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### Honor Crimes: A Question of Honor, Culture, and Humanity

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**Honor Crimes: A Question of Honor, Culture, and Humanity**

*A Critical Discourse Analysis of Arab and Western ideologies in the Middle East surrounding honor crimes and the results of the effects it has on social and political changes.*

Nadia N. Almusleh

A Thesis  
submitted to the Department of International Studies  
in partial fulfillment for the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

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Advised by Dr. Sadia Saeed, Ph. D, Professor of Sociology

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## Dedications

*This thesis is dedicated to Israa Ghrayeb, Henriette Karra, Ahlam, and the countless other nameless women who have had to pay the ultimate price in the name of “honor”*

*“I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Gandhi, Mahatma, and Louis Fischer. *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work and Ideas*. Vintage Books, 2002.

## **Abstract**

Honor crimes, femicide, domestic abuse and violence are widely prevalent in patriarchal societies. Middle Eastern cultures deeply value protecting the chastity and honor of women. The traditional images of women and the notions of honor and shame are consistently used as justifications for violence and killings. This is not attributable to a single culture or religion. It is rather a manifestation of societal norms around gender-based violence. Feminist activism against honor crimes in the Middle East within the last decade has increasingly received social media attention. However, the impact of this social media activism on government intervention has yet to be evaluated. Existing literature has primarily focused on textual analysis of honor crimes and the construction of gender patriarchy. Consequently, the relationship between honor crimes and actual government intervention has been relatively unexamined.

This thesis will offer a critical analysis of the presumptions behind honor crimes, while also incorporating a comparative study between case studies of recent honor killings in the Levant region, and the effects of these impactful honor crimes. This paper draws on social media posts and case study analyses to examine Arab news' discourse, discourse of the international community, and the political implications of online activism against honor crimes and the sociopolitical effects it has in the Middle East. It analyzes social media responses of the Arab community towards three honor crimes that happened within 2017 to 2020 and compares it to the responses of the international community by conducting discourse analysis in addition to qualitative critical discourse and content analysis.

**Key Terms:** Honor Crimes, Gender based violence, femicide, Jordan, Palestine, Israa Ghrayeb, Henriette Karra, Ahlam, Article 340, Honor, domestic violence, honor killing

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# INTRODUCTION

Humanity faces a multitude of challenges when it comes to addressing the ethical and moral standards of what is inalienable and what can be conveyable. Amongst the countless concerns that are internationally debatable are infamous honor crimes that are more prevalent than ever. Honor crimes in all their forms are a practice that are very much alive and present in several parts of the world; yet the way they are addressed is questionable due to the lack of protection women's rights in Middle Eastern societies. Human rights violations against specific groups of people and vulnerable communities in general are already turned a blind eye by the international community, and although Muslim women's rights have been a trending topic within the recent decade, any issues relating to the violence, oppression, and censorship of women, is almost always pushed even further down the list especially when it comes to national or political movements. Violence against women is a topic that is consistently denied attention amongst international organizations, governments, and human rights groups while millions of young girls and women face the cruel reality of violence, torture, and even death. Honor crimes, although not exclusive to any one part of the world, tend to be mostly associated in the Middle East, especially within predominantly Islamic countries.

Honor and gender-based violence is not a contemporary phenomenon. It is a practice that has taken place throughout the course of history. All over the world, women are murdered in the name of honor or contempt. There are many forms of gender-based violence<sup>2</sup> that can be categorized as honor crimes and those include violence against women through acts of

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<sup>2</sup> Elakkary, S., Franke, B., Shokri, D. *et al.* Honor crimes: review and proposed definition. *Forensic Sci Med Pathol* 10, 76–82 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12024-013-9455-1>

domestic and sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, torture, and ultimately death by honor. These are all justifiable acts in certain patriarchal honor-based societies where protecting the family honor is of utmost preeminence. Women are considered to be the upholders of familial honor according to custom and tradition, which is why women are almost always the victims of such atrocities. These crimes are usually done to women who have brought “dishonor” to their families, and what is considered a dishonorable act is dependent on the surrounding circumstances. The most common cause of these crimes and murders are due to sexual misconduct, infidelity, prohibited and inappropriate relationships. “Cultural norms and practices including the legal practices related to honor crimes support the practice of killing women for sexual misconduct and excuse perpetrators of the crimes from punishment.”<sup>3</sup> Essentially, any perpetrator of an honor crime is typically excused or granted leniency under the law. Each country has their own legal penal code of how every crime is interpreted by Islamic law and the particular country.

The white cloth and blood stains, virginity testing, and the proof of innocence as a question of honor are devices meant to ascertain the chastity of a woman. A common affiliation in Middle Eastern communities centers the honor of a family to be in the hands of a woman’s purity. As the world continuously unfolds and develops into an ever more interconnected global society thanks to the internet and modern-day technology, there have been more spaces for people and nations to connect at an astonishing rate. Through the more recent years of media becoming more accessible and the establishment of a socialized virtual world, all forms

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<sup>3</sup> Kulwicki , Anahid Devartanian. “THE PRACTICE OF HONOR CRIMES: A GLIMPSE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD.” *Taylor & Francis*, 9 July 2009, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01612840252825491?casa\\_token=2RH84yEAdjcAAAAA%3AMlsljwb0j-A28w--i1MuhvXg3yKVfj2SPv9gb7e4C7fSY5fyWuHLJte55CrDjJENJ2ZtB2i0Q](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01612840252825491?casa_token=2RH84yEAdjcAAAAA%3AMlsljwb0j-A28w--i1MuhvXg3yKVfj2SPv9gb7e4C7fSY5fyWuHLJte55CrDjJENJ2ZtB2i0Q).

of media, in the Middle East in particular, have drawn attention to the surge of this phenomena of honor killings, gender-based violence, and censorship which has in turn created considerable controversy within the society as the values and principles of the Middle East have been put into question. This has ultimately led to the unveiling of the darker conservative and patriarchal practices which has gained international criticism.

However, with this new globalized world alongside the rise of online social media, has created a double-edged sword in the Arab world. Alongside the rise of social platforms and online campaigns, there is digital activism that has given Arab feminists a voice. Arab feminists in the Middle East have become increasingly vocal throughout the global stage within the last decade, and although this can be seen as a positive notion, it is considered to be a very dangerous act, which has led to a mass violation of women's rights as well as gender-based violence throughout the region.

This thesis focuses on the Levant region of the Middle East, more specifically the countries of Jordan, the West Bank of occupied Palestine, and Israel. By examining three specific case studies through various media and social media platforms, this thesis will examine different ideological discourses surrounding the phenomena of honor crimes by addressing the differences between Arab news discourses and the discourse of the international community. The specific case studies in question will be those of Ahlam from Jordan, Israa Ghayeb from the west bank of Palestine, and Henriette Khara from Israel. This will then identify the different discourses amongst Arabs about honor crimes, and lastly analyze how these results impact state policy and legislative change. I will focus on case studies, statistics, reporting, and social media posts, nonviolent/social media movements, and hashtags which will

enable me to structure the formulation of these socio-political effects in these regions (Jordan, West Bank/Palestine, Israel) of the Middle East.

Ultimately, the data collected through various social media platforms answers the effects of feminist social movements and women's activism in the Middle East and the societal impacts it's had, while also examining legislative change, if any. If honor crimes are considered a violation of human rights and violence against women that need to be addressed, are there religious, cultural, social, or economical classifications that justify these crimes? Honor crimes recently, post Arab Spring, received social media attention and it has ultimately led to some form of political and legal reform.

The operationalized data set used within this thesis is comparing various social and historical media discourses on the honor crime case studies to make evident a historical shift and a development in culture, society, and legislation. This will also highlight what is considered to be a violation of human rights in contrast to religious, cultural, traditional Arab norms. Honor crimes and violent crimes against women are rarely documented and tried in the legal systems in the Middle East. To understand the cultural and societal roles behind honor-based crimes, it is important to understand the legal structure of each respective country as it will provide a window into understanding the framework, if any, in which these crimes are just.

## **Jordan<sup>4</sup>**

To begin the analysis of the countries that will be empirically analyzed throughout this paper, the first case study will be the country of Jordan. The Jordanian legal system is

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<sup>4</sup> Almusleh, N. (2019). *Women's Rights Laws: The West vs. the Middle East* [unpublished final paper for Law 700: Comparative Law]. University of San Francisco.

somewhat similar to the United States legal system as it comprises three independent and separate branches of government; the constitution, the court establishment clause of 1951, Islamic and ecclesiastical laws in addition to a civil and criminal code<sup>5</sup>. Jordan is a hereditary monarchy with a parliamentary system with a mixed legal system of civil law, customary law and Sharia (Islamic) law and the Jordanian constitution outlines the different perspectives of the law as well as the functions of the powers of the state. The Jordanian court system is unique as it does not use judicial review, since it is a civil law country, it is based off an inquisitorial system. The role of a judge is essential and even more so involved than the role that a lawyer plays.

The Jordanian government prides itself on its education system as it ensures equal access to both women and men which creates a strong potential for the government's economic, social, and political development.<sup>6</sup> However there is a real gap between constitutional rights and cultural and social norms that limit the advancement of women as well as the protection of rights of women.<sup>7</sup> One of the most persistent issues that remains is violence against women due to the societal pressures. of disallowing for advancement and change. Anahid Devartanian Kuliwcki's 2009 research study gives us a glimpse of how domestic violence crimes are classified in the country of Jordan. Kuliwicki highlights how any form of killing is prohibited both legally and religiously. Any form of killing is considered a serious crime in Arab Muslim society and is severely punishable by traditional Islamic and civil laws.

“The maximum penalty for first-degree murder in Jordan is death; penalty for second-

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<sup>5</sup> “Jordanian Legal System.” U.S. Embassy in Jordan, [jo.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/attorneys/jordanian-legal-system/](http://jo.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/local-resources-of-u-s-citizens/attorneys/jordanian-legal-system/).

<sup>6</sup> “Gender Equality and Female Empowerment: Jordan.” U.S. Agency for International Development, 14 Feb. 2019, [www.usaid.gov/jordan/gender-equality-womens-empowerment](http://www.usaid.gov/jordan/gender-equality-womens-empowerment).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

degree murder is 15 years. However, current laws make distinctions between honor crimes and other forms of crimes. Criminal laws in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon that involve honor crimes allow for leniency or excuse from penalty the men who commit such crimes.”<sup>8</sup>

The current legal framework for the protection of women in Jordan ratified in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992<sup>9</sup>, but with reservations granting women full equal rights. The two criminal laws that address crimes against women and are for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault are The Family Protection from domestic violence law and the Anti-trafficking law respectively. However, there are loopholes to these laws because their definition of domestic violence is vague<sup>10</sup>. The human trafficking law provides a more comprehensive method of measure that addresses human trafficking. Article 292 of the Penal Code Law criminalizes rape; however, rape must be perpetrated by an individual other than a spouse<sup>11</sup>. The criminal laws currently in place by the Jordanian criminal system, although might seem progressive in contrast to other Arab countries in the region, are still considered to be noteworthy achievements. However, there is still so much to be done to make change to the current legal system.

Jordan has begun the process of reforming these laws with legal reform, and

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<sup>8</sup> Kulwicki , Anahid Devartanian. “THE PRACTICE OF HONOR CRIMES: A GLIMPSE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD.” *Taylor & Francis*, 9 July 2009, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01612840252825491?casa\\_token=2RH84yEAAdjcAAAAA%3AMlsljwb0j-A28w--i1MuhvXg3yKVfj2SPv9gb7e4C7fSY5fyWuHLJte55CrDjJENJ2ZtB2i0Q](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01612840252825491?casa_token=2RH84yEAAdjcAAAAA%3AMlsljwb0j-A28w--i1MuhvXg3yKVfj2SPv9gb7e4C7fSY5fyWuHLJte55CrDjJENJ2ZtB2i0Q).

<sup>9</sup> “FOCUS ON: WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN JORDAN’S LEGISLATION BY IM SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT PARTNER.” Jordan INGO Forum, Mar. 2018, [jordaningoforum.org/2018/03/01/focus-on-womens-rights-in-jordans-legislation-by-im-swedish-partner/](http://jordaningoforum.org/2018/03/01/focus-on-womens-rights-in-jordans-legislation-by-im-swedish-partner/).

<sup>10</sup> “Jordan: Gender Justice & the Law.” UN Women , 2018, [www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Gender%20Justice/English/Full%20reports/Jordan%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Gender%20Justice/English/Full%20reports/Jordan%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

according to Human Rights Watch:

In August, Jordanian lawmakers abolished article 308 of the country's 1960 penal code, an infamous provision that allowed perpetrators of sexual assault to avoid punishment if they married their victims. Lawmakers also amended article 98 to state that perpetrators of crimes "against women" cannot receive mitigated sentences. The provision leaves a loophole, however, under article 340 of the same law, which allows for mitigated sentences for those who murder their spouses discovered committing adultery.<sup>12</sup>

International organizations like USAID, the UN, Human Rights Watch are all active participants in trying to advance the role of women all over the globe. However, the difficulties in accomplishing these missions, specifically in a country like Jordan prove difficult when customary and religious law are, or play a significant role, in the legal system.

## **Palestine**

Palestine, and what is now known as occupied Palestine under Israeli authority, neighbors Jordan, and lies between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River. The early history of Palestine dates to the same early ages that compromised Jordan as well. Palestine was under the British mandate during both world wars, but with the massive influx of Jewish European migration, there was tension in the region which caused the British mandate to turn to the United Nations in which a two-state solution was proposed. The Arabs in Palestine did not agree to a two-state solution and after the involvement of many wars with Israel and various other Arab countries,

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<sup>12</sup> Roth, Kenneth. "World Report 2018: Rights Trends in Jordan." Human Rights Watch, 30 Jan. 2018, [www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/jordan#49dda6](http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/jordan#49dda6).



Israel took the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Palestinians have since become stateless, and displaced refugees migrating to various parts of the world.

Due to the complex legal history of the region, the Palestinian legal system is comprised of many government influences throughout time and with it holds Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Egyptian and Israeli laws that are still enforceable through the Palestinian National Authority<sup>13</sup>. The Oslo Accords, created in 1993, gave right to the Palestinian National Authority to govern in place of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) between Israel and was the beginning of institutional development within the territories. The PLO governed the West Bank and the Gaza Strip until the 1996 elections when the Palestinian Legislative Council came into effect<sup>14</sup>. The Legal and legislative framework of the Palestinian Judicial system comprises of Basic Law which serves as a parliamentary democracy based on political party and pluralism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Discourses on Gender Based Violence

Although violence against women is usually pushed down the list of human rights violations, only recently has it become a trending topic that has gained widespread international attention, especially with the help of social media, making it officially known as a recognized public health issue, and internationally recognized human rights violation<sup>15</sup>. Gender inequality and

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<sup>13</sup> Lafee, Wael. "Palestinian Law and the Formation of Regular Courts." *Jurist*, University of Pittsburg , 19 June 2012, [www.jurist.org/commentary/2012/06/wael-lafee-palestine-judiciary/](http://www.jurist.org/commentary/2012/06/wael-lafee-palestine-judiciary/).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Krantz, Gunilla, and Claudia Garcia-Moreno. "Violence against Women." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, BMJ Publishing Group Ltd, 1 Oct. 2005, [jech.bmj.com/content/59/10/818](http://jech.bmj.com/content/59/10/818).

the actions taken against women is a sociocultural phenomenon that translates into masculinity being superior to femininity which has resulted in discrimination and violence against women and girls all over the world. A 2018 United Nations study conducted by the World Health Organization, provided evidence that across 161 countries nearly 1 in 3 (30%) have been subjected to some form of physical and sexual violence by both intimate and nonintimate male counterparts and nearly 38% of women around the world are killed by their intimate partners.<sup>16</sup>

Violence against women is so common within various societies and international bodies, so heavily prevalent, that the United Nations imposed a General Assembly Resolution 48/104 in December of 1993, known as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women where it recognizes violence against women as a manifestation of social mechanisms that concerns specific groups of women throughout the international community, particularly those most vulnerable communities most likely to fall victim to gender based violence. The declaration defines violence against women to encompass

“( a ) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

( b ) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at

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<sup>16</sup> “Violence against Women.” *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, 9 Mar. 2021, [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women).

work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

( c ) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.”<sup>17</sup>

Article 4 then continues to describe the condemnation of violence against women by declaring that “States should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination.”<sup>18</sup>

It is evident that violence against women, in all its forms, is a complex international social problem and there are varying degrees that are tied to these actions, as they are rooted from gender inequality. The crimes and violent actions against women are a sociocultural phenomenon that translates into masculinity being superior to femininity. However, the challenge that poses a significant effect is the magnitude of the problem and to what degree these acts of violence come to, and result in such heinous crimes. Moreover, the violence and extent of abuse should be measured in context to specific societies, cultures, and gender roles between communities and bodies.

Now that gender-based violence against women has been defined generally, it’s important to understand the types of gender-based violence that exists within particular regions of the world, and what they mean to that particular community and region. The regions in which women are most subjected to some form violence by their intimate partner are in Africa, Middle East, and

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<sup>17</sup>United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Declaration on the elimination of violence against women. Proceedings of the 85th plenary meeting, Geneva, 20 Dec 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Southeast Asian regions<sup>19</sup>. These three regions are most known for their patriarchal systems where men are the heads of households and tend to hold high power over women, who tend to be heavily excluded from socio political affairs. All of these societal factors contribute to the reluctance of women in the region to speak up.

## **Honor Based Crimes**

Countries across MENA, already face high gender-based violence rates, and the spikes in 2020 due to the COVID-19 international pandemic lockdowns have had rampant effects. According to a March 2021 report made by Amnesty International, despite the advancement that has already been made in recent years through legislative and institutional levels across the MENA region, the reforms are continuously being overshadowed by violence women face in matters relating to marriage, inheritance and child custody, and denial of women’s agency.<sup>20</sup> The most common form of violence against women throughout MENA is known as “honor” based crimes and “honor killings” that are still heavily pervasive with the most recent recorded cases stemming from the MENA countries of Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Israel, and Palestine<sup>21</sup>. The governing bodies of these respective countries have overlooked the calls to action in the prosecution of perpetrators and have failed to address the ratifications and amendments of legislation that discriminate against women and lack any form of protection towards gender and honor-based violence.

Honor based crimes and killings are gender-based violence that hold a distinction between

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<sup>19</sup> “Violence against Women.” *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, 9 Mar. 2021, [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women).

<sup>20</sup> “Violence against Women in MENA.” *Amnesty International*, 8 Mar. 2021, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/mena-gender-based-violence-continues-to-devastate-lives-of-women-across-region/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/mena-gender-based-violence-continues-to-devastate-lives-of-women-across-region/).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

the perpetrators. In comparison to the more generalized definition of gender-based violence that is typically conducted by an intimate male partner, honor-based crimes revolve around the family and are associated with the concepts of bringing honor and shame to women and family members within these patriarchal societies. For one to understand the meaning of honor crimes or gender-based violence as a result of honor within these societies, it is important to comprehend the culture behind the concept of honor. The concept of women being considered as a vessel in family honor within these societies has various historical and cultural connections that intertwine into a wider context of domestic violence. Any form of violent crime from “crimes of passion” to “dowry deaths” are all horrifying manifestations of gender-based violence and produce into a much larger global phenomenon. When discussing honor in patriarchal societies, the judge and jury tend to be the male relatives, and the subject being tried is the woman and her honor. Understanding the definition of honor is crucial to better understand the nature of such honor crimes and how and why they play such an impactful role, even in today’s modernized society.

Honor and shame are the notion of how honor codes in Arab societies function, and although these honorable traits tend to vary depending on the region, the Arabic terms that distinguish them are *Sharaf* (honor) and *Ird* (shame). Trammell, in her 2012 studies demonstrates in her interviews and findings that there is no shame without honor and proceeds to explain the definitions and how they are intertwined. *Sharaf* is a collective form of how honor relates to a collective group or social unit but can pertain to an individual.<sup>22</sup> *Ird* is more specific to women and is described as the purity or chastity of a woman.

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<sup>22</sup> Trammell, Rebecca, and Travis Morris. “The Connection between Stigma, Power, and Life Chances: A Qualitative Examination of Gender and Sex Crime in Yemen.” *Taylor & Francis*, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00380237.2012.657127?casa\\_token=cFvgjoYHpAEAAAAA%3ApB4TmlfjzuChuVhfMocJTcbMIMprCX67ZPCP9RNDorN-QELyRVGQ\\_B8nSlg2z-Uxgp-tOE8f0w](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00380237.2012.657127?casa_token=cFvgjoYHpAEAAAAA%3ApB4TmlfjzuChuVhfMocJTcbMIMprCX67ZPCP9RNDorN-QELyRVGQ_B8nSlg2z-Uxgp-tOE8f0w).

Honor based societies uphold the recognition of a man being the defender of and face of the family, meanwhile females are considered to symbolize family honor. This leaves male relatives to justify their honor based violent acts against women by upholding and preserving the family honor if they deem the action of a woman to be shameful or to have brought dishonor.

“In these situations, honor involves the female’s assigned sexual and familial roles as indicated by cultural norms and traditions. According to these traditions, adultery, premarital sexual, or nonsexual relationships, suspected pregnancy outside marriage, rape, and falling in love with an “inappropriate” person would all be considered as violations of the collective family’s honor. Women might also bear the burden of any shame resulting from a male’s violations of sexual “honor” and would be subject to honor-based violence because they have fallen pregnant as victims of incest or rape.”<sup>23</sup>

The term “honor crime” in itself has caused controversy in the scholarly world and has been criticized by researchers and has adopted various definitions and interpretations.<sup>24</sup> Honor has different meanings to different societies and cultures around the world, however as Gill<sup>25</sup> argues, honor-based violence and crimes must be dissociated from the term “honor” as there is no honor in crime. The argument between combining the word “honor” and “crime” to describe an act of violence mitigates the fact that it is a premeditated crime as well as an implication of a woman merely bringing the crimes upon herself by engaging in dishonorable acts. Ultimately, Gill

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<sup>23</sup> Sally Elakkary, et al. “Honor Crimes: Review and Proposed Definition.” *Springer*, Springer Science+Business Media New York 2013, 15 Jan. 2013, link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12024-013-9455-1.pdf.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Gill, Aisha. “Honor Killings and the Quest for Justice in Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in the United Kingdom - Aisha Gill, 2009.” *SAGE Journals*, Dec. 2009, journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0887403408329604.

considers this a form of violence against women that is put in place by explicitly hierarchical patriarchal societies to sustain male dominance against women and tactical term used to “justify the perpetration of femicidal violence”.<sup>26</sup>

The term ‘honor’ in Western culture is considered an ancient term and associated with barbaric practices, especially when placed in a context of culture unfamiliar to western societies. The reality is, that both the West and the Middle East have honor codes and issues with patriarchal societies, but the difference is that one is deemed more primitive than the other. The West prides itself on being the civilized, free, and equal society that is polar opposite to the oppressive Middle Eastern regimes since the West does not uphold societal and public honor and shame codes. However, it is a hypocritical stereotype tied to the Middle East as the West has their own toxic culture that is heavily embedded within their society. Despite the West's efforts to maintain a pro feminist environment, there are hidden notions of honor within society that consider similarities with regards to a woman’s chastity. “Slut-shaming” is a contemporary form of being dishonorable or bringing shame to oneself<sup>27</sup>. The sole element that distinguishes the two notions of honor between the two societies is that honor in the Middle East is to the entire family, while honor in the west is within the individual. While there is indeed a social and cultural implication of honor-based crimes, there is also a western implication of honor when trying to understand whether transnational feminism is possible through understanding that patriarchy is a global phenomenon<sup>28</sup>.

In turn, studies have steered toward various terminology to address honor crimes and honor killings and have a consensus view of femicide; a term described by the World Health Organization

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Meharchand, Rebecca, "A Western Concept of Honour: Understanding Cultural Differences, Realizing Patriarchal Similarities" (2016). 2016 Undergraduate Awards. 22. [https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/ungradawards\\_2016/22](https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/ungradawards_2016/22)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

as “an international murder of women, because they are women”.<sup>29</sup> The reason the term varies from homicide, or male homicide, is because the victim of the crime is related to the power struggle between females and their partner or male relatives. There are several types of femicides, not limited to the honor related femicide. Intimate femicides, is a generalized term adopted for gender-based violence which comprises 35% of global female murders that are committed by an intimate partner<sup>30</sup>. Dowry related femicide which is most prevalent in India and parts of Southeast Asia; non intimate femicide most prevalent in countries like Mexico, Central and South America; and female genital mutilation primarily occurring in Africa. This is all evidence pertaining to a wider scope of the problem highlighting that honor-based crimes and killings are a worldwide phenomenon, rather than a common problem within a particular region, such as the Middle East.

## **Orientalism and Islamophobia**

Considering islamophobia within a global context, it is evident that Western societies have adopted a tie between barbaric acts to Islam especially after the events of 9/11. These acts of cruelty and patriarchy are all tied to oppressive regimes and religions in the Middle East to where women, specifically Muslim women who wear the veil, began to be labeled as oppressed. Due to these preconceived notions, any form of violence against women was downplayed with hardly any sort of intervention in forms of media from the international community as they were correlated with being in accordance with Muslim societies. It was not until honor crimes and gender-based violence became more prevalent and a sort of ‘hot topic’ in Western Europe and the United States that the international community saw some sort of relationship between gender-based violence as

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<sup>29</sup> Garcia Moreno, Claudia, et al. “ Understanding and Addressing Violence against Women - Femicide.” *World Health Organization* , Pan American Health Organization, 2012, [apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77421/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.38\\_eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77421/WHO_RHR_12.38_eng.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



a global problem, rather than a Muslim based society problem. However, the question that remains is if there is a distinction between honor-based violence in the West, how is it different from those in the Middle East?

This common fallacy is based on a neo-orientalist conception that Muslim men are violent and barbaric perpetrators and Muslim women are submissive oppressed targets<sup>31</sup>. Neo-orientalism is a theory-based ontology that builds from Edward Said's theory of orientalism. Orientalism is an ideology that promotes the West and Islam through a dualistic lens that tends to depict a more western favored idea of what Islam and the Middle East (the Orient) is seen as versus what it actually is, and this is due to an imperialistic ideology supported by the main idea that Edward Said highlights in his theory of how the Orient, or the Middle East, is around knowledge and power through a western perspective. Said supports his analysis with oriental literature and religious texts, and his approach is distinct in remaining unbiased throughout his work to define imperialism as a form of power that constitutes connections that go beyond empire and military but are interdependent on culture and identity. With the perspective of orientalism in mind, he identifies imperialism as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory."<sup>32</sup> Said leaves room for building knowledge and theoretical power, as it will never end, but it will shift.

Neo orientalism is a reconstruction of Islam, and Muslim societies, contrary to the original orientalist view, which was used to imperialize it, there is a difference between the paradigms in which neoconservatives "have framed the outcome being the emergence of an identity-related

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<sup>31</sup> Idriss, Mohammad Mazher, and Tahir Abbas. 2010. *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam*. Taylor & Francis. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat00548a&AN=iusf.b4326559&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>32</sup> Said, Edward (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books (Random House). p. xiii

social phenomenon called Islamophobia<sup>33</sup>.” This ideologically motivated paradigm has emerged systemically through powerful institutions, money, politicians, and the media that contributes to the creation of a space that allows for the reconstruction of the Muslim world to be related to concepts involving fear, racism, and anti-Muslimism. The term “islamophobia” has caused notable scholarly debate in its definition, but nonetheless remains a social phenomenon that rejects Islam.

### **Islamic & Secular Feminist Arguments**

The two main feminist paradigms are Islamic feminism and secular feminism in which secular feminism first emerged in the MENA region during the nineteenth century constituting multiple discourses of democratic and nationalist factors. It has been controversial in the sense that it creates a form of ambiguity in the concept. The ideology of it being a foreign influence from the west aiming to stray away from Islam and a Middle East version of separation from church and state. However, it has still been heavily advocated by states in the Middle East and secular feminist activists aim for discourse surrounding international human rights rather than religious discourse to address a more realistic sense of sociopolitical and cultural issues their countries face<sup>34</sup>. The most common critique of Islamic secularism is that Islam is a way of life, and unlike other religions like Christianity, cannot be distinguished as Islam and politics mandate a caliphate<sup>35</sup>.

Muslim women, regardless of secular or Islamic beliefs, struggle with their unique distinct cultures to address the inequality of the dominating patriarchal suppression. The struggle is not limited to the MENA region as Muslim women find the same struggle living in the West as they

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<sup>33</sup> Kerboua, Salim (2016). From Orientalism to neo-Orientalism: Early and contemporary constructions of Islam and the Muslim world. *\_Intellectual Discourse\_* 24 (1).

<sup>34</sup> Al-Ali, Nadjie Sadig. *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East: the Egyptian Women's Movement*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Ardic, Nurullah. *Islam and the Politics of Secularism: The Caliphate and Middle Eastern modernization in the early 20th century*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

constantly tread to navigate their religious and cultural practices from their origin country while still striving to conserve their rights as Muslim women. Although secular feminism has come in waves throughout the centuries, addressing various issues, it has most recently become a form of gender equality and has faced new challenges as Islamist movements become rampant throughout Muslim states.

The key differences between secular Islam and feminist Islam are that secular Islamist feminist goals can be centrally focused on a specific country or issue; meanwhile Islamic feminism is a more generalized term that can ultimately apply to feminists globally as it centered around the Quran and the advocacy for equality. Unfortunately for some, Islamic feminism is the only form of feminism they can express under the scrutiny of their Islamic regimes, therefore it is important to contest the politics of the region they are in and bring about the change or empowerment that is the reality within the said society<sup>36</sup>.

“Global Feminism argues that women worldwide experience similar subjugation in many social constructs because many cultures are based on a patriarchal past, but other waves reject the concept of a universal women's experience and stresses the significance of diversity in women's experiences and see their activities as transnational rather than global<sup>37</sup>.”

While both secular and Islamic feminism contribute to the same objective, it is important to

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<sup>36</sup> Ahmed-Ghosh, Huma. “Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms.” *Bridgewater State University, Journal of International Women's Studies*, May 2008, [vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1321&context=jiws](http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1321&context=jiws).

<sup>37</sup> Al Bunni, Nada, et al. “The Shape of Arab Feminism on Facebook.” *The Shape of Arab Feminism on Facebook*, ACM Digital Library, 1 May 2018, [dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3201064.3201090](https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3201064.3201090).

exemplify that both originated in the Middle East<sup>38</sup>, and has transcended globally as it has provided a new definition to feminism in contrast to traditional western feminism. While secular feminism has played its part in history with the effective change it has had in the revolutionary Islamist movements, the transnational Islamic revival movement<sup>39</sup> is still an ongoing process rapidly gaining the support from both secular and Islamist feminists. Islamic feminism with secular grassroots and activist organization alongside the universally characteristic of women equality is gaining the two feminisms a revolution in the Middle East and beyond<sup>40</sup>.

### **Digital Activism and Female Social Media Presence**

With feminism and all its diversifications alongside globalization sweeping over the 21st century, social media has facilitated the mission of feminists alike from all over the world and has reshaped feminism in its entirety. While there is still an ongoing debate on how the various interpretations and applications of feminists from all over the world, the one common platform they share that allows them to come together to organize, advocate, and fight for what they believe in is the internet. Social media specifically, has been the quickest form of communication and facilitating the spread of media, advocacy, and spreading awareness. This begs the question of what the root cause is to this sudden rise specifically through social media, whether this is just another form of Edward Said's inspired ideology of western imperialistic media virtues that the Middle East is adopting and interpreting in their own way, or if it is the beginning of something much greater unraveling in the fight for basic human rights in the Middle East.

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<sup>38</sup>Badran, Margot. "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1, no. 1 (2005): 6-28. Accessed April 22, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40326847>.

<sup>39</sup>BAHI, Riham, *Islamic and Secular Feminisms: Two Discourses Mobilized for Gender Justice*, EUI RSCAS, 2011/25, Mediterranean Programme Series

Retrieved from Cadmus, European University Institute Research Repository, at: <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/17294>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Honor crimes and killings are the most extreme examples of human rights violations taking place in the Middle East under Islamic law, and although many Muslim women will argue that they are still proud of their Islamic values and principles, they are beginning to realize that many of these laws are in fact a violation of human rights based on international law. This ideology has led to the development of social justice movements and has rippled through the rest of the Middle East. The West, with the help of globalization and social media, has led to the modern-day activist social movements that Middle Eastern women are beginning to advocate for and adjust to their definition of feminism.

When we put the terms imperialism and globalization in modern day context, the definitions vary. The beginning of globalization was seen as limited to the increase of trade around the world when it came to evolving technology and goods, but now it has an alternate meaning to a situation in which these goods and services have transformed into social, cultural, economic and even political influences that have linked the world together<sup>41</sup> in a way that has never been done before. The internet has undoubtedly become the world's biggest technological advancement in history as it has allowed us to connect from one corner of the globe to another in just the click of a button. It has opened a window to view the world, literally, from the palm of your hands. Although this advancement has been seen to have positively impacted the rest of the world, the Islamic Middle East has been the greatest challenger when it comes to accepting such advancements, especially since social media was introduced. The Islamic Middle East has been untouched by the rest of the world's norms and was successfully able to maintain their conservative ideas, religious values, traditions, and cultures, until 'globalization' began to take

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<sup>41</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/globalization>

hold at such a rapid rate that it became dangerous to their normal practices leading them to push back at the controversy it has begun to create.

The Middle East now looks to globalization in a critical view and as the equivalence of a form of modernization and just another form of contemporary western imperialism. The reason being, "globalization is [only] accepted if and when it is perceived not as destroying the local society but helping it to survive and flourish in a partly new form."<sup>42</sup> The west and its globalized ideas seeping not only through social media platforms, but various other ways of globalization have become a threat to the Islamic Middle East and the rejection of such implications derives from the fear of succumbing to western influence and imperialistic practices.

However, aside from the western influence, social media has played an even more impactful role in the Middle East especially during the Arab Spring. Since most countries in the Middle East do not have freedom of the press, social media has paved the way for freedom of expression, obtaining information, and raising awareness. The Arab Spring alone is an example of how critical the right to information is for political activism and participation.

With social media is rapidly expanding their platforms, it is essential to understand the "implications of the global reach and influence of social networking technologies"<sup>43</sup>. Increasingly, the internet has been used by Muslim women to express and educate about their religious and gender identities via social media with their feminist arguments expanding digitally. The veil, while not foreign to Islam, but foreign to the West has made a debut in social media drawing discussions about Islam and women's roles. With the invasions of Iraq and

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<sup>42</sup> Rubin, Barry. "Globalization and the Middle East: Part One." *Globalization and the Middle East: Part One*, YaleGlobal Online, 16 Jan. 2003, [yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/globalization-and-middle-east-part-one](http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/globalization-and-middle-east-part-one).

<sup>43</sup> Young, Sean D, et al. "The Influence of Social Networking Technologies on Female Religious Veil-Wearing Behavior in Iran." *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., May 2014, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4012633/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4012633/).

Afghanistan being the standards set for the West as a form of liberation, the West conveyed the idea that Muslim women need saving and must be liberated from their oppression. With atrocities of the Taliban<sup>44</sup> being circulated, especially post 9/11, the standard goal for the West was to unveil the women who so desperately needed saving.

In addition, with the revelation of Western post-feminist expression of women's body expression and sexuality, "reinforce assumptions about the veil's abnegation of sexual desire that ignore Islamic thinking about female sexuality, but the opportunity this offered for diversity of perspective was repeatedly undermined by the continuing obsession with veiling/unveiling."<sup>45</sup>

The image of the veil continues to be an ongoing battle over the perceptions for Islam and Muslim women, but social media has facilitated the openness of both feminists views to discuss freely, share news, and advocate both arguments. While western feminism via social media emphasizes sexual freedom and advocacy for issues that are not necessarily detrimental to the well-being of female individuals, but rather societal issues that need attention. Whereas Middle Eastern social media feminist advocacy is centered more so around the fight for having basic human rights and being equal to the men in their patriarchal societies. While #MeToo is at a crossroads in America, around the world, it's just the beginning and there is a long road ahead.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This thesis draws on two comparative ideological discourses with social media as the theoretical framework and the subject. The research methodology used in this thesis evaluates

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<sup>44</sup> Macdonald, Mayra. "Muslim Women and the Veil Problems of Image and Voice in Media Representations." *Taylor & Francis*, 16 Aug. 2006, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14680770500471004?casa\\_token=JwzV8H3LFEAAAAA%3AaWpDSK-6oFvUGJaEUWielM\\_yL2ki0SzJPad0MdAoCKn2ZDVgBiXbFWXcOPtSGYBnnHeRmjbgfg](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14680770500471004?casa_token=JwzV8H3LFEAAAAA%3AaWpDSK-6oFvUGJaEUWielM_yL2ki0SzJPad0MdAoCKn2ZDVgBiXbFWXcOPtSGYBnnHeRmjbgfg).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

the various competing ideologies of the Middle East and the international community as well as the sociopolitical movements in and outside of social media. To begin, the Arab Spring is used as the transition timeline between a comparative analysis of historical and new data and discourse that was analyzed to demonstrate the number of honor crimes that have taken place pre and post Arab Spring. This compares the circumstances surrounding honor crimes before social media, and then the results of honor crimes after social media that estimates the increase or decrease in honor crimes. The data will suggest how honor crimes have shifted as time has progressed and what role social media has played in surrounding this phenomenon.

The approach that this thesis takes is depicting the transformative image that women have portrayed post Arab Spring and exposes the diversity and complexity of Arab women contrary to the preconceived notions of Orientalists<sup>46</sup> stereotypes. The purpose of this theoretical component is to compare the realities and complexities of old and new media platforms and how they've been able to transition into a more progressive state of involvement and activism while also taking into consideration all the potentially negative factors and new problems that arise with this new media of self-expression and who and what Arab societies think of such self-expression, advocacy, and activism.

Following the analysis of comparing ideological discourse surrounding honor crimes, this thesis used three recent honor crimes in the Middle East as case studies to compare the amount of social media attention -- or lack of -- these cases received. The main goal of these social media case studies was to depict the new social challenges that Arab feminist activists face with their digital form of activism and offline efforts. By gathering a mix of collective quantitative and qualitative experimental data and controlling and manipulating variables, the three case

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<sup>46</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. W. Ross MacDonald School, Resource Services Library, 2006.



studies were able to be broken down to focus on the social media response each individual case received. Thus, unraveling the answers to the questions of why each case study either received widespread social media attention, or lack thereof, as well as legislative action in response to these virtual movements and outcries of indignation through a comparison of primary and secondary data.

These cases all took place in three different countries of the Middle East, Jordan, occupied Palestine, and Israel and they are the three most recent case studies that received media attention, except for one receiving barely, or almost any media attention. This approach demonstrates the evolution of social media feminist activism while also questioning the types of reactions circulated in the media of each individual case studies' society. Each honor crime case study was analyzed in focusing on the cause of what resulted in the honor crime, the type of media response, or lack of, it received and how Arab societies responded and reacted to each case. These key components lead to whether the context around honor crimes, femicide, and violence against women have either evolved or remained the same since the pre-Arab Spring era. The answer that these case studies unravel go as far as the social, political, religious, and legislative efforts presented to each society's respective institutions, and whether the extent of these efforts have proven to be effective. The reasons for why these three individual case studies were selected were based on how each case varies on the spectrum in the type of response each one had regarding social media, legislative reform, and perpetrator accountability. Another reason for focusing on these three cases specifically had to do with the demographics of each case. While many Middle Eastern governments have begun advocating for reform, there are other countries within the region that still have a long road ahead for any changes regarding women's rights to be made. However, the main theme within the focus of this research is to draw

a distinction between how social media can positively evoke a platform and create awareness to stop honor crimes or if social media has recently become just another obstacle and even a reason for patriarchal societies to continue their heinous crimes against women. The studies conducted ultimately reveal the sociopolitical factors intertwined with contemporary media and the effects that it can have on legislative reform. This includes an analysis of the recent social movements in the region that have trended globally leading to legal challenges or any form of action within the state, or lack thereof. Lastly, are the recommendations of policy change and discussion of the mitigation of honor crimes and its adverse effects in patriarchal societies as well as the rest of the world.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Legislation Pre-Arab Spring**

Honor crimes and honor-based violence clearly have a history long before they became voiced by social media and activists alike. The honor killings derived from this research are not the first, and nor will they be the last. However, because honor crimes are very rarely reported, it's difficult to obtain an exact number of statistical data. However,

“Even the partial information available since the mid-1990s paints a very disturbing picture. Data from the Ministry of Social Development indicate that nine crimes of this kind were recorded in 1995 and six in 1998. By 2006 and 2007, according to Ministry data, the reported number of cases was 18 and 17 for each respective year. Other statistics suggest that 12 crimes in 2014 were committed under the pretext of honor and eight in 2016. By 2017, Human Rights Watch estimated that between 15 and 20 honor crimes occurred annually.

The Jordanian Women’s Solidarity Institute recorded 21 family murders of women in 2019. 2020 ultimately saw a total of 17 honor killings.”<sup>47</sup>

The above data reveals the number of honor crimes in Jordan since the 1990’s has increased up to 133.33% but has fluctuated through the middle of the decade with the highest number of honor crimes recorded in 2019.

Regarding history of honor crimes in the Palestinian Territories and Israel, according to a report by Aljazeera in 2014, honor killings doubled in size every year from 2011 to 2013 going from five, to thirteen, and then totaling 26 honor crimes in 2013 alone. In Israel, "of the 14 women’s shelters in Israel, only two cater to Arab women, despite that 30% of women seeking shelter are Arab women”<sup>48</sup> Another 2014 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner Report, thirty-seven women were murdered in Palestine under the pretext of honor<sup>49</sup>. In 2019 Human Rights Watch Report, “The Palestinian nongovernmental organization Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) documented a total of 23 killings of women in the West Bank and Gaza in 2018 –10 in Gaza and 13 in the West Bank.”<sup>50</sup> With advocacy efforts for a comprehensive domestic violence law being pushed since 2007, the Palestinian Authority has been reviewing a draft Family Protection Law since 2016.<sup>51</sup>

The two Palestinian territories operate under two different legal systems. Both Gaza and the West Bank operate under different political parties with Gaza being under Hamas and the

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<sup>47</sup> Balaha, Hiba. “Until When?! Honor Killings and Other Domestic Violence Against Women in Jordan.” *POMED: Project on Middle East Democracy*, 8 Mar. 2021, [pomed.org/until-when-honor-killings-and-other-domestic-violence-against-women-in-jordan/](http://pomed.org/until-when-honor-killings-and-other-domestic-violence-against-women-in-jordan/).

<sup>48</sup> Feser, Madison, et al. “Focus on Honor Killings: Israel.” *The Diplomatic Envoy*, 22 Jan. 2021, <https://blogs.shu.edu/thediplomaticenvoy/2018/03/30/focus-on-honor-killings-in-israel/>.

<sup>49</sup> al ashqar, Judge ahmad. Executive Summary Study Called Honour Killings ... - OHCHR. Apr. 2014, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Executive\\_summary\\_study\\_called\\_honour\\_killings\\_Palestine.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Executive_summary_study_called_honour_killings_Palestine.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Begum, Rothna. “The Deadly Toll for Palestinian Women.” *Human Rights Watch*, 19 Sept. 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/19/deadly-toll-palestinian-women#>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

West Bank under Fatah, which ultimately makes it almost impossible to implement a single clear law that criminalizes perpetrators of violence against women.<sup>52</sup> Given the limited information provided, based on these statistics alone, it is safe to assume that honor crimes have only increased through time and remain an ongoing problem in the region.

The case of Israel and Palestine is a bit more complex in terms of religion and law because of the people that make up the state and the occupied territories. Religion in the region plays a major part in the intersectionality especially of the Arab/Palestinians that comprise the state. The main religions that exist in Israel are majority Jewish which makes up 81% of the population while the remaining religions are mostly ethnically Arab and religiously 14% Muslim, 2% Christian and 2% Druze.<sup>53</sup> The dynamics of how honor crimes in Israel are recorded and/or dealt with differ greatly as police officials tend to identify these crimes as tribal and clan structured crimes that are culturally embedded within the Arab society, and because it is a dark part of Arab society, there is nothing they can do. However, if a Jewish woman is murdered in Jewish society (Israel), it is classified as a murder.

Now that the pre-Arab Spring number of honor crimes have been identified, it is important to begin the discussion of comparing ideological discourses as well as the number of honor crimes post Arab Spring. A key component is understanding the launch of social media in the late 90's and early 2000's and how it evolved into a rapidly growing sociological and commercial force. "The evolution of social media has been fueled by the human impulse to communicate and by advances in digital technology. It is a story about establishing and nurturing personal connections at scale."<sup>54</sup> Social media became the new media contrasting the

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<sup>52</sup> Odgaard, Lena. "Upsurge in Palestinian 'Honour Killings.'" Features | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 25 Mar. 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2014/3/25/upsurge-in-palestinian-honour-killings>.

<sup>53</sup> Lipka, Michael. "Religion and Politics in Israel: 7 Key Findings." Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 31 May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/08/key-findings-religion-politics-israel/>.

<sup>54</sup> "The Evolution of Social Media: How Did It Begin and Where Could It Go Next?" *Maryville Online*, 3 Mar. 2021, [online.maryville.edu/blog/evolution-social-media/#history](https://online.maryville.edu/blog/evolution-social-media/#history).

traditional television, and radio news media<sup>55</sup> all over the world and instead, it became an interconnected form of quick and efficient mass communication that reached individual to individual across oceans at the click of a button. A groundbreaking and historical example of how grave the effects that social media had was exemplified in MENA. The world witnessed the social unraveling of the sociopolitical mobilization that made transformative political change in the region. It is important to note that social media played an impactful role in the Middle East during the revolutionary Arab Spring between 2010 and 2012. The uprisings and anti-government protests and civil wars were in response to the region's instability and its oppressive regimes.

After the events leading up to the Arab Spring, as a result, both the destruction and progression of many states made evident that social media was the new media digital revolution. Thus, social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter surged as one of the most popular applications being used within the region. While this wave of enlightenment and empowerment created a landscape of inspiration for people in MENA, including women, to arm themselves with a new vision of what it means to have your voice heard, and express yourself through a screen, new challenges, like with every movement or trend, have been posed. The Arab Spring awakened women to grasp onto the new unconventional media to fight for not only their nationalist inequalities, but the gender discrimination and injustices they face as women within their own communities. For so long women did not have a voice due to the constricted and controlled press, but because of virtual media, they were able to transmit messages using media platforms to empower and embolden women far and wide.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Khondker, Habibul Haque. "Globalizations: Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring." *Globalizations*, 18 Nov. 2011, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14747731.2011.621287?needAccess=true](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14747731.2011.621287?needAccess=true).

<sup>56</sup> Odine, Maurice. (2013). Role of social media in the empowerment of Arab women. 12.

## **The Revelation of Social Media in the Arab World**

According to Damian Radcliffe's<sup>57</sup> 2020 social media trend report, social media users in MENA, alongside Latin America, take the lead when it comes to who spends the most time on social media averaging about three and a half hours a day. It's safe to say that the Middle East loves social media. The traditional networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) are still very much relevant and only continue to grow in popularity despite the rapid increase in visually led social networks. Another study consisting of Arab youth ages 18-24 demonstrates that 35%<sup>58</sup> use social media daily to update themselves on current events and news. The pandemic alone has demonstrated to be a big push for users in different countries to use social media more than they already do, because at this point in time, they must. It is evident that social media usage is only going to continue to increase and expand over the next several years. Although not all countries throughout MENA are at the same level, for example, the UAE is the leading user of social media, and when put into comparison to a country like Yemen or Syria, there will most likely be a significant gap as both countries still actively participate, they are preoccupied with the resurgence of their countries from the Arab Spring and other dissonances.

The real increase in social media use is not only limited to the Middle East, but the rest of the world came during the outbreak of the COVID-19 international pandemic. Since December of 2020, the world began to slow down, enforced lock downs and quarantines in countries all over the globe forcing populations to not only physically distance themselves to prevent the spread of the deadly disease, but also socially distance ourselves from the real world, into a virtual reality. Businesses, universities, schools, airports, borders, and entire countries across the globe have had to adjust to what is known as a new virtual reality. From

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<sup>57</sup> Radcliffe, Damian. "Social Media in the Middle East: 5 Things You Need to Know." *International Journalists' Network*, 5 Apr. 2021, [ijnet.org/en/story/social-media-middle-east-5-things-you-need-know](http://ijnet.org/en/story/social-media-middle-east-5-things-you-need-know).

<sup>58</sup> AW Staff. "Social Media Use by Youth Is Rising across the Middle East: ." *AW*, [theArabweekly.com/social-media-use-youth-rising-across-middle-east](http://theArabweekly.com/social-media-use-youth-rising-across-middle-east).

the date of this thesis being written, more than a year has passed since the announcement of the international pandemic, and just this year, 2021, a vaccine to combat this disease has been discovered. Slowly, regulations and orders are being lifted, but for some countries, the pandemic is at an all-time high, and the path to re-opening and going back to what we consider normality, is a long road ahead.

With businesses and especially schools across the world remaining socially distant, ultimately leaving no other choice but online learning, it's evident that people, especially our youth, are spending more time online and on social media than ever before. More than half of users reported "an increase 71% of respondents in the Middle East reported their usage of WhatsApp and other messaging apps had increased since the outbreak of the pandemic. This was just behind the 75% of users who said their consumption of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok had increased because of social distancing."<sup>59</sup> Along with the pandemic, social media as a phenomenon of new media has grown dramatically, branching out to the economic, political, and informative realms. It's no longer limited to communication to one another, but rather a contemporary source of news and information of all kinds.

However, even before this sudden surge of increased technology and social media involvement, there was already a progressive increase of female presence in social media beginning in 2017, 2018, and 2019. The case studies are those of Henriette Khara, Israa Ghrayeb, and Ahlam. The case studies provide a background under each study and comparatively examine the commonalities and distinctions and extend to the social and news media presence that each case study has had -- or not-- on the internet. Finally, the data

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

compiled of hashtags, posts, and other internet media discussions address the comparative analysis to the extent in which the ideologies of the West and the Middle East have changed.

The case studies that this thesis examines are more recent incidents of honor killings based predominantly within the Levant region of the Middle East and more specifically the countries of Palestine, Jordan, and Israel.

## **Case Studies**

### **Henriette Kara**

The first case is the case of Henriette Kara, an Arab-Israeli Christian teenager who was murdered by her father after she ran away to be with her Arab Muslim lover. Henriette Karra was an 18-year-old teenager who had just graduated high school just a day before when she was found dead with multiple stab wounds on June 13th, 2017. Henriette's was from Ramle, Israel<sup>60</sup> and weeks leading up to her murder, her friend revealed she had received frightening messages from Henriette expressing her fear of the threats she received from her family.

The threats seemed to have sprouted about a year prior to her murder after it was discovered that she had been romantically involved with a Muslim man. After the threats she received, she ran away to various places including to the home of her lover's mother. According to her murderer's indictment, Henriette had run away from home about two weeks before the murder because she feared for her life after her family had tried violent tactics to try and end her relationship. Henriette had even filed a complaint with the police a week before, but they continued their threats to her and her boyfriend's mother to make her return home. Her last known whereabouts were at the home of her friend, where she was again discovered by her

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<sup>60</sup> Hovel, Revital. "Israeli Christian Charged with Murdering His Teen Daughter over Relationship with Muslim." *Haaretz.com*, Haaretz, 17 July 2017, [www.haaretz.com/israel-news/christian-charged-with-murdering-teen-daughter-over-affair-with-muslim-1.5494447](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/christian-charged-with-murdering-teen-daughter-over-affair-with-muslim-1.5494447).



parents which led to an altercation between them as well as two of her uncles. Police responded to the scene which later led to a hearing with social services a few days later between Henriette and her parents.

Henriette eventually made her return home and on the evening after her graduation, Henriette spoke to a relative revealing her intentions to convert to Islam after her boyfriend was released from prison which was to be in a few days and that same family later contacted her father to inform him of her plans. According to the indictment, that was when her father decided to murder her, and she was later found dead in her parent's kitchen with multiple stab wounds.<sup>61</sup> Her father was later taken into custody, but after analyzing seven news media reports, all which result as top Google searches, none spoke of the conviction, but in fact made the mention that Sami Karra, Henriette's father, is actually related to Supreme Court Justice George Karra. Whether or not this was a conflict of interest, it was not made public in any of the news media reports.

Based on the news media outlets found in Figure 2, there were seven major news media reports that appeared when typing the key word, "Henriette Karra" in the Google search engine. Four of the seven (57%) media reports were Israeli-based news outlets, with two out of seven (29%) were American based media, and only one of seven (14%) was Arab-based news media. Although three of the four Israeli based news reports stuck to the facts of the incident, one<sup>62</sup> of them was quick to hesitate in acknowledging it for what it was, an honor crime. The newspaper went on to label it as the "murder of the Arab-Israeli woman and drew "similarities" of honor killings.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Winer, Stuart. "Father Charged with Murdering Daughter over Affair with Muslim." *The Times of Israel*, 16 July 2017, [www.timesofisrael.com/father-charged-with-murdering-daughter-over-affair-with-muslim/](http://www.timesofisrael.com/father-charged-with-murdering-daughter-over-affair-with-muslim/).

“The killings have some similarities to the so-called “honor killings” elsewhere in the Muslim world, in which women are murdered by relatives for tarnishing the family name through perceived sexual indiscretions. But activists in Israel reject such comparisons, saying the vast majority of the killings are the result of rampant spousal abuse that has been ignored by police in a landscape rife with drugs, crime and poverty.”<sup>63</sup>

The article continues to explain that Arabs are the ones who represent half of the murders of women killed in Israel every year and clarifies that there is a distinction between Arab-Israeli’s and other Israeli citizens. There is no distinction between religion, but rather ethnicity. Attributing murder and violence against Arab women is another way that Israel promotes the violent Arab culture and further imposes the disassociation of Arabs despite the victims being Israeli citizens. An example of this is the case of Henriette Karra<sup>64</sup> and Diana Abu Qatifan<sup>65</sup>. Both Israeli citizens, and both made known that they are ethnically Arab regardless of their religion. Henriette Kara is a Christian Israeli citizen and Diana Abu Qatifan was a Muslim Israeli citizen. Both women were killed by male family members and although there were interventions taken by Israeli authorities, there is only a limited amount of protection they can provide due to the lack of women’s resources for Israeli Arab women<sup>66</sup>. Arabs in the region tend to be more exposed to weapons, poor quality of education, less education, lesser part of the work force than their Jewish counterparts which is why it’s not a

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Winer, Stuart. “Father Charged with Murdering Daughter Over Affair with Muslim.” The Times of Israel, 16 July 2017. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/father-charged-with-murdering-daughter-over-affair-with-muslim/>.

<sup>65</sup> Peleg, Bar. “Everyone Knew This Arab Israeli Woman Would Be Murdered. It Wasn't Enough to Prevent It.” Haaretz.com, Haaretz, 31 Mar. 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-everyone-knew-this-arab-israeli-woman-would-be-murdered-it-didn-t-stop-it-1.7069030>.

<sup>66</sup> Ben-Porat, Anat, et al. “Domestic Violence in Arab Society: A Comparison of Arab and Jewish Women in Shelters in Israel.” Journal of Interpersonal Violence, vol. 36, no. 1-2, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517731789>.

coincidence that there are higher levels of violence in the Arab communities regardless of citizenship<sup>67</sup>. The numbers of domestic violence against women in the Jewish community in Israel is significantly lower compared to those of Muslim society, but it also attributes back to the socioeconomical circumstances of those communities<sup>68</sup>.

The two American-based articles tend to speak on the facts of the incident, while one concludes the article<sup>69</sup> by highlighting the fact that honor killings are mostly rendered by the Muslim community, so Henriette's case was a rarity given the fact that she came from a Christian family. The other American based news article<sup>70</sup> however served more as a more neutral explanation of facts while also giving an informative outlook on honor crimes, explaining what they are and questioning the hesitance of labeling it as honor crime solely for the crime stemming from a Christian family rather than an Arab family. Finally, it concludes with stating that honor killings are not limited to a single religion but are rather an extreme measure acted upon in certain cultures.

The final article<sup>71</sup> speaks briefly about the incident and the indictment, but primarily focuses on the social media discussions surrounding honor crimes and a "Christian honor killing" while also including the discussion of honor killings not having a religion. The article went on to use the feedback from Facebook comments to draw correlation between culture rather than focusing on religion. Another argument posed by the comments allowed for the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Eisikovits, Zvi, et al. "The First Israeli National Survey on Domestic Violence." *Violence Against Women*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2004, pp. 729–748., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801204265549>.

<sup>69</sup> All That's Interesting. "Christian Father Indicted In Alleged Honor Killing Of Daughter, Who Was Dating Muslim." *All That's Interesting*, All That's Interesting, 7 Mar. 2018, [www.allthatsinteresting.com/israel-honor-killing](http://www.allthatsinteresting.com/israel-honor-killing).

<sup>70</sup> "Honor Killing? Father Murders Own Daughter for Taking Muslim Boyfriend." *Universal Life Church Monastery*, 25 July 2017, [www.themonastery.org/blog/honor-killing-father-murders-own-daughter-for-taking-muslim-boyfriend](http://www.themonastery.org/blog/honor-killing-father-murders-own-daughter-for-taking-muslim-boyfriend).

<sup>71</sup> Alfatlawi, Rosie. "Does the Case of Henriette Kara Suggest Honor Crime Is Cultural, Not Religious?" *Al Bawaba*, 9 July 2017, [www.albawaba.com/loop/does-case-henriette-kara-suggest-honor-crime-cultural-not-religious-999216](http://www.albawaba.com/loop/does-case-henriette-kara-suggest-honor-crime-cultural-not-religious-999216).

analysis between the Christian Palestinians, or Arab Christians, to be deemed different from western Christians as they would not accept their religion to be associated with “honor killings”. The rhetoric of “otherness” being to be able to separate the West from the Middle East and justify certain acts, in this case western media and western Christians separating themselves from Middle Eastern media and Middle Eastern Christians.

Although Henriette Kara did receive some form of news coverage in both the west and the Middle East, it was limited to local Middle Eastern coverage, and the western coverage was not by a major media outlet. When “Henriette Kara” is searched on Instagram, Twitter, and even Facebook, there are no hashtags or news related posts relating to her crime. Even the Facebook posts used in the Arab news report are no longer available. This begs the question as to why Henriette Kara’s murder did not receive social media attention, if her case is only three years old? Based on the information provided by the local news outlets, the statement of facts with very little information regarding the subject of honor crimes is very apparent. The only news articles that drew an analytical distinction was one of the American articles, which was not even a newspaper article, but rather an international church organization website and source for religious ministers. The second article that drew this analysis was the Middle Eastern article outside of Israel and occupied Palestine. It is evident that because of the religious affiliation to the crime, it is just another example of how Israeli based media tries to fend off certain condemnation from the international community, especially western media from the violation of the rights of the Palestinian people.

Not only does this form of rhetoric try to subjugate the Muslim and Christian religions as well as the Palestinian identity in Israel, but it also dilutes the gravity of the issue at hand, which is honor-based violence in all its forms blatantly categorized as just another murder from an Arab-Israeli. Secondly, there is also a lack for an update regarding the conviction of

Henriette's murder. Whether or not her father was convicted or if there was a conflict of interest, and ultimately, the main question being was their justice for Henriette? Evidently, the discussions revolved so little regarding an attempt to seek justice for the victim, but all the articles focused on blaming the religion or patriarchal culture rather than establishing a goal to convict the murderer, regardless of whether he was Christian or Muslim, Arab or Israeli, but in fact the murderer of Henriette Kara who was another victim of honor-based violence.

### **Israa Ghrayeb**

The following is the prime case study, which is the honor killing of Israa Ghrayeb<sup>72</sup>, a Palestinian social media make-up artist and influencer who began her influence on social media and whose murder influenced the social media movements around the world. Israa was a 21-year-old Palestinian girl from Beit Sahour, a city near Bethlehem, and had a significant following of approximately 33,500 followers on the social media platform, Instagram, where she would post make-up tutorials and other related make-up content.

Israa was newly engaged after a guy came to ask for her hand in marriage, her parents agreed, and everything was going smoothly. However, it was not yet made publicly official. Just a day before the family made everything official, Israa, her fiancé and her sister decided to go on an outing in a public place with her parents' approval. During the outing, Israa proceeded to post a snapchat of all three of them having a good time and filming their social activities, and it received thousands of views. Being seen in public with a man who is not your husband or family member is seen as dishonorable in most of these conservative households. One of Israa's cousins saw this and immediately contacted Israa's father expressing their concern of how Israa is ruining their family reputation by posting this before it has been officially announced that Israa is

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<sup>72</sup> Bateman, Tom. "Israa Ghrayeb: Palestinian Woman's Death Prompts Soul-Searching." BBC News. BBC, September 16, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-49688920>.

engaged. Upon arriving at her home, her brothers and father awaited her and immediately began beating and assaulting her and Israa ultimately ended up falling off the balcony of their home breaking her spine.

According to various news articles, her family was said to have told medical officials that she had been possessed and had mental issues which was the result of “self-inflicted” injuries<sup>73</sup>. There was a video being circulated through social media and even uploaded to YouTube where her screams are being heard in the hospital as her family continuously beat and assaulted her despite her spinal injury. About a day later, Israa died of these injuries. Israa’s murder (**Picture 1**) made international news and sparked international outrage, from her small village in Palestine to the wider Arab audience across the Levant, and the United States, with the hashtag #WeAreAllIsraa, #JusticeForIsraa, #IsraaGhrayeb. It is one of the first honor killing cases in recent years to have received so much international attention that people from the region demanded immediate justice with the fast-acting press conferences, and legal reform.

Support for Israa Ghrayeb came from all corners of the globe and came together through hashtags, posts, and online activism demanding justice for Israa and to put an end to this tradition of honor crimes. The social media outlets heavily pertaining to Israa Ghrayeb’s death were Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, with Instagram and Twitter taking the lead. The most common English Instagram hashtags were: #WeAreAllIsraa receiving more than 200 posts, #JusticeForIsraa receiving 373 posts, and #IsraaGhrayeb receiving 710 posts. Twitter and Facebook also shared the same hashtags trending during the time of the murder. The hashtag #honorcrimes was also heavily tied to Israa Ghrayeb and the case of Ahlam. This outpour of social media support from the international community inspired on the ground

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

protests to pressure Palestinian Authorities to take legislative action and prevent the legal protection of violent perpetrators.

**Picture 1**



**Muslim**

Sep 15, 2019 · 🌐



Three relatives of Israa Ghrayeb were charged for her murder. Last month, Israa Ghrayeb, 21, was beaten and tortured to death by her brother for 'dishonoring' family by posting a video with a man to whom she was soon to be engaged. Social media reports claim her brother Ihab was told by her father to beat her and she suffered serious back injury when trying to escape. She was later attacked again while awaiting spinal cord surgery in the hospital. Her final message on social media was a message to her oppressors, "Don't send me messages telling me to be strong, I am strong. May God be the judge of those who oppressed me and hurt me." [#WeAreAllIsraa](#) [#IsraaGhrayeb](#)



## Ahlam

The final case study is the case of Ahlam, whose name means “dream” in English, is a Jordanian Muslim girl who was killed in the street by her father, who bludgeoned her head with a brick in the middle of the night. Ahlam's screams were recorded through neighborhood security cameras and the video was circulated throughout social media. Ahlam, whose full name has not been disclosed and whose age has been contradicted through various media outlets, was brutally killed by her father on July 17th, 2020, during the COVID-19 international pandemic. Ahlam, was a resident of Jordan, and was approximately thirty years old, according to six of the ten media articles that appear on Google’s search engine under “justice for ahlam”, has made headlines on various news outlets after her gruesome murder in Amman, Jordan.

Ahlam, had recently returned to her home after her stay at a women’s detention facility after reporting domestic abuse.<sup>74</sup> “Reports indicate a long history of abuse preceding the murder, which police had allegedly only dealt with by having her family sign ‘pledges’ to stop the abuse.”<sup>75</sup> It is unknown as to what led to Ahlam fleeing her family’s home in the middle of the night, but it was then that her father chased her with a brick and bludgeoned her head until she died. The most horrifying part of the story is that it is said that after her father bashed Ahlam’s head into the concrete with a brick, he lit a cigarette, pulled up a chair, and drank a cup of tea next to her body while he waited for the paramedics to arrive.<sup>76</sup> It’s said that neighbors witnessed the altercation outside and that she was already bleeding when she was being chased, however no one intervened. According to some witnesses, neighbors tried to

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<sup>74</sup> Roberts, Abigail. *ABC News*, ABC News Network, July 2020, [abcnews.go.com/International/video-father-beating-daughter-death-called-honor-killing/story?id=71903071](https://abcnews.go.com/International/video-father-beating-daughter-death-called-honor-killing/story?id=71903071).

<sup>75</sup> Amin, Bahira. “Ahlam's Screams: Harrowing ‘Honour Killing’ in Jordan Sparks Outrage and Demands for Justice.” *SceneArabia*, 20 July 2020, [scenearabia.com/Life/Ahlams-Screams-Harrowing-Honour-Killing-in-Jordan-Sparks-Social-Media-Outrage](https://scenearabia.com/Life/Ahlams-Screams-Harrowing-Honour-Killing-in-Jordan-Sparks-Social-Media-Outrage).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*



intervene after they heard the screams, but were stopped by Ahlam's brothers,<sup>77</sup> and paramedics didn't arrive on the scene until thirty minutes after the incident. Ahlam's father did not get arrested until only after the videos of Ahlam's screams and pictures of her body circulated social media.

“The video of Ahlam's cries ignited a furious nationwide debate not only over the myriad ways Jordan's legal system has failed to protect women, but also over how they're viewed in the deeply conservative society.”<sup>78</sup> Seven of the ten news media articles shown in Figure 2 were based in the west and had received an uproar in Jordan, flooding social media with the goal of granting justice for Ahlam. Every article wrote about the condemnation the killer must face in response to the heinous act and provides the pushback the Jordanian government has faced due to Jordan's complacent laws and penal code. Article 340 and the lack of protection for women against domestic abuse are issues activists alike are trying to improve on in Jordan. “While Jordan has changed some of its laws, including Article 340, which allows judges to issue sentences that are less severe for males who kill or harm a female relative for adultery, Article 99 remains one of the country's most frequently invoked statutes.”<sup>79</sup>

The most commonly used hashtags (**Picture 2**) associated with Ahlam's murder were #TheScreamsofAhlam, #JusticeForAhlam, and #BloodDoesNotBecomeTea. The social media platforms that evoked the most results with those hashtags were Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter with Instagram and Twitter having the most comments. Each article condemns Jordan

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<sup>77</sup> Amir, Khitam Al. “Father Kills Daughter and Drinks Tea beside Her Body in Jordan.” *Mena – Gulf News*, Gulf News, 20 July 2020, [gulfnews.com/world/mena/father-kills-daughter-and-drinks-tea-beside-her-body-in-jordan-1.1595164364536](https://www.gulfnews.com/world/mena/father-kills-daughter-and-drinks-tea-beside-her-body-in-jordan-1.1595164364536).

<sup>78</sup> Bulos, Nabih. “After Woman's Brutal Killing by Her Father, Jordan Asks at What Price 'Honor'?” *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles Times, 28 July 2020, [www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-07-28/jordan-honor-killing-protests-violence-against-women](https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-07-28/jordan-honor-killing-protests-violence-against-women).

<sup>79</sup> Kavalier, Tara. “Activists Hope 'Honor Killing' of Jordanian Teen Will Be Turning Point.” *The Media Line*, 21 July 2020, [themedialine.org/by-region/activists-hope-honor-killing-of-jordanian-teen-will-be-turning-point/](https://themedialine.org/by-region/activists-hope-honor-killing-of-jordanian-teen-will-be-turning-point/).

for their lack of protection against women, and calls for a change in legislation, before there can be societal change. There were also a significant number of connections and comparisons to the murder of Israa Ghrayeb, and the urgency to bring about legislative change. The push for social media activism was not as big as Israa's, but it's the beginning step towards permanent change.

Picture 2



## **Collective Findings**

These three case studies serve as a steppingstone to distinguish the differences not only in time frame, but also in social media advocacy. The lack of findings surrounding Henriette Karra demonstrate that not a single social media post regarding Henriette Kara was found. Not even a lot of the mainstream news media websites, and it has to do predominantly with the fact that she identifies as an Arab-Israeli Christian, despite her being murdered in cold blood by her own father on the basis of crime, the Israeli media did not allow her to be categorized as another honor crime because it does not align with the cultural practices of her faith and Arab-Israeli identity.

Israa on the other hand, received massive social media attention with protests surging throughout the international community. Given, Israa was already well known in the world of social media because of her popularity as a make-up artist, but she was only a local influencer. Israa updated her social media accounts letting her followers know of her circumstances while she was in the hospital. Israa wanted to live, and it was evident by her will to keep her followers updated. What also helped her cause was that after her death, there was a video circulating social media where her screams were made very apparent throughout the video while she was in the hospital. Israa's dedicated followers took to social media and began social and political movements in an effort to end the violence against women and killings "in the name of honor".

Finally, the story of Ahlam, who was an average Jordanian woman with no significant social media presence, still received media attention due to the video of her final screams being shared. The witnesses who were brave enough to share it and voice their opinion on how they were appalled at her father who sat next to her lifeless body drinking tea was enough to raise awareness and push the Jordanian society to advocate for justice. Posts of Israa and Henriette, demonstrate the mass online movements that a single hashtag can have in uniting the

international community while also holding those in power accountable for their actions. The hashtags (**Table 1**) were shared, retweeted, and liked by thousands of people and was a stance in solidarity with victims of honor-based violence and crimes.

**Table 1**

<b>SOCIAL MEDIA HASHTAGS</b>	
<b>ENGLISH</b>	<b>ARABIC</b>
#HonorCrimes	#جرائم_الشرف
#WeAreAllIsraa	#كلنا_اسراء
#JusticeForIsraa	#العدالة_لاسراء
#TheScreamsofAhlam	#صرخات_احلام
#IsraaGhrayeb	#اسراء_غريب

## Legislative Changes

Now that the cases have been identified and the analysis of their social media effects have been analyzed, it's important to see how the social amplification of said crimes have resulted in any legislative changes. With the legal dynamics of the Palestinian Territories already a challenge due to the split between Gaza and the West Bank, it is challenging to implement any sort of legal developments. However, the latest advocacy efforts regarding changes to the penal code in relation to honor killings was inspired by the protestors who took their online efforts to the streets, demanding greater legal protection for women in the Palestinian Territories.

The broken silence on this issue resulted in the release of a public statement by the Office of the Head of the Palestinian National Authority, Mohammad Shtayyeh<sup>80</sup> as well as an investigation to the matter that ultimately also led to the arrests of three of Israa's relatives. They were charged with manslaughter under article 330 of Law No. 16 of 1960 on the Penal Code. Under Article 330, it is stipulated that manslaughter is punishable by imprisonment for a minimum of five years.<sup>81</sup> Article 326 of the Penal Code entails a murder charge is punishable with 15 years of imprisonment with hard labor and the harshest punishment being article 328 which punishes the perpetrator of murder of a sister, daughter, or mother with the death penalty.<sup>82</sup> Each article weighs differently, only increasing in gravity of punishment and although it might be easy to presume that the crime committed by Israa's family fits the punishment under Article 328, in the end, charges under Article 330 were pressed against Israa's perpetrator.

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<sup>80</sup> "Www.alhurra.com." Perma.cc, 5 Sept. 2019, <https://perma.cc/CXG5-MZAV>.

<sup>81</sup> West Bank: Palestinian Authority Announces Planned Changes to Penal Code in Response to Case of Honor Killing. 2019. Web Page. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2019-11-13/west-bank-palestinian-authority-announces-planned-changes-to-penal-code-in-response-to-case-of-honor-killing/](http://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2019-11-13/west-bank-palestinian-authority-announces-planned-changes-to-penal-code-in-response-to-case-of-honor-killing/)>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

As of 2018, the West Bank repealed Article 308 of the penal code which exonerated a rapist of criminal charges if the perpetrator married the rape survivor. Although this was before the slaying of Israa Ghrayeb, laws that allowed mitigation of penalties for honor crimes were repealed in 2011 and the most recent were in 2018 in the West Bank, however Gaza has not applied the same reforms.<sup>83</sup> Gaza has not amended Article 18 of the Criminal Code of 1936 which allows for an excuse of a crime to be committed under the circumstances that the causes were considered “irreparable damage to their honour, money, or the person or honour of others that those offenders are obliged to protect, or money placed in their possession” The penal laws reaffirm societal norms by providing reduced punishments for male perpetrators.

The West Bank has made progress by ratifying certain legislative articles, the most infamous, Article 340, adopted from the Jordanian Penal Code and repealed in 2011 by Presidential decree.<sup>84</sup> Despite the repeal of Article 340, there are other provisions that still allow room for reduced sentences based on mitigating factors such as Article 99 where the court is allowed to reduce penalties if the victim’s family offers a personal “pardon” to the perpetrator. However, as of 2018 it has been amended to prohibit judges from using it to reduce sentences for serious crimes, especially those of women and children<sup>85</sup>.

Comparing both Palestinian Territories to Jordan, it seems that the West Bank has taken the lead on the developments of legislative reform. Jordan, unlike the Palestinian Territories, does not have the complications of an ununified government. Honor crimes in Jordanian society are the ultimate representation of a sociological and cultural problem where laws and norms of

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<sup>83</sup> State of Palestine Gender Justice & The Law . United Nations Development Programme, 2018, [https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Palestine.Country.Assessment.Eng\\_.pdf](https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Palestine.Country.Assessment.Eng_.pdf).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

the society are at odds with the observed laws<sup>86</sup>. Islamic laws are not interpreted by the Jordanian society correctly, because if they were, honor crimes would not be condoned. Islamic law holds a more sophisticated system of justice without gender discrimination while the Jordanian System fails to do so as clearly being gender biased in its penal code which is in direct contrast to the Jordanian constitution which grants equality to all Jordanian citizens.

After the viral videos of Ahlam went viral, the uproar in Jordan was shared predominantly through social media but the testament to changing societal views of honor crimes are the street protests that took place in the streets of Jordan. According to a news report, the Jordanian governments response to the protests resulted in a gag order of the cases, banning the media from reporting on it and the public from discussing the crime<sup>87</sup>. This ban did not prevent the ongoing protest and petitions circulating Jordanian society advocating for the protection of women and better legislation.

Thanks to the persistence of women activist groups from women's shelters and various other efforts, demonstrations have been able to push for the government's admittance that Jordanian society indeed does suffer from a gender violence-based problem and it's the government's obligation to act and take responsibility for the safety and security of women's rights. In August of 2017, Jordanian women saw their voices being heard after Article 308, was finally repealed. This was partially due to a regional movement geared towards canceling provisions that allow impunity for sexual assault and was echoed in support by the governments of Tunisia and Lebanon repealing their own similar penal code provisions<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Hussein, Rana. "Rising against so Called Honor Killings in Jordan." Wilson Center, 25 Nov. 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/rising-against-so-called-honor-killings-jordan>.

<sup>88</sup> "Jordan: Parliament Passes Human Rights Reforms." Human Rights Watch, 4 Oct. 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/04/jordan-parliament-passes-human-rights-reforms>.

Article 98 was also amended to disallow mitigated sentences for crimes against women, but the highly debated Article 340 remains in place allowing for a loophole in Article 98. The loophole leaves room for the common defense known as the crime being committed in a “fit of fury”. The last amendment made to Article 340 was in 2001 where a clause was added to the article that included women attackers to receive the same benefit of a mitigated sentence should they commit a crime based on fury should they discover their spouse in the act of committing adultery. This was the latest amendment rather than the complete abolishment of the article and 20 years later, is still being advocated to be completely abolished. Today, the sentences are becoming longer and the government, like the Jordanian society is no longer tolerating the “honor” crime excuse. While there is still a long way to go in legislative changes for both Jordan and Palestine, it’s nice to know the efforts are only progressing.

## **DISCUSSION**

After analyzing the data gathered through social media platforms, comparing hashtags and posts alike as well as seeing the effects that it has resulted in legislative change; the role that social media plays in merging feminists of the global community alike is online advocacy. When comparing Arab news media ideologies to that of the west, they are quite similar in many ways, but also distinct. For Arab regimes, the internet and especially social media has recently become more than just a microphone, but a weapon for the oppressed as young activists take to the internet inspired with goals to seek out justice. While the ideologies of the West are similar in terms of seeking justice through various forms of social media advocacy, there is a distinction. The West has sought refuge in the comfort of running to social media to freely share their advocacy, and while it may be a giant step for the West, for women in the Middle East, it is still not completely successful outside the digital realm.



These factors rely on one another, and they compromise the social and political system of societies in the Levant. As time progresses, the use of social media increases, and it's events like the Arab Spring that has paved the way for an ongoing Women Spring. While globalization and modernization constantly receive pushback from the Middle East, families are beginning to stray away from long held traditions and concepts and recognize that domestic and gender-based violence is wrong. The religious ties that bound the laws to legislation are constantly being challenged to separate the wrongfully interpreted religious implications from being used as weapons against women. Social media is merely the first step to furthering progression and legal change and the case studies from this thesis have proven that there has been a shift on gender-based violence thanks to the persistence of the civil society, activists, and women's movements.

While more notable social movements known in the West like #MeToo have proven to be successful in terms of raising awareness regarding victims of sexual assault and making almost immediate effects with employees in the workplace, at universities, and is on its way to implementing systemic legal change;<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, for women in the Middle East when social movements are put into practice, there is a mix of results. Western countries are already used to this strong form of activism, but it is still new to the Middle East especially when drawn back to the history between secular and religious factors.

Although the conversation and space to speak on the issue is there, reform for example, in Jordan for Article 340 and article 99 are still in place. It is essential to keep uprooting this conversation and bringing attention to the issue to finally see the effects that happen in the Western world, in the Middle East. This could lead to expansion of women centers across the

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<sup>89</sup> Conklin, Michael, et al. "#MeToo Effects on Juror Decision Making." *California Law Review*, 18 June 2020, [www.californialawreview.org/metoo-juror-decision-making/#clr-toc-heading-3](http://www.californialawreview.org/metoo-juror-decision-making/#clr-toc-heading-3).

region and activate the governing bodies to resolve the cases that stem from the need for these centers. A most notable recommendation moving forward would be to allow for the accurate numbers of domestic violence cases to be reported and cease censorship on the topic.

Promoting community campaigns, whether it be via social media or grassroots advocacy can create room for opportunity for women to seek opportunity within the societal norms, but also break barriers that would lead to the decrease of violence against women.

It may be taking more time in the Middle East for further legal changes to develop as demonstrated in the recently amended legislation, but the contemporary discussions of feminist activists online continue to grow momentum, especially through social media. Despite the distinctions, “one can deduce that women’s movements in the Middle East are challenged to work with or through state structures which at times could be conducive and at other times impeding women’s activism. Women’s movements fluctuate between adherence and opposition to existing structures, occasionally trying manoeuvre and expand political spaces but rarely rejecting the system in its totality.”<sup>90</sup>

After the studies that this thesis has presented and comparing the various sociopolitical structures of various governments across the Middle Eastern region, violence against women is a global issue and human rights concern that not only threatens the livelihood of women, but of the entire society. The case studies have demonstrated that the absence of protective laws especially in communities that have lower levels of education and economic conditions, indirectly contribute to gender-based violence in the region, but the campaigning is very much alive. It’s evident that the change is needed and not just in Palestinian Territories and Jordan, but the entire Middle Eastern region as well as the rest of the world, which is why it is

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<sup>90</sup> Al-Ali, Nadjie. “Women's Movements in the Middle East: Case Studies of Egypt and Turkey.” 2002. [https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/4889/2/UNRISD\\_Report\\_final.pdf](https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/4889/2/UNRISD_Report_final.pdf)

imperative for the discussion of gender-based violence continues to be talked about and include the restructuring of media discourse on violence against women.

## **CONCLUSION**

The problem with the society in the case studies above specifically, is that the perpetrators are also victims of these atrocities; they have fallen victim to the patriarchal society that places them in a position of choosing honor over the life of a woman. Honor killings and other crimes such as the ones noted in this thesis serve as an essential reminder about the plight of honor, gender-based violence, and overall abuse towards women and girls in patriarchal societies. The ethical dilemma of culture and religion is no longer being accepted as a legal defense, but rather highlights the importance of the shift of sociocultural change and strife for inclusive environments for the protection of women.

Overall, based on the evidence demonstrated thus far, honor crimes, gender-based violence and femicide are increasingly receiving ongoing efforts of both online and offline activism by women across the region. The start of a new revolution for the Middle East is already on the rise. Social media has proven to be this generations most prominent tool to voicing and acknowledging the power of transnational commonalities, because for the first time ever individuals – in this case women— control the narrative. Women share their stories, their struggles, their pleas, and their injustices which allow women from all over the world to stand in solidarity with one another. There is a promising hope for the future development in the region, by the enablement of social media's objective of influencing societal change and the notions of women's empowerment, to be fully embraced by Arab women and men. The changes taken place thus far are not enough, yet still hold promise for a future of peace and protection so long as the fight continues, because in the end, there is no honor in crime.