Documenting Saudi Intangible Cultural Heritage: Women's Dance

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For Juman, my joy, my pride, my beloved daughter.
For Kenan, my blessing, my dream, my dearest son.
For Hussain, whose love made this possible.

For my parents, Abdulrahman and Maryam,
The roots of my strength and grace.

This work is for you, my heart and my foundation.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis, titled "Documenting Saudi Intangible Cultural Heritage: Women's Dance," represents the research and work I conducted during my PhD in Film at the Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts, Lancaster University. The concepts and ideas presented in this thesis result from my research and original contributions. Any ideas or work derived from other sources have been appropriately cited and referenced.

This thesis has not been submitted, either in part or in full, to support an application for any other degree at Lancaster University or any other institution. Many of the ideas explored here emerged from productive and insightful discussions with my supervisors, Professor Bruce Bennett and Dr Maryam Ghorbankarimi, whose unwavering support and guidance have been integral to the development and completion of this work.

I affirm that I have adhered to all academic honesty and integrity principles throughout this research. I have not misrepresented, fabricated, or falsified any ideas, data, facts, or sources in this submission or during the research process.

Areej Alghamdi

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Abstract

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is rich in intangible heritage that reflects its cultural diversity and deep-rooted traditions. However, cultural and religious beliefs, along with governmental restrictions, have prevented Saudi intangible cultural heritage from being robustly documented and archived, especially women's practices. As a result, Saudi women's traditional dance has received little academic attention and has rarely been studied, visually documented, or filmed. This thesis examines the intangible cultural heritage of women's traditional dance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, specifically focusing on two dances: the *Al-la'ib* (اللَّعِب) dance of Al Bahah and the *Al-Jahli* (الجَحْلِي) dance of Jizan.

The thesis comprises two related components: a written thesis and a documentary film. By adopting a practice-based research methodology, this study combines documentary filmmaking, participant interviews, and critical reflection to record and analyse these dance traditions while navigating sociocultural and Islamic sensitivities around gender and visibility. The documentary film: *The Path of Memory, Between the Lands of Jasmine and Basil* (خُطى الذاكرة: بين بلاد الفُل والريحان). It was produced over the course of four years during multiple visits to the cities of Al Bahah and Jizan. It aims to document the traditional women's dances of the respective regions.

The written thesis works within broader debates on intangible cultural heritage (ICH), in the specific context of Saudi Arabia. Engaging with both UNESCO's global safeguarding framework and national initiatives such as Saudi Vision 2030. It addresses the limited representation of women's cultural practices in Saudi cinema and emphasises the urgency of visual documentation in a context where oral traditions are increasingly at risk. The findings reveal the historical depth and performative richness of Saudi women's dances yet show that cultural significance alone does not guarantee preservation. Due to their ephemeral nature, the study argues that film offers a vital means of safeguarding these underrepresented traditions. By contributing original material not previously documented, the research positions documentary filmmaking as a powerful method for sustaining cultural memory and amplifying marginalised voices.

Note: I recommend watching the film before reading the written component, as it provides essential context and enhances the understanding of the following analysis.

Film Link:

https://youtu.be/5BhNL0D_6tA

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Undertaking this PhD journey changed me in ways I never expected. It taught me patience, resilience, and a deeper sense of self-discipline. I could not have reached this point without many people's encouragement, support, and kindness.

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To my husband, my closest confidant, thank you for your endless patience and support through every challenge. To my daughter, Juman, your presence is my greatest source of strength and a reminder of the purpose behind this journey: to leave behind something meaningful for you and for generations of women whose stories deserve to be told and seen.

I am deeply grateful for the guidance of my supervisors, Professor Bruce Bennett and Dr Maryam Ghorbankarimi. Professor Bennett’s insights into narrative structure and thematic development greatly shaped my film and thesis. His thoughtful critique and steady support elevated my writing and analysis. Dr Ghorbankarimi’s expertise in filmmaking and production was equally vital—her advice on camera techniques, editing, and visual detail enriched the film, and her encouragement helped me through challenging moments. It has been an honour to be one of their PhD students has been an honour, and I sincerely appreciate their dedication, support, and patience throughout this journey.

To my siblings Azhar, Afnan, Amjad, Aram, Faris, Ahmed, and Mohanned, thank you for believing in me. To my friends Duha, Aicha, Basemah, Lulwah, Ian, Oula, Sarah, Noura, Lynn, Amal, Alaa, Lujain, Nuha, Haneen, and Wala’a—thank you for nurturing my creative spirit and encouraging me. With heartfelt appreciation to all those who generously contributed to the making of this film.

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ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
CH	Cultural Heritage
UNESCO's	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
PaR	Practice-based research: is an academic research method that incorporates practice into the research process or output.
ICOMOS	The International Council on Monuments and Sites, a non-governmental organisation established by the Venice Charter in 1964 with the aim of promoting the conservation of the world's monuments and sites.
NGOs	Non-governmental organization
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CGIs	Community Group Interests
DHC	Dance Heritage Coalition
WHS	World Heritage Sites
FIAT/IFTA	International Federation of Television Archives
SBA	Saudi Broadcasting Authority

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Introduction

A. Background and Motivation

My interest in documenting Saudi women's dance began after the birth of my daughter in 2015, the same year I lost my beloved grandmother, Hamdah, who had been a central figure in my life. She was the heart of our family, a vibrant presence whose poems, songs, and rhythmic on the duff filled my world with life and melody. Her passing left a profound silence, an aching void where her voice and spirit once resided.

As a child, every summer we would embark on long road trips, escaping the sweltering heat of Jeddah to the cool embrace of Al-Bahah, my parents' hometown—what we lovingly called "Aldirah." My grandmother Hamdah, with her duff always by her side, would make the journey unforgettable. Her voice would rise in poetic verses as we drove, the resonant beat of the daff filling the air, creating a sense of magic in the mundane. Upon our arrival, a symphony of celebration would await us. Women would gather by the entrance of the house, playing the duff, singing, and welcoming us with their joyful melodies These summers were a kaleidoscope of reunions and festivities where I first witnessed the beauty of Saudi women's traditional dances—their movements, beating the tamporin, and songs a vivid expression of joy and connection.

Now, as a mother, I regret not preserving Hamdah's voice, her songs, and her poetry—artistry I long to share with my daughter. Her absence inspires me to safeguard this heritage, honouring women like her whose stories deserve to be remembered and celebrated.

Marrying a husband from a different tribe came with the new and challenging experience of that tribe's culture, traditions, expectations, and costumes. I wondered how these elements, so different from my own, would be transferred to my daughter and shape her identity. Eventually, I became invested in the culture into which I had married into and eager for my daughter to learn from her grandmother Haleem, my husband's mother, whom we lost this year after filming the most important scenes of my film *The Path of Memory, Between the Lands of Jasmine and Basil* with her. Those

scenes, which form the heart of the film, brilliantly showcase how heritage is passed down from one generation to the next, forming the deep family bonds and cultural legacies that shape our identity. Losing her was a great loss, but it increased the importance of this artistic work as a living document that commemorates her memory and educates future generations.

Between 2012 and 2017, as a lecturer in the Graphic Design and Digital Media department at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh, I developed community service programmes in collaboration with the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society under the guidance of Dr. Maha Al-Sinan. I integrated cultural heritage preservation into my teaching, encouraging students to create films exploring Saudi Arabia's intangible cultural heritage. Over 50 documentaries were produced, but documenting women's traditional dances proved especially challenging due to the cultural, religious, and social restrictions discussed later in this thesis—barriers that have long hindered Saudi women's representation in film.

In facing these challenges, I began to question the role of documentation in preserving cultural practices. The women we sought to film showed remarkable resilience, maintaining their dances and heritage without formal records or external recognition. This revealed a profound truth: while documentation can support preservation, the survival of these traditions relies more on the lived practices, community transmission, and embodied experiences that keep them alive. Nonetheless, documenting these expressions provides a valuable record and encourages their appreciation and continuity in a rapidly globalising world.

B. Historical Context

The historical context of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage and its policies regarding the documentation of intangible heritage are intricately linked to the marked lack of female representation in film and media within the country. Saudi Arabia has a rich cultural history, with various traditional forms of art and performance, including dance, that have historically been segregated by gender due to conservative interpretations of

Islamic doctrine, and Sharia law[1]. This segregation "refers to the cultural and religious practice of separating men and women in public and private spaces, such as schools, workplaces, and public transport," and is seen as a way to maintain modesty and uphold religious values (Al-Saggaf, 2004, P.2). For example, women may have separate prayer areas in mosques, separate seating sections in cinemas or restaurants, and different timings or days for accessing certain recreational venues. Yet, recent reforms have begun to reduce the practice of segregation (Shelton, 2023).

To understand Saudi women's representation in films, it is crucial to note Saudi Arabia's history of strict regulations on public entertainment and cinema. The country banned cinemas in 1979 and only lifted the ban in 2017 after the announcement of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's Vision 2030, signalling a new era for Saudi cinema and diverse storytelling. Vision 2030 is a government that aims for increased economic, social, and cultural diversity. Under Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has embarked on a cultural heritage revival mission, emphasising the preservation and promotion of its traditional culture and values through media (Vision 2030, 2016). As part of this strategy, Saudi Arabia has launched a cultural heritage revival, emphasizing the preservation and promotion of its traditional culture and values through media. However, despite this renewed focus on cultural preservation, the legacy of strict gender segregation continues to shape and, at times, constrain the portrayal of Saudi women's cultural heritage in film.

C. Research Objectives and Questions

The primary aim of this research is to document the intangible cultural heritage of Saudi women's traditional dance in two regions of Saudi Arabia: the Al-Lai'b dance in Al Bahah and the Al-Jahli dance in Jizan. Using documentary filmmaking techniques, this study seeks to provide a faithful portrayal of these art forms within their cultural context while addressing key issues related to their preservation and representation.

[1] Sharia law (الشريعة), meaning "the clear path" in Arabic, is the Islamic legal and ethical framework derived from the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah (the teachings, sayings, and practices of Prophet Muhammad), with further interpretations through Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). It governs religious, social, and moral conduct, covering areas such as worship, family law, and contracts, guiding Muslims in both spiritual and worldly matters (Hallaq, 2009).

The following key questions guide this research:

- Why is the documentation of Saudi women's intangible cultural heritage, particularly traditional dance, important? How do existing preservation frameworks, such as UNESCO's safeguarding methods, influence this process, and what is the cultural significance of these dances?

- What are the historical, social, and cultural factors contributing to the limited documentation of Saudi women's intangible cultural heritage in dance in Saudi cinema?

- How can documentary filmmaking effectively serve as a methodological tool and method to capture and preserve the intangible cultural heritage of Saudi women's traditional dances in the regions of Al Bahah and Jizan?

The first objective of this research and thesis is to define intangible cultural heritage (ICH), especially within the context of Saudi Arabia and Vision 2030, to evaluate the limitations of some of the existing preservation practices, such as UNESCO's safeguarding methods, and to highlight the need for further documentation of Saudi women's ICH, particularly in exploring the historical and cultural significance of Saudi women's traditional dances.

The second objective is to understand the historical, political, and cultural factors that have limited the documentation of Saudi women's dance and intangible cultural heritage more broadly, to explore the ethical considerations and socio-political challenges related to documenting Saudi women's dance, and to identify potential solutions to these challenges.

The third objective is to document two traditional dances of Al Bahah and Jizan while utilising creative approaches to overcome the limitations of previous documentation of Saudi women's dance and ICH, thus offering insight into the production process of a contemporary female Saudi filmmaker and the challenges she faces while

demonstrating how documentary filmmaking itself can serve as an investigative tool, document ICH and research methodology.

D. Chapter Overview

Chapter 1: *Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage: Safeguarding, Documentation, and Comparative Perspectives.*

This chapter defines intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and historicises UNESCO's management and recognition of ICH. UNESCO's role in and procedures for safeguarding ICH by promoting its upkeep and transmission are considered alongside the importance of documentation methods for preserving ICH. The performing arts domain of ICH and the new technologies available to document it are given special attention. Finally, the ethical considerations of documenting ICH are addressed.

Chapter 2*: Saudi Arabia's Cultural Heritage: History, Policy, and Documentation of Intangible Heritage.*

This chapter contextualises the past and present literature on Saudi Arabian heritage, history, and policy concerning this thesis. It chronicles the history of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. It examines the cultural goals of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 to theorise the reasons behind the lack of female representation in film and media. It argues that documentation of intangible culture is necessary and looks at the ways in which Saudi Arabia has already documented its ICH, including men's dance. Finally, the Islamic ideology, politics, and culture of Saudi Arabia are explored to explain and theorise the lack of visualisation and documentation of women in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 3*: Saudi Women's Traditional Dance*.

This chapter explores the historical and cultural significance of Saudi women's traditional dances, emphasising their role in preserving intangible cultural heritage. The chapter begins with an introduction to the importance of dance as a form of expression and cultural identity, particularly within the Arabian Peninsula. It then delves into the history of the region's dance, highlighting its evolution from sacred rituals to artistic performances. The chapter also examines the impact of Islamic principles on dance

practices, focusing on the Sahwa[2] movement's influence on public perceptions and restrictions. The research employs ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation to provide a comprehensive understanding of two specific dances: the Al-la'ib dance in the Al Bahah region and the Al-Jahli dance in the Jizan region. This chapter aims to shed light on the unique characteristics, rituals, and cultural significance of these dances while also addressing the challenges faced in documenting and preserving them in contemporary Saudi society.

Chapter 4: *The evolving landscape of Saudi cinema: A Historical Review.*

This chapter will investigate the reasons behind the lack of documentation of Saudi women's dance in films and the censorship in Saudi Arabia. To do this, the history of cinema in Saudi Arabia is overviewed, and the factors constraining the portrayal of Saudi women's culture in documentaries and cinema are analysed.

Chapter 5: *Case Study Analyses*

This chapter will contextually analyse two Saudi documentary films produced during the nation's cinema ban that feature Saudi women's traditional dance: *Rawabi Al Bahah* (1981) and *Folk Wedding in Jizan* (1996). Thematic concerns and cultural contexts will be explored while examining the artistic contributions of the directors, narrators, and their applied techniques.

Chapter 6: *Film Practice: "The Path of Memory, Between the Lands of Jasmine and Basil".*

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of documentary filmmaking as a tool for preserving Saudi women's traditional dances, using *The Path of Memory, Between the*

[2] Sahwa is a modern Islamic revival movement with roots in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna and the Jama'at-i Islami in India by Mawlana Abu. These movements emphasize the belief that the moral and social salvation of Islamic societies depends on a return to the teachings of the Quran and the Sunna. They advocate for a reinstatement of Sharia law, urging a removal of practices and beliefs they consider deviations from pure Islam. Their core philosophy includes fostering individual and communal commitment to Islamic values, which they see as essential for social justice and the equitable treatment of the poor. Additionally, these movements promote traditional family roles for women (Lapidus, 1997).

Lands of Jasmine and Basil, as a case study. It reflects on my production methodology, including re-enactments and restaging to address the lack of documentation of these practices. The chapter examines how the film serves as both a documentation and a confrontation of the challenges inherent in this process, such as privacy, consent, and cultural sensitivities. Through selected interviews, themes of absence and cultural continuity are explored. My approach emphasises transparent authorship, blending personal narratives with broader societal challenges in Saudi cinema. Ultimately, the chapter highlights how film acts as a practice of remembering and preserving cultural heritage.

E. Methodology

Cultural heritage has long been a favoured subject for documentary and ethnographic filmmakers and commissioning bodies. In documenting cultural heritage, filmmakers provide invaluable insights into the richness and diversity of human societies, rituals, and ways of life, preserving traditions that might otherwise fade into obscurity. This focus on cultural heritage and ethnography has given rise to a significant body of work that not only educates and informs but also fosters a deeper appreciation for the complexities and beauty of human cultures around the world.

However, effectively utilising documentary film in an ethnographic context requires careful consideration of the ethical issues associated with representing cultural practices on screen. As a Saudi female filmmaker, I approach my subject with sensitivity and respect, navigating the political and social complexities of representing Saudi women's traditional dances. Informed consent was obtained from the communities and all individuals involved to ensure respect for their cultural traditions and privacy. This research establishes a framework that honours the cultural context of Saudi women's dance, engaging with the community members, dancers, and cultural experts in a collaborative and participatory manner. By valuing their voices and perspectives throughout the documentation process, we can portray these practices to a broad audience while upholding their cultural integrity.

This research addresses the significant gap in the documentation and representation of traditional Saudi women’s dances, both in academic studies and documentary films.

These dances have long existed within private, women-only spaces, making their documentation challenging. Social, religious, and political factors have further contributed to their limited visibility. This research seeks to highlight the importance of documenting and preserving these traditions, given the limited previous efforts in this field. Although national initiatives, such as Vision 2030, focus on preserving cultural heritage, this focus often aligns with a broader governmental vision that does not necessarily prioritise the documentation of women's intangible cultural heritage. By documenting and analysing these performances, this study actively contributes to preserving an endangered aspect of Saudi cultural identity by documenting.

To build a solid foundation for this research, the early chapters introduce the key concepts of intangible heritage, trace the historical contexts that shaped its documentation, and situate dance within the Saudi cultural landscape. These discussions prepare the ground for later chapters, where I analyse how Saudi cinema has historically struggled to represent women's cultural traditions and examine the methods available for preserving them. Because there is so little previous documentation, this study works both as an intervention and an archive, offering new ways of studying these dances and transmitting them to future generations. The research also includes two rare Saudi films as case studies, each showing different aspects of women's dances. I also reflect on my own experience of producing a documentary, one of the first to highlight the Al-Li'b and Al-Jahli dances. In this way, the study does not only examines an overlooked subject—it also contributes directly to documenting and preserving it, representing an original addition to knowledge of Saudi cultural heritage.

This research follows a qualitative case study design that combines ethnographic and autoethnographic methods. I worked directly with women in Al-Bahah and Jizan through visits, interviews, and informal conversations. At the same time, I drew on my own memories and experiences as data, connecting personal reflection with cultural context. The making of the documentary itself was also a method, since filming became both a way to collect material and a means of producing knowledge. This approach gave

me flexibility in facing the challenges of working with traditions performed in private, women-only spaces.

The theoretical framework is built on three strands. First, Sarah Pink, in Doing Visual Ethnography (2007, p. 5), shows that visual ethnography is process-oriented, with methods developing during the research rather than being fixed in advance. Second, Bill Nichols, in Introduction to Documentary (2017, p. 118), stresses the importance of reflexivity in filmmaking, urging researchers to acknowledge their own presence and perspective. Third, Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011, p. 273), describe autoethnography as both process and product, where the researcher's story becomes a way of understanding culture. Together, these perspectives shape my approach as both personal and collaborative, grounded in my background and in the voices of the women who shared their traditions with me.

The methods I used include semi-structured interviews with dancers, cultural historians, and elders, along with contextual analysis of two Saudi films that depict women's dances. When direct filming of private gatherings was not possible, I used re-enactment and worked with social actors and professional performers. This mix of methods gave me different ways into the subject, balancing cultural sensitivity with the need to document. Oral histories and interviews gave me the voices and meanings behind the dances, while film analysis and re-enactments provided visual and performative insight.

My positionality is at the heart of this research. As a Saudi woman from the region, I bring insider knowledge and trust, but also personal memories and emotions. I recognise that my subjectivity shapes the research, and I approach it with reflexivity. I used my own narration in the film, writing exercises, and constant comparison with interviews and cultural sources to check and balance my perspective. This position is not neutral, but it is truthful—rooted in the belief that documenting women's dance is both a scholarly duty and a personal responsibility.

Figure 1 presents the methodological framework of this research, highlighting the intersections between dance, documentary film, and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Each sphere contributes distinct approaches: dance is explored through autoethnography and re-enactments; film provides tools such as analysis and re-staging;

and ICH grounds the work in theoretical review and ethical framing. At the points of overlap, methods such as semi-structured interviews and re-enactments emerge, while at the core lies practice-based research, which integrates these diverse strategies into a cohesive methodology. This interconnected design reflects the layered and interdisciplinary nature of the research.

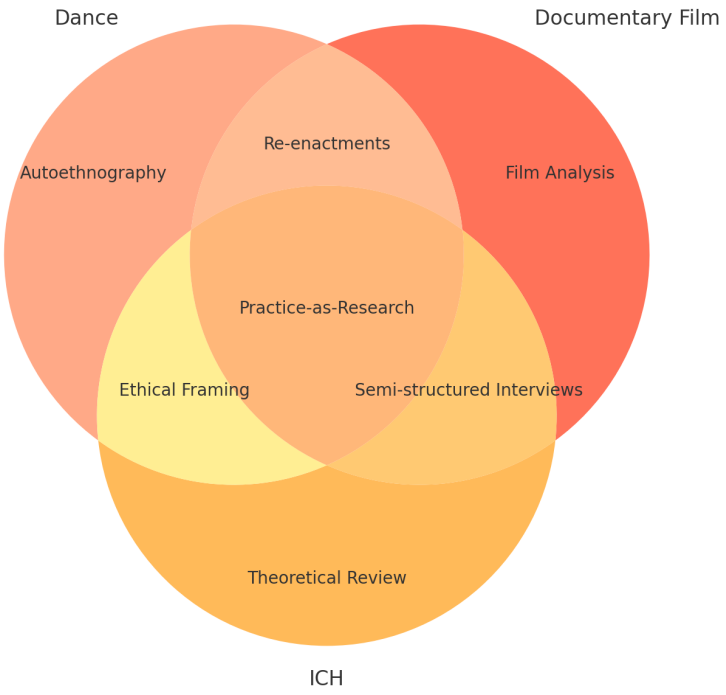

Figure 1: Illustration of the research methodology

Practice-as-Research (PaR) in Film and Ethnography

In this research, the production of my documentary serves as a qualitative methodology, demonstrating Practice-as-Research (PaR) through the act of documenting, interpreting, and recontextualising traditional Saudi women's dances. The film is not merely a record of these performances but an active process of reviving and sustaining them in the present. Through filming, narration, and re-enactment, the documentary captures both the tangible and intangible elements of these traditions while critically examining the factors that have led to their marginalisation.

Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2010, p. 1) argue that Practice-as-Research (PaR) is a significant approach to knowledge production, positioning creative practice as a legitimate and complementary mode of inquiry alongside conventional academic research. Robin Nelson (2013 p. 37) expands on this idea by outlining a "triadic model" of PaR, which integrates "know-how" (practical skills), "know-what" (theoretical knowledge), and "know-that" (critical reflection. This model frames artistic practice as both a method of inquiry and a means of producing knowledge through experience. In the context of ethnographic filmmaking, this approach is particularly significant, as recording cultural practices is inherently an act of interpretation and engagement. Rather than striving for objectivity, my methodology acknowledges my dual role as a researcher and filmmaker, embracing a reflexive approach that foregrounds subjectivity and cultural mediation.

This study was shaped by external factors such as ethical considerations, the difficulties of filming women in private spaces, and the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges influenced the methods used in both the research and the documentary's production, reinforcing the importance of adapting ethnographic practices to the socio-political landscape of Saudi Arabia. By combining historical research with filmmaking, this study offers a more inclusive representation of Saudi women's cultural heritage while critically reflecting on the power dynamics surrounding its documentation.

Methodological Considerations: Documentary Techniques and Ethnographic Engagement

Documentary film techniques such as ethnographic observation, narration, and re-enactment are key tools in analysing and preserving Saudi women's traditional dances. These techniques open up possibilities of close interaction with the social and cultural contexts in which these dances exist rather than merely recording them as static traditions. Also, the use of social actors, professional and community actors, interviews, and attention to landscape, symbolism, and music not only influenced the production of the documentary but also deepened the understanding of how women's representation in Saudi cinema has been historically constrained.

The concept of social actors, as introduced by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984, p. 25) in *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, refers to individuals who actively shape and reflect social realities. In the context of this research, social actors—women directly involved in the practice and transmission of traditional dance—were integral to the documentary. Their participation was particularly crucial in navigating the challenges of filming private social dances, where securing permission is often complex due to cultural sensitivities and ethical considerations. By involving these women in the filmmaking process, the documentary does not merely depict their traditions but also becomes a platform for cultural participation and knowledge-sharing.

The approach of integrating social actors aligns with the principles of ethnographic filmmaking, where the filmmaker engages directly with the community to co-create meaning rather than imposing an external narrative (MacDougall, 1998, p. 72). This participatory approach fosters collaboration and trust, ensuring that the representation of these dances remains contextually grounded and shaped by those who practice them. Furthermore, ethical considerations played a central role in this process, including decisions to blur faces or anonymise participants to respect their privacy and safety.

Given the cultural sensitivities surrounding the filming of private women's gatherings, re-enactments and performative documentary techniques provide an alternative means of representation. Social actors—individuals within the community who have a direct connection with the tradition—are the heart of this approach in that the actors help provide a culturally aware and informed representation (Giddens, 1984, p. 25).). This method allows for the visual preservation of these dances while ensuring that ethical and cultural boundaries are upheld.

As Nichols (2017, p. 118) explains, performative documentaries go beyond factual representation, using creative elements to immerse audiences in lived experiences. In this documentary, social actors provide an authentic connection to the tradition, while professional actors were also engaged in controlled settings to reconstruct elements of the performances. Unlike the social actors, professional performers were filmed without

covering their faces and were able to execute the dances without restrictions, allowing for greater visibility of movement and expression.

This dual approach enabled the documentary to balance ethical considerations with the need for representation, ensuring that these cultural practices could be captured while respecting the sensitivities surrounding them. The final chapter will discuss more details on the use of social and professional actors and the broader implications of this approach.

As someone deeply embedded in the culture and region, my first-hand knowledge and lived experiences provide a crucial foundation for this research. My understanding of Saudi women's traditional dances stems not only from academic inquiry but also from personal experience, particularly through the influence of my grandmothers. Their performances were woven into the fabric of my childhood, creating an intimate connection to these dances that now informs my approach to documenting them. This close connection aligns with the tradition of ethnographic and autoethnographic research, in which the researcher's cultural immersion and lived experience are part of the research (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, p. 273).

Rather than striving for an unattainable objectivity, my artistic approach acknowledges my role as both researcher and cultural participant. Ethnographic filmmaking, according to MacDougall (1998, p. 72), is about more than simply observing and documenting; it's also about generating meaning through involvement and connection with the subjects. My documentary reflects this perspective, embracing subjectivity to capture the lived reality of these dance traditions. One of the deliberate choices I made was to incorporate personal narration through my daughter, using her as a bridge between past and present. She serves as both an observer and a participant, mirroring my own memories while embodying the transmission of knowledge across generations.

Through her, the story of these dances unfolds—how they originated, how they are performed, and why they remained undocumented. Her grandmother was her first teacher, guiding her with graceful steps, whispering the secrets of the movements and rhythms as if passing down the keys to a heritage woven through generations. This

method aligns with the ethnographic theory of cultural transmission, whereby heritage is sustained through lived experience and storytelling across generations (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). In spite of the inexorable advance of modernity, which tends to wear away localised practices in favour of homogeneity, Despite the relentless march of modernity, which often erodes localised traditions in favour of homogeneity, my daughter's engagement with these dances reflects how cultural heritage provides a deep-rooted sense of identity. In this way, the documentary not only records but actively participates in preserving and reviving an endangered tradition, reinforcing the role of ethnographic filmmaking as both an archival and a transformative tool.

Through voiceover narration, I weave my own memories through my daughter's voice and reflections into the documentary, bridging the past and present. I do not position myself as an external observer but rather as someone who has grown up with these traditions, who has witnessed their beauty first-hand, and who now feels a responsibility to document them before they fade. The narration becomes a space for questioning, remembering, and reinterpreting—why have these dances remained undocumented for so long? What do they mean to the women who perform them? And what does their preservation mean for future generations?

By bringing my own perspective into the film, I recognise that no documentary can be completely objective. My presence and my daughter's voice are part of the storytelling, making it clear to the audience that I play an active role in shaping the narrative. This follows the idea of autoethnographic filmmaking, where personal experience is not just background information but a key part of the research (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011, p. 273). My narration is more than just explaining the dances—it is a way to share my personal connection to them, why they are important to me, to the women who perform them, and to Saudi cultural history.

This approach does more than just record traditions; it helps keep them alive. It ensures that these dances are not only seen but also understood and appreciated. According to MacDougall (1998, p. 72), ethnographic filmmaking involves actively interacting with the culture being filmed rather than just recording it. My documentary shows this

through my interactions with the dancers and how I include my daughter as a link between generations. Just as my grandmother passed these dances down, I am continuing the tradition, using both film and lived experience to keep this heritage alive.

Interviews are a narrative and contextual device, and the voices of cultural historians, practitioners, and elders shape the film's structure. Oral histories are particularly important in preserving intangible heritage because they provide insight into the social meaning and historical context of these dances (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011, p. 273). By incorporating first-hand accounts, the documentary bridges the gap between past and present, ensuring that these traditions are recorded not only visually but also through the stories of those who have carried them forward.

In addition to the PaR documentary method, this thesis incorporates semi-structured interviews, which were used both in the film and as a key qualitative ethnographic approach. Semi-structured interviews are widely recognised as a flexible method for eliciting rich, detailed narratives, particularly when documenting oral traditions and cultural practices (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 57). These interviews were conducted with women who have inherited and practised these dances, including my grandmother and social actors. Engaging with these participants allowed me to gather firsthand accounts of how these dances have been passed down, their cultural significance, and their evolution—insights that would otherwise remain undocumented.

The flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to share their personal experiences while allowing for follow-up questions that provided a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural and historical contexts of these performances. As Noor (2008, p. 1604) explains, semi-structured interviews allow researchers to balance structured inquiry with the adaptability needed to explore individual experiences. Rather than serving as a tool for data analysis, the interviews provided direct quotations that enriched the documentary and the written thesis. This approach aligns with the principles of ethnographic research, which emphasise participatory engagement and first-hand cultural immersion (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). It also reinforced a collaborative dynamic, ensuring that these women's voices remained central to the study rather than being mediated solely through my perspective. Further discussion of this method is

presented in Chapters Three and Six, where its application and findings are explored in greater detail.

Additionally, the research includes an analysis of two rare Saudi films made for television, both of which depict traditional women's dances. The analysis examines their narrative structure, cultural context, and mise-en-scène, assessing how these films represent Saudi women's dance traditions within the constraints of their respective periods. The aim is to identify strengths, weaknesses, and potential gaps in their portrayal, drawing on current film scholarship and documentary theory.

This study's use of several case studies conforms with the key qualitative research principles of describing, understanding, and explaining (Tellis, 1997). By analysing two films with a shared subject, the study facilitates comparisons and cross-examinations, offering insights into the documentary strategies used, their effectiveness, and their limitations. These two films represent the only known Saudi films documenting traditional women's dances, underscoring the significant gap in cinematic representation. While this limited selection may appear restrictive, it highlights the rarity of such portrayals and the necessity of an in-depth analysis. Their scarcity reinforces the importance of this research in preserving and critically engaging with the visual documentation of Saudi women's intangible cultural heritage. A more detailed discussion of this method can be found in Chapter 5.

Chapter 1: Preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage: Safeguarding, Documentation, and Comparative Perspectives

1.1 Introduction

The concept of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) evolved from earlier terms like "folklore" and "non-bodily history" (Vaivade, 2020). This reflects a shift from academic to political discourse, which ended with the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Convention was preceded by several UNESCO projects, including the Proclamation of Masterpieces programme, which served as the catalyst for its creation (Aikawa-Faure, 1964). This chapter sets the conceptual foundation for the thesis by tracing the evolution of ICH discourse, critically engaging with the limitations of global frameworks, and highlighting the urgent need for alternative, community-based methods of documentation. The chapter's structure explores UNESCO's historical and legal developments, broader cultural and political perspectives on heritage, the roles of stakeholders, and the potential of documentary film to ethically and effectively record living traditions. Central to this inquiry is the following research question: Why is the documentation of Saudi women's intangible cultural heritage, particularly traditional dance, important? How do existing preservation frameworks, such as UNESCO's safeguarding methods, influence this process, and what is the cultural significance of these dances? This question not only interrogates preservation methodologies but also calls for a reflection on cultural authority, archival absence, and the role of film in making lacking practices visible.

Chapter 1 provides an overview and literature review structured across seven key areas. First, it examines the pre-convention period when heritage was formally recognised and defined. Second, it defines ICH within the context of UNESCO's 2003 Convention, exploring its domains, characteristics, and safeguarding measures. Third, it reviews broader scholarly perspectives on culture and heritage, followed by an exploration of

the roles played by various stakeholders in ICH preservation. The fifth section focuses on the performing arts as a vibrant domain of ICH, highlighting their role in fostering social identity and cultural diversity, with special attention to the innovative use of digital technologies and film. Sixth, the chapter outlines the processes and criteria for nominating ICH documentaries to UNESCO's representative lists. Finally, it addresses the ethical and practical challenges of filming ICH, emphasising the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in documentation.

1.2 UNESCO and Pre-Convention Understandings of Heritage

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation, was established on 16 November 1945. Born out of World War II, its purpose is to promote respect for the cultures of all UN member states and international cooperation and respect for human rights (UNESCO, n.d. a). Since its inception, UNESCO has undertaken a wide range of activities, including scientific study, publication of educational resources, preservation of cultural sites and objects, and promotion of literacy and teacher training schemes. Today, there are 193 member states of UNESCO with 12 more associate members (UNESCO, n.d. b). The legal concept of heritage developed over the 20th and 21st centuries.

In the Hague Convention of 1954, the term 'cultural property' was used to describe physical cultural objects such as monuments, works of art, and manuscripts (Vecco, 2010). The Convention followed directly from the extensive destruction of cultural heritage sites, archives, and artworks in World War II, including devastation of cities like Warsaw and widespread looting of European art. These events emphasised the importance of legal measures for the safeguarding of material heritage, recognising that it is susceptible to theft, damage, and destruction during periods of armed conflict. Subsequent to these premises, the Venice Charter (1964) was one of the first official documents to legally establish heritage, emphasising the conservation of historic buildings as well as the setting:

> *The concept of a historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or a historic*

> *event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time. (International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, 1964, Article 1).*

This term was selected on the basis of its legal precision in an effort to protect material property under international law. The application of 'cultural heritage,' however, encompasses tangible and intangible elements like tradition and language and were more difficult to define legally at this stage. The recognition of intangible elements of culture increased with the 1972 UNESCO Convention, where 'cultural heritage' was officially entered on the world agenda (UNESCO, 1972). This development represents an expanding recognition that identifies heritage outside tangible materials to include meaning, practices, and identity they bear.

However, this definition was restricted to material heritage, as indicated by the emphasis placed on terms such as "historic monument" and "architectural work " Most official documents by UNESCO, ICOMOS, and other organisations at regional, national, and multinational levels addressed cultural heritage, but their primary focus remained material and monumental heritage (Ruggles & Silverman, 2009).

The Convention on World Heritage 1972 differentiated between three categories of cultural heritage: monuments, groups of buildings, and sites. The definitions employ the phrase "quality of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science" for the first two and "outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view" for the third (The World Heritage Convention, art.1).

These definitions focused predominantly on physical edifices, and this was criticised by those who advocated a broader conceptualisation of cultural heritage as including tangible and intangible components. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) argues that the 1972 definition failed to acknowledge the living nature of cultural heritage and that it still continues to evolve. She suggests that cultural heritage should be considered as a continuous process of negotiation and transformation, which is shaped through interactions between people, things, and environments over time. Ahmed (2006) also blamed UNESCO's 1972 definition for its limited focus on tangible aspects of culture, such as monuments, artefacts, and buildings, at the expense of intangible forms of cultural expression, such as music,

dance, and oral traditions. He suggests that cultural heritage needs to be more broadly defined to encompass both tangible and intangible culture and to recognise the multiplicity and diversity of cultural expressions within and among societies.

UNESCO launched the system of Living Human Treasures in 1993, and in 1998, the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity programs. These were in reaction to the alarm over the decline of traditional cultural practices and disappearance of inherited skills and knowledge. In 1999, UNESCO ratified the establishment of a standard-setting instrument for intangible heritage. This established the groundwork for the subsequent Convention for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage which was a breakthrough toward recognition of a broader notion of cultural heritage.

1.3 Defining and Preserving ICH: Key Domains and Characteristics

The Convention for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage was established by UNESCO and agreed upon during the UNESCO General Conference on October 17 2003. The convention highlights the significance of the ICH as a way of promoting social cohesion, sustainable development, and mutual knowledge among peoples (Ubertazzi, 2022) and aims to safeguard and ensure respect for ICH while raising awareness of the importance of ICH and providing international cooperation, assistance, and funding (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003, Art. 1, Arts. 25/ 26). Article 2 defines intangible cultural heritage:

> The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. (Convention for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003, Art. 2).

The five domains of ICH are oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the

universe; and traditional craftsmanship. (Convention for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003, Art. 2).

The text of the 2003 convention provides a detailed explanation of the actual steps that countries should follow to be successful in their safeguarding efforts and also gives the ratifying states guidelines for the preservation processes. Each country that ratifies the convention must set up a national ICH committee to facilitate the convention's implementation and coordinate activities with the communities involved (Bortolotto et al., 2020). Safeguarding is defined as the following:

> Safeguarding means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, and transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalisation of the various aspects of such heritage (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003 Art. 2 para. 3).

Participating states are required to identify and list in a network relevant cultural elements and instances to be considered as ICH and such instances in need of urgent safeguarding (Art. 16). An impartial committee of experts evaluates the cultural significance, viability, and necessary safeguards.

The next step in the safeguarding of ICH is the documentation, recording, and collection of information on the history, significance, and current situation of intangible activities and related objects and sites, which may be used for research, management, and education (Kerr & Riede, 2022). Documentation enables interested parties to maintain their traditions and knowledge so they are not lost in the long run. This is important for ICH, which is at risk of disappearing as a result of cultural homogenisation and urbanisation (Bacevich, 2020). With individuals relocating from the rural to urban areas, they tend to leave their traditional way of life and embrace other cultures, which might result in loss of their traditional practices and knowledge. Urbanisation might precipitate a change in the physical environment, which might make it difficult to conserve customary cultural practices. The development of high-rise buildings and other urban infrastructure is likely to displace traditional spaces utilised for cultural purposes, such as open land or village centres, from their original usage. Urbanisation is likely to cause displacement of communities and weakening of cultural customs because individuals coming from various locations and cultures find themselves in

cities. Documentation and protection efforts assist in ensuring that the traditional practices and the knowledge are passed to future generations and kept intact despite the rapid development of society.

Documentation is typically a collaboration between primary contributors, external experts, anthropologists, folklorists, and archivists. Community involvement to ensure accuracy and respect for cultural values. Public folklore practices empower communities to document and present their heritage on their own terms, sharing authority with scholars and administrators (Baron, 2016). The practice acknowledges the importance of these activities in the conservation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the promotion of cultural self-determination. and it is also an important factor in preserving cultural heritage because it ensures that individuals who create, use, and transfer the cultural heritage become engaged in preserving it and controlling it. People's engagement in the management and preservation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) ensures its preservation. Non-material measures, such as community celebrations, surveys, interviews with cultural specialists and aged individuals, legal protection, administration plans, learning, and raising awareness, are significant in the protection and transmission of ICH practices, know-how, and expressions to posterity. In summary, safeguarding measures for ICH safeguarding measures for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) must be comprehensive and incorporate various approaches to enhance the existing knowledge system (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023). Such measures are necessary to protect traditional information and practices so that they can continue to be dynamic in contemporary society.

1.4 Beyond Definitions: A Broader Understanding of Heritage and Culture

In addition to the formal definitions of ICH arising from UN conventions and texts, there has been substantial scholarly interest in developing a conceptual understanding of cultural heritage.

In his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (2014), Raymond Williams defines 'culture' as one of the most complex words in the English vocabulary due to its variegated and ever-changing significations across centuries and disciplines of study. It is mostly due to its historical development across different European languages and its contemporary usage to synopsise ideas across a variety of intellectual paradigms and spheres. Culture is a broadly utilised term to characterise the beliefs, values, practices, customs, habits, and conduct of a particular group of individuals, including such variables as their culinary customs, artistic expression forms, music tradition, linguistic features, histories, geography, social structures, and individual experience. Culture is not a staying component either, but more a continually transforming system of practice and signification continuously being renegotiated and remoulded through human transactions. Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation and affects individuals' approach to viewing the world and interacting with others. Culture is an important component of identity and can vary greatly among different communities and societies (Etymonline, n.d.).

The word ‘heritage’ is derived from the Latin word *haeres*, meaning heir or heiress. The 13th-century understanding of the term—borrowed from the old French *heritor*—was mostly associated with that which could be legally passed on or inherited. Throughout history, it has always been about what is inherited or can be inherited, no matter its value (Sandis, 2014), but only in the 17th century did heritage come to also mean a cultural condition passed down from ancestors and maintained in the present. Contemporary understandings of heritage encompass a wide range of interconnected tangible and intangible attributes, including physical manifestations such as buildings and landscapes, as well as cultural features such as the traditions, knowledge, and expressions of a society (Pranskūnienė et al., 2023). Peter Howard is a scholar specialising in heritage studies. He served as the editor of *Landscape Research* and founded the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. His book, *Heritage: Management, Interpretation, Identity* (2010, p.1), examines the multifaceted nature of heritage preservation and its significance in shaping identities. He asserts that heritage is "that whole which people wish to save for the future, which clearly puts the emphasis on people and on actions taken in the present." Inherent in the definition of heritage is a sense of collective ownership or accountability for items that can be regarded as

private or personal. This can apply to items, customs, or cultural practices that are treasured for their importance to a specific community or culture and are thought deserving of preservation for the benefit of later generations (Murray, 2008).

Laurajane Smith, a renowned scholar in heritage studies, is the author of *Uses of Heritage* (2020), where she critically explores the social construction of heritage and the power dynamics involved in its management. Smith (2020, p. 15) posits that the study of heritage encompasses the examination of cultural, historical, and natural resources. Heritage literature seeks to identify and understand the significance of these resources while developing strategies for their conservation, management, and interpretation. This multidisciplinary field spans archaeology, anthropology, geography, history, architecture, art, economics, and tourism. For instance, cultural and heritage economics highlights the importance of cultural assets in supporting regional economies (Vegheș, 2019). Cultural heritage has been regarded as an integral part of history that underpins present economic and cultural objectives (Valdés, 2023). Through the unique cultural experiences offered by cultural heritage tourism, tourists not only undergo but also play a role in preserving heritage (Lussetyowati, 2015). According to Skounti (2008), the evolution of extensive contact between societies, along with global consumerism, has increased the desire to preserve heritage more than ever. In times of uncertainty, individuals turn to reference frameworks to recreate a sense of stability and continuity. This is why heritage is perceived as a social construction generated from "a kind of recycling process, recycling cultural facts which become heritage" (Skounti, 2008, p. 76).

Heritage, according to Davison (2008), is primarily a political notion that places the interest of the group above the benefit of the individual. Logane and Smith (2009) argue that understandings of heritage often result from a selection process guided by government regulations and can be mobilised to achieve positive goals such as developing a sense of community between otherwise disparate groups or to generate employment and promote tourism to capitalise on cultural appreciation, preservation, and awareness (Kim et al., 2019). Through the promotion of notions of heritage,

governments and communities can encourage and celebrate their national and local diversity and object to prejudice, misrecognition, or racism.

On the other hand, ideas of heritage can also be used in less benevolent ways, such as by reshaping the attitude of the public in relation to a political agenda or by mobilising people to fight their neighbours in civil conflicts and international wars. The topic of heritage has also emerged as a contentious matter during electoral campaigns, as it can be perceived as a tool for acquiring power on the basis of economic influence. The incorporation of heritage within economic strategies may even challenge its social benefits (Walker, 2011) if it is believed that heritage has its roots in shared cultural significance rather than in its possessions or financial worth. In this manner, there is a deep relationship between heritage, human rights, and social fairness (Akagawa & Smith, 2018).

1.5 The Role of Stakeholders

ICH preservation decisions involve numerous stakeholders, including government agencies, cultural professionals, international bodies like UNESCO, NGOs, universities, and local societies. In an ideal world, local societies who are the true bearers of this heritage need to take ownership. However, in practice, the dynamics are more complex. Government agencies and cultural institutions often consult with community representatives and cultural experts to determine which elements to include in national or international ICH lists. Anthropologists and cultural experts document and research cultural practices, government institutions legislate, international organisations like UNESCO set preservation standards and offer support, NGOs advocate and offer support, and educational institutions supply research to inform preservation policy. These stakeholders work together to make preservation work honour community desires and protect cultural heritage for generations to come.

In reality, this collaborative process can encounter challenges. Disagreements can occur because of varying interests, priorities, and power relations between stakeholders. For example, UNESCO has been charged with being politicised and elitist in nature, apart from side-lining descendants and Indigenous peoples in its heritage initiatives (Labadi, 2013). Furthermore, security threats, forced displacement of populations, and other

emergencies that interrupt cultural practice can jeopardise the deployment of preservation programmes (Bouchenaki, 2003). These constraints point to the necessity for sincere community involvement as well as addressing power disparities to ensure that preservation initiatives are aligned with the values and interests of the communities that they seek to serve.

Local communities, often referred to in heritage studies as "Community Group Interests" (CGIs), are the primary guardians of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and share an interest in safeguarding. Such communities often face challenges in engaging with larger institutions, such as UNESCO or government bodies, due to constrained communication and a lack of technical knowledge or capacity to participate in complex negotiations about their heritage. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), such as NGOs, frequently function as intermediaries to express and articulate community perspectives, while heritage policy agents, including government officials or cultural managers, facilitate communication between communities and other stakeholders such as international institutions, experts, or sponsors. This collaborative approach aims to make sure that the preservation activity is in accord with community priorities but is not without obstacles. Arantes (2019) emphasises that preservation practices are often rooted in legal and administrative systems that concentrate on the functions of heritage management institutions, thereby restricting the direct involvement of and access of local communities to decision-making. These dynamics demonstrate the necessity for elevated levels of community participation to close gaps and reconcile competing interests of stakeholders.

In summary, protecting heritage is not the sole preserve of government interventions or third-sector heritage organisations but must also include local people and special interest groups (Akagawa & Smith, 2018). Local communities play a crucial role as protectors, ensuring that intangible heritage is safeguarded through the implementation of strategic plans at all levels of government (Wu & Hou, 2019). Locals must be trusted to identify and prioritise which elements of their cultural heritage they wish to safeguard and transmit to future generations.

1.6 Promoting and Documenting ICH in the Performing Arts Domain

The performing arts are one of the most vibrant and dynamic domains of ICH. The art embraces a variety of traditional practices such as song, dance, theatre, puppetry, and storytelling (Chen, 2023). As noted by Maria Ounanian and John Howells (2022), these practices are important in maintaining social harmony, identity construction, and cultural diversity. Robert Baron (2021) also, in the same context, highlights the necessity to safeguard ICH in the performing arts so as to value the relevance and importance of the traditions and practices that established the contemporary society. ICH performance practices are transmitted regularly and can be further developed through formal or informal apprenticeships, workshops, exhibitions, fairs, and performances, as well as through educational institutions. These activities help to generate interest in a specific culture and generate a sense of cultural identity within the population, which can foster public awareness of the significance of ICH in the performing arts sector—be it one's own or that of others. In this regard, UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage initiatives play a crucial role in safeguarding ICH in the performing arts sector.

The media and methods used to document ICH can be diverse, although the process often includes narrative, visual and semiotic analysis and interviews to collect data about the practices, performances, activities, knowledge systems, and skills of groups and individuals (Lim et al., 2021). For the purpose of protecting ICH in performing arts, especially in dance, the most effective form of documentation is visual, mainly achieved through film and video recordings (Aristidou et al., 2022, P.1). This is the most important method because it picks up the complexity of dance movements, the particular techniques, as well as the changing interaction between the performers and their audience. Visual documentation is not merely a record of preservation but also an educational tool to enable the transmission and continued practice and availability of these expressions of culture.

Film, digital technology, and the internet offer previously unprecedented opportunities to conserve and exhibit cultural assets internationally and over the long term (Monova-Zheleva et al., 2020). Advanced digital technologies, including virtual reality and 3D

technology, can be employed to create museum content and engage the public in learning about ICH in novel ways (Kim et al., 2019; Skublewska-Paszkowska et al., 2022). For instance, motion capture technology may be used to record movement so as to accurately preserve traditional martial arts and dance performances (Chao et al., 2018). Films may also be utilised to capture traditional celebrations, as well as music, storytelling, and handicrafts, giving spectators a visual record of cultural practices that can subsequently be shared and distributed (Zami, 2020).

The employment of social media for promoting and distributing Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) offers an effective way of reaching people from both local and global communities. Social media allows cultural traditions to be shared dynamically, transcending geographical boundaries and introducing audiences to diverse cultural practices. In Morocco, platforms like YouTube and Instagram have been used to promote ICH and generate interest in cultural tourism. Research on Marrakesh's craft industry highlights how social media plays a key role in marketing and preserving traditional handicrafts, increasing their visibility and cultural significance (El Fazziki & El Alaoui, 2020). Another example of Chinese is Li Ziqi, a Sichuan province influencer, who has utilised platforms like YouTube and Douyin to market traditional Chinese food and handicrafts. Her painstakingly shot videos depict village life and have drawn a global audience, broadening the enjoyment of Chinese cultural heritage. Academic analyses reveal that Li Ziqi represents Chinese culture through various symbols, constructing a micro-narrative framework that influences audience perceptions (Li et al., 2023). Her content has been instrumental in cultural dissemination and positively shaping China's national image abroad (Whyke et al., 2022). Beyond merely showcasing traditions, these technologies empower individuals to represent their heritage in ways that might challenge or complement official narratives.

User-generated content, such as ICH-focused videos published on platforms like YouTube, exemplifies how new technologies contribute to social archiving. As Pietrobruno (2013) notes, such content bypasses traditional institutional filters, offering more democratised and diverse representations of culture. This is especially significant in contexts where official narratives may marginalise or distort certain aspects of ICH, including those related to gender or minority voices.

However, it is crucial to find suitable forms and methods to document the embodied knowledge and living nature of ICH to effectively represent and transmit them (Hou et al., 2022). Additionally, protection of intellectual property rights and legislative action are necessary to protect the communities to which ICH belongs (Lin & Lian, 2018). Understanding the spatial distribution characteristics of ICH can also assist preservation activity (Kuang et al., 2023). Overall, a comprehensive approach that combines technological advancements, community involvement, legal frameworks, and spatial analysis is necessary when seeking to protect and preserve ICH (Hwang, 2023; Shi, 2023).

Other useful methods of recording ICH within the performing arts and dance may entail pictures, written descriptions, and notations; however, these methods may not offer the most complete depiction of the recorded practice. While film is an excellent medium for depicting, recording, and preserving the performing arts, it may require specialised knowledge, skills, and technologies that are often not well-known among local communities. Despite the availability of training programmes for Indigenous researchers, photographers, filmmakers, and cultural agents, which are generally supported by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Arantes, 2019), these programmes remain inaccessible to many, and the preservation of ICH necessitates further outreach to individuals and communities that may have remained on the margins of documentation efforts. Preservation measures to create and store the documentation of ICH can encompass setting up cultural centres, organising galas, and initiating formal or informal apprenticeships.

Film is typically promoted as the most effective medium for documenting Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in the performing arts, particularly dance, because it can most effectively grasp the embodied knowledge—the lived, physical experience—of these performances. Dance is an art form deeply rooted in movement, rhythm, and spatial relationships, elements that are inherently visual and kinetic. Unlike written descriptions or still images, film provides a dynamic, real-time representation of movements, gestures, and interactions, preserving nuances that might otherwise be lost. For example, it can document the interplay between dancers, the audience's reactions, the integration of music, and the subtle expressions that are integral to the performance.

Moreover, the film serves as an educational tool, offering future generations a means to engage with and learn these practices in a way that feels more immediate and authentic than textual descriptions. It bridges gaps in transmission, especially in contexts where traditional modes of teaching, such as direct apprenticeship, are becoming less viable due to urbanisation or migration.

Critics argue that film risks reducing traditional dances to decontextualised visual records, stripping them of their communal and ritualistic dimensions, and fostering a passive relationship with cultural practices (Smith, 2016, p. 87). Over-reliance on film may discourage hands-on learning, undermining the embodied and interactive nature of dance. However, film can serve as a complementary tool rather than a replacement, capturing not only movements but also the environmental and cultural contexts of dance performances. By including interviews, natural settings, and cultural narratives, the film can preserve both the technique and meaning of traditional dances, offering a gateway to deeper engagement rather than a static archive.

While the film may not fully replicate the embodied experience of dance, it remains an invaluable tool when used thoughtfully. It captures aspects of performance that no other medium can, providing a vital resource for preservation and education. However, its effectiveness depends on how it is used—whether it complements efforts to sustain traditional teaching methods and whether it contextualises the dance within its broader cultural framework. Thus, the argument for the film must emphasise its role within a comprehensive strategy for safeguarding ICH, ensuring that it enhances rather than diminishes the vibrancy of cultural practices.

1.7 UNESCO and Documentary Films

The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was established in 2008, the year the 2003 Convention took effect. Among the first batch of 90 inscriptions, dance, singing, poetry, spiritual objects, textiles, theatre, and narrative expression were represented, showcasing the diversity of ICH globally (UNESCO, n.d. c). Accompanying each inscription is a short documentary film, reflecting UNESCO's emphasis on the centrality of video documentation in safeguarding ICH. For example,

Saudi Arabia's first inscription in 2015 included the *Alardah,* a traditional performance of dancing, chanting poetry, and drumming (UNESCO, 2015).

UNESCO's nomination guidelines outline strict criteria for the preparation of video documentation, as specified in Form ICH-01. These five-minute videos are designed to demonstrate the vitality and authenticity of ICH elements, including interviews with practitioners, live demonstrations, and relevant context. Videos serve multiple purposes: they ensure an archival record, promote public awareness, and provide a visual benchmark for monitoring and evaluating the state of the element over time. However, these guidelines also raise questions about whether such a condensed format adequately represents the complexity and cultural depth of ICH practices, particularly in dynamic forms like dance. Critics might argue that reducing ICH to a brief video risks oversimplification or decontextualisation, creating what Bouttiaux (2012) describes as "museumified fragments" of cultural practices.

Moreover, while UNESCO's framework provides a critical framework for global ICH conservation, it may inadvertently favour state efforts and homogenise diverse cultural expressions. For instance, collaborative nominations of shared ICH elements across borders, while good for regional cooperation, are often founded on narratives crafted by government officials rather than the people themselves. This top-down approach may marginalise grassroots voices, which raises the dilemma of the authenticity and representation of such narratives (Smith, 2016).

On the other hand, initiatives like the Dance Heritage Coalition (DHC) in the United States demonstrate alternative approaches. Although not affiliated with UNESCO, the DHC insists on community-based documentation practices that allow practitioners to take agency over the storytelling and centre local context. While the DHC's success in safeguarding dance traditions within its national framework is commendable, it operates in a cultural and institutional environment vastly different from UNESCO's global framework. Therefore, attempting to broadly adopt the DHC's methodology across different socio-political contexts may prove challenging. Nevertheless, its focus on practitioner documentation and collaboration offers valuable lessons in how to improve UNESCO's model.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the Saudi context, as it highlights the importance of balancing standardised international guidelines with culturally sensitive, community-driven approaches. In a society where social norms and traditions often limit direct participation in documentation efforts, a more nuanced model is essential. By integrating UNESCO's structured archival methodologies with practitioner-led strategies inspired by the Dance Heritage Coalition, it becomes possible to develop a documentation framework that not only preserves the technical elements of women's dances but also protects their cultural context, social significance and deeper meanings.

1.8 Ethical Considerations and Challenges of Documentary Film

Film has been widely recognised as a powerful medium for documenting the memories and diverse examples of ICH globally. Nonetheless, there has been ethical debate surrounding the use of film in ICH documentation, raising questions about ownership, representation, and exploitation. Some scholars argue that the very act of filming ICH without the consent of the community or individuals involved can be classed as exploitation or theft. Furthermore, it is possible to view filming as a violation of privacy or as a disturbance of the cultural activity being recorded. In addition, filmmakers may either unintentionally or deliberately provide an inaccurate or stereotypical representation of the culture or practice being documented. This may lead to misrepresentation, perpetuation of stereotypes, or even cultural appropriation.

Latcho Drom "Safe Journey", a 1993 documentary by Tony Gatlif, is an interesting journey through the Romani musical tradition, tracing their path from India to Spain. Although its ethnography and artistry are commended, *Latcho Drom* raises important ethical concerns with capturing ICH. This is an ethical concern in that the film doesn't have narration or contextual scenes, and it is stylistically engaging despite the same, yet leaving all of the interpretation's work to just the viewer alone. With no direct answers coming from Romani individuals or backstories, it is possible that viewers can deliver preconceived misconceptions or lies on cultural subjects being exposed. This threatens to reinforce stereotypical, romanticised, or exoticised views of Romani identity rather

than creating space for the community itself to produce its own cultural history (Butchart, 2006).

However, Gatlif's methods can also be seen as an ethical strength in its rejection of an external, authoritative voice that might impose an outsider's perspective on Romani culture. By focusing only on song, music and visual storytelling, the film prioritises the Romani people's lived experience and embodied customs and allows their cultural practices to speak for themselves. This aligns with decolonial ethnographic methods, which encourage non-extractive, participatory ways of documenting culture (Nichols, 2010).

The film's unobtrusive approach allows us to see the Romani people as engaged actors within their culture. rather than framing their traditions as artefacts of the past, *Latcho Drom* presents a living, evolving culture, emphasising its resilience despite historical displacement and discrimination. Thus, while the film's lack of explicit framing may pose risks in terms of audience misinterpretation, it also represents an ethical commitment to avoiding imposed narratives, thereby granting the Romani community greater agency in how their culture is experienced on screen.

Ethical considerations are the top priority when documentary filmmaking is involved, particularly when concerning cultural heritage. Documentaries also possess the influence to form people's perceptions and comprehension of varied cultures, rendering it important that one approaches representations sensitively as well as factually (Maccarone, 2010). Under the umbrella of ICH, ethical implications include the fact that communities must be active partners in the safeguarding of their heritage, as offered by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Hennessy, 2012). Through an examination of the ethical aspects, the people's participation, and the safeguarding of both tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage, documentaries can point towards a more enlightened and respectful portrayal of multicultural traditions.

Legal restrictions, particularly within areas with censored media rules and regulations, might hinder the ability to film in certain locations or cover certain topics. Conservative communities, such as Saudi Arabia, impose additional limitations due to cultural norms, religious convictions, and traditions that restrict the act of filming, especially during

events such as weddings or women's dances. Additional challenges may involve technological barriers, difficulties of accessibility, and the risk of losing the cultural context when showing cultural aspects outside their normal setting. Moreover, the contextual richness of ICH may be lost if it is limited to visual and audio components only, thereby neglecting to include the complete details of cultural practices. Financial limitations may also be a major obstacle because effective archival preservation and high-quality film production can be expensive.

UNESCO offers valuable guidelines and recommendations for sharing films and audio-visual documents[3] related to cultural heritage, including ICH. These recommendations highlight the crucial need for preserving moving images over the long term and making them accessible to everyone. They also encourage member states to create national policies and programs focused on the preservation, restoration, and sharing of their audio-visual heritage. The goal of these guidelines is to promote cultural diversity, increase public awareness, and emphasise the importance of accurate representation and respectful portrayal of diverse cultural traditions in films that take heritage as their focus (Norton, 2018). When it comes to World Heritage Sites (WHS), UNESCO's guidelines also address how film can be a powerful tool for raising awareness about local cultural heritage and empowering nearby communities. Films that highlight the importance of WHS can significantly contribute to promoting sustainable social and environmental development, which aligns with UNESCO's goals for heritage conservation and community involvement (Ribaudo & Figini, 2016). Ideally, films that focus on cultural heritage, including ICH and WHS, should involve local communities, scholars, the private sector, NGOs, and government bodies in the filmmaking process. This collaborative approach ensures that the films genuinely reflect the values and significance of the heritage being depicted, leading to more effective conservation efforts (Permatasari et al., 2020).

[3] One of the key documents in this regard is the "Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images." This Recommendation was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 1980 and provides guidelines for the preservation, restoration, and dissemination of films and audio-visual materials. https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-safeguarding-and-preservation-moving-images

It is crucial to remember that the use of film to preserve ICH should be undertaken in a way that is ethical and sensitive to cultural differences, with the participation and agreement of the communities and persons being recorded (Sousa, 2018). While film has had a profound effect on documenting diverse ICH around the world, it is key that we recognise and address the ethical questions that arise. Only by probing these questions can we better understand the potential benefits and challenges of using digital technologies to preserve intangible cultural heritage.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the significant aspects and multifaceted nature of ICH-as guided by UNESCO's dedicated efforts. From tracing the historical roots and the broad adoption of the term "ICH" to detailing the specific mechanisms, including the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the discourse emphasises the critical role of preservation and promotion within the global cultural landscape. The exploration extends into the domains and characteristics of ICH, spotlighting the rich tapestry of performing arts and innovative interventions through digital technologies and film. While UNESCO has been instrumental in drawing attention to the importance of safeguarding ICH—particularly through legal instruments and audio-visual documentation—it remains necessary to question how such frameworks operate in specific cultural contexts. In the case of Saudi Arabia, and especially in relation to women's dance traditions, UNESCO's mechanisms do not fully address the local complexities, social constraints, and ethical sensitivities involved in documentation. As such, this research argues for a more grounded, culturally responsive approach to heritage preservation—one that recognises the role of communities, embraces participatory methods, and engages with visual media not just as a tool of preservation but as a space of representation and agency.

Additionally, the narrative underscores the importance of documentary films in capturing and perpetuating the essence of ICH. Collectively, these sections highlight the dynamic interplay between traditional practices and modern technological advancements, stressing the need for ethical considerations and community-inclusive strategies in the documentation and safeguarding of ICH. This comprehensive

exploration not only reinforces the importance of cultural diversity but also illuminates the enduring efforts necessary to preserve such heritage in an ever-evolving world.

Chapter 2: Saudi Arabia's Cultural Heritage: History, Policy, and Documentation of Intangible Heritage

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's history, cultural heritage, and policy to set up the groundwork and later theorise the reasons behind the lack of female representation and documentation of women's dance in film and media. The ICH elements already registered on the Kingdom's representative list are explored. Saudi Arabia's formal and informal relationship to its intangible cultural heritage is contextualised through reference to the nation's geography, religion, tribal systems, and government ministries. Special attention is given to the cultural and artistic initiatives of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 programme. Additionally, this chapter delves into the multifaceted challenges involved in documenting Saudi Arabia's rich cultural heritage, with a particular emphasis on women's heritage.

Despite the richness of Saudi Arabia's ICH, women's artistic traditions remain underrepresented due to historical, political, and cultural constraints. Strict gender segregation and past restrictions on media and public performance have limited the visibility of women's cultural expressions, particularly in the performing arts. While international frameworks such as UNESCO's safeguarding methods advocate for ICH preservation, their implementation in Saudi Arabia is shaped by socio-political considerations and state narratives. Vision 2030 promotes cultural heritage as part of national identity but often prioritises state-approved representations, leaving some traditions, including women's dance, overlooked.

This research addresses these gaps, emphasising the urgency of documenting Saudi women's traditional dances before they disappear amid rapid modernisation and globalisation.

2.2 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, situated on the Arabian Peninsula, is a sprawling and culturally rich nation known for its strategic location as a gateway between Asia, Africa, and Europe (Figure 2). The peninsula is the largest in the world, covering three million square kilometres. It contains diverse environments, including deserts, rural areas, mountains, coasts, and eight cultural and environmental UNESCO World Heritage Sites from pre-historic and Islamic periods (Bamyeh, 1999; Al-Wasil, 2012, UNESCO). The Prophet Mohammed was born in Mecca, the cradle of Islam, where he first delivered God's message in the seventh century. Islam grew outside the Arabian Peninsula and engaged with diverse cultures and civilisations, ultimately becoming deeply rooted across the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia. Saudi Arabia still hosts the annual Hajj pilgrimage, which is required at least once by all physically and financially able devotees to Islam.

The Arabian Peninsula was part of various empires and caliphates and was under partial or nominal Ottoman rule for four centuries until the Ottoman's complete withdrawal at the end of WW1. The Ottomans mostly controlled the region of Al Hijaz, which covered a large part of Western Saudi Arabia. They benefitted the country by constructing and maintaining roads, bridges, and other public facilities aimed to facilitate the movement of pilgrims and goods in and out of the holy cities. However, large coastal cities like Jeddah were the only ones profiting from investments, with far-off tribal areas like Jizan and Al Bahah city being accorded a degree of autonomy. This disparity in development efforts led to differing urbanisation and economic growth levels within these regions (bn Jurais, 2005, p.38). Scholars such as Köksal (2006) suggest that the Ottoman Empire's attempts at centralisation and modernisation through initiatives like the regulatory reforms had limited impact on peripheral tribal regions, such as those in the Arabian Peninsula, where local customs largely persisted (Kasaba, 2010). Similarly,

Rogan (2000) notes that Ottoman control in these remote areas was often nominal, enabling these communities to retain their distinct identities and resist assimilation into the broader Ottoman culture.

Unlike the Levant to the north, the Arabian Peninsula was largely left untouched by European colonialism and interest until the discovery of oil later in the 20th century. The establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was declared on September 23, 1932, by King Abdulaziz Al-Saud. Officially named the Saudi Arab Kingdom (المملكة العربية السعودية) after the royal family name (Al-Saud), it was announced that Arabic is the national language, Islam is the religion, and the Quran is the constitution. As Lujain Mirza (2017) has mentioned, the current Saudi state's identity is rooted in the history of the first Saudi state,[4] whose social structure and regulations arose from adopting Islam as a way of life. The majority of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is Sunni Muslim. The Sunnis follow the Hanbali[5] doctrine, which is one of the strictest of the four Islamic doctrines concerning what is permissible and what is forbidden, such as the prohibition of photography. As for other sects, such as Shi'a and Sufis, they are among the minorities in Saudi Arabia; their combined number does not exceed 15% of the total citizens in Saudi Arabia. They are concentrated in the eastern region, in the cities of Al-Ahsa and Qatif, and in the southern region of Najran. According to the latest data available from the General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia, the population of Saudi Arabia is approximately 32.1 million people with an average age of 29 years. The Kingdom is divided into 13 administrative regions, each with its own governorates and tribes.

[4] The First Saudi State (1744–1818) was established by Muhammad ibn Saud in alliance with the religious reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. This partnership formed the basis of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance, which aimed to reform Islamic practices across the Arabian Peninsula. The state expanded rapidly, particularly in the Najd region, and by the late 18th century, controlled much of the peninsula. However, the First Saudi State was defeated in 1818 after an extensive military campaign led by the Ottoman commander Ibrahim Pasha, which destroyed Diriyah, the capital of the Saudi state (Ochsenwald, 1984,f49-50; Vassiliev, 1998, 154-156).

[5] In the Hanbali school of thought, the sum of the rulings that Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal went to, or the sum of the jurisprudential issues that Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal said, and what was attached to that from what his companions came out with on its rules and principles.

Figure 2: The 13 provinces of Saudi Arabia (University of Texas Libraries, 2021)

Saudi Arabia has one of the largest Arab tribal populations, with seventy-two tribes spread across the country, each maintaining its distinct traditions and identity. Tribal systems have a hierarchy of authority maintained by sheikhs of varying factions. Despite this hierarchy, each faction has significant independence in managing internal affairs. Tribal societies are present in cities and rural areas and are a fundamental aspect of Saudi Arabian and other Arabian Peninsula communities (Abdullah, 2018).

According to Lisa Urkevich, a specialist in the music and heritage of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the greater Arabian Peninsula. In her book *Music and Traditions of the Arabian Peninsula* (2014, p.3), she states that Saudi Arabia exhibits distinct cultural and social divisions, particularly between the nomadic Bedouin (بدو) and urban or Hadar (حضر) groups. While many Saudis have roots in nomadic tribes, they have primarily settled over time. Nonetheless, tribal traditions and identities continue to wield significant influence. The boundaries between Bedouin and Hadar communities are often blurred, with some settled individuals in oasis villages still adhering to Bedouin customs. This nuanced social hierarchy highlights the complexity of the Saudi social structure and underscores the persisting importance of tribal identity and lineage in shaping societal interactions and individual status. These classifications not only affect social relationships but also play a crucial role in political and economic dynamics within the country.

King Al Saud's notable achievement was the unification of various tribes and disparate regions into a single nation through a combination of military force and adept conflict management. The continued success of the Al-Saud monarchy can be attributed to its control over the oil fields in the east, governance of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina in the west, and management of the capital city of Riyadh and the arid desert in the middle of the peninsula (Lacey, 2011, p.9). The country underwent a massive economic transformation after the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, with oil becoming a major source of revenue and economic development. The pace of economic growth accelerated, contributing to significant improvements in infrastructure and the standard of living.

2.2.1 Al Bahah and Jizan Regions

The documentation of two traditional regional dances located in the Al Hijaz region of southwestern Saudi Arabia, Al-La'ib in Al Bahah and Al-Jahli in Jizan, are the focus of my research. Al Bahah is located in the Hijaz Mountain range, while Jizan is situated along the Red Sea. Established as an administrative region in 1383 CE, with the city of Al Bahah as its capital, Al Bahah is now the smallest province in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, covering an area of around 10,362 square kilometres and consisting of 10 governorates: Al Bahah, Baljurashi, Al-Mandaq, Al-Mukhwah, Al-Hajrah, Bani Hassan, Ghamid Al-Zinad, Al-Aqiq, Al-Qura, and Qilwah as it shows in (Figure 3). The region attracts many tourists and is marked by a diverse topography, including parks, forests, mountains, and valleys with various natural plant species and scattered historical sites (MOI, 2023). Historically recognised as the "Garden of Hijaz" and "Meadow of Mecca," Al Bahah is home to Ghamid and Zahrani tribes and possesses a rich cultural and geographical heritage.

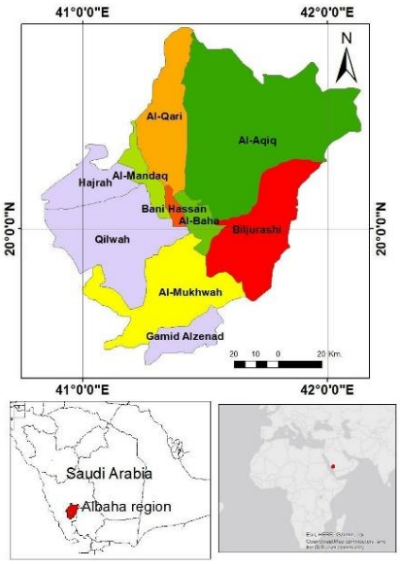

Figure 3: Map of Al Bahah province (Ahmed. et al. 2022)

Jizan province is the second-smallest province in total area, at around 13,000 kilometres, and includes islands such as Farasan Island (MOI, 2023). Jizan City is its capital. Historically known as Al-Mikhlaf Al-Sulaimani, Jizan serves as a pivotal location for land and sea trade, with its port, the third biggest in the Kingdom, acting as a crucial hub for imports to the southwestern part of the Kingdom and a rest stop connecting Yemen and Mecca (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Map of Jizan province and its 16 governorates (Alsheikh et al. 2017)

2.3 Documentation and Study of ICH in the Region

The Qur'an and the hadiths, along with the poems that came to accompany them, can be regarded as among the earliest efforts to document, collect, and archive the oral cultural heritage of the Arabian Peninsula. Following the killing of many memorisers of the Qur'an in the Battle of Yamamah in 632 CE, Umar ibn al-Khattab urged Abu Bakr to collect the Qur'an to preserve it from being lost with the deaths of those who held it in their memory. This act of transferring knowledge from "men's chests" into written form marks a significant moment in the Islamic tradition and reflects an early recognition of the importance of documentation (Al Saif, 2015). It exemplifies the cultural value placed on making intangible heritage tangible to ensure its transmission to future generations, preserving not only the words but the essence of the heritage itself.

This historical precedent highlights that the concept of documentation for preservation is deeply rooted in the cultural practices of the region long before the establishment of organisations like UNESCO. This perspective strengthens the argument that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the Arabian context, such as traditional dances, aligns with an enduring historical and cultural ethos rather than being solely a modern international framework.

Omer Al Saif (2015) notes that interest in and documentation of the heritage of the Arabian Peninsula was sparked during the modern era by Orientalists who ventured into the region and interacted with its people. One of the earliest Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (1784–1817), a Swiss traveller and orientalist, is also known for his detailed observations of Bedouin life in the Middle East. His notable contributions include the rediscovery of Petra and his in-depth documentation of Arab customs, traditions, and dialects through immersive interaction with local communities. Similarly, William Palgrave (1826–1888), a British diplomat and explorer, travelled across the Arabian Peninsula, offering rich insights into its culture, politics, and society during the mid-19th century. Charles Doughty (1843–1926), in his seminal work *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, captured the landscapes and life of the Bedouins, providing one of the most detailed European accounts of the region. Together, their contributions significantly enriched Western understanding of the Arabian Peninsula's intangible heritage (Al Saif, 2015).

Mostafa Jad (2017) notes that the documentation of intangible cultural heritage in the contemporary Arab world by Arabs themselves began relatively late, with significant efforts starting in the early 1970s, particularly in Egypt and Iraq. In the Gulf countries, this initiative started in the early 1980s with the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council's Centre for Folk Heritage. However, this project was institutionally halted after the Gulf War, resulting in reliance on individual initiatives and efforts rather than continuing within an organised institutional framework (Aldegheishem, 2023).

Writings on Saudi heritage began with local scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, driven by diverse motivations. Several key figures have significantly contributed to the collection and documentation of Saudi Arabia's oral and intangible heritage. For instance, Ahmed Al-Sibai focused on gathering and preserving traditional proverbs, as seen in *Popular Proverbs in the Cities of Hijaz* and *Dictionary of Local Dialects Comparative Linguistic Studies* by Muhammad bin Ahmed Al Aqili. Among these efforts, the work of anthropologist Saad Al Sowayan stands out for its scientific rigour and prominence. As a professor of anthropology at King Saud University, Al Sowayan oversaw a landmark project aimed at collecting Nabati poetry directly from oral sources. His work, conducted between 1983 and 1990, remains one of the most comprehensive and scholarly contributions to the documentation of Saudi Arabia's oral heritage (Al Saif, 2015).

The documentation of Saudi folk heritage is generally weak, and records of Saudi women's dances are almost non-existent. However, there are few references that often document popular songs without considering their historical origins. As a counter-example, Hind Baghaffar's work has been instrumental in documenting and preserving Saudi Arabia's rich musical heritage. Her book *Popular Songs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (1994) comprehensively explores the nation's folk music traditions. Organised into eight sections based on regional variations, the book covers over 140 types of folk songs, offering valuable insights into the cultural and historical contexts of these musical forms and the depth and diversity of Saudi Arabia's musical heritage. Similarly, in his 2010 book *Taghni Al-Ard: Archive of the Renaissance and Memory of Modernity,* Ahmad Al-Wasil explored the origins of women's singing groups, particularly in

Kuwait, and their influence on the Arabian Peninsula. He suggests that these groups first emerged in Kuwait, influenced by the Saudi poet Ibn Laboun (1790-1830), who later relocated there (Aldegheishem, 2023).

Despite these efforts, a significant gender bias persists in the documentation of Saudi Arabia's intangible cultural heritage. Male-dominated practices, such as *Nabati* poetry, receive more comprehensive attention, while women's contributions, especially in areas like dance and music, remain underrepresented. This imbalance underscores the gendered approach to heritage documentation in the region. As noted by Al Hanouf Aldegheishem (2023), who explores the historical and social structures shaping Saudi women's musical bands, the dominance of men in popular singing is deeply rooted in social and authoritative hierarchies. These structures allowed men to form organised singing groups, or at least the beginnings of such collectives, as seen in Al-Ardha and *Samri*, even if they remained relatively simple in their early stages.

In contrast, women lacked similar opportunities due to restrictions on their participation in public musical spaces. Women's singing is typically portrayed as individual and spontaneous, often occurring in private settings. Furthermore, efforts by women to create formalised or collective singing groups were frequently met with resistance, limiting the development of women's collective musical traditions.

Similarly, Al-Wasil (2010) analyses the social factors in central of Saudi Arabia that led to the formation of women's singing groups before solo female singers emerged. Key factors include women's work being confined to household chores, social conservatism restricting singing to the home, and the separation between men and women.

Another key factor impacting the documentation of Saudi heritage is the influence of religious conservatism, particularly during the Sahwa[6] (Islamic Awakening) movement. Sahwa negatively impacted the documentation and development of these groups in the public sphere. Consequently, women formed private and segregated singing groups for

themselves. For example, the artist Etab, born in Saudi Arabia in 1948, had to migrate to Cairo when her presence evolved from being part of a women's musical group to becoming a solo singer. This was due to the influence of the Sahwa, which resisted her rise as an artist.

The documentation of Saudi Arabia's intangible cultural heritage has historically concentrated on the central region, particularly on Bedouin traditions, leaving other regions, such as the south, underexplored. The focus on Bedouin culture, which includes oral storytelling, poetry, and music, stems from its significant role in shaping national identity, particularly around key administrative centres like Riyadh. Meanwhile, the Hijaz region, with its rich and diverse cultural history shaped by international trade routes and pilgrimage, has received more attention, especially in cities like Mecca and Jeddah. However, the southern regions of Saudi Arabia, including Asir, Jizan, Najran, and Al Bahah, remain underrepresented in cultural documentation. These areas possess unique traditions, such as distinct musical forms, oral literature, and social customs influenced by geographic isolation and neighbouring cultures. The lack of formal records has contributed to this gap in recognition. Efforts to rectify this imbalance have emerged, which will be explained on the next page. These initiatives have been led by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Culture, which has taken steps to encourage research and documentation of these underrepresented regions.

2.4 Saudi Efforts in Promoting ICH: An Overview

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has undertaken significant efforts to promote and preserve its cultural heritage, aligning with both UN objectives and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman’s Vision 2030, a government initiative designed to foster economic, social, and cultural diversification. Originally announced on April 25, 2016, Vision 2030 strategically integrates the safeguarding and promotion of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) with the Kingdom’s broader economic development goals. Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 programme has prioritised cultural heritage as part of its economic diversification efforts. The Ministry of Culture, established in 2018, has led efforts to safeguard cultural heritage, aligning with the broader goals of tourism, national identity, and international recognition. The creation of the Heritage

Commission reflects a growing recognition of the importance of ICH, yet there remains a strong focus on male-dominated practices, such as Al-Ardahand Al-Mezmar, which are inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. However, while these male-dominated traditions are well-documented, women's ICH, particularly in music and dance, is significantly underrepresented. Despite national efforts, the documentation of women's traditions is constrained by cultural and religious factors that limit women's visibility in public spheres**.** The following passages will highlight some of these initiatives.

The Ministry of Culture in Saudi Arabia, established in 2018 under Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan Al Saud, marked a major shift in the country's approach to cultural preservation and development. In 2020, a significant milestone occurred when the responsibility for the Kingdom's national heritage was transferred from the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage to the Ministry of Culture. This move reflected the Kingdom's growing emphasis on safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as well as fostering social and cultural development (SPA, 2019).

Following this transfer, the Heritage Commission was established as the official body responsible for overseeing the Kingdom's heritage, encompassing antiquities, urban heritage, traditional handicrafts, and intangible cultural elements. Its strategy is built on eight key pillars: protecting and managing cultural and archaeological sites, advancing research and developing heritage talents, integrating digital technologies, establishing regulations and licensing, fostering private sector collaboration, securing government and international funding, raising public awareness, and building local and global partnerships (Heritage Commission, 2024).

"Heritage talents" refers to individuals with expertise in preserving, researching, and promoting cultural heritage, including traditional artisans, heritage scholars, cultural practitioners, conservation specialists, museum professionals, and digital heritage experts. In Saudi Arabia, this term also highlights the training and development of local experts to ensure the continuity and innovation of cultural traditions.

Although once the responsibility of the Ministry of National Guard, the Ministry of Culture is now responsible for Saudi Arabia's Al-Janadriyah Cultural Festival, which has been organised annually since 1985. It is a national festival for heritage and culture

that includes many different activities related to Saudi heritage, including camel races, performances of local music, and traditional male dances. Seeking to preserve cultural heritage and protect it from extinction, Al-Janadriyah is the most important heritage and cultural festival in the Riyadh region and contributes to revitalising the economy through tourism by attracting tens of thousands of visitors, including Saudi citizens, foreign residents, and visitors and tourists from abroad (Buker, 2019).

In 2023, UNESCO and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched five new cultural heritage projects. These projects will receive over 10 million USD in funding over three years as part of the Fund-in-Trust Agreement established in January 2020 between UNESCO and the Saudi Ministry of Culture (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2023). Additionally, as part of the Vision 2030 plan, the government is undertaking projects to build cultural museums and expand the number of registered Saudi UNESCO World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2023).

In 2006, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia encouraged the revival of artistic heritage and folklore. They approved the teaching of Saudi men's dance in the boys' curriculum, and in 2022, the boys' art curriculum, for the first time, showed lessons about the Saudis performing traditional dances such as Al-Ardah (Ministry of Education, Art, 2023). However, there are no signs of teaching women's traditional dance performances being included in the national days or the Founding Day in a private setting. The Minister of Education states, “The matter is open for training in the field of education and institutes. The Ministry of Culture is responsible for that, and it needs governance, at the present time, for this field to be available” (Abdullah, 2021).

The Saudi government has also actively promoted the celebration of Saudi National Day as a significant ideological event. To ensure widespread participation, the government has issued directives to public institutions and private entities. This initiative aligns with the broader goals of Vision 2030, which aims to foster national pride and unity. National holidays such as Saudi National Day on 23 September and Founding Day[7] on 22 February provide a platform for celebrating and transmitting ICH

[7] This day coincides with the anniversary of the founding of the first Saudi state nearly three centuries ago.

to future generations by increasing public awareness of the importance of ICH in promoting diversity and expressing cultural identities. On these occasions, the cities of the Kingdom hold numerous distinguished cultural, artistic and popular events (Saudi Founding Day, 2023).

The Royal Institute of Traditional Arts (*Wirth*) ورث is an independent government entity, with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud as its honorary chairman. It provides quality education and training in traditional art forms, promoting and preserving national heritage both locally and internationally. In line with Saudi Vision 2030, Wirth represents Saudi culture by narrating the history and stories of traditional artworks and artists, preserving the authenticity of these arts, and encouraging enthusiasts to learn, master, and develop them. Traditional arts are integral to Saudi culture, and this is evident in calligraphy, embroidery, textile art, jewellery making, and more. These arts include visual, performing, and musical traditions from various regions, playing a significant role in the Kingdom's history and future (The Royal Institute of Traditional Arts, 2024).

The Saudi Heritage Preservation Society is a non-profit organisation established to serve the national heritage of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In February 2019, UNESCO registered the association as an international non-governmental organisation in the heritage field. Its mission is to monitor and follow up on efforts made in the area of Saudi heritage, identify aspects deserving of more care and attention, motivate and support the community and the institutions concerned to achieve this, and raise awareness of and generate benefit from it. It organises local and international cultural heritage events to enrich knowledge and raise awareness among citizens of the Kingdom's legacy and the importance of preserving and developing it (Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, 2019). Additionally, it has established a virtual archive of ICH, including music, dance, and traditional crafts (Kumar & Singh, 2022).

The Intangible Heritage Professional Association is the first professional association for intangible heritage in the Kingdom, with its board of directors chaired by Dr Othman Al-Sini (Spa. 2021). The association works to develop practice standards in the intangible heritage sector, recognise talent within the sector by awarding certificates and prizes, and provide support. It also aims to create awareness campaigns and events of all kinds to increase public awareness of the sector's importance and to improve the

future of practitioners by providing education and training and strengthening networking within the sector (Intangible Heritage Association, 2024).

Many Saudi universities offer programmes focussing on studying and preserving the Kingdom's cultural heritage. King Saud University in Riyadh has a College of Tourism and Archaeology with degrees in archaeology, museum studies, and heritage management. Umm Al-Qura University in Mecca has a Department of Archaeology and Museums covering archaeological excavation, heritage conservation, and museology. King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals has a Centre for Islamic Arts and Architecture, studying the country's architectural heritage. Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh includes programmes on the history, culture, and religious heritage of Saudi Arabia. Taibah University in Medina offers a Master's in Heritage Management, which covers preservation, cultural tourism, and museums. These university programmes are vital in training the next generation of scholars and professionals dedicated to safeguarding Saudi Arabia's invaluable cultural legacy.

Additionally, the King Abdul-Aziz Foundation, the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, and the Saudi Archaeological Association at King Saud University are essential research centres that contribute to the preservation and study of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. The King Abdul-Aziz Library and the King Fahad National Library are two of the most significant libraries and archives in Saudi Arabia. They hold extensive collections of historical documents and other materials related to the kingdom's rich cultural heritage.

Just as there are institutions and governmental and non-governmental entities dedicated to collecting intangible cultural heritage, there are also individual and collective efforts. Academics and researchers represent these efforts. Many Saudi scholars and researchers have contributed to the documentation and study of intangible cultural heritage in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Among the prominent scholars is Abdulrahman Al-Ansary, one of the pioneers of archaeology in Saudi Arabia, who has made numerous archaeological discoveries. Hessa bint Abdullah Al-Shaikh is another notable figure, serving as a professor of cultural anthropology and known for her research on social customs and traditions. Saad Al-Rashid has significantly contributed to documenting

folk heritage and folklore through his field studies. Additionally, Abdullah bin Mohammed Al-Shaya is known for documenting folk tales and traditional poetry, while Ahmed bin Omar Al-Zailai focuses on studying urban and historical heritage. Lastly, Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Harbi is recognised for his research on traditional arts and popular literature. Other notable scholars include Saad Al Sowayan, renowned for his comprehensive studies on Saudi folklore; the writer Mohammed Al-Aqili; Thuraya Al-Turki, who focuses on cultural anthropology; and Laila Al-Bassam, who works on documenting traditional clothing.

The efforts of these scholars play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Saudi cultural heritage for future generations. Additionally, many Saudi researchers conduct studies that collect oral narratives, document customs and traditions, and study folk arts such as traditional dances and songs.

2.5 UNESCO Preservation of ICH in Saudi Arabia: Men's Dances

Saudi Arabia's affiliation with UNESCO has been instrumental in recognising and safeguarding its Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) on a global scale. Saudi Arabia became a member of UNESCO in 1948, marking the beginning of its active involvement in international efforts to safeguard cultural heritage (López-Guzmán & Cruz, 2016). As a member state, Saudi Arabia has collaborated with UNESCO on various initiatives to preserve and promote cultural diversity. This membership has provided Saudi Arabia a platform to engage with other nations in safeguarding cultural heritage and celebrating the diversity of cultural expressions worldwide.

The survey and documentation process has uncovered a vast historical treasure of intangible cultural heritage elements, showcasing Saudi Arabia's rich and diverse heritage. The National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage includes many of these elements, with thirteen elements associated with Saudi Arabia inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity—two of which are dances performed only by men. These are Al-Ardah Al-Najdiyah (العرضة النجدية), a dance involving drumming and poetry, inscribed in 2015 (10.COM), and Almezmar (المزمار), a dance featuring drumming and sticks, inscribed in 2016 (11.COM). The other

elements are date palms, falconry, metal engraving, Arabic coffee, the cultivation of Khawlani coffee beans, Majlis (a form of traditional council), Al-Qatt Al-Asiri (القط العسيري) , a conventional female wall decoration, Al Sadu weaving, oral traditions related to camel flocking, the traditional Alharees dish, and Arabic calligraphy. The Ministry of Culture, through the Heritage Commission, is actively working to identify, register, and document even more elements that are unique to the different regions of the Kingdom. This effort highlights the dynamic and living nature of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage, ensuring that these traditions are preserved and celebrated for future generations.

Al Ardah Al Najdiyah (Figure 5) is a traditional dance that originated in the Najd region of Saudi Arabia. This dance is rooted in military history, where Arab warriors took part in rituals before confronting their enemies on the battlefield. The sword dance was a way to showcase men's weapons and fighting spirit. The Najd performance also evokes the battles led by the founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz Al Saud. Today, however, it is a form of folk dance performed at special events such as national festivals, weddings, and celebrations. The dance involves a group of men forming two rows facing each other, with a space between them for the dancers to move. The dancers hold swords or canes and perform a series of steps and movements to the beat of drums and other traditional instruments (UNESCO, 2016).

Figure 5: Al Ardah Al Najdiyah (Alshem, 2015)

Almezmar (Figure 6) is a traditional dance that involves drumming and dancing with a stick. It is practised in Al-Hijaz, in western Saudi Arabia. It typically involves 15–100 participants dressed in white garments standing in two rows facing each other. The performance starts with beating drums, and then the leader of each row begins to clap and chant traditional songs loudly (UNESCO, 2016).

Figure 6: Almezmar dance (Abdullatif, 2016)

Women or mixed-gender groups perform none of these dances. The documentation process of intangible cultural heritage for women in Saudi Arabia, mainly traditional dances, faces multiple challenges. One of the main challenges is the traditional and gender roles that limit women's participation in public or traditional activities. Cultural and religious restrictions significantly affect women's ability to perform dances publicly, as these activities may be considered a departure from tradition in some communities. The lack of researchers and specialists focusing on documenting the intangible cultural heritage of women poses an additional challenge, as the scarcity of available information and documents hinders efforts to preserve this part of the cultural heritage. The UNESCO web archive has a documentary film that shows how these two dances are performed. These two films were filmed and produced in Saudi Arabia. Some shots of women stood or watched the dances, but no women participated or danced. Most of the women in these films were covered by an Abaya.

However, governmental, academic, and community-led initiatives, along with non-governmental efforts, are increasingly working to document the intangible cultural heritage of women in Saudi Arabia, reflecting a growing recognition of its significance and the need for its preservation. The Ministry of Culture, as part of Saudi Vision 2030, has played a key role in launching initiatives aimed at preserving traditional arts and crafts, recognising their importance in enriching cultural identity and improving quality of life. Academic institutions, such as King Abdulaziz University and Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, have also expanded their research efforts to highlight the role of women in cultural transmission, acknowledging their essential contributions to sustaining intangible heritage. International collaborations, particularly with UNESCO, have further strengthened these efforts. A significant example is the recognition of Al-Qatt Al-Asiri, a traditional form of female interior wall decoration from the Asir region, which was added to UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017.

Another example is the documentation of *Al-Sadu*, a traditional Bedouin weaving craft that uses natural fibres to create geometric patterns on textiles, reflecting Bedouin

culture and lifestyle. These were inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017 and 2020, respectively. Community-led movements, such as those led by the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, have also been instrumental in safeguarding and promoting women's cultural expressions. This growing recognition comes at a critical time, as rapid social changes and globalisation threaten the continuity of traditional practices. By documenting and preserving these traditions, we protect cultural diversity and strengthen national identity and social cohesion in this transformative era.

This recognition has become especially urgent in the face of modernisation, urbanisation, and globalisation, threatening the continuity of traditional practices. As Saudi society undergoes rapid transformation, there is growing concern about the potential loss of oral traditions, traditional crafts, and performing arts—particularly those historically preserved by women in domestic and community spaces. Documenting and safeguarding these cultural expressions now is crucial to ensuring their transmission to future generations, preserving cultural diversity, and reinforcing national identity. At the same time, the increasing visibility of women's contributions to heritage reflects broader socio-cultural changes in Saudi Arabia, where women are playing a more prominent role in public life, academia, and the arts. The growing appreciation for women's intangible heritage is part of a more significant movement to recognise and honour their historical and cultural contributions in shaping Saudi society.

2.6 Lack of Women's Visual Representative and Documentation: Islamic Ideology and Politics

This section will provide an overview of the religious, political, and social reasons behind the lack of visualisation of women in Saudi Arabia. The first and most eminent reason for the lack of visual documentation for women in Saudi Arabia is Islamic interpretation, which holds varying positions regarding art and representative portrayal, including photography, painting, music, and dance. These positions largely depend on the interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence and the religious figures who have

influenced Islamic societies in the course of history. Abdul Aziz Bin Baz, one of the most famous Saudi Arabian Sunni Islamic scholars, stated many hadiths (i.e., the Prophet's practices and teachings) on the authority of the Prophet in Al-Sahih, Al-Masanid, and Al-Sunah, indicating that it is forbidden to depict any being with a soul, whether human or animal, whether in sculpture, drawings, or photographs. Faruq Sherif: In *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'an*, Sherif (1995, Pp.62-63) notes that the Qur'an does not explicitly prohibit visual representations, but certain hadiths discourage creating images of living beings to prevent idolatry. Similarly, Saudi Islamic scholar Salih Alfozan's opinion also states that portrait pictures are forbidden except in cases of necessity and that artistic or pleasure photography is taboo (Facey and Grant, 2001, p.9).

In *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation* (2007), Viola Shafik, an Egyptian-German film scholar, curator, and producer, explores Egypt's film industry within its socio-political context, tracing its evolution from the 1930s to the era of globalisation. She notes that photography once met with resistance, eventually became widely accepted, though not fully respected by the religious establishment. She observes that all Gulf States reinforce national identity through images of past leaders in photographs and motion pictures (Shafik, 2007, p. 9). Sheikh Ibn Uthaymeen's fatwa on the permissibility of photography asserts that one is free to take photographs or be photographed if it is mandatory for a valid reason, such as a National ID picture or passport (Ibn Uthaymeen, n.d). Although representative imagery has additionally become mainstream in advertisements and entertainment in Saudi Arabia, the taboo proves to be stronger for images of women than men, perhaps due to women's dress code under Sharia law, which requires women to cover their heads and wear conservative clothing, such as an abaya or hijab. These requirements for women are based on judicial and clerical interpretations of the Quran and Hadith, some of which instruct women to cover themselves and behave modestly in the presence of men. Mirza, in her PhD dissertation titled "Photographing Saudi Women: A Collaborative Exploration through Images and Narratives", states that "Though photography has become the norm in Saudi Arabia, there are few, if any, visual representations of Saudi women, whether in photography exhibitions, magazines, or posters; it is hard to find

Saudi female portraits. It is challenging to find books or exhibitions produced by locals representing Saudi women" (Mirza, 2018). According to Bashatah (2017), images of Saudi women are rare since most Saudi women do not appear in public places unless covered by hijab or niqab.

The hijab, which refers to the belief in dressing modestly in Islam as well as the specific headscarf that many Muslim women wear, is a crucial element of both Muslim identity and Islamic practice (Sintang et al., 2016). The hijab is more than a mere cloth; it is a sign of adherence to Islamic values and allows Muslim women to categorise themselves as members of the broader Islamic community (Siraj, 2011). Such group identity is empowering because it confirms and sustains common beliefs and values that unite Muslim women. Despite a potential belief among some that the hijab symbolises oppression, it is essential to acknowledge the variety of interpretations and meanings Muslim women attach to it (Jardim & Vorster, 2003). According to Tolaymat and Moradi (2011), the hijab is an important tool for women, giving significant protection from harassment and discrimination. This protection allows women to navigate societies with entrenched sexist norms more freely. The hijab acts as both a physical and psychological barrier, Offering women protection from societal judgment and unsolicited attention, helping them retain their dignity and autonomy.

Yet, in the context of Saudi Arabia, requirements for hijab and the abaya play a significant role in influencing the visualisation of women and the documentation of their intangible cultural heritage in Saudi Arabia. The abaya became officially required for girls in Saudi middle schools in 1955, coinciding with increased educational opportunities for girls in the Kingdom (Ambah, 2007). Although women have not been required to wear the abaya in Saudi Arabia since 2018, it remains a social and cultural norm. The specific women's dances I will discuss in later chapters are performed without an abaya or hijab and in female company. Despite the women's ability to be documented while performing these dances in an abaya, even this comes with complications. Despite being primarily, a symbol of religious adherence, the hijab and the abaya also pervade cultural practices and limit their recording, reflecting the complex interplay between religious obligations and cultural expression. This has implications for how women's cultural contributions are preserved and shown, highlighting the nuanced ways in which religious and cultural identities intersect.

Although hijab alone is not in itself the primary reason for the lack of documentation of this type of women's heritage, it is one part of a conservative social system that pushed women into a specific mould, protecting them from any behaviours deemed unethical by a conservative society, such as revealing their adornments and attire or uncovering their faces or parts of their bodies. Additionally, the dominance of men in Saudi society further underscores the prioritisation of men's heritage documentation over women's heritage. Men have long had more freedom and control over their representation, often overshadowing women's contributions and experiences. This gender imbalance in documentation perpetuates the marginalisation of women's cultural expressions, making it imperative to address and rectify these disparities to ensure a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of cultural heritage (Figure 6).

On the other hand, the hijab or abaya, as an element of this system, can also be considered a means of protecting material heritage by adhering to modest and conservative dress codes. As an outer layer, the articles act as a barrier protecting the traditional, ornate clothing and precious jewellery worn by women. This protection allows women to maintain their cultural heritage in a discreet and hidden manner, ensuring a type of privacy and agency they could not have otherwise (Khan, 2024).

Another factor that has reduced the visualisation of women and the documentation and growth of traditional Saudi women's dances is the Shwa movement, which played a critical impact in shaping the cultural and social landscape of Saudi Arabia, especially in the regulation of gender public expression. Emerging as a response to perceived deviations from Islamic principles, the movement enforced strict moral codes that significantly restricted women's visibility in media, education, and cultural activities (Kraidy, 2009). While framed as a return to religious authenticity, these restrictions disproportionately impacted women, limiting their participation in public life while allowing men's cultural traditions to persist.

A key example of this gendered cultural suppression is the stark contrast between the treatment of men's and women's traditional dances. Under Sahwa, men's performances, such as the Al-Ardha Performance, which was mentioned earlier, were upheld as symbols of national pride, and they were performed at official events and even

registered with UNESCO. In contrast, women's dances were rendered invisible, considered inappropriate for public display, and thus excluded from official documentation and preservation efforts. This reveals a double standard in cultural policy: while men's traditions were preserved as part of national identity, women's heritage was marginalised under the guise of religious and moral propriety.

Moreover, the enforced absence of women from media and public cultural spaces further compounded this marginalisation (Hafez, 2008). Schools were segregated, and women needed to wear an abaya and cover their faces, as shown in Figure 7. They were also banned from appearing on television, radio, and newspapers, reinforcing structural barriers that restricted the documentation and transmission of their cultural expressions. The result was not merely an oversight but an active erasure of women's intangible cultural heritage, a legacy that persists today despite the loosening of restrictions under Vision 2030.

Thus, the Sahwa movement's influence on women's cultural heritage extends beyond temporary restrictions; it has impacted how women's traditions are documented, recorded, valued, and preserved. The absence of women's dances from archives is not an accident—it is the product of a systematic privileging of male heritage under religious and political justifications. A critical reassessment of this history is essential to restoring balance and ensuring that women's contributions to Saudi cultural heritage receive the recognition and preservation they deserve.

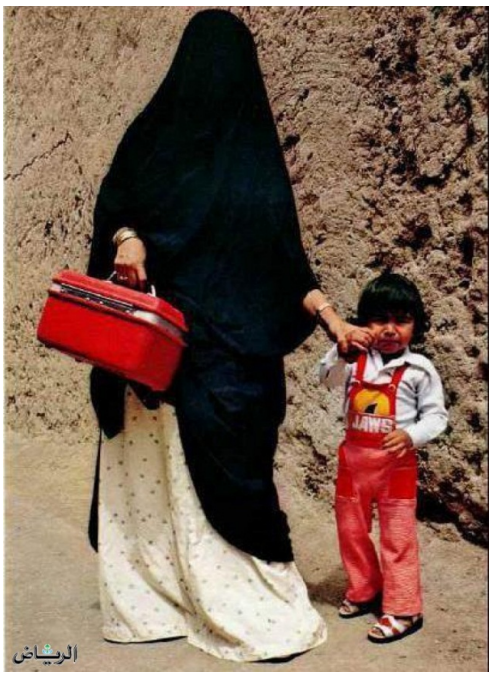

Figure 7: A Saudi woman in an abaya: raising the abaya to the middle of the body became common in the 70s as a form of protest, but would later return to full length with gloves (Al Riyadh newspaper, 2016)

Despite its early influence, the Sahwa movement ultimately declined, marking a significant shift in Saudi Arabia's political landscape. Its downfall coincided with the rise of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the implementation of his developmental agenda. As part of Vision 2030, the Saudi government established the Heritage Authority, which prioritises the preservation of intangible cultural heritage as a key sector in its broader cultural and heritage initiatives (Heritage Authority, 2023).

Nonetheless, the Sahwa movement served to entrench the strict gender segregation that remains a hallmark of Saudi society to this day. This has limited women's opportunities in many areas, including employment, politics, and social life. Arguably, the Sahwa movement's stringent gender norms and conservative shifts have had long-lasting impacts on the visibility and representation of Saudi women. As a result, women's visual representation in cultural heritage has been severely impacted, with their presence in historical records, archives, and cultural documentation being limited or non-existent.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the lack of documentation of women's dances in Saudi Arabia is influenced by a combination of religious, social, and political factors. The influence of Islamic ideology has contributed to the scarcity of visual records by prohibiting the photography of people. Despite normalising photography, visual representations of Saudi women remain limited in exhibitions and publications (Mirza, 2018). The dress code mandated by Sharia law, requiring women to wear the abaya and hijab, further impacts documentation by restricting visual representation and reducing women's visibility in cultural records. The Sahwa movement, or Islamic Awakening, reinforced strict gender segregation, limiting women's opportunities in various fields, including media, politics, and social life, thereby contributing to the underdocumentation of women's cultural heritage, including traditional dances.

Saudi Arabia’s cultural heritage preservation efforts under Vision 2030 have marked a significant shift in the national approach to safeguarding intangible heritage. However, the persistence of gender biases in the documentation of ICH continues to marginalise women’s cultural contributions, particularly in the performing arts. The influence of religious and social conservatism has historically limited women’s visibility, yet there is growing recognition of the need to rectify this imbalance.

Addressing these factors is crucial for the comprehensive documentation of women's intangible heritage, and this discussion sets the stage for further exploration of the historical documentation of women's dances in Saudi Arabia in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 3: Saudi Women's Traditional Dance

3.1 Introduction

Dance has traditionally served as a profound form of expression and ritual for various tribes and communities around the world, allowing individuals to convey emotions and articulate joy or sorrow through deliberate or spontaneous movements (Alshuqir, 2021). Additionally, traditional dances are often integral to various religious and sacred ceremonies. They are deeply rooted in cultural and ethnic identities, varying drastically in form and function from place to place. For example, Fodéba Keïta, a prominent figure in African arts and culture, described African dances as ritualistic and imbued with a magical nature; compared to European dance forms, African dance is not regarded as an art form separate from everyday life but rather as a learned cultural expression, similar to how one learns to speak (1959). Preserving and documenting indigenous dances is crucial for combating stereotypes, maintaining cultural identity, and fostering intercultural understanding in the face of globalisation (Izu & de Villiers, 2023).

Today, traditional dances are performed at public events and family occasions, helping to maintain national identity and passing down important cultural knowledge and traditions from generation to generation (Issari, 2011). For example, Smith (2018) found that practising traditional dance acts as a vehicle for identity construction and social engagement for Karen youth after their forced migration from Burma to urban areas in the US, helping them maintain ties to Karen culture and community in a foreign land" (Smith, 2018, pp. 1-3). Traditional dances are often accompanied by oral traditions, including songs and narratives. Still, the dances themselves can also serve as a form of communication by embodying cultural values and stories through physical movements, gestures, and expressions. Dance can also bring people of different backgrounds together, helping to overcome cultural barriers and facilitate knowledge and empathy between communities with movement and rhythm. Practising traditional

dances today is deeply intertwined with preserving intangible cultural heritage and is essential for safeguarding cultural traditions.

While dance has historically been a significant part of Islamic and Arab cultural heritage, restrictive norms and interpretations of Islamic teachings have limited women's participation in dance, particularly in Saudi Arabia. These restrictions, rooted in both religious interpretations and socio-political influences, not only marginalise women's cultural contributions but also perpetuate gender disparities in artistic expression. This chapter explores the historical and contemporary dimensions of dance in Islamic societies, highlighting how restrictive norms have shaped perceptions of dance and arguing for a more inclusive interpretation that recognises dance as an integral part of cultural heritage and communal identity.

However, within the contemporary context of Saudi Arabia, particularly in conservative communities, the practice of women's dance is challenged by a myriad of conditions shaped by religious, cultural, and social factors, often unknown to the Western world. Islamic principles and socio-political movements, such as the Sahwa, have influenced the practice and perception of dance in Saudi Arabia. This chapter will explore the historical trajectory of dance in the Arabian Peninsula, emphasising its cultural significance over time, particularly within Islamic culture. Dances will be analysed for their thematic content and relationship to their broader social environment, followed by a comprehensive description and cultural analysis of my two primary case studies—the Al-la'ib dance in the Al Bahah region and the Al Jahli dance in the Jizan region—based on my empirical observations and interviews with local and professional participants.

Methodologically, this chapter will analyse the approaches used in documenting traditional dances, including archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, and performance analysis. The importance of visual documentation and the role of pioneering artists, such as Safeya Binzagr, in preserving the cultural heritage of Saudi women's dances will also be addressed. Through these various lenses, the chapter offers a nuanced and contextualised understanding of the rich tapestry of Saudi Arabian women's dance traditions.

3.2 History of Dance in the Arabian Peninsula

Cultural dance is characterised as dancing that occurs within a specific community or group and serves various purposes tied to traditional customs, ceremonies, celebrations (such as those marking significant life events like births, deaths, initiations, or marriages), healing rituals, spiritual practices, cultural heritage preservation, or fostering social cohesion and belonging among individuals within the community (Jain & Brown, 2001, P.217). Dance reflects the history of human rituals and religion, and it is a fundamental aspect of human culture and tradition. Dance was initially associated with sacred rituals, often performed in temples as part of religious ceremonies, and only gradually evolved over thousands of years into a form of entertainment (Alharbi, 2020, P.281).

People have been dancing in Saudi Arabia for over five thousand years, as evidenced by drawings discovered within sacred spaces. In the pre-Islamic era, the Arabian Peninsula featured various dances, ranging from those performed as part of religious rituals during pagan pilgrimage seasons to celebratory dances for joyful occasions and other significant events. Festivities were held at the end of the pilgrimage season and organised by temple servants. Overseen by trained older women, young women called "khurba dancers" performed expressive dances symbolising the meeting of deities such as Tammuz, Asherah, Asaf, and Na'ilah in silence (Alharbi, 2020, p.281).

Archaeological findings in Saudi Arabia reveal rock art depicting animals and women dates back to the Neolithic period (approximately 10,000–6,000 years ago), with Madeha AL-Ajroush documenting women's representation in sites such as Jubbah[8] and Bi'r Hima (Al-Senan, 2016). These underexplored depictions may represent goddesses or women involved in battle or entertainment (Macdonald, 2016). Women's portrayal in Arabian rock art reflects their varied societal roles, from political figures such as the Queen of Sheba to symbols of modesty and poetic inspiration (Al-Ajroush, 2016), as

[8] Jubbah, a town situated 90 kilometres northwest of Ha'il, Saudi Arabia, boasts unique Rock Art inscriptions.

shown in Figure 8. Al-Senan (2016) suggests that such representations illustrate women's status and societal perceptions of them.

Figure 8: The Queen of Sheba (Al-Ajroush, 2016)

According to Khan (2013), the cultural heritage of Arab nomads, or Bedouins, has ancient origins with deep roots in their tribal system, which has transmitted necessary social and cultural customs since antiquity. Islam adopted pagan practices, and some Arab dances today retain elements reminiscent of tribal art from millennia ago. Notably, a carved panel discovered at Jubbah depicts masked figures engaged in group dancing, possibly representing mythological beings with human bodies and equine heads (Figure 9). This ancient artwork reveals intriguing parallels between the arrangement, postures, and movements depicted therein and the contemporary tradition of the Al Ardah dance practised by Saudi Arabian men. Notably, the scene portrays two distinct groups of individuals fully engaged in their respective dance forms. The first group's linear formation suggests a rhythmic performance characterised by discipline and celebration, which can also be found in the Al-la'ib dance practised by women in Al Bahah today, where women come together in a single line, moving in harmony with the rhythm of the music.

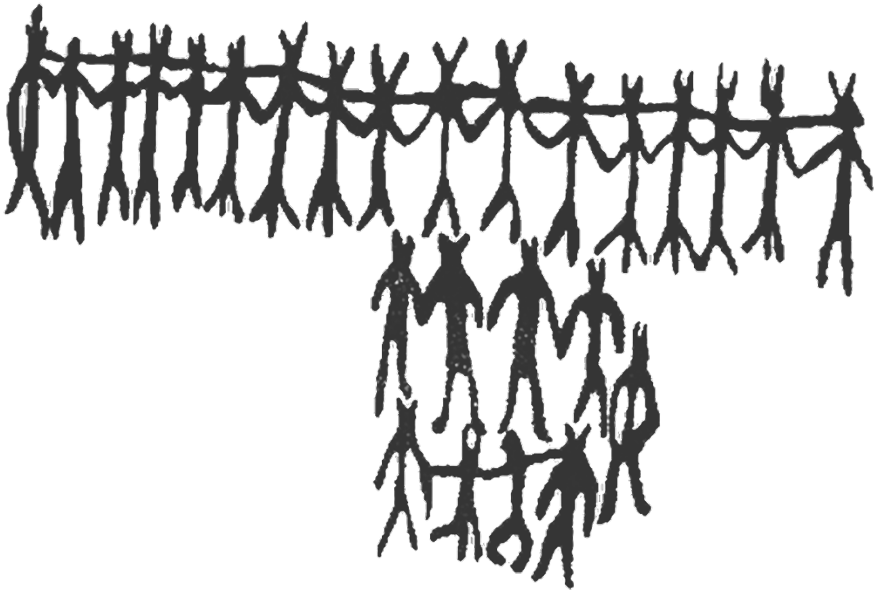

Figure 9 : Rock Art inscriptions in Jubbah (Khan, 2013)

In contrast, the second group in Figure 8 adopts a circular formation, evoking a sense of communal connectivity. This formation is also found in the women's dance tradition in Jizan known as *Al-saff* (الصف), such as line dance, where women gather in a single line and gracefully move in a circular motion. This cultural continuity underscores the enduring significance of communal dance forms, bridging the gap between ancient traditions and modern practices.

3.3 Historic Dance in Islam and the Region

Islam's arrival in Arab society brought extensive changes to Arab thought and culture, reforming social norms and political institutions. Islam was crucial in advancing Arabic as the Qur'anic language, fostering Arab intellectualism, and challenging conventional wisdom (Melhem, 2022). Dance holds a complex position within Islamic culture. Some forms of dance are embraced as expressions of cultural identity and religious practices, and others are questioned due to perceived tensions with Islamic morality.

Dance plays a significant role in Islamic mysticism to this day. Originating from the teachings of Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic, Sufi whirling is a form of moving meditation that the Mevlevi Order performs. This ritual, called "Sema,"

represents the movement of the planets and the ascent of the soul to union with God, demonstrating a close connection to the universe and religious harmony (Knysh, 2017, pp. 120-123). Sufi dancing is considered a spiritual practice that seeks to bring the dancer nearer to God and attain His satisfaction (Badridduja et al., 2022).

However, various schools of Islamic thought have sought to purify Islamic practices by removing elements such as Sufi rituals involving dance and music (Baer, 2004, P.436). Additionally, due to cultural restrictions in Islamic contexts, educational materials have been modified to reflect Islamic principles. For example, dance and other acts that are considered incompatible with Islamic culture have been avoided (Ghaemi & Oghabi, 2015). For example, Sufi practices have not become very popular in Saudi Arabia due to the widespread adherence to the Hanbali Sunni school of Islamic thought and the conservative Wahhabi religious movement that grew from it, which has limited the popularity and acceptance of Sufi practices, like Sufi dances, as these are often viewed as unorthodox (Kayaoğlu, 2015).

In contrast, in the rest of other regions, dance forms part of cultural heritage and identity, such example being the syncretic mixing of music, dance, and oral poetry among the Berbers, characteristic of a syncretic blend of "popular Islam" and old traditions and beliefs (Eger, 2020). The diverse views on dance within Islamic culture underscore the nuanced relationship between tradition, spirituality, and societal dynamics in shaping cultural expressions.

In historical Islamic societies, courtesans and enslaved women played significant roles in arts, entertainment, and politics. Courtesans, often skilled in poetry and music, were integral to social gatherings in elite circles, where they would entertain and dance to the melodic tunes and deeply emotional poetic lyrics of the muswashahat,[9] (الموشحات) (Schofield, 2012). The effectiveness of muswashahat dances depends on the group's synchronised performance rather than the actions of individual dancers. This synchronisation can involve collective movements or the seamless transition of

[9] The muwashshat is a poetic-musical form that originated in Al-Andalus in the ninth century. The muwashshat are written in classical Arabic, but they don't follow the rhythms of classical Arabic verse. They are arranged as modifications of a pre-set rhythmic melodic pattern rather than following a set order of accented and non-accented syllables.

movement between performers or from one performer to the rest of the group (Abdul-Ghaffar, 2018, P.165).

Lila Abu-Lughod, a leading scholar in anthropology and gender studies, studied the differences in description of performances by free women and slave women in early 20th-century literature, illuminating complex intersections of gender, class, power dynamics, and cultural norms (Abu-Lughod, 2002, P.786). For example, in some historical contexts, performances by free women were characterised by grace, elegance, and refined movements. On the other hand, performances by slave women were often viewed as more sensual or provocative, reflecting the power dynamics and societal hierarchies in which this occurred. Such historical findings reveal the significant impact of social hierarchies on artistic expression and who is allowed to do what (Najmabadi, 2005).

Despite the potentially hierarchical and non-consensual setting in which these dances occurred, courtesans dancing to *muwashahat* [10] reflected the developing beauty and splendour of Islamic culture (Chejne & Šaḥnah, 1974). Notably, it was typically enslaved women, rather than free women, were usually the ones allowed to dance in public or semi-public spaces, as dancing was considered inappropriate for free women in that era. This distinction reflects how class and gender shaped who could engage in the arts and entertainment. Early visual records of dance in the Islamic world can be seen in Arab and Persian miniature drawings, such as the lively scene depicted in Figure 10 and other art forms. One can speculate that the visual documentation of dance embodied and preserved in architecture, decorations, mosaics, and fabrics was not only informed by the dances it depicted but also informed the ongoing practice of those dances, just as I will argue that documentary film can do for traditional dance today, documentary film today can act as a modern extension of that cultural preservation.

[10] *Muwashahat* (sg. *muwashah*) emerged in medieval Muslim Spain as a poetic form characterized by its shifting rhythms and the blending of classical and colloquial Arabic. Unlike traditional Arabic poetry, it breaks away from the canonical 16 metres and double verse structures, allowing for greater formal flexibility (Schielke, 2019, pp.113)

Figure 10: Persian Minatare, Divan of Hafiz (1858)

3.4 Permissibility of Dance in Islam and Saudi Arabia

According to Musmon et al. (2008, p. 72), Islamic rules and values significantly impact dance, especially when it comes to the standards for modesty and gender segregation. Unlike in Western cultures, where dance is popular, Islam imposes restrictions on men and women dancing together, which results in distinct dances that are only done by one or the other gender. Furthermore, Islamic principles require women to always wear a head covering in order to protect their modesty, unless they are with their immediate relatives or in situations when unrelated men are not present.

The permissibility of dancing is among the matters discussed by jurists[11] because there is no clear law that outright forbids it.[12] Generally, dancing in private settings among

[11] In Saudi Arabia, jurists play an important role in interpreting and applying Islamic law, or Sharia. "Jurist" describes any scholar with advanced knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence, or fiqh (فقه), and issues, legal opinions, or fatwas on numerous topics, including religious, ethical, and legal matters. Hanbali jurisprudence is the school of thought most used in Saudi Arabia.

[12] Another contentious issue in Islam is the permissibility of music and singing, and their relationship to dance. While the Qur'an does not explicitly mention music, interpretations vary among scholars regarding its permissibility, with some seeing certain verses as prohibiting idle talk, which may include music (Gamzatov & Sirazhudinova, 2023). Reports contained in the Hadith literature offer conflicting views on

women or with male mahram is considered permissible, provided it avoids sensuality and adheres to Islamic behavioural principles. Accordingly, jurists have issued various rulings and judgments on the matter. For example, the ruling on women dancing among themselves at wedding parties, according to the Saudi Mufti Ibn Baz (Ibn Baz, nd), "There is no harm in women dancing among themselves, especially when there are no men present. Dancing is permissible, and there is no objection to it. Similarly, songs that praise the bride, groom, or their families are acceptable as long as they do not contain vulgarity, promote indecency, or encourage inappropriate behaviour. All these are considered permissible."

In spite of this, it is not widely acceptable for women to dance in public or mixed-gender settings in Saudi Arabia, as it is viewed as violating the conservative Islamic norms and values that prioritise modesty and caution against situations that could lead to impropriety or temptation (Ahmed, 2010; Musmon et al., 2008). Furthermore, Alshyqair (2021) asserts that women's dance tends to be connected to play and entertainment, which is considered frivolous and inappropriate for public display. As a result, it may cause harassment, unfavourable social reactions, or even legal issues. Although dance is not explicitly prohibited so long as modest clothing is worn, in practice, women can rarely be observed dancing in public in Saudi Arabia. The Sahwa movement additionally contributed to a shift in attitudes around public performances, particularly those involving mixed-gender participation. Therefore, certain forms of dance that were once widely practised in public faced more significant restrictions or even outright prohibition. Although this movement and ideology lost significant ground over the tenure of Prime Minister Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s Vision 2030, its ideology continues to haunt Saudi society and persists in more conservative communities .

The Prophet Muhammad's stance on music and musical instruments, with some condemning them while others suggesting that he permitted certain forms of vocal music and singing (Brown, 2009). Some Islamic schools of thought adhere strictly to prohibitions on music and singing, while others are more lenient, permitting vocal music and singing under specific conditions such as avoiding immoral lyrics and excessive entertainment, as well as maintaining gender segregation (Nasr, 1997).

The prominence of traditional men's dances at the Al Janadriyah Festival in Saudi Arabia, juxtaposed with the marginalisation of women's dances, reflects broader societal norms and gender dynamics. This observation aligns with the findings by Alshammari et al. (2019), who noted that cultural events in Saudi Arabia often exhibit gender-specific participation, mirroring societal expectations and traditional roles. Their study on festival attendance motivations revealed that while both men and women are eager to engage in cultural festivities, the nature and extent of their participation are influenced by prevailing gender norms.

Additionally, Wadiah Boker (2019) highlighted that the Janadriyah Festival serves as a significant platform for preserving folklore and reinforcing national identity. However, the representation within the festival tends to emphasise traditional male-dominated performances, which may inadvertently sideline women's contributions to cultural heritage. These insights suggest that the festival's programming reflects and reinforces existing societal structures, where men's cultural expressions are more prominently showcased, while women's artistic contributions receive less visibility. These dynamic underscores the complex interplay between cultural preservation efforts and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles within Saudi society.

This restrictive stance on dance within many Islamic contexts, including Saudi Arabia, underscores a broader issue of gender inequality and the policing of women's bodies. The notion that women must cover themselves and avoid public dancing to prevent impropriety is rooted in patriarchal norms rather than a nuanced understanding of Islamic ethics. It reduces women's autonomy and diminishes their role in cultural practices despite historical evidence that women have long been active participants in dance and other forms of artistic expression.

Challenging restrictive norms surrounding dance in Islamic contexts is essential. Embracing a more inclusive interpretation of Islamic teachings that recognises dance's cultural significance can foster a richer, more dynamic cultural landscape. Dance should be viewed not as a threat to modesty but as a vital component of cultural heritage and communal identity. This approach will not only preserve traditional practices but also promote gender equality and artistic innovation.

3.5 Arabic Terminology for Dance

The distinctions in the interpretation and practice of dance between men and women in Saudi Arabia, as discussed and explored by Alshyqair (2021), highlight the cultural and linguistic complexities surrounding the concept of dance. While the English term "dance" is most commonly translated into Arabic as *raqṣ* (رَقَصَ), the word *raqṣ* is generally associated with leisure or celebratory movement, often involving hip swaying to music and is primarily linked to women's dance forms. In contrast, men's dance is more commonly referred to as Al-la'ib (اللعب), meaning "play," and typically incorporates movements with swords, daggers, or sticks, reflecting historical connections to battle and martial display. The usage of Al-la'ib[13] to describe mainly men's dance aligns with cultural perceptions, as dance raqṣ (رَقَصَ) is traditionally viewed as a practice more associated with women, as noted by the renowned Saudi Islamic scholar Ibn Uthaymeen (as cited in Alshyqair, 2021). The term "play" in Arabic has various definitions, including futile work, mockery, or activities devoid of seriousness, but it also signifies enjoyment and intellectual growth, particularly in children (Alshyqair, 2021).

Thus, male dance is simultaneously associated with the physical authority and strength of a warrior and the innocence, harmlessness, and curiosity of a child. Men's dance is not dance at all, so to speak, whereas women's dance is weighted with the whole meaning of dance and the possibility for seduction and transgression it implies within a conservative Islamic context. Thus, *raqs* gain a derogatory connotation within the Saudi context, underscoring societal attitudes towards sexuality and propriety, offering insights into the dichotomous perceptions of male and female dance performances and the disparity of visibility and documentation (Najmabadi, 2005). This discourse prompts further scholarly exploration of the intricate dynamics of cultural heritage, gender relations, and linguistic symbolism in Middle Eastern dance traditions.

[13] Although some forms of women's dance is also referred to as Al-la'ib in Saudi Arabia, including the dance that will be discussed in the Al Bahah region later in this chapter.

3.6 Visual Documentation of Saudi Women's Dances in Painting

The visual documentation of Saudi women's dances, initiated by pioneering artist Safeya Binzagr in the early 1960s, played a pivotal role in transforming cultural perspectives in Saudi Arabia, particularly in Jeddah. Born in 1940 in Jeddah, Makkah Province, Binzagr's education included private art instruction in Egypt and a degree from London's St. Martin's School of Art in 1965. According to Farouk Yusuf (2024), "The emergence of Binzagr in the late 1960s brought about a significant revolution in prevailing cultural concepts. The artist broke through two barriers that were unimaginable to overcome at that time—the barrier of the strict religious stance on painting, especially when it was figurative, and the barrier of the cultural and social attitude towards women." This breakthrough not only redefined artistic expression in Saudi Arabia but also challenged and reshaped societal norms and perceptions regarding gender roles and artistic freedom.

Binzagr created numerous paintings of Saudi women in various artistic styles. Her work is significant not only for preserving heritage but also for studying the cultural evolution in the region. In her 2014 PhD thesis, "Image Industry: Image of the Woman in the Works and Biography of the Artist Safeya Binzagr from 1968 to 2000," Eiman Elgibreen examines Binzagr's work in the context of various political and social reforms that influenced society's perceptions of art, leading to a cultural reevaluation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This shift contributed to tensions between cultural and intellectual activities and social and religious norms, affecting not only Safeya's work but also the visibility and mobility of cultural and social events.

Figures 11 and 12 show how gender segregation affects women's dances at social events such as weddings. Figure 10 shows "*The Bedouin Dance",* where only women dance, and no men appear. Most women in the paintings cover half of their faces and only show their eyes.

Figure 11 Bedouin Dance, oil on canvas, 100 × 140 cm (Binzagr, 1986)

"The Ankle Bracelet" (Figure 12) depicts women playing music on drums facing different directions, functioning as a band, and dancers shown in various poses. Islamic texts provide insight into the significance of the ankle bracelet in the bride's procession and Binzagr's painting. The bracelet symbolises the bride's hidden charm, which she was expected to keep concealed in the presence of foreign men. A Qur'anic verse advises women not to reveal their hidden adornments, which early Islamic scholars agreed referred to ankle bracelets: 'And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment.' Thus, Binzagr captures the moment a young male relative fastens the bride's final adornment, signalling her readiness to meet her future husband. The female-dominated space, the male figure's position at the bride's feet, the empty foreground, and the number of standing figures present highlight his vulnerability and diminished significance. Elgibreen (2014) states that if these were real women, this scene would have been considered scandalous as it transgressed the cultural norms.

Figure 12: The ankle bracelet, oil on canvas,100 × 140 cm (Binzagr, 1972,75)

Ahmad Abdullah Al-Mughlooth, another notable Saudi visual artist and caricaturist, was born in Al-Mubarraz in Al-Ahsa, Eastern Province, in 1950. He is considered one of the pioneers of the artistic movement in Al-Ahsa, captivating both intellectuals and cultural heritage enthusiasts with his works that embody the spirit and identity of the locale, reflecting its popular and traditional themes. Al-Mughlooth has held numerous exhibitions in Saudi Arabia and internationally, including at the first Janadriyah Festival in 1985 (Salamah, 2024).

One of his notable works, *the Henna Night* (Figure 13), captures Saudi Arabia's tradition of celebrating the night of henna. In this vibrant scene, the bride's female family gathers with other women and girls to honour their daughter. The painting's rich colour palette showcases the patterned clothes, the bride's head jewellery, and the distinctively coloured carpet. Although the women depicted are not dancing, the viewer can easily imagine them breaking into dance to the rhythm of ululations, songs, and the beating of tambourines (duff) shown in the painting. Al-Mughlooth choice to publicly depict the intimate and private female celebration and the attendees uncovered hair transgresses the expectation within Saudi society of the gendered segregation that the painting itself depicts by foregrounding the Saudi female experience that is usually hidden from view.

Figure 13: Henna Night, rituals of the pre-wedding night in Eastern province (Al-Mughlooth, C. 1990)

During the 20th century, there was limited representation of Saudi women's dance in visual art due to restrictions and censorship. Artists who ventured to depict such themes exhibited considerable courage in an environment where expression was heavily monitored. Chapter 4 will go on to investigate the portrayal of Saudi women's dance in cinema and media.

3.7 Types of Women's Dance in Saudi Arabia

Dance, as a form of artistic expression, is linked to the prosperity and health of societies, social and cultural development, and national pride and identity. However, scholars like Sheppard and Broughton (2020) note that dance can also thrive in unstable environments, serving as a powerful form of resistance. Within their studies of the use of music and dance in promoting well-being, they pinpoint the ways dance has been strategically used in social movements, for example, in civil rights marches, anti-war protests, and gender equality campaigns. Traditional dances like the juba and the ring shout, for example, were repurposed by enslaved individuals in the Americas as acts of resistance, through which they reasserted their humanity and agency within the dehumanising context of slavery. The complexity and ambiguity inherent in the meaning of dance highlight its ability to reflect a wide range of perspectives and

experiences within a society. While some participants use dance as a means to remember and preserve cultural traditions, dance scholar Ursula Vaughan (2020) is concerned with its potential as a powerful means of social justice, capable of challenging societal norms and advocating for change. Vaughan's work explores how dance can function as both cultural expression and activist force, giving voice to marginalised voices to be heard. This duality underscores dance's dynamic role as both a form of heritage preserver and a vehicle for resistance. In my project, I observed how women skilfully employed poetry and dance as subtle forms of protest, using these artistic expressions to voice their demands for human rights within a context where their public presence was significantly restricted.

The cultural landscape of the Arabian Peninsula (specifically the Gulf Countries[14]) includes various forms of artistic expression, including poetry and music, which often intertwine to create songs. However, societal norms historically restricted local Arab women from participating in public artistic performances, necessitating the involvement of other female performers. This role was often filled by black "slaves," known as *Taghāghāt* (طقّاقات), as they were known in the Najd region and across the Arabian Gulf during the 1950s (Doubleday, 1999), or *thabalāt* (طبالات), meaning "female drummers," played a central role in women's musical performances in the south and west of the Arabian Peninsula, who were described among local society as slaves (Alwasil, 2014, P. 45). According to Alsheridah (2019, P.66), in Kuwait, the Taghaghat dance troupe gained prominence, initially comprising performers of African descent. Renowned for their professional performances at weddings and ceremonies, they seamlessly integrated into the context of Kuwaiti customs. Over time, the composition of the Taghaghat troupe evolved, with more Kuwaiti women joining, reflecting shifting societal attitudes.

The origin of these bands in Bahrain and Kuwait can be traced back to the late 17th century, as Arab tribes migrated from central Najd to the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, as suggested by ancient records (Khalifa, 2019). They were established by the followers of the sheikhs of those Arab tribes and their practices were passed down through the generations. Most of these followers were of African slave origin at that

[14] The Gulf Countries, also known as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These countries are located in the Arabian Peninsula and along the Persian Gulf.

time and were used to fulfil the function of celebrating the marriages of their masters' sons and daughters. As these bands evolved in coastal society, they made the transition from elite households to neighbourhood gatherings, gradually becoming popular in and embraced by society. They became essential for social celebrations, reflecting a shift towards a more communal lifestyle.

In her publication *Middle Eastern Dance* (2nd ed.), AlZayer (2010, p. 61) describes an elegant and graceful women's dance that is frequently performed at joyful occasions such as weddings and social gatherings. This dance is known by various names across the Gulf region: *samra* (سمر) or *samri* (سمري) in Kuwait, *raqs nasha'at* (رقص النشأة) in the United Arab Emirates, and more generally, particularly outside the region, as *Khaliji* dance, *Saudi dance*, or *raqs na'shaar* (رقص الشعر), which translates as "the dance of the hair."

Urkevich (2015, P.39) further explores the cultural symbolism associated with this dance form, particularly emphasising the significance of the dancer's long, lustrous hair. Within traditional communities, hair is revered as a symbol of vitality, fertility, and feminine beauty. The practice of whipping the hair during the dance, known as *laf-ha, اللفح* serves as a captivating visual spectacle, accentuating the dancer's skill and grace. In certain Bedouin communities, such as the Shammar tribe, dancers employ specific techniques, such as simultaneously throwing back all their hair, adding layers of cultural nuance to these striking performances.

As addressed before, women who dance may be subject to moral judgments and societal scrutiny. In response to these challenges, Bahraini performer Sharifa Al-Zayani released her booklet *Gulf Women's Dance(* 2023), challenging the stigma associated with female dancing. She presents herself as a certified and trained Gulf female dance instructor, dedicating her book to women of all ages who pursue expression through dance, promoting joy, happiness, and the cultural significance of dance as a form of self-expression. While it offers valuable visual documentation of dance moves, the textual content is brief and lacks depth, focusing mainly on descriptions of dances, rhythms, instruments, attire, and performance details. Despite its limitations as a scholarly document, the booklet serves as a practical guide for learning dance performance and

plays a vital role in preserving Gulf cultural heritage amidst the challenges of globalisation (Moatouq, 2023).

A small number of academic scholars, such as Lisa Urkevich (2015), have written about women's dance in the Gulf region; she is a distinguished specialist renowned for her expertise in the heritage and music of the Arabian Peninsula. With nearly three decades of residence and fieldwork in the region, she has made significant contributions to the understanding, preservation, and promotion of the cultural traditions of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and other Gulf States. Table 1 includes additional Saudi dances that were not featured in her book but have been identified through my own research.

Table 1: Types of Saudi women's Dances

Province	Women's dances
Mekkah Region	*Al-Majass* (المجس), *Al-Khobayti* (الخبيتي), *Al-Hayawmat* (الحيومات), *Al-Dag (الدق), Al-Mal'aba or Al-Inshad* (*الملعبة* أو الإنشاد), *Al-Majrūr* (المجرور) *and Al-Mahshush* (المهشوش).
Najd, Riyadh Region	*Al-Badāwī* (البداوي), *Al-Samrī* (السامري), *Al-Lafḥ* (اللفح), *Al-Naqāzī* (النقازي), and *Al-Jalwah* (الجلوة).
Eastern Region	*Al-Khamārī* (الخماري), *Daq al-Ḥab* (دق الحب), *Al-Majlisi* (المجيلسي) and *Al-La'būnī* (اللباني).
Asir Region	*Al-Khaṭwah* (الخطوة), *Al-Zaḥfah* (الزحفة), *Al-Zeer* (الزير) *Al-daryah* (الدرية) *and Al-Qazū'ī* or *Al-Jazū'ī* (القزوعي أو الجزوعي).
Jizan Region	*Al-Jahlī* (الجحلي), *Al-Ṭabā'a* (الطبعة), *Al-Khamrā* (الخمرة), *Al-Mughannī* (المغني), *Al-Ṣaff* (الصفّ)or *Al-*Ḥaml (الحمل), *Al-Sayf* (السيف), *Al-Tanshīr* or *Al-Nashīr* (التنشير أو النشير), *Al-Zaḥf* (الزحف), *Al-Takhyīla* (التخييلة), *Al-Mu'ashshī* (المعشي), *Al-Rabsh* (الربش), and *Al-Rajḥa* (الرجحة).

Medina Region	*Al-Zār* (الزار), *Al-Yanbuʿī* (الينبعاوي), *Al-Rajīʿī* (الرجيعي), *Al-Khobayṭī* (الخبيتي), *Al-Nuzūk* (النزوك), and *Al-Jinniyah* (الجنية).
Al-Qassim Region	*Al-Samrī* (السامري), *Al-Baddāwī* (البدّاوي), and *Al-Ḥanad* (الحند).
Tabuk Region	*Al-Rifāʿīḥī* (الرفيحي), *Al-Taḥiyyah* (التحية), *Al-Hashi* (الحاشي) and *Al-Daḥḥah* (الدّحة).
Ha'il Region	*Al-Samrī* (السامري) and *Samrī Ḥujaynī* (سامري هجيني).
Najran Region	*l-Saʿb* (السعب), *Ṣaff al-Badū* (صف البدو), and *Al-Laʿib* (اللعب).
Al-Jawf Region	*Al-Rifāʿīḥī* (الرفيحي), *Al-Hashi* (الحاشي) and *Al-Daḥḥah* (الدّحة).
Al Bahah Region	*Al-Laʿib* (اللعب), *Al-Mashḥabānī* (المسحباني), and *Al-Ṭarq Al-Jabalī* (الطرق الجبلي).
Northern Border Region	*Al-Rifāʿīḥī* (الرفيحي), *Al-Samrī* (السامري), and *Al-Daḥḥah* (الدّحة)

Some of these dance forms in Saudi Arabia may manifest similarities because of factors such as historical connections, related cultural practices, and geographic closeness, especially to other Arabian Gulf countries. However, each dance has its distinct style, motions, and cultural significance, adding to the rich tapestry of Saudi Arabian dance traditions. Ahmed (2009) stated that dancing in the Eastern Province, Al-Ahsa, the Central region, and even in the northern regions possesses a shared character, while the southern and western regions have their own unique rhythms and exhibit fast movements.

One of the renowned dances among women is the *Al-Khaṭwah* (الخطوة) dance, originating from the southern region of Asir in Saudi Arabia and more recently spreading to other areas within the kingdom. Al-Khaṭwah dance was first practised by the tribes of Asir in the 13th century CE. Its name, ″Khaṭwah,″ translates to "step of the foot on the ground" in English, symbolising the rhythmic movement of stepping

forward with the left foot and then returning it to its initial position. This dance is closely associated with the musical traditions of the Asir, Tihama, and As-Sarat tribes, as well as some Shahran and Qahtan tribes. It is commonly performed during various happy occasions and national celebrations (Ba Ghaffar, 2013).

Amal Al-Hussein (2019) mentions that many women's traditional styles of performance are absent and do not find themselves welcome at important heritage forums such as the Al-Janadriyah festival, where many dances such as *Al-Dahhah* (الدحة) could have been presented (Sabq, 2019). *Al-Dahhah* is no longer practised as it was for hundreds of years. The involvement of what is known as *Al-Hashi* (الحاشي) (a young camel) in *Al-Dahhah* is an essential part of the dance, and it cannot be complete without it. Historically, the Arabs used to express their victory over their enemies by slaughtering a young camel. The men would gather around the *Hashi*[15] about to be slaughtered and would start making sounds like wild beasts to frighten it. Then, one of them would step forward, taking his cue from the exhaustion of the Hashi, and kill it with a sword. Women have taken on the role of the Hashi in this dance style to prove their strength, resilience, and defiance of danger. They are often women with strong personalities and leadership roles among the Arabs. They are called the Hashi of Al-Dhaha, and they may injure or even kill anyone who tries to challenge them, such as knights who try to escape this fate with their exceptional skills (Sabaq cited Al Hussain, 2019). The duel often ends with the woman's superiority. This indicates the strength and resilience of the Hashi woman (Al-Anazi, 2007).

The *Shabak dance* (رقصة الشبك) in Al Bahah is also no longer practised because of changes in societal norms; this used to be performed and attended by men and women together, but it came to a halt due to the spread of the culture of gender segregation after the Sahwa movement in 1979 (Alghamdi, 2019).

Another kind of dance is *Zar* (الزار) which spread in the western side of Saudi Arabia. It is a complex healing ritual practised in societies around the Red Sea and the Arabian

[15] الحاشي Hashi is The woman or girl who enters the *mal'abah*—the area in front of or between the two rows of performers of the **dahiya dance** in Saudi, Jordan and Palestine—does so without anyone recognizing her. She carries a stick, and in the past, she used to hold a sword in her hand. Traditionally, girls from the tribe would participate alongside the men, as there were no outsiders present, and their participation was limited to performing the **hashi dance**.

Gulf, with historical and cultural significance in the Gulf area and origins likely in Egypt (El Hadidi, 2016).

Dance serves multifaceted purposes within parts of Saudi Arabian society. In the case of the *badda ̄wi* (البداوي) dance within Bedouin communities, Urkevich (2015) highlights its crucial role in facilitating matchmaking, as elders closely observe such dances to assess young women as potential matches for their male family members. The dance intricately incorporates hand movements that convey significant messages. For example, a forward wave signals readiness and the desire to enter into marriage, whereas a backward wave signifies existing marital status or disinterest in pursuing a partner. Symbolic gestures, such as tracing a figure-eight pattern over the head, communicate a welcoming greeting to the audience.

Although many of the dances covered in this section are no longer practised to the same extent or are not practised at all, women and women's ensembles of the Gulf and Saudi Arabia still sing among themselves and with their families to celebrate rites of passage much as they have for centuries, often playing for traditional women's parties, such as the wedding celebrations. Headed by *a mutriba* (مطربة), a lead singer/instrumentalist who is often an oud player, these groups perform both traditional women's songs and the latest popular music hits. In Saudi Arabia, these ensembles are made up of female musicians only, while in neighbouring Gulf countries, many ensembles are mixed (AlZayer, 2010). Dance in Saudi Arabia underwent development and partial homogenisation, largely influenced by the dances shown by the artist Etab in the 1960s. This influence led to a convergence of styles across different regions, particularly evident in women's dances at weddings, which became similar to the Gulf dance prevalent throughout the Arabian Gulf, which in some parts could be called *Shakshakh dance* (شكشكة). This dance typically involves lines of women standing closely together, executing deliberate, shuffling movements while swaying their hair in rhythm. Emphasising upper body movements, the hips usually remain stationary. Despite this, regional dances maintain their distinctiveness and are practised according to each region or tribe. Two of these dances and the regionally distinctive traditions that surround them will be discussed later in the chapter.

3.8 Dance Insights: The Use of Semi-Structured Interviews

The next section will address the two main case studies of this research: the Al-la'ib dance from Al Bahah and the Al Jahli dance from Jizan. The main research methodology used to gain insights into these dances was the conduction of semi-structured interviews with local and professional subjects. Semi-structured interviews are a valuable tool for gathering primary information about traditional dances that rely on oral traditions and direct transmission from generation to generation, especially when there is a lack of existing literature or public performances. Following the approach outlined by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the interviews were conducted with a predetermined set of topics and themes after gaining full ethical approval from Lancaster University Faculty FASS and LUMS Research Ethics Committee, providing a flexible framework that allowed for adaptation based on the direction and depth of the conversations. As explained by Noor (2008, P.1604), "The choice of semi-structured interviews offers sufficient flexibility to approach different respondents differently while still covering the same areas of data collection." The objective of these interviews was to elicit rich descriptions of the participants' beliefs and experiences related to the dances being researched. By encouraging follow-up queries, clarifications, and the exploration of personal experiences, a deeper and more nuanced knowledge of these dances was facilitated.

As someone who grew up in the culture and region, I possess first-hand knowledge and understanding of the subject matter, particularly through the influence of my grandmothers. Their performances were a vivid part of my childhood memories, etching a deep connection in me. This personal connection serves as a foundation for my research, aligning with the principles of autoethnography, which involves the researcher's immersion in their own cultural experience. To reinforce and validate my own perspectives, the use of interviews not only provides supporting evidence but also allows me to incorporate multiple voices and viewpoints into my work. Furthermore, involving members of the community or practitioners in the research process fostered trust and collaboration. I believe this pluralistic approach adds depth and richness to the research and the documentary film. It acknowledges that my perspective is subjective and not the definitive or sole way of preserving the cultural heritage of Saudi women's dance.

3.8.1 Reflexivity

As a researcher from Al Bahah City, my background and personal experiences inevitably shaped my approach to studying traditional Saudi women's dances in Jizan and Al Bahah. While my familiarity with the local culture, language, and social norms provided me with unique insights, it also posed the risk of introducing biases. To address this, I took several steps to ensure my research remained balanced and credible. One effective strategy I used was seeking regular feedback from colleagues and advisors who are not from the same cultural background. Their external viewpoints were invaluable in identifying biases I might have missed and ensuring a more balanced interpretation of the data. Additionally, I engaged in peer debriefing sessions where I discussed my findings and interpretations with peers to get diverse perspectives and insights.

To further enhance the accuracy of the research, I made sure the participants' voices were prominently featured through direct quotes (some of which will appear in the following section), and I validated my findings with them. This approach ensured that their perspectives were accurately represented. Moreover, I conducted member checks by sharing preliminary results with participants and asking for their feedback to confirm the accuracy of my interpretations. I also triangulated the interviews I conducted by incorporating video analysis, filmmaking, and archival research into my methodological approach, which will be discussed further in the coming chapters.

Throughout the research process, I remained open-minded and adaptable, allowing the data to guide my conclusions rather than my preconceptions. By employing these strategies, I aimed to mitigate my biases and provide a more nuanced and credible study of Saudi women's intangible cultural heritage in the form of dance.

3.8.2 Detailed Interview Guide

The sampling approach adopted in this study prioritises credibility over representativeness. Doing so in a sampling approach means that the researcher aims to

gather highly reliable, in-depth data from a specific source or context, even if it does not necessarily reflect the broader population (Patton, 2002, p. 244).

The research sample criteria encompassed interviews with local and expert participants from various professional backgrounds related to the research subject, such as cultural heritage, Saudi history, female dance bands, and poetry recitals. All participants were adult women, capable of providing their own opinions and consenting to participate in the research. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a participant information sheet (PIS) to obtain their consent. Local participants offer an insider's view grounded in lived experiences, enabling me to understand the intricate nuances and cultural, historical, and social context of the heritage. Their input ensures cultural sensitivity and reduces the risk of misinterpretation. Experts bring specialised knowledge, theoretical frameworks, and a comparative approach, complementing the insights provided by locals. The presence of both groups enhances the credibility of the research through validation and verification. A total of fourteen participants were included in the study, with two categories from each region: the fields of cultural heritage and history experts and local participants (including residents of the regions and individuals with an interest in cultural heritage).

Originally, I intended to have twenty participants, but due to unforeseen circumstances, six individuals were unable to participate. The number of participants from each region is summarised in Table 2:

Table 2: Representation of the number of participants.

City	Al Bahah	Jizan
Number of expert participants	3	4
Number of local participants	5	2

The recruitment process involved reaching out to appropriate heritage institutions in Saudi Arabia to announce the research and extend invitations to interested participants. These institutions included the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (in Al Bahah and Jizan regions), the Intangible Heritage

Association, the Al-Atawelah Women's Festival Committee, and Jizan Heritage. An application form containing relevant information about the study, participant requirements, and data collection methods was submitted to these institutions for approval. Once these were approved, an email confirmation was received.

Subsequently, I contacted the potential participants via email to seek their consent and determine their availability. I emphasised that participation in the study was voluntary and that their identities would remain anonymous. Participants were free to choose whether or not to participate, and they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences. The participant information sheet (PIS) and consent form were then sent to those who expressed interest (see appendix).

The fieldwork of semi-structured interviews was conducted entirely online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, there was no physical contact between the researcher and the participants. The logistics of the interviews involved utilising online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and FaceTime to accommodate the availability and convenience of the participants. The interview duration ranged from approximately seven minutes to forty-five minutes. Prior permission was obtained from the participants to audio-record the interviews exclusively for the research project. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were kept anonymous throughout the study.

To facilitate effective communication and better concentrate on the participants' responses, the interviews were conducted in Arabic, their native language. Conducting the interviews in Arabic allowed for a clearer understanding and the ability to seek clarification and delve deeper into their answers. This approach eliminated the need for note-taking during the interviews. Subsequently, a professional translator and transcriber were employed to convert the Arabic conversations into English, ensuring accurate representation and analysis of the interview data.

3.8.3 Interview Questions and Ethical Considerations

As a researcher conducting semi-structured interviews with an ethnographic approach to studying cultural heritage dance, I have taken into consideration the holistic nature of dance as living heritage. The inspiration behind the questions stems from a personal

desire to uncover the stories behind the dances. Growing up away from my original hometown, I experienced a lack of familiarity with the local language and dialect. Consequently, I lacked an understanding of the names and explanations associated with the dances and the items used or performances within them. Utilising "WH" questions (who, what, when, where, why, and how), I aimed to gather comprehensive knowledge about the performers' techniques, historical and cultural contexts, and motivations behind the dances. (See the appendix with the detailed interview guide.)

Throughout the process of formulating interview questions, ethical considerations were taken into account. In addition to obtaining informed consent from participants and prioritising their privacy and confidentiality, I was aware of the power dynamics and strived to create a comfortable and respectful environment to encourage participants to express themselves freely. Incorporating research ethics training into my first-year training plan allowed me to identify potential ethical considerations that could impact the participants I intended to recruit for the study (see Appendix A).

3.8.4 Data Utilisation

Although I primarily used direct quotes from these interviews without thematic analysis, the rich data gathered provided valuable contextual background for my film project. The interviews illuminated various aspects of the dances that I might not have fully appreciated otherwise. This first-hand information was instrumental in accurately portraying the dances' cultural significance and ensuring that my documentation was both authentic and respectful. While the semi-structured interviews yielded significant insights, the lack of thematic analysis meant that some potential connections and deeper themes may not have been fully explored. My primary aim was to use the interviews as contextual background for my film project. The immediate goal was to accurately and authentically portray the dances, not necessarily to engage in in-depth qualitative research. Thematic analysis is time-intensive, requiring careful coding, categorisation, and interpretation. Given the demands of film production—such as scripting, directing, and editing—there was not have been sufficient time to undertake a thorough thematic analysis. Also, interviews were designed to elicit descriptive and factual information (e.g., descriptions of dance movements, cultural significance, or historical context); such data might be more effectively used as direct quotes or detailed narratives.

3.9 Al-la’ib Dance of Al Bahah

Al-la’ib dance has been performed in Al Bahah for more than a hundred years. Al-la’ib is often performed within the context of wedding celebrations[16], which typically begin with a henna[17] night where the bride undergoes her preparations. The official wedding day follows, where the groom's family is welcomed by the bride's family. Finally, there is a third day of festivities at the groom's home after the consummation of the marriage. During the wedding celebrations, there is a strong emphasis on greeting guests, referred to as *tarhibat al-dayf* (ترحيبات الضيف) . This includes a great deal of music and dance. On the henna night, the bride's female family sings a special welcome song to the visiting groom, during which Al-la’ib is performed. In the welcoming song, a soloist sings one line, and then the other family members repeat after her while the light duff frame drums join in accompaniment, and women clap along to the refrain. The dance is accompanied by high-pitched sounds of ululation and encouragement.

On the wedding day, there is a grand procession *Zaffah* (الزفة) after the Asr prayer (between 4 and 6 pm), with singing and ululation, as friends and family accompany the bride (historically on camelback) from her family house to the groom's house. Upon arrival, the men and women move to their segregated areas to continue with the festivities. The men often celebrate in the village square or another large outdoor area while the bride, followed by her close female family members, enters the home (nowadays this role is usually played by a banquet hall) in a continuation of the outdoor zaffah procession to the sound of women's la'ib music. As one local interviewee described the entrance:

> “The bridegroom’s mother or his family as a whole start preparing for Al-la’ib before the bride’s family arrives. So, a group of women from

[16] Al-la’ib can also be performed at engagements, the Islamic holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, and national celebrations, such as Saudi National Day and Founding Day.

[17] The henna night ceremony, a pre-wedding celebration, involves the application of henna paste to the bride's hands and feet, symbolising beauty and good luck (Ahmed, 2019). This event provides an opportunity for the bride and groom to connect with family and friends, enjoy music, dancing, and food, and prepare for marriage (Jones et al., 2018). While common in Muslim cultures, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, the ceremony's specifics vary due to regional, cultural, religious, and social differences. The rituals and practices differ across regions, countries, and even local communities, influenced by historical, cultural, religious, and social contexts (Smith, 2020).

> the groom's family stand in a row, which we call the (Alaggaya اللقاية), the welcomers, the welcomers of the bride because they are the first ones to welcome the bride and her family on their arrival. So performing 'Al-la'ib' is a way to say welcome. So, women in the groom's house stand in the form of a row as I said before, so those who are good at tambourine play the tambourine, and others who are there applaud based on the tune played with the tambourine or bring their hands together palm to palm and perform 'Al-la'ib'. 'Al-la'ib' is performed through a movement that must be harmonic with the tune of the tambourine, and the body movement should be consistent with the tambourine.
>
> For the preparations of the bride's family, let's say that they are now on their way to the groom's house. Of course, when they get near the house, they ascend from cars or whatever transport they take, and they walk on their feet towards the house of the groom in the form of a row too, and we call them *Arrawaha* (الرواحة), that is, the bride's escort / the wedding escort, in other words, they escort the bride to the next phase of her life in the groom's house. So the escorts Arrawaha(الرواحة) are received by *Alaggaya*(اللقاية), the welcomers who are also standing in a row to welcome the guest; they welcome them in the form of a row with tambourine, ululations, incense, and perfume. Now, the Alaggaya, the welcomers, have received and welcomed Arrawaha, the escort. So, now, it's the turn of Arrawaa , that is, the bride's escort / the wedding escort, to form a row as well, to have two rows. One row of Arrawaha that is, the bride's escort/ the wedding escort, and another row of Alaggaya , the welcomers."

When the bride reaches her seat, both families stand back and provide her space so she can easily face her guests and visitors. On this night, the groom's female family sings song to the bride's family with courteous words of praise and welcome. This song is actually a response to the welcoming song that the bride's family sang to his family on the henna night. The groom enters after the bride and sits next to her while family members dance and parade in front of the couple. The mothers of the bride and groom dance together, waving their hands towards one another as a sign of greeting, which is a typical Al-Bahah move. This public display symbolises their friendship and new family bond.

3.9 .1 Movement

In Al Bahah, women actively participate in the Al-la'ib dance. The group typically ranges from 20 to 100 women, with larger celebrations accommodating up to 70 or even 100 participants. As depicted in Figure 14-15, the dance unfolds with one or two rows of women facing each other, most of them held a duff. This setup allows for an engaging

exchange where the first row echoes the final stanza of the poem while the second row chants the response. Although many of the marriage customs have in recent times witnessed great development, despite the significant societal changes and the adoption of new marriage customs, the traditional dance of Al-la'ib has remained unchanged and resistant to these influences (Makkah Newspaper, 2014). One of the central inquiries posed to the interviewee centred around the traditional configuration for women engaging in this cultural practice. She describes the setup, which is illustrated in Figure 14. I created this illustration based on insights gathered from the interviews:

> "Women stand in a row side by side; of course, we stand in a specific way, our elbows touching each other. Today they don't do it this way literally, but in the past, our elbows had to touch the other women beside us. Then we raise the tambourine high; the tambourine of course is played with the right hand palm, and the rhythm should be synchronised so the group plays the same tune (as shown in Figure 13). The poet stands in the row which is in front of women who repeat after her, so she says the poem, dividing it for the two groups of women to repeat - the first group takes the first half of the verse, and the second group takes the second half, and they repeat after her to a specific, known tune. The poets may have a melodious voice which helps her deliver poems better, but some may have just a normal voice; for *Al-attarg*(الطرق) they start with the famous prelude "Ya lalala alalalal."

Another interviewee added that "during this singing/chanting of the verses, young girls, usually between 15 and 20 years old, and sometimes women as well, perform the dance to the tunes of the chants and the tambourine beats *Al-ddag*(الدق)."

Here it becomes clear the importance of the girls' dance in the middle section, where young girls or unmarried women participate. This allows the standing mothers in the right or the left row to observe them and choose those they deem suitable for their sons or male relatives who are seeking marriage.

3.9.2 Poetry

Folkloric poems within Saudi Arabian cultural traditions encompass a diverse array of themes, with a notable focus on the portrayal of women's suffering. These poetic expressions delve into various aspects of the female experience, reflecting the

multifaceted challenges and struggles encountered in their lives, such as family conflicts and marriage disputes, inheritances and economic restrictions, losses and grief, and societal expectations. (Figure 15) shows where the poet stands and how to face the women's dancing Al-la'ib. Love and relationships emerge as recurring motifs, with verses eloquently narrating tales of unrequited love, heartbreak, and the complexities of romantic entanglements. Moreover, these poems shed light on broader societal issues, casting light on the social injustices and inequalities impacting women, including constraints rooted in cultural norms and prejudicial attitudes. Notably, these folkloric poems provide a platform for women to articulate their experiences, convey profound emotions, and navigate the intricate tapestry of their lives within the cultural and social fabric of Saudi Arabia.

Figure 14: Women's Dance Al-la'ib (PhD. Project 2025)

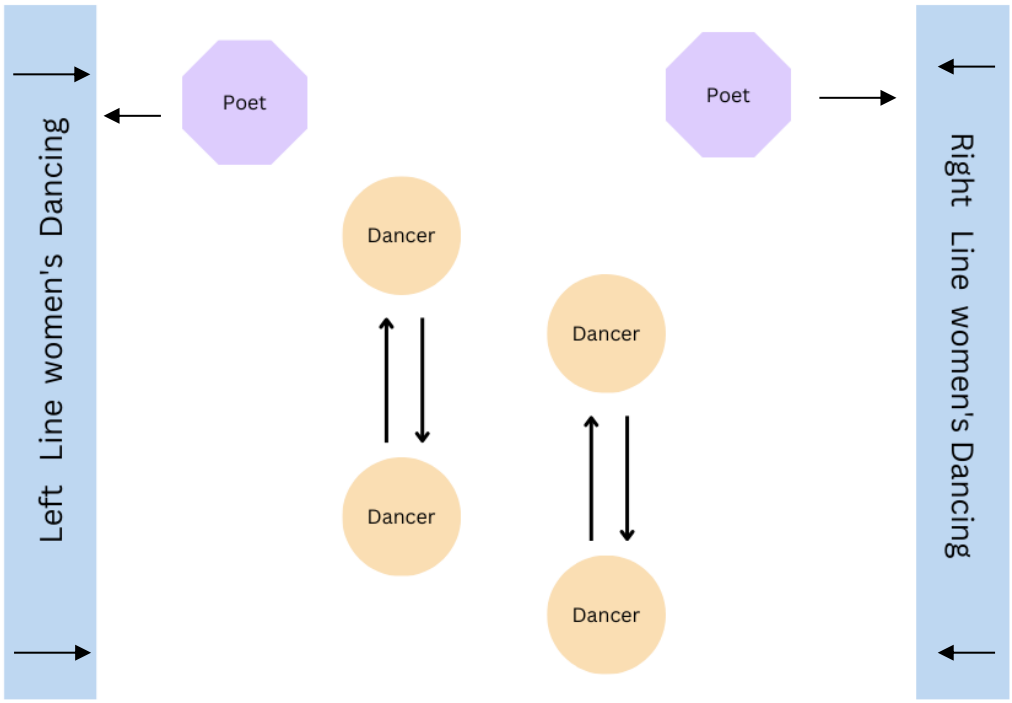

Figure 15: Women's Dance Al-la'ib Choreography (PhD Project 2025)

"Folkloric poems, mostly praising nature, or descriptions of the sufferings of a woman, praising the bride's family, praising the people of the tribe, praising the village people, praising the groom's family (the host of the occasion), etc," the interviewed poet says, "Mostly older women, who know the traditional poems and how to sing them, are the ones who preserve this practice. Young girls, on the other hand, generally don't know how to sing these old-style poems; they prefer listening to modern music instead." In another kind of poem praising the royal family, the poet recites the following:

"Ya La La La La Leh	*يالا لا لا لا له*
Oh God, protect Salman and his crown prince	*ياالله انك تحفظ لنا سلمان وولي عهده*
And protect the region for us and its people	*واحفظ لنا المنطقة واحفظ لنا الشعب كله*
	واحفظلنا قبلة الإسلام مكه وطيبة

And protect the Qibla of Islam Mecca and Taibah *And protect the Qibla of Islam Mecca and Taibah* *And protect Al Bahah region and our Prince Hossam* *We came with ALkashafa supported by Salman* *We came with ALkashafa supported by Salman* *It is such a pride to be from the south and to be a Saudi"*	*واحفظ لنا منطقتنا الباحة واميرنا حسام* *جينا مع فرقة الكشاف في ظل سلمان* *يكفيني اني جنوبيه وجنسي سعودية*

Another greeting poem is shown below:

Greetings from me to you, O you with the brightest face *I came to congratulate you, carrying in my heart a tremendous love for you* *I came to congratulate you, carrying in my heart a tremendous love for you*	*سلام مني لم يا صاحب الوجه الانور* *جينا نبارك وعندي لك محبه لك من اول* *تسمعوا وش نقول يا لول يازين حبه* *اللاش ما رحت بيته والعدو ما نحبه*

Another type of poetry and musical rhythm is *Al-Ṭarq al-Jabalī* (الطرق الجبلي), which translates to "The Mountain Knocking." This form of art is practised amidst towering mountains, where the echoes bounce between them, resonating through the plains, valleys, and ridges, almost as if the mountains themselves were singing or echoing back (Alzahrani, 2007). Interviewees described this unique form of poetic expression occurring in mountainous regions, often associated with women who worked as farmers or shepherds; one added that "it was a sort of amusement for the female shepherds; they

gather in the mountain and perform it. One of them would say a verse of poem/chant and the other one is to answer with another verse of poem/chant within the same theme. That's why it's called *Al-Ṭarq al-Jabalī* (الطرق الجبلي).

3.9.3 Costumes

Traditional costumes, unlike garments with specific designers, embody the customs and traditions of the society with which they are associated. Traditional costumes serve as tangible expressions of local patterns of life and can be considered an art form created by ordinary individuals and passed down through the generations (Alajaji, 2020, p. 7; Alajaji (2012) cited Amin et al, 2009, P.41). Costumes are adapted and personalised to align with the changing customs, traditions, and environment of the society in which people live and reflect the aesthetics, ethics, and values within that society. Additionally, traditional costumes often reflect the political and economic status of members of society, as has been widely observed.

Each region in Saudi Arabia is characterised by distinctive tribal or regional fashions. clothing, a significant aspect of tribal culture, is guarded by women who traditionally preserve their tribe's costumes (Abu Nab, 2020, P.11). These dress codes facilitate the recognition of women from different tribes. It should be noted that tribal communities, either in rural or desert areas, share similarities in social life and organisation but differ significantly regarding fashions (Abu Nab, 2020, cited Al-Dossary, 2012). Traditional costumes in Saudi Arabia is important for preserving tribal identity, social recognition, and safeguarding cultural heritage against globalisation. While tribal communities tend to share the same patriarchal social structures, loyalty to kinship networks, and distinct gender roles, variations in fashion arise from environmental adjustments, accessible resources, and historical influence. both shared traditions and the diverse expressions of Saudi tribal culture

As Buckley and McAssey (2011) assert, fashion is a language which enables the wearer to send social messages, which actively help in defining individuals and contributing

significantly to their social identity. The intricate patterns, colours, and textures used in Saudi Arabian traditional wear are likely to convey meanings related to the wearer's identity, status, and even origin. For example, the distinctive embroidery patterns on a lady's dress in the Najd region might differ from patterns in the Hijaz, which call attention to differences in style at the regional level. In the southern regions, women tend to prefer velvet fabrics more than they do in other areas. This preference is influenced by the cooler weather conditions prevalent in Al Bahah and certain parts of Jizan.

Moreover, these costumes serve as visual narratives of the patterns of life in Saudi Arabia. The incorporation of certain motifs, materials, and embellishments reflects the historical, social, and intellectual aspects of the community. For instance, a traditional costume worn during celebratory events may feature vibrant colours and intricate designs, symbolising joy and festivity.

Figure 16 shows a bride from Al-Bahah wearing a *Mukallaf* (المكلف) dress—an embroidered gown also known as *Motarraz* (مطرز) and *Mashghoul* (مشغول). One interviewee explained: *"The full traditional outfit, including all the jewellery, is called Althawb Almukallaf (الثوب المكلف), which means 'the expensive dress.' It has so many details and therefore requires a great deal of money and effort compared to dresses from other regions of the Kingdom."*

The bride may cover her face with a green or yellow cloth called *Ma'sab* (معصب), adorned with herbal plants such as *basil* (الريحان) and *kadi* (*Pandanus tectorius*, الكادي), particularly woven into the yellow headband. She wears silver jewellery, including *Samaied* (الصمايد), silver belts, snake-like bracelets, and a *Zaytouna* (زيتونة) bracelet. Brides also traditionally apply henna to their hands and feet, and sometimes to their hair to enhance its fragrance before the wedding night, accompanied by the aromatic smoke of *Bakhoor* (البخور).

Figure 16: Actress Mila Alzahrani Wearing Traditional Customs Of The Zahran Tribe (PhD Project 2025)

3.9.4 Music

The musical instrument used in Al-la'ib is known as the *Duff* (الدف) or *Tar*[18] (الطار), similar to a tambourine. Other musical instruments, such as *Azzalafah*[19] (الزلفة) and *Tanaka* (تنكة) can also be used. The musical rhythm is called Mountain drums, in Arabic called *Al-Ṭarq al-Jabalī* (الطرق الجبلي). Al-la'ib has never been forbidden or even considered non-Islamic behaviour. One interviewee said, "Never, even during the era of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), tambourines were part of special occasions." Islamic traditions recognise the permissibility of playing the duff (tambourine) and engaging in celebratory dances during special occasions, provided they align with Islamic principles. Well-known hadith supports this: during Eid, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) allowed Abyssinian companions to perform a cultural dance with spears in the mosque, observing their joyful expression and even encouraging it (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 949; Sahih Muslim, Hadith 892). Additionally, the use of the 'duff' is explicitly permitted in hadiths during weddings

[18] Similar to a tambourine, the tar is a tool used in traditional arts.
[19] Similar to a tabla, closed from both sides and played with sticks.

and other joyous occasions, emphasising that such activities are not only acceptable but also a part of permissible cultural expression within Islamic guidelines.

3.10 Al Jahli Dance of Jizan

The rich tapestry of Jizan Province, characterised by its diverse landscapes and the associated economy across its fourteen towns, has fostered the evolution of various categories and genres of traditional music. This cultural development is further influenced by the interaction with other communities, including the substantial presence of those of Somali and Eritrean descent in Jizan, contributing to the vibrant and diverse musical expressions found within the region. There are more than twenty types of creative dance performances in Jizan. The area is famous for its artistic richness in all of its female arts, where women exhibit various performing arts such as poetry writing and reading, singing, dancing and drumming. Urkevich (2015) mentions that there are eleven types of women's dance performance in Jizan: *Al-Ṭabāʿa* (الطبعة), *Al-Khamrā* (الخمرة), *Al-Mughannī* (المغني), *Al-Ṣaff* (الصفّ), *Ḥaml* (الحمل), *Al-Sayf* (السيف), *Al-Tanshīr* or *Al-Nashīr* (التنشير أو النشير), *Al-Zaḥf* (الزحف), *Al-Takhyīla* (التخييلة), and *Al-Rabsh* (الربش) are among the traditional dance forms, along with *Al-Rajḥa* (الرجحة), which is now commonly referred to as *Al-Khaṭwa* (الخطوة). She did not mention Al Jahli (الجحلي) even though it constitutes one of the most well-known dances among Jizan women. This dance can be performed by one person at a time, or it may be performed in pairs.

Local weddings can last from three to five days depending on the town, and consist of a series of dances accompanied by the traditional folk songs that women sing on different wedding nights depending on the location. For example, *Takhyīla* (التخييلة) is commonly performed in Jizan city. The family and relatives and close friends of the bride gather at the house of her family with *Aladhayah* (العضّاية), the hairdresser and the one who is responsible for the head decoration with *Jasmine* (الفّل) flowers. The event takes place from the afternoon until after dinner. The bride's family hosts a lunch banquet in honour of the participants, expressing their joy and love for their bride. During the bride's “bite” (i.e. eating), there is music with drumming and clapping, accompanied by dancing.

Al taba'a (الطبعه) dance is a lively collective dance performed during the wedding celebration when the groom accompanies his bride. It takes place on the night of the wedding, known as the *Aqd* (عقد), which is the main day of the marriage ceremony. Women gather in festive attire at the groom's family house, dancing and singing while preparing the groom's mother and sisters. They adorn the bride with henna and jasmine, then proceed to a spacious courtyard where they assemble. The bride is then elevated on a tall wooden chair for the invited women to see. Following this, the dancers, using tambourines, engage in rhythmic beats with the clashing of cymbals and drums. The groom's family, along with the guests from the bride's side, participate in the dance, characterised by raised hands and synchronised clapping, accompanied by the rhythmic swaying of their bodies. This lively celebration is accompanied by the enchanting melodies of traditional folk songs and dances in which women stand in circles holding hands and moving together. This proceeds in a one-way loop according to a cycle until they reach the stage of the hakba, which is when the body lowers a little and then raises the left foot to a height of 10 cm and then lowers it to the ground alongside the right foot (Ba Ghaffar, 2013).

Ghumrah (الغمرة) is a term used in the Jizan region to refer to one of the days of events held for the bride. On this night, the bride wears a special gown for the henna night. She places a gold or silver veil over her mouth and nose and puts on what is called the ram of the camel—a mask that accompanies the evening dress and has its edges embroidered from the same evening dress. The bride goes out with songs that are special to this night. Some songs originated from Yemen due to its geographical proximity to Jizan. A notable example is this one by Faisal Alawi.

Oh world, Henna... oh world, Henna	
Oh world, Henna... oh world, Henna	يا علم حنا .. يا علم حنا
The hour of henna heals the sick Take it,	يا علم حنا .. يا علم حنا
O Allah, O Generous One Rejoice,	ساعة الحنا تشفي المارود

O Masoud, the scent of oud has spread	*شلها ياالله يا كريم الجود*
Give us the pure wine, the tear of the grape cluster	*ا سعد يا مسعود فاح عرف العود*
Clear the grief, heal the sick Say it,	*اسقنا الصهبا دمعة العنقود*
O Allah, O Generous One Our evenings are good and renewed	*تجلي الكربه تشفي المارود*
Whenever our loved ones are well, we are well	*جلها يا الله يا كريم الجود*
In the evening, a noble lineage meets us With dark eyes and rosy cheeks	*يا سمرنا به طاب واتجدد*
Apply the henna, O life of the soul	*كلما طاب احبابنا طبنا*
The hour of henna heals the wounded Mohammed, electricity flow	*في السمر لاقانا أصيل الجد*
	ذا كحيل العينين وردي الخد
	حني بالحنا يا حياة الروح
	ساعة الحنا تشفي المجروح

The wedding ceremony features an elaborate dance where the bride performs alongside her family and friends, who are dressed in brightly coloured traditional clothes and carry gifts and cash presents for the bride. They enter with the accompaniment of drums and flutes, and in some regions, they begin dancing. A special area is decorated for the bride, where she sits to receive congratulations.

The groom is escorted to his bride by his family while she waits on the mini-stage crafted by a local carpenter. The stage, *kosha* (كوشة), includes *a qaada* (قعادة)— bed-like seat crafted from *sidr* wood and *tufi* branches of the *doum* palm tree a type of coconut trees. As the groom sits next to his bride, his family begins to dance and sing next to them. One of the traditional songs, especially if the groom's name is Mohammed, includes verses like the following:

Mohammed... Greet and receive	*محمد.. سلم واستلم*
Mohammed... Keeper of the pen	*محمد.. راعي القلم*

Mohammed, the box of chicks	محمد صندوق سيسان
Mohammed from Jizan	محمد وارد جيزان
Mohammed counted in thousands	محمد عدها ألوف
Mohammed in the land of sheikhs	محمد في ديار الشيوخ
Mohammed when he intended	محمد حينما نوى
Mohammed, bird of passion	محمد طير الهوى
Mohammed, no waste, no waste	محمد لا هدر هدر
Mohammed broke the stone	محمد كسر أمحجر
Mohammed got a reward	محمد حصل كاذية
Mohammed and his mother are pleased	محمد وأمه راضية
Mohammed, a shining star	محمد نجمة لامعة
Mohammed studies at university	محمد يدرس جامعة
Mohammed, a beautiful bloom	محمد فل فاتشي
Mohammed, electricity flow	محمد كهربا تشي

Some people from Jizan think of Al Jahli dance as not specific to the tribes of Jizan. One interviewee noted,

> "It is a play for Ethiopian women and came with the Africans in ancient times. It is their inheritance and is practised on special occasions. The disciples are ashamed to attribute it to its origin, and I do not know why, even according to the official website of Jizan's heritage, this women's dance is not registered. What is strange is that they highlight it more when guests come from outside Jizan as our heritage; so they distort the image of the region".

However, since this dance has been performed by the Jizan people for more than three decades, it is considered an example of intangible cultural heritage. The historical documentation of the Al Jahli dance in the Jizan region is uncertain. According to one interviewee, "it has been existing for a long time, maybe it started in 1960," while other professional interviewees stated that the provenance of this dance in Jizan is more than

60 years old. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), particularly folk dances, can transcend national borders while maintaining connections to their origins, much like Egyptian dance (belly dance), which is practised globally yet remains tied to its Egyptian roots (Loiacono & Fallon, 2018).

It is possible that racism could be a contributing factor to the lack of recognition or acknowledgement of the Al Jahli dance as part of Jizan's heritage. The notion that the dance should be attributed to Ethiopian women and that it came with Africans in ancient times could indicate a bias against its origins or a reluctance to embrace cultural diversity.

This duality of rootedness and adaptability is a hallmark of ICH. While Al Jahli remains a regional treasure, its potential for broader recognition raises questions about authenticity and cultural ownership, challenges also faced by *Raqs Sharqi* (belly dance) in its global commercialisation. Responsible documentation and promotion of Al Jahli can ensure it continues to be both a symbol of Jizan's heritage and a point of intercultural connection, balancing preservation with adaptation.

3.10.1 Movement

This particular dance requires agility and quick reflexes because it employs a quick rhythm. It is performed on drums and sung in the cities and villages of the plains and islands in the Jizan region. Each woman or girl faces or dances by the side of the other woman or girl, and another woman stands between them and sings for them. As Figure 16 shows, the dancers dance with their shoulders, making light movements with their chests, and some move their waists and hips or go down on their knees and dance. The steps of the dance include holding the garment or veil and tilting the head slightly to the side, making a gentle movement as if to display the garment to the guests. The dancer may also lift the garment above their foot to allow easier movement, especially if the dress is long. For weddings, the dagagat الدقاقات ensemble does a *Al-Takhyīla* (التخييلة) as a dance rhythm which is similar to Zaffah زفة or bride entering the ceremony. The bride enters the wedding ceremony accompanied by incense and traditional songs. Two women stand beside her, one on her right and one on her left. Each side is accompanied by a group of women arranged in a row for what is known as a "step," but the step is performed quickly without a pause or bending at the knee. The bride's mother and the

groom's family throw money above her head in a gesture of honour, singing traditional tunes during the celebratory procession. As it is shown in Figure 17 and explained in Figure 18.

Another notable aspect of the Al Jahli dance is that the bride is allowed to participate. As mentioned in the interview, "We make her stand and dance, but she does not stand to dance from the beginning, she should wait a little to give a good impression that she is mature and good-tempered." The below song is cited from the interview.

"We brought down our daughter, imagine, from high palaces,	نزلنا بنتنا تخيل من عاليا القصور
We brought down our daughter, imagine, send blessings upon the Prophet	نزلنا بنتنا تخيل صلوا على النبي
Her hair is fragrant with oud and sandalwood	شعرها مشلش عودي وصندلي
We brought down our daughter, imagine, send blessings upon the Prophet"	نزلنا بنتنا تخيل صلوا على النبي

Figure 17: Woman's Al Jahli Dance (PhD Project 2025)

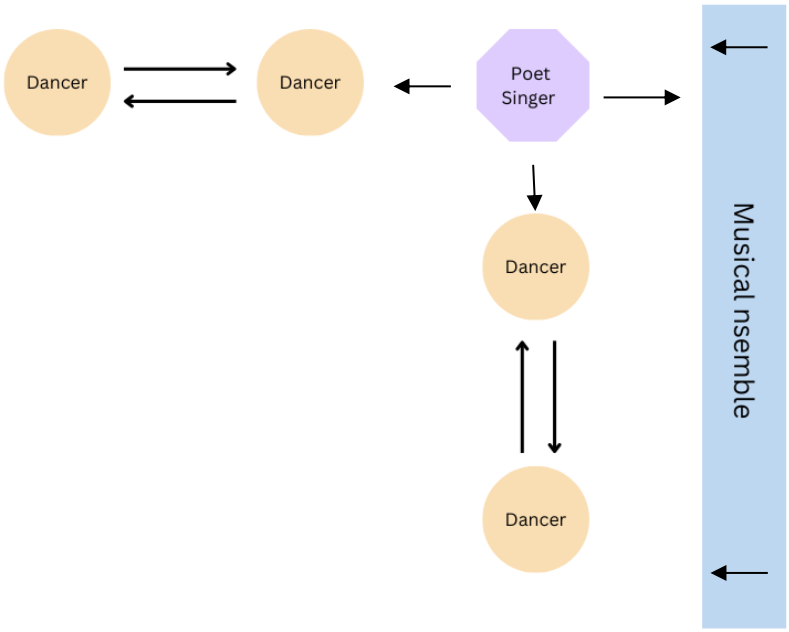

Figure 18: Woman's Dance Al Jahli Choreography (PhD Project 2025)

Aside from the bodily movement, singing of poems, and drumming the duff, there is the *Ghatrūf* غطاريف, which is a term used in the Jizan region to refer to a loud sound produced by the hostess on special occasions. It is a way of welcoming guests at events such as weddings, expressing joy for achievements, sharing happiness and encouragement with others, or celebrating the birth of a child. It is also used as a form of congratulation for someone returning from the Hajj pilgrimage, where the sound is repeatedly chanted, resembling ululation and chirping.

Each ululation or Ghatrūf represents the occasion being celebrated. In the bride's family, ululation during the night of the wedding ceremony *Aqd al-Qur'an* (عقد القران) is considered inappropriate; it can only come from the groom's family. The mother of the bride and her sisters do not ululate. Similarly, it is considered inappropriate for men to ululate on any occasion or context because ululation is associated with women. Some women who are unable to ululate attend their *Majlis* (المجلس) , the Arabic name of the sitting room, where someone else ululates on their behalf to welcome their guests.

3.10.2 Costumes

Figure 19 illustrates a Jizan bride wearing *Almeel* (ثوب الميل) dress, while other women may wear a *Kurta (كرته)* or a *Daffa Matrouza* (دفة مطرزه) dress. The bride is adorned with silver or gold accessories, including a belt, bracelet, and a long necklace called a *Jonyhat* (جنيهات), meaning "golden coins."

The preparation of the bride begins by dividing her hair into two sections and applying a fragrant powder made of *mahlab* (محلب), cardamom, and walnut mixed with water to create a thick texture. A substance called *Zafar al-Tayyib*(ظفْر الطيب), extracted from seashells, is added to enhance the aromatic scent. Afterward, the hair is infused with the mixture and decorated with aromatic plants known as *Al-Khutoor* (الخطور) or Al-*Mikhdhara* (المخطار). These plants are arranged along with fragrant flowers, which are cut and placed on the forehead.

The hair is then styled and covered with various fragrant flowers, such as jasmine, it is cut and organised in a thin thread, forming a headband-like structure at the front of the forehead, the flowers cover the entire hair from top to bottom in an organised and beautiful shape known locally as *Al-Adiyah* (العظية) or *Wallabah* (الوبلة). This has many forms and names, including *Al-Mabroum* (مبروم) and Alkhator (الخطور), with variations in terminology across governorates and villages

After the braiding process is completed, gold coin beads are placed after they have been sewn into a piece of cloth in an orderly manner, which is known as *Alshamas* (الشمس او الشماس) or *Mashakhees* (مشاخيص) or *Mahaff* (المحف) studded with golden pounds is placed on the middle of the head. Then they cover it with a layer of a veil whether it's the same color as the dress or black.

There are two types of henna in Jizan: black henna called *Aafs (عفص),* which is used to decorate the bride's hands with *Almushaab* (المشعاب) giving the appearance of lines, and red henna, which is the usual form of henna.

Figure 19: Actress Rifal Khawaji Wearing Traditional Customs Of Jizan Brid (PhD Project 2024)

3.10.3 Music

The Thabalat band uses musical instruments such as a tambourine or duff, with the possible addition of the *Alzeer* (الزير), *Alsafha* (الصفحة) or *Alssahan* (الصحن), *Zolaf tabla* (زلاف) and *Maradda* (مردة). The musical rhythm is either the Jahli dance beats or the Assaf (عسف) dance beats. Unlike the Al-la'ib dance, it can be performed solo. The number of participants usually ranges from two to ten women, depending on the number present.

3.10.4 Occasions

The dance usually takes place at weddings, engagements, Islamic holidays like Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, and national holidays. Another such occasion is the circumcision of boys, according to an interviewee: "In the past, they used to perform it on different occasions, such as circumcision, on this occasion they would go to the house of the Sheikh, where circumcision is held for young boys, and they perform Al Jahli there."

3.11 Documenting Women's Dance

There are numerous reasons why traditional dances are not well documented. It's possible that certain histories are suppressed, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Intentional suppression could stem from political, cultural, social or religious motives

where dominant groups may want to promote their own narratives over others (Eze, 2010, p. 45). For example, some traditional dances in Al Bahah, like the *Shabak* dance mentioned earlier, are no longer practised due to prevailing segregation norms. On the other hand, unintentional suppression could result from broader societal neglect rather than a deliberate effort to erase certain histories or groups (Eze, 2010, p. 47). Without institutional support or dedicated associations advocating for the preservation of these traditional dances, there is a significant omission regarding their documentation. Additionally, a lack of awareness among communities about the importance of preserving such heritage could contribute to the absence of documentation efforts. One of the interviewees acknowledged this by saying: "I consider there to be a neglect of this heritage by women themselves. There was no association or institution to adopt this heritage; there was no awareness about its importance."

Undoubtedly, these cultural practices have been affected by a combination of societal, religious, political, and economic changes that prioritise different values and behaviours, leading to the decline of traditional heritage activities. Following the discovery and exploitation of oil resources, Saudi society underwent a time of unprecedented economic expansion, according to Dr Leila Al-Bassam (1985), resulting in rapid modernisation. The subsequent development in the economic, social, and technological domains has played a role in the deterioration of cultural elements, ultimately resulting in the reduction and degradation of the legacy of dance (Lobo, 2023). In order to preserve the Saudi identity and not be completely subsumed into global civilisation, we must pay special attention to reviving our heritage, and this revival must take effect by looking at it from the social perspective rather than focussing only on archaeological elements.

As addressed in more detail in the previous chapter, the lack of visual and video documentation of women's dance can be attributed to societal norms that consider it inappropriate for women to be filmed, particularly in certain cultural contexts where modesty and privacy are highly valued. A prevailing belief exists that women's visibility in videos could compromise their dignity, honour, and that of their family members. As the interviewee stated, "According to society, it is considered immoral for a woman to

expose her face in a video for men to see. In addition to men's sense of honour, one cannot accept his wife, sister, or mother being displayed in a video for all men to see."

During an interview, it was revealed that women themselves used to decline to have their voices recorded:

> It was immoral to record a woman's voice; it was immoral to have the voice of a woman being listened to by everyone, but actually, it was women who listened to them. It's custom, a tradition for many people that a woman's voice shouldn't be spread among all people, this custom still exists for some people today also. Both video and audio recording of women was considered immoral; so, the idea is that women shouldn't appear for everyone to see, and that she should wear hijab; adherence to hijab was very widespread to the extent that women themselves couldn't recognise each other in the street. So, that was the main factor, they shouldn't appear for everyone to see one the one hand. On the other hand, there were no abundant visual media as we have today. There were not such available cameras as today. Yes, there were some cameras but only to film some types of men, but for women, it was forbidden to film them with a camera, to the extent that a woman was forbidden to have camera when she attended a wedding, I don't know if it's due to intellectual deficiency or misunderstanding, not sure actually . . . In the past [thirty years ago], it was socially unacceptable for a woman to be recorded. Actually, there are still some people who find it inappropriate even now.

This last statement highlights the historical and ongoing societal attitudes towards recording women. I further delved into the consequences of someone recording the interviewee in the past. In response, the interviewee revealed, "People would report the person responsible for recording to the authorities since it had been done without permission. This is applied in the modern day, not just back then." These statements emphasise the importance of consent in capturing personal moments and serve as a reminder of the cultural and societal shifts that have and have not taken place over time. Honour, including the concept of *Ird*[20] (العِرض) or *Sharaf*[21] (الشرف), plays a significant role in Arab culture. Some perceive filming women as a potential invasion of privacy

[20] Ird is a person's honour, dignity, and reputation, particularly in relation to their community and family. It includes concepts of respectability, integrity, and virginity, especially with regard to women (Abu-Lughod, 1990).
[21] Sharaf denotes dignity, honour, and nobility on both a personal and a societal level. It entails keeping one's word, protecting family honour, and respecting moral and ethical norms (Khoury, 1998).

or a threat to dignity, which can be closely tied to concerns about honour. However, it is important to acknowledge that perspectives on this matter differ, and not everyone within a culture or community holds the same beliefs. As the interviewee clearly mentioned:

> Honour is the main reason a man would reject that his wife or a woman/girl of his relatives or under his custody could appear in a film or a picture. So, it was difficult for a man to see the picture of his wife/relative spread among people, even if she wears an Abaya; it was sort of *Monkar* (منكر) (i.e., sort of evil action) that in the past, even if she was wearing her Abaya; without her Abaya, it would be unimaginable.

Another interviewee from Saudi Arabia stated, “If someone from a tribe films a woman, the other tribe would criticise him and file a lawsuit against him, demanding compensation for the damage. This is how we were brought up, and also, our religion does not allow us to expose our bodies and the like”.

While the professional interviewee presented an alternate perspective, she recognised that women themselves may refuse to be filmed due to their personal preferences. She explained that these women hold conservative values and deeply respect religious rules and social norms. In her own words, she stated, “Mothers, brothers, and everyone else would not accept seeing their female relatives being filmed and publicly shared. It is a matter of modesty and avoiding engaging in any actions deemed immoral by society”.

The situation surrounding women's rights and their treatment in relation to tribes and male guardianship is complex. When asked about the potential consequences of a woman being filmed and her video being published without her permission, one interviewee expressed concern: “Poor her, she will be tortured by her father, her house/ family. Her father may even kill her, and her husband could divorce her, so a woman should be careful”. This highlights the need for women and filmmakers, photographers, and documentarians to be cautious and mindful of their actions in order to avoid such dire consequences.

During the interview, one interviewee remarked on the decline in the presence of traditional dance, specifically Al-la'ib, in contemporary wedding ceremonies. She noted that the prevalence of such dances has diminished, attributing this decline to the increasing popularity of hosting weddings in modern wedding venues. According to their observations, it has become increasingly uncommon for both the bride's and groom's families to agree to include Al-la'ib, even as a brief prelude to the wedding festivities. They emphasised that only a few individuals, with a particular appreciation for traditional dance, opt to incorporate it into their celebrations. The interviewee expressed a sense of the rarity of the inclusion of traditional dance in weddings: "It has become rare in weddings. It has become limited to events and festivals only". This observation underscores the influence of modernisation and changing societal norms on cultural practices, particularly within the context of significant life events such as weddings. It prompts reflection on the challenges of preserving cultural heritage amidst evolving societal trends and highlights the delicate balance between tradition and modernity in contemporary society.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive exploration of the significance of dance within Islamic culture, focusing specifically on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf regions. Through an analysis of traditional dances, including the Al-la'ib dance in the Al Bahah region and the Al Jahli dance in the Jizan region, the profound role of dance in conveying emotions, participating in rituals, and strengthening cultural identity has been established.

The chapter has highlighted the unique conditions shaping the practice of women's dance in conservative Saudi Arabian society, emphasising the importance of understanding religious, cultural, and social factors in this context. Through contextual analysis and interviews with local participants, we have offered a nuanced understanding of Saudi Arabian women's dance traditions while providing valuable context rather than a complete historical account.

Furthermore, this chapter has documented the historical significance of dance as an intangible cultural heritage within Islamic culture, tracing its origins and evolution over

time. By analysing methodologies used in documenting dance and examining its representation in various contexts, we have shed light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in preserving this cultural heritage. Overall, this chapter has honoured and reflected upon Saudi Arabian dance traditions and their vital role in preserving cultural identity and heritage.

Chapter 4: The Evolving Landscape of Saudi Cinema: A Historical Review

4.1 Introduction

Recent policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has placed a greater emphasis on the importance of cultural heritage and its revival by encouraging the documentation and dissemination of tangible and intangible heritage through various media such as documentaries and cinema. However, the presence of Saudi women's intangible heritage in these media is still very weak, if not absent totally. This chapter will explore the reasons behind the lack of documentation of Saudi women's dance in films and the censorship in Saudi Arabia. To do this, I will provide an overview of the history of Cinema in Saudi Arabia and analyse the factors that constrain the Saudi cinema development, which can be divided into three periods: its emergence with 'early cinema' (1950–1979), the 'banned phase' (1980–2017) during which cinemas were banned in Saudi Arabia by law, and finally the 'vision phase' (2017–present) when cinemas were allowed to open under Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. Illustrating these three phases of cinema in Saudi Arabia will lead to a better understanding of the political and cultural aspects related to the lack of documentation of Saudi women's dance and the relationship between cinema and mass media. I also investigate the existing limitations and the question of censorship regarding the depiction of Saudi women in films as a whole.

From here, I will outline some historical factors, political events, economic developments, and social, cultural and religious factors that may have directly or indirectly affected the entry of cinema into Saudi lands and culture. A key question that will be addressed by this discussion is whether religion alone was the reason for the absence of cinema in Saudi Arabia in the sixties, or if other reasons affected and delayed the entry of cinema to Saudi Arabia.

4.2 Oil, Islam, and the Living Image

Before the discovery of oil,[22] Saudi Arabia suffered from a lack of financial and natural resources as a desert country with few water sources, crops, or infrastructure and a lack of education (Alsa'ed, 2017). Oil extraction in the Kingdom began when King Abdulaziz bin Abdurrahman Al Saud signed a concession agreement with the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL) in 1933. The California Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC), a subsidiary business, was established to oversee the contract.

Before oil, there was no electronic media or film industry in the Kingdom. Although there was a newspaper industry, the Saudi government heavily shaped this industry and its output, with the first truly Saudi dailies appearing only in the 1950s (Alshamikh, 1981). It wasn't until 1949 that the first radio broadcasts were announced. Religious authorities opposed these broadcasts and sought to persuade King Abdul-Aziz to end the service, which they saw as antithetical to Islamic beliefs (AlShebeili, 2000). The king pressed ahead with a service but did not require citizens to possess radios. In response, the Sharia judge issued a fatwa that forbade radio possession. Radio continued to dominate most people's daily lives in spite of this religious resistance. However, due to political, religious, and cultural reasons, the government of Saudi Arabia banned foreign radio stations from broadcasting for political, religious, and cultural grounds, arguing that doing so would compromise Saudi society's customs and the government's authority. On the other hand, only material that adhered to official government doctrine and Islamic culture may be broadcast on local radio stations.

Although political and religious authorities in Saudi Arabia eventually accepted and adapted to mainstream media and technologies through newspapers, television, and radio, they rarely did so through film. Göran Larsson, a professor in Religious Studies at the University of Gothenburg and author of Muslims and the New Media, investigates

[22] Pre-oil is a term commonly used in history, anthropology, and socioeconomic scholarly work to depict Gulf state societies, notably Saudi Arabia, prior to the infusion of oil income in the 1950s. The 'rulership of shaikhdoms' was the main socio-political element of the pre-oil era. This comprised the 'ruling families, tribes and tribal guards, merchants, and governors,' as well as their 'small-scale societies,' which were made up of tribes and towns rather than modern states. Furthermore, pre-oil nations had limited resources, traditional and basic industries, low populations, and relied on local goods. (D.P. & ATTORKI, 1992)

the attitudes of Islamic clerics toward media technologies and treats the impact of media technology on Muslim cultures as something that cannot be avoided (Larsson, 2011). His attention is primarily centred on the effects that new media can have on public morals and religious practice. This seminal study examines the most common disagreements about motion pictures and cinema within Islamic jurisprudence. I draw on Larsson's work to explore Sunni clerics' perspectives on art, film, and cinema in the context of globalisation.

Shafik (2007) provides a comparative evaluation of the traditions of the Islamic arts with the West to understand the tendency behind the Islamic rejection of cinema in her book, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity*. Shafik observes, "Unlike in medieval Europe, where paintings reached the people through churches and had a definite pedagogic and indoctrinating function, mosques and Quran schools, until today, use only decorative ornaments and calligraphy" (Shafik, 2007, p. 49). As already discussed, most Islamic Sunni clerics viewed photography as sinful as it included the representation of sentient beings and souls.

However, the ban on cinema in Saudi Arabia was not just related to representation. Göran Larsson described cinema-going as a "social activity that involves other participants, and for most Ulamma, this interaction could become a moral problem because it breaks and crosses the public-private distinction" (2011, p. 79). In Islamic teaching, it is a matter of principle to prevent the mixing of genders, especially if there is no moral intent behind it. Thus, going to the movies and being exposed to modern content is a challenge to Muslim ideology, as leisure activities may encourage immorality (Larsson, 2011). For Islamic clerics, cinema is not inherently forbidden; rather, their concerns are with the environment that cinema is seen to provide and encourage.

However, early evidence of the existence of cinema in the Kingdom and the strong reactions it provoked can be found in the Egyptian Studio magazine, one of the first cinema magazines published in Egypt when launched in 1947. At the end of 1948, one of its articles contained the following:

> *His Majesty King Abdul Aziz Al Saud came to Makkah and visited the homes of his children and grandchildren, the princes one night and searched for*

cinema projectors and films that they had bought to watch in a special show in the cinema halls that they had specially built in their palaces. His Majesty ordered the burning and smashing of the films because they contradicted the teachings of the Islam religion. The Saudi princes used to buy copies of Egyptian and American films from Cairo. The Saudi monarch learned about these films, so he himself rose and supervised their destruction and burning. There was not a single cinema in the Arabian Peninsula, and some American companies have tried to establish small cinemas in Jeddah, and some countries where foreigners are allowed to reside, but the Saudi government refused that because cinema is one of the things that contradicts the teachings of the true religion (Alzibawi, 2018). Shown Figure 20.

This incident shows that cinema was present in the Kingdom but not for the public, existing within private halls of the Saudi royal family. According to Ciecko (2011), Crown Prince Imam Badr (1929–1996) is said to have been a cinema fanatic who had his own personal auditorium and created his own films to document his trip.

Figure 20 : Cinema and Religion, 'King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud (Studio Magazine, 1948)

In 1948, Egyptian Sharia judge Muhammad Mustafa Al-Maraghi, then Sheikh Al-Azhar, reportedly issued a fatwa condemning cinema as "an abomination from the work of the devil," deeming it impermissible for Muslims due to its provocative content. Al-Maraghi frequently protested against romantic films, demanding their ban. As cinema became a staple of Egyptian social life, the Islamic Association for Reform emerged, aiming to combat vices such as alcohol, gambling, and cinema through peaceful means. Religious protests escalated, prompting the government to assign clerics to monitor and censor films, particularly scenes of intimacy. In response, the Egyptian government decided to use clerics to monitor films and to remove scenes of intimacies. However, Egyptian authorities continue to back Egyptian cinema, which has grown in strength in great contrast to Saudi Arabia (Al Zibawi, 2018). Although cinema in Saudi Arabia has been extremely limited and repressed compared to the rest of the Arab and Muslim world, it does have a history that contributed to shaping a national identity that will be explored in the following sections.

4.3 Early Saudi Cinema 1950–1979

The emergence of cinemas in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was linked to the construction and completion 1950 of the Trans-Arabia Pipeline. "*The Tapline*", with a length of 1,212 kilometres, was the longest pipeline in the world at that time, linking the eastern part of the Kingdom to the Mediterranean Sea and significantly shortening the time for oil exports to Europe and the United States of America (Aramco, 2022). Cinema entered its infancy in the oil-rich eastern region, close to the Kuwaiti[23] border. Under the heat of the desert sun of Al-Dahna and Al-Nafud, CASOC built residential gatherings for workers to provide them with cooled rooms, ice water, cinemas, and modern restaurants, which was a cultural shift for the people at the time. Today's elderly residents of cities established along the Tapline (Tarif, Arar, and Rafha) can look back to the days long ago when their parents took them to cinemas for Tapline workers and the schools of Arar, which showed scientific films as well as American films (Al-Lamie, 2017), as shown in Figure 21.

[23] At the time, Kuwait was ahead of its time in Gulf terms and was one of the first nations to pay attention to the cinematic and theatrical arts, followed by women's political movements (Al-Qudaihi, 2009).

Figure 21 : A collection of images showing the Tipline cinema theater (Alarabiya, 2017)

George Sadoul's book *The Cinema in the Arab Countries,* published in 1966, only briefly mentioned Saudi cinema. He does mention that Saudi Arabia did not have a significant film production industry and was largely absent from the cinematic map due to a combination of cultural, religious, and political factors. This left a local population largely ignorant of cinema due to lack of access, which was restricted to, on the one hand, the private reception halls of wealthy Saudis and, on the other hand, the private compounds of expat workers. The book affords far greater coverage of Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria (Sadoul, 1966, pp. 541–542). Despite this, Egyptian cinema significantly influenced Saudi audiences, introducing storytelling techniques, melodramatic narratives, and themes of social change that resonated with local experiences. Egyptian musicals featuring icons like Umm Kulthum and Abdel Halim Hafez also shaped Saudi appreciation for music-driven narratives (Shafik, 2007, pp. 45–48; Armbrust, 1996, pp. 67–69). Additionally, Saudis often travelled to cinemas in neighbouring countries like Bahrain and Kuwait, fostering cultural exchange and integrating Egyptian cinematic elements into Saudi cultural expressions (Shafik, 2007, p. 50).

The cinema that did exist in Saudi Arabia was used as an educational and awareness-raising tool, as the first Saudi films produced in Saudi Arabia were shown to the public in places such as parks and sports clubs. As for imported entertainment films, Saudi and expat audiences who were working at the oil company saw them at their residency compound or in the *Al-Ahwash cinema* سينما الأحواش , something discussed later in this chapter.

Khaled Al-Sayed, author of the first Saudi book on cinema published in 2008, entitled *The Magic Lantern: Readings in the Cinema*, noted that from 1950, the only Saudi films were documentaries produced by oil companies in the Eastern Province (Al-Yousef, 2020). Among the works produced by CASOC, later Aramco, was a documentary film about the inauguration of the first oil well in the Kingdom in the presence of Saudi King Abdul-Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud (Almulla, 2018). *Miyah, A Story of Water* (1950) was a short educational film about how Saudi Arabia preserved, drew and conserved water. The company also produced what many consider to be the first Saudi documentary film, *The Fly*, in 1952, starring the Saudi actor Hassan Al-Ghanim, who is recognised as the first Saudi film actor. The film aimed to educate people about the dangers of flies spreading diseases, a widespread problem in that period in Saudi Arabia, especially causing digestive diseases, which were killing many children and the elderly due to their weak immunity (Aljumai'ei, 2022). These films were produced in Saudi Arabia for Saudi citizens.

The company produced these educational films for health education purposes. For this reason, Aramco brought in a specialised film team from Hollywood to produce *The Fly*. The film's production took about two and a half months and did not exceed 30 minutes. It was originally produced to be presented to the residents of the Kingdom in that era but was subsequently translated into eight different languages. Due to the lack of services such as electricity at that time, the promotion of the film’s showings relied on loudspeakers, with an official calling out to people that the film would be shown in a location in the villages of the region, such as cafes, public square, parks, or some major diwaniyas (reception halls) (Habib, 2008).

Since cinema theatres did not exist outside Aramco's complexes and television broadcasting had not yet begun, Aramco had to find a way to show films to Saudi citizens, so they installed film screens and generators onto trucks cruising the desert.

These mobile screens were temporarily installed in village squares, markets, or stadiums in villages and cities. In this way, the movie *A Story of Water* (1950) مياه was shown to many Saudis who had never seen cinematic films (Almulla, 2018). The American director of this film, Richard Lyford, also directed the documentary *Island of Allah* جزيرة العرب, first shown on national television in 1956. In this documentary, a twenty-three-year-old Prince Abdul Aziz ibn Saud is depicted as he invades Riyadh with his military in a daring raid by geologists exploring the Saudi deserts. The film consists of a mixture of dramatisation, stock footage, and documentary sequences, unified by a somewhat seamless narrative.

By the time Saudi filmmakers started to appear in the region, oil companies had acquired advanced film studios and equipment, such as 35 mm and 16 mm movie cameras. Aramco produced films and assisted international production in the region during the 1950s and 1960s. A number of Saudis were sent abroad by national oil companies to study filmmaking. For instance, Abdullah Al-Muhaisan graduated from the London Film School in 1974, a school with a long history of producing films. During this time, oil companies and local rulers invited some international productions to the region (Alghannam, 2020, P.117).

4.3.1 *Cinema Al-Ahwash* سينما الأحواش

At the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies, theatres began to spread among the local population, and galleries available to Saudi citizens were located in local sports clubs and in some famous courtyards and houses, especially in Riyadh, Jeddah, Taif, Abha, Dammam. Qafandish (2012) explains that by 1960, the appearance of cinema was not limited to foreigners' residences but also extended to foreign embassies such as the American and Egyptian embassies. However, they featured random showings that lacked the necessary organisation, preparation, and marketing. In Riyadh, cinema screens continued to appear in the residential compounds of foreigners, so the people of Riyadh began to set up places to screen films in the city centre within the Al-Murabba neighbourhood, where a large number of film screens were assembled, leading it to be referred to as *'Cinema Lane'* حارة السينما. At this time, Fouad Jamjoom rose to prominence as the pioneering owner of the most famous shop

for the rental or purchase of cinematic equipment in the city of Jeddah. His travels to Egypt influenced Jamjoom, and he sold cinema equipment to other retailers (Alhatoon magazine, 2019).

The prevalence of cinema in the western region (known as Alhijaz) led to an interest among sports clubs in various regions of the Kingdom for organising cinematic shows at their headquarters, to the extent that it became an arena for competition between them (Alotaibi, 2018). The presence and spread of cinemas in the Kingdom, especially in the western region, was characterised by the name Cinema Al-Ahwash (Backyard Cinema) Figure 22. The name *Al-Ahwash* الأحواش came from the local dialect, and it means the courtyards of homes. These large spaces attached to the homes were considered a family outlet or a place for holding parties and events such as weddings and feasts. However, some of those interested in the arts invested in making them movie galleries (Mohammed, 2023).

Figure 22: Jamjoom Cinema Al-Ahwash in Albaghdadia district in Jeddah (Al Bilad Daily, 2017)

In their beginnings, these were rudimentary theatres, mainly showing Egyptian films alongside popular American films. According to Zughbi (2017), one black-and-white film could be shown after the evening prayer, with an entrance fee of only half a Riyal per person. On Friday night, two films might be shown, one Arab, Egyptian or Lebanese, and the other foreign or Indian, with an entrance price of two or three Riyals. Occasionally, three films might be shown at a price of five Riyals. During holidays or film premieres, the entrance fee could reach as high as ten or even twenty Riyals.

Zughbi (2017) claims that a curtain used to be placed to separate women from men at showings and that families usually preferred musical films and dramas. This is a clear indication of the gender segregation that started before the Sahwa movement, which in later years saw regulation become much stricter.

Aljumai'ei (2022) describes how cinemas in the early stages of media history in Saudi Arabia did not need an official license and gained their legitimacy from their spread to many Saudi cities. This was assisted by the participation of senior Saudi families who helped in the establishment of cinemas. However, Saudi authorities did not welcome Jamjoom's cinema equipment business or the content of the films he showed. Almadhi and Alotaibi (2019) state that initially, he was subjected to imprisonment for content including intimacy or nudity. Although official laws regarding censorship were not yet in place in Saudi Arabia, hostile conditions in the country prompted leaders to take stricter rules that, in turn, affected the media. Saudi cinema was not under any government regulation at that time; instead, it was the product of personal efforts by businessmen and wealthy enthusiasts who were interested in showing it to the public in the backyards of their own homes.

4.3.2 Developments across Saudi Media

By the 1960s, Saudi society was stable and had become an influential force in the region, and plans for socio-economic development were drawn up in collaboration with United Nations organisations aimed at progressing Saudi society to a new level. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia declared its intention to make television available to the general population in 1962 through then-Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, who justified the choice by saying, “The responsibility of this facility is to serve our religion, our country, and our nation” (Alkhudair, 2019). Sadoul (1954) also cites Eric Rollo, the editor of the French newspaper Le Monde at the time, who wrote that King Faisal Al Saud violated the Sharia law, which forbade cinemas and the opening of cinemas, by establishing a television network despite the opposition and protests of the religious authorities in the country.

Despite the somewhat radical introduction of cinema to the Kingdom, King Faisal Al Saud's statement affirms that anything that contradicts the religious teaching of Islam was to be excluded from television specifically and the media as a whole. This is one explanation that may explain the absence of women in visual documentation due to the conservative, religious, and regulated nature of television's introduction to the Kingdom.

Saudi interest in the media is driven by what can be defined as a security necessity stemming from many alleged internal concerns and external threats, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, the perceived threat of socialist ideologies, and a rival centre of spiritual leadership, political influence, and authority being established in the Middle East following the Iranian Revolution that ended the nearly four-decade rule of the pro-Western Shah Mohammad Pahlavi and set Iran on a Shiite theocratic path.

As a matter of fact, during the second part of the 20th century, but especially since the end of the 1970s, the growth of the kingdom's media has been closely tied to internal dynamics, geopolitical concerns, regional rivalries, international trends, and its oil revenue. Kingdom's share of the Arab Oil Company rose to 25% in 1973, and in 1980, what would come to be named the Saudi Arabian Oil Group (Aramco) achieved 100% Saudi state ownership (Aramco, n.d.). Oil prices rose from $3 a barrel to $35 in 1981, spurring a full-fledged economic boom that would transform the lives of Saudi citizens (Krane & Finley, 2023). Not only did the Kingdom enjoy the status of the guardian of Islam's most holy sites—giving it a special place in Arab culture and politics—but it was also now rich, making it an interest of Arab media and interested in producing Arab media.

With the help of its oil resources, Saudi Arabia followed a twin media strategy, creating decentralised, open, and contemporary transnational media networks overseas while running state-controlled and state-managed domestic media systems.

> *A centripetal media system at home which protects its social values, attenuates the influence of outside media, insulates the population from the flow of undesired information and images, and limits the perceived onslaught of Western culture goes a long way towards upholding the religious sensibility of the kingdom and enhancing its political stability (Zayani, 2012, p.309).*

Thus, although cinema entered the country late compared to neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia later had an active international media role through the establishment of television channels and the spread of the Saudi press through Arab hands working in London.

The first stations to broadcast in Saudi Arabia were AJL-TV (1955) and Aramco TV (1975); however, the audiences were limited to American armed forces and oil company employees, respectively. In 1965, Saudi national television broadcasting began with Saudi TV Channel 1, and a new chapter opened in the relationship of the Saudis to the film and media industries. A generation of Saudi artists emerged who made drama films under the name of TV Nights. Among the pioneers of that period was the late director Saad Al-Fraih, who directed a film entitled *Repentance of Conscience* in 1966, in addition to other dramatic works that made him one of the most important filmmakers in the Kingdom, even though his works were made for television. In parallel, cinematic activity continued to grow and developed to the point of establishing cinemas in the neighbourhoods of Jeddah and Taif, the most important of which were created by Fouad Jamjoom in the mid-sixties: Fatani Cinema and Al-Sahahiri Cinema (Almotairi,2018).

Director Abdullah Al-Muhaisin was the first Saudi to make cinematic films to be shown in film festivals. He studied cinema at the London Film Institute and British Royal Television Academy, obtaining a higher diploma in film directing in 1975. In the same year, he returned to the Kingdom to establish the "International Company," and from there, he set out to make successful documentaries such as *The Assassination of a City* اغتيال مدينة/ in 1977 (Almotairi, 2018).

4.3.4 Glimpses of Saudi Women's Dance on Screen

Film production in this era was almost entirely associated only with Saudi television. Saudi TV Channel 1, which broadcasted in black and white until 1974, was joined by Saudi TV Channel Two in 1982, which was an English-language channel. During this period, national television aired music shows recorded in studios, some of which contained traditional women's dances. These types of depiction were permitted at this time and faced no objection by the government or society. The National TV Channel 1

also aired music and dance content from the neighbouring Egyptian culture as well as content and films from other countries.

Broadcast television has played a crucial role in fostering national unity by providing a shared cultural experience that reinforces collective identity. Benedict Anderson (2006, p.25) argues that media helps construct "imagined communities," where individuals, despite never meeting, feel a sense of belonging to a national collective. Similarly, Dayan and Katz (1992, p. 5) describe televised "media events"—such as national celebrations, concerts, and sporting events—as rituals of social integration that unite diverse audiences around common narratives. Music and traditional performances further contribute to this sense of identity. Stokes (1994) highlights that music functions as a cultural marker, strengthening national and ethnic identity by embodying shared heritage. Urkevich (2015, p. 45) notes that Saudi Arabian television has historically broadcast traditional dances like Samri, a performance rooted in Najdi culture, to promote and preserve national heritage. Figure 23 depicts a screenshot of one of the most famous songs sung by Mohammed Abdu, a Saudi singer and one of the pioneers of Saudi music in the Gulf region. The video features the Samri dance, a tribal dance for people from Najd, a middle region of Saudi Arabia. This was produced in Kuwait in 1973 and then released on Saudi national TV, and it is likely that much of the nation shared the experience of watching this video at that time.

Figure 23: Women performing the Samri dance music video for Mohammed Abdu's song "Albaraqe," originally released in 1973 (Thikrayat Channel, 2020)

The artist Etab, Figure 24, was one of the most well-known singers for weddings and women's celebrations in Saudi culture in the 1970s. She achieved great fame and was the first Saudi woman to achieve fame for her stage performance and singing. Etab was not only a good singer but also a great performer, known for her light rhythmic movements, which she performed on stage. After the assassination of King Faisal in 1975, Saudi King Khalid Al Saudi assumed the throne, and many press sources stated that King Khalid did not like her dancing, so she left Saudi Arabia in 1980 to pursue her career in Egypt and escape Saudi censorship (Aljumai'ei, 2022). Etab's star shone brighter in Cairo, especially with the return of the fundamentalist Sahwa movement and their Wahhabist principles in the eighties in Saudi Arabia. She is an example of a Saudi woman who used to appear on Saudi television as a singer but who could not endure the pressure and expectations for women in the increasingly more conservative Kingdom, further emphasising women's absence and their dances from Saudi film.

Figure 24: Etab performing a dance in the music video for the song Men Fina Ya hal tra, originally released in 1989 (Shamrani, 2013)

4.4 The Banned Period 1980–2017

In 1979, Sahwa extremists took over the Grand Mosque. In response, the royal family cracked down not only on extremists but turned to repression of the press and women as a means to control the narrative it feared was slipping out of its control. Immediately after the storming of the Great Mosque of Mecca, a royal decree was issued from King Khalid bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud to the Minister of Information, approving the following: "Firstly, not to show any women's dance or the appearance of any singer on television. Secondly, no woman appears to present a news bulletin. Thirdly, no Saudi women appear on television. Finally, showing any pictures of women in Saudi newspapers and magazines is strictly forbidden" (Barhoma, 2017). The government under King Khalid and later his brother King Fahd imposed policies to help counter potential hostility and unrest, which meant working closely with the religious establishment to bring about reforms (Lawson, 2017). Under pressure from Islamists, cinemas were banned in the early 1980s as Saudi culture shifted to a more conservative version of Islam that forbade men and women from interacting in public and enjoying public entertainment (Paul, 2017).

Many homes smashed their cable boxes and burned their photographs out of fear during this time. Live music and movie theatres were prohibited under the country's laws and social customs, such as the wearing of the Abaya, were now made law. Increased gender segregation and movement restrictions on women were imposed, including the institution of the male-guardianship system, cessation of driving, and restrictions on travelling without a male guardian (Mirza, 2018).

Saudi women were banned from TV broadcasts for a short period and during Ramadan (Sakr, 2007). The government established the Higher Council of Media under the Ministry of Interior in 1982 (A1 Kheraigi, 1992). According to Al-Shebili (2002), the council was founded to provide information on Islamic law policies and to monitor media policy implementation. Another function of the council, which made it one of the censorship tools, was to monitor the content of radio, television, books, magazines,

newspapers, films, recorded materials, and any and all items relating to the government or the commercial sector, both inside and outside the country (Hebeeb, 1985, p. 53).

The Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, also referred to as the Islamic religious police, was also a part of the effort to promote Islamist ideology. Originally founded in 1940, their role was to monitor all public areas and observe people's behaviour and prevent undesirable behaviour by speaking with and counselling the accused if they saw inappropriate clothing or a scenario that did not adhere to Sharia law. People were frequently either beaten or put in jail. In addition, musical and entertainment events were replaced by Islamic advocacy meetings and campaigns, where musical instruments were often destroyed. While the kingdom progressed economically, it was socially regressing. Life became unpleasant for most Saudi citizens, especially women who were obliged to adhere to certain instructions, including covering their face (Janbi, 2018).

With censorship and control of national television content firmly in place, the arrival of direct satellite broadcasting presented a new challenge. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, leading to the Gulf War the following year, many Saudi citizens followed events on their newly acquired satellite dishes. Alarmed at its citizenry's access to unregulated and uncensored content on channels such as CNN, fatwas were issued outlawing possession of the dishes before formal orders were issued by the Interior Ministry in 1994 alongside fines of between 100,000 and 500,000 Riyals (£20,000 to £100,000) for those caught in possession (Associated Press, 1994). Much of the local media joined in the highlighting of satellite as a threat to Islamic values and some people's concern about acquiring foreign habits that would conflict with the country's dominant Arabic and Islamic culture. Despite these measures, enforcement proved challenging, and many citizens continued to use satellite dishes discreetly. By April 2000, the Saudi government lifted the ban, allowing direct-to-home satellite platforms to legally advertise, promote, and sell their services within the country (Forrester, 2000).

Ironically, in 1975, Saudi Arabia took the lead in founding the Arab Satellite Organization in Riyadh to promote the exchange of technical expertise and infrastructure. The first generation of the joint Arab venture, ARABSAT was

successfully launched in 1985 with financial support primarily provided by the Saudis, providing a pan-Arab infrastructure of satellite technology that had a significant impact on the growth of Arab media. Such communications technology would encourage the growth of satellite channels, draw media investors, alter consumer behaviour, and shift audience expectations over the following few years. This is particularly interesting as it demonstrates how, from an external perspective, Saudi Arabia appeared to be closing off its media landscape. In reality, however, the country was using satellite TV as a means to connect with the broader Arab world and beyond. This allowed Saudi Arabia to maintain a presence in regional media and continue shaping narratives and stories through proxies.

Despite the later crackdown on satellite dishes, private entertainment institutions owned by Saudi business executives were established, such as MBC Group and Rotana Media Group, ART, and Orbit. These channels produced and distributed more liberal international content, including women's dance and music, for Saudi and Arabic viewers. The state could ultimately not prevent these channels or monitor them because they were often located outside its geographical borders. For example, ART, a network of encrypted channels founded in 1993 by Saudi businessman Saleh Kamel, specialized in broadcasting music, films, variety shows, and children's programmes (Khiabany, 2016, p.276). The network's establishment aligns with a broader trend of Saudi businessmen acquiring pan-Arab media outlets since the 1970s, leading to significant control over various media platforms in the region.

Another important figure in the development of Arab satellite broadcasting is Al-Waleed bin Talal. Al-Waleed, a Saudi prince and one of the richest men in the world, is the owner of the Rotana network. In 2003, Rotana, based in Beirut, launched its network of television channels, which includes five free satellite channels: Rotana Music, Rotana Clip, Rotana Tarab, Rotana Songs, and Rotana Khaleejiah. Sakr (2013) explains how Al-Waleed had already purchased shares in significant U.S. media companies like Time Warner, News Corporation, and Disney in the 1990s before he raised his ownership stake in Rotana to 100% in 2003. Rotana Cinema was launched at the start of 2005 and distinguished itself from competitors not only by being free-to-air but also by showing recent movies. Al-Waheed is known for his support for the participation of Saudi women in society in addition to believing that there is no conflict

between a socially, economically, and intellectually advanced society and a religiously adherent one.

El Mkaouar (2016) discusses how Rotana produced the first Saudi feature films in partnership with other foreign production companies. These were Kaif Alhal (2005), Menahi (2009), and Wadjda (2012). The first film used the restriction of women and the limitations on art to show the irrationality of religious extremism. The second was a comedy centred on business and Bedouin life. The third, however, uses a light drama to directly address the situation of women in Saudi Arabia.

Haifaa Al Mansour, the first Saudi female director, exemplified the struggles faced by women filmmakers when she filmed Wadjda in 2012. She had to instruct the external scenes and the filming team by radio phone from inside a van wearing an abaya while filming in the conservative neighbourhoods of Riyadh (Roxborough, 2012). It was not easy to shoot this film, although it received the support of Saudi Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal and the German film production company (Razor Film). However, Wadjda was not released in Saudi Arabia because of the ban on movie theatres and the lack of suitable venues. Her film was released in US cinemas in 2013, and it was the first time the country submitted an entry to the Oscar Awards, although it was not nominated (Roxborough, 2012).

Mohammed Redda, a Lebanese critic active in Arab cinematic culture over the last forty years, argues that a film can still be described as Saudi even if it is produced beyond the Kingdom's borders. What defines a film in national and cultural terms is an interesting debate. Some critics have taken it as being the nationality of the director while others, including Redda, reject this and point to examples such as Mary Shelley, a film by Haifaa Al Mansour about the British author of the same name and filmed in Ireland and France. Although funding may have come from Saudi institutions, money is not what gives national identity to a film but various elements such as history, characters, customs, and beliefs (Redaa, 2021). Redaa's insight gives the agency and possibility to Saudi and all diasporic filmmakers to tell their cultural and national stories outside of the country borders that restrict them or to which they cannot return.

4.5 The Vision Phase 2018 – Present

In the same way that satellite broadcasting presented a challenge to Saudi authorities' control of the media in the 1990s, two new challenges appeared twenty years later. Increased air travel among Saudis had created a steady flow of film fans to other Gulf countries (principally Bahrain and Abu Dhabi) to view Hollywood releases. Secondly, the global rise of Netflix and other streaming services was arriving at Saudi doors and after a period of unofficial use, Netflix Saudi Arabia officially launched in January 2016 (Fakhruddin, 2016).

However, in recent years, the country has directed itself towards investing in human resources and the new generation's ambitions. In March 2018, as part of social and economic reforms undertaken by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the licensing of cinemas was finally approved. The move was part of bin Salman's Vision 2030, which is a programme focusing on liberalising the socially conservative kingdom. The first public cinema screening in decades took place in April 2018, with the film Black Panther being shown in a newly established cinema in Riyadh.

Vision 2030 aims for socio-economic development that meets the needs of the people in the country (Vision 2018-2030). Moreover, the vision aims to build resilient and a sustainable society through a prosperous and stable economy that offers unlimited opportunities for all and empowers the private sector through improved partnership opportunities. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has worked to advance the agenda of Vision 2030, and one of the most important objectives of the ambitious plan is to become a film production force in the Middle East to compete with other centres of production and artistic creativity in the Arab world. Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC), the second largest professional services network in the world, ranked Saudi Arabia as an attractive market for local and foreign investors. Aiming to establish partnerships with international entertainment companies, the Investment and Entertainment Development Company is working to develop the cinema sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with an investment budget of 10 billion Saudi riyals (PWC).

The initial showing of the Disney blockbuster was shown to an invitation-only audience of VIP guests including Saudi celebrities, government ministers and foreign diplomats

(Jovanovic, 2018). Broader audiences followed as doors opened for many commercial cinema companies to sign agreements such as AMC Entertainment, the Chinese-owned group that signed a deal with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. Meanwhile, Netflix responded to the local cultural sensitivities of its new Saudi audience by investing in local content and buying locally produced work. A notable example was *Whispers*, a psychological thriller produced by the Saudi Entertainment Phenomena Company (EP Saudi) and written and directed by Hana Alomair. In a marked change from the past, *Whispers* is dominated by female characters described as "contemporary" and "creative" (Wilson, 2020).

Much like the economic boom after the discovery of oil, cinema is booming rapidly in the Kingdom. Saudi cinema had gone from a total ban to being the 15th most important movie market globally in just a few years, even despite the COVID-19 pandemic interruption. 2023 saw no fewer than 443 cinematic releases across the kingdom's 69 cinemas, 628 screens and 65,000 seats (Screen Daily, 2024). Among the box office successes were both Hollywood movies like Mission Impossible and Oppenheimer and locally produced films like the action comedy Sattar.

Additionally, the government supports the effort to produce films through the creation of the Saudi Film Commission (SFC), which was established in February 2020 in Riyadh and affiliated with the Ministry of Culture. The authority works to develop the film sector and production environment in Saudi Arabia, in addition to motivating and empowering Saudi filmmakers, by marketing Saudi films, encouraging financing and investment, working on talent development, regulatory procedures, and representing the Kingdom in regional and international forums related to the field of films.

While a new era of access to cinema is well underway, the long-standing issues of censorship and control continue. In particular, the emergence of global streaming platforms, such as Netflix, and the wide popularity of social media platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter), in the Kingdom continue to challenge official Saudi narratives (Kraidy, 2021). A subtle shift in censorship activity has seen suppression of criticism of the Saudi government and royal family become the leading concern, with a somewhat lower priority given to religious censorship. In July 2024, Abdulaziz Almuzaini, a

popular children's animator and dual American-Saudi citizen whose work was streamed on Netflix was jailed for 13 years for "supporting extremist ideology" through his cartoons and social media posts (Nereim, 2024). The court's decision was influenced by tweets Almuzaini posted between 2010 and 2014, which prosecutors interpreted as attempts to destabilise society and spread harmful content. Almuzaini denied these charges, asserting that his posts were either sarcastic or aligned with current Saudi policies (Singh, 2024). Almuzaini's case highlights Saudi Arabia's evolving yet restrictive approach to media. While modernising its entertainment sector, the country enforces strict content regulations, posing challenges for creatives navigating this complex environment.

Although Vision 2030 has widened access to both watching and producing films in Saudi Arabia, the motivations behind this expansion are often linked to broader economic and cultural development goals. While the opportunities it provides can be seen as mutually beneficial for Saudi artists, filmmakers, and the Kingdom's economy, they also operate within certain boundaries regarding content and expression. At the same time, the field of filmmaking still requires careful navigation, as particular themes and representations may continue to be treated with greater sensitivity than others.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided a historical review of Saudi cinema divided into three distinct phases: the emergent phase between 1950 and 1979, when the nascent cinema was developing in a relatively permissive environment; the banned period from 1980 to 2017, when religious conservatism prevailed and Arab cinema existed only beyond the borders of Saudi Arabia; and the third and brief recent period since 2018, which has seen cinema and film return to the Kingdom, through theatres and streaming services, both major and rapidly growing industries in Saudi Arabia.

Through the oil boom, the Sahwa period, and even now, cinema and women's depictions in it have been determined both by the Islamic interpretations and their applications in the moment and the ongoing negotiations between the Kingdom's two patriarchal powers: religious scholars and the Kingdom's rulers. Additionally, the state of technology available in the Kingdom has perhaps played an even more instrumental

role in what images can be shown and produced, especially those that concern women and their cultural production, such as dance. Historically, changes to the media landscape are not only restricted to government regulations and religious edicts but also to technological developments such as terrestrial broadcast television, satellite broadcasting, the internet, social media, and online streaming services. New technologies present both challenges and opportunities to the Saudi government. In terms of infrastructure, this change has now been embraced by the government (Mubasher, 2019); however, a desire to censor certain types of content remains.

While Saudi officials and religious scholars restricted the country's cinema industry and movie theatre operators, this is not unique to Saudi Arabia. The medium of cinema and film as a whole has provoked reactions from authorities around the world. Movie censorship laws emerged in the United States from 1907 onwards, were often driven by moral and religious motives, and would remain controversial for much of the twentieth century (Couvares, 2006). Nevertheless, the challenges faced by those involved in cinema in Saudi Arabia, particularly those interested in cultural heritage, such as Saudi women's dance, have faced particularly challenging circumstances.

Chapter 5: Case Study Analyses

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a case study analysis of two rare documentary films featuring Saudi women's traditional dance, exploring thematic concerns and cultural contexts while examining the artistic contributions of the directors, narrators, and their applied techniques. *Rawabi Al Bahah* (1981) *روابي الباحة* showcases the traditional women's dance Al-la'ib in the Al Bahah region—which I also documented in my film. It was produced during the cinema ban in Saudi Arabia through Saudi National Television. I will provide insight into how films were made during that period and the limitations faced by government channels. *Folk Wedding in Jizan* (1996) *العرس الشعبي في جازان*, my other case study, depicts several traditional dances from the Jizan region and was produced by ART[24] satellite channels during the cinema ban.

A case study approach has been particularly effective in my research on Saudi women's traditional dance, enabling a nuanced exploration of cultural, social, and historical contexts embedded within the performances I document. This method allows for an in-depth analysis of individual dance forms, capturing the layered complexities in meaning, cultural significance, and stylistic nuances that could be overlooked in broader cultural reviews, aligning with Stokes' (2012) argument on the value of focused detailed analysis. By treating each dance form as a distinct case study, I can critically examine how regional traditions, gender dynamics, and historical narratives influence the ways these dances are performed, perceived, and preserved.

In particular, my project focuses on the Al-la'ib dance from the Al Bahah region, using it as a case study to explore how traditional dances serve as expressions of cultural

[24] The Arab Radio and Television Network (ART), established in 1993 and headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, is a leading Arabic-language satellite network that offers a wide range of content, including films, dramas, and cultural programmes. It caters to Arabic-speaking audiences globally through channels such as ART Movies and ART Hekayat, available via satellite providers like Dish Network (*ART Online*, 2025).

identity while also functioning as subtle forms of social commentary. Through this approach, I observed how women used poetry and dance not just as artistic expressions but also as vehicles for voicing social concerns and advocating for their rights within spaces that historically limited their public presence. This reflects Corner's (1994) assertion that cultural products—whether films or performances—are shaped by their historical, political, and social contexts and cannot be understood in isolation. Similarly, comparing the Jahli with traditional dances from the Al Bahah region introduced a comparative layer, highlighting both shared cultural values and regional differences.

By applying this case study framework, the case studies analysis moves beyond simple documentation to offer a deeper, contextualised understanding of Saudi women's traditional dance. It highlights how these performances are not only cultural practices but also living narratives that reflect the complex interplay between tradition, gender, and societal change—an approach that underscores the importance of cultural preservation while critically engaging with the evolving roles of women in Saudi society.

One of my fundamental challenges in the historical analysis of television productions was locating the material. When contacting Saudi National Television to obtain archival films on women's dancing, including the two TV films mentioned above, they reported that none of these documentaries could be found. All the clips they sent depicted young girls dancing in TV programmes, as young girls fall within the culturally permissible age for public depiction, avoiding the sensitivities associated with filming adult women. The only available archival clips depicted young girls dancing on television programs, reflecting cultural sensitivities that restrict the depiction of adult women in dance. Remarkably, both case study films were found on YouTube rather than in official archives, raising critical questions about how Saudi cultural heritage is stored and accessed. This situation underscores the gap and the importance of archiving documentaries produced by national television and satellite channels for the preservation of cultural heritage.

Archival practices are a fundamental part of cultural memory, shaping how societies preserve, access, and interpret their heritage. According to UNESCO (2005, p. 12),

audiovisual materials are critical components of national heritage, reflecting social, cultural, and historical narratives. Yet, the absence of systematic archiving in Saudi Arabia has resulted in the loss of numerous cultural records, including early television productions featuring traditional dance. According to Al-Hazza (2014), the storage conditions for Saudi Arabia's television archive have indeed been managed poorly in Saudi Arabia. To address this issue, a contract was signed in 2008, approximately 40 years after the establishment of television at that time, with a specialised French company to implement a comprehensive project for archiving radio and television materials (Sanad, 2014). Al-Shehri (2023) emphasises that preserving the Kingdom's auditory and visual memory is crucial for maintaining cultural and intellectual heritage, both locally and globally, and is essential for enhancing national identity. Examples of projects focused on archiving and cultural heritage at the local level include the "Saudi Film Archive" presented by the Film Commission, the archiving project by the Broadcasting and Television Authority, and the King Abdulaziz Foundation, which is concerned with the archive of historical films in the Kingdom.

The reliance on YouTube and similar digital platforms for accessing historical Saudi films highlights the evolving role of social media as an informal archive. Burgess and Green (2009, pp. 57-60) argue that YouTube functions as a form of participatory culture, enabling users to document, share, and engage with cultural heritage beyond traditional institutional frameworks. This decentralised model of archiving democratises access to cultural materials but also introduces significant challenges regarding content longevity, accuracy, and authenticity. Videos uploaded by individuals lack standardised metadata, archival preservation protocols, and quality verification, making them unreliable as long-term repositories (UNESCO, 2003).

Moreover, the reliability of these videos for documenting intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is further complicated by the lack of verification and quality control on platforms like YouTube. UNESCO's protocols for safeguarding ICH emphasise the importance of accuracy, authenticity, and community involvement in the documentation process. According to UNESCO (2003), documentation should be conducted in collaboration with the communities concerned, ensuring that their perspectives and interpretations are accurately represented. Videos on YouTube, however, are often uploaded without such rigorous standards, which can lead to misrepresentation or loss of context. The absence

of standardised metadata and archival standards means that important information about the videos, such as their origin, creators, and context, may not be preserved, potentially undermining their reliability as historical documents.

Media play a crucial role in shaping and determining cultural memory by selecting, emphasising, and disseminating particular narratives and images (Hoskins, 2011, p. 23). Ensuring that the documentary is accessible through more formal and regulated channels, such as digital archives, streaming services, or educational resources, would better fulfil its role in preserving cultural memory. Such platforms typically adhere to archival standards and protocols that ensure the longevity, reliability, and authenticity of the content, making traditional practices known and appreciated even as societal contexts evolve.

Despite the challenges, the creation and existence of these documentary films, even in fragmented forms, indicate some effort to document cultural practices and intent to preserve cultural heritage, reflecting an awareness of the importance of such efforts (Smith, 2006). The dual perspective on the disappearance of these films—either as a sign of inadequate documentation or as evidence of historical documentation efforts—highlights the complexity of cultural preservation. Effective archiving requires not only the creation of documentary materials but also their proper management, storage, and accessibility, underscoring the necessity for improved archival practices that can adapt to technological advancements and changing cultural contexts (Besser, 2001; Beagrie, 2003).

5.2 Case One: *Rawabi Al Bahah* (1981) *روابي الباحة*

Rawābī al-Bāḥah (1981 ,روابي الباحة) is one of the first few films to document the cultural heritage and traditions of Al Bahah. Produced in 1981 by the Ministry of Media with Saudi national television sponsorship, the film exemplifies the role of national television in shaping and preserving cultural identity. During the late 20th century, Saudi National TV served as a primary medium for educating the public about the nation's heritage, values, and rapid development. Documentaries were particularly effective in this regard, offering visual and narrative accounts of the country's

transformation (Saudi Broadcasting Authority. n.d.). While nowadays, Saudi Broadcasting Authority (SBA) is a broader term that represents the entire state-owned media organisation, which was established later as an umbrella organisation overseeing multiple channels, including newer ones launched to modernise and expand content offerings (SBA, 2024).

The film was directed by the late Yahya Tewfik, an Egyptian director who worked for Saudi national television from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s. Tewfik blended cultural documentation with state-led narratives of progress, working for both government agencies such as Saudi national TV and private entities like Ara Art Production Company. He directed TV programmes such as *Rabou' Bilādī* (ربوع بلادي), which can be translated as *"the lands of my country",* and TV dramas like*Qanādīl Ramaḍān* (قناديل رمضان), meaning "Ramadan Lanterns." . Additionally, Tewfik directed ten documentary films about Saudi Arabia on various subjects about Saudi city's culture and developments for national TV, of which most of the films archived at the King Fahad Library, but *Rawabi Al Bahah* as a long film was not found in the archive, only the TV version.

Before analysing the film, it is important to discuss key elements of Tawfik's contribution to Saudi national TV, which perhaps inspired him to eventually direct the *Rawabi Al Bahah. Rabou' Bilady* was produced in 1981 and aired during the holy month of Ramadan on Saudi National TV Channel One. The show lasted more than four years, during which he directed over fifty episodes covering various Saudi cities and provinces. The programme's primary target audience was families and children. The series' credits feature a family embarking on a journey to different cities. As they explore these locations, the show highlights each city's geographical elements, natural resources, and cultural aspects without any direct interaction with people from the cities. Instead, they were filmed while performing staged activities, such as cooking, farming, teaching, and other tasks. The main character is the driver and father of the family, as shown in Figure 25. He takes them from place to place, with narration providing information about the cities. However, most of these episodes feature significantly fewer women compared to men. The episodes typically show men working in primary jobs, fields, or oil companies, while only young girls appear briefly during the show credits, along with music and performance sequences. The absence of women results

from the prevailing conservative social norms that were discussed in the previous chapters.

Figure 25: Screenshots from *Rabou' Bilady* 1979-1983 (Thikrayat TV, 2021)

Tawfik's directing style, such as staging people while working, adding music clips and showing cultural heritage dancing of some cities in the *Rabou' Bilady* series, carries through to the *Rawabi Al Bahah* documentary film. The episode covering the Al Bahah region contains common features with the film to come, especially in the way the episode introduces the city's geographical features and mentions the tribal names of the region. This episode was narrated by Dr Hussain Najjar, a pioneering Saudi journalist and broadcaster.

Rawabi Al Bahah was produced by Mohamed Al-Madhaifi Al-Zahrani. In his early career, he worked as an officer in the National Guard with the rank of Captain, but his career did not last long, as he left his job for his art. He is a poet, musician, composer, director, and producer, and he is well known for being the first to present the first military recruitment anthem to the National Guard in 1978. He also published many Saudi songs, which became famous at the time, including *Yā Bint Ḥassān* (يابنت حسان), translated as *Daughter of Hassan*, and *Rummān Bīdah* (رمان بيده). He was also the first to present an operetta to the Ministry of Information on television in 1979 and the first to sing for Saudi children in the operetta *Spelling Letters* with the direct sponsorship of television. Highlighting the role of such figures situates the episode within a broader narrative of cultural preservation, artistic collaboration, and the evolution of Saudi media. These pioneers not only paved the way for contemporary documentation of Saudi heritage but also contributed to a larger dialogue about national identity and

cultural storytelling in the Kingdom. By emphasising their contributions, you frame the episode as part of a collective effort to celebrate and protect intangible cultural heritage through media innovation.

Al-Madhaifi's producing career started with his first television drama, *Ẓilāl wa Rimāl* (ظِلال ورمال). Madhaifi was inspired to create *Rawabi Al Bahah* not only to document the life and development of this Saudi Arabian city but also to reflect Al Madhaifi's life growing up in the Al Bahah region and explore the relationship and changes with his hometown as the country economically developed in the 1980s. A clip from the film that reflects this exploration of tradition in the context of change is where Al-Madhaifi performs a folk song, dances and plays an instrument; he sings with several young girls wearing traditional costumes and performs a traditional dance.

Although Al-Madhaifi was commissioned by Saudi TV to make the film, it is not readily available in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned earlier, I could only find a bootleg copy on YouTube, uploaded by Badran Saeed in 2016. Saeed's YouTube channel has over 12,000 subscribers. The majority of the videos on this channel show archival footage from Saudi National TV, traditional songs, archival films, and drama. As of July 30, 2024, *Rawabi Al Bahah* has attracted 44,000 views and 119 comments since its publication on this channel. However, some excerpts from the film that are also uploaded by other users, including Al-laib's, have reached 378,000 viewers. The mentioned song clips *Rummān Bīdah* (رمان بيده), sequence 13:06-17:38, has hit one million views and gained more than 500 comments in total. The exact release date of the film is unconfirmed, but based on the information given in the film, such as the construction of the tourism road between Taif and Al Bahah, the establishment of King Fahad Hospital, car models, alongside the fashion and hairstyles of the men suggest the film was made in the early eighties, perhaps 1981. A YouTube commenter has also identified this as the release year.

Previously named The Land Ghamed and Zahran, it was renamed to the Al Bahah region in 1983. Al Bahah was established as an administrative region during the reign of King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in 1964. The film's central focus is on the tribes that live in Al Bahah city, including the Azd Shenoua tribe. The film sheds light on the community's culture and traditions, economic activities, geography, and agricultural

facets ranging from its rich landscapes, the community's religion, customs practised, rituals, and celebrations of marriage and folklore.

The documentary begins with the narrator introducing us to the Al Bahah region and its location between the Al-Sawarat Heights and the Tihamah Plain. The narrator explains that the Al-Sawarat Heights are characterised by "steep mountains, inaccessible roads, difficult paths, high mountains, and wide agriculture land where most villages are located." In contrast, Tihamah is described as wealthy and urban. Najjar, the off-screen narrator, speaks in a poetic and informative way, a style of narration that portrays an omniscient, impartial, deep-voiced male narrator. This voiceover technique has been widely used in documentary filmmaking, particularly in expository documentaries, where it serves to establish authority and credibility. Although this film is informative and has an expository style, his example underscores a vital yet often overlooked aspect of documentary filmmaking: the complexity and multiplicity of motives behind such efforts. While documentaries are frequently viewed as vehicles for truth or cultural preservation, they can also carry layered agendas—political, economic, or social—that shape their content and narrative style. The case of the Al Bahah documentary demonstrates how poetic narration, and expository framing can simultaneously educate and persuade, blending artistic expression with a subtle propaganda function.

In acknowledging this complexity, it becomes evident that not all documentation efforts are unequivocally “good” or purely objective. Instead, they often reflect the priorities and constraints of their time, including governmental influence, societal norms, and the filmmakers’ intentions.it can be seen as also having a political agenda as it could be used as propaganda to show government-led economic developments and encourage regional tourism. This complexity reminds us that not all documentary efforts are purely “good” or entirely objective. They often reflect the priorities, constraints, and intentions of their time, shaped by government influence, societal expectations, or the filmmaker's perspective.

The narrator continues setting the stage for the city, introducing its resources such as agriculture and energy, and its trade centres and manufacturing locales. The city is renowned for the manufacturing of jewellery, guns, and straw baskets. The voiceover

emphasises the city's harvesting customs and educational and religious facilities like schools and mosques. The film depicts and contrasts the same locations before and after the economic development using distinct images. An example of this is the depiction of the local school. In one shot, Figure 26, children are shown studying on the floor without any study materials, conveying the rural poverty of local society before the developments. In the next shot, the film depicts an industry and a developed school. This juxtaposition emphasises the division between the urban and rural areas of Al Bahah. Although the film does not directly show architectural developments, it does show the historical progress in education and health institutions with film sequences moving from old traditional highland buildings made with stone and rock to modern concrete buildings such as in Figure 27.

Figure 26: Students studying on the floor (Rawabi Al Bahah, 1981)

Figure 27: Traditional highland buildings contrasted with modern concrete (Rawabi Al Bahah, 1981)

The film moves on from focusing on the city's nature and economy to an exploration of social customs associated with the region, including marriage ceremonies, celebrations and folk dancing and singing. In the beginning, the film explores the reasons for early marriage and states that it was to traditionally increase the number of offspring and thus family members to sustain the agricultural workforce. Traditionally parents arrange the marriages and select someone close to the family, even cousins[25].

[25] Consanguineous marriages, particularly cousin marriages, are prevalent in Islamic and Middle Eastern societies, with rates exceeding 50% in some regions (Akyol & Mocan, 2020).

The narrative is punctuated by scenes of traditional weddings as a depiction of old traditional weddings, the sequence at 32:00-37:00 shows several people walking in a procession heading to the bride's home. In the past, they used camels as transportation to move the bride's belongings and take her to the groom's house. In Figure 28 a young girl wear traditional clothes with yellow headbands decorated with herbal green leaves. When the men and women arrive at the house where the wedding is held, they line up outside to greet the bride's family. They sing poetry and play the tambourine as an expression of joy.

We see in Figure 28-29 a depiction of what in Saudi they call *Zaffa,* which means the bride's entrance to the reception area. We observe a young girl playing the role of a bride and hear male voices in the background giving her instructions to follow. The young girl steps up onto a camel in front of an audience of men and women, and they then take her inside and she disappears from the frame. This scene depicts a traditional or symbolic representation of this young girl's transition or role within a patriarchal cultural framework, where male guardianship and obedience are prominent. The imagery of the girl stepping onto the camel in a public setting, guided by male voices, underscores the authority of male figures in her life and the societal expectations placed upon her.

Figure 28 : A young girl wears a yellow headband and drumming the duff (Rawabi Al Bahah, 1981)

Figure 29: The Zaffa, welcoming the bride(Rawabi Al Bahah, 1981)

Men go on to perform the *Al-Mashḥabānī* [26] المسحباني dance. They move their legs freely but slowly, and the dancers line up in two rows straight lines facing each other while their hands are on their chest. They shake their body with graceful, coordinated movements, sometimes accompanied by sung poetry. The men are shown to stand at the bottom of the house, and the girls at the top. As mentioned earlier, segregation was imposed in Saudi cultural production and reception during that era. Tewfik shows that indirectly with the use of a wide-angle shot that clearly segregates the genders. After showing the historical version of the marriage ceremony, the film cuts to a contemporary marriage, comprising clips of a bridal procession using cars instead of camels and depicting young girls wearing modern, western-style white dresses.

majority of the dancing scenes are staged, a technique that Tewfik used to navigate the complexities of filming adult women in Saudi culture by replacing the adult female dancers that they usually perform with young girls. This helped him avoid the religious and social complexities of filming live at a wedding. Young girls in Saudi culture are

[26] ***Al-Mashḥabānī*** is kind of Al-Ardah, characterized by the simplicity and slow fluidity of movements. The legs move gently while the hands are aligned with the chest, accompanied by a graceful swaying of the body. At times, it is paired with poetic duelling, which includes pauses and a drumbeat distinct from that of the Al-Ardah. Typically, the rows are long, straight, and aligned facing each other (Okaz,2012).

considered minors, and thus Islamic regulation is not applied to them until they grow up, including regulations such as wearing the Hijab or dancing.[27] The director used the young girls as a substitute for women because he could not employ real actresses to participate due to Saudi cultural and TV censorship. Even if he had the chance to film real Saudi women, he might have faced some ethical issues, including putting himself in danger with male relatives of the 'exposed' women. Even I, four decades after the making of this film, faced resistance to filming traditional women's dances performed by local, adult women, which I reflect on in the next chapter.

Despite this film offering a window into marriage rituals, including bridal processions and dancing shows in Figure 30, the film does not go into detail about the main features of the dances shown, for example, why they are performed, how many women usually take part, and whether there is a leader or a main singer that the dancers follow.

[27] The use of children in cinema as substitutes for adults due to cultural and religious constraints is notable in various film industries, including Iranian and Turkish cinema. Renowned Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami often used children to navigate strict regulations, as seen in *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987), allowing him to explore social themes without confronting restrictions on adult interactions (Naficy, 2001, p. 98). *The White Balloon* (1995) directed by Jafar Panahi, and *Children of Heaven* (1997) directed by Majid Majidi, also employ young characters to navigate adult themes and societal critiques that might be more controversial if portrayed by adult actors (Naficy, 2002, p. 214).

Similarly, in Turkish cinema, directors often use children to address sensitive topics. In *Mustang* (2015), directed by Deniz Gamze Ergüven, young girls are used to highlight issues of gender and societal expectations. The film portrays the lives of five sisters navigating the restrictive societal norms in rural Turkey. This technique allows the filmmakers to broach delicate subjects while maintaining a level of acceptability within the cultural context (Suner, 2010, pp. 96-98).

Figure 30: A screenshot of a girl's performance Al-la'ib (Rawabi Al Bahah, 1981)

While the film is an important example, it does not provide a comprehensive record of this specific cultural dance. This may be the only film that records Al-la'ib in Al Bahah, but it only focuses on the dance for a short time, featuring the dance for a matter of seconds in just one sequence. Additionally, the dances performed by children are peculiarly filmed and edited and seem to lack important musical and ritualistic aspects; for example, the duff is played incorrectly, and the background digital music is not synchronised with the actual performance on the screen. The young girls also appear to lack enthusiasm, and it is difficult to say whether this is due to a lack of enjoyment or if this is a feature of the dance. We do not even know if the girls are locals of Al Bahah.

While the document's value in providing an accurate depiction of tribal customs may be questioned—particularly regarding the authenticity of the dances' choreography and the representation of the women who perform them—it is important to recognise its significance within the broader cultural and historical context. Produced during the Sahwa movement and under Saudi Arabia's strict regulatory environment, Tewfik's work reflects a deliberate effort to showcase regional dances to a Saudi audience. Though this may have come at the expense of complete authenticity, the inclusion of women-only dance scenes marks a groundbreaking achievement. These were among the earliest visual documentations of traditional rituals filmed by Saudi National TV.

Rather than abandoning the idea entirely due to societal restrictions, Al-Madhaifi employed creative strategies, such as substituting girls for women dancers, to ensure the segment's inclusion. This hour-long programme remains one of the few dedicated to the region, deliberately navigating cultural and regulatory challenges by selectively including young girls while avoiding the filming of adult women. This approach makes it a noteworthy example of balancing heritage preservation with cultural sensitivities.

No translated version of the film can be found so we can assume that the film was only released on Saudi TV or maximum through other channels for other Arabi-speaking countries. As Saudi Arabia is comprised of many different tribes, each with their own culture and tradition, many members of the Saudi audience would have been unaware of these dancing customs. These dances are only found in Al-Bahah; even their traditional clothes, jewellery, and musical rhythm, Al-la'ib, *Al-Mashḥabānī* (المسحباني), and *Al-Ṭarq al-Jabalī* (الطرق الجبلي) belong to them only. The representation of these dances can be said to show the authentic identity of the Ghamed and Zahran tribes, even if the dances themselves are edited and interpreted for the sake of filming.

Michael Renov, a leading scholar in documentary theory, introduced the concept of the "four fundamental tendencies" of documentary in his seminal work Theorizing Documentary (1993). This framework offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the diverse motivations that shape documentary films, moving beyond simplistic categorizations and recognizing the complexity of the genre. These tendencies include recording, revealing, or preserving; persuading or promoting; analysing or interrogating; and expressing (Lloga Sanz, 2020. Pp. 75–102) Applying Renov's framework to specific examples like *Rawabi Al Bahah* illustrates these tendencies in practice. Tewfik is clearly trying to record, reveal, and preserve the cultural heritage of the people of Al Bahah, but it is highly compromised by both a lack of attention to detail and a highly restrictive production environment, particularly regarding the portrayal of women and their participation in the filming. Tewfik also aims to persuade and promote. Specifically, the film serves as a propaganda tool, showcasing the economic and social developments in Al Bahah, reflecting the broader state-led narratives of progress and modernisation. The films were shot after the oil revenue boom period between 1969 and 1980, when the oil revenues increased, leading to a strong economic boom. By highlighting the advancements in infrastructure,

education, and healthcare, the documentary promotes a positive image of the government's efforts to modernise the region.

Through its portrayal of social customs and economic activities, *Rawabi Al Bahah* expresses the changes brought about by modernisation, raising questions—even if superficially—about the impact of modernisation on cultural traditions, particularly the preservation of intangible heritage like traditional dances and music. The inclusion of scenes depicting both historical and contemporary marriage ceremonies, for example, offers a critical lens on how these customs have adapted or persisted amidst change. However, we do not hear the voices of direct witnesses to the quite dramatic changes and economic developments that the oil boom brought about.

After a careful analysis of *Rawabi Al Bahah*, the question to answer is whether this film documents the intangible heritage of women's dance. Instead of answering directly, as what constitutes documentation differs between individuals and institutions, we can say that the portrayal of women's dance in this film speaks to the broader issues of women's representation in Saudi Arabian films. Due to cultural pressures and regulations on women, Saudi film continues to blur the lines between fictional and non-fictional representation to preserve social norms. This raises an intriguing question that will be explored in the next chapter: can fiction capture elements that non-fiction cannot? Perhaps Tewfik and Al-Madhaifi recognized that creating a fictional representation of Al-Bahah was necessary to convey its essence effectively.5.3 Case Two: Folk Wedding in Jizan (1996).

The history of television and cinema in Saudi Arabia is marked by significant cultural and political influences that have shaped the country's media landscape. The advent of satellite television in the late 20th century further transformed the media landscape in Saudi Arabia. Satellite channels like the Arab Radio and Television Network (ART) and later Al Jazeera provided alternative sources of information and entertainment, often featuring content that was more liberal than what was available on state-run channels (Kraidy, 2002, p. 178). This increased access to diverse content and challenged the cultural and informational monopoly previously held by the state, influencing Saudi cultural practices, especially among younger generations.

5.3 Case Two: *Folk Wedding in Jizan* (1996) العرس الشعبي في جازان

I have chosen the film *Folk Wedding in Jizan* (1996) because it is a film that was produced during the ban on cinemas in Saudi Arabia yet after the introduction of satellite television. This film is one of the rare examples that documents Saudi women's dances. My aim is to examine all the limitations that the film had at the time and compare it with my own film production, the Saudi women's representation techniques that I used, and the situation of filming now in Saudi Arabia in the Vision 2030 phase.

The Arab Radio and Television Broadcast (ART) produced six episodes of the *Heritage Treasures* (كنوز التراث) series in 1996, which included *Popular Weddings in the Kingdom*—a series of documentaries for ART station's Arabic viewers. This series included episodes about wedding customs in Jizan, Najd, and the Western provinces. It covered traditional women's bridal customs and clothing, traditional jewellery, and men's performance arts.

Imad Alyafi, a Syrian director, directed all six episodes of the series and studied drama at the Arab States Broadcasting Union. Hind Baghaffar, the series' writer and narrator, is one of the most prominent figures in the field of Saudi folk heritage. Born in Jeddah in 1955, she earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. She also obtained a master's degree in Anthropology from Cairo University, with a thesis titled "Stability and Change in Marriage Customs in the Western Region." In 2005, she received a PhD in History and Philosophy from the International Academy of Sciences affiliated with the United Nations in Dubai (Alithnainya, 2015). Baghaffar has played a crucial role in documenting folk heritage, offering a valuable resource for researchers and enthusiasts of Saudi traditions. She has authored several notable works on Saudi heritage and wrote and narrated scripts for cultural episodes, using her extensive collection of traditional customs and jewellery for filming. This personal touch added authenticity and depth to her portrayals, reinforcing her impact on preserving and celebrating Saudi heritage.

It is important to acknowledge that the film copy being analysed is not an official version, but rather a re-edited copy found on YouTube. This episode was showcased on YouTube after its ownership was transferred to Baghaffar through the Professional Event Industry Association, a professional non-profit organization involved in

organizing all types of events and licensed by the Ministry of Human Resources. The absence of credits and the ART logo suggests that this version has been cropped or edited by non-archivists, reflecting the Professional Event Industry Association's attempt to share the material rather than a formal archival effort. The lack of such details in this copy does not reflect the film's original content or its official dissemination. This copy is being used in my research solely because no other accessible version is available.

The episode was first uploaded on 4th January 2024, and as of July 2024, it had garnered 136,000 views and over 180 comments. The episode begins with the Professional Event Industry Association's logo, followed by a person addressing the viewers, explaining that the episode is presented by the association.

Jan Assmann's differentiates between communicative memory, supported by daily life and enduring about three generations, and cultural memory, which is longer-lastingand preserved through artefacts and rituals (Assmann, 2011, p. 8). The documentary captures elements of cultural memory through oral traditions, songs, and dances, that keep them alive. Being a cultural artefact, the film encodes Jizan's wedding practices, contributing to Saudi Arabia's cultural memory (Assmann, 1995, p. 129). Additionally, it makes these traditions accessible to younger generations, maintaining community identity (Erll, 2011, p. 17). The documentary's potential to serve as a cultural memory artefact significantly depends on its accessibility to audiences beyond its initial broadcast. Even though the film can now be viewed on YouTube, this raises concerns about its reliability as an archival tool, as discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Given its limited accessibility and the challenges in obtaining a complete version, the documentary's potential as a cultural preservation tool is significantly constrained. While it holds historical and cultural value, its effectiveness in preserving and transmitting heritage is undermined by the difficulty in accessing a full copy If a complete version were more readily available through either institutional archives or internet sites, it would be an even more effective tool in securing collective memory and cultural identity in Saudi Arabia and Jizan.

The film features several main characters who are described but not named. It begins with the singing of a traditional dance called *Al-Ṭabāʿa* (الطبعة). Baghaffar acknowledges that this gathering of women for the wedding takes place indoors and closed venues. It is evident that the filming is done indoors, likely in a studio, due to the confined space and the framing of the shots. The overhead shot reveals the lighting setup inside what appears to be a studio, suggesting that the filming might have taken place outside Saudi Arabia, most likely in Egypt. For the majority of the film, there is a recurring shot of the same scene, indicating that a camera is suspended on a crane due to its height above the ground and the full view of the ensemble, as shown in Figure 31.

Figure 31: Overhead Crane Shot of the Ensemble)Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

Baghaffar explains the *Al-Ṣaff* (الصفّ) dance, noting that it is a group dance where two rows of women face each other, raising their right hands while holding the edge of their scarves, while two women dance in the middle. Although Baghaffar claims that these traditions are performed indoors in single-gender settings, the presence of the camera, men on the film crew, and the public broadcasting of the film on television, where it would be seen by the general public, necessitates that the women cover their hair.

The film is mostly composed of static wide to medium-angle shots with occasional close-ups. The camera moves from top to bottom in a medium shot when the women are dancing energetically in rhythm at 20:55-24:22. Here, they are shown holding a dagger while dancing (Figure 32), which could symbolise the strength of women.

Figure 32: Overhead Crane Shot of the Ensemble)Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

Most close-up shots focus on the bride, either showing her sadness while preparing for the wedding at 8:25, as shown in Figure 33, where the hairdresser decorates the bride's hair and showcases the beauty of the tools used. The soundtrack and the dark colours represent the bride’s sadness as she leaves the family house.

Figure 33: The bride looking sorrowful) Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

However, it also shows her joy after the wedding procession when she laughs while watching the women dance, as shown in Figure 34. The bride is shown fully adorned, sitting shyly in the centre of the gathering without dancing, reflecting the tradition that brides should be modest and not dance at their own wedding. The bride's mother, who accompanies her most of the time, interacts with and hosts the guests. The folk band, wearing abayas, sings and plays drums and tambourines. The drummer is usually seated, while the rest may stand. The poet, who sings praises for the bride and her family, plays a metallic dish with her hands. At the end of the celebration, guests collaborate with the bride's family to reward the folk band for their performance by discreetly giving them money.

Figure 34: Bride's joy after the reception) Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

The bride's young age compared to the others is apparent, suggesting she is probably between 13-15 years old at most. Traditionally, it was common for women in Saudi Arabia to marry between the ages of 15-19, but the situation has since changed, and now the minimum age for marriage is set at 18. However, it is unlikely that a girl was cast as the bride to portray a child marriage. Similar to the use of children in *Rawabi Al Bahah*, a girl was probably cast as the bride so that she could appear in the same scenes as the male actor playing her husband and be touched by him in accordance with Saudi Arabia's strict gender segregation at the time for adult men and women and Islamic Sharia law that forbids men to touch women whom they are not closely related to or married.[28]

Most scenes feature only women, emphasising the gender separation in Saudi celebrations. Men appear only in two scenes: the first when the groom and the bride's father greet the bride in front of the guests, and the second at minute 10:18, when the

[28] This is based on various hadiths, including one where the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "It is better for one of you to be struck on the head with an iron needle than to touch a woman whom it is unlawful to touch" (Al-Muwatta, Book 50, Hadith 3).

groom uncovers the bride’s face, places his hand on her head, and recites the Al-Fatiha from the Quran before leaving for the men's celebration, shown in Figure 35. In this scene, Baghaffar emphasises that the bride's face remains covered so that her beauty is revealed only to her husband.

Figure 35: The bride is covered as the groom enters the wedding ceremony

However, in real life the groom does not enter and place his hand on the bride's head and recite Al-Fatiha except during the private moment between the groom and his bride, away from the eyes of others. However, the guests remain in their places in the film and can be seen attempting to cover part of their faces since the groom is not their relative (Figure 36). Meanwhile, the groom's mother and the bride's mother remain standing beside the bride and the groom.

Figure 36: Guest cover their faces when the groom and the bride's father enter the place)Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

In a later scene, the camera follows the bride as she goes to her marital home (Figure 37) At 25:55- 29:55, the groom welcomes his bride outside the house, and the bride refuses to enter until a mat is laid out for her. This is a traditional custom symbolising the groom's humility and respect for the bride as she enters her new home with her female relatives for the first time, as shown in Figure 36. At this moment, the women dance lightly and reveal a significant part of their arms, which is unusual because women in this region are very conservative and do not appear in front of men without an abaya or a face covering such as a niqab. Therefore, I suspect that the women might not be of Saudi origin and could possibly be Ethiopian, Yemeni, or Sudanese. as many live in Jizan and know the culture well.

Figure 37: The groom welcomes his bride outside the house)Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

While the lighting was usually colour-graded to highlight the vibrant hues of the traditional customs, external shots appeared gloomy, because they were likely recorded at sunset, resulting in muted colours. A few external, handheld shots at minute 11:11-11:53, show the groom's family heading to the bride's house with gifts in Figure 37, accompanied by a poet singing praises with a folk band. These shots also show women covering their faces and wearing the Abaya and Niqab, reflecting the strict Sharia law and gender segregation (Figure 38).

Figure 38: External shot, handheld shot shows part of the wedding preparation

The director uses close-up shots such as that in Figure 38, particularly of the poet's hands or the folk band while drumming, highlighting the drummer’s rings, as seen at minute 4:53. Close-ups also focus on women clapping to show their interaction with the dancing audience and the band.

The film is edited sequentially, narrating the stages of the celebration with its preparation for the bride from hair to customs, then reception and women's dances. The majority of scenes are connected through straight cuts. However, in certain moments, the editor uses alternative techniques, such as longer takes or transitional effects, to emphasize specific details or highlight cultural elements. These deliberate choices in editing guide the viewer through the celebration while drawing attention to key moments within the event. For instance, at 3:36 the scene shows a woman grinding spices, the transition is made with a rolling paper effect, wrapping the scene around the grinding tool shown in Figure 39. Many of the tools and props used in the film belong to Baghaffar herself shown in Figure 40.

Figure 39: Close-up shots of the women’s drumming)Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

Figure 40: Transition between shots using the rolling paper effect)Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

Transparency effects are also used to transition between shots, giving a romantic appearance, such as when women examine the bride's belongings and then transition to dancing and singing. Also, the only instance of using text is to explain an old folk myth at minute 8:40 in which a woman breaks an egg into a pan with a sword placed in front of her, believing this will protect her from the evil eye in Figure 41.

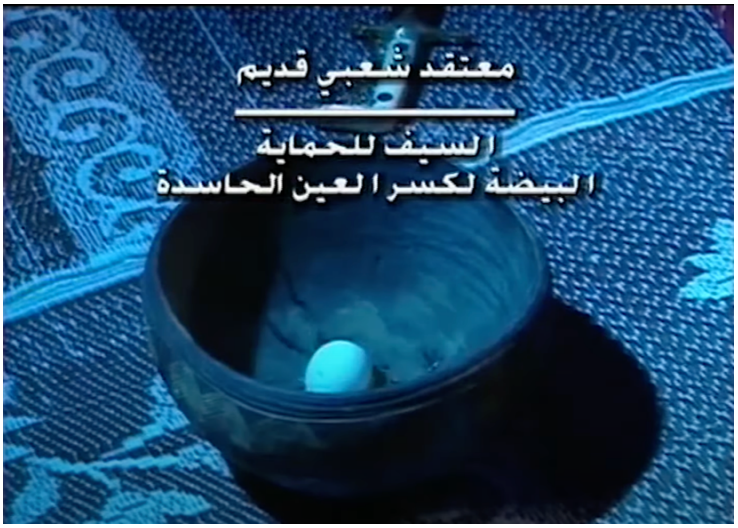

Figure 41: Text explains the old folk myth) Folk Wedding in Jizan, 1996)

In my opinion, this film effectively documents a specific historical period before the turn of the millennium, capturing the heritage of women in the Kingdom in a way few other films have managed. Baghaffar undertook a formidable challenge in producing this film during a time when cinema was banned in Saudi Arabia, and women's roles were severely restricted. While the documentary provides a rich and detailed depiction of traditional wedding customs in Jizan, it falls short in several areas that could have significantly enhanced its impact and depth.

The sound design suffers from a lack of synchronisation between the visuals and the audio, reducing the immersive experience. Most sounds seem to have been recorded in a studio, including the narration and singing. However, the women's songs are not very clear, with only some words being audible. Subtitles could have been used to further the educational aspect of the video, as the songs in the film are highly specific to the region and not widely known across Saudi Arabia. Only a few scenes feature background music, such as when the bride prepares for her wedding, accompanied by sad music to symbolize her departure from her family. Improving the integration of sound and visuals and ensuring that the music and ambient sounds are recorded live during the scenes, would have created a more cohesive and immersive viewing experience.

Baghfar's narration only mentions characters by their roles, such as "the bride" or "the musical ensemble." This approach focuses on cultural practices rather than individual stories, maintaining a formal distance. Baghffar's narration is characterised by a steady, calm, and serious tone. Her non-diegetic, third-person narration provided informative and descriptive insight into the traditions and dances. While this ensures clarity and a formal presentation, it lacks the emotional variability that could enhance the storytelling by reflecting the joy, excitement, or solemnity of the scenes depicted. For example, when describing the bride's preparations and the various wedding rituals, the narration emphasises actions and traditions without delving into the personal emotions and motivations of the participants. A typical description might be, "The bride is prepared for her wedding, with family members assisting in various traditional rituals," which tells the viewer what is happening but not how the bride feels about these preparations. Similarly, the narration might state, "The musical ensemble plays traditional

instruments, setting the tone for the celebrations," which informs the audience about the ensemble's role but not their individual experiences or emotions.

The documentary focuses heavily on women's roles and customs, which is essential in highlighting gender-specific traditions. However, the narration could have delved more deeply into the impact of gender segregation on society and livelihoods in Jizan, which historically confined women's dances to private settings. For a documentary about Saudi women's dance in Jizan to be truly effective, it must be placed within the historical and cultural context to provide a comprehensive understanding of the societal norms, values, and issues of its time.

Despite my critiques, Baghaffar challenged customs, traditions, and norms, creating a significant work that provides valuable insights into the practice of these customs and traditions, portraying women in a manner that mostly aligns with the conservative expectations of Saudi women while also subverting them in certain scenes, such as when the women dance outside the groom's home with their faces visible. The making of the film itself can even be considered a subversion of the roles and expectations of women in Saudi society. Although the film is directed by Alyafi, a male outsider of Syrian origin, Baghaffar, as a local woman, likely played a crucial role in guiding his understanding of the dances, customs, and traditions, but this guidance might not fully bridge the cultural gap of an outsider's directorial perspective and approach

Having said this, it is possible that an outsider can bring an even more accurate, objective perspective. This idea is supported by several academic discussions. For instance, the concept of "the outsider's perspective" in ethnographic research is often considered beneficial because it allows for a more detached, less biased view of the subject matter (Smith, 1999). Outsiders can sometimes see things that insiders take for granted and can ask questions that might not occur to someone within the culture (Smith, 1999). This perspective is echoed by anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, who argues that an outsider's analysis can provide a valuable "thick description"—a method that captures the complexities of cultural practices by interpreting them within their broader social and symbolic contexts (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). Thick description goes beyond mere observation, offering a detailed and contextualised interpretation of human behaviour to uncover the deeper meanings behind actions, rituals, and traditions. Geertz builds on philosopher Gilbert Ryle's distinction between thin description—a

straightforward account of action—and thick description, which considers the cultural significance embedded within it. For instance, while a thin description might simply note that a person winked, a thick description would interpret the wink's meaning—whether it signifies humour, flirtation, or a coded message understood within a particular cultural setting. Through this approach, an outsider's perspective can provide deeper insights into cultural practices, shedding light on meanings that might be overlooked by insiders.

In the context of film, directors like Jean Rouch have demonstrated that outsider filmmakers can produce compelling ethnographic films that provide fresh insights into the cultures they depict. Rouch's work with the people of Niger, for example, is celebrated for its ability to present an authentic view of their traditions and everyday life while maintaining a critical distance (Henley, 2009, pp. 43-45).

In the case of the *Folk Wedding in Jizan*, Alyafi's outsider status as a director could potentially offer a more nuanced, objective perspective on the customs and traditions of Jizan. While there may be a lack of intimate cultural knowledge, this distance could have prevented bias that might arise from being too close to the subject matter. In conclusion, the combination of Alyafi's outside eye and direction and the expertise, writing, and narration of Baghaffar, a Saudi woman and scholar, is a strategic pairing that accounts for biases and distance from the subject. Despite this, the film could have benefited from a more personal approach that included the perspectives, voices, and stories of the local participants.

5.4 Conclusion

The case studies examined in this chapter underscore the importance of archiving in preserving Saudi women's ICH. The loss of early television productions and the reliance on social media for accessing historical materials highlight significant gaps in formal archival infrastructure. While platforms like YouTube provide access to endangered cultural records, their instability raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of such informal archives.

By integrating the history of Saudi cinema and television with my case studies, I demonstrate how the absence of a formal film industry shaped the documentation of women's dance. My research reinforces the need for sustainable archival practices that combine institutional efforts with community-driven documentation, ensuring that Saudi women's ICH is preserved, accessible, and accurately represented for future generations.

Chapter 6: Film Practice; "The Path of Memory, Between the Lands of Jasmine and Basil"

6.1 Introduction

For over a century, filmmakers have been experimenting with different forms of visual storytelling, as filmmaking was and remains an influential medium in both art and everyday life. Documentaries, in particular, have the power to capture a moment, uncover its hidden layers, and reveal truths often unseen. While traditionally viewed as a straightforward, factual genre, documentaries have gained recognition as complex and demanding, requiring a mastery of both technical skill and artistic vision comparable to other art forms (Nichols 2010, p.12). Documentary films serve as a unique medium that blends the representation of reality with creative interpretation, often employing staging and reenactment to convey social activities and historical narratives. As Grierson (1933, p. 8) articulated, “Documentary, or the creative treatment of actuality, is a new art with no such background in the story and the stage as the studio product so glibly possesses.” In this blend of reality and artistic craft, the filmmaker becomes both observer and storyteller, revealing that every documentary is a construction of reality shaped by personal perspective, narrative choices, and cultural context.

This chapter presents a reflection and analysis of my practice as a case study, focusing on my production methodology and its various stages. It will examine how documentary film can be employed to preserve Saudi women's traditional dance within a cultural context that imposes unique challenges and constraints. By exploring the ethical, representational, and methodological considerations of documenting these dances, this reflection highlights the potential of film to convey the richness of intangible cultural heritage while navigating issues of cultural sensitivity and social norms.

I explore how the methodology employed in the film serves as a practice of memory, actively reiterating cultural practices into the present moment. Central to this approach is the reenactment of women's traditional dances, which addresses how these dances are practiced in local communities. The film not only serves as an attempt to document but also confronts the challenges inherent in this process, particularly through the use of carefully selected interviews that highlight themes of absence and cultural continuity. My artistic approach embraces transparent authorship and positionality, allowing the film to reflect both my subjective perspective and the broader challenges of Saudi women's representation in Saudi cinema. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the results, answering my research questions, and addressing the contributions and limitations of my practice.

The oral and performative nature of these traditions makes visual and narrative documentation essential, serving as a living archive that preserves what words alone often cannot convey. To expand and validate my perspective, I conducted semi-structured interviews, gathering diverse voices and experiences. This enriched my work, emphasising that while my view is deeply rooted and informed, it is but one lens through which to preserve Saudi women's cultural heritage.

Incorporating autobiographical elements into my documentary holds special significance for me. It allows for a personal, subjective lens that creates a more layered and multifaceted portrayal of this tradition. My upbringing and memories, particularly of my grandmother's performances, have profoundly shaped my connection to these dances and their meanings. Additionally, it marks the subjective nature of my work, as I intentionally avoid claims of objectivity that may invalidate the truth of alternative representations of heritage and memory.

6.2 Film as a Research Methodology

Documentary films occupy a unique place in film practice, balancing representation of reality and creative interpretation. This section discusses the theoretical approaches that informed my documentary on Saudi women's dance, drawing on existing documentary theories and synthesising them with the practical issues and decisions encountered during production. The discussion is structured around participatory and reflexive

documentary modes, autoethnography, ethnographic film theory, and the blending of factual and fictional elements; all contextualised within the framework of preserving intangible cultural heritage.

In the book *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* by Bill Nickols, the author examines the definition of documentary film from the perspective of the audience. Nichols explores the viewer's point of view through the lens of film theory and psychology, concepts that may often go beyond the comprehension of a general audience. However, he provides insights that are particularly relevant for the analysis of documentary authenticity. Nichols explains, “As viewers, we expect that what occurred in front of the camera has undergone little or no modification in order to be recorded” (Nichols, 1991, p. 27). Although modifications in image and sound may reflect artistic skill and technological advances, they often seem misleading in documentaries due to their potential to distort the truth and undermine the intent of documentation. This concern over distortion and manipulation in documentary filmmaking remains a critical issue for both creators and audiences (Maccarone, 2010).

John Grierson, a pioneering figure in documentary filmmaking during the World War II era, asserted that documentary filmmakers are artists, though distinct from painters, photographers, and entertainment filmmakers. While showing the truth is essential, the artistic process remains integral to the documentary genre. Grierson said that “the documentary is the branch of film production which goes to the actual, and photographs it, edits, and shapes it” (Grierson, 1946, p. 13). Grierson, who first initially gave the name "documentary" to the genre under his pseudonym "The Moviegoer" in a review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana* (1926), described the film as “a creative treatment of actuality” (Grierson, 1926). Along with Dziga Vertov, Grierson is recognised as a foundational figure in the evolution of documentary film. As the genre developed, audiences became more critical, questioning the objectivity and truth claims of documentaries that incorporated observational techniques with subjective fictional elements.

Nichols' (1991) documentary mode classification, in particular the participatory mode, has had a profound influence on present documentary practice. The mode centers on the

filmmaker-subject interaction, thereby establishing a more immersive and intimate narrative. Nichols maintains that participatory documentaries erase the traditional observer/observed divide, instead favouring a twining interactivity that places the filmmaker's role at the centre (Nichols, 1991, p. 44). This approach offers viewers a deeper insight into the documentary's subject matter by showcasing the relationship between the filmmaker and the subjects.

In the context of my documentary on Saudi women's dance, I adopted a participatory approach by engaging directly with the women dancers in the regions of Al Bahah and Jizan. This approach allowed me to document their performances and, more importantly, their personal stories, experiences, and efforts to preserve cultural heritage. By featuring myself within the narrative—whether through voiceover, direct interaction, or presence on camera—I highlighted the deeply personal nature of this endeavour and underscored my dual role as both participant and researcher. This method aligns with Nichols' assertion that participatory documentaries foster a transparent and nuanced connection between the filmmaker and the subjects, enabling the audience to grasp the broader cultural and social contexts at play (Nichols, 2001, p. 117). Including my daughter Juman in the film served as a deliberate means of transmitting cultural memory and heritage through the documentary itself. Her presence added a profound layer to the subtext, enriching the narrative with themes of archival memory and the continuity of cultural traditions. By weaving her into the film, I created a living portrayal of memory transmission, capturing the tangible efficacy of how heritage survives and evolves across generations.

Building on this participatory approach, I came to recognise that autoethnography offered the most suitable framework for my research. This method allowed me to weave my personal experiences into the study, not only to document traditional dances but also to explore the wider cultural and social meanings they carry. In *An Autoethnography on Learning About Autoethnography*, Wall (2006, p. 146) explains that this method enables the researcher to write in a highly personal style, using lived experience as a lens to understand broader phenomena. Its roots lie in both autobiography and ethnography, as Lapadat notes in *Ethics in Autoethnography and Collaborative Autoethnography* (2017, p. 590). While ethnography provides what Clifford Geertz famously called "thick descriptions" of cultural life, autoethnography reaches a similar goal by using the

researcher's own experiences as primary data, as argued by Kosonen and Ikonen in *Autoethnography as a Method for Cultural Studies* (2022, p. 213). Hammond, in his article *Autoethnography as Epistemological Practice* (2014, p. 129), further explains that this method places the author at the centre, connecting personal memory with cultural interpretation. In this sense, my reflections, voice, and presence within the film became part of the data itself. At the same time, Denshire and Lee (2013, p. 153) highlight that analytical autoethnography moves beyond the purely personal account, situating individual experiences within broader cultural patterns and social frameworks.

In addition, autoethnography was a valuable methodological technique, blending personal storytelling with broad cultural analysis. Ellis and. Bochner (2000) note that why enables researchers to use their own lives to research and illuminate broader social and cultural issues. This approach was especially relevant to my documentary project, as my personal connection to Saudi women's dance, shaped by my own experiences, family heritage, and cultural identity, deeply influenced the film's structure and narrative direction. By embedding elements of my personal story, reflections, and memories into the film, I sought to create a portrayal that resonated both personally and culturally. This integration is in line with Ellis and Bochner's emphasis on narrative as a successful mode for conveying complex cultural meaning and for establishing an affective connection with the audience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 733).

The initial spark for my documentary was rooted in a personal desire to preserve and explore the traditional dances practised by Saudi women in the regions of Al Bahah and Jizan. From the outset, I recognised that my personal connection to this cultural heritage was integral to the story I wanted to tell. Autoethnography provided a clear path for integrating my experiences, memories, and reflections into the narrative. According to Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (2000), autoethnography allows researchers to use personal narratives to identify shared cultural and social problems (p. 734). This theory highlighted how important my presence was in the documentary, not just as an observer but as a participant who had my own journey of rediscovery that would enrich the story of the film. Therefore, the decision to position myself at the centre of the story naturally evolved from the desire to create a film that would resonate personally and culturally.

Ethnographic film theory offered a meaningful foundation for my documentary practice, especially in its emphasis on representing and preserving cultural practices through immersive, observational methods. Ethnographic filmmakers typically build close relationships with communities they document and film by capturing everyday life, rituals, and cultural expressions to convey authenticity and cultural depth. While my film does not follow strictly traditional ethnographic methods due to the specific cultural sensitivities and constraints present in Saudi Arabia, it incorporates essential ethnographic principles such as participant observation, cultural immersion, and reflexivity.

David MacDougall (1998) highlights the importance of reflexivity and awareness of ethics in the representation of cultural practice through film with a self-reflexive orientation that considers the role of the filmmaker in informing the representation of subjects (MacDougall, 1998, p. 61). By navigating the challenges and obstacles f filming Saudi women's dance, ensuring respect for participants and cultural norms, I aimed to strike a balance between cultural sensitivity and original representation, reflecting the broader aims of ethnographic filmmaking to preserve and interpret cultural traditions while maintaining the agency and dignity of those represented. Also, this prompted me to consider how my presence, perspective, and interactions with participants would shape the narrative. I sought to create an open dialogue with the women featured in the film, ensuring that their voices, stories, and perspectives were authentically represented.

David MacDougall's (1998) visual anthropology highlights the extreme importance of reflexivity and responsibility to do no harm in presenting cultural practice. Reflexivity, with its self-critical examination of the filmmaker's effect on the interaction with the subject, is essential in minimising potential biases and guaranteeing minimum standards of morality. In documenting Saudi women's dance, I confronted numerous ethical and cultural considerations, from building trust with participants to ensuring respectful and accurate depictions of their traditions and identities. Navigating these challenges required a careful balance between cultural sensitivity and the goal of authentically preserving and portraying the dances within their broader societal context. This approach echoes the core aims of ethnographic filmmaking: to represent and interpret

cultural practices and preserve the agency and dignity of the respective people and communities involved (MacDougall, 1998, p. 64).

The combined influence of autoethnographic and ethnographic methods enabled a rich and textured representation of Saudi women's dance by merging personal and cultural dimensions to offer an immersive, reflective, and ethically grounded exploration. The interplay between these two frameworks underscores my documentary's commitment to capturing cultural heritage not just as an external observer but as an active participant who acknowledges and interrogates their own role in the process. Such engagement is crucial in navigating and respecting the complexities of cultural representation, particularly within a context as sensitive and rich as Saudi women's dance traditions. By adopting this hybrid model, the film seeks to contribute meaningfully to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that personal narrative and cultural authenticity remain at its core.

6.3 Ethical Considerations and Cultural Sensitivities in Documenting Women's Dance

Ethical considerations play a pivotal role in documentary filmmaking, particularly when exploring sensitive subjects such as women's dance in Saudi Arabia. Saudi cultural and social norms impose strict constraints on the documentation of women's public activities, reflecting broader concerns about modesty, privacy, and public perception. Women often express reluctance to appear in visual media due to fears of violating cultural and religious expectations that govern the display of women's bodies and movements in public. This section will delve into the implications of these sensitivities for filmmakers, highlighting the necessity of building trust, obtaining informed consent, and working within cultural parameters to create authentic representations of traditional dance.

A major ethical decision influenced by the theoretical frameworks of autoethnography and ethnographic film theory was to respect cultural norms by covering the faces of

some social actors while allowing professional actors to reveal their faces. This decision reflects the intersection of cultural sensitivity and creative expression, illustrating the value of reflexivity in navigating ethical complexities. David MacDougall (1998) emphasises the ethical responsibility of ethnographic filmmakers to maintain a respectful and culturally aware approach when representing communities and their traditions (p. 63). This reflexivity guided my efforts to create an authentic and sensitive portrayal while honouring the values and beliefs of my subjects.

Choosing to film in Saudi Arabia posed numerous challenges, as the entire project focused on preserving and reflecting on Saudi cultural heritage through traditional dance. The first challenge involved adhering to Saudi laws regulating audiovisual media activities. The General Commission for Audiovisual Media mandates that filmmakers must obtain a license before engaging in any public filming. Regulations stipulate that media content must not violate public morals, depict nudity or immodest clothing, provoke instincts, or use vulgar language. Additionally, female broadcasters on Saudi television are required to wear modest clothing, reflecting Islamic law and prevailing customs concerning women's dress. These regulations necessitated a cautious approach to content filming, ensuring that women depicted in the documentary adhered to modest attire consistent with cultural norms and traditional clothing.

The portrayal of dance, however, presented a unique challenge. Dance performances, particularly those by women, can be subject to varying interpretations and may raise questions about their appropriateness within cultural and religious frameworks. I reviewed the regulations carefully and found no explicit restrictions on filming women's dance, provided that participants gave informed consent. To ensure compliance, I obtained consent forms from all women featured in the film, documenting their voluntary agreement to participate.

A further challenge arose from the social and cultural sensitivities surrounding the filming of Saudi women. While some women may agree to be filmed, their male family members, particularly husbands or fathers, may object, leading to potential conflicts. Under Saudi law, women over the age of eighteen are considered adult citizens with their own legal rights and do not require male family members to sign consent forms for participation. Nevertheless, female participants often sought their families' approval

out of respect for cultural traditions. Ensuring anonymity and maintaining respectful interactions were critical to protecting participants from potential repercussions.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has strict regulations governing photography and videography, emphasizing the protection of privacy and reputation. Unauthorized filming or photography of individuals can lead to severe penalties, including fines and imprisonment. This legal context further complicated the process of filming women in public or private settings, necessitating stringent measures to obtain explicit consent and protect participants' identities. The Saudi government's strict laws aim to prevent the misuse of photography and ensure ethical practices.

Convincing real social actors to participate in the film proved challenging, as many work exclusively in women-only environments. To capture authentic music and songs, I collaborated with female dance ensembles, such as Taqaqat. The leading actors in the film, who chose not to wear a scarf or abaya, revealed her identity, reflecting her professional role in the project. In contrast, ensemble members who wore niqabs remained anonymous, respecting their cultural and personal preferences for face-covering.

One notable instance involved Umm Mishari, whom we filmed without her niqab. Out of respect for her privacy and adherence to cultural norms, her face had to be blurred in the final cut of the film see Figure 42. This decision underscores the visual portrayal of the social restrictions and sensitivities surrounding public representation for Saudi women, particularly in the context of preserving cultural heritage. These distinctions also necessitated staging the dances for the film, as attending and filming actual events was prohibited without explicit permission. The complex ethical considerations surrounding the documentation of women's dance in Saudi Arabia highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity and respect in documentary filmmaking. By adhering to Saudi regulations, building trust with participants, and maintaining reflexivity in my approach, I aimed to create an authentic and ethically sound representation of traditional dance. The integration of professional and social actors allowed for a nuanced portrayal that respected individual preferences while capturing the cultural essence of Saudi women's dance.

Figure 42:Blur the face of the poet (The Path of Memory,2025)

6.4 Film Location

Location scouting, according to Maier (1994), is the careful evaluation of a number of multiple factors to ensure the chosen location serves the purpose of the film. This process involves narrowing down options based on various criteria, with accessibility being a significant factor. Filming locally, as Rahmel (1994) emphasizes, helps reduce travel costs and minimizes crew fatigue, which can result from long commutes (p. 56). In selecting locations for my documentary, I prioritized closed settings where public access was restricted during filming. These included the archaeological village of Al-Atawlah, the historical village of Al-Mafarjah, my grandmother's home in Al Bahah, and two private farms in Baish, Jizan. Each location was carefully chosen to reflect the cultural heritage of women's dance and to make the scenes as realistic as possible. As McDowell (2017) asserts, the chosen location must align with the story being told, and in my case, these historical and traditional spaces illustrate how women engage with their surroundings, capturing the cultural and environmental context that gave rise to these dances (p. 122).

When obtaining a filming permit from the production company, I deliberately refrained from disclosing explicit details about the film's content to avoid potential regulatory issues with overseeing authorities. This strategy also circumvented the need to notify

nearby residents or arrange traffic control, thereby reducing costs by eliminating the need for permits or additional personnel to manage traffic flow.

Before embarking on this documentary project, my academic experience over five years (2012–2017) teaching "Digital Media 1-2" gave me valuable insights into navigating cultural norms and social sensitivities, particularly in the context of filming women in Saudi Arabia. At that time, teaching filmmaking was conducted under the label of "Digital Media" to avoid using terms like "cinema" or "film studies," as cinema was officially prohibited. My students and I faced significant challenges, from bringing cameras onto campus to obtaining the necessary permits for filming inside or outside the university. Cameras were considered a controversial symbol at the time, and several students were stopped by police or campus security simply for carrying them in public spaces, although the majority had the required permits.

The portrayal of women in any film during that period required multiple layers of approval, especially with the approval of a male guardian, leading many students to avoid including female figures in their cinematic projects. Instead, some relied on men or children from their families to portray adult roles. Others opted to use silhouettes or partial representations of women, such as hands, shadows, only from behind, or specific facial features while respecting the preferences of those who chose to appear veiled or wished to remain anonymous.

This experience prepared me to handle the challenges associated with women's reluctance to appear publicly in films, where public exposure was often perceived as a potential source of scandal. Additionally, it was common for women to withhold their names to safeguard their privacy, deepening my understanding of the cultural and social boundaries surrounding the representation of women in visual media.

These norms may seem unfamiliar to Western audiences, where freedom of expression often allows women greater autonomy in how they are represented in media. However, this contrast underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and awareness when documenting traditional practices in specific contexts. By respecting these boundaries, I was able to authentically capture the essence of Saudi women's dances while navigating the complexities of cultural representation and preserving tradition.

6.5 Using Social Actors to Stage the Dances

Connecting with the popular groups that appeared in the film, who served as social actors, was a challenging process. These groups were recommended by people either living in the areas where they perform or by individuals with a keen interest in intangible cultural heritage. The ensembles represented include the Umm Fares ensemble, known for performing at weddings and events; the Sahab ensemble, affiliated with the Development Association in the archaeological village of Al-Atawlah in Al Bahah; and the Umm Ayman ensemble in Jizan. Initially, these ensembles declined my request to film them. However, after explaining the nature and content of my project and assuring them that they had full freedom regarding how they would appear—without revealing their real personal names but using their ensemble names—and that filming would take place in a closed setting, they agreed to participate and signed the consent form.

In Al-Bahah, I worked with two popular music ensembles. The first was the Sahab ensemble, which agreed to come to the filming location in the village of Al-Atawlah. We received a warm welcome, and I had previously explained the project to the association's director, who raised no objections to filming. Brides were represented using actors, whose selection and purpose I will detail later. Once we finished filming scenes of the bride getting dressed and ready, we moved to the upper floor into a separate room. However, upon seeing the male camera-operator with us, the ensemble members completely barred him from entering, despite being covered with niqabs. They were fully adorned in traditional dress, jewellery, and decorations specific to the region. Consequently, another female camera-operator and I captured quick scenes while contending with numerous village visitors who entered unexpectedly once the village opened its doors. This unplanned disruption complicated the filming process, even though we had specifically requested to film in a designated room. The next day, I chose to record additional scenes in the village of Al-Mafarja to avoid visitor interruptions. Here, the Umm Fares ensemble participated, portraying an old wedding tradition without issue. The presence of a male camera-operator was permitted, and they did not object to his work.

In Jizan, the situation turned out to be far more challenging than anticipated. Initially, it was believed that the ensemble had granted permission to film; however,

complications arose during the process. The five participating women were wearing kurtas, a simple dress representing the region's heritage. This led to a confrontation when the son of the ensemble leader became highly agitated upon seeing the costumes and noticing the cameraman, Khalid Zidan, filming them. He attempted to stop the shoot and even threatened to physically confront both me and the production director.

To address the situation during this tense moment, I immediately instructed the cameraman to stop filming out of concern for our safety, as the man appeared extremely angry. My husband, who accompanied me on all filming trips, intervened to calm him down. Afterward, I spoke with him privately, explaining that the women had the freedom to choose how they appeared. As a compromise, the women agreed to wear abayas over their kurtas and niqabs to cover their faces. This moment not only underscored the complexities of navigating cultural sensitivities but also highlighted the negotiations required to balance authenticity with respect for local norms.

In the film, this tense moment was deliberately portrayed to provide viewers with a candid glimpse into the challenges of documenting traditional practices within restrictive cultural frameworks. The scene clearly shows how filming was temporarily halted and then transitions to Maleeha, who validated and discussed the resolution. By including this, I aimed to present a transparent account of the production's dynamics, emphasizing the collaborative effort to strike a balance between artistic expression and cultural respect.

6.6 Casting

The decision to cast actors from the same cultural and regional backgrounds as the cities depicted in my film is rooted in theories of cultural representation, authenticity, and audience engagement. By selecting professional actors with deep ties to these communities, I aimed to bring an accurate and respectful portrayal of traditional clothing, dances, and customs. Such an approach is in line with cultural representation theory, which highlights the importance of depicting a range of viewpoints and fostering authenticity in media representations (Nwonka, 2020). Casting actors who have a personal connection to the culture they represent enhances viewer immersion and

authenticity by adding credibility and allowing a rich portrayal of traditions. (Banks, 2009). As part of my methodology, I explicitly acknowledged in the film that these were actors performing re-enactments. This transparency was essential to maintain ethical integrity and to inform the audience that while the scenes were reconstructed, they were grounded in extensive research and collaboration with the communities involved. By doing so, I aimed to create a balance between artistic representation and historical accuracy, ensuring the re-enactments honored the traditions and cultural practices they portrayed.

The casting process was meticulous, prioritizing individuals whose heritage matched the regions depicted in the film. This deliberate choice facilitated a more accurate depiction of cultural nuances, creating a deeper connection between the audience and the narrative. According to Kamičaitytė-Virbašienė and Ribelytė (2017), depicting individuals with a strong connection to their environment and customs can enhance a sense of place and cultural heritage (p. 93). By focusing on cultural and regional specificity, my film aims to showcase the richness of these traditions and engage the audience in a more meaningful cinematic experience.

Professional actors, such as those selected for my film, enjoy certain freedoms and societal acceptance that enable them to participate without facing the same level of scrutiny or societal backlash as social actors or individuals from less public backgrounds. This distinction highlights the complex dynamics of cultural representation and public perception in film (Banks, 2009, p. 147). Professional actors' established reputations also lend credibility to the project, enhancing the audience's perception of authenticity and respect for the cultural heritage being portrayed.

One notable example is Mila Al-Zahrani, who represents the heritage of the Al-Bahah region and the Zahran tribe. A Saudi actor and model, Mila began her career in 2017 and has since gained acclaim for her performances in film and television. Her roots in the Al-Baha region allowed her to embody the role of the Bride of Al-Baha with authenticity and depth, which was further enriched through an interview where she expressed the personal significance of this role as a mother with a diverse cultural heritage and as a public figure with the potential to raise awareness about her region's cultural traditions. The second actor, Rafal Khawaji, embodies the city of Jizan and the Al Jahli dance. I discovered her through a viral social media clip showcasing her

captivating performance of the Al Jahli dance. Despite the challenges posed by the region's strong adherence to preserving customs and traditions, her inclusion in the film brings an invaluable level of authenticity and passion.

A deeply personal element of the film was my decision to include my daughter Juman Daghriri. This choice stemmed from both emotional and personal motivations, reflecting the way a child engages with and absorbs cultural heritage. By showcasing her exploration of traditional dances, I aimed to present a voice from the future, providing reflections on what she observed and internalised from these traditions. Filming with my daughter allowed me to explore the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage and confront my own emotional connection to these customs. In doing so, the film transcends the boundaries of a traditional documentary, becoming a personal reflection of my own heritage and identity, intertwined with a broader cultural narrative.

Including interactions with my grandmother and mother-in-law was crucial for showing the multigenerational transfer of knowledge and tradition. Their presence serves as a direct connection to the past, offering viewers an intimate view of the wisdom and memory that often unfolds in private, familial settings. This approach emphasises the continuity of cultural traditions through generations and highlights the essential role women play as keepers of cultural practices. Their contributions ground the film in authentic lived experiences, making it both a record of intangible cultural heritage and an active part of preserving and passing it on.

By capturing these moments, the film acts as a tribute to and a means of safeguarding the legacy of Saudi women's dance. The carefully selected participants, deeply rooted in their respective cultural backgrounds, bring not only their talent but also genuine connections to the traditions shown. Their involvement reflects the film's dedication to cultural authenticity and respectful portrayal, offering a meaningful depiction of Saudi women's dance traditions.

6.7 Production

During the production phase of my film, the initial challenge I faced was the lack of substantial preparation due to the need to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic. This required travelling to the south of Saudi Arabia with the actors, who were prepared to don the traditional attire of the Al-Bahah tribes and perform the dances. The situation quickly became complicated when, upon arrival, some of the women's ensembles refused to continue with the filming if a male camera operator was present.

To address the cultural sensitivities surrounding the filming process, I ensured that my crew primarily consisted of women, including a female camera operator, makeup artist, and art director. This decision was intended to ease concerns and create a more comfortable environment for the women involved. However, the inclusion of a male camera operator became unavoidable due to the scarcity of skilled female camera operators, particularly in regions were strict cultural norms limit women's access to technical roles. Additionally, the technical demands of the project necessitated the presence of an experienced professional, regardless of gender.

The presence of a male camera operator, however, heightened the women's anxieties significantly. For many, being filmed by a man was deeply uncomfortable, as the very act of filming was already fraught with concerns. From their perspective, having their images or videos recorded posed a significant risk, as they feared these materials could be shared without consent, potentially leading to family conflicts or social repercussions.

In this conservative setting, a woman's image is closely tied to notions of privacy, and being filmed could be perceived as a violation of that privacy, invoking cultural ideas of honour and shame. The involvement of male relatives or other family members added another layer of complexity, as some conservative men might react harshly if their female relatives appeared in recorded footage, even under strictly controlled conditions.

As a result, not all the women were willing to participate. Those who agreed did so only under the condition that their identities would remain fully concealed by veils and niqabs, ensuring that their privacy and anonymity were respected. This arrangement

underscored the delicate balance I had to navigate between cultural sensitivity and the practical needs of the production.

It wasn't solely the influence of male guardianship that caused hesitation. The reluctance also stemmed from deeply ingrained cultural and social norms. Although such legal constraints are no longer in place in Saudi Arabia, many women still choose to adhere to the traditional values that align with the expectations of male authority, even in its absence from a legal standpoint. These norms were not imposed on them but rather accepted and upheld by the women themselves as part of their identity and societal structure; the women themselves didn't want to be filmed, as they considered it against the norm. They viewed their faces, even when covered, as their personal business. No one was coercing them into accepting the authority of the men; they agreed with it themselves.

Religious movements in Saudi Arabia have reinforced the perception that a woman's voice, face, and body are 'Awrah' عورة (i.e., parts of the body that should be covered), shaping societal behaviour by closely linking customs and traditions to religious and moral values. These movements have influenced people to preserve traditional practices as part of their spiritual and cultural identity. One interviewee reflected on this, stating:

> "The problem that we have now is that we are considering religious teachings and traditions as equal footing, and that's why most of the heritage is not known by many people. So, when we say that women's voice is 'Awrah' (i.e., the parts of the body that should be covered,) it has become a tradition as well, and this made 'Ala'ib' very limited and confined from the past to now, so this can be the reason or the barrier; I am not sure to what extent this is religiously true, I can't be that sure. However, as a customary belief, this has affected the transfer of heritage from one generation to another, as they considered women's voices to be 'Awrah'.

Additionally, there was significant concern regarding how women perceived themselves in the context of filming. They feared that their movements or actions might

be captured in ways they did not agree with, particularly considering the sensitivity of dance as a subject. Movements such as swaying the hips or playing the duff could be interpreted in ways that made them uncomfortable, especially if certain body parts became visible during the performance. For instance, in Al Jahli dance, the performer tilts her chest up and down in a gesture that could potentially be misunderstood as provocative or arousing.

In many cultures, including some Arab communities, dance movements—particularly those emphasising the waist and hips—are frequently associated with sexual meanings. This association is based on the link between such movements and the stimulation of sensual signals, as the rhythm and sway of the body can be seen as representations of femininity and attraction. For example, Al-Qamhawi (2007, p. 45) notes in his article, *The Sexual Metaphor in Belly Dance and Ballet,* that belly dance, in particular, contains clear sexual metaphors, as its movements often focus on parts of the body considered provocative.

From the perspective of a man, these movements might be interpreted as suggestive or seductive, thus leading to misinterpretation of what the dancers intend. These are guided by social stereotypes concerning the bodies and roles of women. In her study, *Sex in Arab Culture*, Ahmed (2013, p. 89) discusses how belly dance is perceived as a medium for sexual expression, which directly influences societal attitudes toward dancers.

These interpretations create significant discomfort for women performing traditional dances, as they fear that their movements could be misread or culturally misaligned. Such concerns emphasise the importance of understanding the social and cultural contexts of dance and avoiding shallow interpretations that might result in misrepresentation or discomfort for the performers.

Another significant challenge was obtaining the women's consent, which required considerable communication and convincing. Those who worked professionally in this field agreed to be filmed on the condition that their identities would remain anonymous, which they ensured by wearing veils during filming and using nicknames. I encouraged them to express their identity through their traditional costumes. Some agreed to do so, as can be seen in the film, while others showed certain aspects of their costumes but still wore niqab.

6.8 Film Interviews

The questions posed during these interviews were designed to deepen my understanding of Saudi women's dances and address key research questions:

1. What is the most important ritual significance in these dances?

2. How did you learn these dances?

3. In your opinion, how is this heritage and legacy transferred to the next generation?

4. Why do Saudi women resist documenting these dances with a camera and sound recording?

5. How does religious influence shape people's adherence to traditional customs?

For professional performers, I asked:

1. How old are these dances, and how did you come to learn about them?

2. Where are these dances typically performed?

3. What are the main characteristics and movements of this type of dance?

4. How would you ensure the dances are passed on to future generations?

5. Why do you resist documenting these dances through cameras and sound recordings?

These questions allowed me to capture a range of perspectives and narratives, emphasizing both personal and collective dimensions of cultural heritage.

6.9 The use of the Landscapes

The filming process consisted of three main stages. The first stage took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 amidst travel restrictions and airline closures. Taking advantage of my presence in Saudi Arabia, I travelled to the Al-Bahah region to film for the first time. Over three days, I captured several scenes, including preparations,

dances, an interview with my grandmother, Dousha Al-Faran, and footage of my daughter Juman walking through the old town. The shape of the narrative was still in development. And I knew that I needed to return after a period of growth. I concentrated on capturing Mila Al-Zahrani as she prepared and wandered through the village, crafting a visual narrative that portrayed Juman as an adult, retracing her steps through the village. It was as though she was reliving the echoes of women's lives, their stories still woven into the fabric of the stone pathways and walls.

The second phase of filming took place in Jizan in 2022, spanning three days. The first day was dedicated to filming the bride's preparations and dances. The second day focused on interviews with Maliha Babgi and my mother-in-law, Halimah Daghriri. On the final day, I filmed Juman on Jizan's beach and at a jasmine farm. Most of this footage was used in the final project, as I had a clear plan of what I wanted to capture during this stage.

The third and final stage of production took place in 2024 when I returned to Al Bahah with my editor and camera operator, Lynn, who graciously offered to assist in reshooting scenes of the region and its dances over two days. I also had another filming crew, such as Mostafa, the second camera operator, and Ahmed Alghamdi, my line Producer. During this stage, I refined the filming style to incorporate fictional elements, focusing on Juman and her memories, with Mila portraying the adult Juman. On the first day, we captured the Al-Li'b dance and conducted interviews with Um Mishari, Hayat Bakri, and Amal Al-Zahrani, adding depth and personal narratives to the documentary. The second day was dedicated to filming Juman as she wandered through the old houses of the village, creating a visual exploration of memory and heritage. This structured and multi-year approach to filming allowed for a comprehensive portrayal of the cultural richness and heritage of the regions depicted in the documentary.

Incorporating landscapes and architecture was crucial to contextualising Saudi Arabia's traditional dances within their geographical and cultural environments. These visual elements anchored the dances to their settings, illustrating how culture and environment are intertwined (Alkaff et al., 2019, p. 45). The diverse landscapes, from Al Bahah's mountains to Jizan's coastal regions, enhanced the film's aesthetic appeal and created an immersive narrative atmosphere.

Old cities and architectural landmarks further emphasised the historical and cultural depth of the dances. Filming these spaces highlighted their importance as living embodiments of community identity and cultural heritage, reflecting craftsmanship and traditions unique to the regions (Khan, 2014, p. 218). Introducing the locations of the city geographically, without the use of a graphic map, was a deliberate choice to provide spatial context in a more organic manner. This technique helped viewers understand the regional diversity and cultural linkages in Saudi Arabia, which aligned with UNESCO's emphasis on the importance of highlighting the relationship between cultural heritage and its geographical roots (UNESCO, 2003, p. 12). By using landscapes and architecture as storytelling devices, the film aimed to preserve and reflect Saudi Arabia's intangible cultural heritage while also promoting a greater understanding of the relationship between people, place, and tradition.

6.10 Symbolism

In the realm of film imagery, various elements are strategically employed to craft compelling shots. Some are overt, while others harbour symbols and concealed meanings. Cinema utilises numerous factors to compose its visual language—some straightforward and others laden with symbolic significance. Symbolism, wherein an object transcends its literal meaning to represent something deeper, finds a place in the opening scene, becoming a method for dissecting art and media. Directors often infuse their work with inner symbolic meanings, fostering hidden messages. Ferdinand de Saussure, the pioneer of contemporary linguistics, established the foundations of basic linguistic theory, such as the one-to-one correspondence between signifiers and signified symbols. Symbols are an essential part of our everyday lives, facilitating navigation and comprehension of our environment and ourselves. So deeply embedded is symbolism in our daily habits that its ubiquity frequently goes unnoticed. Recognising this pervasive influence, it becomes fitting to apply the same principle to the interpretation of art (Failla, 2020).

In my film, I took the opportunity to feature my daughter, who assumed a role with dual backgrounds—Al Bahah and Jizan. Through cinematic shots, she engaged with the red headband, known as *Almesa'ab* المعصب, symbolising the Al Bahah dance. Clad in the

traditional attire of Al Bahah women, she traversed the old villages, capturing the essence of the region. In contrast, the use of Jasmine flowers which called *Al-Adiyah* (العظية) as Shown in Figure 43, from Jizan adorned her in scenes shot within a Jasmine flower farm and by the sea, highlighting the geographical disparities between the two regions.

Figure 43: Jasmine flower headband *Al-Adiyah* (العظية)

Both the red headband and Jasmine flowers are distinctive features essential for brides in these regions. These shots were strategically employed to convey the authenticity of Al Bahah and Jizan, imbuing a sentimental significance into the representation of these cultural practices.

6.11 Post-production

The post-production phase of my documentary was pivotal in shaping its narrative and achieving aesthetic coherence. Often described as the "final rewrite" of a film, the editing stage provides the space to refine both visual and auditory elements, bringing the themes of cultural heritage and emotional storytelling to the forefront (Dancyger, 2014, p. 3).

Initially, I attempted to edit the film myself but struggled to achieve the desired outcome. This led me to collaborate with editor Lynn El-Safah, who skillfully worked

with the existing footage while aligning with my creative vision. Together, we identified gaps and areas for improvement, which inspired the addition of newly written and filmed scenes to enrich the narrative. This process also led to the decision to reshoot certain scenes in Al Bahah, ensuring they were seamlessly integrated with the visuals captured in Jizan. As the editing progressed, the material began to come together cohesively, resulting in a consistent and artistically compelling narrative that fully realized the film's vision.

Organising the raw footage was an essential first step in the editing process. I meticulously logged each clip, categorising them by theme and location, which enabled me to identify gaps in the narrative. This step aligns with Dancyger's assertion that careful organisation in post-production can streamline the storytelling process and prevent creative fatigue (Dancyger, 2014, p. 72).

In constructing the narrative, I prioritised a balance between observational and participatory modes, inspired by Nichols' framework of documentary storytelling. The decision to place interviews interspersed with dance sequences helped to contextualise cultural practices while maintaining viewer engagement. Adjusting the pacing was particularly challenging, as slower sequences risked losing audience interest, while rapid transitions diminished emotional depth (Nichols, 1991, p. 41).

The use of sound design played a pivotal role in taking the audience to the cultural setting of the dances. In order to establish an emotional bond with the history being depicted, I concentrated on the use of primarily diegetic soundscapes, with traditional instruments serving as background music. As Rose (2015) observes, sound editing must be synchronised with visual elements in an effort to create narrative coherence, and careful synchronisation of the dance steps with the drumbeats was critical to achieving this (Rose, 2015, p. 142).

Colour grading posed a significant challenge, as I aimed to maintain a warm tone that complemented the cultural themes. I worked with Michel Nakhle, who uses DaVinci Resolve, to adjust the hues and saturation in a sense that highlights the vibrant costumes without compromising naturalism. As Mercado (2010) notes, colour grading is not

merely a technical task but a vital storytelling tool that shapes the audience's perception of the film's mood and atmosphere (Mercado, 2010, p. 98).

During the process of recording the voiceover for the film, several considerations and debates arose. Initially, the plan was to narrate the film entirely in my own voice. However, I found this approach conflicted with Juman's portrayal as someone exploring heritage in a reflective and contemplative manner. Juman's narrative serves as a flashback to what she observed from the future's perspective, including my voice as the main narrator risked creating a sense of dissonance for the audience. Since my voice is already present in several parts of the film, I worried this might confuse viewers, blurring the lines between my role as the filmmaker and the reflective narrative of the child, my daughter, as the protagonist.

Another suggestion was to use Juman's voice as a child to narrate the story. However, I felt this approach might lack the depth and emotional resonance necessary to convey the film's intended themes. The story reflects women's collective memories and lived experiences, and the narration needed to strike a delicate balance—both deeply personal and universally relatable—while capturing the essence of intergenerational cultural transmission. Instead, the narration embraces a future perspective, with Juman portrayed as an adult who is reflecting on her memories. This perspective forms a key subtextual storyline, highlighting the process of remembering and how cultural heritage is preserved and reinterpreted across generations.

Ultimately, I decided to work with a young female narrator, Sarah Al Shehri, whose voice could embody both the innocence of Jumana's perspective and the maturity needed to connect with broader themes. Sarah's narration brought passion and depth to the story, effectively representing my daughter's voice as one that speaks from the future. Her delivery added an emotional layer to the narrative, emphasising the reflective and hopeful tone of the film.

Selecting a female narrator was also a deliberate and symbolic decision. In a society where women's voices have often been marginalised or silenced, having a female narrator asserted a powerful presence. The choice to centre a woman's voice in the film was both literal and metaphorical, reinforcing the film's mission to preserve and celebrate the narratives of Saudi women. As Nichols (2001, p. 116) notes, narration in

documentary films serves as a key tool for framing the story and engaging the audience, and Sarah's voice-over achieved this by providing a compelling and authentic guide through the narrative journey. This approach reflects the broader importance of voice in representing cultural identity and heritage. The inclusion of Sarah's narration ensured that the film not only documented the past but also presented a forward-looking perspective, connecting the traditions of the past with the voices of the future.

6.12 Self-Reflective Analysis

The experience of producing and creating the documentary *The Path of Memory, Between the Lands of Jasmine and Basil* has been a profoundly personal and academic journey. It has required me to navigate the intersection of cultural preservation, artistic expression, and ethical responsibility. This process revealed to me the complexities of documenting Saudi women's traditional dances within a context shaped by cultural sensitivities and societal constraints.

A central realisation was the tension between cultural authenticity and creative representation. By employing autoethnography and participatory documentary modes, I positioned myself not only as a filmmaker but as an active participant. My personal connection to the dances, rooted in childhood memories and familial traditions, offered an emotional depth to the narrative but also demanded careful self-reflection to ensure that my perspective did not overshadow the voices of others.

This realisation led me to understand that the issue extends far beyond the dances themselves; it is deeply rooted in the voices of women—voices they have historically used to defend their rights and express their identities. While their images may have been obscured by societal constraints, their voices found ways to transcend these limitations. Through poetry, they conveyed emotions of joy, sorrow, hope, and existence. I fully grasped the depth of this expression only when I heard my grandmother recite traditional poems in her resonant voice, unravelling both their surface meanings and the hidden layers of their messages.

In spaces where men were absent, women found a sense of freedom, even within the confines of their homes. These gatherings were vibrant and intimate. One woman might seek advice; another lament a distant lover. One mourned the loss of her husband, while another teased her daughter-in-law with a playful gift, saying, "Forget about your husband!" These moments of shared experiences were deeply personal and revealed the strength of their communal bonds.

Even within Arabic literature, women's poetry is marked by restraint, shaped and regulated by social, religious, and political boundaries. If I were to compare the lives of men and women, I would argue that men's lives are less encumbered by such constraints. Men freely display their masculinity—carrying weapons, showcasing strength, and expressing dominance without fear of reproach. Their physical movements are not scrutinised in the same way as women's, whose dances and bodily expressions are often suppressed under the weight of social expectations. Yet, does this lack of display mean women go unnoticed? Certainly not. Women observe men as men observe women, but the boundaries imposed over generations have rendered female self-expression far more challenging. Their desires, their stories, and their dances often remain hidden, like treasures locked away in boxes.

Cultural traditions in Al Bahah and Jizan endure with quiet strength. A child might recall their mother or grandmother performing these dances, internalising the rhythm of the duff and the elegance of each movement. Performed away from men's gaze, these dances hold deep significance within their private spaces. Yet, the sound of the duff carries beyond, and the poetry—celebrating a bride or a young woman awaiting her suitor resonates within the community. These performances are more than tradition; they are moments of shared joy and connection, preserved despite societal constraints.

The challenges encountered during filming—particularly the apprehensions of participants regarding being filmed—underscored the importance of trust and cultural sensitivity. The creative decision to blend re-enactments, anonymous performances, and symbolic representations was pivotal in addressing these challenges while still conveying the richness of the traditions. This approach taught me that ethical filmmaking requires constant negotiation between respecting participants' boundaries and fulfilling the artistic and academic aims of the project.

Editing the film further deepened my understanding of how narrative structure and visual elements shape the audience's perception. The collaborative process with my editor highlighted the importance of balancing observational and participatory elements to create an engaging yet reflective documentary. Decisions around sound design, colour grading, and narration were similarly guided by the need to maintain cultural authenticity while crafting an emotionally resonant story.

This project also illuminated the broader societal and historical forces shaping Saudi women's cultural heritage. The reluctance of participants to fully engage with the camera reflects not just personal hesitations but a deeper legacy of societal norms that have constrained women's public expression. Recognising and addressing these barriers became an integral part of my work, emphasising the documentary's role as both a preservation tool and a platform for critical reflection.

I am immensely grateful for the invaluable support and guidance from my supervisors, Professor Bruce Bennett and Dr Maryam Ghorbankarimi, throughout my film and doctoral thesis. Their insights in writing, filming, directing, and production were instrumental, and their feedback significantly shaped and refined my work.

Each time I shared the film with them, they offered precise and impactful comments that accumulated over five years of work, forming the foundation of the film's current form. One of the most crucial pieces of advice was to focus on capturing the film simply and realistically, avoiding excessive equipment or a large crew. This approach enhanced the film's originality and grounded its narrative.

Dr Maryam, in particular, guided me on how to engage with the individuals I interviewed, break the ice, and initiate conversations. She emphasised letting the camera run for longer periods without frequent interruptions, allowing me to capture spontaneous and genuine moments. Additionally, she helped me understand how to use Juman's character as a narrative device to bridge the past and present, adding depth to the storytelling.

Professor Bruce was a constant source of inspiration, especially in encouraging me to think imaginatively and step outside traditional documentary boundaries. He

consistently pushed me to think outside the box, guiding me on how to integrate elements of fiction into the narrative without losing the documentary's essence. He also helped me use interviews effectively, selecting parts that enriched the storyline and ensured the film mirrored the critical and narrative aspects of my thesis. His advice to create a film that felt authentic and emotional, rather than resembling a promotional piece for the region, added an entirely new dimension to the project.

This film is not merely my own work but a collaborative effort that reflects the shared ideas and input of my creative team and my supervisors. Their belief in me and my vision, combined with their academic and artistic insights, made this film a true testament to the power of collaborative creativity.

6.13 Conclusion

This research has documented and analysed a largely overlooked aspect of Saudi Arabia's intangible cultural heritage: women's traditional dance practices in the southern regions of Al-Bahah and Jizan. Through the production and analysis of an original documentary, this project has not only preserved visual evidence of these endangered cultural expressions but also contributed a new perspective on the challenges and possibilities of documenting female heritage in a transforming socio-political context.

By engaging with theories of documentary filmmaking and cultural heritage, this thesis has addressed key gaps in the literature on Saudi women's intangible cultural heritage, particularly traditional dance practices. While UNESCO has long framed cultural heritage as a means of resisting cultural loss and promoting intercultural understanding, this project demonstrates that documentation in a Saudi context is embedded in unique political, religious, and gendered constraints that demand a locally grounded and reflexive approach. Through this research, I have proposed a practice-led methodology shaped by personal experience, ethical sensitivity, and creative negotiation, foregrounding how women can reclaim authorship over their stories through film.

As Saudi Arabia redefines its identity through Vision 2030, my work highlights how grassroots documentation can offer alternative narratives that exist outside or alongside state-driven heritage agendas. While Vision 2030 promotes a modern image of Saudi society, this project insists that traditional, region-specific, and often gendered forms of expression must not be lost in the rush toward globalisation and national rebranding. My own journey—shaped by my familial ties, my position as a Saudi woman, and my academic training—has allowed me to navigate these tensions with care and insight.

Through this study, I have come to appreciate the transformative power of documentary filmmaking in preserving intangible cultural heritage, specifically the traditional dances of Saudi women. By applying participatory and reflexive modes alongside autoethnographic and ethnographic methodologies, I was able to weave my personal narrative into a broader cultural context. This allowed me to explore the complex interplay of tradition, representation, and identity within a society shaped by unique challenges of privacy, gender dynamics, and cultural sensitivity.

Documentary fiction, in particular, became an invaluable tool in this journey. By blending factual documentation with creative re-enactments, I was able to break free from the constraints of conventional objectivity, embracing subjectivity as a means of portraying truth. This approach enabled me to ethically navigate the social sensitivities surrounding the documentation of Saudi women's dances, allowing for an honest and nuanced representation of their cultural significance. I found that re-enactments and symbolic storytelling not only honoured these traditions but also deepened their emotional resonance.

In shaping *The Path of Memory Between the Lands of Jasmine and Basil*, I deliberately drew on Western documentary tools such as observational techniques, reflexive narration, and re-enactments. These tools, however, were not adopted straightforwardly. Instead, I reworked them within the Saudi context to respond to the specific challenges of documenting women's intangible heritage. For example, re-enactment, often critiqued in Western debates as blurring fact and fiction, became a crucial strategy to ethically navigate restrictions around filming in women-only spaces. Similarly, reflexive voiceover commonly associated with the Western autobiographical mode was

reinterpreted here as a culturally situated practice of testimony, where my subjectivity as a Saudi woman became part of the archive. This adaptive use of form demonstrates that Western tools, when critically recontextualised, can become instruments of cultural negotiation rather than vehicles of cultural dominance.

At the same time, this approach sought to challenge entrenched Western stereotypes of Saudi women, who are frequently represented as voiceless, hidden, or bound by oppression. By combining Western documentary methods with local aesthetics such as symbolic landscapes, oral testimonies, and intergenerational memory I created a counter-narrative that foregrounds women's creativity, resilience, and cultural authority. In this sense, the film is not simply about documenting tradition; it is also about interrogating the representational frameworks through which Saudi women have been seen. The blending of Western techniques with Saudi cultural logics shows how form itself can be an act of resistance. This work contributes to broader debates in visual anthropology and film theory, where the politics of representation is inseparable from the politics of method.

These reflections highlight a broader theoretical contribution: that the way a documentary is made the choice of form, tools, and techniques cannot be separated from the way people and cultures are represented. By adapting Western documentary practices within a Saudi framework, this research shows how practice-based filmmaking can both preserve intangible heritage and critically question the representational systems that have shaped how Saudi women are viewed. In doing so, the project contributes to debates in feminist film theory and visual anthropology, offering a model of how documentary can function at once as a method of cultural preservation and as a means of critique.

I believe this work also contributes to the evolving genre of documentary fiction, a form that has empowered me as a filmmaker. By embracing my role as both observer and storyteller, I was able to challenge traditional notions of authenticity in documentary filmmaking. I see this as an opportunity to demonstrate how transparency and creative experimentation can enrich the portrayal of cultures shaped by historical silences and societal constraints.

The challenges I faced, particularly in gaining trust and navigating the boundaries of representation, underscored the importance of ethical responsibility in filmmaking. Yet, these obstacles also reinforced the urgency of preserving traditions that might otherwise fade into obscurity. This project is more than an artistic endeavour—it is a platform for cultural preservation and a call to centre marginalizsd voices. I hope it serves as a testament to the power of storytelling and as an example of how documentary fiction can create truthful and deeply personal portrayals of lived experiences.

By situating my work within the framework of documentary fiction, I discovered new ways to capture the richness of Saudi women's heritage. This approach has not only allowed me to preserve these traditions but also to imagine how they can resonate with future generations. Through this project, I believe I have contributed to redefining how we document and interpret cultural memory, ensuring its survival in a way that is both meaningful and innovative.

In conclusion, this thesis makes an original contribution to both the academic discourse on intangible cultural heritage and to the practice of documentary filmmaking in Saudi Arabia. It reasserts that heritage is not a static or singular category but a contested and living practice that requires inclusive, situated, and critical documentation. This research demonstrates that documentary film can both preserve tradition and reshape narratives about Saudi women. I hope this work serves not only as a historical record but also as an invitation and inspiration for future scholars, artists, and community members to continue exploring, preserving, and celebrating the richness of Saudi women's cultural knowledge. Ultimately, this thesis stands as a testament to the resilience of Saudi women's cultural traditions and to the power of film in ensuring their voices endure.

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Ethical Approval Form

Lancaster University

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Management School Research Ethics Committee (FASS-LUMS REC)

ETHICS APPLICATION FORM FOR STAFF and PhD STUDENTS

Instructions: Before completing this application form please read the instructions and questions on the ethics webpage under the heading: **'What level of review is required for my project?'**
Please also refer to NOTES in this form for guidance.

SECTION ONE [Must be completed by all applicants]

Project Details	Answer
Name of applicant/researcher	Areej Alghamdi
Title of Project: Note 1	Documenting Saudi Intangible Cultural Heritage: Women's Dance
Department	LICA: Film Studies
Appointment/position held by applicant within FASS or LUMS	PhD Candidate
ACP ID Number (if applicable)	35315761
Funding source (if applicable)	The Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau (SACB) - Saudi Government Scholarship.
Grant Code (if applicable)	

NOTE
[1] Make your title short and descriptive so that people can easily identify the main topic of the research. The title of your project does not need to be the same as the title you propose to use for your publication (e.g. your thesis).

Type of study
☐ Involves existing documents/data only or the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants. **Complete sections** one, two **and** four **of this form**
☒ Includes direct involvement by human subjects (including but not limited to interviews, completing questionnaires, social media and other internet based research).
Complete sections one, three **and** four **of this form.**

Contact details

1. Contact information for applicant:
   E-mail: a.a.m.alghamdi@lancaster.ac.uk
   Telephone: 07704796552 (please give a number on which you can be contacted at short notice)
   Lancaster University Address: LICA Building, Lancaster University, LA1 4YR
2. Names and appointments/position of all members of the research team:

Name of research team	Appointment/position
Areej Alghamdi	PhD Candidate

PhD Students

Complete this section if this is a PhD student project

3. **Project supervisor(s) names**: Dr. Bruce Bennett and Dr. Maryam Ghorbankarimi

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SECTION TWO

Complete this section if your project involves existing data only, or the evaluation of an existing project with no direct contact with human participants

1. Anticipated project dates (month and year) Note 2
   Start date: **End date:**

   NOTE
   [2] These dates should indicate when you wish to begin your project (taking into account the timescale of the ethical approval process) and when funding ends or your thesis will be submitted.

2. Please state the aims and objectives of the project (no more than 150 words, in lay-person's language) Note 3:

   NOTE
   [3] This summary should concisely but clearly tell the reviewer (in simple terms and in a way which would be understandable to a general audience) what you are broadly planning to do in your study.

3. Please describe briefly the data or records to be studied, or the evaluation to be undertaken.

4. How will any data or records be obtained?

5. Confidentiality and Anonymity
   If your study involves re-analysis and potential publication of existing data but which was gathered as part of a previous project, conducted by another individual or collective, involving direct contact with human beings, how will you ensure that your re-analysis of this data maintains confidentiality and anonymity as guaranteed in the original study?

6. What plan is in place for the storage of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc)? Note 4

   Please ensure that your plans comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 .

   NOTE
   [4] State clearly where and in what format your data will be stored.
   Timescales: The standard guidance we provide to people about length of time for retaining data is for a minimum of 10 years. This is not a requirement but a general recommendation. Your study may have a rationale for retaining data longer, but if so, please explain. Where electronic data is to be stored for longer than the recommended period, we recommend storing data on University storage. If data is collected or stored by own devices they need to be encrypted. For data sharing with external partners we recommend using Box.
   Data security: Data stored on all portable devices (eg laptops) should be encrypted as well as password protected; data stored on the University server does not, however, need to be encrypted. If you are based and work predominantly away from the University, give consideration to how you will store the data securely as you undertake your research, and how it will be securely transferred to the LU campus for longer term storage.

7. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research? Note 5

NOTE
[5] Dissemination covers a wide range of activities including (but not limited to) reports, academic submissions (such as theses and journal articles), newspaper articles, etc.

8a. Is the secondary data you will be using in the public domain?

8b. If NO, please indicate the original purpose for which the data was collected, and comment on whether consent was gathered for additional later use of the data.

9. What other ethical considerations (if any), not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study? How will these issues be addressed?

10a. Will you be gathering data from discussion forums, on-line 'chat-rooms' and similar online spaces where privacy and anonymity are contention?

10b. If yes, your project requires full ethics review. Please complete Sections 1, 3 and 4.

SECTION THREE

Error! Reference source not found.**Complete this section if your project includes direct involvement by human subjects**

NOTE:
In addition to completing this section you must submit all supporting materials such as participant information sheet(s), consent form(s), interview questions, questionnaires, etc. See the **checklist** at the end of this form for guidance.

1. Summary of research in lay terms, including aims (maximum length 150 words) Note 6:

The aim of this project is to investigate and document Saudi women's folk dance in two Southern Regions in Saudi Arabia, namely, Allai'b dance (لعب النساء) in Albaha Region and Al-Jahli dance (الجحلي) in Jizan Region. Therefore, the method of making a documentary film to record dances in social events and compile an inventory of different existing dances has been adopted.

The research questions are:

1. What are the distinguishing features of Saudi women's dances in the two southern areas of Saudi Arabia?
2. In what ways does the traditional appearance of the dancers represent the identity of the region?
3. What are the main reasons for the lack of visual documentation of the Saudi female intangible cultural heritage such as dances?
4. To what extent is documentary film a suitable medium to document intangible cultural heritage (such as dance)?

NOTE
[6] The summary should concisely, but clearly, tell the reviewers what you are planning to do. It is very important that you describe your study in such a way that it is understandable to a general audience. Your study will be reviewed by colleagues from different disciplines who will not be familiar with your specific field of research and it may also be reviewed by the lay members of the FASS-LUMS Research Ethics Committee; therefore avoid jargon and use simple terms.

2. Anticipated project dates (month and year only) Note 7
Start date: Oct - 2019 **End date:** Sep - 2023

NOTE
[7] These dates should indicate when recruitment will begin, (taking into account the timescale of the ethical approval process) and when funding ends or your thesis will be submitted.

3. Please describe briefly the intended human participants (including number, age, gender, and any other relevant characteristics):

The research will include interviews with local poeple and expert participants with different professional backgrounds within the research subject (Cultural Heritage, Saudi History, Female Dance band, Poetry Reciter). All participants are adult, and can give their own opinion and consent to participate in the research. Consent will be obtained using the participant information sheet [PIS].

4. Are members of the public involved in a research capacity, for example as data collector (e.g. participatory research) and if so, do you anticipate any ethical issues resulting from this? Note 8

No members of the public will be involved in a research capacity.

NOTE
[8] This does not refer to members of the public being interviewed, but to forms of participatory research, where you invite members of the public to collect data.

5. How will participants be recruited and from where? Note 9

Since the study will be conducted in Saudi Arabia, 'Purposive sampling' is a suitable technique used for my research sample due to the limitations of participants who can serve as primary data sources and the nature of the research design and aims and objectives. I'm using purposive sampling because it is extremely time and cost-effective compared to other sampling methods. I'm aware it is highly subjective and so I am determined to generate the qualifying criteria each participant must meet to be considered for the research study.

First, the sample was selected based on characteristic criteria to serve the research. Local participants will be selected from the two regions, Albaha and Jizan. They are the people who take part in these dances at different social events and their authenticity as being from the regions tribe and being a member of local heritage institutions. Expert participants will be selected based on their profession as dancers or musicians.

Secondly, I will contact appropriate "heritage institutions" in Saudi Arabia to send out a call for interested participants. The advertisement will include all the information about the research. Also, it will mention that interested participants can opt into the study and receive more information by contacting me directly.

These institutions will help me reach some potential participants that are hard to reach. These institutions are the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society, Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts in two regions, Albaha and Jizan, and the Intangible Heritage Association, AL-Atawelah Women's Festival Committee, and Jazan Heritage. I will produce an application form that includes information about the nature of the study, the participants needed, and the data

collection methods. Once the institutions have approved the application, I will be given an approval letter through email.

Finally, I will contact these experts and locals via email to obtain their consent and availability. I will explain to them that their participation in the study is entirely optional and thier identity will be anonymous. I will inform them that they are free to choose whether they want to participate, and they can withdraw from the study anytime without any negative repercussions. There are no negative consequences or repercussions to their refusal to participate. Then I will send the PIS and Consent Form to them.

NOTE
[9]Please include here (if applicable) information about the following: How will participants be able to find out about the study? Will all volunteering participants be included or may you have to turn some away? If you will use different recruitment procedures for different participant groups, clearly indicate this and outline each set of procedures.

6. Briefly describe your data collection methods, drawing particular attention to any potential ethical issues.

This research project will use one data collection method, which is the semi-structured interview.

Semi-structured interviews: I intend to have online teams or zoom interviews based on availability and convenience. The interviews will take approximately 45 minutes. I will ask their permission to audio-record the interview solely for this research project as part of this process. Each participant will be interviewed individually, and participant names will remain anonymous. All interviews will be conducted in the Arabic language, the native language of the interviewees. Therefore, I will translate and transcribe the interviews into English with a professional translator and transcriber. I will make these translations and transcription files available as an appendix to my Ph.D. thesis. All gathered research data will be stored securely on encrypted computers and servers OneDrive and accessed only by me for this research.

7. Consent

7a. Will you take all necessary steps to obtain the voluntary and informed consent of the prospective participant(s) or, in the case of individual(s) not capable of giving informed consent, the permission of a legally authorised representative in accordance with applicable law? Yes.

If yes, please go to question 7b.
If no, please go to question 7c.

7b. Please explain the procedure you will use for obtaining consent? Note 10

Please include sample participant information sheets (PIS) and consent forms in your application. If applicable, please explain the procedures you intend to use to gain permission on behalf of participants who are unable to give informed consent. Please include copies of any relevant documentation.

For the semi-structured interviews:

I will contact the chosen participants directly to be part of the study and invite them to do the interviews, which will be conducted online due to the safety regulations of COVID-19 that are still applied in Saudi Arabia and for the safety of all parties involved. I will contact the participants through email, sending an invitation letter that briefly explains the research project, aim, and objectives. In addition, the email will explain what the research is intended to explore and the benefits of taking part in this research. I will contact them through teams or Zoom based on their availability and convenience. I will ask their permission to audio-record the interview solely for

this research project as part of this process. Those interested in participating will be provided with the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Consent Form to sign before taking part.
The consent form will inform the participants of their freedom to withdraw from the study before, during, or after the interview. However, it will be noted that the notice to withdraw from the study must be provided within two weeks after data collection. This is to protect me and the integrity of my research.

NOTE
[10] Please include sample participant information sheets (PIS) and consent form(s) or verbal consent protocol (where written consent is not possible) in your application. Written consent is preferable but may not always be possible. If you are using the verbal protocol, please explain why this is appropriate and how you plan to record the consent (for example audio-recording, coded table, etc.). A sample participant information sheet and consent form are available here. A sample verbal protocol is available here.
If non-handwritten forms of consent will be used in the study, explain why and what they will be.
If your research includes anonymous surveys for data collection, no consent form will be used because that would compromise anonymity. However, a cover sheet or opening page/section or some type of introduction should clearly inform participants that by completing the survey they are providing consent for the use of the data for research. The cover sheet or introduction may also remind participants of other aspects of what they are agreeing to (but without requiring them to sign or type identifying information such as a name at the end of the information).
If you are using computer-based forms of data collection, describe carefully how consent processes will be addressed.

7c. If it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time, please explain why.(For example covert observations may be necessary in some settings; some experiments require use of deception or partial deception – not telling participants everything about the experiment).

8. What discomfort (physical and psychological eg distressing, sensitive or embarrassing topics), inconvenience or danger could be caused by participation in the project beyond the risks encountered in normal life?
Please indicate plans to address these potential risks. Note 11
State the timescales within which participants may withdraw from the study, noting your reasons. Note 12

As a researcher from Saudi Arabia, I am aware of any potential social risk associated with my project and, in particular, I am familiar with all the cultural sensitivity differences between these two regions because I am originally from the Albaha region. As mentioned above, in this project, I will document Saudi women's-dance through **semi-structured interviews,** which will be done online with only audio recording. The study will therefore not expose the participants to any physical discomfort. In addition to that, the psychological and social risks of participating in this study are considered slight. The interview questions exclude the following matters: incidents of violence, sexual issues, or personal life that may lead to possible legal accusations or victimization. The questions only ask about participants' experiences, relevant perceptions, and practices regarding the intangible heritage of "Saudi women's dance". Since all data collected are anonymised, I will take every effort to ensure that no information presented in my research exposes any particular participant's identity.

NOTE
[11] Be as thorough as possible in anticipating potential sources of discomfort.
Provide a plan for addressing the discomfort that may arise during the conduct of the research and discomfort that may develop following the conduct of the research, potentially as a consequence of participation in the research. We suggest you include possible sources of support in the Participant Information Sheet. You may also consider providing a debriefing sheet.

[12] **Time limits for withdrawing from the study:** please avoid the phrase "participants may withdraw at any time" because withdrawal for most studies is time limited. For example, once you have published your data, withdrawal is clearly not possible in the true sense. You may want to consider a reasonable time period for withdrawal following data collection, depending on the type of study you are doing, for example:

i. If you are collecting interview data and will be conducting simultaneous data collection and analysis, it may be reasonable to give participants a 2 week period following the interview to withdraw their data. [For other studies, longer periods of time may be appropriate.] An example of wording that may be used is "Participants are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time before or during the interview and up to 2 weeks following their interview (or survey completion)."
ii. If you are collecting your data via focus groups or group interviews, it is impractical to allow participants to withdraw their contribution once the group has started and recording begun. An example of wording that may be used is "Participants are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time before the focus group begins, but will not be able to withdraw their contribution to the discussion once recording has started." You should be explicit in this section about your intention to brief participants about this at the start of the focus group (for example during the setting of ground rules).
iii. If you use anonymous surveys, you need to clearly indicate to participants that they will NOT be able to withdraw their data/contribution once they have submitted it because it will not be possible to identify it as theirs.

9. How will you protect participants' confidentiality and/or anonymity in data collection (e.g. interviews), data storage, data analysis, presentation of findings and publications? Note 13

Participants will be provided with the participant information sheet (PIS) to ensure they understand what the project will involve and give them the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the nature of the study. Participants will be asked to sign a consent sheet (at the beginning of each interview). All interview data will then be managed in an anonymised format, which means that participants' information, including their names and identities, will remain undisclosed outside of the research setting or to unauthorized persons. Confidentiality protections will be obtained before research, during data collection, after study closure, and in any publications.

Audio-recorded data will be filed in encrypted form on password-protected laptops on the University network. This data will not be available to other parties besides the supervisor, translator, transcriber, and researcher. Further, the data will be processed digitally, and no hard copies will be made. All data will be stored in Lancaster University's online encrypted server OneDrive. The data will be stored for approximately ten years following Lancaster University guidelines.

NOTE

[13] In the context of research confidentiality means that you will only disclose information that participants share with you in the forms agreed by them in the consent form. In most case, this includes offering anonymity, i.e. using pseudonyms and ensuring that individual participants cannot be identified in your dissertation/publications/presentations.
If, as part of your study, you will take photographs of participants or if you will film participants, please explain what you intend to do with these images. You may only use these images to help you with your data analysis. In that case, you will not show these images to other people nor will you use them in publications/your thesis. Or, you may want to use images of participants in your publications and presentations. In that case, you need to ask participants to consent to your use of these images. These images make them identifiable, unless you pixelate/blurr faces. Whatever you intend to do with images

of participants, make sure to explain this on the application form and also in the information sheet and consent form.
In some studies, it is possible that in the course of the research information arises that gives the researcher cause for concern and that may require her/him to breach confidentiality. For example, if in an interview a participant discloses information that indicates that they or others may be at risk of harm, the researcher may need to share this information with others. In your PIS, when eliciting consent, explain the limits to confidentiality. This is in particular important when working with vulnerable individuals or groups.

10. Do you anticipate any ethical constraints relating to power imbalances or dependent relationships, either with participants or with or within the research team?
If yes, please explain how you intend to address these? Note 14

There are no anticipated ethical constraints.

NOTE
[14] For example, if you are a teacher/former teacher conducting research in the school/language school you used to or are still working in, what are the implications for research participants? Explain clearly that their participation or decision not to take part does not affect their studies or any assessments.

11. **What potential risks may exist for the researcher and/or research team?**
Please indicate plans to address such risks (for example, noting the support available to you/the researcher; counselling considerations arising from the sensitive or distressing nature of the research/topic; details of the lone worker plan you or any researchers will follow, in particular when working abroad. Note 15

No physical or psychological risks are expected. However, communication will take place with the supervisors regularly, informing them of the progress as well as any issues that may hinder the collection of the data. The fieldwork of the semi-structured interviews will be entirely conducted online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, there will not be any physical contact between the researcher and the participants.

Data will be anonymous, securely saved on personal devices, and backed up on the University OneDrive servier. Participants will have the option to participate voluntarily and they are free to withdraw at any time before and during the interview, and also to withdraw tbeir pafrticipation within two weeks after the date of the interview..

NOTE
[15] The University's guidance on Lone Working can help you with this, see here:
http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/safety/files/loneworking.pdf

12. Whilst there may not be any significant direct benefits to participants as a result of this research, please state here any that may result from participation in the study.

13. Please explain the rationale for any incentives/payments (including out-of-pocket expenses) made to participants. Note 16

There will be no incentive or any payment to participant.

NOTE
[16] If you are intending to use incentives/payments, keep in mind that they should be modest so as not to suggest coercion of the participants. If you are reimbursing for travel, please indicate the financial limit of the reimbursement.

14. What are your plans for the storage of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc.)? Note 17

Audio recordings, notes, and translated and transcripted forms from interviews will be held in Lancaster University OneDrive, which is encrypted and automatically backed up by default for a period of 10 years. Data will be stored on encrypted as well as password-protected computers and servers that are accessed only by me. Data will be deleted permanently from the recorders as quickly as possible, i.e., after the data has been transferred to a secure university server via a password-protected PC. Any non-anonymised paper-based data will be stored in locked cabinets. Only the research supervisors, a translator, a transcriber and I will have access to this data. My supervisors will be responsible for securely destroying the data at the end of the 10-year retention period.

Please ensure that your plans comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 .

NOTE

[17] Data storage: non-audio and non-video data. State clearly where and what format your data will be stored.

Timescales: The standard guidance we provide to people about length of time for retaining data is 10 years (minimum). This is not a requirement but a general recommendation. Your study may have a rationale for retaining data longer and for various intended purposes, but if so, please explain. For example, some data may be specifically collected with intent to be added to a formal databank (quantitative or qualitative), or there may be plans for secondary data analysis that is anticipated from early in the design of the project. Where electronic data is to be stored for longer than the recommended period, it should only be kept on Lancaster University servers, and not on portable or home devices.

Data Stewardship: Please state who will have guardianship of the stored data (and if you are a student, who will be responsible for storing/deleting your data once you have completed your course). Please also include information on who will see the data (e.g. supervisors; research team members; transcribers)

Location: If your data is stored centrally or will be accessible to others, you should note in your application who will have access to the data.

Data security: Data stored on all portable devices (eg laptops) should be encrypted as well as password protected; data stored on the University server does not, however, need to be encrypted.

If you are based and work predominantly away from the University, give consideration to how you will store the data securely as you undertake your research, and how it will be securely transferred to the LU campus for long term storage.

15. Please answer the following question only if you have <u>not</u> completed a Data Management Plan for an external funder.

Data will be deposited in Lancaster University's institutional data repository, Pure, and made freely available with an appropriate data license. Participants will be informed about this requirement in PIS and consent forms.

15a. Do you intend to deposit your (anonymised) data in a data archive? Note18 Yes ☒ No ☐

Data will be deposited in Lancaster University's institutional data repository and made freely available with an appropriate data license. Lancaster University uses Pure as the data repository which will hold, manage, preserve and provide access to datasets produced by Lancaster University research. Participants will be informed of this requirement in PIS and consent forms.

NOTE

[18] Most funders require researchers to preserve and share their data via a data archive. Lancaster University's Research Data Management Policy also suggests that all researchers, PhD students included, should store and archive their data in ways appropriate to the specific study and type of data. Please note that if you store data in a data archive where other researchers, upon request, can have access to this data, this needs to be explained on participant information sheets & consent forms. There are different ways of storing and sharing data, but you are likely to follow one of these two options:
Example 1: Data will be deposited in Lancaster University's institutional data repository and made freely available with an appropriate data license. Lancaster University uses Pure as the data repository which will hold, manage, preserve and provide access to datasets produced by Lancaster University research.
Example 2: Data will be offered to the UK Data Archive (as per the standard ESRC procedures) or another similar data archive.
For further guidance on data archiving, please see here: Library Deposit your research data

15b. If you have responded '**no**' to question 15a, please explain briefly why you cannot share your data via a data archive or repository. Note 19

NOTE
[19] You may have reasons for not making your data widely available. For example, due to the small sample size, even after full anonymization, there may be a small risk that participants can be identified. It may also be the case that due to the (commercially, politically, ethically) sensitive nature of the research, no participants consented to their data being shared.
You can find more information about ethical constraints on sharing data on this site:
Library data access statements

16. Will audio or video recording take place?
no ☐ audio ☒ video ☐

16a. Will portable devices (laptop, USB drive, audio- and video- recorders, etc) be encrypted (in particular where they are used for identifiable data)? Audio recordings of the interviews will involve a mobile device and portable hard drive and will be securely saved on personal devices, and backed up on the University OneDrive server. Identifiable data (including recordings of participants' voices) will be deleted from the password-protected recording devices as quickly as possible after being transferred via password password-protected PC. I confirm that in the meantime the recording device will be stored securely.
yes ☒ no ☐

16b If it is not possible to encrypt your portable devices, please comment here on the steps you will take to protect the data. Note 20
As noted above, under University guidelines, I will keep the data securely stored for ten years; then, it will be deleted from the server. The data will be encrypted and stored in the Lancaster University OneDrive. Any identifiable data (including recordings of participants' voices) will be deleted from the password-protected recording devices as quickly as possible after being transferred via a password-protected PC. Any data will be stored securely in the researcher's possession in a locked storage compartment in secure office buildings in Lancaster University.

NOTE
[20] Transporting audio/video data: you should state that if you store any identifiable data (audio recordings, participant contact details etc) on portable devices such as a memory stick or laptop you will use encryption. Password protection alone is not sufficient for identifiable data. Information on encryption is available from ISS http://www.lancs.ac.uk/iss/security/encryptionoptions/ and their service desk is also able to assist.

If your portable device cannot be encrypted, you must confirm that any identifiable data (including recordings of participants' voices) will be deleted from the recorder as quickly as possible (eg when they have been transferred to a secure medium, such as a password protected & encrypted PC) and state that the device will be stored securely in the meantime.

16c What arrangements have been made for audio/video data storage?
At what point in the research will tapes/digital recordings/files be destroyed? Note 21

I will transfer all recorded audio data from the recording device to Lancaster OneDrive, an encrypted server, through an encrypted computer as soon as possible, deleting it thereafter from the memory on the device. The recordings will be retained throughout the project on encrypted servers and only accessed by me and the supervisors Dr. Bruce Bennett and Dr. Maryam Ghorbankarmi and a translator and a transcriber. Data will be encrypted and stored on university storage for a minimum of 10 years and destroyed following this period.

NOTE
[21] **Storage.** Audio and video data is considered more sensitive than most written data because of its capacity to threaten confidentiality more directly. There are, however, no fixed deadlines, and recordings such as oral histories may be kept in perpetuity.
With audio data that does not need to be kept for the long term, it is common to erase/destroy the recording once it has been transcribed and checked. However, we suggest that you retain the recordings until your work has been examined and/or published, in case you need to check the original recordings for any reason.
For video, it may depend on the types of analyses proposed for the study. There may be good reason to keep the data longer, but the key in completing this section of the application form is to be explicit about timescales for storage, and the reasons for your timescale should be clearly indicated and explained.

16d. If your study includes video recordings, what are the implications for participants' anonymity? Can anonymity be guaranteed and if so, how? If participants are identifiable on the recordings, how will you explain to them what you will do with the recordings? How will you seek consent from them?

17. What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research? If you are a student, include here your thesis. Note 22
Please also include any impact activities and potential ethical issues these may raise.

The research findings will be used in publications for academic, educational, or promotional purposes, and a summary of the results will be made available for the participants. This will include a Ph.D. thesis, future reports, articles, and conference presentations, and web-based publishing relating to the research, which the public can view. All data in words will be anonymised. When writing up the findings of this study, I may reproduce some of the views and ideas from the participants. When doing so, and unless the participant has indicated that their name can be used, I will use anonymised quotes or paraphrase their views so that the participant cannot be identified in the publications.

NOTE
[22] Dissemination covers a wide range of activities including (but not limited to) reports, academic submissions (such as theses and journal articles), study summaries, and publications:
- If you are a student, be sure to include your academic paper (such as dissertation or thesis) as a form of dissemination.

- Phrasing regarding publication should reflect that you may pursue submission for publication, but you cannot guarantee that the dissemination will include publication. For example, you may write "Results of the research may be submitted for publication in an academic/professional journal."

18. What particular ethical considerations, not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study? Note 23
Are there any matters about which you wish to seek guidance from the FASS-LUMS REC?

NOTE
[23]It is rare that studies have no ethical considerations at all. Try to be thorough and thoughtful when considering this question. You should not try to invent issues, and at the same time, do not assume that by noting a problem you are hurting your application. This section provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate to the committee that you have a substantial and clear understanding of the potential ethical issues, and that you have given thought to how to address them (even if they may not be able to be addressed perfectly).

SECTION FOUR [Must be completed by all applicants]

Statement and Signatures

By submitting and signing this form, I confirm that

- I understand that as Principal Investigator/researcher/PhD candidate I have overall responsibility for the ethical management of the project and confirm the following:
- I have read the Code of Practice, Research Ethics at Lancaster: a code of practice and I am willing to abide by it in relation to the current proposal.
- I will manage the project in an ethically appropriate manner according to: (a) the subject matter involved and (b) the Code of Practice and Procedures of the university.
- On behalf of the institution I accept responsibility for the project in relation to promoting good research practice and the prevention of misconduct (including plagiarism and fabrication or misrepresentation of results).
- On behalf of the institution I accept responsibility for the project in relation to the observance of the rules for the exploitation of intellectual property.
- If applicable, I will give all staff and students involved in the project guidance on the good practice and ethical standards expected in the project in accordance with the university Code of Practice. (Online Research Integrity training is available for staff and students)
- If applicable, I will take steps to ensure that no students or staff involved in the project will be exposed to inappropriate situations.

- **I confirm that I have completed all risk assessments and other Health and Safety requirements as advised by my departmental Safety Officer: please tick this box to confirm** ☐

Please note: If you are not able to confirm the statements above please contact the FASS-LUMS research ethics committee and provide an explanation.

Applicant electronic signature: Note 24 Areej Alghamdi Date: 26/1/2022

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Lancaster University

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Management School Research Ethics Committee (FASS-LUMS REC)

ETHICS APPLICATION FORM FOR STAFF and PhD STUDENTS

NOTE [24] If you are a student, make sure that you have discussed the project and the application with your supervisor. Build in enough time in your preparation schedule for your supervisor to properly review your application and give their comments before submitting it for ethical review.

Student applicants:

Please tick to confirm that you have discussed this application with your supervisor, and that they agree to the application being submitted for ethical review ☒

Project Supervisor name: Dr. Bruce Bennett and Dr. Maryam Ghorbankarimi

Date application discussed 24/11/2021

Students must submit this application from their Lancaster University email address, and copy their supervisor in to the email with this application attached

All applicants (Staff and Students) must complete this declaration:

I confirm that I have sent a copy of this application to my Head of Department (or their delegated representative).

Tick here to confirm ☒

Name of Head of Department *(or their delegated representative)* Dr Alan Marsden

In addition to completing this form you must submit all supporting materials. For examples of supporting documents see the checklist below. [Note25]

Checklist

- ☐ Advertising materials (posters, emails)
- ☒ Letters/emails of invitation to participate
- ☒ Participant information sheets
- ☒ Consent forms
- ☐ Questionnaires, surveys, demographic sheets
- ☒ Interview question guides/interview schedules
- ☐ Focus group scripts
- ☐ Confidentiality agreement (if using an external transcriber)
- ☐ Debriefing sheets, resource lists

NOTE [25]

If you experience formatting issues in your supporting documents after you have copied and pasted them here, at the end of this application form you may find the following guidance useful:

1. On your keyboard select F1 (**or** click on the Microsoft Word help button at the top right of this document)
2. Enter this text in the search field: 'keep source formatting' then select 'Control the formatting when you paste text' and follow the guidance in the 'help window'.

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Appendix A. Consent Form For Interviews

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Management School Research Ethics Committee (FASS-LUMS REC)

ETHICS APPLICATION FORM FOR STAFF and PhD STUDENTS

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Please adapt this consent form for your study, for example if you are not using focus groups, delete all references to focus groups from this form.

Project Title: Documenting Saudi intangible Cultural Heritage; Women Dance
Name of Researchers: Areej Alghamdi
Email: a.a.m.alghamdi@lancaster.ac.uk
Please tick each box

	Yes	No
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily	☐	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within 2 weeks after I took part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within [2weeks] of taking part in the study my data will be removed.	☐	☐
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, promotional work, public dissemination on a website , publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.	☐	☐
4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.	☐	☐
5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	☐	☐
6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	☐	☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study.	☐	☐

_____ _____ _____
Name of Participant Date Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent_____ **Date** _____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University

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Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Management School Research Ethics Committee (FASS-LUMS REC)

ETHICS APPLICATION FORM FOR STAFF and PhD STUDENTS

Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts | Lancaster University

Participant Information Sheet

Can I kindly ask you to take the time to read the following information carefully before you make a decision whether or not you wish to participate in this study.

Who will conduct the research?

Areej Alghamdi, a Ph.D. candidate at Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts (LICA), Lancaster University, United Kingdom. Areej is a fully-funded student by the Cultural Bureau of Saudi Arabia, London. This project is approved by them.

I would like to invite you to participate in the research project, Documenting Saudi Intangible Cultural Heritage: Women's Dance. Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part as an interviewee for the data collection for the research.

What is the study about?

The aim of this project is to investigate and document Saudi women's folk dance in two Southern Regions in Saudi Arabia, namely, Allai'b dance (لعب النساء) in the Albaha Region and Al-Jahli dance (الجحلي) in the Jizan Region . Therefore, an approach for making a documentary film about dances in social events and an inventory of different existining dances have been adopted.

The research questions are:

1. What are the distinguishing features of Saudi women's dances in the two southern areas of Saudi Arabia?
2. In what ways does the traditional appearance of the dancers represent the identity of the region?
3. What are the main reasons for the lack of visual documentation of the Saudi female intangible cultural heritage such as dances?
4. To what extent is documentary film a suitable medium to document intangible cultural heritage (such as dance)?

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because you have been identified as an active member in your field of profession in Saudi Arabia, and your qualification and experience fit the sampling criteria of this research. Also, you have been a member of a local community that participates in these dances. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part in the interviews, this would involve being interviewed (approximately an 45 mintues long) about your profession, general knowledge, and background of participating in southern heritage dance in your work or your experience in general. I will also ask your permission to take audio recordings of the interview, which will be anonymised to conceal your identity before transcription

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What are the possible benefits from taking part?

There is no financial benefit for participation in this study. However, you may find that this study provides you with the opportunity to share your experiences of women's dance in the southern regions, and it will document these dances for future generations in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it might offer you an opportunity for reflection on your work experiences within the subject of the research.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's entirely up to you to decide whether you take part.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw your participation from the study at any time; you will have up to two weeks from the interview date. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract and destroy any ideas or information (data) you contributed with to the study. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data related to one specific participant when it has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I am a researcher from Saudi Arabia and I am aware of any possible disadvantages and risks associated with my project and I am familiar of all the cultural sensitivities of these two regions because I am originally from the southern region. In this project, I will document Saudi women's traditional dance through semi-structured Interviews, which will be done online without recording your faces, and only audio will be recorded. The study will not expose you to any physical discomfort. In addition to that, psychological and social risks of participating in this study are considered slight. The interview questions exclude the following matters: incidents of violence, sexual issues, or personal life that may lead to possible legal accusations or victimization.The questions only ask about your experiences, relevant perceptions, and practices regarding Saudi women's dance. Since all data collected are anonymised,I make all the effort no information is linked to any particular person. If you feel discomfort, you have the option not to participate and withdraw from the study at any point. If you choose to cancel, the collected information will be destroyed immediately. This process will be valid within 14 days of participation. After two weeks of collecting data, participants can no longer withdraw from the study.

Will my data be identifiable?

Data will be filed in encrypted form on password-protected laptops on the University network. This data will not be available to other parties besides the supervisor, translator, transcriber, and researcher. Furthermore, the data will be processed digitally, and no hard copies will be made. All data will be stored in Lancaster University's online encrypted server OneDrive. The data will be stored for approximately ten years following Lancaster University guidelines.

All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of your participation in this research, and your identity will not be revealed and will not be shared with others unless otherwise, you intend to do so. However, a professional translator and transcriber will listen to the recordings and produce an English-language written version of what you have said. The translator and transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the data for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis, my documentary films and any other publications, for example, journal articles, and conference papers; and I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences. When writing up the findings of this study, I may have to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised data so that although I will use your exact words, you cannot be identified in my publications. Also, I may share the results of my documentary films which I may participate it in film festivals or film competitions.

any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, promotional work, public dissemination on a website , publications or presentations by the researcher/s, but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

How my data will be stored

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is, no-one other than me, the researcher, will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

Audio recordings, notes and transcripts from interviews will be held in Lancaster University OneDrive which is encrypted and automatically backed up by default for a period of 10 years. Data will be deleted permanently from the recorders as quickly as possible, i.e. after the data has been transferred to a secure university server via a password protected PC. Any non-anonymised paper-based data will be stored in locked cabinets. My supervisors and I will have access to this data only. My supervisors will be responsible for securely destroying the data at the end of the 10-year retention period.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself Areej Alghamdi , a.a.m.alghamdi@lancaster.ac.uk**, or** supervisors Dr Bruce Bennett, b.bennett@lancaster.ac.uk and Dr Maryam Ghorbankarmi, m.ghorbankarimi@lancaster.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact: Professor Alan Marsden, a.marsden@lancaster.ac.uk**, Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts, Lancaster University,LA1 4YW, UK. Phone number +44 1524 593774**

Sources of support

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

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Appendix E. Invitation Letter to Potential Participants

Lancaster University

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Management School Research Ethics Committee (FASS-LUMS REC)

ETHICS APPLICATION FORM FOR STAFF and PhD STUDENTS

Invitation Letter to Potential Participants

I am Areej Alghamdi, a Ph.D. candidate at Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts (LICA), Lancaster University, United Kingdom. As a student, I am fully-funded by the cultural bureau of Saudi Arabia, London.

I want to invite you to participate in a research study about Documenting Saudi Intangible Cultural Heritage; Women Dance. Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part as an interviewer for the data collection.

This project aims to support the direction of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's vision 2030 in developing research in national intangible cultural heritage. This project aims to investigate and document Saudi women's folk dance in two Southern areas, Albaha in Allai'b (لعب النساء) and Jizan in Al-Jahli(الجحلي), by collecting data about dances in social events and an inventory of different existing dances.

You are an essential person; you have been identified as an active member in your field of profession in Saudi Arabia, and your qualification and experience fit the sampling criteria of this research. Also, you have been a member of a local community that participates in these dances. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

If you decided to take part in the interviews, this would involve being interviewed (approximately 45 minutes) about your profession, general knowledge, and background of participating in southern heritage dance in your work or your experience in general. I will also ask your permission to take audio recordings of the interview, which will be anonymised to conceal your identity before translation and transcription. If you disagree to be recorded, I will take notes during the interview, later anonymised.

Thank you. Yours sincerely,

Areej Alghamdi

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Appendix F. Interview Questions

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Management School Research Ethics Committee (FASS-LUMS REC)

ETHICS APPLICATION FORM FOR STAFF and PhD STUDENTS

Interviews Questions:

The researcher aims to investigate the reasons behind the lack of documentation in the subject of cultural heritage dance and will conduct an interview with locals and experts who participate in these dances. The study aims to cover two different area ; Albaha and Jizan. I will ask the same questions for each region.

Question for locals:

. Name the dances you know in the region.

. How old are these dances?

. How did you learn about these dances?

. When do you do this dance? Which occasions?

. Who participates in these dances? Can you describe how the bride participates in these dance?

. Can you explain what makes these dance traditional?

. How many participants do these dance have?

. What is the role of each participant?

. How do you prepare for this dance?

. What kind of costumes do they wear?

. What type of instrument do they use?

. Who sings the lyrics?

. What kind of poems are used in the singing? How do you memorise the verses?

. How long each dance lasts (how long is each song)?

. Could you explain the choreography of the dance and the main features of this kind of dance?

. In your opinion, how are this heritage and legacy transferred to the next generation?

. How does religious movement control and affect people's adherence to their tradition and customs?.

. How will you transfer these dances to the next generation?

. Do modern life influence villages' customs, traditions, and dance?

. How does the local community help in preserving these dances?

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. What are the main reasons for not documenting these dances by a camera and sound recording?

Question for Experts:

. What kind of dances do you know/perform?

. How many participants do these dances have?

. What is the role of each participant?

. How old are these dances?

. How did you learn about these dances?

. How do you prepare for these dances?

. What kind of costumes do they wear?

. What type of instrument do they use?

. Who sings the lyrics?

. What kind of poems are used in the singing and dances? How do you memorise the verses?

. Could you explain the choreography dance and the main features of this kind of dance?

. How do regions and district boundaries impact the customs and traditions, and cultural identity of these dances?

. How does religious movement controls and affects people's adherence to their tradition and customs?
. How do different media such as Arabic literature, novels, and folk stories preserve intangible cultural heritage such as dance?

. Does the local community help in preserving these dances? How?

. Are there any private or governmental intuitions that help to preserve these dances?

. Do you participate in these dances at any heritage festivals? If yes, where and when?

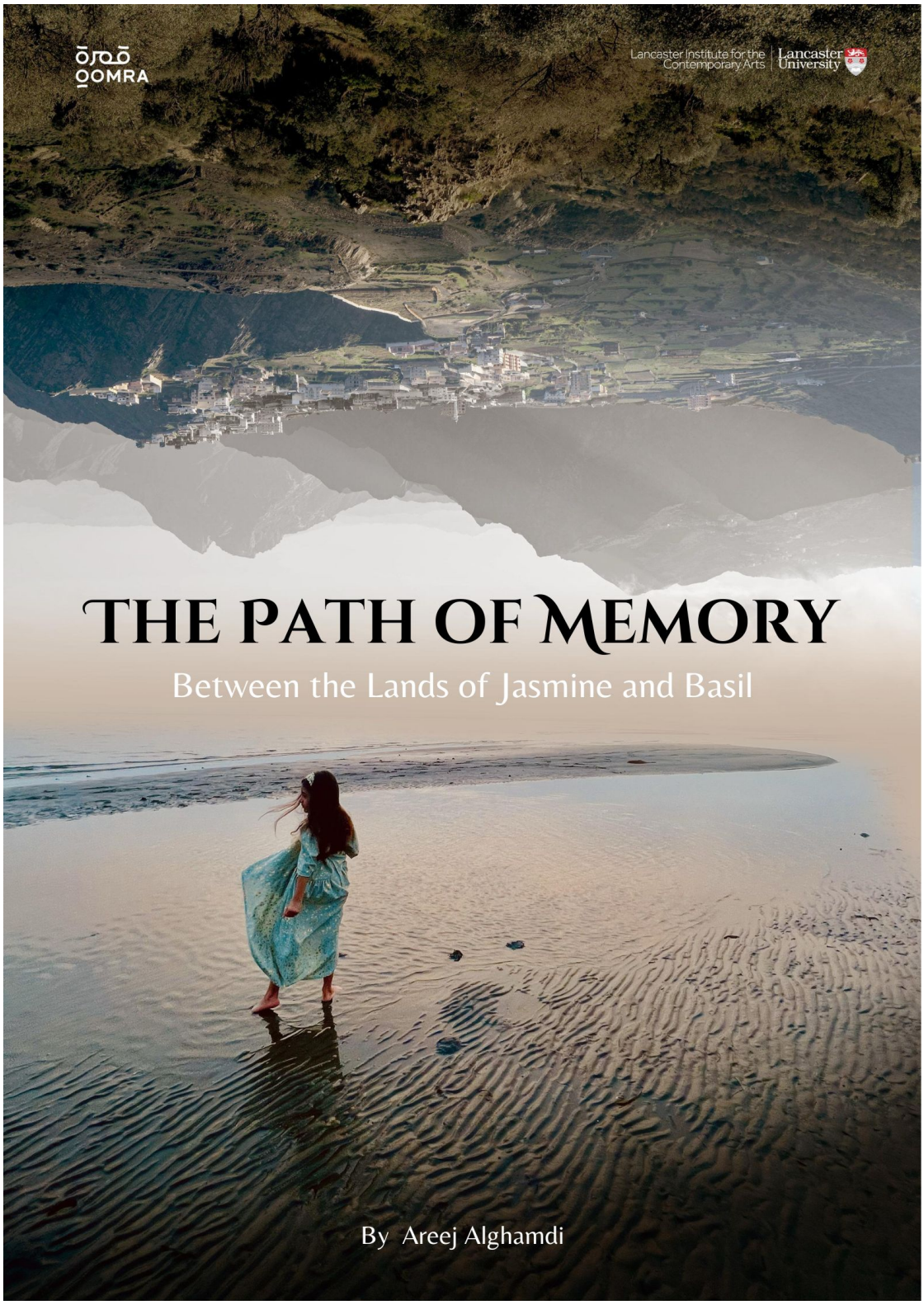
. Do modern life influence villages' customs, traditions, and dance?

. What do you think of your experience at the festivals?

. How would you transfer these dances to the next generation?

. What are the main reasons for not documenting these dances by a camera and sound recording?

Appendix G. Film Poster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THE PATH OF MEMORY
Between the Lands of Jasmine and Basil
By Areej Alghamdi