



The spectacle of the feminine Other: Reading migrant women's autobiographies about honour-based violence

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ABSTRACT

Autobiographies of migrant women about their experiences with honour-based violence (HBV) reach many readers and are used in policy debates on women's emancipation and immigrant integration. Migrant women's central position in this nationalistic debate stigmatises them as passive victims, their husbands as violent and their culture as oppressive. We read 16 autobiographies by female authors to analyse how the spectacle of the other is represented in their stories. Despite their victimisation, most authors present themselves as strong women. Nevertheless, the image of an exceptional woman who breaks off all contact with her family, still stigmatises migrant communities as oppressive. We found a few stories of women who describe their ongoing struggle to make their own life choices within their communities. These stories deserve more attention because they may be useful for addressing honour conflicts. To end HBV, we need to move beyond spectacle and consider how we can learn from these women.

Introduction

'My daughter is dead, murdered by her father. (...) The eldest of my four daughters died because she wanted to be like her German classmates. She wanted to hang out with friends, to go dancing and to wear fashionable clothes. And she loved a boy that wasn't Albanese enough according to her father's standards.' (Gashi, 2006: 9).

'It was the first day of her marriage and she already learned to stare at the wall and suppress an upcoming scream.' (Darznik, 2011: 71).

Honour-based violence (HBV) has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years, both in the public and in the academic debate (for an overview, see Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2010, Kromhout, 2008, Mazher Idriss & Abbas, 2010, Welchman & Hossain, 2005). It is the topic of many bestselling biographies by migrant women in western countries, such as the Netherlands. The quotes above are from biographies about women's experiences with HBV and strict cultural rules set by their families and communities. This sort of violence is committed by (extended) family members who wish to restore or prevent damage to family honour. HBV is a complex phenomenon that should be treated as an intersectional phenomenon, combining culture, gender and migration. It is influenced by cultural practices that are regarded as traditional but are actually changing through the process of migration and

immigrant integration. It is a sensitive topic that has become boundary marker in the public debate on immigrant integration (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009; Pratt Ewing, 2008). HBV is used in a polarising nationalist discourse where two sides are involved in the reification of culture, with migrant women at centre stage; as "...women are often the ones who are given the social role of intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine, and, of course, the mother tongue (sic!). The actual behaviour of women can also signify ethnic and cultural boundaries, as often the distinction between one ethnic group and another is constituted centrally by sexual behaviour of women" (Yuval-Davis, 1993: 627). Constructions of manhood and womanhood, and gendered relations of power are sites where difference between 'us' and 'them' are constituted (Yuval-Davis & Stoezler, 2002). There are those who see HBV as a barbaric cultural practice that marks the boundary between "us" modern westerners and "them" (mostly Muslim) migrants. They feel that migrant behaviour is entirely determined by culture and that the only way to eradicate HBV is for members of such communities to completely discard their culture. Opponents regard this as a discriminatory perspective. Then there are those who see HBV as purely patriarchal violence against women that is present in all societies, regardless of culture (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2010). In public discourse on immigrant integration biographies by female victims of HBV play an important role (Carbin, 2014). They are read by a wide audience and they can help politicians to frame policies

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to tackle HBV. Some policy makers try to use the voices of victimised immigrant women as a tool to emancipate them (Carbin, 2014). But this means that the voices of migrant women are mostly heard through these narratives of violence (Carbin, 2014; Janssen & Sanberg, 2010b; Meetoo & Mirza, 2011). The question is whether this will lead to the emancipation of these women or to their stigmatisation? In order to tackle this question we will analyse the narrative of HBV in 16 biographies that are at present popular in the Netherlands. We will take into account concepts such as culture, stigma, gender, ethnicity and postcolonial identity. Firstly we will provide a brief impression of HBV in a Dutch context. In the second paragraph we will look into the main questions and research methodology. Then follows an empirical exploration of the contents of the biographies followed by a paragraph on the reception and authenticity of these works. Finally, we will formulate conclusions and share points for further discussion.

HBV in the Dutch context

Different perspectives on HBV

HBV has been defined in many different ways; as a strictly cultural practice as well as purely patriarchal violence of men against women. The construct of honour is then regarded as an excuse for male perpetrators to oppress women (Welchman & Hossain, 2005). Some authors have a nuanced view and for example take into account that men too can fall victim to HBV, and argue for a human rights perspective on this violence and to prevent discriminatory practices (Meetoo & Mirza, 2011). Current Dutch policy with regard to HBV is focused on the context of families and in terms of relationships between men and women (Janssen & Sanberg, 2013). This means governmental institutions working on HBV focus on cases of family conflict and moral aspects regarding sexuality and parenthood. The Dutch police have a centre of expertise on HBV that deals with HBV cases and carries out research into the backgrounds of this sort of violence and effective policing practices. The cases treated at this centre show that honour conflicts often revolve around resisting strict (gender) rules, partner choice, sexuality and (illegitimate) pregnancies and parenthood (Janssen & Sanberg, 2010a).

At the Dutch centre of expertise on HBV, police files show that despite the fact that more women seem to suffer from HBV, there are cases with female offenders and male victims (Janssen & Sanberg, 2013). Women seldom pull the trigger, but they can put considerable pressure on their husbands or male family members to do something about a damaged family honour (Janssen & Sanberg, 2013). Honour is strongly connected to ideas about the proper behaviour of women and men. Honour conflicts often start when women misbehave according to gendered rules in the community, such as having sex before marriage (Janssen & Sanberg, 2010a). Male family members are expected to act upon this and restore the family honour. Nevertheless, men too can become victims of HBV. In cases where they are pressured to commit violence to restore the family honour, or when they have a relationship with a married woman, they can fall victim to violence from that woman's husband or family. Men can also be victimised for being openly gay if their families consider homosexuality to be a violation of honour. For more examples of male victimisation, see Thapar-Björkert (2011). Therefore, we think it is a good thing that Dutch policy on HBV defines it in a gender-neutral way (Brenninkmeijer, Geerse, & Roggeband, 2009). HBV should be understood as more than just men hurting women. Like Mohanty (1988), who argues that the equally harmful cultural practice of female genital mutilation should not exclusively be understood as male to female violence, we think the specific cultural components of HBV should be accounted for. When the focus is on men as "subjects-who-perpetrate-violence" versus women as "objects-who-defend-themselves" you will not fully grasp this particular form of violence, which means it is impossible to undertake effective action against it (Mohanty, 1988: 67).

HBV and a postcolonial feminist perspective

Most of the cases of HBV in the Dutch context can be related to the Turkish (approximately 40% of the case load of the aforementioned national centre of expertise) and Moroccan (approximately 25% of the case load) context (reference). People from these ethnic groups are descendants of migrant workers who came to the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s. Another, smaller ethnic group in the Netherlands for which HBV plays an important role is the Hindustani community. They originate from the Dutch former colony of Suriname. Their forebears came to Suriname from India as indentured labourers in the nineteenth century and a large number of them migrated to the Netherlands in the second half of the 20th century. During the last few years there has been an influx of honour cases in communities of refugees and their offspring from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq as well as from countries in eastern Africa such as Somalia and Eritrea. Such migratory movements are the result of changing political dependency relationships, combined with a persistence of power structures from colonial times. A postcolonial perspective offers insight in the way these power structures still influence not only current relations between the western world and other less privileged parts of the globe, but also the treatment of migrants who come to live in western countries. Spivak (1993), Moallem (2005), Mohanty (1988) and Abu Lughod (2002), for example, have elaborated a post-colonial feminist perspective and illustrated how feminism in the western world builds on two polarised images: the stereotypical image of the emancipated, White, western woman versus the Absolute Other, the 'Third World Woman', a victim of patriarchal oppression. The image of aggressive migrant men versus oppressed, passive migrant women who need to be rescued by enlightened western saviours is reproduced in all kinds of media, policy documents, both fiction and non-fiction (Pratt Ewing, 2006). Migrant women are perceived to have no voice. In the earliest Dutch policy documents on immigrant integration, their needs are largely invisible. This changed from the 1990s when politicians criticize integration policy and attention shifts from economic to include cultural integration of immigrants. The debate is highly gendered, and implicitly views migrant men as the problem and migrant women as victims of their oppressive culture, who will obviously benefit from integration (Prins & Saharso, 2008, Ghorashi, 2010). Even though the Dutch debate on HBV includes the voices of immigrant communities through engaging their own organizations in policy responses (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2013), the placement of women's emancipation within a nationalist discourse can lead to the stigmatisation of immigrant communities (Carbin, 2014; Ghorashi, 2010). In the last decades, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the subsequent war on terror (Abu Lughod, 2002; Moallem, 2005) and fuelled more recently by violence committed by IS, immigrant women find themselves in the centre of the debate on immigration and on integration of immigrants. Following Moallem (2005) the feminine Other is at center stage and she is crucial in containing the modern crisis of the nation-state by the renationalization of the states." (Moallem, 2005: 160). This central role is bestowed upon them because women are seen as the cultural signifiers and transmitters of the nation or any imagined community (Yuval-Davis, 1993) and cultural differences are often located in the domain of gender relations (Yuval-Davis & Stoezler, 2002). The focus on migrant women could be considered as beneficial to their social position but it has negative side effects. It obstructs the actual emancipation of these women because they are stigmatised as helpless victims and their families and communities as violent and oppressive (Carbin, 2014, Ghorashi, 2010, Pratt Ewing, 2006, Razack, 2004, Prins & Saharso, 2008), and they are framed as in need of outside help (Abu Lughod, 2002). "The tropes of the Muslim woman in general (...) as the ultimate victims of a timeless patriarchy defined by the barbarism of Islamic religion and in need of civilizing have become very important components of Western regimes of power and knowledge." (Moallem, 2005: 160).

Main questions and methods

The spectacle of the migrant woman

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, it is important to include the voice of the research subject, in this case women who were victims of honour based violence. Autobiographies by migrant women about their victimisation could offer a wonderful opportunity to gather profound insight in this subject. One of the first of this genre is Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower*, about female genital mutilation. Books about western women married to Middle Eastern men (as studied by De Hart, 2001) and migrant women who deal with HBV (Van Eck, 2005) quickly followed. But there are some warning signs. These tales of hardship have become part of the western discourse against certain culturally inspired harmful practices such as HBV (Carbin, 2014). Policy makers try to learn from the life stories of migrant women, but do so within a nationalist discourse, which automatically leads to the exclusion of certain views and voices. Furthermore, when victimised women speak out and gain national attention for their stories, they are singled out against their families and communities. Their communities and, in particular, their fathers and husbands are labelled as the Absolute Other. For these women there seems to be no way back. The negative side effects are twofold: women who speak up find themselves in a difficult position in their communities, and they are stigmatised as victims in the public debate. A useful definition of stigma is given by the well-known sociologist Goffman (1963): stigmatisation occurs when we see a person '... possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma.' (Goffman, 1963: 12). This idea of stigma can be enriched by Stuart Hall's views on stereotype and the Spectacle of the Other. Hall (1997) places stereotype in a postcolonial perspective. When a person is 'stereotyped' he is 'reduced to a few essentials, fixed by a few simplified characteristics' (Hall, 1997:249). Stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference', and it symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong. (...) it sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' (...) and 'Other', Us and Them. It facilitates the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community'. Hall cites Said in saying that the Other as represented in "Orientalism is never far from (...) the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans" (Said, 1978: 7 as cited in Hall, 1997:261). The position of women is especially interesting here, because they are both excluded and included in the imagined community of the nation or the ethnic group (Yuval-Davis, 1993) and they play the role of both cultural transmitters and signifiers of the community. As biological reproducers and as main caregivers of children, they transmit culture and customs as well as language (mother tongue) to the next generation. They are boundary markers: gender relations often come to be seen as constituting the 'essence' of cultures in ways of life to be passed on from generation to generation ("Yuval-Davis & Stoezler, 2002: 335). Stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power, and where one hegemonic culture applies their own norms to that of others, by representing the Other in a certain way (Hall, 1997). Furthermore, Hall states that "Marking difference leads us, symbolically, to close ranks shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal. However, paradoxically, it also makes difference powerful, strangely attractive precisely because it is forbidden, taboo, threatening to cultural order." (Hall, 1997: 237). So the representation of the Other, that includes both dismissal and attractiveness of the Other at the same time, through images and texts and all kinds of media, creates what Hall has called the 'spectacle of the Other'. Moallem (2005) emphasises that this idea of the spectacle of the Other has only become more important in current times, where (social) media

have become increasingly important in people's lives.

The spectacle of the Other also determines who is seen as authentic and who is not. In the discourse on migration, Gunew states the following: "... the whole notion of authenticity, of the authentic migrant experience, is one that comes to us constructed by hegemonic voices; and so, what one has to tease out is what is not there. One way of doing this is to say: But look, this is what left out, this is what is covered over, this kind of construction is taking place, this kind of reading is being privileged; and then to ask: what readings are not privileged, what is not there?" (Spivak & Gunew, 1990: 61).

This article follows Goffman's idea of stigmatisation as a discrepancy between the way people experience their social identity and the way others in society look at them – in a negative way. In the biographies analysed in this paper, the authors are given the opportunity to represent themselves as whole persons, but how are these stories read? We will establish how the stigmas of the Absolute Other, the stereotypical oriental woman, the spectacle of the Other (as described by Stuart Hall) are present in their stories and the reception of these stories. How are these women's experiences regarded as the authentic migrant experience? Following Gunew and Spivak, we ask: what is not there, which stories are not privileged?

Main questions

This article examines the way in which these personal accounts of migrant women give an insight into the practice of HBV and to what extent they contribute to the formation of stigma as defined by Goffman. How do the biographies these women have produced give an insight into the whole person? Do the life stories of HBV victims mirror the binary oppositions that are found in media reports and political debate on immigrant integration? Do these stories display the passivity of the women and the aggression of the men or are there more complex gender roles displayed? Which stories are published and by whom? How are their stories received? Are they regarded as authentic?

Method: narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is a way of case-centred research for which particular stories of individuals are collected, resulting in an "accumulation of detail" leading to "a fuller picture of the individual or group" (Riessman, 2008: 11). It can be regarded as a "close reading" of a text during which the reader pays attention not only to the words and the plot but also to all aspects of the literary apparatus of a text. This process has been customary in literary research for ages, but was introduced as a sociological method at the start of the twentieth century by researchers of the Chicago School (Riessman, 2008, Shover, 2012, Stanley, 1993). One of the first examples of this research method is the work of sociologists Thomas & Znaniecki (1918-1920), who analysed narratives from the letters Polish immigrants in the US exchanged with their family members back in Poland to form a picture of the social life of Polish peasants at the time. But autobiography is not only of sociological interest for the insider view of the life history of a certain individual or community. Stanley goes on to show that there is another way in which autobiography should be studied by scholars; from Merton and from the feminist movement she distils that it is not only an insight into 'history' as described in autobiographies, but also its 'historiography', in the sense that they are "written version of the past, not a slice of the past itself" (Stanley, 1993: 41). Thus, in our analysis of autobiographies, we will not only consider the content of the life stories but also how the authors present themselves, how their books are marketed by publishers, and how the stories are received by readers.

As many methodological handbooks confirm, academic attention for (women's) autobiographies can be attributed to the rise of feminism in academia. "Feminism as a social movement is concerned with (...) inscribing them [lives] as gendered (and raced, classed, with sexualities), and also with describing a wider range of possibilities for

women's lives by providing contrasting exemplars" (Stanley, 1993: 46). In our analysis, special attention is devoted to the gendered experiences of these authors, and also their descriptions of ethnicity or cultural background and intersectionality between gender and ethnicity. The narrative analyst "focuses on specific actors, in specific social places, during specific social times; the investigator is interested in how speakers or writers assemble sequences and events and use language and/or visual images to communicate meaning, that is, make particular points to an audience" (Riessman, 2008: 11). The actors in our study are migrant women from Middle Eastern, Asian and North African countries, the social place being western, migrant-receiving societies (North-western Europe, UK and US). By analysing these narratives we can learn about their life experiences but also about their reception and role in a wider debate on gender, culture and violence in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, Stanley (1993) mentions that Merton's ideas on the sociological autobiography, as a life story that specifically aims to point out the social embeddedness of the author's life, draws attention to the fact that people construct different and often competing descriptions of reality. This is important to the question of authenticity that sometimes arises with the publication of these books, and the audience's expectations that go with the genre of autobiography or true life stories. In what context are these stories published and to what extent is the true life story influenced by editors and ghost writers?

Based on previous research on cases of HBV that are dealt with by the police, we developed a set of four sources of conflict that can lead to HBV: resisting strict (gender) rules, partner choice, sexuality, (extra-marital) pregnancies and conflicts regarding parenthood (reference). The second column in Fig. 1 clarifies which of the four themes is addressed in each book. Depending on the situation, conflicts revolving around these themes can lead to violent reactions from (extended) family members aimed at preventing or making up for the loss of honour. The third column in Fig. 1 states in what way protagonists feel victimised or what acts of violence they experience. Sometimes the violence is easy to point out; in three of the books there are descriptions of how a murder takes place and in numerous books there are accounts of acts of physical abuse. Sometimes victimisation is harder to pinpoint when it is not physical violence but harm resulting from gossip in the community or the enforcement of restrictive (gender) rules. To systematically analyse the stories, the following list of questions was filled out by one researcher per book. With regard to the narrative aspects we will focus on the following questions: what is the source of conflict described by the author? What are the (possibly violent) consequences of the conflict? What does she do to solve her problems? Is the author able to deal with her problems swiftly or does she spend years struggling to deal with them? How does the author present herself: as a victim, as a perpetrator or in a different role? How does the author characterise the men in her life story: as a victim, a perpetrator or in another role? Does the author stay in touch with her family or does she break off all contacts? With regard to how the book is received and what role it plays in the debate on HBV, the following questions will be addressed. Does the book display images of the author? How does the author describe her physical appearance? Did the author write the book herself or did a co-author or a ghost writer? Did the book receive media attention? How was it received?

Selection

For collecting relevant biographies we used university and public library catalogues and websites of online booksellers such as Amazon and its Dutch counterpart Bol. These websites offer many current bestsellers that easily find their way to Dutch readers. We browsed through the category of 'true life stories' and selected books by female authors with a migrant status or background. We also used the options provided by the website indicating which additional books were purchased by readers of a particular title. This allowed us to view related books, and to see which ones received many reviews by readers. We

selected 16 non-fiction books in Dutch by 15 female authors.

Results: narrative analysis of biographies by migrant women

Sources of conflict

One theme that recurs in every book is the resistance the authors put up to the rules which were set by their (extended) family or their community. All of the authors mention the strict gender rules they are expected to follow. Even if some authors are not subjected to violence as punishment for their disobedience, they still feel the pressure to conform. Abdel Aal for example, would love to find a husband. But as a young woman in Egypt she is not allowed to actively get acquainted with men, let alone to date or flirt with them; it would be a flagrant violation of honour. So she tries to find herself a husband without violating the boundaries of acceptable behaviour, such as letting a local matchmaker set up meetings with potential husbands, who come to visit her and her parents. This leads to awkward situations which she describes with humour.

In nearly every book the source of conflict is the choice of a partner. Ayse, a young Yezidi woman growing up in Germany, has a German boyfriend and runs away with him because her family does not approve of their relationship. Many other women in our sample face the opposite problem: they are forced to marry a man not of their own choosing. Some manage to escape before the wedding takes place as did Kassindja, Dirie and Kalkan. Unfortunately, most women did not see a way out of their situation at the time and suffered the consequences. Zana Muhsen and her sister are teens when they are brought from their home in the UK to Yemen, the country where their father was born, supposedly for a holiday. That holiday turns into a nightmare when it becomes clear that they are stuck in a remote Yemeni village and they are expected to marry local men chosen for them by their father. He does not want his daughters to be corrupted by Western culture and therefore finds them each a husband that would meet his standards. Because the girls have a Yemeni passport and their father is not breaking Yemeni law, they see no way out and so, reluctantly, they get married. For many years they live the life of rural Yemeni women before they manage to get outside help and change their situation.

Pregnancy and the transition to parenthood may also lead to conflict, for example when a child is born out of wedlock, or when children's custody arrangements have to be made after a divorce. Although this appears not to be a very prominent problem in our sample, it is crucial in three stories. Zana Muhsen faces a dilemma when she is finally able to get a divorce and return to the UK: the Yemeni courts only allow her to do so provided she leaves her child in the care of her husband and his Yemeni family. Zana's sister ends up choosing to stay because she does not want to be separated from her children. Zana is convinced her sister was brainwashed.

The theme that is presented the least often as the main issue, is sexual activity. This can lead to honour violations when it takes place outside of marriage, for example when a girl loses her virginity before marriage, or when marital partners commit adultery. One of the authors in our sample gives a description of committed adultery: Halime wants to end her forced marriage to one of her cousins and falls in love with someone else before her divorce is final.

Victimised: how and by whom?

All the authors present themselves as victims one way or another. A few authors also write about their own mistakes: for example, Halime who admits to have committed adultery and Hirsir Ali who admits to have lied during her asylum procedure. The persons causing the women's suffering are certainly not exclusively men. Considerable pressure to conform to their families' wishes is put on the authors by their female family members: five authors mention mothers, mothers-in-law and aunts. On top of that, women in the larger communities can interfere;

Bibliography	Source of conflict	Consequence of conflict	Ethnic background
Abdel Aal G (2010) <i>Ik wil trouwen!</i> [I want to get married!]. Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam Uitgevers.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Gossip	Egyptian (takes place in Egypt)
Ayşe (2008) <i>Op de vlucht voor eerwraak</i> [Fleeing honour killing]. Amsterdam: Poema-pocket.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Threats, kidnapping, outcast	Turkish (takes place in Germany)
Arib K (2009) <i>Couscous op zondag</i> [Couscous on Sunday]. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans.	Resisting (gender) rules	Gossip	Moroccan (takes place in the Netherlands)
Çalışkan A (2006) <i>De nootjes van het huwelijk</i> [The nuts of marriage]. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Thoeris.	Partner choice, parenthood	Forced marriage, kidnapping, physical abuse, stalking	Turkish (takes place in the Netherlands)
Darznik J (2011) <i>De goede dochter</i> [The good daughter]. Amsterdam: Artemis & Co.	Partner choice, parenthood, resisting (gender) rules	Forced marriage, physical abuse	Iranian (takes place in Iran, the US)
Dirie W and D'Haem J (2001) <i>Mijn woestijn</i> [Desert Dawn]. Amsterdam: Arena.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Female genital mutilation	Somali (takes place in Somalia and the US)
Gashi H (2006) <i>Mijn leed draagt jouw naam</i> [My suffering bears your name]. Amsterdam: Maarten Muntinga.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Forced marriage, physical abuse, murder	Kosovar/Albanese (takes place in Kosovo and Germany)
Halime (2008) <i>Ongeschreven tradities</i> [Unwritten traditions]. Amsterdam: Artemis & Co.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Forced marriage	Turkish, Kurdish (takes place in the Netherlands)
Hirsi Ali A (2008) <i>Infidel</i> . New York: Free Press.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Forced marriage, female genital mutilation, outcast, asylum procedure	Somali (takes place in East-Africa and the Netherlands)
Kalkan H (2007) <i>Ik wilde alleen maar vrij zijn</i> [I just wanted to be free]. Amsterdam: Poema-pocket.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Forced marriage	Turkish (takes place in Germany and Turkey)
Kassindja F (2004) <i>Wie hoort mijn tranen?</i> [Do they hear you when you cry?]. Amsterdam: Maarten Muntinga.	Partner choice	Forced marriage, female genital mutilation, asylum procedure	Togo (takes place in Togo, Germany, and the US)
Muhsen Z and Crofts A (2005) <i>Nog eenmaal mijn moeder zien</i> [To see my mother one last time]. Amsterdam: Maarten Muntinga.	Partner choice, parenthood, resisting (gender) rules	Forced marriage, physical abuse, kidnapping	Yemeni (takes place in the UK and Yemen)
Oum'Hamed F (2009) <i>De uitverkorene</i> [The chosen one]. Amsterdam: Artemis & Co.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Forced marriage, physical abuse	Moroccan (takes place in the Netherlands)
Saillo O (2004) <i>Dochter van Agadir</i> [Daughter of Agadir]. Amsterdam: Sirene.	Resisting (gender) rules	Physical abuse, sexual abuse, murder	Moroccan (takes place in Morocco)
Saillo O (2009) <i>Een spoor van tranen</i> [A trail of tears]. Amsterdam: Sirene.	Partner choice, resisting (gender) rules	Stalking, outcast	Moroccan (takes place in Germany)
Shah H (2009) <i>Dochter van de imam</i> [The Imam's daughter]. Amsterdam: De Boekerij.	Partner choice	Forced marriage, sexual abuse	Pakistani (takes place in the UK)

Fig. 1. Biographies about HBV included in the research sample.

Arib mentions the gossip of neighbourhood women she and her family are exposed to when she decides to live on her own as a young student. The person who forces Fauziya Kassindja to marry an old man she has never met before is her aunt. Ayşel Çalışkan too is mistreated more severely by her mother and her mother-in-law than she is by her father. Except for Hirsi Ali, who is regularly beaten by her mother, all authors suffer only mental abuse by women. Nevertheless, the iron grip with which these women enforce gender rules is a force to be reckoned with causing both mental and physical suffering. This becomes poignantly clear in the books about female genital mutilation (Dirie, Hirsi Ali, Kassindja). Female family members such as grandmothers turn out to be the instigators (not executors) of these horrible procedures. When it comes to physical abuse, however, it is men who are responsible. Many women have to deal with physical abuse, and some suffer sexual abuse and incest such as in the story of Hannah Shah. After she is molested by

her father, she is afraid to speak out because of his important role in the local community as an imam. Fayza Oum'Hamed is a victim of her father's actions (he marries her off to an unknown family), of the physical and mental abuse she suffers from her husband and most of all of the treatment by her father-in-law who forces her to work for his family, locks her up and incites his son to beat her up. Two authors write about a murder. Ouarda Saillo's mother is killed by her husband, Hanife Gashi's daughter was killed by her father. In our sample, most of the books support the view that men are the main aggressors. Besides individuals, official institutions too cause the protagonists to suffer. Kassindja's lengthy struggle with American immigration authorities almost makes her want to give up and return home, whatever the consequences. Saillo and Hirsi Ali also refer to complicated asylum procedures they had to contend with. Some other authors also mention their struggles with (government) institutions. Halime and Fayza

Oum'Hamed describe their arduous journey through various women's shelters and other aid organizations that seem to slow them down with bureaucracy before they are able to build up their independent lives.

Character traits

Despite their victimisation, many authors present themselves as fighters, as strong women who persevere. They manage to escape and build up a new life of their own in spite of numerous setbacks. The back blurbs are a testament of the courage these women show, such as the text on the cover of Hulya Kalkan's book: 'using her creativity and courage she manages to escape her fate'. This courage is often preceded by a period of fear, doubt and uncertainty, caused by running away from home or the escalation of a family conflict. Particularly interesting is the fact that a number of women emphasise the character differences between themselves and their family members. They describe how they had been aware from an early age that they stood out from their siblings who complied with the traditions without many complaints. Both Dirie and Shah for instance say they were 'born a rebel', and Shah describes her sister and mother as timid and easily frightened. All protagonists oppose the life their families have mapped out for them: they refuse to marry the candidate their parents have chosen, or they want more from life than is granted through traditional gender roles. For Arib, this not only applies to herself but also to her own parents. They are more liberal than most other Moroccan families living in the Netherlands. Her mother goes out to work and her father doesn't want to have anything to do with conservative religious practices of his peers. They even allow their daughter to live on her own at the age of 18, a decision that is frowned upon by members of their community.

Problem solving strategies

The degree to which the main characters display strength varies significantly. Amidst the rigid structures that hold them back, some authors are strong enough to take action to solve their problems, sometimes with considerable risks. One protagonist who clearly takes her life into her own hands is Ayşe. She carefully plans her flight from her home. She even describes an earlier attempt to run away and she had given up once she discovered she had left her cell phone at home. This would have made it easy for her parents to find her hiding place. She has the courage to cancel her plans and postpone her flight from home; a rational and cool-headed approach. Yet, there are also examples of apathy, such in the case of Halime. She has a relatively passive attitude. She wants to divorce her husband and ends up in a women's shelter, but it takes many years before the divorce is granted. Other authors slowly become more self-sufficient, and only then they dare to leave their family or divorce their husband. Little by little, they manage to become more independent by for example taking driving lessons, going to school or getting a job. That this process can take many years is not always due to their own hesitation: as described above, sometimes judicial procedures related to immigration, divorce or custody rights form an obstacle.

How is the author's relationship with her family?

Only Abdel Aal and Arib have an overall amiable relationship with their family. Abdel Aal remarkably seeks to manoeuvre her wishes within the boundaries set by her culture and her family. Arib portrays herself as an exception and says she is happy that her parents allowed her to make her own decisions without too much struggle. She reports about the problems other migrant women have to contend with in her community. This is reflected in the stories of other authors, who have a bad relationship with their family. Particularly Ayse and Shah who state that they wrote their book under a pseudonym and that they are still on the run from their families. Saillo's relationship with her family changes when she leaves the country to start her own life in Germany. Her first

book is about the hardships she endures at the hands of her abusive father, who kills her mother. After he is imprisoned, she and her siblings are sent to an aunt and uncle who are supposed to take care of them, but who neglect them. As it turns out, they only take interest in Saillo when she is grown up and they meet her German husband-to-be, because they see a business opportunity. Like Saillo, most authors turn out to have a mixed or changing relationship with their families. Caliskan and Halime have intense conflicts with their families, endure violence and severe restrictions but then later come to conciliatory arrangements with them. Despite their precarious financial situation, Halime and her husband regularly loan her father sums of money although she is aware that he will not be paying it back. Her father takes this for granted and demands financial support from them again and again. When she finally stands up to him, he is angry. They break off communication for a while. There are plenty examples of these negotiations in her book and they always end with a reunion.

Do the stories have a happy end?

Some authors have struggled with their problems for many years before the violence ends. They end up reconciling with their abusive husbands time and again, often to please their families, such as Caliskan. Or they (are forced to) wait for help from the outside world such as Muhsen. A few authors make for a sudden escape, such as Ayse, who flees to another part of the country, is tracked down by her family but manages to escape again with help of the police and by taking refuge in a women's shelter. Authors who escape their families then face the problem of building up a new life. Oum'Hamed, for example, escapes from her forced marriage after attempting suicide by jumping off a balcony. Although she no longer has to endure violence from her family in law, she now is entangled with aid institutions and has to fight her ex-husband over visiting rights.

All in the family?

Not every author is clear about the status of the relations with family at the end of the book. And of course, their lives go on after the publication of their memoirs, so there may still be a chance of a reunion. It is not clear whether Kalkan and Oum'Hamed are still in touch with their families after they have started their new lives. Although some authors are treated badly by some members of their family or exclusively by members of their family-in-law, they still enjoy the support of some members of their own family. For example, after her divorce, Darznik has to leave her firstborn daughter behind with her family-in-law, but she returns to her own family who supports her and she is able to continue her life with them again. Ayse and Shah end their stories by noting that they are still on the run from their violent families. Muhsen and Saillo have reconnected with some family members, excluding those who harmed them most. Some of Saillo's siblings are unhappy about her publishing the story of their difficult childhood. Muhsen still misses her child whom she had to leave behind in Yemen, and her sister who chose to stay. Another strategy is to leave their families behind or flee to another country and then reconnect with them after years of silence. For example, Dirie has reconnected with her family who still live in Somalia. When she manages to visit her parents after twenty years, they say she is still as rebellious as when she was as a child; she dares to bring up difficult subjects. Due to the unrest in Somalia, the time they spend together is limited and Dirie soon flies back to her modelling career in the USA. Dirie's parents are not part of her daily life anymore; they live in different worlds. Caliskan and Halime however, stay in touch with their troubled families throughout their story. Even though their families caused them considerable harm, they continue to fall back on them. This kind of scenario may be difficult to comprehend for western readers. Despite the fact Caliskan had endured abuse and was forced into an arranged marriage at a very young age, and had to struggle for years to become self-sufficient, she

has stayed in touch with her parents. Halime got divorced from the husband her parents chose for her. She explicitly states that she doesn't hold a grudge against him, because for him this was also a forced marriage. She is still in touch with him for the sake of their children and her parents who are equally important to her. A western audience might rather read about a strong woman who breaks free from her controlling family and starts an independent new life.

Authenticity: publication and reception characteristics

Description and meaning of physical appearance

While reading, we noticed that the books devote a considerable amount of attention to the appearance and clothing of the main characters. Most of them are described as beautiful young women; however this can change during the course of their story. For example, Halime and Zana Muhsen describe how their bodies change after childbearing. Zana's change of appearance is the most dramatic: in Yemen, she has to work hard under primitive conditions both at home and in the fields, which darken her skin and cause her physical suffering. Clothing can also be a subject of dispute between the women and their family members. The women want to wear western clothes of which their families or their husbands disapprove. Aysel Çalişkan, for instance, refuses to go to school until her mother stops forcing her to wear trousers underneath her skirt, as she is picked on by the other children. Likewise, Hanife Gashi has a serious dispute with her in-laws when she refuses to wear a headscarf. For Kassindja, it's not her own family but her extended family and neighbours who disapprove of her and her sisters' lack of Islamic headscarves. They are described as 'those modern children' and are only able to maintain their special status as a result of the respect their father enjoys. Once he dies, more conservative family members immediately take action to get his children to follow the line. In contrast, Ayaan Hirsi Ali spends a number of her high school years wearing a black niqab on her own initiative, when she is interested in the teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood. The niqab is deemed unnecessary by most of her friends and family who are less dogmatic in their religious beliefs. When she eventually flees her family, Hirsi Ali drastically changes her appearance: she cuts her hair short and starts wearing jeans and large sweaters. Later on she also discards her religious beliefs. She becomes quite famous for this, and a vocal critic of Islamic religion, calling it backwards in its oppression of and violence against women. Do the clothes function as a signifier or a forbidding in her story? When she makes a career as a politician, she again transforms her wardrobe to a more business-like attire of suits and her hair in a chic bun. Many books clearly describe in detail how the protagonists have changed their wardrobe to look more fashionable during the course of their life. Why are so many pages devoted to clothing and physical appearance? It seems to function as an important part of 'the presentation of self' as Goffman calls it. The women express their being different and resisting their family's expectations through their choice of clothing. The issue also seems to be gendered, as earlier research among migrants has stated that conflicts about clothing are more important in life stories of female migrants than male migrants (Buitelaar, 2002). The conflicts about clothing described in our sample of books gradually spread to other areas of life and deepen and escalate over time.

Cover pictures

Almost all the books have the portrait of a woman on the cover. One is an abstract graphical design and on two covers a family is depicted. Nine of them depict the authors themselves. For five books, the identity of the person portrayed on the cover is unknown. At least five authors in our selection display a western look (or are described in this way when pictures are not included). Other book covers display images that are in line with the stereotype of the Muslim migrant woman, for

example, including an Islamic headscarf. Particularly eye-catching is the depiction on the book cover of Fauziya Kassindja, the writer, together with her Caucasian American lawyer, who plays an important role in her story. While the front cover of the Dutch edition shows a picture of someone who is evidently not the writer (the model is paler than Kassindja and has different facial features) the copies of the original American edition have the picture of Kassindja and her lawyer on the front cover. It seems as if the Dutch publisher felt Kassindja's appearance did not comply with the standard image of the oppressed migrant woman in the eyes of Dutch readers and felt it necessary to have it replaced. A similar scenario seems to fit Ouarda Saïlo's book. On the front cover Saïlo is depicted in a totally different style than in the pictures inside the book. The cover shows her with stereotypical orientalist accessories like a headscarf and big earrings, while in her private photos she has a more casual, western look: she wears jeans, fashionable sunglasses and loose hair. Clearly, these book covers have been adapted to fit the stereotypical image, the spectacle of the Other, that readers will recognise and that will lure them in to buy the book.

Fact, fiction and ghost writers

We came across some books that were filed in the library under the heading 'true life story' but were in actual fact (partly) works of fiction. Two novels by the author Hülya Cigdem contain stories about her own experiences as an underage bride brought in from Turkey to her in-laws in the Netherlands, stories of other women and fictional stories (Cigdem, 2008, 2014). However informative these books are on the subject of honour conflicts, we did not use these in our sample. All books discussed here are presented as autobiographies. Less than half of them involve ghost writers. This is not always apparent from the book covers. Usually it is stated on the title page or in the acknowledgement section. As an exception to the rule, Kassindja openly describes the whole process of turning her experiences into a book; how she was inspired by Waris Dirie's example and how the publicity around Dirie's book helped her win her case.

Not all publications show whether or not another author or editor, except of the author herself, helped writing the story. It does not seem likely that all of these women wrote down their story by themselves, especially when the protagonist describes her relatively short stay in the country or her modest level of education. One of the struggles the women go through on their road to independence is often learning a new language or learning to read and write. Of course, using a ghost writer does not automatically make the story a lie. But it may influence the construction and the tone of the book. This becomes clear when studying the work of Dutch scholars Ghorashi and Brinkgreve (2011). They have set up a course in writing autobiographical stories for women (both migrant and native Dutch). Ghorashi and Brinkgreve collected their stories and published them in a book. However, after the manuscript was returned by the editor, a heated discussion erupted among some of the participating women because they found their life stories to sound 'too Dutch'. Is it possible for migrant women to use their own voice when their stories are used in a nationalist discourse and when they are edited by publishers? Is the process of writing the book documented in it? These questions are relevant to determine the authenticity of the books and the choices that were made in constructing the narrative.

One of the biographies that was originally sampled for our research, turned out to be false and therefore removed from our research sample. Still, it is an interesting case when we look at the question of authenticity of the immigrant experience (Spivak & Gunew, 1990), because it had already become a best seller when the Jordanian Human Rights activist Rana Husseini and an Australian journalist analysed Norma Khouri's story and concluded that it was inaccurate (Husseini, 2003). They discovered that Khouri did not flee from Jordan as a young woman after her best friend was killed – as she describes in her memoir – but in fact immigrated to the United States with her family at the age

of three. As a result of this research, her book was withdrawn from the Australian market in 2004. Furthermore, Khouri ultimately left Australia when the Australian government started procedures to retract her residence permit as her story had been the basis for her residency. Interestingly, because Khouri persists that her book describes the true facts, it is still sold as a true story in the Netherlands. Khouri's story was convincing enough for Australian authorities to grant her a residence permit: she was seen as an authentic immigrant. The spectacle of the Other, the violent image of orientalist culture and the alluring taboo that it describes may have contributed to the book's success. Khouri's fabrication is therefore damaging in two ways: it adds to the stigma of violent Oriental culture that victimises women, and it may harm the position of truly victimised women who actually need help. As this story is revealed to be untrue, it might add to a stigma of the immigrant that will lie in order to secure a residence permit in a western country. This can be harmful to women trying to tell their story of victimisation, seeking refuge, and who may now encounter scepticism.

Another author who experienced heavy backlash after publishing her memoir is Hirsi Ali. She was not accused of fabricating her life story, but she openly wrote about the lies she told while going through the asylum procedure in order to obtain a refugee status. At the time she graduated from university in the Netherlands, gained Dutch citizenship and made a swift career as a member of the Dutch parliament. The revelations in her memoir led to an investigation to have her citizenship retracted. Amidst this political storm Hirsi Ali was living under strict security measures because of death threats she received following the murder of Dutch film producer Theo van Gogh, with whom she had made a film denouncing violence against Muslim women, suggesting this violence to be legitimized by Islam (see also [Prins & Saharso, 2008](#)). Because of these stressful circumstances, Hirsi Ali decided to quit her job as a member of parliament, leave the Netherlands and start a new life in the United States. The tribulations arising from the revelations in her autobiography were not the only reason she abruptly ended her tempestuous political career in the Netherlands, but it certainly contributed to it.

True life stories?

Because the protagonist in an autobiography is the author, it is the author who gets the stigma of 'liar' attached to her when irregularities are discovered. If they have indeed written the books themselves, this assumption is fair. Problems however arise when the story has been extensively edited or written by a ghost writer and this is not explicitly mentioned. The audience expects to read true life stories and responds with anger when a story turns out to be fictional. Public outrage is fuelled by the assumption that the authors (and publishers) have earned a great deal of money by writing the book. Readers buying a novel know that the contents of the book are purely fictional. In contrast, (auto)biographies are supposed to be true life stories. With the rise of the semi-autobiographical novel, the distinction between fiction and fact seem to get blurred in the literary world ([Louwerse, 2012](#)). And even among non-fictional life histories, maintaining a clear distinction between autobiographies and life histories is hard. Especially when autobiographies are products of ghost writers, it is "nearly impossible to trace their influence or to distinguish first-person narrative from the author's editorial reworking of materials." ([Shover, 2012](#): 12). For authors with a migrant background, like the women in this article, this is particularly awkward. Readers' expectations of 'special' authors, such as those with a migrant background, even if they write fiction, are still different. They assume that the author's background is reflected in their work, that he or she makes different choices than the typical author, being a white male from the middle class ([Louwerse, 2012](#)). Authors are pushed by publishers to indulge these expectations, and successful authors react in different ways; some embrace their status as a spokesman for ethnic minorities, and some resist this label and say that their inspiration includes both their foreign roots and Dutch literary heritage

and that their ambitions are to produce literature, and not to advocate immigrant integration ([Moenandar, 2007](#); [Van Der Poel, 2012](#)). However, the books analysed here are non-fiction and some explicitly state that by publishing their story, they wish to reach other immigrant women in similar situations and empower them. The feminist issue of providing contrasting examples of (immigrant) women's life trajectories ([Stanley, 1993](#)) is thus voiced explicitly in foreword or promotion material for the books that we study here. The voice of these authors reaches the political arena, through the participation of politicians who advocate women's rights or immigrant integration. They are happy to write a foreword (see [Gashi, Ayşe and Kalkan](#), whose books are introduced by female politicians, two of which are of immigrant background themselves) or to participate in book presentations (such as [Oum'Hamed](#), whose book was presented to the Dutch Minister of Integration). We would like to connect this to Spivak's thoughts on the act of 'speaking as': "There are many subject positions one must inhabit, one is not just one thing. (...) for the person who does the speaking as something, it is a problem of distancing from one's self, whatever that self might be. But when the hegemonic people, the dominant people, talk about listening to someone speaking as something, I think there one encounters a problem. When they want to hear an Indian speaking as an Indian, a Third World Woman speaking as a Third World Woman, they cover over the fact of the ignorance that they are allowed to possess, into a kind of homogenization" ([Spivak & Gunew, 1990](#): 60). Automatically, because a migrant woman is invited to speak as a victimised migrant woman, it is these aspects of her identity that she is reduced to, creating a stereotype. Especially when she is then listened to by a politician of the hegemonic culture and who has a certain standpoint in the politics of immigration, the story of one specific immigrant woman becomes homogenized into the story of the immigrant woman and there is no room for internal conflicting parts; certain parts are silenced.

Conclusion and discussion

The voices of migrant women are heard in western debates on emancipation and integration mainly through biographies documenting their difficult lives and experiences of honour-based violence. Our key research question was how the attention for their life stories affects the perception of migrant women. Do the biographies show 'whole persons' and examples of agency by these women or do they focus on violence and passive victimisation? The answer is both yes and no.

There are two ways in which memoirs by migrant women about their victimisation of HBV influence public discourse on this topic. Through their commercial success they influence reader's views on the lives of migrant women, and through the use of these stories in political discourse, they influence public policy on immigrant integration. Both these routes lead to reproduction of stereotype and stigmatisation because of the simplified image that is created through media coverage, and through the positioning within a nationalist discourse.

In the stories about HBV, we see migrant women in the role of the Ideal Victim and their husbands and (predominantly but not exclusively) male family members as the Absolute Other. The simplified binaries make biographies of migrant women commercially successful. The effect is augmented by the use of these stories within a nationalist discourse ([Carbin, 2014](#)). Regardless of the mostly nuanced image of the women's victimisation and agency that arises from the books, they still follow a narrative that leads to stigmatisation. Biographies of women dealing with HBV follow a narrative that is expected by western readers. The women want more freedom but are restricted by their traditional families and communities, up to the point of being the victim of violence. Their only way out is to flee and to sever all ties with their families. Some reconnect but only after many years when they have established their own life outside of the community they came from. It must of course be regarded as a great achievement that these protagonists are able to build up an independent life of their own in the

end. They refuse to take the role of the passive victim and are, rightfully so, seen as strong and determined women. In earlier research on this subject, we came to this conclusion (reference). But looking at these stories again, and taking into account a postcolonial feminist perspective, another issue became clear to us. To exchange the narrative of the passive migrant woman who needs to be saved, for the narrative of the few exceptionally brave migrant women who succeed to break free from their controlling families, is to trade one stigma for another. Their families and communities are still seen as backwards and oppressive. The problem with this narrative is that it adds to the polarising discourse on migrant women: it labels migrant men and conservative migrant communities as the Absolute Other. This does not benefit the emancipation of migrant women for it only offers them one role, that of the ideal victim, or as a rebellious exception to the rule (Carbin, 2014; Razack, 2004). The question raised by postcolonial feminists when reading representation of Others, is What is not there? (Spivak & Gunew, 1990). In this case of some bestselling migrant women's autobiographies, what is not there or rather which story is not privileged, receives less attention, is the nuanced story of women who muddles along, who finds ways to negotiate with her oppressive, sometimes even violent family members. The woman who makes compromises in order to shape her life in such a way that she can make her own choices while either keeping in touch with her family and community or reuniting after a period of disconnection. Why is the story of the women who break off all contact with their families privileged over other life stories that are less spectacular? One reason might be that such stories do not follow the one dimensional path of from oppression and victimisation and then either martyrdom or a dramatic escape to a new, free, life. This is the kind of narrative that appeals to western readers: The spectacle of the Other is at once something to denounce because it is different, barbaric, and also alluring because it is taboo and it challenges the hegemonic cultural order (Hall, 1997). When leaving their families and communities behind is the only way for migrant women to escape violence, the dichotomy between them and us will continue to exist. Because the communities are still oppressive, violent, backwards, and the enlightened western saviours can rescue the victims so that they can be free. This way, migrant women and adolescents cannot talk about their problems at home without immediately setting of a chain reaction of security measures (Razack, 2004). Their stories are used in a nationalist, polarising discourse. Many of the authors say that they publish their story to reach out to girls in a similar situation: even if they can help only one girl escape abuse or a forced marriage and therefore they feel that their book is a success. But a side effect of their powerful narrative is that it seems not only to the white European reader but also to that girl within the migrant community that the only way to gain more agency, to be in control of her own life, without falling victim to violence, is to sever all ties with her family and community. Pratt Ewing's study of Muslim men in Germany (2008) describes how migrant men are equally influenced not only by conservative forces from their community, but also by the popularised image of dangerous Muslim men who have to police their female family members and react violently if they defy the rules. This way, the polarising narratives can be a destructive force in the lives of both immigrant women and men.

Stories of women who keep in touch with their families and who are struggling to make their marriages work for years to please their families and keep the peace, may be less appealing to western readers. Nevertheless they do make interesting reading to the researcher, because they can tell us something beyond ethnic and gendered stereotypes. And as Dutch-Iranian scholar Ghorashi puts it, "It is important to make space for the ways in which diverse groups of women shape their own emancipation processes starting from their own cultural backgrounds" (Ghorashi, 2010: 89). Even though we have seen some examples of migrant women negotiating their life choices within their families and communities, they deserve more attention, not only from academics but also from policy makers and frontline professionals.

Because judging police files of HBV on failed marriages and the involvement of children, leaving everything behind may not be an option for migrant women, as their ex-husband may have custody or visiting rights. In these communities, women who get married become part of their husband's family and so do their children. When they get divorced, not only their husbands but their entire family will do anything to keep in touch with the children. This clashes with the practice of the majority of courts in western countries to predominantly give custody rights to the mother, which creates a possible motive for HBV. Police, women's shelters and youth care institutions therefore can learn more from women who find a way to cope with cultural and gendered rules in their communities and their day-by-day negotiations, than from the few exceptional women who break off all relations with their community and build up a new independent life. This is especially problematic because the damage to honour and with it the need a family may feel to do something about it, possibly by committing violence, increases when more and more people are informed about the problem. When trying to helping a possible victim, outsiders should tread carefully. The stories of women who continuously negotiate their life choices with their families and communities could be a great inspiration for a nuanced, culturally sensitive, gendered approach of honour conflicts. That said, we take this warning to heart "...I think [the act of speaking in the name of] has to be kept alive as a problem. (...) this question of representation, self-representation, representing others, is a problem. On the other hand, we cannot sweep it under the carpet with the demand for authentic voices; we have to remind ourselves that, as we do this, we might be compounding to the problem even as we are trying to solve it." (Spivak & Gunew, 1990: 63).

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