

Western Governments Play a Key Role in Successful Honor Killing Escapes

by Phyllis Chesler



If one is in flight to escape being honor killed, what is needed to ensure a successful escape? What kind of woman, who has been raised in an honor/shame tribal culture, is likely to undertake such a dangerous and difficult journey to Western-style freedom?

A woman who has been humiliated, battered, and death threatened almost daily from childhood on; who has not been taught that she is an individual and, as such, entitled to human rights; does not believe she has an identity other than that of daughter, sister, wife, and mother – how can such a person suddenly decide that her life is worth saving and that she is entitled to both freedom and happiness?

I have been looking for such unlikely heroes ever since 2004,

when I began studying the nature and prevalence of honor killings. I first wrote about honor killings and honor killing escapees in the West in 2005 in [Forced Marriage \(Civil Protection\) Act](#) protecting people from being “forced to enter into marriage without their free and full consent.” But it “only applies to UK citizens,” said London-based grassroots activist [included](#) “gender” as well as “gender identity and sexual orientation” as valid grounds for “refugee resettlement.” However, the words “honor” or “honor crime” were not included. The Parliament also has [ruled](#) Jan. 22 that “people fleeing their country of origin to escape honor crimes are worthy of international protection.” The case involved a Pakistani Muslim man who had dared to have a relationship with a Muslim woman from a higher class. When their affair was discovered, she was either honor killed or [to vindicate her death.](#)”

He fled before they could honor kill him. The Italian Court granted him asylum.

Benjamin Ismail, a Paris-based journalist and free speech advocate, confirmed the difficulties involved in convincing the authorities that someone is in great danger if forced to return to one’s country of origin. “Supporting documents and eyewitness testimonials” may be difficult to come by, he said, “especially in cases of forced marriage and intended honor killing victims.”

“In France, the asylum requests that have the most chance of success are those that are supported by Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, or at least by a local women rights NGO,” Ismail said. “Sometimes, local Western embassies can also be helpful, especially for asylum seekers applying from their country of residence.”

The second requirement for a successful escape from being honor killed is something that cannot be quantified. Based on first-hand accounts provided in interviews, questionnaires,

memoirs of people who have escaped and other public accounts since 2009, I must conclude that *why* a girl or a woman takes that first psychological step remains a mystery. But, once she decides to flee, there are some variables associated with someone who escapes and requests asylum in the West.

Successful escapees have been influenced by a Western-style education, Western books and Western films; by inspiring teachers and helpful neighbors; in some instances by American soldiers, Israeli police and physicians, Western boyfriends or fiancées, and by non-Western husbands; by a Christian religious network (for the converts to Christianity); in several cases, by Western psychotherapy; and in one instance, by a strong and loving grandmother.

As noted, all escapees whose experiences I studied were assisted by Western governments, which granted them asylum, put them into the equivalent of witness protection programs, or housed them in government-funded secular feminist shelters. In one case, the Jordanian government [Ayaan Hirsi Ali](#) (Somalia, the United States), [Sunny Angel](#) (India, Britain), [Nonie Darwish](#) (Egypt, United States), [Jasvinder Sanghera](#) (Pakistan, Britain), and [Boko Haram](#), the [Pakistani](#) Taliban, [al-Qaida](#) strongly oppose Western education especially for women. They fear just such escapes. We are privileged to be able to offer asylum to those who have escaped such Islamist totalitarian tyrannies.

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