

Who is Responsible for Palestinian Honor Killing?

Abigail R. Esman writes in the [Israa Ghrayeb](#), a 21-year-old Palestinian makeup artist, is no more, [refused](#) to call it an honor killing.

But that is precisely what it was.

By now the numbers have become familiar. The United Nations estimates that, globally, 5,000 women are the victims of honor killings every year. It is a figure most experts dispute as being far too low.

The stories have also become tragically familiar: a young woman who falls in love with a man her parents didn't choose; an unwed couple who appear in public together; a girl who is seen not wearing her hijab; a wife who tries to escape the husband who regularly beats and rapes her – all murdered by their families in an effort to restore the family honor her misbehavior has threatened to destroy.

Ghrayeb's murder, unlike so many others, however, set off a wave of protests in the region, with women calling for stricter laws against such killings and demanding more attention be paid to domestic abuse. And rightly: in the West Bank and Gaza, Amnesty International [A Family Conspiracy: Honor Killing](#). Nonetheless, she told the Investigative Project on Terrorism, honor crimes are “pandemic in Gaza and on the West Bank, and also among Arabs in Israel.”

But even if they are not more frequent, honor killings in these territories carry one important distinction from those elsewhere: they are purportedly not the fault of the murderers. They are the fault of the Jews.

The argument goes something like [according to](#) one Palestinian

contributor to the Israeli-Palestinian magazine 972.

That this overlooks the killings of Palestinian women like 16-year-old Palestina Isa, [believed](#) she had dishonored the family, is obviously not the point. Nor is it apparently relevant that honor killings also take place at astounding rates in countries like Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Turkey, and in immigrant communities across the West. To be fair, one writer [noted](#): “Seldom is domestic violence celebrated, even by its perpetrators. In the West, wife batterers are ostracized. Here, there is an important difference in honor crimes. Muslims who commit or assist in the commission of honor killings view these killings as heroic and even view the murder as the fulfillment of a religious obligation.” The vast majority of honor killings, Chesler [beat her](#) in the hospital where she was recovering from earlier wounds – make clear that this was no episode of regular domestic abuse. Her family wanted her dead; and even as she cried out for help from her hospital bed, no one, not even the nurses, came to her aid.

Ironically, there are ways in which Israel does play a role in the family violence of Palestinian communities. In her extraordinary [BBC](#), the protests that have risen in her name have led to “much soul searching over the protection of women from gender-based violence in Palestinian society.” True, in recent years the Palestinian Authority has repealed laws that permitted rapists to avoid prosecution if they married their victims, and other new laws have increased penalties for domestic abuse. But those changes have gone largely unacknowledged in the courts.

But this time may be different. In Ramallah, for instance, the attorney general called “false” the family’s explanation that Israa had “fallen” from a balcony, and declared her death the result of “torture and abuse.” A [petition](#) declares, “Men can’t keep taking pride in killing their women...! And then walk free untouched because no one does anything about it[.] no woman

should be beaten up or killed in the name of honor.”

The voices behind such initiatives are those of courage; and that courage is heartening. But the truth is that nothing will ever truly change until Palestinians fully understand: The Jews didn't kill Israa Ghrayeb. And neither did Israel.

You did.

Abigail R. Esman, the author, most recently, of