

**DAUGHTERS OF IZZAT:  
NAVIGATING AND RESISTING HONOUR  
RELATED VIOLENCE IN CANADA**

**Mandeep Kaur Mucina,  
MSW, PhD  
mmucina@uvic.ca**

# Some questions for you...

Think about moments in your young adult life when you broke the rules or transgressed the boundaries in your house.

- \* What were the consequences?
- \* How was your behaviour regulated?
- \* Were the consequences different for the men in the household? (if applicable)
- \* Think about what the family is trying to preserve? And for what reasons?

# Who am I?

- \* Insider and Outsider to the community
  - \* Punjabi Sikh...Second Generation Canadian...
- \* Child and Youth care worker Social Worker
  - \* Complex ways in which women were encountering violence, patriarchy (private and public), and racism
  - \* Young women navigating their family and wider society

# “Honour”

\* *Ghar dhi izzat khuri nhar rhandi hai*

The izzat of the household rests in the daughter(s) of the house

\* *Lokh Kya Kyan Ghe?* What will people in the community say?

\* What is Izzat?

\* Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi

\* Defined as “honour”

\* A sense of duty and/or responsibility

\* Reputation

\* Collectivity/connectivity to my relations

# “Honour Related Violence” In Western Discourses

- \* Aqsa Parvez
- \* Jassi Sidhu
- \* Amandeep Atwal
- \* Shafia Sisters



# Izzat - A Tool Of Patriarchy

- \* Izzat (“Honour”) a source of regulation over second-generation South Asian women's bodies
  - \* A global phenomena (i.e. when women’s bodies transgress boundaries of beauty, nationality, or sexuality – marked bodies)
- \* Yet is also a part of our moral connectivity to our selves and our family and/or community
- \* Can this be reclaimed?

# "Honour" Related Violence:

- \* Form of violence that is connected to gender-based violence as a whole
- \* Women are targeted because their actual or perceived behaviour is deemed to be shameful or to violate family or community codes of conduct
- \* The displacement/excommunication/exile of women from their family/community is a part of the continuum

# The “Complex Work The Honor Crime Is Doing In The World Today” (Abu-lughod, 2011)

Discourses of “honour” related violence:

- 1) Displaying women without moral agency and autonomy when defining honour crimes within honour cultures;
- 2) creating a fantasy and seduction of honour crimes for Western audiences;



- 3) purifying liberalism so to distract the gaze of western audiences from violence within and to establish superiority of liberalism;
- 4) governing honor in human rights arguments in order to give resilience and legitimacy to regulation and transnational governance;
- 5) situating honour cultures as ahistorical and ignoring the transformations of women, families and everyday social and cultural life and experience.

# Cultural Racism

- \* Brown bodies are pathologized as helpless victims of “deviant” patriarchy juxtaposed to neo-liberal Western ideals of women, feminism and choice
- \* Silenced through discourses of “cultural racism” and public policy that perpetuates Islamaphobia

## Implications:

- \* Zero Tolerances for Cultural Practices – Bill C-7
- \* Quebec Charter of Values
- \* PM Harper niqab is “rooted in a culture that is anti-woman”

# Silence

- \* What do these “seductive” and racist discourses do to the young racialized women who encounter family violence?
- \* What conversations are necessary for South Asian communities to have inside their community?
- \* Community silenced by these racist and damaging discourses surrounding “Honour” related violence.

# Working As An “Insider”

- \* How can I, a second generation South Asian, Punjabi Sikh, able bodied, heteronormative woman, who has intimate and complex relationship with *izzat*, begin speaking to the complexities of my everyday struggle with “honour” and the violence associated with it, without having my words and my body become a representation of dominant liberal culturally racist discourses about honour violence.
- \* Complexities of working as “insider/outsider” to my community

# Why Second Generation South Asian Women

- \* Their everyday encounters with racism and oppression is different from that of their parents (Rajiva, 2006)
- \* Belonging is questioned (Aujla, 2000)
- \* Defined as in a “culture clash” ultimately desiring to be a part of the West (Handa, 2003).
- \* Transgressors or “rebels” (Jasbir Puar, 1995) are seen as those that succeed in her desire to become Western.

# Multiple Forms Of Patriarchy Experienced By Second Generation Women

- \* “Migrant communities are surviving against the potential loss of their cultural identity and the demoralization of their identity through the racism they experience” ...
- \* "The immigrant community uses restrictions on women's lives as one form of resistance to racism. This form of cultural resistance, however, severely restricts the lives of women, particularly those of the second generation, and it casts the family as a potential site of intense conflict and oppressive demands in immigrant lives." (Espiritu, 2001, p. 436)

# Patriarchy Inside And Outside The Family

- ★ Second-generation South Asian women are situated in a liminal space between heteropatriarchy enacted in mainstream society that intersects with their experiences of racism and historical colonialism, and the heteropatriarchy inside their family and community that uses their body as a space to enact power and control over their cultural identity.
- ★ *“it is the convergence of these internal and external patriarchies that demands scrutiny”* (Jiwani, 2006, p. 23).

# Research Questions

- \* How does izzat become a tool of patriarchy and violence in the lives of second- generation Punjabi women?
- \* What are second-generation Punjabi women's stories of transgressing boundaries of izzat?
- \* How do second-generation Punjabi women negotiate and /or resist patriarchy inside and outside their family home?



# Research

- \* Deconstruction
  - \* Of current discourses of “honour”
  - \* Of izzat in Northern India
  
- \* In-depth Interviews – 6 women across Canada
  - \* Second-Generation Punjabi Women who have been excommunicated from their families/communities due to transgressing boundaries of izzat
  - \* Transgressed Boundaries of izzat defined on their bodies through their relationships:
    - \* Same sex relationships
    - \* Interracial relationships
    - \* Across religious/ethnic boundaries.

- \* Action based research
  - \* Consciousness raising inside the Punjabi community
  - \* Collective engagement
  
- \* Methodology
  - \* Discursive theoretical framework
  - \* Anti-racism; discourse analysis; narrative inquiry; post-structural feminism.
  - \* Autoethnography
  - \* Unstructured interviews focus on narratives of izzat from childhood to current context, with particular focus on the event.

# Women's stories – Themes

## Maneuvering through izzat:

- \* The boundaries that are placed around women's bodies, izzat becomes the tool of surveillance and control.
- \* *“I never shared anything with my family. I never shared who my friends were with my family...I always had a secret life. I was one person at home and I was one person at school.”*  
(Lakshimi)

## Impossible choice:

- \* Disclosure of transgression from izzat that leads to the imposition of a “choosing”
- \* Resulting in excommunication/ displacement/ exile from family and/or community
- \* *“So if the worst-case scenario that I’m imagining is my family just never speaks to me again, my mom especially. I think I’ll just be removed from the most important world that I’ve inhabited so far... And you never want to destroy something to create another thing, right?” (Mahavidya)*

## Grief/loss and reclamation of izzat:

- \* The aftermath of being excommunicated/ displaced/ exiled
- \* Creating new families/ connections
- \* Reconnecting to self, family and community
- \* *“Does izzat mean loss?...Finding a blip in the narrative where you get to start over again”  
(Sarswati)*

# Maneuvering through “izzat” boundaries:

## Continuum of Violence:

- \* Many of the women spoke to not feeling like their stories were legitimate enough or extreme enough to be called of Honour Based Violence
- \* Continuum and ways in which we are engaging HRV is through the extreme cases of honour killings.
- \* How does this impact women coming forward and feeling they can share their experiences with others, particularly in the moment of crisis.

# Third Wall

- \* Creating multiple worlds in order to navigate the boundaries of Izzat, patriarchy and racism inside and outside the home.
- \* When the third wall crumbles
  - \* Perceived transgressions – expectations from community to enact power over these transgressions.
- \* Surviving and resisting

# Impossible choice

- \* Excommunication and choice.
- \* Challenging notions of “cleansing family honour” places women in opposition to their families
- \* Transgressions against a social order that each member of the collective is invested in preserving
- \* Complicating notions of choice
- \* Resistance and Reclamation



# Grief/loss and reclamation of izzat

- \* The process of leaving a situation of "honour" violence and forced marriage is challenging - grieving the loss of family and extended relationships
- \* Living in displacement - Health impacts
- \* Attachment...building new connections.
- \* Going from extended families to being alone - losing the support

# Re-building New Relationships:

- \* “Does izzat mean loss?”
- \* Family reunification is a possibility and something that the women may or may not be striving for.
- \* Creating new relationships
- \* Family: know that I can love my community culture, family, etc. despite the violence that might happen in it.

# Education and Financial Resources to Start a New Life:

- \* Fear of any physical violence or movement along the continuum after creating autonomous choices.
- \* Verbal/emotional control vs. physical control
- \* Creating opportunities for autonomy...learning how to cope in the "new life"
  - \* ie. Differences between inappropriate demands from reasonable demands
  - \* Saying No to family and caregivers

# Spirituality and Community Supports:

- \* Building a new relationship with their religion and/or spirituality
- \* Being able to define what they want from this and challenging those who confine them to a particular way of practicing.
- \* Check in about "cultural" tools that provide a sense of safety and connection

# Implications for Practice

- \* To examine the everyday workings of violence and shame rather than the exceptions;
- \* Family violence lens – opens up how we support help young women
- \* Examine the institutions that frame and reinforce honour related violence in order to reinforce the regulation and surveillance of young girls bodies

# Social Supports...

When you first encounter someone going through this...

- ★ Space: give them a chance to give you feedback throughout your work together
- ★ Treat their words as important: understand urgency and seriousness
- ★ Patience: do not rush them. Let them go at their own pace and not yours
- ★ Define with them what safety looks like and feels like for them
- ★ Action and Accompaniment: seeing them through the systems that they navigate.
- ★ Long Term Support: Recognize that this is a long process and they need help throughout it

# Migration is a part of our global context

- \* Child and youth care workers are more and more important as a result of the movement of people and the migration of communities across the globe
- \* Struggling with patriarchy and violence
- \* Struggling with racism, xenophobia, and sexism
- \* How does this translate to the south African context?

# References:

- \* Aujla, A. (2000). Others in their own land: second generation South Asian Canadian Women, racism, and the persistence of colonial discourse. *Canadian Women Studies*, 20 (2), pp. 41-47.
- \* Handa, A. (2003). *Of silk saris and mini-skirts: South Asian girls walk the tightrope of culture*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- \* Handa, A. (1997). *Caught between omissions: Exploring "culture conflict" among second generation South Asian women in Canada*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- \* Jiwani, Y. (2006) *Discourses of denial: Mediations of race, gender, and violence*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- \* Puar, J. (1994). Resituating discourses of "whiteness" and "Asianness" in northern England. *Specialist Review*, 94(1 and 2), pp. 21-54.
- \* Rajiva, M. (2006). Brown girls, white worlds: Adolescence and the making of racialized selves. *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 43 (2), pp. 165-183.