



# PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

## 18-Year-Old Muslim Girl Executed by Family in “Honor Killing”

by Dr. Edy Cohen

BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 2,123, August 15, 2021

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Young Arab women must toe a very narrow line or risk bringing “shame” on their family—which could result in their being murdered by their own relatives. “Honor killing” is a plague that continues to infect the Arab world, though it is not sanctioned by either religion or state.

An 18-year-old Syrian Arab girl, Aida Hamoudi Saeedo, was recently executed by firing squad for refusing to marry her cousin. She lived with her parents and brother in the al-Hasaka region in northeastern Syria. Ostensibly she lived under her family’s protection, but the firing squad that executed her consisted of her own relatives.

Many in the Muslim world still marry cousins, and are told in childhood that this is what will happen when they reach marriageable age. Aida had other plans. She disobeyed her parents’ order and ran away with another young man with whom she was in love. When her parents, family, and friends eventually found her, she was forced to pay the ultimate price for having “desecrated” the family’s “honor.”

Practically all so-called “honor killings” involve the killing of women. In Arab society, any behavior by females that does not conform to the values of society is said to bring shame to their families. In much of the Arab world, even women who are victims of rape are sometimes murdered by relatives on the grounds that their compromised physical status casts a black mark on their family. The result is that many Arab women who are raped never report the crime for fear of the deadly consequences. They are thus vulnerable targets, and are sometimes victimized even by family members.

When Aida was caught, she was locked in a room, denied food and water, and severely beaten. Her “offense” against family honor was twofold: She had run off with a man without her parents’ consent, and had refused an arranged marriage to a close relative. In her family’s eyes, this caused grave injury to both the family unit and the wider clan, and nothing is more important in Arab society than family and clan. The family’s solution was this: Aida’s father, brothers, and the cousin she was supposed to marry stood her against a wall and shot her, firing squad-style. To make sure the message was received by a wider audience, the family took the unusual step of posting a video of Aida’s gruesome execution on social media. Her voice can be heard in the seconds before she died, screaming, “Mother, please save me!”

Horrific as Aida’s murder was, “honor killings” like this occur across the Arab world. Nothing can change thousands of years of tradition, ignorance, and primitive tribal thinking. Murder is prohibited by Syrian law and contrary to sharia law—there is no instruction in Islam to kill a young woman because she refuses to marry a cousin, or because she runs away with her beloved. The problem is neither the state nor the religion. The problem is the society, which is profoundly sick.

Only in Islamic societies does “honor killing” take place. In many Arab countries, including Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf States, the legal system forgives the perpetrators of violence against women. If a husband murders his wife and her lover, for example, he is likely to get a light sentence and sometimes be released without any jail time.

In Israel, there are dozens of cases every year of “honor killings” committed to erase a presumed “desecration” of the family. Most, but not all, occur in the Muslim Bedouin sector, and most of the victims are women. When a Bedouin woman has sex with a man before marriage, it is considered an act of shame that harms the dignity of the family. Divorced Bedouin women, or young Bedouin women who marry Jews, must flee their tribes and are persecuted by their families for the rest of their lives. One woman left her place of residence in East Jerusalem and fled to Eilat for safety until her ex-husband found and murdered her.

In Israel, the perpetrators of “honor killings” receive harsh sentences, as would the convicted perpetrators of any murder, be they Jewish or Arab. But this does not seem to be an adequate deterrence. Only education and guidelines from Muslim clerics will help reduce this phenomenon. In no religion is it permissible to murder for the sake of honor, not even in Islam. These twisted norms stem from primitive tribal mentalities that are intolerable in modern society.

*This is an edited version of an [article](#) published in Israel Today on July 15, 2021.*

*Dr. Edy Cohen, a researcher at the BESA Center, grew up in Lebanon and served for 15 years in the Israeli intelligence community. He specializes in inter-Arab relations, the Arab-Israeli conflict, terrorism, and Jewish communities in the Arab world. He is the author of The Holocaust in the Eyes of Mahmoud Abbas (Hebrew).*