

# Honor Crimes in Siham Alenezi's *Saliha's Execution*

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**Abstract**—This research paper examines honor crimes that prevail in patriarchal societies. The researcher conducts a feminist analysis on Siham Alenezi's novel, *Saliha's Execution* (2022), which is inspired by real events in a Saudi town. It shows that the main female characters in this novel – Munira, Saliha, and Sita – are persecuted by the tyrannical norms and traditions of the patriarchal system in which they live. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the various multilayered pressures women experience that might lead to their murder at the hands of their narrow-minded/ extremist relatives, as in the case of Munira's murder in the novel under study. Thus, the present paper comes to the conclusion that many women who lose their lives under the so-called honor crimes are innocent and honorable women like Munira. In this case, the victimized women are perceived as representations of honor to be protected and controlled rather than human beings. As Loza (2022) demonstrates, honor-based crimes inflict long-lasting trauma on entire communities.

**Index Terms**—honor crimes, honor killing, patriarchy, oppression, cultural norms

## I. INTRODUCTION

Siham Alenezi is a Saudi novelist, poet, and literary translator. She was born in Saudi Arabia and lives currently in Kuwait. The writer has written a series of stories about different nations and translated them from English to Arabic. It is a collection of novels and short stories based on true crimes. She won the Damascus Literary Festival Award. Her novel *Saliha's Execution* (2022) decries and exposes the defects and dangerous consequences of the oppressive norms of the patriarchal society that have nothing to do with true Islam or any other religion. Rather, such repression and coercion are rooted in rigid cultural norms (Abu-Lughod, 2011) and traditions, and they are not limited to a specific country or religion. They suppress women's desires, kill their ambitions, deprive them of rights enshrined in international frameworks (United Nations, 1948), and limit their life choices. The irony in patriarchal and traditional societies lurks in stark gender injustice. As Shalhoub-Kevorkian (1999) observes, patriarchal societies assign men the role of custodians of family honor, and they exclude men from any severe punishment when they violate their family's honor. The author displays women's agonies as they are subject to rumors, surveillance, retaliation, murder, and/ or disgrace in patriarchal societies. In this research, the researcher questions and condemns the stifling patriarchal rules, especially when they result in fatal consequences, by applying a feminist analysis on Siham Alenezi's *Saliha's Execution*.

E'dam *Saliha* [*Saliha's Execution*] is a Saudi novel that portrays female characters of different generations who live in suppressive conditions. The novel ends with the death of three people as a result of unjust, oppressive patriarchal traditions and norms. In order to expose such gender-based violence, the researcher has translated into English some texts from the novel for the purpose of her research. Accordingly, she would like to note that all the quotes are her translation. In Siham Alenezi's *Saliha's Execution*, Munira, Saliha, and Sita are "othered" and oppressed for crossing the lines of the accepted norms and not adhering to the roles assigned to females in their patriarchal society. Dedi Nur explains in his article 'An Analysis of the Feminist Characters in Kate Chopin's "The Awakening"' that in patriarchal societies, men and women are different because of the way they were brought up, which has set men to be powerful and women to be powerless. In these societies, women are assigned traditional jobs like taking care of a husband and bearing children, and kinds of jobs are used to keep women in subjugating positions (Nur, 2017, p. 2). In light of this, many women in close-knit societies must comply with the accepted traditions and roles assigned to females, and they have to maintain their chastity. Furthermore, a woman's future husband should be accepted and welcomed by the male members of her family.

Symbolizing the honor of their families, women in patriarchal societies are subject to a high level of surveillance and discipline. In conservative societies, any moral misconduct will not be tolerated, and the sinful woman will be susceptible to various sorts of abuse, verbally, emotionally, and physically. The woman's misconduct might result in her death in an honor crime. Kulwicki (2002, p. 77) defines an honor crime as an act of violence carried out by male relatives against a woman who is perceived to have disgraced her family. Langah and Umrani (2022, p. 2) note that honor killings originate from deeply rooted patriarchal traditions and are not confined to any one religion, culture, or geographic region. Historically, such practices have been observed in societies across the Mediterranean, Latin America, and among some Muslim communities. Today, countries in South Asia—such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India—continue to report high incidences of honor-related violence. By the same token, Anahid Devartanian Kulwicki states that criminal laws in some Arab countries like Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, which involve honor crimes, are somehow lenient. In some cases, they

exempt the perpetrators from penalty. The roots of these laws go back to Ottoman, French, Spanish, and Italian laws which were adopted by the aforementioned Arab countries (Kulwicki, 2002, p. 83). Kulwicki (2002) explains that in certain cultures, traditional beliefs not only justify the killing of women accused of sexual transgressions but also often absolve the perpetrators from facing legal consequences (p. 77).

Close-knit societies believe that if a woman commits a shameful act, honor-based violence, which ranges from physical assault, domestic abuse, forced abortion, forced marriage to a woman's rapist, threats of killing, and being poisoned, can restore the honor of the family. Honor killing is usually committed by one or more perpetrators, mainly male family members (AlQahtani et al., 2023, p. 1). In fact, some cultures place great importance on women's social and sexual behavior, which explains the honor-killing phenomenon in these communities. Thus, cultures that place great importance on familial and societal networks consider honor killing a collective act decided by the family network (AlQahtani et al., 2023, p. 1). As a matter of fact, it is correct that in most cases, honor killings need group approval for their validity, yet in some cases, the killings are done individually in a fit of fury. Either way, the current research condemns honor crimes that persecute and oppress many innocent people, as the researcher will exemplify in the discussion and analysis section. Therefore, perpetrators of honor crimes should be punished severely by the authorities. From the researcher's perspective, the penalty for honor offenses should commensurate with the gravity of the crime committed in order to deter the fundamentalists from committing crimes under the name of honor. Nazirullah et al. (2022) argue that strict criminal penalties can act as an effective deterrent, discouraging individuals from committing honor killings in society (p. 130). Generally speaking, the paper at hand asserts that honor crimes are not exclusive to one nationality or one religion; quite the contrary, such crimes can be found among people who come from different nationalities and religious backgrounds. Ultimately, honor killing is not justified, nor is it ordained in any religion.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In their article "Honor Killing and Penalties in Criminal Law for Accusers: Ethnographic Case Studies of Islamic Ethnic Lawyers and Victims" (2022), Nazirullah, Saheem Nasif, and Shakeel Ahmed explain that honor-based murder is a societal phenomenon that occurs when a family's honor is shamed by violating prescribed sexual boundaries. The violators face social penalties that might end in their death. Honor killing is known in patriarchal societies as a way to control women's illegal sexual relationships with both males and females. Oftentimes, unlawful intimate partner relationships that society considers illegal and prohibited result in honor killings. Nazirullah et al. correctly insist that the accuser of honor crimes must be rigorously punished in the court's jurisdiction and legislation. Judges must have the authority to pass severe verdicts against offenders. Nazirullah et al. add that punishment can deter honor fundamentalists from committing crimes due to the fear of court punishment. Thus, the honor crime rate will be controlled in the future.

In her article "Women's bodies and lives as symbols of patriarchal codes: Honor killings" (2022), Yasmine Loza points out that honor crimes, also called "shame killings", are violent acts of murder. These acts "are supposedly held to save the reputation and honor of the family." The worst and most extreme form of honor violence is honor killing, in which the family's honor is restored by killing the offending woman. Loza postulates that although honor crimes occur in myriad countries among communities of different cultural and religious backgrounds, they are more likely to happen among conservative traditional societies. However, Loza insists, which is also the researcher's emphasis, that such crimes have nothing to do with restoring the dignity and honor of a family reputation. Conversely, honor killing deprives and dispossesses the woman of "her own essential being, body, choices, and life due to ignorance" (Loza, 2022, p. 7).

In their article "Gender, Sexuality and Representation in Pakistani Literature: Qandeel Baloch as a Victim of Honor Killing" (2022), Nukhbah Taj Langah and Sumera Umrani explain that honor killing is justified on the pretense that the murdered has defiled, disgraced, and humiliated her family and tribe. The murder is carried out by male family members who suspect that their female kin has gone beyond the boundaries of womanhood defined by tribal masters. The writers postulate that tribal honor is maintained through females' chastity, self-effacement, and obedience. Women's honor, in this sense, is fragile, and it is jeopardized by women's liberty, education, or/ and employment. At times, even weak assumptions and mere suspicions of a woman's infidelity to her family can damage tribal honor. Likewise, Munira, in *Saliha's Execution*, risks her family's reputation by her insistence on working with men. Thus, by rejecting the social norms and taboos, Munira defies domestic restrictions assigned to women; consequently, she becomes subject to her community's disdain and her brother's revenge.

In her Ph.D. dissertation, *Arab Feminism and the Negotiation of Gender in Contemporary Jordanian Novels* (2016), Amani Al Serhan discusses the demeaning state of women under the stifling system of patriarchy in the Arab world in general and in Jordan in particular. She focuses in her dissertation on women who are deprived of some of their "human rights", like the right to study, to work, or to choose a husband. She condemns how women are valued in relation to their men and perceived as part of their clan rather than based on their characteristics. When girls are raised in a close-knit society under the control of many male members, they resort to marriage, where they enjoy some newly found freedom and personal space under the watchful gaze of only one man, the husband. In her dissertation, Al Serhan calls for a change in women's status in the Arab world to emerge from passivity and assume an effective role in society. She also questions honor crimes and argues that they have no roots in Islamic teachings. Al Serhan criticizes the double-standard nature of patriarchy, meaning that a man's honor remains intact no matter how many sins he commits, whereas a woman's honor

can be stained at the slightest mistake. Finally, Al Serhan points out that patriarchy is maintained and perpetuated not only by men but also by some women.

In his article “Honor Crimes in Sahar Khalifeh’s *The Inheritance* and Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock: A Comparative Study*” (2015), Hussein Alhawamdeh criticizes “honor crimes”, which are sometimes committed in patriarchal societies, as tyrannical conduct rooted in patriarchy rather than Islam. Alhawamdeh adds that the discourse of honor crimes is a man-made culture, which is legitimized by tradition rather than religion. Indeed, Islam has never incited honor crimes; rather, they are based on false interpretations, not “on clearly religious textual evidences that justify [the] killings” (Alhawamdeh, 2016, p. 106).

In her article “Crimes of Honor and Shame: Violence Against Women in Non-Western and Western Societies” (2000), Sharon K. Araji sheds light on the double standard of patriarchal perception of the females’ and males’ amoral acts and behaviors. The punitive traditional reactions towards males’ and females’ violation of their family honor are unjustly different. Araji (2000) illustrates that in India, a son who gains a reputation for behaviors such as stealing or gambling may tarnish the family’s name, but such actions typically do not lead to severe repercussions from his family. In fact, this point has been tackled in Siham Alenezi’s *Saliha’s Execution*, where the immoral behaviors of Yousef and Khalid do not besmear their honor while their sisters’ work outside the house does. The novel also exposes the hypocrisy of patriarchal societies where the concept of honor and shame is associated with women’s conduct, irrespective of men’s behavior.

Although the aforementioned studies have discussed the concept of honor crimes, they tackled it as a harmful conduct that has detrimental effects. However, this research is different in that it analyzes the concept of honor crimes by applying it to a true story from a Saudi culture. Furthermore, it sheds light on a rural woman who loses her life as a result of unjust rumors that tarnish her reputation and ruin her children’s lives. Therefore, the researcher demonstrates in the discussion section that the aforementioned crimes have severe consequences not only for the generation of the murdered individual but also for the subsequent generations of that person.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher applies a feminist lens informed by Butler’s (1990) theory of gendered power dynamics in reading Siham Alenezi’s *Saliha’s Execution*. In doing so, the researcher tackles two dangerous issues: honor crimes and patriarchy.

### IV. CRITICAL EXAMINATION: THEMATIC EXPLORATION AND TITLE RESONANCE

#### A. Title Significance and Summary

Before delving deeper into the discussion and analysis of the events of *Saliha’s Execution*, the researcher would like to start this part by discussing briefly the significance of the title. Next, a summary of the main events is provided for clarification. Concerning the title page of the book, it works as the first hook that represents and reflects professionally the content of the novel. The title, *E’dam Saliha [Saliha’s Execution]*, is very significant in that it talks about the death sentence of a woman named Saliha, and this name means a good woman. Thus, the title in itself is quite moving because, from the very beginning, the reader comes to know that the book is about a woman who will be unjustly executed.

*Saliha’s Execution* is a story of extreme oppression practiced on one of the women, Munira, in a Saudi village (1999) where patriarchy is overarching and domineering power. Munira is wronged by her immediate family members—her parents, brother Sa’ad, and sister Manal—whom she loves and reveres. Munira’s story starts after the death of her husband when she finds herself forced to finance, all by herself, her five children since no one has offered her any economic support. Although she maintains her morality and chastity as she works on the farms, her job brings her and her family a lot of harsh gossip and criticism since she is mixing with men. The rumors about Sa’ad’s sister’s alleged immorality humiliate him and tarnish the family’s reputation among the townspeople. After a heated argument with her brother, who considers himself her guardian, he kills her in a surge of anger in his parents’ house. Considering the tyrannical authority of the patriarch, Halim Barakat states that the patriarch “continues to wield authority, assumes responsibility for the family, and expects respect and unquestioning compliance with his instructions” (Barakat, 1993, p. 23). This quotation justifies Sa’ad’s inability to tolerate his sister’s disobedience with his orders.

It is noteworthy to mention that Munira’s parents and siblings do not mourn their deceased daughter, but they grieve over the imprisonment of their son, Sa’ad. At this point, the researcher would like to comment that Sa’ad’s deed of murder does not taint his reputation; on the contrary, he is praised, and his deed is celebrated by his family and the majority of his people as well. Alhawamdeh further argues that even if male characters demonstrate moral depravity and social irresponsibility, they still feel that they are the protectors of their family’s honor and cannot be held accountable to punish or kill their sisters, daughters, or wives in order to clear the shame (p. 105). As illustrated in this research, Munira, Saliha, and Sita assume an active and productive role in their society; however, they are scrutinized and oppressed by their useless brothers. Essentially, the brothers exploit and benefit from the power offered to them by their society.

For the purpose of alleviating the verdict and mitigating the sentence of their son, Munira’s parents falsely testify against their murdered daughter, telling the police that she was a sinful woman. Further, they pressure Munira’s children and allure them with a large amount of money to drop the lawsuit against the murderer of their mother. This compensation money causes a lot of disputes and quarrels between Munira’s children. It also tempts their half-brother, Yousef, to steal it, killing Khaled in the process. After the murder of her only financial and emotional supporter, Munira’s eldest daughter,

Saliha, has to shoulder the whole responsibility alone. She, along with her sister, Sita, drops out of university and embarks on a hard mission of looking for a job. Yet, with the tarnished reputation of their mother and without a university degree, this mission is even harder in their close-knit community.

The same scenario is repeated with Saliha, who is forced to assume lowly jobs to secure life necessities for her siblings, and she faces the same unmerciful backbiting and criticism from her community, the thing which leads her brothers, Khalid and Yousef, to abuse her physically and verbally. At the same time, the two brothers refuse to offer any substitute solution to her financial difficulties. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator describes Saliha's devastated soul and exhausted mentality after having experienced all kinds of oppression and suppression from her family members and strangers equally. Saliha's suffering culminates in the unjust and painful death of her brother, Khalid, as a consequence of his mother's oppressive murder. In a state of blind rage and despair, Saliha retaliates against the murderer of her brother, and she kills her half-brother, Yousef.

### B. Discussion and Analysis

The researcher would like to start this section by denouncing all the accusations that blame honor murder on Islam. In fact, "religious authorities disagree with extra punishments such as honour killing and prohibit it" (Muhammad, 2013, p. 21; Alhawamdeh's emphasis, 2015; Nazirullah et al.'s emphasis, 2022). Barakat (1993) points out that while many Arab scholars acknowledge that women are generally placed in a lower societal position, there is considerable disagreement over how widely this inequality is accepted within Arab communities. As such, in her novel, Alenezi makes it clear that she is critical of gendered beliefs and practices. In essence, this novel is a harsh outcry against the injustices and misogynistic customs practiced against women under the name of Islam. This can be highlighted in the character of Munira and Saliha in particular. Without having any concrete evidence, the townspeople wrongly accuse Munira and then her daughters of deviating from Islamic teachings by committing obscene sins. From this perspective, the novel condemns the religious misconceptions about women, and it calls for reformation. Furthermore, this novel can also be considered a call for women to reevaluate their roles in life and to assume more vibrant and productive positions in society.

The setting of the novel, *Saliha's Execution*, is a small town in Saudi Arabia where people are strictly attached to their traditional and cultural norms and values, like the separation of men and women in all sectors of life. Significantly, many conservative communities maintain their strict patriarchal traditions. Thus, countries that insist on sex separation, Sherifa Zuhur explains in her research paper "Considerations of Honor Crimes, FGM, Kidnapping/Rape, and Early Marriage in Selected Arab Nations", like Saudi Arabia risk women's rights violations. Zuhur acknowledges that honor violence involves murder or attempted murder. These crimes emanate from the deeply rooted social beliefs of some men and women in tight knit patriarchal societies to control and protect the sexuality of women in the family. They must contain their women and keep them in order or kill them for soiling the reputation of the family (Zuhur, 2004, p. 4).

Accordingly, defiant women, like the main female character of the novel, Munira, in patriarchal societies are at risk of honor violence. In the novel, Munira is not described as vulnerable or conformist despite the economic and social pressures laid on her after the death of her husband. She endures the townspeople's condescending view of her as a widowed working woman. She learns farming from watching her father and other farmers working on the farms, and she has a great passion for working like them. However, she is prevented by her husband and by her brother, Sa'ad, after her husband's death. This is because working in mixed surroundings goes against the traditions of Munira's society. AlQahtani et al. explain that in deeply patriarchal societies, a man's honor is closely tied to the behavior of his female family members, and this tradition of men being responsible for protecting women's honor has been perpetuated across generations. If a woman's father dies, she still has her brothers and cousins to ensure her chastity until she gets bonded to a new honor-guarding man that is a husband (AlQahtani et al., 2023, p. 4). As such, the females' guardianship is perceived as a kind of commodity that is liable to be inherited or shared among the male members of the family.

In her article "Crimes of Honor and the Constructions of Gender in Arab Societies" (1996), Abu-Odeh explains that the moral acts of Arab women are controlled and supervised by males. Accordingly, in Arab culture, failing to restore one's honor, especially by not retaliating against a female relative who is perceived to have brought shame, is seen as a serious blow to a man's masculinity (1996, p. 13). This conviction is adopted in many patriarchal societies, and this is illustrated in the novel under study. In *Saliha's Execution*, Sa'ad is shamed and enraged by the gossip about his sister's supposed immorality, especially that she insists on working with men on the farms. Unable to convince Munira to quit her job, Sa'ad murders her to restore his lost manhood and wash the family's honor in her blood. In fact, Munira's defiance of the social structures of her society sends her to the grave. During a scheduled meeting between Munira and her brother, tensions rise and lead to a heated confrontation.

He insists that her work shames him among the townspeople, who look down upon him. He asserts that he is the man, and his word is the final, the thing that Munira denies as long as he does not take part in her family's finances (Alenezi, 2022, p. 15). The author here is strongly critical of Saudi/ Arab men who cling to backward conceptions regarding women's right to work. She also condemns the oppressive society that pressures men to commit such heinous crimes. In patriarchal cultures, men are instigated to kill the alleged immoral woman by provoking expressions. These expressions challenge men's masculinity, and they urge them to kill the misbehaved woman. In this vein, AlQahtani et al. explain that: When the family members are reluctant to commit the act of honor killing, they are under relentless intensive peer pressure of their society surrounding and as a traumatizing measure, they are strictly not allowed to express the smallest

kind of sympathy with their assaulted female family member. Rather, they are encouraged to punish, stigmatize, and reject them, hoping to one day restore the family's dignity in society (AlQahtani et al., 2023, p. 4).

In patrilineal societies where the honor of a man is measured by women's chastity, usually any male member of the patriline can harass or even kill his unlawful woman (Kulwicki, 2002, p. 86). Accordingly, women's reputation in these societies is part and parcel of their clan's reputation, and if this reputation has been sullied in any way, the whole clan will be unmercifully scandalized. Similarly, Barakat agrees that the sexual misbehavior of a woman reflects not only upon herself but upon her family as a whole. Thus, the crime of honor, which is sometimes still practiced in tightly knit communities, is an attempt to retrieve the family's honor and stature in the community by killing the sinful woman (Barakat, 1993, p. 98). By her insistence on working in mixed surroundings, Munira crosses the red lines of accepted norms of her society. In addition, the widespread rumors about her immorality contribute to humiliating and besmirching her family name. Therefore, Munira's brother decides to take action, meaning either to force her to quit her job or to kill her. Convinced that his sister will never leave her job, Sa'ad kills Munira after a heated argument. Sa'ad believes that his sister's murder is the perfect solution to restore the family's honor, and he admits to his father that he wishes he had killed her a long time ago (Alenezi, 2022, p. 26).

By laying bare appalling and shocking facts about a sector of Saudi society, the author exposes the defects of the suffocating patriarchal norms and their fatal and long-lasting effects, whether in this particular society or any other society that adopts similar views and traditions. Believing that Munira has brought shame and humiliation to her family, many people, including her own parents, are satisfied with her murder. For example, in many instances, the author makes it clear that Munira's father is far more worried about his son's destiny than the murder of his daughter (Alenezi, 2022, p. 17). Therefore, he hires a costly, intelligent lawyer to defend his son. The father goes further to unjustly testify against his murdered daughter in order to reduce his son's sentence. He tells the police that his daughter was a sinful woman who stained the honor of his family, and it was his son's duty to cleanse it. Ultimately, the author does a good job of conveying to the reader how indifferent Munira's father is regarding the murder of his daughter. He visits Munira's children three days after the murder to ask them to drop the lawsuit and alleviate or even conceal the charges laid upon his son, Sa'ad. Moving further into describing how mean, tough, and merciless the patriarchal society where Munira used to live is, the author makes special emphasis on the reaction of Munira's immediate family members toward their daughter's murder. The father, mother, and sister, Manal, are completely convinced of Munira's immorality, and they have buried feelings of rage and blame toward the murdered daughter for Sa'ad's imprisonment. Every time Munira's name is mentioned, they express their hatred and spite by either swearing at or cursing her and her children.

A key factor contributing to the oppression of women in patriarchal societies is the hierarchical structure, where family roles are organized by age and gender. Younger individuals are expected to submit to their elders, and women, particularly those who are poor or have children, are among the most marginalized groups in Arab society (Barakat, 1993, p. 102). The researcher personally believes that stratification plays a good part in persecuting women, and this persecution is exemplified in the novel. Munira is subordinated to her father, who keeps her from practicing the work she loves, and then her husband does the same. Even after the death of her husband, Munira comes under the guardianship and control of her narrow-minded father and extremist brother. Although the widowed woman needs to work to support her family, she has no other option but to work behind her brother's back, who refuses to take any part in financing her family. Sa'ad's control extends further to impact Munira's daughters' future; for example, he tries to interfere in their choices of university majors.

As for the reaction of the townspeople at large regarding Munira's murder, the narrator makes mention of the satisfaction of many of them. AlQahtani et al. (2023) argue that honor killings are often viewed not as criminal acts but as justified responses to perceived dishonor, seen as a way to reclaim the family's reputation and, therefore, regarded as socially acceptable behavior (p. 6). After Munira's death, the father's neighbors surrounded the old man to congratulate him and praise his son's bravery and manhood in retrieving the honor of his family by killing his sister. They console the old man over the imprisonment of his son with words that I find shocking and appalling, like:

La twatti rasak! Irfa'o! Al sijn lel rijal Sa'ad rijjal wa ghasal arduh wa sharafuh be yadduh, Munira law tammam aysha beta'athu fi al ardh fasadan dawaha w jaha ... testahal al mawt al walad ma makano walad amma al bint mithl al zubala tatakathar! (Alenezi, 2022, p. 29)

[Do not lower your head! Raise it! Prison is for men Sa'ad cleansed his honor with his hands. Had Munira remained alive, she would have wreaked havoc on the earth. She got the perfect cure and deserved death. Sons cannot be replaced, but daughters multiply like garbage.<sup>1</sup>] The tarnished reputation of Munira does not end with Munira's death; it extends to spoil her children's lives, particularly the daughters' lives. Munira's daughters are stigmatized and haunted by the alleged immoral deeds of their mother. People refrain from dealing with or talking to them. The narrator adds that whoever dares to admit Saliha and her sister to their homes, even if for serving purposes, is harshly criticized by the rest of the community members. You should be proud of your son.

It should also be noted that the hegemonic oppression of the patriarchal society, which might end up in the death of the oppressed woman, is maintained and supported not only by men but also by women. Jackson (2010) illustrates that patriarchal oppression isn't only enforced by men; often, women themselves support and reinforce gender restrictions both within the family and among other women (p. 121). As an illustration, some of the women who attend Munira's

<sup>1</sup> All translations from the Arabic novel *Saliha's Execution* (Alenezi, 2022) are my own.

funeral reveal their satisfaction with Sa'ad's murder of his sister. One of the female attendees likens Munira to cancer that should have been eradicated a long time ago. The same woman praises men who strictly control and discipline their women (Alenezi, 2022, p. 18). Significantly, Siham Alenezi makes it clear that the stifling cycle of patriarchy will never come to an end as long as it has faithful agents who maintain its perpetuity and strength. In this respect, Jackson states that "women's complicity in patriarchal oppression [takes part in] the maintenance of patriarchy" (2010, p. 138).

Needless to say, the aforementioned kinds of societies have long-lasting and devastating effects on oppressed women and their upcoming generations. After the murder of their mother, Munira's five children pass through an endless cycle of hardships and troubles on different levels and in various aspects of life. The narrator vividly describes the aftermath of Munira's death; her children are left alone with their eldest sister, Saliha, to shoulder the whole responsibility of raising up her siblings. With no one to support them, neither financially nor emotionally, Saliha decides, along with her younger sister, Sita, to drop out of university and find a job. Without a university degree and being women in a patriarchal society, the two sisters are left with very few options to find a job. From a prospective doctor, the narrator informs, Saliha, along with her younger sister, Sita, is reduced to a private teacher, maid, babysitter, and tailor, and her biggest ambition becomes merely securing life necessities for her siblings (Alenezi, 2022, p. 72). Suddenly, Munira's children find themselves subject either to charity or to contempt of their society, which shames them constantly for their mother's alleged misconduct.

To reinforce her point of how badly honor-based killing can affect many innocent people, the author displays in a sorrowful scene the little girl's discovery of her mother's murder. Mi'ad innocently used to think that her mother was bedridden in a hospital, and she had no idea about her mother's death. One day at Mi'ad's school, the mothers' meeting was discussed, intensifying the girl's sorrow over her mother's long absence. Thus, the girl's sorrow is heartlessly multiplied at the hands of some careless school colleagues as they revealed the truth of Mi'ad's mother's disappearance. Looking at her little sister's melancholic face, Sita asks:

Wesh fik habibti leh za'alaneh?

Mi'ad: hwwa sahih en ummi Munira matat el banat bilmadrasah lamma takallamu aan ijtim'a al ummahat isaaluni ummik betiji?

Raddat Suha bint jaratna qalat, "wain tiji? Ummaha maita!"

Wamma qult laha ummi bilmustashfa sarat tadhak allai taqul:

Ummik qatalha khalik wa ashba'at mot! (Alenezi, 2022, p. 73).

What is wrong with you, darling? Why are you sad?

The following is the translation of the previous quotations<sup>2</sup>:

Mi'ad: Has my mother, Munira, died? The schoolgirls asked whether she was going to attend the meeting.

Our neighbor, Suha, retorted: "How come she attends? Her mother is dead!"

And when I told her that my mother is hospitalized, she burst into laughter and said:

"Your mother was killed at the hands of your uncle a long time ago!"

The merciless reaction of Munira's community towards her nonconformity to the well-defined rules of her society is explained by Arash Heydari et al. as they say: Deviating from accepted social and sexual norms often provokes strong emotional responses such as shame and disgust, and individuals who defy these roles are typically subject to punishment (2021, p. 97). From the researcher's perspective, the previous scene seeks to capture the readers' attention regarding the harsh reality and heartless individuals of Munira's society, where oppressive patriarchy dominates all aspects of life. Additionally, this scene can be considered a harsh outcry against all the oppressive and suppressive features of patriarchal societies. Talking about the serious and far-reaching effects of honor crimes, the future of Munira's young girls is drastically impacted by the murder of their mother and her ill-reputation. They can never dream of having a normal life like other girls in their community since no man would like to propose to them for marriage. To add insult to injury, the girls' stature in society is reduced further by their menial work. Working as cleaners and maids in people's houses increased the rumors about their suspected immoral behaviors.

Although Yousef and Khalid are fully aware of the financial difficulties their sisters have been going through after the murder of their mother, they have no effective part in the women's lives, neither emotionally nor financially. Moreover, the two men warn their sisters from working outside the house. However, the women disobey their brothers, and they continue their mission of providing for their family. Sadly, the sisters' commitment goes unrecognized by their brothers, who resort to violence to punish them for not complying. This situation is deeply ironic, as the brothers themselves are irresponsible, indifferent, and morally corrupt, showing no concern for their family's well-being. In addition, Saliha's brothers frequent indecent parties where different kinds of intoxicating substances are consumed. Despite their disgraceful behavior, society grants them complete authority to regulate their sisters' choices and conduct. To this effect, Nawal El Saadawi discusses the hypocritical binary opposition of the concept of honor in Arab societies as follows: In Arab society, the concept of honor is often deeply flawed, as it tends to be linked more to the conduct of women in the family than to that of the men themselves. A man may engage in highly immoral behavior, such as excessive womanizing, and still be regarded as honorable, as long as the women in his family maintain sexual purity. This reflects a broader societal acceptance of double moral standards, with separate ethical expectations for men and women (2007, p. 47).

<sup>2</sup> All translations from the Arabic novel *Saliha's Execution* (Alenezi, 2022) are my own.

Saliha's heart was burning because of the amount of oppression she and her family had to endure without committing any sin, and at the same time, their oppressors managed to get away with their sins. To put it simply, the murderer of Munira has been released from prison, and the thief of all their money was able to enjoy the stolen cash. Relatively speaking, "[i]n a primarily patrilineal society where honor and shame are pivotal in determining male-female relations", Anahid Devartanian Kulwicki points out, Male relatives such as brothers, fathers, sons, and husbands often receive social and legal leniency, including reduced penalties or even exemptions, when involved in cases of murder (2002, p. 86). Likewise, in their article "Punitive Effects of Sentencing to a Crime Against Honour: A Comparative Study" (2022), Ghufra Adnan Mohammed and Hayder Ars Afan explain that offenders of honor crimes can benefit from the system of suspension of execution of the sentence if it is found that the offender is not dangerous to the security of society, and it is improbable for him to return to crime. Furthermore, the convict's verdict can also be mitigated on the condition that he has not previously been sentenced for a deliberate crime, considering his morals, past, age, and circumstances of the crime. Indeed, these conditions apply to the character of Sa'ad in *Saliha's Execution*. Sa'ad, who does not have a criminal past, benefits from the lenient honor-crime laws of his country. This leniency is harshly decried in Siham Alenezi's novel.

In a similar context, Zuhur postulates that some honor crimes stem from false gossip and unfair suspicion (Zuhur, 2009, p. 7). This is exactly the case for Munira and her family; she is punished for a sin she has not committed, and her children's lives have been ruined as a result. To comment, although Munira's people are Muslims, they do not adhere to Islamic teachings. As acknowledged previously, honor killings are rooted in retarded societal traditions rather than religions. There are no references in the holy Quran that justify such sorts of violence. Islam prohibits judging people blindly on the grounds of rumors with no clear evidence provided against the accused, and the author criticizes the fact that Munira's community commits a major sin by accusing an innocent woman. Based on false rumors, Munira is wronged and unjustly treated by her people because they suspected that she was deviating from the accepted Islamic, traditional, and Arab norms. AlQahtani et al. (2023) point out that even a minor accusation or rumor that casts doubt on a woman's chastity can lead to severe consequences, including being confined at home, denied access to education or social activities, or, in extreme cases, being killed (p. 4).

Women are, in essence, an essential component of every community, and tearing this component apart will cause major issues for that community. As such, killing women under the name of honor crimes has devastating impacts on their children in addition to other members of their families. In this respect, Halim Barakat asserts that the decline of the status of women is directly linked to the decline of a whole society (Barakat, 1993, p. 248). Practically speaking, this is what Siham Alenezi is trying to convey through her novel *Saliha's Execution*. The oppressive patriarchal norms and traditions cost Munira her life; this oppression later destroyed her children's lives. Thus, the bitter and painful impact of oppression has extended to the next generations. That is to say, by inflicting oppression on women, families will fall apart. Naturally, family is the building block of society. In a similar respect, AlQahtani et al. correctly argue that honor-based crimes have nothing to do with restoring family honor. Contrariwise, they damage the families' reputations by alienating them from their community, exacerbating their social isolation, rejection, and degradation (AlQahtani et al., 2023, p. 5).

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research highlights the misconceptions and flawed beliefs about women in patriarchal societies, which victimize innocent women and sometimes end up with their murder. In *Saliha's Execution*, Munira has always had radical views against the injustices practiced against women, and she refused to adhere to the accepted roles assigned to women in her society. Hence, patriarchal traditions unjustly empower men at the expense of women and have a devastating impact on society's main building block, the family. Fundamentally, in tightly knit patriarchal societies, women are perceived as part of their tribe and represent its honor. Accordingly, it is men's duty to protect the tribe's honor and to cleanse it with blood when violated. Consequently, Munira's brother takes it upon himself to restore the family name by killing his sister after it has been stained by her actions.

The research also criticizes the ironic discrepancy in treating men and women in patriarchal societies; men are exempted from any misconduct punishment while women are held accountable for the slightest lapses. In the novel under study, Siham Alenezi foregrounds the gendered hypocrisy of honor, as when men's immoral deeds do not shame their families, nor do they tarnish their reputations. This is exemplified in the character of Sa'ad, whose murder is not condemned by society, and whose verdict is mitigated by the government. At the beginning of the novel, Sa'ad, who has no identified respectable job, nor does he participate in the nourishment of his society, frightens his moral sister away from working outside her house despite his knowledge of her dire need for money to support her five children after the death of her husband. Likewise, the immoral Yousif and Khalid assume the same power as Sa'ad over their hardworking sisters.

Furthermore, the current research decries the fact that some women encourage honor crimes against women who swerve away from the agreed-upon patriarchal traditions as exemplified in Siham Alenezi's *Saliha's Execution*. In her novel, the author sheds light on the female oppressors who expressed publicly their happiness over Munira's murder. Additionally, this research condemns honor killings by dramatizing their heinous and horrible everlasting consequences; for instance, Munira's children are "othered" and devalued in the eyes of their people after the murder of their mother. Furthermore, Munira's son, Khalid, loses his life as a result of his mother's unfairly tarnished reputation, and his sisters lose any chance to have marriage proposals in the future.

All in all, this research is a harsh outcry to everyone who is in charge to work on reformation. The research calls for valuing women as individuals rather than merely associating them with male figures. Relatively, men and women should face the same punishment when committing similar sins, such as adultery. Moreover, women should not be condemned or punished without concrete evidence available about their infidelity. The punishment must be conducted by a qualified authority according to the legislation of that country, rather than by individuals who act upon their own perspectives. Therefore, the researcher recommends that a more severe penalty system be enacted for honor crimes to deter extremists and narrow-minded people from committing such atrocious crimes.

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