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Capturing “Dishonor”: Honor Crimes and Mobile Camera Phones

Cultural variation plays a significant role in the patterns and manifestations of violence. Honor crimes are one of the most heinous violence examples where the scripts for violence are culturally and socially determined (Vandello & Cohen, 1994). The rarefied concept of honor mitigates violence by taking specific cultural traits that pervade to the total cultural pattern in many communities. Indeed, what marks honor crimes a hot debate topic is also highly related to the fact that the vicious violence is tolerated and even sanctioned by some societies and in some cases by state laws. Although honor crimes are incomprehensible especially from a human rights perspective, the concept of honor continues to act as a trigger of social violence, and the victims of honor crimes are at peak numbers. An interesting reason adding to the numbers of victims is the mobile camera phones (Cockburn, 2008).

World was shocked when the footage depicting Dua Khalil Aswad’s public lynching was captured by mobile phones and distributed widely in the Internet. The footage merging an archaic mentality with a modern technology device was tragic, difficult to digest, and yet; thought provoking. The image of Aswad’s “pornographic picnic” with few other visual examples depicting honor killings exemplified a new dimension of the camera phone usage patterns (Okabe, 2004; Reponen et al., 2007): “producing visual threats targeted at the potential future victims through community sharing” (Yildiz, 2008). In the same vein, the “honor” of capturing and sharing the “dishonor” of a person via mobile camera phones has recently become an additional trigger for social violence. Only in Iraqi Kurdistan, five hundred and twenty women were victimized on the basis of lost honor due to sounds, images and videos captured by mobile phones (Khalil, 2008). The abuse of mobile camera phones showing women and girls breaking the honor codes through sexually explicit conversations or intimate relations is a serious threat in face-to-face societies where honor and shame dominate everyday life (Pitt-Rivers, 1966; Mojab, 2004). The phenomenon of sharing private-intimate productions without the consent of subject matter is not restricted to honor cultures, but; the implications and results of these actions are received different in honor cultures. The aim of this paper is to unravel the complex social dimensions in honor

related violence triggered by the abuse of mobile camera phones. For a thorough understanding of the depth of this social violence, first a typology of the concepts of honor disclosing the social cues of (1) feminine honor, (2) masculine honor, (3) family honor, (4) self honor and (5) community honor will be presented (Wikan, 2008; Stewart, 1994; Vandello & Cohen, 2003) . Secondly, a special emphasis will be put on the relations among the concepts honor, honor crimes and media technologies by referring to infamous cases. The meaning and implications of visuals produced by mobile camera phones will be interpreted according to the honor and shame dynamics. After the descriptive part, the paper will conclude with a suggestion of an additional category to study visual mobile communication (Kinderberg et. al, 2005a, 2005b; Vili, 2007; Koskinen et al., 2002).

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