Case Study: "Honour" Killings and Blood Feuds

Focus:
(1) Pakistan
(2) Jordan
(3) Palestine/Israel
(4) The Balkans

(1) "Honour" Killings of Women

Summary

"Honour" killings of women can be defined as acts of murder in which "a woman is killed for her actual or perceived immoral behavior." (Yasmeen Hassan, "The Fate of Pakistani Women," *International Herald Tribune*, May 25, 1999.) Such "immoral behavior" may take the form of marital infidelity, refusing to submit to an arranged marriage, demanding a divorce, flirting with or receiving phone calls from men, failing to serve a meal on time, or -- grotesquely -- "allowing herself" to be raped. In the Turkish province of Sanliurfa, one young woman's "throat was slit in the town square because a love ballad was dedicated to her over the radio." (Pelin Turgut, "'Honour' Killings Still Plague Turkish Province," *The Toronto Star*, May 14, 1998.)

Most "honour" killings of women occur in Muslim countries, the focus of this case study; but it is worth noting that no sanction for such murders is granted in Islamic religion or law. And the phenomenon is in any case a global one. According to Stephanie Nebehay, such killings "have been reported in Bangladesh, Britain, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey and Uganda." Afghanistan, where the practice is condoned under the rule of the fundamentalist Taliban movement, can be added to the list, along with Iraq and Iran. (Nebehay, "'Honor Killings' of Women Said on Rise Worldwide," Reuters dispatch, April 7, 2000.)

Focus (1): Pakistan

Pakistan, where "honour" killings are known as *karo-kari*, is probably the country where such atrocities are most pervasive. Estimating the scale of the phenomenon there, as elsewhere, is made more difficult not only by the problems of data collection in predominantly rural countries, but by the extent to which community members and political authorities collaborate in covering up the atrocities. According to Yasmeen Hassan, author of *The Haven Becomes Hell: A Study of Domestic Violence in Pakistan*, "The concepts of women as property and honor are so deeply entrenched in the social, political and economic fabric of Pakistan that the government, for the most part, ignores the daily occurrences of women being killed and maimed by their families." (Hassan, "The Fate of Pakistani Women.") Frequently, women murdered in "honour" killings are recorded as having committed suicide or died in accidents.

One of the most notorious "honour" killings of recent years occurred in April 1999, when Samia Imran, a young married woman, "was shot in the office of a lawyer helping her to seek a divorce which her family could never countenance." According to Suzanne Goldenberg,

> Samia, 28, arrived at the Lahore law offices of Hina Jilani and Asma Jahangir, who are sisters, on April 6. She had engaged Jilani a few days earlier, because she wanted a divorce from her violent husband. Samia settled on a chair across the desk from the lawyer. Sultana, Samia's mother, entered five minutes later with a male companion. Samia half-rose in greeting. The man, Habib-ur-Rhemna, grabbed Samia and put a pistol to her head. The first bullet entered near Samia's eye and she fell. "There was no scream. There was dead silence. I don't even think she knew what was happening," Jilani said. The killer stood over Samia's body, and fired again. Jilani reached for the alarm button as the gunman and Sultana left. "She never even bothered to look whether the girl was dead."

The aftermath of the murder was equally revealing: "Members of Pakistan's upper house demanded punishment for the two women [lawyers] and none of Pakistan's political leaders condemned the attack. ... The clergy in Peshawar want the lawyers to be put to death" for trying to help Imran. (Suzanne Goldenberg, "A Question of Honor," *The Guardian* (UK), May 27, 1999.)

Hina Jilani, Pakistani campaigner against "honour" killings.

According to Goldenberg, "Those who kill for honour [in Pakistan] are almost never punished. In the rare instances [that] cases reach the courts, the killers are sentenced to just two or three years. Hana Jilani [the Jahore lawyer who witnessed Samia Imran's murder] has collected 150 case studies and in only eight did the judges reject the argument that the women were killed for honour. All the other [perpetrators] were let off, or given reduced sentences." (Goldenberg, "A Question of Honour.")

A human-rights report published in March 1999 stated that "honour" killings took the lives of 888 women in the single province of Punjab in 1998 (Hassan, "The Fate of Pakistani Women"). Similar figures were recorded for 1999. In Sindh province, some 300 women died in 1997, according to Pakistan's independent Human Rights Commission. (Goldenberg, "A Question of Honour.") It is unknown how many women are maimed or disfigured for life in attacks that fall short of murder. Pamela Constable describes one such case:

> Zahida Perveen's head is shrouded in a white cotton veil, which

she self-consciously tightens every few moments. But when she reaches down to her baby daughter, the veil falls away to reveal the face of one of Pakistan's most horrific social ills, broadly known as "honour" crimes. Perveen's eyes are empty sockets of unseeing flesh, her earlobes have been sliced off, and her nose is a gaping, reddened stump of bone. Sixteen months ago, her husband, in a fit of rage over her alleged affair with a brother-in-law, bound her hands and feet and slashed her with a razor and knife. She was three months pregnant at the time. "He came home from the mosque and accused me of having a bad character," the tiny, 32-year-old woman murmured as she awaited a court hearing ... "I told him it was not true, but he didn't believe me. He caught me and tied me up, and then he started cutting my face. He never said a word except, "This is your last night." (Constable, "The Price of 'Honour'," *The Gazette* (Montreal), May 22, 2000.)

Bangladeshi women scarred in acid attacks.

Perveen's husband stated in court that "What I did was wrong, but I am satisfied. I did it for my honour and prestige." Often burning or scarring with acid are the preferred weapons of the men committing such crimes. "The Progressive Women's Association, which assists attack victims, tracked 3,560 women who were hospitalized after being attacked at home with fire, gasoline or acid between 1994 and 1999," according to Constable. About half the victims died. Lawyer and women's activist Nahida Mahbooba Elahi states that "We deal with these cases every day, but I have seen very few convictions. The men say the wife didn't obey their orders, or was having relations with someone else. The police often say it is a domestic matter and refuse to pursue the case. Some judges even justify it and do not consider it murder." (Constable, "The Price of 'Honour.'") Such crimes are also rife in Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, where some 2,200 women are disfigured every year in acid attacks by jealous or estranged men. (Ellen Goodman, "How Long Before We Take the Honor out of Killing?," *The Washington Post* [in the *Guardian Weekly*, April 6-12, 2000.)

In August 1999, an international furore erupted when the Pakistani Senate rejected a resolution by former Prime Minister Benazhir Butto to condemn "honour" killings in the country. (See Zaffer Abbas, "Pakistan Fails to Condemn 'Honour' Killings", *BBC Online*, August 3, 1999.) In April 2000, the head of the Pakistani military regime, General Pervez Musharraf, pledged that his government would take strong measures to curb "honour" killings. "Such acts do not find a place in our religion or law," Musharraf stated. "Killing in the name of honour is murder, and it will be treated as such." Most observers were skeptical, however, that Musharraf's words would be followed up by committed actions. (See "Honour Killings Now Seen As Murder", *The Sydney Morning Herald* [from *The Telegraph* (UK)], April 24, 2000.)

While the victims of Pakistani "honour" killings are overwhelmingly female, tradition dictates that males involved in the "crimes" should face death as well. But the accused women are standardly killed first, giving men a chance to flee retribution. Moreover, targeted men can escape death by paying compensation to the family of the female victim, leading to an "'honour killing

industry' involving tribespeople, police and tribal mediators," which "provides many opportunities to make money, [or] obtain a woman in compensation," according to Amnesty International. The organization also states: "Reports abound about men who have killed other men in murders not connected with honour issues who then kill a woman of their own family ... to camouflage the initial murder as an honour killing." (Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Honour Killings of Girls and Women", September 1999.)

[**Note:** For more information on "honour" killings in Pakistan, contact the International Network for the Rights of Female Victims in Pakistan, P.O. Box 17202, Louisville, KY 40217, USA; e-mail: inrfvvp@inrfvvp.org.]

A poster condemning "honour" killings, produced by Kurdish Women Action Against Honour Killing.

Focus (2): Jordan

In Jordan, "honour" killings are sanctioned by law. According to Article 340 of the criminal code, "A husband or a close blood relative who kills a woman caught in a situation highly suspicious of adultery will be totally exempt from sentence." Article 98, meanwhile, guarantees a lighter sentence for male killers of female relatives who have committed an "act which is illicit in the eyes of the perpetrator." Julian Borger notes that "in practice, once a murder has been judged an 'honour killing,' the usual sentence is from three months to one year." (Julian Borger, "In Cold Blood," *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, November 16, 1997. See also "Four Men Sentenced to Year or Less for Brutal Jordan Honour Killings," Agence France-Presse dispatch, July 31, 1999; the perpetrators included a 19-year-old man, Hussein Suleiman, who "was accused of driving three times over his six-month-pregnant unmarried sister in a pick-up truck, despite her denials of immoral behaviour and pleas for help.") Ironically, as Borger notes, this legislation is "the result of Western influence in the Middle East," having arisen "out of a fusion between Egyptian tribal custom and the Napoleonic Code in 1810, after the French legions took Cairo." (Borger, "In Cold Blood.")

In a particularly tragic case in 1994, a handicapped 18-year-old girl, who had already served six months in jail (!) for becoming pregnant out of wedlock, was killed by her 17-year-old brother. A neighbour was quoted as saying the family "seemed relaxed, happy and satisfied after announcing the news that she was killed ..." (Rana Husseini, "18-year-old killed for 'family honor,'" *The Jordan Times*, September 19, 1994.) *Manchester Guardian Weekly* reporter Julian Borger described another typical case in 1997:

> One morning this summer, Rania Arafat's two aunts came to take her for a walk. They told their 21-year-old niece they had arranged a secret meeting with her boyfriend. She strolled with them through Gwiesmeh, a poor suburb where Amman's concrete sprawl peters out into desert. When the three women reached a patch of open land, the aunts suddenly stepped aside, leaving Arafat standing alone. She was shot four times in the back of the head at close range and once in the forehead. The gunman was her 17-year-old brother, Rami. ... Arafat's crime was to refuse an arranged marriage and elope with her Iraqi boyfriend. Rami is in jail, but is unlikely to be sentenced to more than a few months, especially as he is a minor, which is almost certainly why he was given the role of executioner. (Borger, "In Cold Blood.")

Rana Husseini, a journalist with The Jordan Times, *has exposed "honour" killings in her country.*

The Jordan Times estimated in 1994 that between 28 and 60 Jordanian women -- the difference between official police figures and commonly-cited estimates of the actual number -- die in "honour" killings every year (Rana Husseini, "Murder in the Name of Honour," October 6-7, 1994.) The death-toll may even run into the hundreds, with hundreds more women in perpetual hiding, fearful for their lives.

One positive sign is the staunch opposition to the practice displayed by the regime of King Abdullah II, who took power after the death of his father King Hussein in 1999. "The king has backed legislation to put honor killings on a par with other murders and has encouraged public support to change the law. ... The fact that the royal palace has taken such a stance has translated into tougher sentencing and investigations of honor killings by the courts and police. The king's support has also encouraged activist groups to speak out more strongly against honor killings." (Stephen Franklin, "Jordan Begins to Punish Practice of 'Honor Killings'", *The Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 2000.)

Such efforts continue to encounter staunch resistance from conservative elements, however. In early February 2000, the Jordanian parliament "took only three minutes to reject a draft law calling for the cancellation of Article 340." The country's leading political party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), denounced the draft law as an effort to "destroy our Islamic, social and family values, by stripping the man from his humanity, [and] not allowing him to get angry when he is surprised by [i.e., surprises] his wife committing adultery." Ten days later, in an unprecedented action, some 5,000 protesters flooded the streets of Amman demanding the repeal of the penal code provision allowing "honour" killings. The protesters included "Prince Ali, who is King Abdullah's brother and his personal guard, as well as Prince Gazi, the king's advisor for tribal affairs."

Focus (3): Palestine/Israel

"Honour" killings are also regularly reported in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the Canadian women's magazine *Chatelaine*, Sally Armstrong described the fate of one victim:

> Flirting was a costly mistake for Samera. She was only 15 years old when her neighbours in Salfeet, a small Palestinian town on the West Bank, saw her chatting with a young man without a male chaperone. Her family's honour was at stake; a marriage was quickly arranged. By 16, she had a child. Five years later, when she could stand the bogus marriage no longer, she bolted. In a place where gossip is traded like hard currency, and a girl's chastity is as public as her name, Samera's actions were considered akin to making a date with the devil. According to the gossips, she went from man to man as she moved from place to place. Finally, last July [1999], her family caught up with her. A few days later she was found stuffed down a well. Her neck had been broken. Her father told the coroner she'd committed suicide. But everyone on the grapevine knew that Samera was a victim of honour killing, murdered by her own family because her actions brought dishonour to their name. ... Here in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority law allows honour killing. Samera's parents are walking the streets of their neighbourhood with their heads held high, relieved that the family honour has been restored. (Armstrong, "Honour's Victims", *Chatelaine*, March 2000.)

Twenty-two other women died in the Palestinian territories in the same year as Samera. The killings often spill over into neighbouring Israel, as with the killing of "40-year-old Ittihaj Hassoon" near Haifa in 1995:

> On Oct. 16, 1995, ... Hassoon got out of a car with her younger brother on a main street of Daliat al Carmel, a small Israeli Druze village ... Over 10 years before, Ittihaj had committed the unpardonable sin of marrying a non-Druze man. Now, after luring her back to her home village with promises that all was forgiven and her safety assured, her brother finally had the chance to publicly cleanse the blot on the family name with the spilling of her blood. In broad daylight in front of witnesses, he pulled out a knife and began to stab her. The witnesses quickly swelled to a crowd of more than 100 villagers who -- approving, urging him on -- chanted, ululated, danced in the street. Within minutes, Hassoon lay dead on the ground while the crowd cheered her killer, "Hero, hero! You are a real man!" (Suzanne Zima, "When Brothers Kill Sisters," *The Gazette* [Montreal], April 17, 1999. See also Walter Rodgers, "Honor Killings: A Brutal Tribal Custom", *CNN World News*, December 7, 1995.)

According to Zima, "Ibrahim had agonized over his decision: 'She is my sister -- my flesh and blood -- I am a human being. I didn't want to kill her. I didn't want to be in this situation. They [community members] push[ed] me to make this decision. I know what they expect from me. If I do this, they look at me like a hero, a clean guy, a real man. If I don't kill my sister, the people would look at me like I am a small person.'"

Who is responsible?

"Honour" killings of women (and occasionally their male "partners in crime") reflect longstanding patriarchal-tribal traditions. In a "bizarre duality," women are viewed "on the one hand as fragile creatures who need protection and on the other as evil Jezebels from whom society needs protection." Patriarchal tradition "casts the male as the sole protector of the female so he must have total control of her. If his protection is violated, he loses honour because either he failed to protect her or he failed to bring her up correctly." (Armstrong, "Honour's Victims.") Clearly, the vulnerability of women around the world to this type of violence will only be reduced when these

patriarchal mindsets are challenged and effectively confronted.

As many of the examples cited in this case study indicate, state authorities frequently ignore their obligation to prosecute "honour" killings. They should be viewed as "co-conspirators" in such crimes, and held accountable by organizations such as the United Nations.

The typical "honour" killer is a man, usually the father, husband, or brother of the victim. Frequently teenage brothers are selected by their family or community to be the executioners, because their sentences will generally be lighter than those handed down to adults (as was the case with the killing of Rania Arafat in Jordan, cited above). "Talking and writing about this atrocity is a good start," wrote Marina Sanchez-Rashid in a letter to *The Jordan Times*, "but I believe that action to start treating and judging the men who commit these crimes as the first degree murderers that they are, as well as to protect the victims as they deserve to be protected, is needed as soon as possible." (Quoted in Patrick Goodenough, "Middle East Women Campaign Against 'Family Honor' Killings," Conservative News Service, March 8, 1999.)

As with **witch-hunts**, however, "honour" killings also need to be viewed from a broader societal perspective; they derive from expectations of female behaviour that are held and perpetuated by men and women alike. Women's role has often been underappreciated. Occasionally, they participate directly in the killings. More frequently, they play a leading role in preparing the ground. In Palestine, for example, the anthropologist Ilsa Glaser has noted that "women acted as instigators and collaborators in these murders, unleashing a torrent of gossip that spurred the accusations." (Quoted in *The Calgary Herald*, April 20, 2000.) Jordanian women running for parliament have also been "reluctant to break the taboo" on condemning and prosecuting "honour" killings; one told the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* that "This is our tradition. We do not want to encourage women who break up the family." (Borger, "In Cold Blood.") In the Ramle district of Israel, police commander Yifrach Duchovey lamented his inability to secure the cooperation of community members in investigating "honour" killings: "Even other women -- the mothers -- won't cooperate with us. Sometimes the women co-operate with the men who commit the murders. ... A woman may think it is OK -- maybe she thinks the victim deserves it." (Quoted in Zima, "When Brothers Kill Sisters.")

---

(2) Blood Feuds

Summary

The institution of the "blood feud" is the little-known but highly-destructive male counterpart to "honour" killings of women. Every year, at least a thousand men and boys die in blood-feud killings in Albania alone; the lives of tens of thousands more are spent in isolation and perpetual fear. Women and girls are virtually never targeted.

Focus (4): The Balkans

The Balkans, along with the Caucasus region, Sicily, and Corsica, are the areas where the "blood

feud" still holds greatest sway today. (In the past, the institution was also prominent in Scotland -- and in the U.S. region of Appalachia, as with the famous feud between the Hatfields and McCoys.)

The institution of the blood feud is most virulent in the *malësi* (mountain regions) of northern Albania, spilling over into the territory that is today the Yugoslav province of **Kosovo**. The institution has its roots in the *Kanun* (canon) of Lek Dukagjin, a legal code compiled in the fifteenth century that enshrined "many customary practices which went back much further into the past," according to Noel Malcolm. Malcolm writes that

> The importance of the *Kanun* to the ordinary life of the Albanians of Kosovo and the Malësi can hardly be exaggerated. ... One leading scholar has summed up the basic principles of the *Kanun* as follows. The foundation of it all is the principle of personal honour. Next comes the equality of persons. From these flows a third principle, the freedom of each to act in accordance with his own honour, within the limits of the law, without being subject to another's command. And the fourth principle is the word of honour, the *besë* ... which creates a situation of inviolable trust. Gjeçov's version of the Kanun ["the fullest and most authoritative text"] decrees: "An offence to honour is not paid for with property, but by spilling of blood or a magnanimous pardon." And it specifies the ways of dishonouring a man, of which the most important are calling him a liar in front of other men; insulting his wife; taking his weapons; or violating his hospitality. ... This was very much a man's world. ... Women had their honour, but it existed through, and was defended by, men. (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* [London: Papermac, 1998], pp. 18-19.)

The blood feud was the result of perceived violations of this code of "honour." It "is one of the most archaic features of northern Albanian society," notes Malcolm. "... What lies at the heart of the blood-feud is a concept alien to the modern mind, and more easily learned about from the plays of Aeschylus than from the works of modern sociologists: the aim is not punishment of a murderer, but satisfaction of the blood of the person murdered – or, initially, satisfaction of one's own honour when it has been polluted. If retribution were the real aim, then only those personally responsible for the original crime or insult would be potential targets; but instead, honour is cleansed by killing any male member of the family of the original offender, and the spilt blood of that victim then cries out to its own family for purification." The blood feud granted blanket exemption to females, the killing of whom was seen as a profound violation of a *man's* personal honour. "The strongest taboo of all concerned the murder of women, and any woman could walk through raging gunfire in the knowledge that she would never be shot at." (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, pp. 19-20.)

In his study of the blood-feud in the Yugoslav province of Montenegro, Christopher Boehm gives a vivid picture of the surreal lengths to which this gender-selectivity is carried:

> In the old days, women were free to come and go as they chose under feuding conditions, since taking their blood did nothing to help the blood score and also counted as a dishonor, morally speaking. Thus, their normal daily activities could continue. But men were sorely pressed when it came to doing any work other than herding, which allowed them to stay under cover with a rifle ready at all times. In 1965 [at the time of field research] it was for this reason that women still did so much of the heavier work in the fields, so I was told by the slightly apologetic Montenegrin

> "male chauvinists," who viewed this as a once-necessary custom formed in an earlier era. ... Whatever might happen to the men during a feud, the women were always free to keep the household economy going because the rules of feuding were taken so seriously by the opposing party.
>
> With respect to the sanctity of women, it was even possible for them to enter directly into combat during the first stage of a feud, when the killer's clan shut itself in and the victim's clan attacked the fortified stone farmhouse, which had loopholes [for firing rifles] everywhere. With no fear of being harmed, women could carry straw and firebrands up to the house to try to burn it. Also, women of a besieged house could go outside at night carrying torches, to light up the enemy so that their own men could shoot at them. This exemplifies the strength of these particular rules: to shoot a woman was a source of shame (*sramota*) for the entire clan. (Boehm, *Blood Revenge: The Anthropology of Feuding in Montenegro and Other Tribal Societies* [Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984], pp. 111-12.)

The death-toll exacted by the blood feud has historically been heavy for Balkans men. "At the end of the Ottoman period it was estimated that 19 percent of all adult male deaths in the Malësi were blood-feud murders, and that in an area of Western Kosovo with 50,000 inhabitants, 600 died in these feuds every year." (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, p. 20.) In Albania, the feuds gave rise to another enduring institution: the "sworn virgin," women who "cut their hair short, wear trousers and drink fiery local brandy with the men." According to Julius Strauss, "The tradition of the sworn virgins was born of necessity in this barren land racked by war, blood feuds and intense poverty. In times past when the male line of a family was wiped out, such a virgin was entitled to take over as the head of the family." (Strauss, "The Virgins Who Live Like Men," *The Daily Telegraph* [UK], February 6, 1997.)

Blood feuds generally declined in the Balkans after the Second World War, as the authoritarian rulers of Albania (Enver Hoxha) and Yugoslavia (Josip Broz Tito) clamped down on practices that were seen as a legacy of the feudal past. In Albania, however, the blood feud has returned with -- one might say -- a vengeance. It has also spread from the traditional heartland of the Malësi to Tirana, the capital, and to the south of the country.

The origins of the current blood-feud crisis in Albania date to the collapse of the communist regime in 1991, and the weakness of the quasi-democratic government that replaced it. From 1992 to 1996, "press reports in Tirana" spoke of "more than 5,000 murders linked to vendettas in the past four years." (Branko Jolis, "Honour Killing Makes a Comeback," *The Guardian* [UK], August 14, 1996.) It is worth noting that this rate of approximately 1,250 men killed in blood feuds annually is slightly greater than the number of known "honour" killings of women in Pakistan -- in a country with about 1/35th the population. Estimates of fatalities are made difficult by the fact that many blood-feud murders go unreported. As one Albanian clan leader told *The New York Times*, "People don't want to report killings to the police because then the accused would be protected by the state in prison instead of being available to kill." (Jane Perlez, "Blood Feuds Draining a Fierce Corner of Albania," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1998.)

In March 1997, the post-communist regime was rocked by "the collapse of enormous, government-endorsed pyramid investment schemes. The public looted army weapons depots as furious investors clashed with security forces. Roughly 1 million firearms are said to be in circulation in a Balkan nation of only 3.2 million." (Michael J. Jordan, "In Albania, A Return to 'Eye for Eye'", *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 7, 1997.) Between 1,600 and 5,000

Albanians died in the ensuing six months, and "revenge killings skyrocketed." (Perlez, "Blood Feuds.") In 1998, Gjin Mekshi, a leader of the Committee of Blood Reconciliation in the town of Shkoder, stated that "In some families there are no men left," although "So far no women have been killed." (Owen Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children in Hiding to Escape Blood Feuds," *The Guardian* [UK], September 30, 1998.)

In addition to the thousands killed, tens of thousands of men live in fear and seclusion as a result of the blood feuds. Mihaela Rodina cites estimates by Albanian non-governmental organizations that "the men of some 25,000 families in northern Albania live thus, never going out of the house for fear of being victims of ... feuding. The women, who are unaffected by the *kanun*, are left alone to provide for the family's needs." (Rodina, "Blood Code Rules in Northern Albania," Agence France-Presse dispatch, June 30, 1999.) In 1997, *The Christian Science Monitor* interviewed one man in Shkoder who "ha[d] been homebound for six years ... The man says he dreams of escaping with a visa to America. 'This is actually worse than prison,' he says, standing in his fenced-in garden. 'At least in prison I'd know that one day I could get out.'" Even school-age boys must remain cloistered: "up to 6,000 children [were] said to be hiding" in 1998. (Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children.")

The resurgence of the blood feud has led Gjin Mekshi and others to join forces in an attempt to reconcile feuding families. "The Committee of Blood Reconciliation has 3,000 members in Albania and is pressing the government to accept its arbitrations as part of the legal process. 'I have a good reputation and my father was a man of good reputation, too,' says Mr. Mekshi. 'I am approached to arrange truces by those who are in hiding and dare not go out during the day. When we agree a deal, we sanctify the arrangement with a procession led by the local priest." (Bowcott, "Thousands of Albanian Children.") Albanian Radio reported in August 2000 that "Seven hundred and fifty-six blood feuds have been reconciled, allowing the people involved to put an end to self-confinement at home." (BBC Worldwide Monitoring, August 10, 2000.) In neighbouring Kosovo, a similar campaign was mounted in the 1990s by Anton Çetta. (Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, p. 20.) Nonetheless, according to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, the success of such campaigns has been "only limited." ("Albanian Blood Feuds Affect 210,000," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 11, 2000.) "The feuds have very deep roots," said Perlat Ramgaj, mayor of the town of Koplik. "They're ingrained on our souls, and in this period of transition people feel free to do just about anything." (Quoted in Helena Smith, "Lost Land Where Vengeance is Written in Blood," *The Guardian* [UK], February 12, 1995.)

[Further reading] [Back to main] [Back to top]