

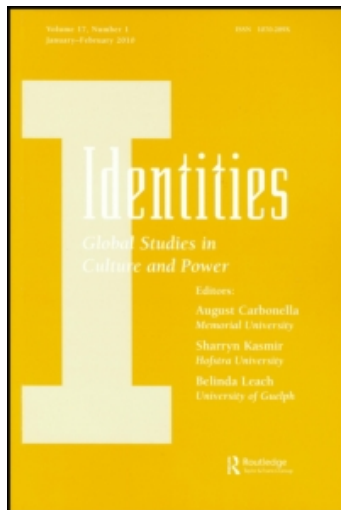
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Identities

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713663307>

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To cite this Article King, Diane E.(2008) 'THE PERSONAL IS PATRILINEAL: *NAMUS* AS SOVEREIGNTY', *Identities*, 15: 3, 317 – 342

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/10702890802073266

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10702890802073266>

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The Personal is Patrilineal: *Namus* as Sovereignty

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In this article I propose a new model of namus, the concept recognized in some circum-Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Central and South Asian cultures and usually translated as “honor.” One way to understand namus is to regard it as patrilineal sovereignty, particularly reproductive sovereignty. After an “honor killing,” a “defense of honor” explanatory narrative is told by both perpetrator and community alike. I argue that an honor killing represents a show of reproductive sovereignty by people who belong to a patrilineage. I first describe ethnographic contexts in which “honor killings” are operative, and then, relying on Delaney’s (1991) model of namus as deeply bound up with patrogenerative theories of procreation, argue that a hymen is both a symbolic and real border to membership in the group. Finally, I apply this new conceptualization to statecraft, specifically to killings carried out in Iraqi Kurdistan following the founding of the Kurdish statelet there in 1991. Here, reproductive sovereignty and defense of borders were operative writ large as “honor killing” logic was expanded from lineage to state.

Key Words: *namus, “honor,” patriliney, sovereignty, borders, the state*

With regard to a woman’s honour the law is most strict. A woman of any social standing who mis-conducts herself, or who is suspected on reasonable grounds of misconducting herself, must surely die; and the husband, brother, or whoever is responsible for her, who fails to put her out of the way, is considered to have lost his honour, and a Kurd’s ‘*namus*’ or honour is one of his most precious possessions . . . I know of one fair lady who was tied up in a sack and thrown into the river (Hay 1921: 69).

Paternity is overdetermined, and in proportion so too are the social measures constructed to ensure the legitimacy of paternity. In the Middle East these have ranged from infibulation and clitoridectomy, harem and eunuchs, veiling and seclusion, early marriage, and even murder to less dramatic but no less effective means . . . I believe [these] can be interpreted as various methods to enclose the human fields, like the earthly ones, in order that a man may be assured that the produce is his own. Not surprisingly, a threat to the boundaries of either field provokes a similar response (Delaney 1991: 39–40).

In some circum-Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Central and South Asian cultures, a particular kind of murder is sometimes visited upon a girl or woman who is suspected of and/or engages in sexual relations with a man other than her husband. Long called “honor killings” in English, they are found only in cultures that reckon belonging to a kinship group agnatically. With few exceptions the killer is the victim’s brother or father. While, as Mojab (2002) and others rightly point out, these killings are part of a wide pattern of femicide worldwide, they differ from the vast majority of domestic violence cases in that they are (in their classical form) not carried out by a current or recent intimate partner but by agnatic kin.¹ Moreover, an “honor killing” carries with it a unique and powerful explanatory narrative. Killer and community alike agree that without the murder, the lineage that the victim and perpetrator share would suffer irreparable harm to its reputation. With the murder, this wrong is righted and the lineage is restored to a place of respect in the community.

In this article I offer a new way of conceptualizing “honor” (*namus*, *ird*) by unpacking the set of ideas and practices associated with “honor killings.” I argue that such killings represent a show of reproductive sovereignty by a patrilineage or larger entity, such as a state, that defines its composition patrilineally. Sovereignty is notoriously difficult to define (Weber 1994), but by “sovereignty” I mean the ability of a lineage and/or state to define its composition, to decide how it will utilize its resources, to define its boundaries, and to use violence. I mean it in a way similar to Simone de Beauvoir, for whom sovereignty is constructed authority and virility and “[t]he sovereignty of the father is a fact of social origin” (1993[1949]). Sovereignty necessarily concerns itself with life and its generation. Foucault’s (2003) concept of “biopower” is also useful. Biopower is an aspect of modern state sovereignty in which the state concerns itself with “the rate of reproduction” and “the fertility of a population” (Foucault 2003: 243) in its quest to control life and death.

I first describe ethnographic contexts in which “honor killings” are operative, and then, relying on Delaney’s (1991) model of “honor” as deeply bound up with patrogenerative theories of procreation, argue that a (real and/or symbolic) hymen is both a symbolic and real border to membership in the group. One way to understand *namus* is to regard it as patrilineal sovereignty, and to regard an honor killing as a response to an affront to that sovereignty. Second, I apply this new conceptualization to statecraft, specifically to killings carried out in Iraqi Kurdistan following the founding of the

Kurdish “de facto state” (Gunter 1993) there in 1991. Here, reproductive sovereignty and defense of borders were operative writ large as “honor killing” logic was expanded from lineage to state.

***Namus* as lineage sovereignty: The reach and context of “honor killings”**

“Honor killings” (and “honor crimes”²) occur among a variety of ethno-linguistic groups and in varied locations. They have been well documented in Palestine (Peteet 1992; Faier 2005), by one account (Ruggi 1998: 13) comprising 70 percent of all murders of women there. They have also been reported in Jordan, where they have increasingly attracted attention of NGOs (Human Rights Watch 2004). In an otherwise-important study, Kressel (1981) misreads them as belonging to the “Arab east.” But they have been recorded as occurring in many non-Arab settings as well: Iraqi Kurdistan (on which I elaborate), Turkey (Koçacıoğlu 2004), Sardinia and Sicily (Bausani 1981), Greece (Blum and Blum 1965: 49; Campbell 1973: 199), and Pakistan (Amnesty International 1999).³

While diverse, the cultures in which honor killings are found have in common patrilineal kinship reckoning, in which group belonging is passed from one generation to the next through fathers, not mothers. In surveying the literature I was unable to find a single case of an honor killing occurring among a non-patrilineal group.⁴ Honor killings do not occur in all patrilineal cultures. Of course, cultures in which honor killings are found share many other commonalities, but I will argue that patriliney is central to the logic of honor killings. At the heart of the justification for an honor killing is a violation of what is called *namus*. This is a term borrowed from Arabic to Kurdish,⁵ Farsi, Turkish, and related languages (an equivalent in Arabic is *ird*). *Namus* is almost always translated “honor”⁶ when rendered in English, although Meeker (1976: 244) is more specific in his detailed treatment of *namus*, calling it “sexual honor.” *Namus* is a symbolic attribute of a patrilineage (Kurdish *mal*, Arabic *ʿaīla*). As I will show, it can be a symbolic attribute of a larger group as well, but in such instances patriliney is retained conceptually and metaphorically.

I have conducted ethnographic research since the mid-1990s in Iraqi Kurdistan,⁷ where the specter of honor killings—both their invocation and their implementation—seems to hang in the air.⁸ This has only recently received more than passing attention in the literature (see especially Mojab 2002, 2004; Mojab and Hassanpour 2002a, 2002b; Mojab and Abdo 2004). In addition to scholarship on honor

killings in Kurdistan, a few activists have drawn attention to them. One website posted by "The Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)" (2007) lists specific cases and provides information on their circumstances. On another website of "Kurdish Women Action Against Honour Killings" (Rashid 2002), the claim is made that honor killings are on the increase and that over 4,000 women have been the victims of honor killings in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1991, when Kurds in Iraq achieved a de-facto independence from Baghdad. This time of relative peace and re-building came after a protracted conflict with the government in which hundreds of thousands died and over 3,000 villages were destroyed. An apparent increase in honor killings against a newly achieved backdrop of relative peace⁹ seems all the more stark. That killer and victim come from the same family further contributes to their starkness. "Honor killing is a tragedy in which fathers and brothers kill their most beloved, their daughters and sisters . . . Here, affection and brutality coexist in conflict and unity," writes Mojab (2002).

The socio-legal regulation of honor killings in Iraqi Kurdistan has undergone very little change since I began research in 1995. In 2002 the parliament of the Kurdistan Regional Government amended the Iraqi criminal code that had previously allowed for a lighter sentence for murders committed in the name of honor, so there has recently been some movement toward their legal curtailment. However, as Natali (2007) points out, the Iraqi Kurdish legal system is ultimately not independent of Baghdad. Moreover, she argues, the changes to the law have not resulted in stronger punishments for perpetrators and "dozens of honor killings occur monthly" despite increased media coverage and awareness-raising by NGOs.

In a social milieu in which honor killings are practiced, to create or nurture suspicion about a girl or woman's sexual transgression is to possibly endanger her life. To remain above this suspicion, most adolescent girls and women of childbearing age living in small towns in my field site in Iraqi Kurdistan (and in its ethnographic present) heavily curtail their bodily mobility.¹⁰ A typical female lives with family members, never alone. Nor does she travel anywhere alone, and she is never left home alone. Her household members ensure that if she goes to school or college, she is transported there with kin or in an approved manner such as on a school bus.¹¹ She does not have a job outside the home or one inside the home that would require her to receive non-kin visitors. Her social life revolves around her household, immediate neighbors, and kin. If she pays visits to kin or friends, she does not travel alone (whether on foot or in a vehicle), but goes with her husband or mother or brother or aunt or another relative. Most

women who work outside the home, such as in jobs as teachers or in health care, are either driven to and from work by male kin or are expected to take public transportation directly there and back, without any side trips. When male guests visit her household, an adolescent girl or woman spends most of her time out of sight, most likely in the kitchen. If she does emerge to be seen by guests, it is only briefly and usually to serve tea and/or food. If not needed in the kitchen, she may occasionally sit with guests, but she will likely (especially if they are not close kin or friends of the household) keep her arms close to her body and (if seated on the floor cushions common to most households) will keep her legs folded uncomfortably underneath her while with other guests. If married, her husband will likely avoid directly discussing her with non-kin men, speaking euphemistically about his "house" (*mal*) instead. Social interaction with males who are not her kin does not take place except perhaps for brief conversations in the marketplace. Amorous interaction with anyone other than a husband is out of the question, although after betrothal she might sit and talk with her fiancé within sight of kin, and might even hold his hand. In general, she and the people around her place a heavy emphasis on her sexual restraint.

Household work is carried out almost exclusively by girls and women, and wage labor is carried out almost entirely by men, with a few exceptions such as in the case of teachers and physicians. Post-marital residence is usually patrilocal, often placing a new bride in a context dominated not only by her husband, but his parents and siblings. Female-ness is in many contexts denigrated, and personal status laws (in many instances derived from interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith) give men more rights than women, who often marry at a young age. Parents, especially mothers, are lauded for bearing sons, and pitied if they fail to conceive or bear only daughters; both of these may be grounds for a husband to divorce his first wife and take another one or to add a second wife where polygyny is an option. (In nearby large cities, this description would likely be less rigid.)

During the initial period of my fieldwork in and near the mainly-Kurdish towns of Dohuk and Zakho, I submitted to the requirements of the gender system, bodily imitating the several girls and women in my multiple Kurdish host households and voluntarily refraining from exercising any greater freedoms.¹² My own female-ness and relative youthfulness (I was 29 on my first trip to Iraqi Kurdistan) meant that I could fit easily into the same social spaces as local women. This "embodied" research yielded a very good sense of the restrictions borne by girls and women. At times these restrictions felt nearly suffocating,

which was not surprising given that they were a new experience for me, but many of the girls and women I met while doing fieldwork confided that they too felt the same way. What emerged from my research was a gender and kinship system¹³ not only very similar to that described by other anthropologists of Kurdistan (Leach 1938; Barth 1953; Hansen 1961; Yalçın-Heckmann 1991; van Bruinessen 1992), but to many settings in the broader area from the Maghreb to South Asia and north into Central Asia (Caldwell 1978; Abu-Lughod 1986; Hale 1996; Shryock 1997; Eickelman 2001).

Within the context of this restrictive way of life for girls and women lurked the specter of honor killings. Most of my female interlocutors who were of childbearing age (but not those younger or older) seemed to live in constant fear of them. This included residents of the towns of Dohuk and Zakho, as well as of surrounding villages. (I did get a sense from several women who had previously lived in the large city of Mosul that they had experienced less fear there than in the towns.) The honor-killing trope seemed remarkably consistent; it was clear who carried the burden of proof of constant propriety (the individual female) and who was to kill her should she fail (her father or brother or someone acting on their behalf). It seemed everyone I knew knew *of* cases of honor killings, and many personally knew someone who had been a victim. But people seemed to handle their fears as they did other fears—by speaking in hushed and/or euphemistic tones, or with silence. Makiya (1998: xxvii) faced a similar kind of silence when trying to interview Iraqi women who had ostensibly been raped. There were hushed stories of elopements, rushed marriages, and girls or women disappearing, but these were elusive and often hypothetical or separated in time and/or space. I never heard an account of a girl or woman whose family was intact remaining in place and weathering serious accusations of sexual impropriety. Such an outcome was spoken of as virtually impossible, if it was spoken of at all. A girl or woman who was able to remain in place and carry on with her life would have obviously been without a father or brother, or at least without an *upstanding* father or brother. (Indeed, it was said of prostitutes that they were able to work because their family knew and consented and had perhaps even encouraged them, with their male family members effectively serving as pimps.)

I found, with Dodd (1973: 45), that “(e)nforcement of norms defending *ird* is carried out primarily by the agnates: father, brother, father’s brothers, and agnatic cousins.”¹⁴ I also found that honor killings were not just the stuff of occasional tragic deaths and women’s private worries but also of popular culture, as in this ironic play on a brother’s obligation. In the course of assuming the role of a fictive brother, a neighbor almost kills the actual brother.

A recent humor skit on television station KTV went like this: A woman and her husband lived alone in their house without any other adults. The husband needed to be gone to another city for a few days, so the couple arranged for the wife's brother to come and stay with her while he was away. A neighbor saw a man who was not her husband enter the house and spend the night. He assumed the worst. He knew that he had to kill her to make things right, so he made plans to do so. However right before he was about to kill her, her husband came home. 'What are you doing?' he said. 'This man is her brother!' (Fieldnote, 3 January 1998).

If people did talk about honor killings, it was usually without mentioning every aspect, such as the fact that one's brother or father would be called upon to do the deed:

Local female employee of the United Nations: 'There was an open UN position in Iran for which I was thinking of applying. I decided not to, however, because it would have involved spending the night in refugee camps. I would have been the only woman on the team. If I did that job I would surely be killed, because they would say that I had spent the night with the male staff. Then they would have to kill me' (Fieldnote, 30 May 1998).

This woman did not say who *they* were. That her brother or father would be called upon to do the deed may have seemed too horrible to mention.

One Kurdish woman who did speak openly, and with whom I discussed many aspects of the restrictions placed on girls and women, told me that she intensely feared becoming a victim of an honor killing and that this was a fear shared by many girls and women she knew. 'We think living under this is crazy,' she said, 'but we do not know how to change things, so we carry on.'

Although people usually refrained from talking openly of their personal fear of honor killings, the etiology of an honor killing almost always involved the opposite of silence: gossip. I sat for many hours with people, listening as they spoke about a range of topics such as politics, past hardship, and the activities of their neighbors. Although most of these conversations were good-natured, they sometimes ventured into the area of sexual suspicion. Who was so impolitic as to be involved sexually with someone to whom she was not married? What was the evidence? Sometimes the evidence might be very simple. For example, a young woman was seen riding in a car with a man unknown to the gossip. The conversationalists might engage in theorizing: Perhaps the man was an uncle, visiting from out of town. But perhaps not; perhaps he was an illicit lover! And so on. Conversations

of this nature were said to diminish the *namus* of the woman and her lineage. So, even in an environment where it appeared that nearly every female was doing her utmost to show any spectators that she was above sexual reproach, the maintenance of *namus* was ultimately “a matter of reputation even more than of fact” (Dodd 1973: 45). This went a long way toward explaining the apparent over-correction in women’s curtailment of their movements. As Glazer and Abu Ras (1994) argue in their analysis of an honor killing among Israeli Arabs, gossip can be a powerful assertion of power by women against other women.

Patrogenesis and entry into the group

In inventorying the attributes of *namus*, my field observation/experience and the literature agree on several points. *Namus* is ultimately an attribute/possession of a lineage, upheld or diminished by individual lineage members. It can be lost through evidence of or gossip-inflamed suspicion of sexual (or even flirtatious) activity outside marriage. It is deeply bound up with ideas of virtue and malignity. It can be restored by an “honor killing.” But I began to wonder what *namus* concealed, what else was under the layers of euphemism. Another anthropologist, Ring (2006), had similar questions. She concluded of the “honor killing stories” she heard while living in a Karachi apartment building that “these were not familiar tales of ‘honor’ and its violation.” Conversely, “these were stories about anger—male anger—as a force in women’s lives” (Ring 2006: 105). If we accept, as I do, Ring’s point about anger (without necessarily accepting her either/or premise), then we accept that a breach in *namus* can lead to a display of fury by a man. The question then becomes, “Why?” Any force that could motivate a man to kill his sister or daughter must be severe.

As I listened to Kurdish people talk about *namus* and its concomitants, reproduction emerged as a central issue.¹⁵ In many societies organized around patrilineal kinship, of which Iraqi Kurdistan is typical, children are assigned to the lineage, tribe, ethnic category, and even state of their father, not their mother (Joseph 1982: 80). Female and male children alike receive categories from their father in equal measure. But those children do not then *pass on* categories in equal measure. “A woman,” wrote the philosopher Aristotle “is as it were an infertile male; the female, in fact, is female on account of inability of a sort” (1983: 267). In patriliney, only males can keep a category going from generation to generation, and every female is potentially the bearer of offspring who do not belong to her own category. For example, people would describe the child of an “Arab” woman and a “Kurdish”

man as “Kurdish.” The individual born of such a union might say, “I am Kurdish, but I feel close to Arabs because my mother is Arab.” A patriline is, conceptually, a male social body extending through time.

The cultural theory that men are the primary genitors of children goes by different names, such as “patrogenesis” (used by Wright 2004: 31) and “monogenesis” (Delaney 1991: 39). Delaney, who carried out research in a Turkish village not far from my field site, richly describes villagers’ “seed and soil” symbolic model of reproduction. Sperm is represented by “seed” and the womb by “soil” (see Figure 1). Delaney notes that this idea is very old and links it to Aristotle and the Bible (Delaney 1991: 12). It is also mentioned by Hippocrates (Hanson 2004) and Plato, who wrote that a man “sows in the womb, as in a field, animals unseen by reason of their smallness and without form” (as quoted in Wright 2004: 44).

A number of ethnographers have described contemporary patrogenic theories of procreation in the circum-Mediterranean and Middle East. Kanaaneh (2002: 232) quotes a Palestinian woman: “The land that you plant with wheat will grow wheat—it’s the same with the seed of a man.” “According to the Moroccan Arabs,” wrote Crapanzano (1973: 48–49), “women do not contribute at all to the hereditary



FIGURE 1 Sowing rice, Barzan Valley, 1998 (photo by Diane E. King).

background of the child; they are the receptacle which receives the male seed." Inhorn (1994) reports that Egyptians believed that "men carry pre-formed fetuses in their sperm." Boddy (1982: 692) found Sudanese villagers believed that "[w]hile pregnant, a woman nourishes her husband's future 'crop' within her." People in Iraqi Kurdistan talked about sexual intercourse using very similar terminology. "We say that when people have sex," one interviewee told me, "it is like the man plants a seed in the woman." This was the most explicit explanation I heard, but there were countless references to this idea in passing or in euphemisms. A drawing of a "family tree," which could be found in many households, carried the metaphor to inter-generational lengths. A lineage founder's name appeared at the trunk, with his sons represented by branches, and son's sons by smaller branches off those, and so on. I saw perhaps ten drawings of family trees, and all were designed in this manner. None included females. I asked people if they had ever seen a family tree that included females; no one said they had.

Schneider (1971) and other early feminist anthropologists argued that the subjugation of women in the Mediterranean and Middle East region could be explained as control of reproduction in a competitive, even hostile, sociopolitical environment. To the degree that this is the case, that in some Middle Eastern settings a woman is not regarded as a generative person, this may be at the heart of the matter, a point Delaney (1991) makes forcefully. If a woman is understood to merely nurture seed, not co-generate it, then she can only be used in the procreative process—possibly by the wrong genitor. She must therefore be cloistered to reduce this possibility.

***Namus* as lineage sovereignty**

With a theory of patrogenesis, the anger men may feel when *namus* is affronted starts to take shape as a crisis of lineage sovereignty that demands amelioration. Men beget children of both sexes, so children of both sexes belong to their father's patriline. This means that a daughter is fully vested, as much as a son, in the patriline from which she comes. But a woman does not share lineage membership with her child (except if the father of her child is one of her lineagemates, a problem in itself that was of great interest to kinship theorists of the mid-twentieth century, such as Barth 1954). Any woman can potentially bear enemy children. A child fathered by the enemy is 100 percent enemy, not 50 percent, because that child's mother is not seen to make a contribution. Prior to an honor killing, a girl or woman has assumed, or been made to assume, a social place of *potential* mother. Her body is seen as possibly housing a

new person, who is seen to be, as any new person is, a member of a patriline. But whose patriline? Therein lies the occasion for male anger. For a new person to be created in the womb/field of a lineage, that lineage must first give a show of its consent in the marriage ritual (another subject treated at great length by mid-century anthropologists). In the “*namus* as sovereignty” model, a wedding is a sovereignty-affirming event, a chance for lineage “A” to communicate to the watching community that it consents that lineage “B” implant, incubate, and rear new members in one of its own. A woman who is used, or seen to be open to being used, by another lineage in this way without benefit of the sovereignty-affirming marriage ritual is killed—if Ring’s assessment is correct, it must be assumed in blinding anger—by a member of her lineage. She is killed precisely because she is *of* her lineage, not because she is an outsider or “other” to the perpetrator. It is the *fetus* that is other. Delaney (1991: 39) asserts of husbands, “a man’s honor depends on his ability to control ‘his’ woman.” When this concept is applied to lineagemates, the woman is not “his” in a possessive sense. Rather, through patrogenesis she is his in an *ontological* sense. This is why it is usually the brother or father who carries out the killing.¹⁶ In his anger, he shows the watching community that his (and synonymously his sister’s) lineage is sovereign.

Accordingly, I found that many women spoke about honor killings from a vantage point *within* their lineages rather than *against* their brothers. While they saw their brothers as potential honor killers, they did not hold it against them but rather valorized them in a manner similar to what Ring goes on to describe—women who tout male anger for its display of “the virility, status, and piety of the entire corporate group” (2006: 117):

Sevi [22-year-old female]¹⁷: Mohammad’s [Sevi’s sister’s husband] sister had sex with a boy before she was married. But because Mohammad is not an honorable man, he did not say anything about it. My oldest brother Jangir—he is a good man. If I had sex with a boy, he would kill me because he is honorable. That is how bad Mohammad is—he did nothing about that horrible situation!

DEK: *Is there anything besides having sex with a boy that would cause Jangir to have to kill you?*

Sevi: No. Having sex outside of marriage is the worst thing.
(Fieldnote, 26 June 1995).

Honor killings were sometimes not isolated incidents, but could lead to further tragedy affecting larger numbers of people acting on behalf of their lineages:

Today I heard the following account: About fifty years ago, a young man and woman eloped. They were both from high-status families. She belonged to [a very high-profile] sheikh lineage, and he was from another high-status lineage. Her family killed both of them. Then his family retaliated to avenge his death, because by the cultural rules only she should have died. The resulting feud went on for years, and many men died. Finally in recent years the governor brokered peace between them. He gathered their leaders together, and they agreed to stop the fighting (Fieldnote, 7 May 1998).

Hymen as border

Borders and sovereignty go together. To a great extent, sovereignty has to do with defining borders and keeping out aliens. Where better for a lineage to focus, then, than on the hymen, a convenient border for controlling reproduction? And that is what many members of patrilineages do: concern themselves with the hymens of their lineage's unmarried female members. Egyptian feminist physician Nawal El Saadawi even goes so far as to conflate honor and the hymen in her polemic against the subjugation of women in the Arab world, especially in Chapter Five, "The Very Fine Membrane Called 'Honour'" (1991: 25–32).

Collective concern with individual females' virginity and chastity has variously been attributed to environment and economics (Schneider 1971), the rise of the state (Ortner 1978), and concern with the preservation of social status (Schlegel 1991). The lineage sovereignty model does not so much change the subject as build on these, especially, as I will show in the next section, on Ortner's connection of virginity with the rise of the (or in this case, a) state.

I found in Iraqi Kurdistan that concern over the "virginity" of women at marriage was shared by women and men alike (see Figure 2). A "virgin" (*kich*, the same word that is translated "girl") while defined in spirit as "a female who has never had intercourse" was defined in letter as "a female whose hymen is unbroken." One unmarried woman told me that, because in her youth she had frequently played in a rough fashion (such as running and climbing trees), she feared that she was unknowingly "not a virgin." "I am very, very afraid of this," she went on. "There is not one day, not *one* day that I do not think about it." One way I heard Kurdish women express anger was to elude to an honor killing by screaming, "I will tear you" (*Ez de tu dirinim*), which literally meant, "I will tear your hymen." This was a threat more forceful than "I will kill you" because it meant, "I will obligate your brother to kill you." A man in his thirties who had not yet married told me,



FIGURE 2 Soap for sale in a beauty shop in Zakho, Iraqi Kurdistan, 2005. On the back, the label reads, “Made in France” (photo by Diane E. King).

Do you know why I am not married? Because I am trying to find a bride who I *know* is a virgin. But every time I consider someone, I learn something about her that causes me to question. Perhaps her family has allowed her a bit of freedom, for example to go out with friends without a brother present. How can I be *sure* that she did not actually have a relationship with a man during a time when no male relative was watching her? I cannot. So I remain unmarried, and still looking for a wife even though it is difficult to remain hopeful.

An obstetrician told me in hushed tones that she knew of colleagues who secretly performed hymenoplasty operations on brides just prior to their wedding night. Iraqi Ba’athist law, she told me, had called for the death penalty for any physician performing the operation, but who could resist helping a bride whose own life would be in danger if she did not provide “evidence” of an intact hymen in the form of bleeding on her wedding night? Although she did not admit it, I suspected that the obstetrician’s report was more autobiographical than she was letting on.

The enforcement of lineage sovereignty is as much about *ascent* reckoning, accounting for who will comprise the patrlineage going

forward in time, as about *descent* reckoning (another favorite topic of mid-century anthropologists), because it is about controlling the *entry* to lineages rather than ruminating on their past. A person enters a lineage at conception. Control of the boundary to conception can include female genital cutting (FGC), which is practiced in Iraqi Kurdistan (although mainly among people to the south of my field site) and is seen to better enable a girl or woman to uphold her family's *namus*. In an early article on this, Montagu (1945: 466) quotes an Egyptian woman as calling FGC a matter of "locking the gate"; Boddy (1982: 695) found a very similar idea in Sudan. *Namus* is again exposed as a euphemism for reproductive prerogative, and an "honor killing" is a purging of possible unsanctioned seed along with the plot of reproductive soil in which it may have been planted. In calls for "protection" of women of childbearing age, what is actually being protected is the lineage's sovereignty, not the woman herself. Woman as "the symbolic repository of group identity" (Kandiyoti 1991: 434) becomes woman as "*physical* repository of new members." Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

***Namus* killings as statecraft: A new Kurdish state**

Killings in the name of *namus* are, as an ideal type, a matter for lineages. I now turn, however, to a case in which they became a matter of statecraft.

The state borders of the modern Middle East were drawn, by the great powers and emergent Turkey, following World War I. The Kurdish homeland, Kurdistan, emerged from this process with borders across it in an "X" formation rather than around it, as would have been the case had ethnicity rather than control of oil been the deciding factor in the drawing of the new states on the map. In all four states, the Kurds have been dominated by a majority ethnic group. In Iraq this domination was especially cruel, culminating in the destruction of thousands of villages and attempted genocide by the Arab Ba'athist government in the late 1980s. (Certainly, the Iraqi Ba'athist government headed by dictator Saddam Hussein, whose government apparatus was composed largely of Arab Sunnis, was not merely anti-Kurdish; it massacred thousands of others as well, mostly Shi'i Arabs in southern Iraq.)

Although there were a variety of rebellions by Kurds throughout the twentieth century, a more concerted guerilla movement formed in 1961, led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani. That movement fought the government for thirty years, always holding some mountain villages, but having only sporadic success in the towns below. But during the war between the Iraqi government and the United States and its allies in 1991, the *peshmerga* (guerilla fighters, "those who face death") seized

their chance. With the United States and its allies engaging the Iraqi army in the south of Iraq, Kurdish people living in northern towns from which the army had recently withdrawn, took to the streets in a spontaneous uprising in early March 1991. Disparate factions representing the majority of Kurdish people in Iraq joined in: the *peshmerga* led by Mes'ud Barzani (who had taken over after his father's death), the *peshmerga* led by Jalal Talabani (who had founded an offshoot from Barzani's group), and the Kurdish *chete* guerilla fighters previously loyal to Baghdad. Also included were a few non-Kurds, primarily Chaldean and Assyrian Christians. Iraqi government administrators who were ethnic Arabs and Kurds and others who remained loyal to the central government were killed or fled to parts of Iraq still controlled by the government. One participant in the uprising later told me, "It was as though we Kurds of Iraq became one lineage overnight, unified in the face of one threat." Less than two weeks later, the same people who had staged the triumphant uprising were fleeing for their lives from the advancing Iraqi army, which killed as many as 20,000 people (McDowall 2004: 373). Many more died in the mountains in the mud and snow before being coaxed back to their homes by the United States military and its allies and Western relief agencies.

The Iraqi Kurdish state that had been gestating since 1961 and was born symbolically in the March 1991 uprising took shape during the following months.¹⁸ Its borders were established as face-off lines between *peshmerga* and Iraqi government troops became fixed, and it became apparent that the Iraqi government would remain on the other side (see Figure 3). *Peshmerga* units, police, and bureaucratic functionaries carried out defense, maintenance of order, and governance. Many of the Arab government workers who had been killed or had fled had had mainly Kurdish deputies and staffs working under them who simply assumed full control. Kurdish flags were raised. Ba'athist symbolism was removed from public spaces. Hospitals, mosques, schools, and other institutions that had borne the name of Saddam Hussein underwent name changes. Statues of the dictator were destroyed and eventually replaced by those of important Kurdish figures. Kurdish media outlets sprang up seemingly overnight. The Iraqi Kurdish "we" now had a fixed landscape into which it could settle. No longer did it exist as a clandestine movement; no longer did its guerillas advance, attack, defend, or retreat. It had a place, delineated by boundaries represented on maps, many of which were circulating by the time I arrived in 1995.

Following the uprising there was an unprecedented flow of people and goods into Iraqi Kurdistan from neighboring states, especially Turkey and Iran. The newcomers included traders as well as representatives of Western NGOs. A report by United Nations High

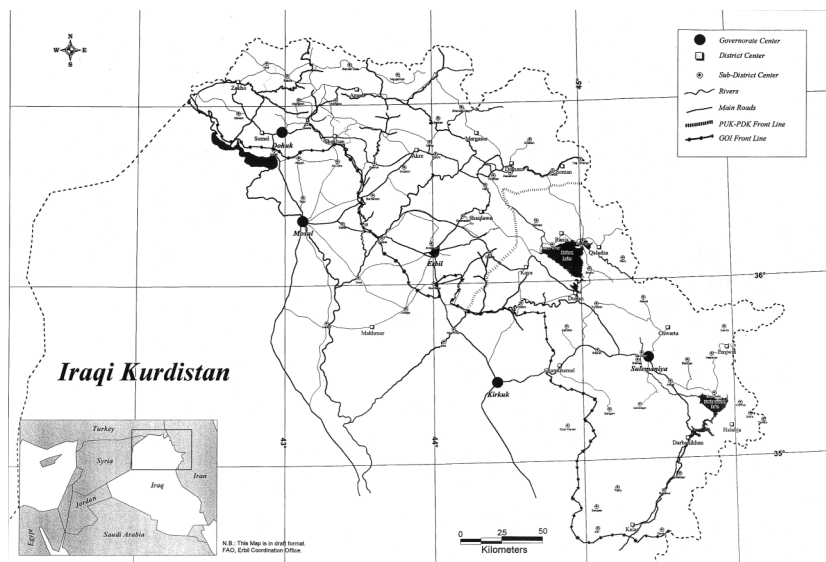


FIGURE 3 Map used and distributed by a local office of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), ca. 1998.

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) describes “thousands of trucks” crossing the border (1992: 55). People described the initial inrush to me as having made their towns feel as though they were “opening up” to “the outside” and that their streets were suddenly “modern” and “like Europe” for the first time. A more diverse population could be seen, and new feelings of freedom and *communitas* prevailed. Some women responded by “downveiling” (Herrera 2001) and removing their head scarves. Some were seen in public, usually at festive events such as picnics, wearing the *shal u shapik* (baggy pants, jacket, and cumberbund) favored by the *peshmerga*, and the ultimate symbol of the fictive lineage of Iraqi Kurds. In a culture in which men dress like men and women like women, a rash of women dressing like men was a powerful statement. The new state had a body, and it was male.

But soon women became women again. The influx of an unknown population of strangers, the majority of whom were male, was seen as dangerous—a challenge to the upholding of *namus*. As interviewees later told me, soon a feeling of sexual vulnerability had settled in. The downveiling trend, which was at best limited in the first place, reversed, and a hyper-concern with propriety again choreographed women’s lives. When asked to describe this in interviews, women

made reference to many of the same events that at first lent them a feeling of freedom, including the introduction of new traffic through the area. Women from the town of Zakho usually added, at that point, the phrase, “especially in Zakho, since it is near the border.”

The new state faced other kinds of vulnerability as well. Following the initial euphoria of the uprising, it became apparent that the new Iraqi Kurdish state would not achieve full sovereignty, mainly because it did not receive “recognition” from the “international community.” Though cut off administratively from Baghdad, the legal system continued to follow Iraqi law. While Iraqi Kurdish administrators had offices in Washington, they were not called “envoys” and there was no office of “ambassador.” Governments varied in the terminology they used, most opting for “northern Iraq.” More locally, the threat that Saddam Hussein’s government in Baghdad would re-assert its sovereignty was omnipresent.

When I first arrived in 1995, I found the participants in the Iraqi Kurdish “de facto state” continuing to perform stateness despite these vulnerabilities. They had begun to experience communal-political life in like manner to people in “legitimate,” “recognized” states, by engaging in its collective imagining and practice. People referred to the place they lived as simply “Kurdistan.” Governance became more institutionalized. The *peshmerga* began to transform into a formal army with its own military academies. Iraqi Kurdish sovereignty was perhaps most starkly illustrated by the absence of central Iraqi sovereignty: During fieldwork I never knowingly met a representative of the central Iraqi government (although I may well have unknowingly met members of its secret security service [*mukhabarat*]).

State as fictive kin group

The mutual constitution of kinship and state in the Middle East is the subject of a rich literature (which I have partially summarized elsewhere [King 2005]). State leaders construct themselves as “fathers” (Saghieh 2000). “Father state” is juxtaposed with “motherland” (Delaney 1995). The state, like a patrilineage, is on its guard against exogenous threats. Accordingly, the emergent Iraqi Kurdish state began to conceptualize itself as a family. In everyday speech Iraqi Kurdish leaders are rendered as kin to all Iraqi Kurds. As the son of Mulla Mustafa Barzani, the “father” of Iraqi Kurdistan, Mes’ud Barzani is referred to and addressed as “*Kak*” (brother). Jalal Talabani, who broke away from Barzani, is called “*Mam*” (father’s brother).

The new, lineage-like entity went about the business of statecraft by asserting its sovereignty in the face of myriad vulnerabilities, which it did in the same manner as a lineage:

Legal professional: In the first years after the uprising, 1991 and 1992, there were killings of women every day! I saw an average of one a day in the court. Her family did not kill her—the *peshmerga* did, but this was not open. There was a “black list” of the women who had had sexual relations with Ba’ath party men. Some were prostitutes, some operated out of fear of the government of Iraq, some were poor, their husbands were off fighting in the war—there were many reasons. The *peshmerga* decided to kill one per day. This was their own decision. The law does not support it because they were not killing their own relatives.

In some cases people told the *peshmerga*, “so-and-so is bad” just because they wanted her killed. In one case the *peshmerga* killed a Yazidi woman right in front of her five children. Her husband came to me crying. I cried too. He said, “I know my wife. She was good [did not engage in extramarital sex].” After two years [an important figure in the Barzani administration] put a stop to this practice. He said, “From this day on you may not kill women.” So now killing is only in families (Fieldnote, 19 October 1998).

The post-uprising killings of non-kin women were well known, and I heard many other accounts like this one. One woman even waxed nostalgic about them, interpreting that they were no longer carried out as a sign that the Kurdish government had ceased to care about promoting virtue in the society. I also learned of earlier killings, before the Kurdish movement had achieved its state. A woman recounted to me how in 1987 the *peshmerga* had killed four people next door to her relatives’ house in Suleymani, the most Kurdish of Iraqi cities. Three were women who were rumored to be prostitutes and the fourth was a man rumored to be their client. “Even then [before the uprising],” she said, “the *peshmerga* were responsible for the reputation of the city.” When I asked if the *peshmerga* had killed Arab women as well, she answered, “No, no, they didn’t care about Arabs, only Kurds.”

The process of fashioning an Iraqi Kurdistan body politic involved invoking a patrilineal logic that had murderous consequences for some women. It involved eliminating those bodies that were impolitic. In a state, sovereignty is policed at the borders, both physical and conceptual. The Iraqi Kurdish homeland had become, as had Iran before it, a metaphorical woman who needed protection “against alien designs, intrusion, and penetration,” and where “men, as a brotherhood of patriots, were concerned over the penetrability of the porous borders” much “as they displayed anxiety over who penetrated the orifices of the bodies of their female possessions” (Najmabadi 1997: 445). It also paralleled the practices of the Ba’athist Iraqi government, which carried out killings of prostitutes with apparently similar motives,

fending off affronts to its honor and asserting the glory of the nation (Smiles, this volume).¹⁹

If established states invoke the family when building their identities, how much more must a vulnerable, “illegitimate” state do so? New offspring for the patrilineal state can be gestated in the bodies of women. But new offspring for enemies can be as well. So, women who had threatened the new Kurdish state’s sovereignty over its own reproductive processes were eliminated along with any possible fetuses they might have borne. As time passed after the uprising, it would have become apparent that any offspring would have been sired by Kurdish men, since Arab men were no longer around. However, a symbolic inertia continued to impel some *peshmerga* to carry out killings of women who had previously shown themselves to be open to enemy seed. “Especially in times of mobilized nationalism,” wrote Pettman (1998: 158), “there is pressure on women to have the right children, by the right men.” “Prostitutes” whose (real or perceived) clients were “outsiders” were seen as tainting the emerging Iraqi Kurdish state with wombs that were too accessible. The policing of reproductive boundaries as manifested in these state-level “honor killings” is both indicative and consequential of a will to statehood on the part of Iraqi Kurds.

Conclusion

I have argued here toward a new model of *namus*, as sovereignty of a lineage or larger category drawing on lineage symbolism such as a state. Patrogenesis, euphemized through the “seed and soil” trope, is a key component of the model. Borders are as well, since it is through a border that one enters a patrilineage. A hymen serves as a border to the womb in which a new member of a different patrilineage is gestated. Before one of the wombs belonging to a patrilineage can be used as a gestation site, permission must be granted in the form of a wedding ceremony. Otherwise, a violation of lineage sovereignty has occurred.

When the Kurdish uprising achieved territorial sovereignty and became encircled by a geophysical border for the first time, its members became concerned with the policing of both borders, of the state and of the wombs of the women belonging to the patrilineages comprising the new state. Broader questions of citizenship logically follow those I have addressed here, and more work could be done on the patrilineal sovereignty model and its application by analogy to broader categories. In the modern Middle Eastern states, the pattern of citizenship has been strongly patrilineal. A male citizen automatically passes on membership in the state (citizenship) to his children of both sexes, but a woman does not. This pertains, in some Middle Eastern

states, even to citizens in exile. (In Lebanon, where I lived for most of the period from 2000 to 2006, I was told that this policy applied to three exiled generations.) Seen in this light, a womb, then, is a place of entry not only into the patrilineage, but into the state itself. The personal is indeed political, but perhaps more importantly for women living under the threat of honor killings, it is patrilineal.

Notes

Received 7 March 2007; accepted 3 November 2007.

I gratefully acknowledge extramural support from the George A. and Eliza Gardner Howard Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation, as well as support from the University of Kentucky, American University of Beirut, and Washington State University. I thank Linda Stone, Jane Harmon Kelley, Samir Khalaf, Iman Humaydan, and the anonymous reviewers for their feedback. My greatest debt is to people in Iraqi Kurdistan who spoke openly to me about topics usually left unmentioned.

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1. "Dowry murders" (Rudd 2002; Stone and James 1995) are another form of domestic violence that seems to be on the increase. They are found mainly among South Asian Hindus practicing dowry marriage payments (as opposed to bride wealth, the much more common marriage payment pattern among groups carrying out honor killings). Usually, the victim's husband or his mother or father perpetrate a dowry murder, with the apparent motive being for him to be able to re-marry so as to again collect dowry.
2. For my purposes in this article, the terms "honor killing" and "honor crime" are interchangeable. "Honor crime" is a more recent term and seems to be favored by activists, likely because it encompasses violence short of killing that still carries with it a "defense of honor" narrative. Honor violence results in death in the vast majority of cases.
3. Most cultures in which honor killings occur are Muslim-majority. However, examples of honor killings occurring among non-Muslims are easy enough to find that a compelling case cannot be made for a direct linkage between Islam and honor killings. The website Islam Awareness (2007) lists several examples of honor killings involving non-Muslims.
4. Multiple types of kinship reckoning can be found in Italy, especially if the historical record is taken into consideration. For example, Murru-Corriga (2000) argues that Sardinia has become more patrilineal over time. The presence of past bilateral and matrilineal reckoning there (and, one could speculate, in surrounding areas) should not be taken as evidence of honor killings occurring in the absence of patriliney.
5. In the Behdini dialect of Kurdish spoken in the region of my fieldwork, this word is rendered "*namîs*." So that it will be more recognizable to readers, I use the more common spelling in this article.
6. Many sources on *namus fîrd* note that it has a counterpart that is usually translated "shame"; especially since Peristiany (1965) and Pitt-Rivers (1977) "honor and shame" has been a central trope in the anthropology of the Mediterranean. With Kurdish people I heard frequent references to the Kurdish version of the shame concept, *sherim*,

especially from mothers of young children, for whom inculcating *sherim* appeared to be a central part of their children's socialization process. Antoun (1968: 672) offers an early description by an anthropologist of an honor killing in a Jordanian village. Afterward, an observer told him the shame had been erased. Shame/*sherim* seemed to represent the inverse of not only *namus*, but additionally of *sherif*, a term also usually translated "honor" but not sexual in connotation. As van Eck explains it in the only book-length anthropological study of honor killings, *namus* is encompassed within *sherif* (2003: 20). I do not further develop shame/*sherim* and *sherif* in this article.

7. I have been conducting participant observation and interviews in Iraqi Kurdistan periodically since 1995. This article mainly concerns the period from 1991 to 2003, now historically bracketed as that period during which Iraqi Kurdistan was governed by local leaders, the majority of them ethnic Kurds, against the will of the Iraqi government headed by Saddam Hussein. While Iraqi Kurdistan continues to have very similar governance to the pre-2003 period, the governance of the portion of Iraq outside Iraqi Kurdistan changed significantly when a United States-led military coalition invaded Iraq and toppled its government in 2003. Thereafter, Kurdish regional self-governance became "legitimate" in the eyes of the central Iraqi state, in 2005 becoming officially recognized as one of the semi-sovereign entities in the new federal Iraq. Some Kurds played important political roles in post-2003 Baghdad as well, with a key Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani, occupying the post of President.
8. Starting with my first visit in 1995, I saw evidence suggesting a rash of "honor suicides" in addition to "honor killings." Health officials working in the main hospital in Dohuk told me that it regularly received large numbers of young female burn victims, more than it would seem would be the result of kitchen accidents (even though young females do most of the cooking in Iraqi Kurdistan). Often, as was exemplified by one burn victim whom I visited, the pattern of the burns suggested self-immolation even though the corresponding explanation given by the victim and/or family did not. People explained that such a suicide would result from family pressure on a girl or woman to kill herself so that her brother or father did not have to. Further treatment of this topic is outside the scope of this article.
9. "Peace" is here a relative term. Iraqi Kurdistan between 1991 and 2003 might better be described as in a state of what is called in NGO and UN circles, "no war, no peace." I have written elsewhere (King forthcoming) about living and researching under fear of violence in Iraqi Kurdistan. After the 2003 removal of the Ba'athist government by the United States and its allies, fear of the Ba'ath subsided, but it was replaced by fear of "terrorists" (*irhabiyyin*).
10. And/or it is curtailed for them. This raises interesting questions of agency that are beyond the scope of this article.
11. When I started my fieldwork in 1995, people could not cite a single example of a local woman driving in Dohuk or Zakho or the surrounding villages, and I never saw one myself. By 1998 I knew of one. On a short visit in 2002 I saw several women driving. None appeared to be young; they were perhaps in their late forties through sixties. A local friend who was very interested in driving and who had been observing the growing phenomenon of woman drivers estimated that in the Dohuk Governorate, an area with about 1 million people, perhaps 100 women were driving in 2002. Several women confided in me that they would like to drive, but that they were worried about what it would do to their (sexual) reputations.
12. Although Iraqi Kurdistan has significant numbers of non-Muslims (mainly Christians and Yezidis), I carried out research almost entirely among Muslims. My

- impression was that the gender and kinship conventions of adherents to other religions such as Christianity and Yezidism were very similar.
13. Following Stone (2006: 1, 5), I assume a mutual constitution of gender ("people's understandings of the categories of 'male' and 'female'" and "the ways in which these understandings are interwoven with other dimensions of social and cultural life") and kinship ("relationships between persons based on descent or marriage").
 14. This assertion appears across the ethnographic literature, and the author of a recent quantitative study (Kulwicki 2002) concurs.
 15. While I find Meeker's translation of *namus* as "*sexual honor*" (1976: 244) (italics added) to be superior to merely translating it "honor," he frustrates both myself and Delaney (1991: 39) by stopping short of fleshing out the role of paternity even though he writes that *namus* has to do with the "legitimation of paternity" (Meeker 1976: 264). He is content instead with a description of *namus* as, although related to "women's chastity," as "a sacred quality, mirrored in communal opinion, modeled on communal convention" (Meeker 1976: 268).
 16. Delaney notes (1991: 101) that "[a]n Arab woman's brother is the one who would defend or avenge her transgressions against her honor, whereas in Turkey it would be the woman's husband and his father. The difference may have something to do with the salience of the patrilineage and whether the women continue belonging to it after marriage." Most of the honor killing examples cited in the literature mention that the obligation to kill lies first with the transgressor's brother or father. But if Delaney's point here is true of Turkish villages (and I wonder to what degree it is, especially of Kurdish villages in Turkey, of which she makes no mention), then both the example and its interpretation provide an exception that proves the rule: A lineage member kills a lineage member.
 17. All names of interlocutors are pseudonyms.
 18. Despite Appadurai's (1990) convincing argument that the hyphen linking "nation" and "state" in "nation-state" is more a representative of disjunction than of conjunction, what I describe here goes against that in that the Iraqi state has, despite itself, given rise to the Iraqi Kurdish nation. I follow generally accepted definitions in which the state "encompasses both a sovereign government *and* the geographically bounded territory, society, and population over which it presides" and "sovereignty is the indispensable attribute of the state" (Porter 1994: 5–6). I do not further take up the problematic of "nation" in this article.
 19. During fieldwork prior to the 2003 war, I frequently heard talk of prostitution in both Iraqi Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq. Although it was difficult to get a sense of how common or uncommon it was, what was clear was that local people regarded the prostitute as an important symbol, one worthy of gossip and expressions of disdain. I was not aware of any sex trafficking to or from distant places; the prostitutes people talked about were described as local. Since the war began, however, reports have been surfacing of sex trafficking in Iraq and to neighboring countries (Amnesty International 2007).

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