honor code is *aşl* (ancestry/origin/nobility), a term expressive of a range of ideas... It is the basis for the proud differentiation of Bedouin from non-Bedouin. Drawing on the genealogical notion of roots, or the pure and illustrious bloodline, it also implies the moral character believed to be passed on through this line. The *aşl* is the primary metaphor for virtue or honor<sup>24</sup>.

A woman is endowed with a capacity either to keep the agnatic bloodline of her husband's family unpolluted, or to blur it by way of illegal child conception. It is precisely her capacity of this kind which in a male-

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<sup>23</sup> Peristiany, J. G. *Honour and Shame: The Values of the Mediterranean Society*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1966, Passim; Peristiany, J. G. *Mediterranean Family Structures*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, Passim; Black-Michaud, J. op. cit., Passim.

<sup>24</sup> Abu-Lughod, L. op. cit., p.87.



dominated social order causes a negative valuation of her sexuality. The Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern type of strict male control over female sexuality is to be naturally premised upon this negative valuation. "The concepts of honor and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman", says Mernissi<sup>25</sup> in order to show how directly women's behavior is impinged upon the honor of men. Another author suggests that there is a positive correlation between women's modesty and men's honor status<sup>26</sup>.

Doubtless, female sexuality is neither satanic nor wicked in itself; it is a state of human nature just like male sexuality. Only in a patriarchal community it is perceived the other way round. In pointing to the importance of male domination in the Muslim world, Fatima Mernissi says that

Women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties. Society can only survive by creating the institutions which foster male dominance through sexual segregation<sup>27</sup>.

As this quotation clearly indicates, the whole rubric of the social life in the Middle East lies in its patriarchal aspects. All transactions, economic or otherwise, are run by men. All contracts are made almost exclusively between men. Women, on the other hand, are a serious threat to such an all-male social order. The source of this threat is to be sought in what Mernissi calls as women's *qaid*<sup>28</sup>, the lethal feminine power to degrade the honor of men through unfaithfulness.

Women's *qaid* produces the most tragic consequences in case of an incestuous commitment. It is known that there is little or no segregation between men and women who are tied to one another either by blood or by marriage. It is very difficult to isolate a mother from her son, or a brother from his sister. Thus, for this state of desegregation is an everyday practice among relatives, it becomes almost impossible to control the possible sexual liaisons between them. Once again, there is nothing wrong with the nature of female sexuality even in an incest. The problem is still with men; their strictly agreed upon honor terms are transgressed in the most treacherous way, a type of way which "represents the most dramatic form of deception that one kinsman can practice on another"<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Mernissi, F. in Al-Hibri, A. op. cit., p.83.

<sup>26</sup> Abu-Lughod, L. op. cit., 158-159.

<sup>27</sup> Mernissi, F. *Beyond the Veil*, New York, John Viley and Sons, 1975, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell, J. K. op. cit., p. 110.

In the Mediterranean and the Middle East women's place in the concept of honor is not just determined by their manipulative *qaid*. In other words, they are a source of conflict between men not only because of their capacity to blur the lineage of their husbands' families through illegitimate child conception, but also because of their great economic value. Mahmut Tezcan explains the violent feuds following the abduction of a woman or a girl with her labor power, no matter this power is greatly inalienable, i.e., cannot be sold or used outside the family lands. Tezcan argues that

A girl or a woman is the one who has various economic duties. She is nearly a multifunctional worker: she looks after animals, works in the field..., performs familial tasks; she works hard and contributes to production much more than the man who is occupied only with the role of a manager's<sup>30</sup>.

Tezcan concludes his discussion by pointing out that girls are not given in marriage to the men they love, but to those who can pay the bride price demanded by their fathers. Moreover, he states that some desperately devoted lovers commit abduction which is most likely to commence long-lasting bloody feuds between families.

As can be seen clearly, women in the Middle East are attached to the honor of their men basically in two respects: (1) through their capacity to determine the purity of genealogy and therefore family solidarity, and (2) through their economic value. These two channels by which women are able to influence men's code of honor appear to be under almost an unlimited possessive male authority. In a way, women are like informal slaves not only in that they work as unpaid laborers, but also in that their status is not higher than that of real concubines.

The unlimited possessive male authority is strongly supported by the public opinion which exerts a strict control over female conduct and sexuality. However, this control is not always direct and simple; it is sometimes embedded in a religious cult. For example, Islamic divorce does not necessitate a period of separation or waiting. But, if the woman is assumed to be pregnant, a three-month period has to pass before she can remarry another man in order to avoid any possible ambiguity concerning the paternity of her child. Additionally, if she is pregnant at the time of divorce, her waiting period lasts until her delivery because, according to Islam, a child should not be exposed to the drop of the semen other than those of his genuine father. If her situation is neither of these, then the

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<sup>30</sup> Tezcan, M. op. cit., p. 35-36.

woman has to wait until she observes two successive menstruation in her body<sup>31</sup>.

Like divorce, which is firmly associated with the maintenance of the lineage purity, repudiation, a man's divorcing his wife by saying three times "I divorce you", which is an ordinary practice of Islamic men, is also one of the measures taken against the danger of women's *qaid*. Other crucial means of male control over female sexuality, or measures against the disruptive nature of the *qaid* are sex segregation, arranged marriage, polygamy and veiling<sup>32</sup>. At least by some of these means paternal control over young males, too, is established. Needless to say, besides women's *qaid* and economic value, the reproduction of the ongoing male-dominated social order makes up a third channel which connects female sexuality to code of honor. Men may increase the number of the variations in their conducts to the extent that they are able to arrange the marriages of their children. When all these factors are taken together, one can better understand why sexual freedom, emotional companionship and the art of sexuality (sexuality far beyond mating and reproductive purposes) are strictly banned particularly for women.

The social meanings of sex segregation and veiling, which are among the basic aspects of female modesty, also connect women to code of honor. Segregation and veiling, like virginity and modesty, signify that the unlimited possessive male authority is firmly established over women. What is more, these ways are internalized and approved by women themselves. Thus, veiling and segregation are not necessarily established to protect women against the sexual exploits of male strangers. They are to be understood far more beyond their literal meanings. For example, women's veiling for the nonkin is very important because they veil in order not to avoid a possible sexual assault, but to show respect for their own kin in their absentia at an environment characterized by an honor-based social organization and differentiation<sup>33</sup>.

Since the concept of honor consists in all-male elements such as manliness, independence, prowess and generosity; and since women are far from exhibiting these characteristics, then what they are expected to do is to defer to their men who are at the higher ladders of social hierarchy and able to meet the requirements of honor by self-asserting to have such qualities. Thus, it is possible to sum up women's attachment to honor in a single

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<sup>31</sup> Abdul-Rauf. M. *The Islamic View of Women and the Family*, New York, Robert Speiler and Sons, Publishers Inc. 1977, p. 120-125.

<sup>32</sup> Mernissi, F. *Beyond the Veil*, New York, John Viley and Sons, 1975, p.14.

<sup>33</sup> Abu-Lughod, L. op. cit., p.164.

sentence such as this: the more they act modestly, the more honorable they become at the eyes of society<sup>34</sup>.

All-in-all, morality in the Mediterranean and the Middle East has, among other things, two sex-linked aspects that are observed on man and woman alternately and simultaneously: manliness of man and sexual shame of woman. All men and all women, except those who rank the lowest in socio-economic status, are supposed to have these qualities as the integral part of their personalities<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, the scope of ideal social morality, among the Awlad Ali for example, demonstrates a very dialectical and organic relation between honor and modesty. In this context, Abu-Lughod suggests that

A family has honor when its men are "real men", embodying the ideals of Bedouin society, including supporting and protecting their dependents, and the women and dependents are modest, deferring to their providers and thus validating these men's claims to their high positions in the hierarchy. If the men fail, their women lose honor, and if the women or other dependents fail, the men lose honor. Thus all members are responsible for the honor of all those with whom they identify as kin<sup>36</sup>.

### **Honor, Modesty and Patriarchy**

This section will try to show how and why an unquestionably patriarchal structure, of which honor is a symbolic and moral aspect, is suitable and necessary for the survival of the people in the Middle East more than elsewhere in the world.

The Middle East is a critical region where feud and intergroup conflicts make up the everyday mode of life. Feud and conflict might be seen as a problem of morality in a different context; but, here they should be taken as the core of life or existence itself. Two basic reasons are responsible for this particular situation. That the Middle East is a cultural mosaic is one of them. The second reason is the aridity of the region as regards the subsistence resources.

The Middle East has always been a middling area between Europe and Asia. It has been a genuine bridge between these regions both in literal and figurative sense. It has constantly witnessed the clash of several cultures; a type of clash which used to create each time a new mosaic of cultures.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 119, 137-138, 142-144.

<sup>35</sup> Campbell, J. K. op. cit., p. 269.

<sup>36</sup> Abu-Lughod, L. op. cit., p. 166.

This cultural mobility and diversity led to the formation of group identity and solidarity on the part of each people instead of resulting in a large and more or less homogeneous society. Consequently each people insisted on exhibiting its self-identity and culturally unique characteristics in order to guarantee its communal solidarity which was vitally important for its survival in such an unstable socio-cultural environment<sup>37</sup>.

The clash of cultures and communities do not always come out peacefully. Violence, or at least conflict, is almost unavoidable in such a clash. Thus, the capacity to make war must have been a highly valued characteristic of an individual in the area. Since the female sex is weakened through fecundity, men gained great advantage against women over time in determining the social order<sup>38</sup>.

Like cultural diversity, geographical aridity is also a basic factor in shaping social organization in the Middle East. Pastures, water reserves and arable lands are quite scarce. Due to this scarcity, a kind of subsistence economy or a small-scale agricultural production and animal husbandry have been and still are highly characteristic of the area. In such a subsistence economy, accumulation of capital remained very limited, and in accordance with this, advanced division of social labor, mass production, formal social institutionalization and social stratification could exhibit a little development. The result was nothing but an absolutely egalitarian social structure in which to set up a hierarchy of human relations came to be almost impossible<sup>39</sup>. Thus, egalitarian social structure, together with resource scarcity, create a type of Hobbesian state of nature where everyone is in war against everyone. As one can easily predict, family or group solidarity could be the most feasible remedy for an individual to survive in such a dangerous environment.

Since women were weakened through their reproductive function, the state of war could best have been exercised by, and between, men. As can be seen, both the element of cultural diversity and that of geographical aridity led us to the same precept: that war or feud came to be a vitally important means of survival in the Middle East, and men outcompeted women in practicing and controlling this crucial means. This is, in a way, the story of transition from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal one in the region. We can observe some aspects and traces of an ancient matriarchy in the Islamic heathen period in Arab Peninsula, especially in the northern part of it. For example, there were some shrines constructed for goddesses who

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<sup>37</sup> Coon, C.S. *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1948, Passim.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Hibri, A. *Women and Islam*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1982, p. 210.

<sup>39</sup> Black-Michaud, op. cit., Passim.

were called as the daughters of God.; and they were extremely influential on Him<sup>40</sup>.

The transition from a matriarchal order to a patriarchal one brought about an overall change in the social and moral life. Fatima Mernissi summarizes both the very process of this transition itself and the overall change it brought about as follows:

Polygamy, repudiation, the prohibition of *zina* (adultery) and the guarantees of physical paternity were all designed to foster the transition from a family based on female self-determination to a family based on male control<sup>41</sup>.

Islam rose in an era of crisis where the matriarchal order deeply collapsed and the patriarchal order, on the other hand, was yet to come. Islam contributed greatly to the establishment of the new system. In this context Mernissi says:

The prophet saw the establishment of the male-dominated Muslim family as crucial to the establishment of Islam. He bitterly fought existing sexual practices where married unions for both men and women were numerous and lax<sup>42</sup>.

In this way a relative stability in the way of life characterizing the Middle East region came about. With the establishment of such a stability the roles of the sexes were differentiated and clarified accordingly. In other words, intersex crisis ended; sex roles and hierarchies were redefined.

The new relation between the sexes was to some extent similar to the one between lord and vassal. This similarity is clearly expressed by Minai as follows:

A woman produced heirs only for her husband and thus increased his clan's number. In return, the husband supplied her material needs and protected her against the harsh environment and against the enemy in the old days of the tribal warfare<sup>43</sup>.

Thus, the logic of this differentiation in sex roles is quite compatible with the pride a family felt when a son was born, and with the shame fallen upon it when the child born was a daughter; no matter how much absurd these sentiments may sound to us.

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<sup>40</sup> Al-Hibri, A. op. cit. p. 208-210; Lerner, G. *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Mernissi, F. *Beyond the Veil*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1975, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> Minai, N. op. cit., p. 114.

Even today the hierarchy manipulating the relations between the sexes is still unquestionable. The unlimited possessive male authority, especially that which flows from patriline, is immanent; that is, it follows a woman wherever she goes and lives. For example, a woman is strictly controlled by her patrikin (necessarily by her father and brothers) even after she gets married<sup>44</sup>. This shows that the organic tie between honor and modesty was strongly woven by the establishment of patriarchal order which had appeared as the only possible choice to maintain people's survival in an extremely unstable and dangerous social environment.

### Summary and Conclusions

This paper has tried to analyze how female sexuality and conduct became a deep male concern. It has also tried to stress the double-standard that men are occupied with against one another in terms of their sexual access to women. A further conflict posed in this essay is that although women are bestowed with a very low position or social value, yet their sexuality attracts the utmost attention, and plays the utmost part in social and moral life. Additionally, the value-orientations expected from men have been defined as the *code of honor* and those expected from women as the *code of modesty or sexual shame*. It has been pointed out that these two sex-centered behavioral categories are inclusive respectively of the conflicts stated above. Questions concerning female conflict (or code of modesty), as emphasized earlier, can be answered within the scope of male conflict (or code of honor). In other words, The female conflict was said to have been created by, or an extension of, the male conflict.

This article has defined two main channels by which a woman is attached to code of honor. The first of these channels is her capacity to affect family solidarity through blurring the genealogical purity of her husband's family. The second channel, on the other hand, is her economic value (stemming from her labor) the loss of which, no doubt, lessens the strength of her family and household.

This critical attachment of a woman to code of honor has been explained by an unconditional, an unlimited possessive male authority and control on her manners for the maintenance of ongoing patriarchal order. The means by which this authority and control is practiced are Islamic divorce, repudiation, arranged marriage, polygamy, veiling, sex segregation and so on. By pointing to the organic relation between modesty and honor, it has been emphasized that manliness of a man and sexual shame of a woman are the two main components of the Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern morality.

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<sup>44</sup> Black-Michaud, J. op. cit., p. 221-222.

It has thus been pointed out that social and sexual valuation of woman in the Middle East are inversely related. The former is placed to the lowest ladder while the latter is placed to the highest in the public appraisal. The subject of the appraisal is the all-male social ideology which is expressed in the concept of honor. The present article has tried to show elaborately how and why a woman is strictly attached to the honor code.

To conclude this article the initial problematic should be re-evaluated: what makes men practice a double-standard against one another in regard to their sexual deeds. That men are eager to seduce and harass the womenfolk of other men and to firmly protect their own should be explained far beyond a mere bravado and libidinal drives. The roots of this double-standard should be sought in tribal warfare which has continuously characterized the social life and morality in the Middle East. Tribal warfare, which is still inherent in the collective consciousness of the modern societies in the region, leads the members of a community (or a group) perceive the properties of other communities (or groups) as potential booties to be plundered when possible. Women under absolute patriarchy are not different from tribal properties, and free from the risk of being plundered by strangers<sup>45</sup>.

Modern societies do not practice too much warfare as in the ancient times. However, they still have some aspects of that life-style such as a widespread ambush tradition, competition, reciprocity and social prestation. Having some or all of these qualities in their personality, modern men are consciously or unconsciously engaged in harassing and seducing the women who are non-relatives.

The nature of love under patriarchal domination is another crucial factor which can partly explain this male dilemma, that is, the double-standard in sexual conduct. Since men are socialized into a state of mind as to dominate and possess women rather than as to see them as their equals or partners, then they would try to increase their possessions just like the possession of certain assets would ignite an economic man to obtain others. This becomes the normal course of human relations in a social environment where men are honored by how much they can possess and how well they can control and protect their possessions.

However, especially recently some drastic change is being experienced in the Middle East, and this change seems to render the code of honor obsolete over time. As far as traditional order is replaced by modern socio-economic patterns, and family is supplanted by individuals as the ultimate and the smallest units of society, women's dependence on their

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<sup>45</sup> Şimşek, S.. *The Code of Honor in the East and in the West*. (unpublished master's thesis). İstanbul, Boğaziçi University, 1990, Passim.



husbands will gradually diminish. To sum it up, the prestige of a man will no longer lie "between the legs of his wife"; nor shall a woman defer, in awkward and strange ways such as veiling and segregation, to her husband. Yet, needless to say, all these will not happen over night. Men and women will no doubt benefit equally from the abolition of patriarchal domination and gender constraints. They will have a better chance to set up autonomous relations relatively free from domination or control of any kind. However, since the Middle East and Turkey are among the oldest sites of classical patriarchy<sup>46</sup> in the world, this change may occur in a period which is longer than we expect. More interestingly, although man is supposed to benefit from patriarchy, woman contributes at least as much as if not more than man to its reproduction<sup>47</sup>. Needless to say, the impact of patriarchy is not the same everywhere in a country; education, economic independence, rural or urban environments, individuals' cultural backgrounds influence its degree and density<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Kandiyoti, D. *Cariyeler Bacılar Yurttaşlar: Kimlikler ve Toplumsal Dönüşümler*, İstanbul, Metis Yayınları, 1992, p. 170.

<sup>47</sup> Esmer, Y. "İstanbul'da Kadın", *İstanbul*, No. 3, 1992, pp. 99-106; Tekeli, Ş. "İstanbul'da Kadın' Üzerine", *İstanbul*, No. 3, 1992, pp. 107-108.

<sup>48</sup> Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç. *İnsan Aile Kültürü*, İstanbul, Remzi Kitabevi, 1990.