

UC Riverside

UC Riverside Previously Published Works

Title

What is moderate Islam?

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/66p6k946>

Journal

TERRORISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE, 31(5)

ISSN

0954-6553

Author

Strenski, Ivan

Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed

How to Dishonor Honor Killing
and
How Not to Pursue Moderate Islam

Ivan Strenski

Richard L. Benkin, ed., *What Is Moderate Islam?* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018) ISBN-13: 978-1498537414. Hardback \$90

Richard Paul Churchill, *Women in the Crossfire: Understanding and Ending Honor Killing* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2018) ISBN 978-0190468569. Hardback \$85

1. From “Moderate” Pillar to “Radical” Post

Is the term, “moderate Islam,” an oxymoron? Is it only a way of congratulating or encouraging Muslims for being like us – for sharing liberal humanist egalitarian values? Is the term, “moderate Islam,” then, any more an oxymoron than “radical Islam” is a tautology – that is to say, a formula for condemning Muslims who are not like us – whose values we find disagreeable? Cautiously circling around that dilemma are the contributors to Richard L. Benkin’s edited volume, *What Is Moderate Islam?* But such assiduous avoidance of unacknowledged fundamental definitional questions rarely wins admiration. As a result, the book consists of a series of chapters that bounce readers back and forth between discussions of “pillars” of good, “moderate” Islam, on the one hand, to the “posts” of bad, “radical” Islam, on

the other. Not a word is written to dispel the view that key terms of the collection -- “moderate” and “radical” -- are loaded from the get-go. Maybe a volume admitting as much would fail to satisfy readers of its conceptual decisions. But not even admitting the problem is unforgivable.

The result? Not much here is new. About bad, “radical” Islam, what don’t we already know? What sort of Western reader will defend the laundry lists of assaults on the fundamentals of liberal humane values represented in so-called belligerence, authoritarianism, violence, intolerance, misogyny, and prudery? Benkin and company spend far too much time kicking in open doors when we most need to be knocking on the barricaded doors of honest entry. How to maneuver around Benkin’s question-begging discourse of “moderate” and “radical” will present the main problems for this review. By contrast, the second book paired for review -- Richard Paul Churchill’s *Women in the Crossfire* -- shows us an author brave enough innovatively to hammer away at precisely such a grim and forbidding subject -- honor killing -- without naively assuming the virtue of our own values and the vice of the values of others. But does his enlightened project succeed in more ways than Benkin’s benighted one?

Having said this, Benkin’s volume offers a good deal of valuable information, however conceptually compromised. For instance, Umar Duad Khattak’s “Moderate Islam Is an Illusion -- at Least for Now” devotes over a page painstakingly itemizing 18 or so “radical” Muslim beliefs and practices, guaranteed to repel any non-*jihadi* reader. Whether this be the determination to convert all non-Muslims, believing that only Muslims will live a blessed afterlife, wallowing in a sense of paranoid victimhood, even while feeling flush with power, and so on, the mind of a “radical” Muslim seems fevered in sickness (147-8). Similarly, Kulbhushan Warikoo’s “Islamist Extremism: Threat to World Peace and Security” leads a Cooke’s Tour of nation by nation horrors of “radical” Islam. You want atrocities against women, children or ethnic-religious minorities? (28). Then, Afghanistan is just the place for you. Are textbooks for efficient Islamization, your thing, or

madrassas fitted out for mass brain-washing young minds more to your taste? Then, by all means, plan to stop-over in Pakistan (31). Or, if widespread, garden-variety human rights abuse better suits your tastes, the whole of Central Asia is ready for you to roam (43). Liberals who spout vacuities like “Islam is a religion of peace” need to be reminded that Islam’s being a religion doesn’t inoculate it from evil-doing any more than our Crusader ancestors were certified virtuous because they were emissaries for the Vicar of Christ.

And, whether headed abroad or staying at home, Daniel Pipes’ list of 90 odd questions listed in his “Smoking out Islamists via Extreme Vetting” may yield unexpected results (15-20). Wondering whether that suspicious swarthy neighbor in the next apartment is on the up-and-up? Simply ask what he thinks of “polytheists,” or whether his woman has the right to dress anyway she likes, say, exposing her hair, bared arms and legs, or if religion and the state should be separate, or whether he’d let his kid go on an overnight trip with their school class, or should his wife have equal rights in initiating a divorce, or what about “homosexuality,” or, whether women should work outside the home and even occupy “high governmental office,” and so on? Pipes is dead sure that by using his handy list of questions, one will be able to “smoke out” whether that guy next door is an Islamist or, maybe... the local Chabadnick *rebbe*.

These unanticipated results from the extreme vetting Pipes aims solely at Muslims should caution us about singling out Islam as “radical,” even in Benkin’s sense of the term. More is at stake, at least since judging what is “radical” depends on how “radical” is defined and one’s point of view. By that standard, other religions and ideological systems may be equally “radical” as Islam. So, maybe it is time we stepped back a pace and recognized the entire enterprise of “smoking out” people who are not like us – “radicals” -- and celebrating those who are like us – “moderates” -- for what it is: arguably an exercise in identifying who our fellow tribe members are or are not. It may not, however, tell us anything worth knowing about

Islam. I submit that if we want to do justice to the issues prompted by Benkin's book, we need to penetrate candidly to the heart of our assumptions about what it means to be "moderate" or "radical" *in interesting ways*. If being "moderate," only means being like us, and being "radical" means not being like us, such an effort is unlikely to produce revelations. Benkin's book fails being "interesting" because it can largely be dismissed as an uncritical exercise in cultural tribalism.

2. *A Real Issue: Muslim Monism versus Muslim Diversity*

Despite how tiresome Benkin's way of addressing the "moderate"/"radical" issues can be, we do learn more about the under-told story of *monistic* Islam. Whether these monistic trends are "moderate" or "radical" is irrelevant. What is important are the respectively homogenizing Saudi and Iranian campaigns now being promoted across the Muslim world. The insurgent efforts of ISIS and Al-Qaeda to bring all (mostly Sunni) Muslims under the caliphate's black flag also may be counted alongside analogous Saudi and Iranian state endeavors. The opposition of monistic/diverse Islam may then matter more, and be less ideologically loaded, than Benkin's obsession with the so-called "moderate"/"radical" binarism.

Benkin's collection contains at least two instructive chapters on monistic "radical" threats to the Islam of Pakistani Balochistan. These serve to celebrate real examples of Benkin's "moderate" Islam amid the bevy of chapters (discussed above) about "radical" Islam's deplorables. Chapter 5, Meerain Baloch's "An Islam That Rejects Islamists: The Case of Baloch" may be the first exposure for many readers of an Islam palatable to a secular Western worldview. State and religion are separate, as are social and personal domains. Balochs value minorities and seek to protect them from predation by the mighty (98f). A Baloch code of hospitality and their values of trust, loyalty to one's word make for a welcoming environment (101).

Somehow or other, and remarkably, the Baloch have devised social schemes to short-circuit revenge violence, as well (100f). What puts Islam on the spot is the fact that for the Balochs, Islam does not exhaust the entirety of what it means to be a Baloch. Nor, however Muslim the Balochs, on the whole, may be, Islam does not need to be acknowledged by non-Muslims as the principal, and certainly not established, religion of the Balochs. All this is worth knowing, but also needs to be kept at least analytically separate from the “moderate”/“radical” question.

Also, worth knowing is that the Balochs may survive the Islamic monisms being rolled out from Riyadh or Teheran, respectively, but that reputedly “moderate” Muslim states such as Malaysia and Bangladesh seem to be falling gradually under their respective sway. The title of Benkin’s chapter, “The Myth of Bangladesh as a Moderate Muslim Nation,” speaks for itself. With a population half the size of the United States’ squeezed onto territory the size of the state of Iowa, and a slowly encroaching Indian Ocean devouring its fragile coastal land, it is no wonder that Bangladeshi *jihadis* have become a major export. A more complex, but likewise depressing story is told by Sunil Kukreja’s, “Whither Moderate Islam: Malaysian Style.” There, a gradual and relentless Wahhabi drive to shape Malaysian Islam according to its own image seems to be winning the day (88). Despite an ebb and flow between deliberate policies to establish a moderate Islam over against counter-currents of Wahhabism, (65-6), a one-size-fits-all “exclusive brand of Islam” seems to be slowly squeezing out other diverse indigenous forms of Islam (69). Greatly complicating matters have been the government’s policies for deepening national integration, employing an ideology of Malaysian “moderate” Islam, on the one side, and a popular wave of pious sentiment for greater Islamization cresting, as it were, at the same time, on the other. “Which way, Malays?” one is tempted to ask. Like so many other examples in the Muslim world, Islam seems uneasily stumbling towards different kinds of futures – some of which secular humanists will find

palatable, others they will not. Against the polemic thrust of Benkin's volume, I would argue that it is a mistake to mire ourselves in the confusions of moderate versus radical Islam. Instead, those seeking to understand the major macro-trends in the Muslim world should focus more on understanding the reasons, causes and consequences of *monistic* efforts to unify what had previously been diverse forms of Islam. What accounts for these efforts? What should the reaction of the West be to them?

3. *The Dromedary in the Room*

Amidst all the many useful facts and trends Benkin's people amass, they ignore the hulking dromedary in the room – a “dromedary” of a conceptual or definitional question. These demands knowing if the contributors of this volume understand the term, “moderate Islam,” to be as much an oxymoron as “radical Islam” is a tautology? “Moderate” or “radical” are terms heavily laden with – unacknowledged -- assumptions and value-judgments. Dare they confess whose convenience is being served by assuming untroubled applications of such terms like “moderate” and “radical” with respect to Islam? Looking that dromedary straight in the eye, I would ask whether Benkin and his contributing authors really mean that *radicalization* is simply Islam come into its own – simply Islam taking off the gloves? Similarly, do they really mean that “moderate” Islam is a way-station on the road to full secularization? Further, do Benkin and company possibly believe there is some neutral way to make the case that so-called “radical” Islam constitutes an illegitimate development of Islam? What do Benkin and his collaborators finally really believe about so-called “religious” value systems? Are these bound to be incompatible with any liberal democratic order? And, if so, what reasons do Benkin and company have for seeming to assume that Islamic values are any less compatible with a secular, liberal democratic order than say the Jewish values of large segments of the Israeli political order, or the Christian Democratic values of Bavaria or Italy, or the aggressive Christian

nationalist political values in the US? This is to say that Benkin and company need to do a lot of explaining about their view of the compatibility of “religious” values *across the board* with a secular democratic political order.

4. *Self-Ownning, Other-Ownning: Either or Both?*

Perhaps the biggest victim of Benkin’s failure to acknowledge the dromedary in the room is our understanding of the opportunities that Islam may offer for understanding ourselves. Pipes, for instance, implicitly indicts Islam as “radical” for restricting marriage of its women to non-Muslim men, for requiring religious tax from non-Muslims living in Muslim lands or forbidding other religions freedom to proselytize among Muslims. But looked at in other ways, such an indictment of bad, radical Islam may prove to be superficial at best. Anthropologist Talal Asad raises some critical questions about our own values by comparing them with the different vision of human nature Islam represents. In this penetrating discussion of religious notions such as blasphemy and secular critique, Asad calls attention to the Occidental pre-eminence of the ideal of the “*self-owning*” individual. He does so explicitly by contrasting it *comparatively* with Islam’s notion of self as *belonging to another*. In an analogous way, anthropologist Louis Dumont has also puzzled over Islam’s sharing with the West the ideal of equality, but without affirming individualism. Asad argues that at a fundamental level, religion is not best conceived as Christians do -- as “belief.” Rather, Muslims view “What matters, finally, is belonging to a peculiar way of life in which the person does not own himself.” (Asad 2013:39) For Muslims, the self, then, is conceived as belonging to Allah ultimately, and proximately to the *ummah*, and to Islam as a collectivity.

Conceiving the human person as “belonging to another” generates an entirely different morality from one dominated by the *self-owning* person. In

that context of other-ownership, for instance, a most grievous moral offense would be to alienate the Muslim from their living relationships, to disrupt the networks of *belonging* that make whole the Muslim self. This is why “seduction,” (or even perhaps with “persuasion” or proselytizing). becomes a serious matter for Muslims. This may help explain Muslim opposition to the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslim men, or Muslim sensitivity to proselytizing by non-Muslims in Muslim lands. Both would constitute attempts to weaken the community and the network of relations sustaining it. “Beliefs,” strictly speaking, have little or nothing to do with these rules. It is the act of “seduction” that matters.

Muslims conceive “seduction” as leading someone away from where they *belong*, from their living relationships. Our sexual sense of seduction may be part of this, not because of the sex, but because of the social alienation. And, the social alienation matters because it is felt to threaten the sense of a person’s deepest self. Seduction amounts to something far worse for the Muslim than taking possession of the *body* of another. In seducing someone, the Muslim sees the very elemental loyalties and affections of another subjected to the will of another. (Asad 2013:25) “To seduce,” in the sense salient for Muslims, says Asad, “is to incite someone to open up his or her innermost self to images, sounds and words offered by the seducer and to lead the seduced – complicit or unwitting – to an end first conceived by the former.” (Asad 2013:26) Seduction facilitates the ultimate act of personal derangement.

5. *How the Muslim “Other” Helps Us Understand Ourselves*

I would submit that Asad’s observations are powerful because they avoid the trite claims that the Muslims have it right (or wrong) and the West has it wrong (or right) about “ownership” of the self. Rather, in bringing out the

conception of a self as belonging to a larger whole, Asad challenges us, “self-owning” Occidentals, to consider the vulnerabilities of our own preferred view of human nature. Inevitably, the comparison raises the prospects of there being unacknowledged strengths in a Muslim view of human being.

Of course, once we think about it for a while, we may recognize that the notion of self as belonging to others is not necessarily utterly alien to the West. For example, is each partner in a marriage self-owning – at least as equally self-owning as before being married? It is only the peculiar historical development of Western societies that has pushed the notion of a self as belonging to another into the shadows as the image of the free-willed, inner-directed, self-reliant, autonomous individual ascends into the light. In this way, Western civilization’s ominous decision to opt for the ideal of self-owning individualism becomes salient by pertinent comparison with Islam. It pushes us to question the strengths and vulnerabilities of self-owning. The Muslim critique of “seduction” might, for instance, give Westerners pause to ponder what we have lost in forsaking the ideal of belonging to another? What social costs have even self-owning individuals incurred by being seduced in one way or another? Consider the damage done to the integrity of the human person and our duties to others by, say, our constant, everyday bombardment by seductive mass media advertising. Far from trivial, on the Muslim view, the assault of advertising by its “hidden persuaders” constitutes a moral danger to human freedom and dignity. Stealthily, mass media advertising steals the soul and its affections, frames our relationships in potentially unhealthy ways, captures the knowing mind and its attitudes, however much we may have become inured to it as just the price of doing business. This then is only one example of how aspects of what Benkin and company call “radical” Islam might actually be read otherwise as offering a way for Westerners to gain critical purchase on values usually gone unexamined.

6. Robert Paul Churchill's *Manual for Moral Revolution*

Since the book being paired with Benkin's treats honor killing -- Robert Paul Churchill's extraordinary *Women in the Crossfire: Understanding and Ending Honor killing* -- readers might begin to wonder about the longer polemic arc of my argument. It may be all very well and good, some readers might think, that some "radical" Islamic values can alert Western victims to the dangers lying in wait for them, say from the "hidden persuaders" of commercial or political seduction. But just how does an Asad, or the present reviewer, propose to interpret "radical" Islam's practice of honor killing (HK, hereafter) analogously? I can see how interpreting aspects of "radical" Islam can help me see how commercial or political interests try to commandeer my buying or voting mind by their seductive methods, and how that can derange my relations with those with whom and to whom I may belong. But surely nothing analogous can be said to accrue to our benefit from a moderate look at honor killing? After all, "Extremism in the pursuit of virtue is no vice," as Senator Barry Goldwater said years ago, "And moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." Barry Goldwater obviously cannot speak for Asad, but I cannot imagine any conditions under which readers would entertain moderation in the interrogation of honor killing.

That may be the main reason I cannot think of another book that has moved me to such sadness as Churchill's. Without even putting faces on its victims, Churchill forces readers to come to terms with the anguish and desperation of its women victims. They die lonely, wretched, demeaning deaths by the thousands each year. A powerful witness to their plight, Churchill's achievement is great, especially considering subject matter that tries the human spirit. In all honesty, nothing that Churchill could -- or should -- have done could change this. The fact that honor killing has ever existed, and indeed continues to exist (at the rate of 20,000 per year) cannot but sicken us to mourn our hapless far-flung sisters. Yet, grief is only part of the story. Not content to wallow in the glum facts of HK, Churchill's initial chapters

parade an exhaustive array of ways to understand the occurrence and persistence of HK, while the final chapters lay out an uplifting practical strategy for ending it. Indeed, the ultimate purpose of Churchill's writing this book is "moral revolution" -- to bring on a radical transformation that will effectively end HK. That motive drives the book forward from first page to last.

7. *No Honor Killing without Honor, And a Fact-List*

Conceptual rigor and clarity are conspicuous strengths of Churchill's book. So too is the exhaustive description of all aspects of HK that Churchill provides readers. Over the course of twelve pages, Churchill delivers a detailed portrayal of every imaginable aspect of what honor killing involves from the characteristics of victims or perpetrators to the characteristics of the communities enabling this social practice (58-70). Beneath the blizzard of details a substratum of "honor" keeps every detail in place. HKs are a particular species of killing, always bound up with issues of honor. Not only that, HK carries on today, both persistent and resilient (11). As such HKs are "social practices" that are "both dependent on and help to structure the larger sociocultural life of" honor/shame cultures (hereafter HSC) (72). That's quite a mouthful. But what it means is that HK does not stand alone, but rather is meaningful only in terms of the rules governing so-called HSCs. That embeddedness in a network of cultural and social understandings explains for Churchill why HK cannot simply be outlawed or otherwise extracted for the purpose of its elimination. Put otherwise, this is to say that honor itself is a function of "how society regards one, not a matter of individual integrity." Being "honored" is all about what people think they know, about perception. Honor is a measure of one's worth in the eyes of others, (78) and a matter of one's social "survival" (81).

Now, as many problems as an HSC throws up, Churchill does not want to abolish honor/shame behavior, nor to replace HSCS with our guilt/sin moral culture. The Alevis of Turkey and the Tuaregs of North Africa abide by the rules of HSCs, but do not practice HK (271-6). Churchill's proposal to end the practice of HK pays respect to the antiquity and logical integrity of the honor/shame system, but seeks instead to encourage its reform from within, by relying on a society's own notions of a greater or better sense of honor. Like many of us chastened by the failures of social intervention, Churchill feels that even well-intentioned tampering with the inner workings of another culture not only bespeaks hubris, but also may also court disaster for the society invaded. It is far easier to crash an alien moral system than to supply a viable replacement. For Churchill, this means that those wanting to change societies need to retain as much of the original as possible. One, therefore, ends HK, not by upsetting the HSC *tout court*, but by revising its rules of honor. Honor itself is enlisted to reframe situations (269). Somehow or other – and Churchill is as unclear about this as is an honor theorist like Kwame Anthony Appiah – HK abolitionists must convince members of HSCs that HK is not honorable. (Appiah 2010) “Cognitive dissonance” should be induced by framing HK as a shameful act for a “real man” to perform, however wayward the woman. Even though it seems to beg the question, occasionally Churchill argues that reformers might argue that HK should be replaced with a greater and better sense of honor because HK is “outdated” (264) and “archaic” (266).

Opposed to honor stands shame. To lose honor, to be shamed, is to be diminished, the inverse of pride (82). Unlike guilt, shame cannot be relieved, say, by a device like “confession,” atonement or forgiveness (83). Shame is socio-cultural filth. To be shamed is to be socially polluted. As such, the only solution to loss of honor is “washing,” being cleansed of pollution (83). Such “washing,” therefore, requires some overt action. The only way honor can be restored, polluting shame washed away, is by an act by or sanctioned by the

community to effect such a restoration. HK is one of the way the pollution of female transgression is purged, or washed away, leaving the family implicated in the transgression scrubbed clean of shame.

So thoroughly embedded are the rules of honor/shame in the societies dominated by them that even in an HK, all participants – the victim as well -- recognize “honor” as the basis for HK. HKs are fully deliberate and often performed in public. Focused as they are on the honor of families, HSCs require that an intimate male family member, who is deeply engaged in issues of family *honor*, to do the deed. A brother, uncle, cousin, or father thus does the deed (18). Indeed, doing HK is one of the deeds men consciously believe they must accept doing openly to prove to the community that they are “real men,” responsible family members in charge of their women (27). HK is, therefore, not performed by a potential sexual partner of the victim, but by someone otherwise a protector.

Nor should HKs be confused with garden-variety gender violence or “IPV” – “intimate partner violence” (15). An HK is an “execution.” They are neither political killings, such as assassinations, nor spontaneous crimes of passion (16-7). Unlike other cases of IPV or other honor-oriented violence (HOV), the death of the victim is the intended outcome of the assault, not some lesser act, such as enslavement or exile (16). To us, HKs may seem *disproportionate* to the offense committed. This raises the question why, in HSCs, is death, with all its finality and irreversibility, the just penalty for committing a possibly passing sexual transgression? Why not exile, enslavement or some other lesser penalty? Moreover, why is even the “perception” of an offense by the woman in question sufficient to require HK’s performance (10)? The answers to such questions always seem to come down to a realization of what one is tempted to call the “brittleness” (144) or fragility of HSCs, with their fixed gender roles, strict in-group/out-

group designations, living in relatively harsh and unforgiving physical environments, and so on. Societies on the edge, so to speak, however long-lived, simply have slimmer margins for error. A woman dishonoring her family threatens to bring down the family. For the sake of the survival of the family, she and the shame she has brought must be purged.

8. *The Micro-Causes of HK: Violence Prone Warriors and the Honor of the Female Body*

While these make up an impressive list of *necessary conditions* for HK, their *sufficiency* remains in considerable doubt. HSCs, such as the Alevis of Turkey and the Tuaregs of North Africa seem to survive quite well without practicing HK. For the *sufficient conditions* for HK, we must therefore look elsewhere. That is why Churchill moves quickly to identify potential underlying psychological and sociological structures in chapters 4-6 *sufficient to explain* HK. Churchill attacks this problem from two complementary strategic vantagepoints. From the “micro-“ level, then, what psychological causal structures select for HK (chapters 4 and 5)? And, from the “macro-“ level, as well, what socio-cultural causes come into play to produce the social practice of HK (chapter 6)?

In chapters 4 and 5, Churchill spells out what he believes is the intricate complex of psychological beliefs about manliness and femininity that inform a culture of HK. Notably, Churchill devotes what seems to this reviewer as an inordinate amount of attention to child-rearing practices. His concern to identify the causes of the personality type likely to perpetrate HK follows an at least (lower-case) freudian path. Practices like playfully fondling the genitals of pre-pubescent boys by their amused nurse maids, aunts and grandmothers draws Churchill’s attention (109-110). Or, his focus instead passes to the way circumcision becomes rite of passage to manhood (122-6).

But all this is in pursuit of the ways that HSCs manufacture – Judith-Butler-like – a particular kind of masculine psyche (102). Churchill fittingly describes this process in dire terms. “Parenting and socialization,” concludes Churchill, “for some male children can be so unpredictable brutal and traumatic as to result in traumatic bonding with their aggressors” (130) No wonder these youths turn into men who can murder a female relative with impunity.

Churchill further argues that since killing is elemental in HK, everything begins with the question of identifying the causes of the “violence prone personality” (VPP). The likely suspects prone to violence in societies where HK exists are always males. Yet, the targets of male violence vary with gender. In war, for instance, violence occurs between men. Why then do the VPP men kill women, as in HK? Well, the mere fact that HK occurs – by definition -- in so-called Honor Shame Cultures (HSC) does not solve the problem. Churchill believes something about strong male/female opposition in HSCs plays a role here (101). Since binarism divides men and women into different, incompatible roles, this would account for why men only do HK to women. Men do not kill other men in HKs, nor women other women in HKs they might initiate. Binarism dictates that how women behave, or are perceived to behave, is seen as the responsibility of men to enforce. While women may be the reservoirs or receptacles of the family’s honor, but it is the manly men who are responsible for avenging, protecting, enforcing, etc. the *honor* of the family. In HSCs male/female binarism features ways in which it can be determined who the “real men” are. Consistent with binarism, HSCs feature a highly ramified notion of masculinity. Salient among such polar notions of masculinity is what Churchill calls “warrior-masculinity” (WM) (103). Now, in situations where VPP and WM coincide, the ideal of warrior masculinity merges with personalities that are “violence prone.” And, when the issue of defending honor is added to the mix, we have a potent

combination that Churchill argues provides further “necessary conditions” of the expectation of an “actual” killing (104).

But what of the opposite pole of the binary? Where then do the ways women are conceived come in? How is it that they become victims of killings, and not their male co-transgressors? Where do they figure in calculations of “honor”? In a nutshell, it is in the body of women that the reservoir of the honor of the family resides (138). Individual women, one recalls from our earlier discussion, are not *self-owning* but *belong to others* – in this case to the family. Violations of her body -- even suspicions of violation -- pollute the entire family. Violations of the woman thus bring devastating shame and dishonor on the entire family. Further, we also know that women are believed to be sexually powerful, by nature. Thus, if something sexually deviant or abusive (rape, infatuation, sexual arousal and so on) should occur, she is always presumed to be at fault (168). Women are also believed to be natural temptresses, so powerful that men are relatively powerless in their presence. Thus, when a woman is accused of sexual misconduct, it is she, rather than her male partner, who bears the blame, who loses honor. But dishonor does not end there with the individual woman. Since she is the reservoir of honor, from which the family drinks, so to speak, her shame and dishonor pollute the entire family as well. HK is the act by which the family blots out their shame and dishonor.

Therefore, unless the family reclaims its honor, and dispels any shame, it will not survive. It will have lost all standing in the community. In cases of dishonor, the family turn to its leaders -- its warrior defenders, those charged with being the family’s “Ardent Avengers” of shame and dishonor. The family, typically through the agency of these warrior masculine men, assumes its role in blotting out the shame caused by a wayward wife. It falls to those chosen by the family to “redress grievances” befalling the family, such as the case of one of their women bringing shame on the family. This

sets the stage for the VPP and WM to act against the woman who has shamed the family. HK is the means by which these grievances are resolved.

9. *Macro-Development Is Micro-Destiny*

In Chapter 6, Churchill tries to account for the way gross cultural determinants create conditions favorable for the rise and maintenance of HK. Churchill's cultural materialist story says that unlike the psychological and emotional – "micro" (181) -- perspectives informing Chapters 4 and 5, the explanations of HK in Chapter 6 are delivered from on high – from the "macro" level (181) of millennia of cultural social evolution. HK supposedly evolved as a slowly emerging social practice formed by the survival needs favored by particular social structures in which it occurred. HK is thus a "unique form of gender violence" (10) that "emerged over a long course of time," (221) only under certain specific cultural conditions. It is something that "must have" (215) passed through a *longue durée* of discernable stages of "natural selection" on its way to becoming what it is today.

Churchill, accordingly, argues from tenets of "natural selection" (184) peculiar to "cultural evolution" theory. These tenets include the limiting conditions set by their kinship organization, the physical ecology in which a human group finds itself, the mode of production employed to cope with and succeed in this environment, the scarcity of resources typical of a given ecological niche, strategies for insuring legitimacy and safety of offspring, the need to avoid, as much as possible, fatal outbreaks of violence that might consume the group, and so on. One way to insure the cohesion and friendliness of group members, for instance, is by sticking together. Endogamy – marrying within one's group – is one way people stick together. Likewise, societies that are both patrilineal and patrilocal believe such arrangements achieve closeness among members of the society and at the

same time minimize hostility. Like the ancient Hebrews claiming descent from a common male ancestor like Abraham, all members of these patrilineal societies have a common male ancestor. These are only some of the ways that human groups thrive and survive by organizing themselves in ways that adapt to the conditions in which they find themselves.

Now, what confounds students of HK is that it occurs within these very societies organized precisely along patrilocal, patrilineal and endogamous lines. Societies that seem consumed with the need to maintain security and predictability generate a social practice – HK -- of the most threatening and notionally destabilizing kind. HK seems like a most *non*-adaptive practice. It diminishes a particular family by subtracting from the family and entire group a valuable female member of childbearing age. It further seems to offend the “one for all and all for one” ethos of these types of societies by preying upon one of their own (206).

But, instead, Churchill claims it is precisely this essential element of common blood achievement and debt that lays the bases for a crisis situation. The transgression of one against the norms of all is a transgression against all. A woman who transgresses against her marriage dishonors herself and the entire group. That is why her offense is so great, and why her punishment must be as great as well. And far from concluding that her elimination by HK be fatal to the group, Churchill’s “cultural evolutionist” approach claims instead that it enhances the survival chances of the group. HK is ultimately adaptive, despite its subtraction of a fruitful member of the group, since it actually increases the esteem in which the HK family is held, and thus its value in the group at large. The HK increases the value of each remaining child of marriageable age, because the family will have demonstrated that its honor will not permit any sort of breach – even if the victim of the HK has only been *rumored* to have been unfaithful (216f).

But many observers are confounded by the need to kill the supposedly wayward woman. Why so extreme a measure against what, after all, only may be a *suspected* transgression? Why murder one of your own valuable females, often of child-bearing age, simply because the surrounding community might believe she has transgressed? The act of HK seems distinctly dysfunctional and the punishment of it, disproportionate. Many other kinds of penalties and punishments, short of death, are available. So, why choose killing? Why not return the wayward wife to her own family, or enslave, exile, physically punish, isolate, or publicly humiliate her –complete with a brazen scarlet letter “A”?

Churchill answers again in terms further spelling out the brutal of the logic of the honor/shame system. If the wayward wife is not killed, she and her child will be “free riders” – thus dishonoring the legitimate family collectively as cuckolds (218). The “natal family” – the wayward wife and her lover – must, therefore, not be seen as profiting from their ill-gotten – *dishonorable* – gains. In an endogamous patrilineal society, the male perpetrator could rightfully claim the power of paternity, all the while the legitimate family bore the costs of raising the child – the Cuckoo Effect. HK solves this crisis of family honor by effectively eliminating the woman, and in the process destroying the natal family. This insures that no dishonor should come to the legitimate family. This is why, as Churchill says, HK is advertised as “honest signaling” (220). By contrast, the offending male is never killed, primarily because in an endogamous, patrilocal and patrilineal society that would incite something far worse -- *internecine* warfare – what Churchill calls “costly signaling” (211f).

10. *Shedding the White Man’s Burden of Saving Brown Women from Brown Men*

Churchill badly wants to end HK. But he's thankfully not ham-strung by liberal guilt. Somehow, he developed immunity from charges of being just another "white man trying to save brown women from brown men," as Gayatri Spivak memorably put it. (Spivak 2010) Nor is Churchill about to have recourse in the pernicious ideologies that enabled occupation of the moral high-ground by imperious Westerners. Whether this came as theories of "white man's burden," the "*mission civilisatrice*," Social Darwinist adaptability, Marxist liberation, Victorian humanist progressivism, or crusading Christian missionary soteriology, Western moral reformers came well-equipped to tell "them" how to behave. Churchill doesn't do that. But readers also benefit from Churchill not predictably dissolving into a puddle of liberal self-doubt. He badly wants to end HK.

Yes, we are all guilty of one sort of cultural transgression or another. But egregious as HK is, it seems to exceed the limits of tolerance afforded by social difference. Churchill's no New England Congregational missionary prude demanding that Hawaiian women drape their naked bodies in an enveloping *Mumu*. At least that's an attitude that Churchill silently assumes. Actually, it never crosses Churchill's mind that some readers might tolerate HK. Nor does one suspect Churchill himself of trying deviously to *pardon* the practice of HK by attempts to *comprehend* it. Post-colonial literature sometimes defaults to actual defenses for one or another questionable Muslim practices, such as some gender division of labor, regimes of female modesty, wearing the *hijab*, and so on. But, even with the best of tolerant multicultural intentions, few of these interpreters of Islamic social practices will go so far as to justify, say, the all-enveloping *burqa*, or certainly, female genital mutilation.

Yet, some try – at least to rationalize the required wearing of the *burqa*. What I find interesting about particular efforts at tolerance is how absurd – even making allowances for cultural difference -- they turn out to be. Consider Muslim post-colonialist feminist, Lila Abu-Lughod's reading of the

burqa in Afghanistan. In her view, we should not judge the *burqa* out-of-hand or harshly as Western feminists have been wont to do. For Abu-Lughod, the *burqa* is part of the *solution* to female confinement, not part of the larger *problem* of Muslim gender segregation. Enveloped by her *burqa*, an Afghan woman, for example, can venture forth into the public, leave her home, shop in the markets, run a business, even visit relatives and friends and so on. Safeguarded within her *burqa*, like some suburban soccer mom in her SUV high about the raging traffic, an Afghan woman can move about her dangerous world without fear of reproach or social penalty! (Abu-Lughod 2002:785) Doubtless, what Abu-Lughod reports is true. But as intriguing as Abu-Lughod's reading may be, one is tempted to press the issue. Yes, the *burqa* might well offer Afghan women some measure of control over their lives in public. But does one really imagine that Afghan women are content with this arrangement, especially as they learn ever more increasingly of the normal lives of other – even Muslim – women in other places? It is hard to resist sarcasm by asking the question of what possible complaints be-*burqa*-ed Afghan women could register since they can safely cruise about all be-*burqa*-ed? If our suburban soccer moms don't grumble about their SUVs, why should Afghan women whine about needing to don a full-bore *burqa* just to step outside the house?

Churchill does not approach the degree of tolerance of HK that Abu-Lughod affords the *burqa*. Nevertheless, he arms himself against charges of making excuses for HK because he argues from the *relativizing* perspective of social evolution. True, Churchill's evolutionism relativizes a practice like HK by citing its functions for social survival within a particular ecological niche and level of historical development. Killing kin within a one's own group is generally proscribed, but HK is an exception to the rule, because in saving a family's honor, its functions to maintain a family's survival. Killing other humans is likewise felt undesirable, but in societies where honor and shame frame behavior, killing to preserve honor maybe a necessity – however

unfortunate. Churchill argues in somewhat the same way, namely that HK should be grasped as a necessary Darwinian “adaptation,” and hence as something necessary for survival of the social units practicing HK *under certain conditions necessary for survival* at certain times and places. HK, thus, “functions” for the survival of a social group only relative to *specific* historical stages of human cultural development and in *particular* cultural ecologies and material environments. Churchill’s detailed discussion of these conditions dominate his discussion of the *macro*-causes of HK.

11. *Immoral and Benighted*

Despite the social functionality demonstrated for HK, not surprisingly, Churchill condemns HK, even if his moral disapproval tends to get lost in his intricate argumentation. But moral condemnation is there, nonetheless. From an absolute standpoint, that is to say, outside the relative conditions of its “archaic and dysfunctional” home location, Churchill declares HK plainly “immoral” (266). Quite simply, the existence of HK shows the extent to which “human beings are benighted” (168).

While Churchill does not spell out the grounds for his moral judgment against HK, he at least avoids defaulting to widely discredited ideological options. *En route* to the moral revolution that he hopes would put an end to HK, Churchill speaks in a nebulous *global moral language* of undeclared provenance. In this, Churchill is in the excellent company of the estimable Kwame Anthony Appiah and his splendid treatise on the honor/shame social system, *Honor Code*. (Appiah 2010) There, Appiah derails potential backdoor neo-imperialism by imagining moral revolutions generated from *within* a given culture, and not imposed upon it from outside. What Appiah (and Churchill) mean can be illustrated by the way 19th century Chinese elites ceased the honor-bound custom of binding the feet of their women. They did not do so because of moral condemnation by Western missionaries. But when they

had embarked on a campaign of gaining respect for China abroad, they found that they were ashamed to admit foot-binding. Thus, for the sake of attaining new kinds and levels of honor, the Chinese abandoned older methods on their own terms. Churchill's "bottom-up transformative processes" (282) are devised to do just that.

Churchill is in good company with post-colonial, multicultural demands for *indigenous* moral and social reform like those advocated by anthropologist, Amina Jamal and philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah, respectively (Appiah 2010; Jamal 2015). Recently, Jamal argued that moral revolutions ought to be justified from within a tradition or culture, not from without. Thus, in opposing such practices as HK, one ought not to imagine that transformative change can only come from the defeat of 'barbaric' religions like Islam by the imperial forces of enlightened secular Occidental universalism. Many Muslim leaders have in fact spoken out already against HK as being un-Islamic. Why might there not be other sources of opposition to HK, again, coming from within Islam, such as the Muslim feminists inspired by a "transgressive piety," mentioned by Jamal? (Jamal 2015:59) Given that his program seeks to relieve women of horrors of HK without invoking familiar tropes of imperialist moralism, Churchill's moral ambition seems to escape the suspicion of reflecting a narrow Western male gender bias. From the onset, he situates his quest for a moral revolution against HK in the contemporary consensus of moral resistance to "gender violence" of any kind whatsoever – again, of undeclared provenance.

12. *Critique: Development as Destiny and the Problem of "Moderate" Islam*

In the end, does Churchill's cultural materialism adequately address the questions one might have about HK? For instance, to Churchill, the rise and survival of HK seems to have little or nothing to do with contemporary human life like political ideology or religion. HK is best understood, he assumes, by attending to its development over a geologically lengthy period

of the evolution. With attention fixed on this long historical development, Churchill resists giving the *contemporary religious politics* of – especially -- modern Muslim theocratic nation-states, such as Iran, Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia much play in the HK of today. So, let me put some questions to Churchill that challenge his view.

a. *How Do We Know?*

Churchill says that HK is both “outdated” (264) and “archaic” (266). But Churchill’s *longue durée* evolutionary projections on the origins and nature of HK will draw fire from critics who wonder how Churchill can be sure of the deep antiquity of HK. I put aside Churchill’s claim that HK is “outdated,” because saying something is, in effect, “out of fashion” seems more an understandable expression of disdain for HK. Fine. We all presumably share that view of the arc of human morality. But adding HK’s being “outdated” doesn’t tell us much more about Churchill’s thinking. At best, it is less a clear statement of fact than one of Churchill’s *evaluation* of HK.

On the other hand, saying HK is “archaic,” and especially in the context of Churchill’s evolutionism, sounds like a straightforward historical claim. HK is an *old* social practice, *very old*. But how do we really know that it is *very old*, indeed, “archaic”? How, that is, do we know of HK’s existence *before* the relatively recent existence of human records, that Churchill himself cites? *Ab origine* is a long while gone. I do not see how Churchill’s theory of cultural evolution is equipped to inform us about such remote pre-historic times. To root HK any deeper than historical times, as Churchill has tried to do, would seem to call for evolutionary theories with greater range than the one he’s supplied.

b. *The Urgency of Now*

The extent to which one finds the archaic character of HKs questionable, one naturally turns inquiry in the direction of the role of contemporary events and structures. But Churchill doesn't do that. Although Churchill deals with the data of modern-day HK, as well as the psychological formation of the personality types likely to perpetrate HK, he shies away from linking these data to contemporary political situations that might have engendered them. Instead, what may seem as undue attention is to childrearing practices dominates his account of the psychological causes animating the HK perpetrators. Because he never considers the possible role of the agent structures of modern theocratic Muslim nation-states, Churchill does not venture to say why we should believe the modern political causes ought to be any less potent than child-rearing practices or the ancient cultural formations that he cites. But I shall do so here. How, exactly, do we know that HK today is not better explained as a *modern* revived social practice? How do we know that *modern* structural demands, such as opposition to the West and its ethos of gender equality, are not responsible for HK? How does Churchill, instead, know that the way young boys are raised in societies practicing HK carries the greater weight of explanation he assigns it? How can one justify ignoring the festering *contemporary religious politics* of modern Muslim theocratic nation-states, such as Iran, Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia? About the effects of these explosive emotional forces within modern theocratic Muslim nation-states for the emergence and sustenance of HK, Churchill is mute. This makes one wonder.

Perhaps with so much invested in showing how HK makes *functional* sense in HSCs, dysfunctional present-day causes, such as male anxieties about losing control, do not get the hearing they deserve? By relegating HK to a function within a specific bygone era, or to dwell on the sexual nurture of young boys in HSCs, Churchill also avoids the inconvenient way long-term dysfunctional social practices can persist in the short-term. One thinks of slavery in the mid-19th century antebellum American South as an instance of such a short-

term success masking its long-term doomed extinction at the hands of emergent agricultural technologies. One might then entertain the notion that HK was never quite as functional as Churchill makes out, never as relatively adaptive as he argues? Maybe HK is more an anthropological “survival,” clinging desperately to a narrow niche of viability, while the rest of the world moves on?

c. *You Call This Surviving?!*

This is to argue that, considered as a presumed *end-product* of long cultural evolution, HK may be a good deal less adaptive, less functional *for social survival* than Churchill would have it. Stand back and look at the societies practicing HK, and that have presumably practiced HK for centuries. Even granting Churchill the proposition that HK could be an ingredient in attaining social stability, are not the societies practicing HK a pretty sorry lot? I accept that, as social experiments, cross-civilizational comparisons are treacherous and hard to control. But, choosing any measure of evaluating cultures, is Afghanistan more “successful” a society than Switzerland, or Saudi Arabia more so than Taiwan, Iran more than the PRC, Malaysia more than Singapore, or even Pakistan more than India? Would anyone be surprised if the comparatively different statuses of women, generally inscribed into the Islam of these nations, had anything to do with these differences?

d. *Nature Abhors the Warrior-Masculine Man*

Similarly, on the male side of the HK phenomenon, recent work by Richard O. Prum in the biology of culture suggests that evolution does not *select for* the kinds of cultures practicing HK. (Prum 2018:Ch 12) Unlike what evolution has conspicuously produced among our nearest biological relatives, the great apes, human evolution *selects against* the survival of the type of warrior-

masculine, VPP (“violence-prone personality”) of the “Ardent Avenger” males who perform HKs. Instead of selecting for the gender binarism typical of cultures practicing HK, human evolution seems, as well, to be selecting for the *lessening* of the biological, and thus cultural, differentiation of human males to females. Compared to the great gender disparity in physical size and strength of the great apes, the ratio of such differences between human males and females is far less. Unlike those cultures where the polarized male/female gender ideal persists (Muslim cultures, *par excellence*), human evolution shows a distinct preference for cultures where the roles of these lately-evolved, *gentle* men commonly overlap with those of women.

Evolution is selecting for human gender relations where tasks such as work, nurturing, food acquisition and preparation, education and childrearing are shared between the sexes (Prum 2018:Ch 12). So, yes, HK may have been a factor in HK societies surviving, but the question Churchill needs to answer is “surviving” in what broken – now “outdated” --condition, at what crippled state of development – cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, economic, political, social and so on? (216f). In terms, then, of these comparative circumstances of survival, Churchill’s arguments for HK’s fulfilling a function for survival might be regarded with a somewhat jaundiced eye. “Survival,” how and what kind?

e. *Islam in Question*

Refocusing on the present naturally brings in religion, particularly the modern Islamic resurgence, so much the concern of Richard L. Benkin’s volume, *What Is Moderate Islam?* Four specific questions come to mind in this connection.

One. Churchill cites several Muslim authorities who tell us flat out that Islam could not have given rise to HK because Muslim authoritative texts and traditions denounce HK. The Quran nowhere sanctions HK, for example (30-

1). But, does this argument suffice? It is unclear why we should grant any more validity to such a disassociation than we would to a Christian authority's denying that the Crusades were "Christian" because they didn't square with the Sermon on the Mount. Are these repudiations of the Islamic character of HK, then, perhaps only *aspirational*? Are they only statements of *hope* that HKs would cease being so frequent in Muslim societies? Are they to be read any differently than similar denials of the actual history of the Christian character to the Crusades? We won't really know until someone decides to research the question.

Two. As I noted earlier, Churchill argues that HK is not *unique* to the Muslim world. "Being a member of the Muslim community is neither sufficient nor necessary condition for being implicated in honor killing, either as a perpetrator, accomplice or supporter (29). HK is not a "'Muslim problem'," Churchill says (29). HKs also occur in Christian lands, such as Corsica, Greece, Sicily, Sardinia and Spain, as well as among the Druze, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and Yazidis (29). Yet, Churchill leaves this reader scratching his head, because he admits that "there is a general association, or overlay, between the density of enclaves in which HSCs exist and honor killings occur and global regions that are predominantly Muslim (31). HK thus occurs across a defined swath of the earth's mid-section among "certain tribal peoples of the deserts and dry mountain uplands" -- from Morocco along the length of Mediterranean North Africa up through Asia Minor and across the Middle East to northern India (182). While this territory maps well onto the range of the Dar-al-Islam, excluding Indonesia, Churchill claims HK also occurs outside Muslim lands. Only the lack of good record-keeping prevents us from determining the density of the occurrence of HK in Muslim sub-Saharan Africa, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and the Balkans. I would note, however, that all of the non-Muslim places that Churchill mentions where HK occurs -- Corsica, Greece, Sicily, Sardinia and Spain -- were, for extensive periods at one time Muslim domains.

I think, however, that Churchill's dismissal of a special relation between Islam and HK betrays some weaknesses. Churchill arbitrarily confines the influence of a "religion," like Islam, to "religious observance or devotion." At the same time, he refuses to assign – arbitrarily, it seems to me -- an Islamic description to other sorts of Muslim behavior. For instance, Churchill fixes on a Muslim's supporting the *Shari'a* as somehow not equally definitive of Muslim piety as "religious observance or devotion" (29). Instead, he rules that this support of the *Shari'a* really only reflects "preferences for religious authoritarianism, strict observance of rules, and intolerance of both deviance and ambiguity" -- as if, strangely, these were not also quintessentially *Islamic* values, albeit *legal* ones, rather than doctrinal or ritual. Here might be a good place to recall Asad's analysis of Islam as a religion less defined by accentuating beliefs than of fostering an *umma* to which the Muslim person can be said "to belong."

Finally, as if trying to correct himself in making this dubious distinction between Islam as belief and ritual practice over against Islam as "belonging" to the people of the *Shari'a*, Churchill immediately adds that "at most, one might infer an association between some forms of ultra-conservative Islam and such authoritarianism, strict observance of rules, and intolerance, on the one hand, and support for honor killing, on the other" (29). But is this not to declare that *at least* this so-called "ultra-conservative" form of Islam might be a necessarily and/or sufficiently connected to the practice of HK? But, who decides what kind of term, this "ultra-conservative" Islam is? Who decides what it means? Is it a tautology, as I argued Benkin's "radical Islam" might arguably be? Is "ultra-conservative" just "real" Islam, Islam with the gloves removed!? Does Islam itself tend, then, to be generally conservative – authoritarian, strict, and intolerant – to such an extent as to render "ultra-conservative" tautologous?

And, if so, does this not replay all the conceptual difficulties plaguing Benkin's *What Is Moderate Islam*? If that, additionally, is so, Churchill, like Benkin and company, will need frankly to address variations on the two questions that have haunted this review: Insofar as HK is a practice associated with "ultra-conservative" Islam, does that fact affect the likelihood of the term, "moderate Islam" remaining an oxymoron change? Similarly, does that same fact affect the likelihood of the term, "radical Islam" being a tautology, change as well? One might raise the same questions about "ultra-conservative" Islam and cliterodectomy, the segregation of the sexes, *jihad*, and a number of other practices for which "ultra-conservative" Islam seems to have an elective affinity. True, these practices are not exclusive to Muslim societies in general, but they are commonplace enough in the two increasingly influential monistic "ultra-conservative" Muslim societies of Iran and Saudi Arabia to warrant respectfully posing some frank questions. If doing so can provoke Islam and the West to begin frank and candid attempts to understand each other, even the many false steps taken by those wedded to the simplistic and question-begging discourse of "moderate" and "radical" Islam will have made a solid contribution to the flourishing of the human species.

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, Lila

2002 "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others". *American Anthropologist* 104(3): 783-90

Appiah, Kwame Anthony

2010 *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*. New York City: W. W. Norton and Company.

Asad, Talal

2013 "Free Speech, Blasphemy and Secular Critique". *In Is Critique Secular?* T. Asad, W. Brown, J. Butler, and S. Mahmood, eds. New York City: Fordham University Press, 14-57.

Jamal, Amina

2015 "Piety, Transgression, and the Feminist Debate on Muslim Women: Resituating the Victim-Subject of Honor-Related Violence from a Transnational Lens". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41(1): 55-79

Prum, Richard O.

2018 *The Evolution of Beauty*. New York City: Anchor.

Spivak, Gayatri

2010 "Can the Subaltern Speak?". *In Can The Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea (Revised Edition)*. R. Morris, ed. New York City: Columbia University Press, 21-80.