

Testimonies on Honor Crimes

By Abir Hamdar

Ten years ago, a young girl from a small village in the Bekaa valley was shot to death to 'cleanse the family honor'. Twenty-five men from the victim's clan witnessed the scene. *Al Raida* meets one of those men – who happens to be the girl's uncle on her mother's side - and he recounts in detail what took place. This is what 75-year old Abu-Mufid (initials A.A) said.

It all happened when Najiyeh, my sister's daughter came to her mother and told her she was pregnant. The girl, who was nineteen at the time, told her mother that her first cousin, on her father's side, had raped her ... (pause). She said that he raped her when she went to visit his wife, who was not at home at the time. My sister lost her mind. The cousin Najiyeh was talking about was married and had three children. He was also twenty years her senior. But all that was not important. It was the girl's belly that had begun to show.

What month was she in?

(Laughs)... I don't know. As long as it takes for a pregnant woman's belly to show. You think that mattered? We are talking here of family honor. You understand what honor is ... don't you? (drinks tea, then continues). I tell you my sister lost her mind. She rushed to her husband, Abu Mohammed, who is also my cousin, and told him everything. You cannot imagine what happened to him when he heard the news. My sister told me it was like a horse had been whipped ... (asks his wife to fill his cup of tea again). And Najiyeh's brothers ... (shakes his head)

Najiyeh's cousin denied the story. He said he didn't know anything about it. A whole dispute broke out. Abu-Mohammed and his five brothers were screaming at one another. My sister had asked me to accompany Abu-Mohammed and his sons. She feared something would happen to them. Everyone was shouting at one another. Someone suggested we summon Najiyeh and ask her to recount what happened. We decided to meet the following day in a field adjacent to our homes. Abu-Mohammed and his sons went home. My sister said they didn't sleep all night. No one slept that night.

And Najiyeh?

She probably slept in the toilet. I don't know. That is not important. The next day...

What day of the week was it?

Ah, sister I don't remember... (Continues)

The next day I met Abu-Mohammed, his four sons and Najiyeh in the field. We were twenty-five men in all: Abu Mohammed's brothers, their eldest sons, and two of my brothers. The (accused) cousin didn't come, but his father asked Najiyeh to tell everyone what had happened. When Najiyeh said she was pregnant, blood rose in our eyes, and when she finished her story she left the gathering and sat aside.

Did Najiyeh cry or plead forgiveness?

I tell you there was blood in men's eyes.

Oum Mufid: You never utter a word when there is blood in men's eyes.

Abu Mufid: After the girl sat aside, we talked for a while ... (pause)

What did you talk about?

We wondered whether the girl was lying since Najiyeh's cousin was a very respectable man. But then we decided that even if he hadn't committed the rape, he should marry Najiyeh, since as her cousin he was supposed to save the family honor. The bridegroom's father asked one of his sons to slaughter a lamb for the occasion. He then invited us for lunch to celebrate the peace we had reached. Abu Mohammed asked Najiyeh to go home, but when she walked a few steps away from us, Najiyeh's eldest brother

The foolish woman shamed us ... Damn such sisters



Mohammed (36 years) took a gun hidden in the pocket of his *abaya* (points to the right side of his *abaya* to indicate where the gun was placed) and shot the girl thirty times. When Mohammed fired the last shot he said addressing the others, “you don’t have to slaughter a lamb. Have this one for lunch ...” (Abu Mufid laughs)

Didn’t anyone try to stop him?

We all wanted it to happen. We were all thinking about it. We were all happy. In our family we have a contract signed by all men in the family which says that if a girl taints the family honor her family has to ‘cleans’ it. If they don’t do it, another relative will have to kill her.

You mean if Mohammed didn’t kill Najiyeh one of you would have done it?

Abu-Mohammed would never have let us reach this point. He was a very proud man. And if the girl wasn’t killed, her other sisters would never have married.

But Mohammed also killed an unborn child?

(Laughs sarcastically). Sister I tell you we are talking of honor.

What happened after that?

We went home.

And Najiyeh’s body?

I don’t remember who buried it, but it was not Abu-Mohammed or his sons. The family never touches the body after they have cleansed their honor.

Abu-Mufid’s wife interrupts. They also didn’t wash the body before burying it. It was so battered they couldn’t wash it.

What about Najiyeh’s mother and sisters?

Oum-Mufid: We didn’t scream or cry. It is *Ayb* (shameful) to cry when honor is cleansed.

Was there a funeral?

Oum Mufid: (Shocked at the question) How can you have a funeral? No one even pronounces the girl’s name after that. What happened to the cousin?

Abu-Mufid: He ran away, not because of Najiyeh. (Abu Mufid refuses to elaborate) I don’t know why he left.

Oum Mufid (excitedly): But Najiyeh’s brother Mohammed was killed in a car accident. It was a year after Najiyeh was shot. He was going to Beirut with his fiancée. (Asks her husband) Were they going to buy gold? (Doesn’t wait for Abu-Mufid to answer). Another man and his fiancée were in the car. They all died on the spot ... pause The family cried and wailed for months ... pause (Asks Abu-Mufid) Isn’t it *haram* in our religion (Islam) to kill Najiyeh? I mean the girl didn’t do anything. She was raped.

Abu Mufid: In religion maybe ...

Did the police arrest anyone after Najiyeh’s death?

Abu-Mufid (abruptly) What police? There was no government.

Now that years have passed do you regret that you didn’t stop them?

I don’t regret anything. Let me tell you something very important: “When one’s honor is tainted, blood is shed whereas when blood is shed, honor is not lost.

I don’t understand?

There is nothing to understand. It is like this.

Do you still believe in cleansing one’s honor?

Of course. If honor is not cleansed, people will point at you

Najiyeh’s eldest brother Mohammed shot her thirty times. When Mohammed fired the last shot he said addressing the others, “you don’t have to slaughter a lamb. Have this one for lunch ...”

all your life. If you are fighting with someone, the first thing he’ll bring up is this unfinished business.

But things have changed. There is now a government?

(smiles) Some still do kill ...

Oum Mufid: Everyone kills for honor. Najiyeh’s story is nothing. Abu-Mufid should tell you about Inaya. Maybe I can take you to her sister. (Looks questionably at Abu Mufid). She is still alive. She will tell you about Inaya.

Inaya’s sister, Oum Khairallah, is a 62-year old woman who lives alone with her daughter in a small house across Abu-Mufid’s house. On the way, Oum Mufid says Oum Khairallah is not originally from the same village as theirs. She says Oum Khairallah’s daughter is 35-years old and has not yet married. The old woman also says her brother’s wife had just died and she’s thinking of telling him about Oum Khairallah’s daughter. When we arrived, Oum Mufid told Oum-Khairallah that ‘Al-Raida’ is a magazine that likes to learn stories about women.

Oum Khairallah: Damn women and their stories.

Oum Mufid: “Tell them Inaya’s story?”

Oum Khairallah invites us to share with her the ‘boiled *Kishek*’ she is eating. She then recounts that “foolish woman’s” story, which according to Oum Khayrallah happened “15 or 17 years ago”. Here is what she said.

Oum Khairallah (initials Z.M): The foolish woman was forty years old. She was married to my cousin who was a very good man. They had two boys that were beautiful like the moon. The foolish woman looked at another man. He was the Mukhtar’s son who was also married. The cousin of Inaya’s husband – who is also our cousin- came to my brother-in-law and told him that Inaya’s conduct was not good. The poor man (*al muatar*) didn’t believe it at first and told his cousin



that he hadn't seen anything bad from Inaya. But the cousin told him that if he didn't divorce Inaya, he would kill him because he was tainting the family honor. Inaya's husband divorced her and she came back to our house. My father was deceased, and we had only one brother. We were seven girls. Inaya was the sixth. I was five years older.

Oum Khairallah: My brother and his wife lived with my mother. We had a big house. My brother couldn't stand the foolish woman's sight. Because he had three small babies to bring up and he couldn't always think of what Inaya had done, he asked my mother to poison her.

Where you with them at the time?

Yes ... I was married and had children. But when Inaya was divorced, all my married sisters came home to stay with our family. The family gathers to mourn the disaster in the same manner they do when someone dies.

How did Inaya behave when she came back?

Like a shameful woman. How do you want her to behave?

Did she try to explain things?

We didn't ask her. What is there to explain?

But maybe she was innocent of the accusation?

Oum Khairallah: Ah, no, no, she wasn't innocent!

How do you know, did you see her with the *Mukhtar's* son?

I would have killed her if I did ...

(pause). We told my mother to do what my brother asked her to do.

Where was your mother to get the poison?

I don't know about that ... But my mother told Inaya that her brother wanted to poison her. A few days later, Inaya ran off with the *Mukhtar's* son.

Oum Mufid interrupts: Her brother was so angry that he broke his mother's two legs.

Oum Khairallah: When Inaya ran away, some people tried to improve matters between the *Mukhtar's* family and ours. My brother was almost convinced. You know they are richer than us, but when they brought Inaya and her new husband to our place, my brother went mad and stabbed her in the back with a knife. The foolish woman didn't die. They took her to the hospital and she got better. At home, we prayed that she would die.

Did your mother share your feelings?

She cried all the time ... (pause) we didn't let people see her cry. A month later my oldest sister was passing by the house that Inaya and the *Mukhtar's* son lived in, after she left the hospital. My sister saw the foolish woman sitting on the terrace under the sun. She came home feeling very angry.

Why was she angry?

After all that happened you don't want her to be angry? (continues). Inaya was immoral. Sitting in the sun as if

nothing had happened.

Where did you want her to sit?

In the grave ... (pause. Oum Mufid shakes her head in agreement). We were having breakfast when my sister arrived. I was still at my parent's home. My sister didn't say a thing. She just removed my brother's headband and wore it.

Oum Mufid interrupts: When you remove the headband from a person's head it implies that he is not man enough.

Oum Khairallah: My sister then told my brother she would become the man of the family and would kill Inaya. My brother wouldn't allow that. He went to the field and dug a grave and put his headband in it.

Oum Mufid: A man who wants to cleanse the family honor always removes his headband and keeps it in the grave the girl is to be buried in, and does not retrieve it until the act is done.

Oum Khairallah: My brother then went to Inaya and stabbed her with a knife. I don't know how many times. When he came with the news we gave trilling cries of joy (*zalghatna*). But the police came and took my brother.

Oum Khairallah's daughter: One of the family members knew an influential man and he tried to help him. He knew the judge who was on the case. When my uncle went to court, the judge addressed him saying: "You didn't mean to kill your sister. You only lost your mind when you saw her?" My uncle didn't know that he

just had to agree and would be set free. Instead, he said he went to Inaya's house with the intention of killing her. The judge asked him again, you know to save his neck, but my uncle insisted. So the judge got angry because my uncle didn't understand that he was trying to help him and sentenced him to nine years imprisonment.

And after that?

Oum Khairallah: Nothing. Nine years later he got out.

Is he still alive?

Oum Khairallah: No he died two years ago. He was like the moon. And his sons are like the moon.

Didn't you feel anything when Inaya died?

Oum Khairallah: The foolish woman shamed us.

She was your sister...

spits ... Damn such sisters

Oum Khairallah's daughter: Our neighbor eloped a while ago. When I see her I feel so ashamed as if it is I who had committed the sin. You can imagine how they felt about what my aunt did.

Oum Mufid: Yes it is true. I cannot stand the woman. I feel like I have committed the shame.

We are talking here of family honor. You understand what honor is ... don't you?

Al-Raida thanked the three women for their cooperation and left them talking about the shame they feel when they see the neighbor who eloped.